The two principles on which our conduct towards the Indians should be founded are justice and fear. After the injuries we have done them, they cannot love us, which leaves us no alternative but that of fear to keep them from attacking us. But justice is what we should never lose sight of, and in time it may recover their esteem.

—Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins, Indian agent, 13 August 1786

. . . When they withdraw themselves to the culture of a small piece of land, they will perceive how useless to them are their extensive forests, and will be willing to pare them off from time to time in exchange for necessaries for their farms and families. To promote this disposition to exchange lands, which they have to spare and we want, for necessaries, which we have to spare and they want, we shall push our trading houses, and be glad to see the good and the influential individuals among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands. . . . In this way our settlements will gradually circumscribe and approach the Indians, and they will in time either incorporate with us as citizens of the United States, or remove beyond the Mississippi. . . . As to their fear, we presume that our strength and their weakness is now so visible that they must see we have only to shut our hand to crush them, and that all our liberalities to them proceed from motives of pure humanity only. Should any tribe be foolhardy enough to take up the hatchet at any

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time, the seizing of the whole country of the tribe, and driving them across the Mississippi, as the only condition of peace, would be an example to others, and a furtherance of our final consolidation. . . .

—Thomas Jefferson to William Henry Harrison, Governor of Indiana Territory, 27 February 1803

IN THE VAST ARRAY of scholarship about Thomas Jefferson, comparatively little has been written about his ideas regarding the American Indian, and even less about the impact his thought on this subject had on future leaders’ beliefs. The eminent Jefferson historian Merrill Peterson gives the subject cursory treatment, mentioning the Indians mainly in the context of the Notes on the State of Virginia, the Lewis and Clark expedition, and various references to British manipulation of the tribes during the Revolution and the War of 1812. Dumas Malone, in his landmark series Jefferson and His Time, allows more space for discussion of Jefferson’s ideas about the Native Americans, but he still fails to elaborate fully on Jefferson’s conflicting statements. Roy Harvey Pierce, in Savagism and Civilization (1953), was the first modern historian to attempt to analyze Jeffersonian ideas regarding the Indians and their tragic outcome, relating Jefferson’s thought to that of later presidents and Indian fighters. Michael Paul Regin’s Fathers and Children (1975) followed, with a greater emphasis on how Jeffersonian attempts to incorporate the Indian into the white man’s society were contradicted by his successors’ increasingly pro-removal policies. He focused on Andrew Jackson’s exploitation and deportation of the Southern tribes, especially the Cherokees, but glances first appeared in Regin’s book linking Jefferson to the tribes’ later removal. Regin tantalizingly offered the suggestion that Jefferson ultimately advocated removal over other alternatives, but failed to expand upon the thought. Francis P. Prucha, in numerous publications, and Donald Jackson in Thomas Jefferson and the Stony Mountains, also hinted at Jefferson’s support for Indian removal, but, like other authors, both failed to elaborate or adequately document their ideas. Jackson does correlate Jefferson’s Indian policy with that of his successors, and in this way suggests Jefferson’s central role in influencing future presidents’ actions.3

2 Quoted in Francis Paul Prucha, ed., Documents of United States Indian Policy, 2d ed., expanded (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 22–23.

Before Jackson and in between Pierce and Rogin, however, came Bernard Sheehan’s *Seeds of Extinction; Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (1973), the most comprehensive, analytical, and accurate book dealing with Jefferson’s own thoughts based on his writings. Sheehan’s exhaustive analysis of primary sources sheds much light on what Jefferson originally thought of the native inhabitants, as expressed in his *Notes*, and what influenced these beliefs. How those beliefs guided the course of Indian diplomacy throughout the early American Republic, especially during Jefferson’s presidency, is the major focus of Sheehan’s research, with an emphasis on how Jeffersonian good will toward the Indian ultimately failed. He offered more evidence of Jefferson’s conflicting ideas of incorporation and possible removal, but, like Rogin, did not theorize that it was Jefferson who first came to accept removal as the best solution to the plight of the Indians.

Strong evidence exists, however, that it was indeed Thomas Jefferson who first decided that the Eastern Indian tribes would have to be removed across the Mississippi. Removal was certainly not his original intention, but the rapid westward movement of the frontier obliged the third president to re-evaluate his earlier philanthropic plan and opt for the alternative of removal. What Sheehan and other authors fail to analyze adequately is the striking dichotomy between Jefferson’s early and later writings—as the two quotes above aptly illustrate. They realize the difference between what he thought and what actually happened, raise derisive cries of hypocrisy, but then leave the puzzling paradox. Yet a close analysis of Jefferson’s writings, both before and during his presidency, indicates that he always supported amalgamation of the tribes with white society, but that the route he believed best suited for this purpose changed direction. This paper argues that removal was a new policy created by Jefferson that abandoned much of the original philanthropic program, but was a policy by means of which he hoped continued acculturation west of the Mississippi might be possible.

Indian acculturation, but like Rogin fails to explicitly connect Jefferson with removal policies. Joseph Ellis’s acclaimed book, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996) also briefly addresses the issue, condensing much of Sheehan’s argument, but again provides no direct evidence implicating Jefferson in the removal. Ellis even appears to misinterpret Jefferson’s intentions by stating that “in Jefferson’s mind, the Indians occupied the same problematic space as the Federalists. They were a doomed species” (239).

Admittedly, Sheehan is the primary scholar of this subject, but like Abel and Rogin he does not explicitly state that Jefferson first arrived at the option of removal, and does not attempt to pin down the time when his philanthropic ideas changed. This paper is not contradicting Sheehan, but continuing the research where he left off.
At different times in his life, Thomas Jefferson believed different things about the American Indian. There was always a strong strain of sentimental philanthropy evident in what he wrote regardless of the time he wrote it. But in early 1803, foreseeing the cession of Louisiana to the United States, Jefferson decided that his own great hopes for ultimate Indian incorporation into white society in the East were either wrong or futile. He basically changed his mind about the Indians because he was forced to submit philanthropic idealism to pragmatic necessity, and thus redirected his philosophy toward removal across the Mississippi. Is it possible to pinpoint Jefferson’s change in opinion? What motivated it? Where can we find evidence of it? This paper explores these questions, which had profound consequences for the fate of Indians in the United States—for the unfortunate result of Jefferson’s altered disposition toward the Native Americans was the removal of the remaining tribes east of the Mississippi by his presidential successors. As Jefferson passed on the cloak of power, he also passed on his idea of Indian removal. The germ of this philosophy did not begin with Jefferson, but he was the first major American statesman who gave it credence in light of the failure of his philanthropic program of acculturation. The change in his mind was subtly expressed, but it is evident. Jefferson’s thoughts molded a generation of Americans, and his ideas regarding the Indians were no exception. His contemporaries, fellow philanthropists, and immediate successors followed his example. After he changed his mind, the stage was set for large-scale removal. The result was tragic for the Indians.

Jefferson’s first encounter with the Native Americans occurred at his father’s home, Shadwell, located only a few miles away from his future estate, Monticello, in Albemarle County, Virginia. Indians on the way to and from Williamsburg often stopped by the Jefferson homestead. Little is known of Jefferson’s memory of these visits because most of his early papers were lost in the fire that burned Shadwell in 1770. Jefferson was at the College of William and Mary in the spring of 1762, though, when a Cherokee chief he knew from earlier visits at Shadwell delivered a farewell oration to his people at Williamsburg before departing to England to meet the king. Jefferson listened intently, awe-

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5 It is difficult to ascertain the precise date of Jefferson’s mind change because no letter clearly stating this has been located. Much circumstantial and supporting evidence does, however, exist, pointing to the Louisiana Purchase as the key event for Jefferson. Based on the strong insinuations contained therein, 1803 is the most likely year.
struck by the eloquence and passion of Outacity’s speech. He later wrote to John Adams just how he felt: “The moon was in full splendor, and to me he seemed to address himself in his prayers for his own safety on the voyage, and for the welfare of his own people during his absence. His sounding voice, distinct articulation, animated action and the solemn silence of his people at their several fires filled me with awe and veneration, although I did not understand a word he uttered.”

Jefferson’s early fascination and admiration for the Indians never left him. He continued to view them, throughout his life, as racial equals to the white man, and possessing certain qualities, such as natural eloquence, that made them almost “noble,” in comparison to many whites. He was smitten with the motif of the “noble savage,” prevalent in the early to middle eighteenth century, and this influence forever tainted Jefferson’s ideas. The noble savage idea dictated that the Indians lived in a veritable paradise that by its very existence made civilization superfluous. Therefore, the various tribes residing in happy, ignorant bliss in the vast wilderness of North America had no need for European civilization and its attendant vices. These vices—robbery, prostitution, material greed—were almost non-existent in most Indian societies, and the white man looked longingly toward the woods for redemption of his own corrupted world. As Bernard Sheehan stated, “the Indian, in effect, became merely a foil in civilized man’s constant efforts at self-examination.”

Jefferson did not escape the lure of noble savagism, and this proved integral to the way he dealt with the Indians as an American leader. His famous Notes on the State of Virginia, published in France in 1784, was a rebuff to the Comte de Buffon’s and the Abbé Raynal’s assertions that America was a dark continent, overgrown with oppressively thick forests, and overrun with a physically inferior race of Indians. Buffon referred to the Indians’ small population as indicative of their lack of sexual desire; he also condemned their physical endurance, mental abilities, and apparent paucity of emotion. Jefferson argued vehemently against these allegations, cementing in his and his American readers’ minds the virtues of the noble savage: “. . . I am able to say, in contradiction to this representation, that he is neither more defective in ardor, nor more impotent with his female, than the white

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reduced to the same diet and exercise: that he is brave, when an enterprise depends on bravery; education with him making the point of honor consist in the destruction of an enemy by stratagem, and in the preservation of his own person free of injury; or perhaps this is nature; while it is education which teaches us to honor force more than finesse. . .”

The Indian, furthermore, would “defend himself against an host of enemies,” choosing death over capture, and looks death squarely in the face. He is “affectionate to his children, careful of them, and indulgent in the extreme,” and he cultivates “strong and faithful” friendships, “weeping most bitterly on the loss of [his] children.” Jefferson was convinced “that his vivacity and activity of mind is equal to ours in the same situation.”

He goes on for several pages enumerating the attributes of the Indians, such as their eloquence, common sense, and lack of body hair, which many Europeans viewed negatively. He also ventured that the native inhabitants were equal to Europeans in all respects, but simply not as far along on the road to civilization. This last defense of the Indians was critical in Jefferson’s estimation; they just needed more time to advance, and they would unquestionably abandon their hunter/gatherer life and settle down in permanent communities. Like other educated white men of the time, Jefferson betrayed in these beliefs a gendered perception of civilization: the occupations of males in any given society generally classified that society in his mind. Hence, he viewed most Eastern tribes as hunters, not farmers, although Indian women were skilled horticulturalists. Indeed, Jefferson knew that some tribes, such as the Cherokee, Choctaw, and the Six Nations of the Iroquois, already cultivated extensive fields and were more sedentary than others. He ardently hoped the “progress” of these peoples toward communities of independent farmers would continue and others would soon follow them.

The dichotomy between the ideal of the noble savage and the reality of conflict between Indians and settlers on the frontier cast a shadow over Jefferson’s perception of the Indian. The Indians could not be left alone to live in their idyllic paradise. Something had to be done to satiate the settlers’ demand for land on the one hand and to preserve the noble Indian on the other. This dilemma was at the root of Jeffersonian philanthropy, and it ironically proved disastrous for the Indians. Because they were innocent of both the virtues and vices of the European Americans, and since some of them were showing signs of proclivity toward civilization, the Native Americans deserved phil-

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9 Ibid.
anthropic assistance. The aid Jefferson had in mind was the gradual acculturation of the tribes through contact with friendly whites—government agents and, later, missionaries—toward his socioeconomic ideal of the yeoman farmer. Once the Indians became small, individual farmers like their white exemplars, they would have no need for their vast lands, and would subsequently sell most of them off to the federal government, which in turn would sell them in parcels to white settlers. Thus, the government would pay off debts incurred in acculturating the Indians, save them from extinction by the settlers, and give the settlers the former Indian lands they so desired. Jefferson thought this system would leave everyone happy: the Indians, the settlers, and the government. The final step of the acculturation would be to incorporate the Indians into the United States as bona-fide citizens. Jefferson predicted that eventually “they would have mixed together their blood with ours, and have been amalgamated and identified with us within no distant period of time.” The absorption of the “noble savage” would benefit both the Indians and the United States. The Indians would receive the gift of civilization, the frontier would be opened to future settlement, and the favorable traits of both white and red men would become “mixed” through intermarriage, thereby strengthening the stock of the citizenry. 10

Unfortunately, there were two inherent flaws in Jefferson’s reasoning—flaws that would negatively influence the outcome of his philanthropic program. First, he believed, as a Lockean, that man confronted nature and took what was needed from it by his labor and converted it into his property. “Private property,” explains Roy Harvey Pierce, “conceived of in the close personal relationships of an agrarian society, was [man’s] means to social maturity.” Working on the land as free-holding farmers brought any man, white or red, to a realization of his self-worth, raising his dignity with his status in society. Indians, running loose in the wilderness, with more land that they could ever need, appeared to whites as anarchic and irrational, even if they were admired as “noble.” It would naturally benefit them if they became farmers because they would have achieved a new conception of identity, become more civilized and thus “higher” than before. 11

10 Francis Paul Prucha, Documents of United States Indian Policy, 2d ed., expanded (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 52. Also see Bernard Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction, for a detailed discussion of Jefferson’s original philanthropic plan, as well as his various Indian addresses, several of which may be found in Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson 15 (Washington, D.C: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1907).
This Jeffersonian assumption was wrong. Most Indian tribes already had a balance, albeit uneven, between raising or gathering crops of some sort and hunting. They were content with their way of life, and few looked enviously at the white farmers. The vastness of their forests allowed ample game to be hunted when needed. Reducing this acreage would eventually cause a shortage of food and was certainly not desired by the Native Americans. If they were on the road to civilization and ultimately destined to become sedentary farmers, many Indians not only did not welcome the prospect, but were also unaware that it had been foretold for them.\(^\text{12}\)

The second flaw in Jefferson’s plan for the Indians thus becomes apparent. He assumed they would want to become like the prosperous white men: they would happily sell their lands to the government, thereby opening up territory for white settlement, in return for farming implements, plows, and so on. Jefferson’s letter to William Henry Harrison (quoted at the beginning of this article) indicates Indians would trade lands for “necessaries . . . which we have to spare and they want.” It was not necessarily the Indians who wanted all of these items, such as plows and spinning wheels; it was Jefferson who wanted them to want them. He continued this misplaced optimism about the will of the Indians to change even after he realized they had to be removed.

Jefferson’s philanthropic program toward the Indians was plagued from the start by these philosophical assumptions. Nonetheless, he put it into action shortly after taking office. His first annual message to Congress of 8 December 1801 reported “that the continued efforts to introduce among them the implements and the practice of husbandry, and of the household arts, have not been without success.” Washington, and to a lesser extent Adams, had earlier introduced farming implements and domestic animals to a few of the closer tribes; they had also encouraged private missionary organizations, such as those of the Quakers and Moravians, to send representatives among the Indians. The first two presidents’ efforts laid the groundwork for Jefferson to

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\(^{12}\)Exceptions must be made here regarding the Indians’ lack of desire for white civilization. In the 1790s the Corplanter Senecas requested agricultural implements and livestock from the government, and welcomed both when Quaker missionaries brought these items later in the decade. According to Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), the tribe enjoyed a period of material well-being as a result of learning how to farm “the American way.” In the Southeast, some members of the “civilized tribes,” such as the Cherokee, likewise welcomed government agents’ and missionaries’ offers of agricultural instruction in traditional white farming methods. The Cherokee were especially amenable to adopting Jefferson’s ideal of small farmers and planters. See William G. McLoughlin, *The Cherokee Ghost Dance: Essays on the Southeastern Indians, 1789–1861* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1984), and Mary Young, “The Cherokee Nation: Mirror of the Republic,” *American Quarterly* 33 1981 (5): 502–24.
build upon. In 1802, Congress authorized approximately $15,000 annually for Indian affairs. This was a meager amount, and indicated that optimism for philanthropy blinded Jefferson and his Congress about the monumental task before them. While some of the money would be distributed to the Indians directly in the form of cash or farming supplies, most of the funds would go to government agents through the authority of the Indian Office of the War Department, expanded under Jefferson’s tenure. The agents, such as Benjamin Hawkins with the Creeks, were strategically located among the Indian tribes at “factories,” or trading posts. There Indians could purchase farm tools, household goods, gunpowder, clothing, and other essentials for civilization. The idea was for tribes, or important chiefs who were presumed to speak for them, to run up considerable accounts and be obligated to pay them off with a cession of lands. In this way, thought Jefferson, the Indians would receive the tools of the white farmers and sell their own land at the same time. On the surface, it appeared to be a very logical plan for making small farmers out of Indians, which Jefferson thought should occur before they became Christian.13

Missionaries gladly assisted the government agents by living among the Indians and spreading by their example the ideals of white civilization. Gideon Blackburn, Gabriel Richard, and David Zeisberger were some of the notable missionaries during Jefferson’s presidency, living among the Delawares, Seneca, Cherokee, and other tribes. Their primary purpose was to convert the Indians to Christianity, and then civilize them, but Jefferson was generally pleased with their efforts at conversion if acculturation accompanied them. Especially after Jefferson had left office, the missionaries shouldered more and more responsibility for the philanthropic program as government efforts increasingly faltered. The efforts of Jeremiah Evart’s American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions were particularly successful, establishing schools among the Choctaws and the other civilized tribes.14


14 Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction*, 7. The well-known reformer Jedidiah Morse cooperated with the ABCFM but also formed his own group called the American Society for Promoting the Civilization and the General Improvement of the Indian Tribes Within the United States. While largely a fiction, this organization nonetheless reflected a wider concern for the future of the Indians among eastern white elites. See Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* 1 (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 150–60.
Jefferson’s philanthropy toward the Indians was not wholly original, but he became identified with the acculturation program as a result of his political prominence and known scientific proclivities. Jefferson occupied center stage in his activities with the Indians because he was known for defending them in his *Notes on Virginia*. The Lewis and Clark and Red River expeditions further solidified his public reputation as a president personally interested in the cultures and welfare of Indian tribes; the transformation of Monticello’s entrance into an “Indian Hall” filled with Indian relics sent back by Lewis and Clark was proof of his intellectual curiosity about Native Americans. Jefferson thus became an unofficial spokesman for a broadly based, bipartisan, philanthropic surge to preserve the Indian. His ideas about eventual incorporation of the Indians into white society meshed nicely with New England missionaries’ goals, Federalist dogma, and the policies of his presidential predecessors. In 1791, George Washington had loosely outlined an Indian policy that utilized trading facilities to introduce the white man’s culture to several nearby tribes, and John Adams had prided himself on his “indefatigable” efforts in maintaining “universal and perpetual peace . . . with all nations, civilized and savage.” Washington’s postmaster-general, Timothy Pickering, was also widely known as a benefactor of the Indians, who strove for the advent of a “civilizing program” of his own in which the Iroquois, in particular, were to be acculturated.15 Not only Jefferson, but many whites living far from the frontier, wanted the best possible solution for the Eastern Indians, attempting to strike a balance between the best interest of the natives and the needs of their settler neighbors. Jefferson’s influence as leader of the philanthropic program was so strong that the policies he adopted while president would shape the general attitudes and policies of later executives.16

Even though the War of 1812 later interrupted coherent Indian policy, Jefferson advised his successor, James Madison, about Indian affairs. In March 1809, Jefferson wrote directly to president-elect Madison about the state of relations with some of the Southeastern tribes, in special “Memoranda from the President.” He denounced white “intruders” who “had settled on the lands of the Cherokees and

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15 Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 1: 139–40, 118; and Gerard H. Clarfield, *Timothy Pickering and the American Republic* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 119–23. Prucha contends that Washington, and to a lesser extent Adams, both pursued prototypes of Jefferson’s philanthropic program, but that it was Jefferson who “was surely the most important theorizer about the aborigines.” Jefferson “[set] a pattern that was not to be successfully challenged . . .” (136).

16 Ibid.
Chickasaws,” and recommended that Madison preserve the rights of the Indians to their land by appointing “a very discreet officer” who would “inform [the white squatters] they would be removed by military force in the spring if still on the lands.” Funds should also be appropriated for a “dwelling house and appurtenances for a school for the instruction of Indian boys and girls in reading etc learning English and household [sic] and mechanical arts,” Jefferson wrote, to assist acculturation around Detroit. Yet in the same paternalistic letter, Jefferson betrayed a tinge of cold practicality: whites who had settled on the “Doublehead Reserve,” land purchased by federal Indian commissioner Return Jonathan Meigs—who strongly favored immediate Indian removal beyond the Mississippi—would not have to leave. Further, a settlement of white squatters on Cherokee land, founded by a frontiersman named Wafford, “should not be disturbed as the Indians themselves expect to arrange that with us, and the exchange for lands beyond the Misipi will furnish good opportunity.” Clearly, Jefferson no longer wanted the Indians in question to remain where they were when he transmitted these instructions to Madison.17

Not only Madison, but also Presidents Monroe and Jackson followed Jefferson’s lead regarding Indian policy. Monroe at first favored a more paternal solution, if possible, to the problem “of Indian title to lands.” His letter to General Andrew Jackson, on 5 October 1817, was strongly reminiscent of Jefferson’s original acculturation program. Not only did Monroe echo Jefferson here, but he also foreshadowed Jackson’s future Indian policy.

Your reasons for promoting the rapid settlement of the Alabama country . . . and for the extinguishment of the title of the Chickasaws, on the Eastern bank of the Mississippi, have great weight. . . . The hunter of savage state, requires, a greater extent of territory to sustain it, than is compatible with the progress and just claims of civilized life, and must yield to it. Nothing is more certain, than, if the Indian tribes do not abandon that state, and become civilized, that they will decline, and become extinct. The hunter state, tho maintained by warlike spirits, presents but a feeble resistance to the more dense, compact, and powerful population of civilized man. It has been customary to purchase the title of the Indian tribes, for a valuable consideration. . . . A compulsory process seems to be necessary, to break their habits,

and to civilize them, and there is much cause to believe that it must be resorted to (civilize &c) to preserve them. . . . I shall avail myself of the light shed on them by your experience and judgment, on every proper occasion, and I shall always be happy to promote your wishes. . . .

From the text of this letter it appears that Monroe depended on his agents located on the frontier, such as Jackson, for an assessment of the success of his Indian policies. Hence, Jackson’s views would strongly influence Monroe’s policy. Jefferson’s philanthropic influence is still quite noticeable, but also present is a more aggressive, less sympathetic tone declaring the necessity of immediate civilization for the Indians—or else. The alternative of removal did not, however, originate with Jackson. Jefferson decided upon it because his philanthropic program failed.19

WHY PHILANTHROPY FAILED

White settlers on the frontier had very few of Jefferson’s optimistic hopes for the Indians. To them, the red men were at best pests to be quickly brushed aside, and at the worst lethal, blood-crazed enemies. This overwhelmingly negative stereotype of the Indian was reinforced by reports of Indian massacres, memories of Indian alliances with the British in the Revolution (who could forget the frenzied blood lust of the Shawnee spurred on by the rewards of Detroit governor Henry Hamilton, the “Hair Buyer”?), and the popular literature of the day, which horrified the reader with tales of Indian captives being burned at the stake and other ritual tortures. Philanthropy thus partly failed because of exaggerated, preconceived notions about Indians in the settler’s mind.

Indeed, Jefferson himself had personal difficulty reconciling his philanthropic program with Indian atrocities, and often resorted to blaming insidious British influence for them. As war governor of Virginia, Jefferson lauded George Rogers Clark’s expedition into the Ohio territory to punish the marauding Shawnee and capture Henry Hamilton. “Nothing is more desirable than total suppression of Savage Insolence and Cruelties,” he wrote Clark, and referring to British

19 Monroe and Jackson had pressures on them for removal from Georgia and other state governments that would probably have led them to promote some sort of removal policy, but Jefferson’s influence on their political views is unquestionable (especially in the case of Monroe, who regarded Jefferson as a mentor). This influence would play at least an indirect role in determining their presidential Indian policies.
instigation of the natives, Jefferson refused to react in kind: “Notwithstanding their base example, we wish not to expose them to the inhumanities of a savage enemy. Let this reproach remain on them, but for ourselves we would not have our national character tarnished with such a practice.”

Jefferson so abhorred Indian warfare that he even frowned on unleashing it upon the British. He wished to keep the national image clean of reciprocal atrocities, reinforcing his belief that the American way of life was pure and righteous while subtly admitting faults among the noble savages. Despite his idealistic vision of the American Indians, Jefferson obviously harbored reservations about them. In warfare, a truly savage aspect of the Indians appeared that contradicted this vision, one Jefferson could not explain away.

As secretary of state under George Washington, Jefferson was preoccupied with his political battles against Alexander Hamilton, yet still advised Washington about Indian policy. He did not have much tolerance for warlike Indians; yet even in 1791 elements of his later philanthropic program may be gleaned. On 17 April he told Washington he hoped “we shall give the Indians a thorough drubbing this summer, and I should think it better afterwards to take up the plan of liberal and repeated presents to them. This would be much the cheapest in the end, and would save all the blood which is now spilt: in time too it would produce a spirit of peace and friendship between us.” As president, Jefferson continually returned to the threat of annihilation for tribes that went on the warpath. His philanthropy toward the Indian vanished when confronted with armed resistance. Much of that resistance, such as the ill-fated Black Hawk War, would occur as a result of the failure of his philanthropic program.

Jeffersonian philanthropy was philosophically flawed: the extension of the Lockean ideal as a solution to the plight of the Indians, and the naive belief that the Indians would voluntarily and cheerfully comply with the ideal were unrealistic, if not ethnocentric, expectations. Philanthropy also failed, however, because tribal leaders utilized both traditional and “progressive” political institutions to resist efforts to make them cede their lands. Few tribes made the mistake of assuming that the way to keep their social and cultural distinctiveness was to refuse all aspects of white civilization, but trading acres of cherished lands for a few plows and hoes did not appear—for good reason—a

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21 Ibid., 145.
fair trade to most tribal leaders. As the frontier pushed ever westward toward the Mississippi, the tribes remaining in the East thus became more cramped and more infused with white culture, but also more determined to retain their own cultures. Many tribes were very willing to change their way of life and still preserve their cultural identity, such as the Cherokee and Choctaw.\footnote{For a good explanation of Indian resistance to land cessions and efforts at preserving tribal identity see Wallace, \textit{The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca}; William McLoughlin, \textit{The Cherokee Ghost Dance}; and Mary Young, \textit{Redskins, Ruffleshirts and Rednecks: Indian Allotments in Alabama and Mississippi, 1830–1860} (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961).}

Yet such attempts at an acceptable “compromise” between white and Indian civilization were generally frowned upon by government agents, and, to a lesser degree, missionaries. Instead of creating independent Indian farmers, the missionaries and government agents in their frustration often created hybrid Indian collectives, where tools and plows were either shared among families or, more frequently, hoarded by a few prominent members of each tribe. Hoarding by certain Indian leaders became a major problem, and Jefferson mentioned it in an address, “To the Chiefs of the Shawanee Nation,” on 19 February 1807: “You complain that Blue-Jacket, and a part of your people at Greenville, cheat you in the distribution of your annuity, and take more of it than their just share. It will be difficult to remedy this evil while your nation is living in different settlements. We will . . . divide the annuities between the settlements justly, according to their numbers.”\footnote{Quoted in Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., \textit{The Writings of Thomas Jefferson} 15 (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1907), 423.}

Often the individuals who led the tribes were half-bloods, the offspring of white traders and Indian women, influenced through parental exposure to white culture to take an interest in farming. Chief William MacIntosh of the Creeks and other half-bloods nearly succeeded in making the transition so yearned for by Jefferson and his colleagues. Often, however, they also used their advantage of mixed ancestry to dominate the tribal leadership and even argue against the sale of tribal territories, since, through white influence, they recognized the value of private possession of land. Yet half-blood and full-blood leaders both generally resisted wholesale cession of ancestral lands simply because they believed their lands could and should not be sold. Without land sales, government agents could not easily convey the articles of white civilization to the Indians and failed to push the philanthropic program. As a result, tribalism survived and few independent farmers appeared.\footnote{Sheehan, \textit{Seeds of Extinction}, 160–64.}
Despite these setbacks, schools were established among the more “civilized” tribes, especially in the Southeast among the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Cherokee. Some Indian youth learned the English language and valuable farming skills, but when they returned to their parents, they found no use for their new skills. Many Indians were converted to the Christian faith, but still clung to hunting and gathering. “Factories,” or trading posts, were established by the government next to Indian towns, where the material wealth of the white man could be viewed and purchased, as Jefferson wished, with the cession of lands. Government traders were instructed to refrain from profit-making, “to sell so low as merely to repay us cost and charges.” Reluctant to cede their lands in the first place, the Indians who did bought more trinkets than plows. Spinning and weaving were taught to countless Indian women, and animal husbandry demonstrated to the men by government agents living among the tribes, but still few Indians seemed interested in breaking away from their tribal societies and becoming exclusively farmers.25

What always concerned Indians was the loss of their lands. Letter after letter arrived on President Jefferson’s desk and numerous Indian delegations came to Washington to treat personally with the “Great Father.” A reiterated theme developed in Jefferson’s responses: he advocated farming as a way of life and the white man as an exemplar of its success. If Indians would just take to farming, he insisted, they would have no need for their tribal lands and thus would have no conflicts with the encroaching white trespassers. The tone in Jefferson’s letters, however, changed from one of “Brothers and Friends” to “My Children” sometime between 1802 and 1807, indicating a distinct change in Jefferson’s attitude. To “Brothers and friends of the Miamis, Powtewateamies, and Weewauks,” Jefferson wrote on 7 January 1802: “. . . We shall, with great pleasure, see your people become disposed to cultivate the earth, to raise herds of useful animals, and to spin and weave, for their food and clothing. These resources are certain; they will never disappoint you: while those of hunting may fail, and expose your women and Children to the miseries of hunger and cold. . . .”26 To “Brothers Miamis and Delawares” on 8 January 1803, he wrote: “. . . From the same good will towards you, we shall be pleased to see you making progress in raising stock and grain, and making clothes for yourselves. A little labor in this way, performed at home and at ease,

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25 Ibid., 164–66. For a more positive assessment of the “civilization and education” components of Jefferson’s philanthropic program, especially among the aforementioned tribes, see Prucha, The Great Father, chapters 4–6.

will go further towards feeding and clothing you, than a great deal of labor in hunting wild beasts. ..."\(^{27}\)

But a few years later, Jefferson altered his salutation; the Indians were suddenly addressed as “children.” To “My Children, Chiefs of the Shawnee Nation,” on 19 February 1807, the same one in which he addressed concerns about hoarding, he noted, “You say you wish to live as we do, ... that you adopt our mode of living, and ourselves as your brothers. My children, I rejoice to hear this; it is the wisest resolution you have ever formed, to raise corn and domestic animals, by the culture of the earth, and to let your women spin and weave clothes for you all, instead of depending for these on hunting.” Jefferson then illustrated how the “labor and hardships” of hunting would be ameliorated through farming. The overwhelming numbers of the whites also resulted from their reliance on farming: “By cultivating the earth, we produce plenty to raise our children, while yours, during a part of every year, suffer for want of food, are forced to eat unwholesome things, are exposed to the weather in your hunting camps, get diseases and die. Hence it is that your numbers lessen.”\(^{28}\)

Such rationalization of the Indians’ demise was not uncommon in Jefferson’s correspondence with them. He continued to stick to the old line that farming was the answer, that adoption of the white man’s ways was the key to salvation. At the same time, letters explain why the Indians were not becoming farmers. Some of the Indian addresses reveal problems caused by continual contact with frontiersmen, who squatted on their lands or bought them individually. Jefferson promised the Indians that only the national government could buy their lands, but in reality he was powerless to stop illegal encroachment. Promises to protect them from the corrupt influences of non-government traders and unscrupulous settlers proved equally empty. Internal philosophical contradictions, Indian resistance to land cessions, and ethnocentric government agents and missionaries all contributed to the failure of Jeffersonian philanthropy.

Yet the greatest reason Jeffersonian philanthropy failed was the government’s inability to isolate the Indians from the onslaught of the frontier. Massive intrusions of settlers on Indian land deprived the Indians of living space, game, and fields to cultivate their crops.\(^{29}\) Rogue

\(^{27}\)Ibid., 190.

\(^{28}\)Ibid., 207.

\(^{29}\)Jefferson’s Indian agents discovered that it was impossible to enforce treaties guaranteeing tribal borders given the extremely limited military force available to them on the frontier. In addition, the unwillingness of local courts to convict white offenders against the Indians proved troublesome. See the various works of Francis Paul Prucha, especially *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years*, and Mary Young, *Redskins, Ruffleshirts and Rednecks*. 
whiskey traders traveled from tribe to tribe, selling their brew in exchange for money the Indians received from the government for tools, schools, and seeds. Sometimes hundreds of acres were traded away for a few gallons of alcohol. Alcohol proved the greatest factor in Indian malaise and corruption, especially among the halfblood chieftains. Many of Jefferson’s Indian addresses respond to sober chiefs’ pleas to regulate the illegal sale of alcohol to their people, but Jefferson could do little to control it. Disease, such as smallpox and measles, was nonetheless the greatest killer, decimating tribes as far away as the Rockies, who had no immediate contact with whites. The combination of alcohol and disease, brought to the Indians by undisciplined white settlers, so weakened many tribes that survival meant dependence on the government’s handouts. Government agents despaired and missionaries bemoaned what was happening, but they could not compete with the often negative influence of the frontiersmen. The frontiersman, oblivious to Jefferson’s philanthropy, kept pressuring the Indian on all sides.30

Ultimately, the tribes splintered into factions, some of which fled across the Mississippi, withered away under the onslaught, or mobilized for one last attempt to defend their lands and way of life. The Cherokee split into “upper” and “lower” towns, the latter group retreating across the Mississippi in search of better hunting grounds, while the former remained behind, having absorbed more of the philanthropic process. The Creeks, Chickasaw, and Choctaw, despite stiffening tribal resistance, sold off large chunks of territory to Georgia and Tennessee under pressure from local whites; the Creeks even split up into “Red Stick,” or anti-government factions, and bands loyal to the United States, and went to war with each other. Andrew Jackson first achieved fame as a military leader by crushing the Red Stick faction in the Creek War of 1812–13. In the Northwest Territory, Tecumseh tried to unite all the Shawnee and neighboring tribes into one large Indian confederacy, but his dream of pan-Indian nationalism was shattered when William Henry Harrison launched a preemptive strike in 1811 that ended in the rout of the Indians at Tippecanoe. Tecumseh fled into Canada. Effective Indian resistance had collapsed.31

30 Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction, 229–30, 276–77, and Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, 393–94, 399. “Spiritous liquors” were frequently discussed between Jefferson and Indian emissaries.

31 For a good analysis of Tecumseh’s uprising, see R. David Edmunds, The Thin Red Line: Tecumseh, the Prophet, and Shawnee Resistance (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio Historical Society, 1987) and, by the same author, Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).
The Creek War and Tecumseh’s uprising during the War of 1812 were valiant but desperate attempts, indicative of the Indians’ growing fear and exasperation at a time when Jefferson hoped his philanthropy would quell native concerns. Once again the British instigated the remaining Indians to fight the Americans, and again failed adequately to support them. Retired from politics, Jefferson viewed the events of the War of 1812 with unmitigated disgust and blamed the British for corrupting the Indians. The defeat of the Indians this time meant outright removal or extermination by angry settlers. In a letter from Monticello to his German friend Alexander von Humboldt, Jefferson mused about his philanthropic program, its failure, and the inevitable result of that failure, which was exacerbated by the Indians’ alliance with Britain during the war. He simultaneously overstated the case that the Americans had done everything possible to convert the Indians to “civilization”: “You know, my friend, the benevolent plan we were pursuing here for the happiness of the aboriginal inhabitants in our vicinities. We spared nothing to keep them at peace with one another. To teach them agriculture and the rudiments of the most necessary arts, and to encourage industry by establishing among them separate property. In this way they would have been enabled to subsist and multiply on a moderate scale of landed possession. They would have mixed their blood with ours, and been amalgamated and identified with us.”

Jefferson continued to lament the fall of the noble Indian, claiming that the “unprincipled policy of England has defeated all our labors for the salvation of these unfortunate people.” The British “seduced the greater part of the tribes,” and Indian massacres of women and children on the frontier “will oblige us now to pursue them to extermination, or drive them to new seats beyond our reach.” The result “of their savage and ruthless warfare” would be “the confirmed brutalization, if not the extermination of this race in America.” The participation of certain tribes on the side of the British during the War of 1812 embittered many proponents of acculturation, including Jefferson. The physical removal of the Eastern Indians was not long distant, a removal that spelled the end of Jeffersonian philanthropy. Yet Jefferson himself had already given up on his philanthropic program long before the War of 1812, dooming his own scheme to incorporate the Eastern Indians as citizen farmers into the United States, even while others still followed his lead.

32 Jefferson to Alexander von Humboldt, 6 December 1813. Quoted in Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson 14: 23–24.
Jefferson’s Mind Change

Thomas Jefferson changed his mind about the Indians because he discovered that his program of philanthropy was not only working far too slowly, but hardly working at all. The government, he found, simply could not isolate the Eastern Indians from the ravages of the frontier. Philanthropy would fail as long as uncontrollable frontier whites provoked and corrupted the Indians. Jefferson never publicly abandoned his philanthropic notions, but clues in his addresses and letters around the time he gave up hope indicate that the Louisiana Purchase had helped to change his attitude. Bernard Sheehan has come the closest to illuminating the importance of Louisiana in the change of Jefferson’s attitude: “The acquisition of Louisiana gave removal a feasibility it had not possessed before . . . the ownership of the territory by the United States and the information about the region supplied by Lewis and Clark provided ground for a new and positive policy.”

Sheehan did not describe this change in detail, but a close examination of Jefferson’s writings after the territory was acquired demonstrates how quickly philanthropy became subordinated to removal. With the Louisiana Purchase a possession of the United States, removing the Indians across the Mississippi became possible. They would still be within American jurisdiction and could still be cared for by the government, but would be far enough away from the frontier that very few white settlers would ever have contact with the displaced tribes. Thus, disease, which in fact continued to plague the Indians, and Indian-hating whites would no longer be present, and the all-important philanthropic program, albeit weakened, could continue isolated and unmolested. Somehow, Jefferson hoped, the government would protect the Indians undergoing philanthropic transformation by distancing them even further from the very civilization they were to emulate.

The removed Eastern tribes would, as a secondary consideration, also function as a buffer between the United States and European encroachment. By exchanging ancestral Indian lands to the east of the Mississippi for newly bought ones to its west, Jefferson hoped to consolidate the nation’s frontiers and remove forever the possibility of future British influence over the Eastern tribes. On 24 May 1803, in a letter written to territorial governor of Mississippi W.C.C. Claiborne (who would shortly become governor of New Orleans), Jefferson outlined his basic plan—even hinting at the soon-to-be-purchased Louisiana:

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33 Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction, 245.
As a means of increasing the security, and providing a protection for our lower possessions on the Mississippi, I think it also all important to press on the Indians, as steadily and strenuously as they can bear, the extension of our purchases on the Mississippi from the Yazoo upwards; and to encourage a settlement along the whole length of that river, that it may possess on its own banks the means of defending itself, and presenting as strong a frontier on our western as we have on our eastern border. . . . I have confident expectations of purchasing this summer a good breadth on the Mississippi. . . . You will be sensible that the preceding views . . . are such as should not be formally declared.34

On 20 October 1803, the treaty ceding Louisiana to the United States was ratified by the Senate and on 20 December the land was officially handed over to the United States by the French in a ceremony in New Orleans. Jefferson, however, had foreseen these events. On 18 January 1803, he addressed Congress in a “Confidential Message Recommending a Western Exploring Expedition.” This was the inception of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The journey of these two men and their comrades actually commenced before Louisiana was bought. Among their most important responsibilities was the collection of information about indigenous Indians who already lived in the West: where they lived, how they got along with other tribes, the laws and customs they followed, and how they differed from the Eastern Indians.35 Answers to these questions would be critical in assessing how Eastern and Western Indians could cohabit. Jefferson had a plan in mind for Louisiana before it was even American territory. This is not to say that getting land for the Eastern Indians was Jefferson’s sole purpose in doubling the size of the country. Indeed, as John L. Larson argues, the Lewis and Clark expedition “belonged to a comprehensive system of government action that undermined Indian autonomy, broke down Indian resistance, and prepared the way for American settlers who would inevitably possess Indian lands and bring them into the empire of liberty.”36 Yet in his never-proposed “Draft of an Amendment to the Constitution,” written in July 1803 to satisfy his need for a strict constructionist regulation of the purchase, Jefferson requested setting aside all Louisiana territory above the thirty-first parallel for Eastern tribes in return for their lands. Once removed to the West,

34 Quoted in Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson 10: 390–91.
35 Washington, Writings of Jefferson, 185, 190, 207.
these Indians could live peacefully under the care of Jeffersonian philanthropy, while frontier whites would take over their old lands back East, thereby avoiding further clashes between the two groups: “The legislature of the Union shall have authority to exchange the right of occupancy in portions where the U.S. have full right [i.e., above the thirty-first parallel] for lands possessed by Indians within the U.S. on the East side of the Mississippi [sic]: to exchange lands on the East side of the river for those of the white inhabitants on the West side thereof and above the latitude of 31 degrees.” Jefferson’s sincerity about providing security for the removed Eastern tribes is also apparent here. The few whites settled on the western side of the river above thirty-one degrees latitude—where the removed Eastern tribes would soon live—ironically had to relocate east of the Mississippi, ensuring “complete” Indian sovereignty over their new homeland.

Personal letters written in 1803 to numerous correspondents also reveal that Jefferson had well-laid plans for a large portion of the new Louisiana territory. On 12 August Jefferson wrote from Monticello to John C. Breckenridge that the inhabited part of Louisiana, “from Point Coupes to the sea,” will “immediately be a territorial government, and soon a State,” but “above that, the best use we can make of the country for some time, will be to give establishments in it to the Indians on the East side of the Missipi [sic], in exchange for their present country, and open land offices in the last, & thus make this acquisition the means of filling up the Eastern side, instead of drawing off it’s [sic] population. When we shall be full on this side, we may lay off a range of States on the Western bank from the head to the mouth, & so, range after range, advancing compactly as we multiply.”

Not only did Jefferson intend to remove the Eastern Indians across the Mississippi, but this letter also hints that he intended his successors eventually to carve states out of the new Western territory, including that which would be occupied by the removed Indians. Another letter written on 11 July 1803 to General Horatio Gates contained similar language: “If our legislature dispose of it with the wisdom we have a right to expect, they may make [Louisiana] the means of tempting all our Indians on the East side of the Mississippi to remove to the West, and of condensing instead of scattering our population.” It is even possible that Jefferson intended to pay for the Louisiana territory by selling off newly-vacated Eastern Indian lands to white settlers. On 9

38 Thomas Jefferson to John C. Breckenridge, 12 August 1803, ibid., 244.
39 Thomas Jefferson to General Horatio Gates, 11 July 1803, ibid., 249.
August, Jefferson wrote to John Dickinson that the northern part of Louisiana must be “shut up from settlement for a long time to come,” and that he was “endeavoring to exchange some of the country there unoccupied by Indians for the lands held by the Indians on this side of the Mississippi, who will be glad to cede us their country here for an equivalent there.” Further, “we may sell out our lands here & pay the whole debt contracted before it comes due.”

Sometime shortly before the transfer of Louisiana to America, Jefferson decided that the expansion of the “Empire of Liberty” and continued Indian philanthropy in the East would not mix well together. He felt compassion for both his country and the Indians, and honestly wanted both to flourish and achieve the destinies that awaited them. In this equation, however, the Indians had to transform themselves into white men, and he came to believe that transformation would occur far too slowly. In his letter to William Henry Harrison on 27 February 1803, Jefferson not only starkly outlined the basis of his old philanthropic program of trading goods from the “factories” for Indian lands through the medium of Indian indebtedness, but added in elements of the new: “. . . Our settlements will gradually circumscribe and approach the Indians, and they will in time either incorporate with us as citizens of the United States, or remove beyond the Mississippi.” The Indians, by this point, Jefferson argued, knew that they could be “crushed” by the United States, and that all the philanthropy expended upon them was for their own good—“reasons of pure humanity.” Yet if any of the tribes should be “foolhardy enough to take up the hatchet,” they would forfeit all their lands and be driven “across the Mississippi, as the only condition of peace.” Moreover, such events would cause a happy “furtherance of our final consolidation.”

In the end, the Indians would lose out to the expansion of the nation, so any excuse was feasible that saved them by getting them out of the way. Jefferson believed that disruptive contact with the frontier was a major reason acculturation of the Indian was proceeding below expectations; the Indians themselves informed him of the constant conflicts with settlers over land encroachment, alcohol, and livestock. Jefferson even banned all sales of alcohol to Indians by government traders. Yet his efforts seemed to yield few results, and he decided in his own mind to solve the problem by removal. The Louisiana Purchase offered the opportunity he sought. An address to “My Children, Chiefs of the Chickasaw nation, Minghey, Mataha, and Tishohotana” on 7 March 1805, illustrated well Jefferson’s new Indian policy:

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40 Thomas Jefferson to John Dickinson, 9 August 1803, ibid., 263.
Your lands are your own, my children, they shall never be taken from you by our people or any others. You will be free to keep or to sell as yourselves shall think most for your own good. If at this time you think it will be better for you to dispose of some of them to pay your debts, and to help your people to improve the rest, we are willing to buy on reasonable terms. Our people multiply so fast that it will suit us to buy as much as you wish to sell, but only according to your good will. We have lately obtained from the French and Spaniards all the country beyond the Mississippi called Louisiana, in which there is a great deal of land unoccupied by any red men. But it is very far off, and we would prefer giving you lands there, or money and goods as you like best, for such parts of your land on this side of the Mississippi as you are disposed to part with. Should you have anything to say on this subject now, or at any future time, we shall be always ready to listen to you.41

This address was delivered in person to the chiefs while they visited Washington. The theme of “justice,” which Jefferson had mentioned in his letter to Benjamin Hawkins as far back as 1786, is still evident. Jefferson never swerved from the idea that Indians had a possessory right to their lands; however, the government had a pre-emptory right to the land also. Thus, through legal, albeit devalued, purchases, the United States could annex Indian lands. Even if payment was no more than a penny an acre (for land often sold to settlers for hundreds times more), this still satisfied Jefferson’s conscience that justice had been served. He was annoyed by white squatters on Indian lands because they were illegitimate as well as harmful to philanthropic goals: the Indians owned the lands until they sold them to the government. In this case, Jefferson insinuated strongly that the Indians should sell their original lands for totally unfamiliar ones across the Mississippi (“unoccupied by any red men,” which Jefferson knew was false from reports by Lewis and Clark). Did Jefferson actually believe that the Eastern tribes would resettle there voluntarily?42

Apparently he did. In an address to “the Deputies of the Cherokees of the Upper and Lower Towns” on 9 January 1809, Jefferson expressed unconcealed happiness that the Cherokees were split between remaining in the East and moving further west: “. . . I am pleased to find so many disposed to ensure, by the cultivation of the

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41 Quoted in H. A. Washington, ed., Writings, 199.
42 Stephen E. Ambrose, in Undaunted Courage, provides much evidence that Jefferson knew about the Western Indians as early as Spring 1805. He had received specimens, artifacts, and letters pertaining to the Western tribes from the Corps of Discovery by this time. See 345–51.
earth, a plentiful subsistence for their families, and to improve their minds by education; but I do not blame those who . . . desire still to follow it to distant countries. . . .” Jefferson then claimed that the United States government was the friend of its Indian children and would support the decisions and satisfy the wishes of both parties. Those who removed themselves would be “permitted” to dispatch a scouting party to their proposed new tribal lands, “the higher up [north and west] the better as they will be the longer unapproached by our settlements, which will begin at the mouths of the rivers. . . .” When the removed Cherokees decided on a “tract of country” suitable to their needs, they would exchange their old lands in the East for it, according to the proportion of their numbers compared with those of the Cherokees remaining on the old lands. “Every aid towards their removal, and what will be necessary for them there, will then be freely administered to them, and when established in the new settlements, we shall still consider them as our children, give them the benefit of exchanging their pelts for what they want at our factories, and always hold them by the hand. . . .”

This letter clearly pronounced Jefferson’s new policy of removal to continue the philanthropic program. The Cherokees left would be “permitted” to explore to their hearts’ content, as long as they ultimately settled where Jefferson preferred them to. Land in the East would be exchanged for land in the West, and “every aid towards their removal . . . will be freely administered.” Once the Indians were in the West, trading posts (factories) from the government would be erected, and just as in the East, assist in the transformation process—“hold[ing] them by the hand,” as before. Little of the text is devoted to the Cherokee who choose to remain behind: they are dismissed with a vague statement assuring them of “our patronage, our aid and our good neighborhood.”

In an earlier letter dated 4 May 1808, to the chiefs of the Upper Cherokees, Jefferson likewise hesitated to address the future of Cherokees who stayed east of the Mississippi. He also questioned their sincerity of purpose in wishing to become American citizens: “You propose, my children . . . to become citizens, and be ruled by our laws; in fine, to be our brothers instead of our children. My children, I shall rejoice to see the day when the red men, our neighbors, become truly

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43 Ibid., 231. While Lipscomb and Bergh include a section of “Indian Addresses” in vol. 16, Washington’s compilation of Jefferson’s writings is more comprehensive. A truly chronological collection of Jefferson’s known presidential addresses to Native Americans, however, remains to be edited. Paul Leicester Ford’s The Writings of Thomas Jefferson is a good source of personal letters Jefferson wrote regarding Indian policy.
one people with us, enjoying all the rights and privileges we do. . . . But are you prepared for this? Have you the resolution to leave off hunting for your living, to lay off a farm for each family to itself, to live by industry . . . ? All this is necessary before our laws can suit you or be of any use to you.” Immediately following this section of the letter Jefferson stipulated an extensive list of prerequisites for the Upper Cherokees to become citizens. The Indians had to agree to all of them, including the creation of laws of farm inheritance, and then send a delegation to Washington to plead their case. All Jefferson promised to do was “ask the assistance of our Great Council, the Congress, whose authority is necessary to give validity to these arrangements.” He then quickly added a forthright statement of his support if any Indians wished to leave “and settle on our lands beyond the Mississippi.” Jefferson’s preference of action for the Cherokees is obvious in this letter—they should remove themselves because, he believed, they would never become American citizens. Ironically, many of the Cherokee who retained their lands in the East became the models for the original Jeffersonian philanthropic program. They became highly agricultural, some of them owning sizable plantations, fine mansions, and slaves. Yet when Jefferson retired from the presidency in 1809 they were truly left behind, as his successors continued the program of removal to the West without much of the philanthropy. These civilized Cherokees were the best paragon of original Jeffersonian philanthropy, but were condemned by their success to suffer the other half of Jefferson’s program of “philanthropy” in the “Trail of Tears” in 1838.

Jefferson’s Second Inaugural Address of 4 March 1805, was the closest he came to publicly despairing of his philanthropic program for the Native Americans. The words he used revealed a desperate, discouraged man who was losing hope and optimism. After a brief description of how Indians had been “liberally furnished with the implements of husbandry and household use,” provided with “instructors in the arts of first necessity,” and “covered with the aegis of the law against aggressors from among ourselves”—a rare admission of the negative influence of frontier whites—Jefferson nonetheless launched into a tirade against the Indians themselves as “powerful

44 Quoted in Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, 16: 434.
46 Please note that this date is only a year, roughly, after the Louisiana Purchase officially became United States territory.
obstacles” in the way of their progress. He had already decided to shift to removal as the answer to the Indians’ woes and needed to find a moral justification. He blamed the failure of his original philanthropic plans on the Indians, thereby salving his conscience: “Endeavors to enlighten them . . . are combated by the habits of their bodies, prejudice of their minds, ignorance, pride, and the influence of interested and crafty individuals among them. These persons inculcate a sanctimonious reverence for the customs of their ancestors; that whatsoever they did, must be done through all time; that reason is a false guide, and to advance under its counsel . . . is perilous innovation; that their duty is to remain as their Creator made them, ignorance being safety.”

Then Jefferson delivered the coup de grace: “in short, my friends, among them is seen the action and counteraction of good sense and bigotry. . . .”47 Are not these the words of Buffon, returning to haunt Jefferson twenty-odd years after he wholeheartedly embraced the ideal of the “noble savage”? Where is Jefferson’s bottomless pool of optimism? It had vanished, and with it the original philanthropic impulse. Somehow the noble savage had lost his nobility, and Jefferson could not accept the fact. Better stated, the Indian was distinctively Indian, and he refused to become Jefferson’s ideal. The unhappy result, as Jefferson had come to admit, would be the removal of the Indian from his lands.

What does Jefferson’s mind change tell us about Thomas Jefferson? Why did he abandon the philanthropic ideal of acculturation and accept removal as the course the Eastern Indians would have to follow? As a true savant of the Enlightenment, Jefferson believed in the power of reason to regulate men’s lives. It was quite reasonable, then, for him to expect philanthropy to work. Yet Jefferson, for all his belief in reason, was not thinking practically regarding the Indians. The noble savage, who tainted his optimism for philanthropy, simply did not exist, and, more important, Jefferson was blind to the failure of real Indians and white settlers to act rationally. They disregarded reason in favor of passion (i.e., violence), monetary gain (such as British bribes and settlers’ alcohol), and tradition (emotional ties to ancestral lands). In most cases, the Indians could not be truthfully blaming for behaving irrationally, because they had lived for centuries as they wanted to live before destructive contact with the frontier disintegrated their way of life. To become Jefferson’s model yeoman farmers would have been anathema to them. One could also argue that the frontiersmen who traded whiskey for land with the Indians were not to blame,

47 Quoted in H. A. Washington, Writings, 42–43.
because they were simply reacting to conditions created by the frontier itself.

The heart of the problem lay with Jefferson. His philanthropic program had set unrealistic expectations for himself and for the Indians. It was certainly feasible that amalgamation could have, in due time, occurred to a large degree—as evidenced by the “civilized progress” many of the five civilized tribes, the Cherokee in particular, had made. Yet the process would take far longer than Jefferson ever imagined, and the problems caused among the Indians by the unrelenting frontier would force Jefferson’s hand far earlier than he ever anticipated. Just as he had written a Declaration of Independence that proclaimed “all men are created equal,” while retaining over eighty slaves, Jefferson the idealist was obliged to transform himself into Jefferson the practical man. Similarly, as president, Jefferson exhibited a tendency to backtrack from the idealism he earlier expressed when he lacked the responsibility of power. He added Louisiana to the United States without waiting for a constitutional amendment, attacked the Barbary Pirates without a declaration of war, and subordinated the rights of states and citizens to federal policy in enforcing the embargo. The sentimentality he had for the Indians was, like other aspects of his philosophical idealism, shed under the onslaught of reality, and the Louisiana Purchase offered Jefferson a way to change policies gracefully. Certainly, he rationalized removal as a necessary evil for the overall maintenance of the decaying philanthropic program, and found scapegoats, such as the British and the Indians themselves, to blame for the failure of philanthropy. The failure, however, rests squarely with Jefferson because he was unable to reconcile his honorable ideal with cold reality.

Thomas Jefferson must have felt saddened by the realization that his philanthropic ideals would never be reached. He had honestly worked for what he thought was the Indians’ best interest, and hoped removal beyond the Mississippi might eventually accomplish what he had so desired for the Indian in the East. Time, however, had worked inexorably against him, and at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson had decided that only removal would preserve the Indian and leave open philanthropic opportunities. He was subtle in expressing this new attitude, however, and modern historians have either failed to detect it or refrained from commenting on it. Much more research remains to be completed before the debate about Jefferson’s change of mind is finished. What is indisputable is the legacy of failed Jeffersonian philanthropy and the policy of removal that succeeded it. The Indian tribes, one by one, were forced off their cherished ancestral lands. The removal policies of James Monroe and Andrew Jackson
grew at least indirectly out of the seeds of removal Jefferson had planted. On 17 October 1820, President Andrew Jackson addressed the chiefs of the Choctaw Indians. He told them that their Great Father wished to

cede you a country beyond the Mississippi, where all who have gone over and wish to remove, may be collected together upon land of their own. Here, also, he wishes to settle all those who will not work . . . so as to preserve them as part of your nation. These are the friendly and humane views of your father the President of the United States, and he is determined to effect them. . . . If the Choctaw children of your father the President, will adopt the measures here recommended, they will be happy; if they should not, they may be lost forever. . . . These are the valuable objects which Mr. Jefferson promised you and was desirous to accomplish.48

Jefferson had indeed influenced his age, and the Indians, especially, felt the ramifications of his mind change toward removal for decades to come. Jefferson, though, died before the last Eastern Indians crossed the Mississippi. It was probably better that he did.

48 Quoted in Harold D. Moser et al., eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, 394.