

# CHAPTER TWO

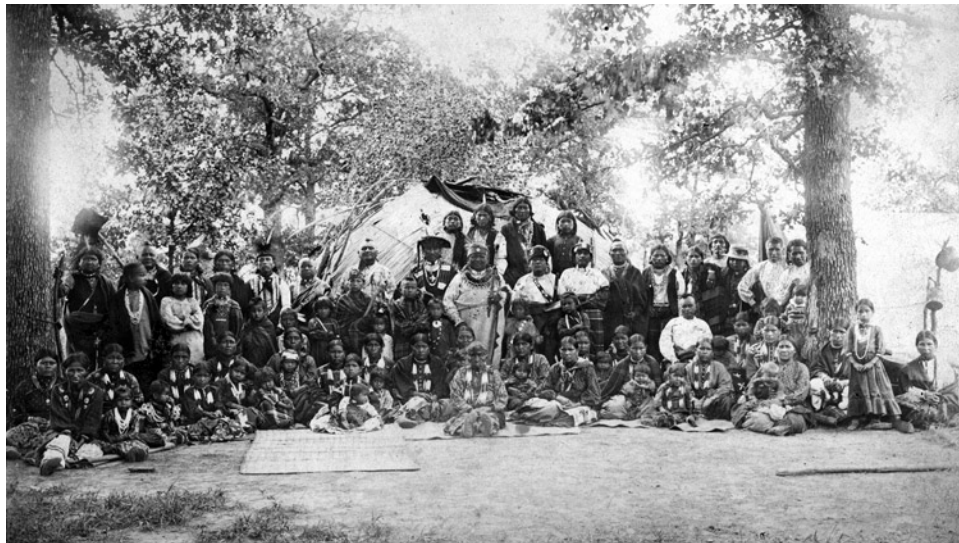
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## THE SAC AND FOX ODYSSEY

*His people were of the same clan as Black Hawk, a leader who fought against the American taking of Indian lands. They were the Sac and Fox. In sixty years, the tribe was transformed from wide-ranging buffalo hunters to a band of 700 survivors on a small reservation. It was the same story for Native Americans all over the country. — Narrator, Jim Thorpe, *The World's Greatest Athlete**

### ORIGINS

The Sac and Fox nation is a confederacy of two tribes, the Sauk and the Mesquakie, whose traditional homelands were in eastern Michigan and northern Ohio. By the late 18th century, they had become principally located in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Their large village of *Saukenuk*, located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Rock Rivers, was described by an English traveler in 1766 as “the largest and best-built Indian town.” Surrounded by hundreds of acres of planted fields, its population was estimated to be as high as 6,000.



*Sac & Fox Group with Chief Pa She Pa Ho, late 19th century*

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In their own language, the Sauk called themselves the Asakiwaki, or “People of the Outlet.” This was eventually shortened in English to Sac.

The Mesquakie, or “Red Earth People,” became known to the French as “Re-nards,” the French word for foxes. Apparently, when a group of Mesquakies was asked to identify themselves by early French visitors, they replied that they were Wahgohagi, or members of the Fox Clan. Thus their clan name was mistaken for the name of their tribal nation.

Closely related in language and culture, the Sauk and Mesquakie shared a history of stubborn resistance to the expansion of French control in Wisconsin. After being nearly wiped out by the French in 1732, about 200 surviving Foxes were given sanctuary by the Sacs. Together, the groups thrived, intermarried, and gained a reputation as a powerful nation to be feared by their enemies.

But the Sac and Fox did not initially seek conflict with Europeans. On the contrary, they were eager to do business with Spanish, British and even the early French traders who came into their territory. In 1806, the famous American explorers *Lewis and Clark* described the Sac and Fox as the best hunters on the Mississippi and the Missouri rivers, estimating that they brought in \$10,000 worth of furs each year.

### MANIFEST DESTINY AND THE ORIGIN OF INDIAN REMOVAL POLICIES

By the beginning of the 19th century, the balance of power between American Indians and Europeans was beginning to change. In 1803, the *Louisiana Purchase*, in which the United States obtained from France 828,800 square miles of territory, an area encompassing much of the central part of the continent, opened up vast new lands for American expansion to the west. The idea of *Manifest Destiny* began to dominate United States policy. This was a sort of historical mysticism that regarded it as natural, good, and inevitable that American civilization would spread across the continent.



*William Tecumseh Sherman, Fort Laramie Treaty Peace Commission, 1868*  
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, WESTERN HISTORY COLLECTION

The solution that the U.S. government applied to the Sac and Fox was the one used to solve virtually all “Indian problems,” namely: Get rid of the Indians. This was done either by warfare or by treaty, in which native groups were forced to cede or sell their lands.

The policy of eradication of peoples who stood in the way of national expansion was not new. It had had its roots in the early 1600s, when the first European settlements were established at Jamestown and Plymouth Plantation. These earliest settlers saw Indians as nomads who did not (by European standards) make full use of the land and therefore had less right to it than the new white settlers, for whom agriculture as a mark of civilization. The settlers and those who followed ignored or were ignorant of the fact that many tribal nations had practiced sophisticated forms of agriculture long before the coming of Europeans. *Crops* that were helping feed the world by the 19th century—maize and potatoes, for example—originated in the Americas.

Religious intolerance also played a pivotal role in shaping how attitudes evolved towards the native inhabitants. The Christian pilgrims and other European settlers also saw Indians as heathen pagans, following false gods. At best they were poor, degraded unfortunates, in need of salvation. At worst, they were the savage enemies of Christian civilization, in league with the devil.

These deeply ingrained biases often caused colonists to discount the experience of their own first contacts with Indians. There are many accounts of early European visitors who remarked on the moral and tolerant nature of the native peoples they encountered. Ironically, many American Indians saw little difference between their own ways of worship and the underlying moral principles of Christianity. In fact, after more than two centuries of contact with European priests and missionaries, a large number of American Indians had accepted the new faith.

It is not surprising that Christianity had become the norm in Jim Thorpe’s own family by the end of the 19th century. His mother was a devout Catholic, and Jim was baptized in the *Sacred Heart Church* near Konawa, Oklahoma. The Sacred Heart Mission near the town of Konawa in Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma,



*Indian Chiefs and U.S. Government Officials*

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where Jim Thorpe was baptized had been built with the help of his mother's tribe. That Catholic faith would continue as a part of Jim's life. When given the choice at Indian school, he would attend the Catholic services, and the three women he would eventually marry would all be Catholic.

## EARLY RESISTANCE TO AMERICAN EXPANSION

The way Manifest Destiny and U.S. government policy, shaped and justified by religious intolerance and European imperialism, played out to determine the fate of the Sac and Fox is similar to the histories of many individual tribes.

In the case of Jim's ancestors, it began as settlers poured into the native lands between the Ohio River and the Mississippi. It resulted in an Indian armed resistance that lasted for several decades. A few names stand out in that heroic but futile native resistance. The first was **Pontiac (1720-1769)**. An Ottawa tribal leader, Pontiac's famous "rebellion" took place in 1763 and brought together a coalition of a dozen different tribal nations to halt what was then British expansion.

**Tecumseh (1768-1813)** of the Shawnee forged a similar intertribal alliance that included the Sac and Fox. Tecumseh's power was broken in 1811 by the American army at the **Battle of Tippecanoe**. The third and last of those who attempted military resistance in the region was Jim Thorpe's illustrious ancestor, **Black Hawk (1767-1838)**. Known also as Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak, or Black Sparrow Hawk, Black Hawk and some of his warriors had been among the first to join forces with Tecumseh and fought on the English/Canadian side in the **War of 1812**. After that war, Black Hawk continued to resist American encroachment on the land, even as another Sac and Fox chief, **Keokuk**, the "Watchful Fox," gave in to demands to relocate the Sac and Fox from Saukenuk to Iowa.

## BLACK HAWK WAR

Finally, in 1831, Blackhawk and a band of followers agreed to abandon Saukenuk and accept Keokuk as chief. Blackhawk was 65 years old at the time and had been fighting for most of his life, but then he was persuaded to change his mind. A Winnebago prophet named White Cloud (Ho-Chunk) urged him to resist



the Americans and reclaim his lands, and a band of Fox warriors came to him for sanctuary. Followers from other nations, Kickapoos and Potawatomis, joined Black Hawk's band. When the spring of 1832 came, Black Hawk led a group of over 2,000 men, women and children back to Saukenuk.

This was the beginning of the tragic misadventure that became known as the **Black Hawk War**. Keokuk had warned the Americans of Black Hawk's plans. A large force of federal troops under General Henry Atkinson and Illinois volunteers under General Samuel Whiteside were sent to intercept Black Hawk. Among them was a lanky 23-year-old from New Salem, Illinois, who thought military service as a captain of volunteers might help him win a seat in the Illinois legislature. His name was **Abraham Lincoln**, and he was later to become the 16th president of the United States.

"Honest" Abe Lincoln would later ridicule the boasts of personal heroism made by such people as Lewis Cass (who was to become Secretary of War) during the campaign against Black Hawk. Lincoln wrote: "If General Cass went in advance of me in picking whortleberries, I guess I surpassed him in charges on the wild onions. If he ever saw any live fighting Indians, I guess it was more than I did, but I had a great many bloody experiences with the mosquitoes; and although I never fainted from loss of blood, I can say I was often very hungry."

Black Hawk led his followers north, fruitlessly seeking support from other native nations. Some, among them the Menominees, Winnebagos and Sioux, joined forces with the Americans to fight against him.

On May 12, Black Hawk found himself facing a detachment of cavalry under Major Isaiah Stillman and 275 militiamen. It seemed hopeless, so he sent a party to Stillman under a flag of truce. Despite the white flag, the troops attacked and killed three Indians. With no choice but to fight, Black Hawk and his warriors made a stand so fierce that the militiamen, panicked and took flight back to Dixon Ferry, 25 miles away. Stillman's Run, as it became known, was the only real Indian victory of the campaign. From then on, it was fight, flight and hunger for Black Hawk's desperate followers.

It ended on August 3, 1832, when the starving, tattered band reached the junction of the Mississippi with the Bad Axe River. Black Hawk tried again to parlay. As before, his delegation was fired upon. Hundreds of others then tried to flee across the river in canoes and on makeshift rafts. They were cut down by heavy fire from the shore and a gunboat on the river. Most died. Only 39 women and children survived.

Black Hawk, White Cloud, the Winnebago prophet, and a number of his followers were taken prisoner and incarcerated in St. Louis. When the famous artist **George Catlin** visited them, they refused to pose for him until he agreed to paint them wearing their balls and chains.

In 1833, Keokuk and **William Clark**, Indian Agent and former explorer of the Louisiana Territory, arranged for the release of most of the prisoners. But Black Hawk, his handsome son Neapope, the prophet White Cloud and two others were judged too dangerous to set free. They were sent east to a safer prison in Maryland.

## BLACK HAWK'S SURRENDER

In the east, Black Hawk and the other prisoners were treated as celebrities. Their tragic war was already becoming a part of the American mythology of the West. They met **President Andrew Jackson**, who was surprisingly cordial. They were given new clothing. At Fort Monroe on the Chesapeake they were given the freedom of the post. In May, their promises to end all resistance and Clark's words on their behalf resulted in their release. They were returned west, after being taken on a tour of Norfolk, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Albany, where throngs of awed onlookers gawked at them and gave them presents. Several women impulsively kissed Black Hawk's son Neapope, described by a Washington reporter as "a noble specimen of physical beauty."

Near the end of their tour, properly awed by the wealth and power of the Americans, Black Hawk made this statement to a group of Seneca Indians, "Brothers, we have seen how great a people the Whites are. They are very rich and very strong — it is folly for us to fight them."

He allowed himself to be taken to the new reservation in Iowa, where he died in 1838, the year that the Cherokees were removed to Indian Territory on the *Trail of Tears*. With the exception of the Seminole resistance in Florida, Black Hawk's War marked the end of armed conflict between the United States and the tribes east of the Mississippi.



*The Trail of Tears, 1838*  
THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK

But the Sac and Fox odyssey was not yet over. Keokuk, who had betrayed his own people, was now undisputed principal chief of the Sac and Fox. In addition to all Sac and Fox lands east of the Mississippi, in the Treaty of 1832, he ceded an additional 50-mile stretch on the Iowa side of the great river, some of the richest farmland in America. The United States honored Keokuk with a statue. Keokuk, now a rich man, then convinced most of his people to give up the rest of their Iowa lands—another ten million acres—and move to a reservation of 435,000 acres in Kansas, with poor soil for agriculture and tribes hostile to the newcomers all around them.

## THE RESERVATION SYSTEM

The system of removing Indians from their homelands and restricting them to reservations was a long-standing part of United States Indian policy. A tract of "public land" would be set aside for the use of a particular Indian group. Those reservations were usually created as a result of treaties signed between the United States and representatives of an Indian nation and were supposed to hold the same force of law as a treaty between two nations. In exchange for ceasing

resistance and ceding their lands, Indians were promised certain benefits, including food, clothing, housing and education for their children. An Indian agent, appointed by the federal government, was placed in charge of each reservation, and his word was law. Indians on reservations did not enjoy the same rights as American citizens. Often, they could not leave the reservation without written permission. They were forbidden to engage in most of their traditional practices. Even farming was difficult, because the land on most reservations was relatively unsuited for agriculture. There was little game within the reservation boundaries, so men often had to leave, with or without permission, to get food. Because there was little available employment on the reservation, most had to rely on the United States government for rations.



*Indians and Log Cabin*  
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, WESTERN HISTORY COLLECTION

The Sac and Fox experienced all the problems of the reservation system, including the fact that the land "given" to them by the United States government lay in the middle of territories long claimed by other American Indian peoples. In Kansas, the Sac and Fox found themselves encroaching on the traditional hunting grounds of powerful plains tribes, all of whom resented the new "frontier Indians." Fortunately, the Sac and Fox were good at fighting. In 1854, a group of 100 Sac and Fox buffalo hunters were encountered by a party of over 1,000 Comanches, Osages, Kiowas, and Cheyennes near Fort Riley. In the fight that followed, half a dozen Sac and Fox were killed, but their adver-

saries were forced to retreat after losing four times that number. In his 1856 report, the superintendent of the Central Division of the Indian Bureau stated that “By their adventurous courage (the Sac and Fox) ... though greatly outnumbered ... [have] caused a panic among those very bands of Comanches long considered so terrible upon the frontiers of Texas.” Jim Thorpe’s ancestors were tough people.

## REMOVAL TO INDIAN TERRITORY

Still the Sac and Fox were dwindling. Two thousand four hundred had been settled on the Kansas reservation under the Treaty of 1842. Within twenty years, half of their population had perished from cholera, smallpox, and measles. In 1851, a hundred of the Kansas Foxes returned to Iowa. Other Foxes joined them, and they were able to eventually purchase a 3,000-acre settlement near Tama, Iowa, using money from their annuities and sales of their horses and jewelry. Given state recognition in 1856, they are known today as the *Mesquakies*.

Meanwhile, the United States abrogated its treaty with the Sac and Fox. In 1854, Congress passed the

*Kansas-Nebraska Bill*, which not only provided for the creation of the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, but also stated that the Indians of the region should be resettled in the region then known as *Indian Territory*, the present-day state of Oklahoma.

In 1859, a group of Sac and Fox leaders, led by *Moses Keokuk*, the son of the old chief, signed a new treaty in which they gave up 300,000 acres of their Kansas reservation. Seven years later they were pressured give up all the rest of their land in Kansas in exchange for money they could use to buy land in Indian Territory.

In December of 1869, during a heavy snowstorm, the survivors of what had once been a mighty nation made their last relocation. The remaining Sac and Fox people, as few as 387 by one count, their old and weak loaded onto government wagons, made the nineteen-day trek to Indian Territory. There, on about 480,000 acres of land, less than 10 percent of which was suitable for farming, they received an annuity of \$60 each. There, in Indian Territory, Jim Thorpe would be born eighteen years later.



# THE SAC AND FOX ODYSSEY

## Concepts and Discussion

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students learn about the history of Jim Thorpe’s tribal nation, the Sac and Fox, linked to the broader history of Western settlement and the United States policy of Indian Removal, treaties, the Indian Wars, and the reservation system.

### TEACHER’S QUICK REFERENCE

#### *Origins*

- Original homelands in eastern Michigan and northern Ohio
- Village of **Saukenuk**, at the confluence of the Mississippi and Rock Rivers, estimated population 6,000
- Asakiwaki (Sauk) and Mesquakie (Red Earth People) joined together after war with the French
- Sac and Fox active in fur trade

#### *Manifest Destiny and the Origin of Indian Removal Policies*

- Louisiana Purchase in 1803
- Idea of Manifest Destiny
- Policies of Indian eradication
- Religious and cultural intolerance of whites toward Indians

#### *Early Resistance to American Expansion*

- Pontiac’s rebellion in 1763
- Tecumseh’s alliance and the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811
- Black Hawk sided with the English in the War of 1812

#### *Black Hawk’s War*

- Troops attack Saukenuk in 1831.
- Black Hawk leads followers back to Saukenuk in 1831.
- Abraham Lincoln in Black Hawk’s war
- Stillman’s Run
- Massacre at Bad Axe River

#### *Black Hawk’s Surrender*

- Black Hawk’s tour as a prisoner of war
- Black Hawk’s death in 1838, the year of the Trail of Tears
- Keokuk cedes more land in the Treaty of 1832.
- Sac and Fox removal to Kansas

#### *The Reservation System*

- “Public” land set aside for Indians
- Indians given certain benefits
- Reservation system

- Role of Indian agent
- Problems of reservation system and treaties
- Sac and Fox problems

#### *Removal to Indian Territory*

- Sac and Fox population dwindles to half.
- Breakaway group of Foxes go to Iowa in 1851, become Mesquakie.
- Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854
- Remaining Sac and Fox go to Indian Territory in 1869.

#### **KEY CONTENT**

- Identity of Sac and Fox
- American expansionism and its effects on Sac and Fox
- Misunderstandings about American Indian cultures
- Indian Removal Policy
- Black Hawk's War
- Indian Territory
- Sac and Fox Removal(s) to Kansas and the Indian Territory
- Indian Treaty system and its effect on Sac and Fox
- Reservations

#### **CONTENT REVIEW**

- Why did the two nations of the Sac and Fox become one allied group?
- What was Saukenuk? How large was the Sac and Fox Nation?
- What were the arguments for Indian Removal?
- Why did American Indians resist removal?
- Who were some of the main Indian resistance leaders in the Great Lakes region in the early 19th century?
- Who was Black Hawk?
- What role did Keokuk play?
- What tribes allied themselves with the Americans in Black Hawk's War?
- What is an Indian Treaty?
- What is a Reservation?
- What was the role of the Indian Agent?
- Why were there often problems on reservations?
- What difficulties did the Sac and Fox encounter in Kansas?
- What is the Mesquakie Community? How and why was it formed?
- How many Sac and Fox ended up in Indian Territory, and what did they find there?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Was the Sac and Fox experience of conflict with the United States and removal from their homelands similar or different from that of many other American Indian nations? Research one or two other tribal nations who were impacted by American Expansionism, such as the Delawares, the Cherokees, or the Navajos, and compare their experience.
- The argument of Manifest Destiny was used to justify the removal of Indians from the East. Have a debate, dividing into two groups, with one defending the right of Indians to their own land and the other defending the United States policies of the time.
- Many American Indians took the side of the United States in disputes against other tribal nations and even their own people. Were they traitors? Were there logical reasons for their actions? Discuss this question.
- What were the problems with the Indian Treaty System? Do some research about the treaties made with other American Indian tribes throughout the United States.
- Discuss the pros and cons of the reservation system. Imagine yourself as an Indian Agent who wants to do good and talk about the problems you might face in that role. Imagine yourself as an American Indian on a reservation in the late 19th century who wants to make things better, and talk about what problems you might face. What changes might be made that you could both agree upon?

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