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Educational -- Oklahoma Indian Territory ("Boomer Sooner")

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When I began my research into the Oklahoma Native American Culture, I found this of interest to me. I decided to use this as my last educational. One of my Beta Psi sisters used part of it as her educational in January, but I wanted to use this anyway.

Oklahoma Indian Territory ("Boomer Sooner")

Oklahoma Territory's history began with the [Indian Intercourse Act](#) of 1834 when the [United States Congress](#) set aside land for Native Americans. At the time, the land was [unorganized territory](#) that consisted of all the federal land "west of the Mississippi and not within the states of Missouri and Louisiana, or the territory of Arkansas..." By 1856, the territory had been reduced to the modern-day borders of the [State of Oklahoma](#). These lands quickly became known as [Indian Territory](#), as they had been granted to certain Indian nations under the [Indian Removal Act](#), in exchange for their historic territories east of the [Mississippi River](#).

Until this point, Native Americans had exclusively used the land. In 1866, after the [American Civil War](#), the federal government required new treaties with the tribes that had supported the [Confederacy](#), and forced them into land and other concessions. As a result of the [Reconstruction Treaties](#), The Five Civilized Tribes were required to [emancipate](#) their [slaves](#) and offer them full citizenship in the tribes if they wanted to stay in the Nations. This forced many of the tribes in [Indian Territory](#) into making concessions. The US officials forced the cession of some 2,000,000 acres of land in the center of the Indian Nation Territory.

The popular press began referring to this tract as the [Unassigned Lands](#) or *Oklahoma* and to the people agitating for its settlement as [Boomers](#). To prevent settlement of the land by European Americans, in April 1879, [President Rutherford B. Hayes](#), issued a proclamation forbidding unlawful entry into Indian Territory. Despite federal obstruction, popular demands for the land did not end. Captain [David L. Payne](#) was one of the main supporters of the opening of Oklahoma to white settlement. Payne traveled to [Kansas](#), where he founded the [Boomer](#) "Colonial Association." Payne's organization hoped to establish a white colony in the Unassigned Lands and included 10,000 members. The formation of the group prompted President Hayes, on February 12, 1880, to issue a proclamation ordering Payne not to enter Indian Territory. In response, Payne and his group traveled to Camp Alice in the Unassigned Lands, east of [Oklahoma City](#). There, they made plans for a city, which they named "Ewing." The Fourth Cavalry arrested them, took them to [Ft. Reno](#) and escorted them back to Kansas. Payne was furious, as [public law](#) prohibited the military from interfering in civil

matters. Payne and his party were freed—effectively denying them access to the courts. Anxious to prove his case in court, Payne and a larger group returned to Ewing in July. The Army again arrested the party and escorted them back to Kansas. Again they were freed but this time the federal government charged Payne with trespassing under the [Indian Intercourse Act](#); he went to trial in [Ft. Smith](#), Arkansas. Judge [Isaac Parker](#) ruled against Payne and fined him the maximum amount of one thousand dollars. Since Payne had no money and no property, the fine could not be collected. The ruling settled nothing as to the question of the public domain lands, and Payne continued his activities.

Payne tried a third time to enter the Unassigned Lands. In December, Payne and his group moved along the northern border of Indian Territory. They were followed by a unit of cavalry under the command of Colonel [J.J. Copinger](#). Colonel Copinger warned Payne that if he crossed the border that they would be "forcibly resisted." As the number of Boomers grew as people joined Payne, they sent a messenger to President Hayes asking permission to enter Indian Territory. After weeks of no response, Payne led his followers to the Unassigned Lands. Once again, they were arrested and Payne was sent back to Fort Smith. He was found guilty and sentenced to pay a \$1,000 fine. Upon his release, he returned to Kansas, where he spent the next four years trying to open Oklahoma. During Payne's last venture, this time into the [Cherokee Outlet](#) in 1884, the Army again arrested him. They took him several hundred miles under severe physical circumstances over a tortuous route to Ft. Smith. The public was outraged about his treatment by the military, and the US government decided to try his case. Payne was turned over to the [United States District Court](#) at [Topeka](#), Kansas. In the fall term, Judge Cassius G. Foster quashed the indictments and ruled that settling on the Unassigned Lands was not a criminal offense. The Boomers celebrated, but the federal government refused to accept the decision. Payne immediately planned another expedition, but he would not lead it. On November 28, 1884, in [Wellington](#), Kansas, the morning after a late-night address to the Boomers, he collapsed and died. After Payne's death, his associate, [William L. Couch](#), assumed the leadership role. Couch moved the Boomers into Indian Territory and founded [Camp Stillwater](#) on December 12, 1884. President [James Garfield](#) sent a small detachment of troops to escort Couch out of the territory. When the soldiers arrived, 200 armed men met them; and refused to be moved. After 600 additional troops arrived as reinforcements, the officers gave the Boomers the choice of leaving within 48 hours or being apprehended. After the Boomers refused to leave, the commanders moved their troops across the Kansas border and cut off Couch's [supply lines](#). Soon, their food was gone, and Couch and the other Boomers were escorted back to Kansas. In response to Couch's claims that the federal government was discriminating against them, on March 3, 1885, Congress approved the [Indian Appropriations Act](#) of 1885. This act authorized negotiations for the cession of unoccupied lands belonging to the [Creek](#), the [Seminole](#), and the [Cherokee Indians](#). Couch stopped being a colonist and became a [lobbyist](#). Couch would spend four years in Washington, D.C. trying to convince Congress to open the Oklahoma lands. Many Indians from the [Five](#)

[Civilized Tribes](#) lobbied against Couch's actions. In January 1889, [Pleasant Porter](#) led a group of Muscogee (Creek) who offered to sell their unoccupied lands. Within weeks, they sold their " [unassigned lands](#) " to the United States. These lands embraced less than 3,000,000 acres (12,000 km²) in the heart of Indian Territory.

On March 2, 1889, Congress passed an amendment to the [Indian Appropriations Act](#) of 1871, which provided for the creation of [homestead](#) settlements in the unassigned lands, to be known as *Oklahoma Territory*. President [Grover Cleveland](#) announced that the Oklahoma lands would be opened on April 22 via [land run](#). The land run was held at noon and was open to all people of at least 21 years of age. The [Land Run of 1889](#), the first [land run](#) in the territory's history, opened Oklahoma Territory to settlement on April 22, 1889. Over 50,000 people entered the lands on the first day, among them several thousand [freedmen](#) and descendants of slaves. Couch and his Boomers, now numbering some 14,000, also entered the race. Those who entered Oklahoma before the official start of the race were called [Sooners](#). When the run began at noon, men on thousands of horses, wagons, buggies, carts, and vehicles rushed across to Oklahoma. The law-abiders fought with the Sooners on several instances. A legal pioneer shot and wounded William Couch, a Sooner. He died on April 21, 1890, as a result of his wounds. When the race was over, many disappointed pioneers were forced to leave the area without any claim. Of the 14,000 Boomers, only 1,000 had made claims. Tent cities grew overnight at [Oklahoma City](#), [Kingfisher](#), [El Reno](#), [Norman](#), [Guthrie](#), and [Stillwater](#), which was the first of the settlements.