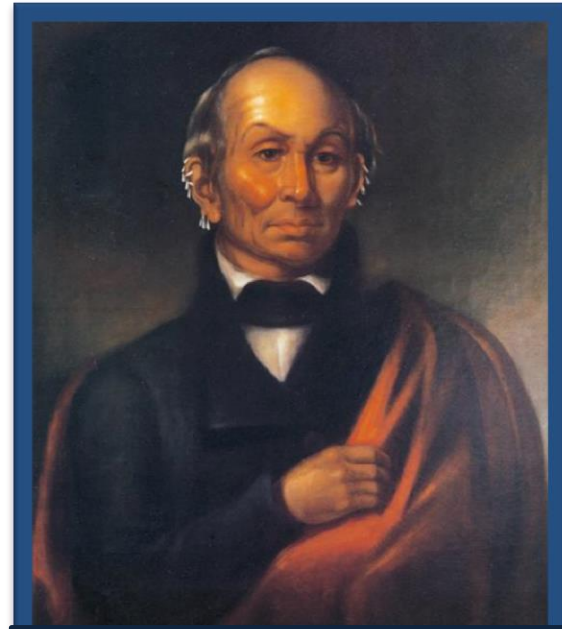


Blood, Guts and 50 million Acres to Spare

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In the early 1800s, the Sauk and Fox¹ Native Americans lived along the Mississippi River from northwestern Illinois to southwestern Wisconsin. They lived peacefully until 1804, when the creation of the St. Louis Treaty took place. The Sauk and Fox Indians were treated unfairly by the United States government in the treaty. This began a war between Sauk and United States which decimated the tribes.

By a treaty of doubtful validity, concluded in St. Louis on November 3, 1804, the Sauk and Fox Indians agreed to give the United States all their land east of the Mississippi and some claims west of it. In exchange for 50 million acres, they were to receive \$2,500 in goods and \$1,000² in cash from the United States every year. The treaty was unjust in negotiating an equal trade for the Native Americans. It was designed in favor of settlers who needed more land, which the Native Americans had. The treaty duped the Natives out of millions of acres of land for an unreasonably low price. The cost per acre was less than one cent. At \$0.00045 an acre, the United States robbed the Sauk of their land. The treaty was negotiated by Indiana Territory³ governor William Henry Harrison. From the U.S. perspective, the Treaty of 1804⁴ was binding and legal. Black Hawk believed the treaty was invalid and refused to sign it and remained at his village of Saukenuk. The four men who signed over the land to the Americans had not been authorized by the Sauk and Fox tribal councils to cede any land, let alone negotiate a treaty of this magnitude. These four men were exhausted after riding for days on horseback and after finally reaching St. Louis, they were plied with alcohol. Tired and under the influence, these men were in no condition to agree to the treaty. When the U.S. insisted on the validity of the treaty, it strained an already tense relationship⁵. After the War of 1812, many more white settlers began to press westward into the Illinois country. Nevertheless, under the terms of the treaty, the Natives could remain on their land as long as it was under the control of the U.S. government, or at least until private settlers purchased it.



Portrait of Black Hawk in 1833; just one year after the brief war between the United States and Sauk natives.

¹Also known as the Sac and Fox tribe and later known as the Meskwaki.

² \$1,000 in 1804 would be equal to \$15,290.78 in 2014 after inflation. The average annual income of a household in the United States was \$51,017 in 2012.

³ In 1804, the Indiana Territory included Illinois.

⁴ Also known as the Treaty of St. Louis.

⁵ During the War of 1812, the Sauk had fought for the British.

For the United States, the land the Natives possessed posed great opportunities for farming, new trading posts, and continued westward expansion. However, this land was the provider of vital resources that the Native Americans used to survive. Food, clothing, shelter, and even their spirituality came from the land they inhabited.

Although Keokuk, head chief of the Sauk, withdrew into Iowa as required, Black Hawk, an adjutant leader, asserted that his people had been tricked, denounced the treaty, and refused to leave. Years of isolated incidents followed until the whites finally forced the Natives out in 1831. Keokuk and other Sauk leaders thought it was futile to resist the overwhelming military force along with an 1829 government order to move across the Mississippi in return for enough corn to get through the winter. Black Hawk and a group of 1,200 Sauk left Iowa Territory and returned to their homes across the Mississippi River in northern Illinois. Black Hawk believed that his Ho-Chunk⁶ neighbors would join him in fighting the Americans if necessary, and in the event of full-scale war the British would also come to his aid.



Black Hawk and his followers were met in the summer of 1832 by the Illinois militia, who were soon strengthened by regular U.S. Army troops. Being unable to rally expected support from other tribes, Black Hawk acknowledged defeat and prepared to talk peace. When one of his envoys to the Americans was murdered, he furiously attacked and defeated a superior force of whites, raided settlements, and ambushed the regiments of militia that were sent to subdue his band. Black Hawk's account of the Battle of Wisconsin Heights is as follows; "Accordingly, on the next day, we commenced moving, with five Winnebagoes acting as our guides, intending to descend the Ouisconsin⁷.... we were proceeding to the Ouisconsin, with our women and children. We arrived and had commenced crossing them to an island, when we discovered a large body of the enemy coming towards us. We were now compelled to fight, or sacrifice our wives and children to the fury of the whites! I met them with fifty warriors, (having left the balance to assist our women and children in crossing) about a

mile from the river, when an attack immediately commenced." For sixteen weeks, Black Hawk and his warriors created tactical diversions while they tried to make their way safely across the Mississippi. They had eluded capture by leading the Americans on a winding route around the

⁶ Also known as the Winnebago tribe.

⁷ A Native name with French influence, it meant "grassy place" in the Chippewa language. The French had encountered many Algonquian Natives. The historic peoples were the Shawnee, Illiniwek, Kickapoo, Menominee, Miami, and Sauk and Fox, whom lived throughout the present-day Midwest of the United States.

populated lead region, through the future location of downtown Madison, and toward the Mississippi above Prairie du Chien. During the battles, several attempts to surrender were ignored or misinterpreted by the American troops, and supplies of food and water repeatedly ran out. Many very young or elderly Sauk died of hunger, thirst, and exhaustion and were often buried on the trail.

Finally, on August 1, 1832, the surviving Sauk finally reached the banks of the Mississippi near the mouth of the Bad Axe River. They were caught between a gunboat in the river ahead of them and the pursuing troops on bluffs behind them. The Natives tried to surrender, but they were misunderstood, and the troops opened fire, initiating the Battle of Bad Axe. The gunboat fired on defenseless swimmers as they attempted to retreat. By the battle's end, about 150 Indians lay dead and almost half that number had been taken prisoner. Army losses were nearly nothing. About 300 Sauk had made it across the river, only to be killed by Sioux warriors, long-time enemies of the Sauk, who were fighting on the side of the Americans.

Black Hawk himself escaped and fled northward, surrendering himself to the Winnebago, who turned him over to the Americans. Of his initial community of 1,200 people who had attempted to return to their homeland, only about 150 remained.

The Sauk tribe of southwest Wisconsin and northwestern Illinois had been treated unfairly by the United States government. In negotiating the treaty, the Americans disregarded the Sauk's integrity of their land and bought it for nearly nothing. Those who signed the treaty had not been authorized, therefore, the treaty was not only unjust, but it was also inauthentic. The men who signed the treaty were inebriated and incapable of hammering out such a consequential agreement. Over 1,000 people perished in the Black Hawk War which could have been prevented had the St. Louis Treaty not been established.

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