

January 20, 1998

Brian Lamb
C-Span CEO
400 N. Capital Ave N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Brian:

I am replying to your request for evidence of the effect of your C-Span series on Alex de Tocqueville. Has it brought attention to DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA? The light finally went on for me when the year 1831 and the map showing Memphis Tennessee as part of his tour.

Since I am part of a Choctaw family and know the route of the Indian exodus from Mississippi to Oklahoma where they settled, I know that they crossed the Mississippi River at Memphis. Could it be that Alex de Tocqueville had been in Memphis at the same time! Low and behold he was there and saw the debacle and wrote about it. I am sending you a piece of writing. This particular quote has appeared in other sources I have read, since I have particular interest in this subject. The trauma of the exodus had much greater effect among the Choctaws for generations. I never heard about what happened to the dogs. There were other quotes from his writing. However, I think this will suffice for his purpose of showing that he understood what he was seeing in Memphis. It must have been a revelation to him to see what effects of the conflicts of the races has been all about.

After reading through parts of his book, it becomes apparent that he did not know that U.S. and Choctaws had signed a treaty. The Choctaws gave up their land for designated lands in Oklahoma, money for schools, money to remove and other grants. Needless to say the U.S. Government was still procrastinating in settling the treaty for more than 25 years after 1830. A Long Story!

I will enclose this letter with the eyewitness account of the crossing and I hope you realize the effect of the whole series on those of us who have been watching.

Sincerely,

Valley Center, CA 92082-3713

P.S. We visited your studio in June '97. We were impressed with you and your wonderful guide Valley Center CA 92082 a very knowledgeable young pretty girl from California

0-TOC9

Eyewitness to Heartbreak

Alexis de Tocqueville, the great French observer of nineteenth-century American life, recorded his personal witness of heartbreak and misery of the Choctaw removal in his classic book, Democracy in America.

"At the end of the year 1831 I was on the left bank of the Mississippi, at the place the Europeans called Memphis. While I was there a numerous band of Choctaws . . . arrived; these savages were leaving their country and seeking to pass over to the right bank of the Mississippi, where they hoped to find an asylum promised to them by the American government. It was then the depths of winter, and that year the cold was exceptionally severe; the snow was hard on the ground, and huge masses of ice drifted on the river. The Indians brought their families with them; there were among them the wounded, the sick, newborn babies, and the old men on the point of death. They had neither tents nor wagons, but only some provisions and weapons. I saw them embark to cross the great river, and the sight will never fade from my memory. Neither sob nor complaint rose from that silent assembly. Their afflictions were of long standing, and they felt them to be irremediable. All the Indians had already got into the boat that was to carry them across; their dogs were still on the bank; as soon as the animals finally realized that they were being left behind forever, they all together raised a terrible howl and plunged into the icy waters of the Mississippi to swim after their masters."

The relocation became a prolonged death march. Winter was unusually severe that year, with temperatures often dropping below zero. Pneumonia killed Choctaws of all ages. When warm weather appeared, a deadly cholera epidemic claimed hundreds of victims. Making matters even worse, the government contractors and federal agents responsible for the well-being of the Indians during the removal cheated them in transactions for food and supplies.

Two thousand Indians died as a result of the removal. Knowing of this ordeal, the remaining Choctaws in Mississippi refused to follow their fellow tribesmen. Instead, they clung to their homelands, despite an ever-increasing tide of invading white settlers who arrived and staked claims on Choctaw land.

In 1850 several Choctaws who had remained in Mississippi described their plight in a letter to a white friend: