

Holding land in common and title by the Cherokee Nation was "un-American" to the Dawes Commission. The Cherokees saw it differently. One writer, in the Cherokee Advocate, in 1892, wrote:

The term "allotment" as used among us is simply another word for title in severalty to our lands.

Now I think white people are as smart as Cherokees, and yet there are swarms of them in all the states and among the Indian tribes who do not own a foot of land and, in all probability, never will own any.

If the system of owning land in severalty has the effect to exclude so many people among the whites from the enjoyment of a home, it seems to me that the same system among the Cherokees would soon have the effect to render many of them homeless.¹¹

Six years later, after the Cherokee Nation refused to negotiate allotment of their lands, the United States Congress, by the Curtis Act, mandated allotment and diminished the government of the Cherokee Nation.¹² Senator Bates of Tennessee was the singular voice in opposition. On the U.S. Senate floor, he stated:

Mr. President, I think this bill is wrong. I think it is in violation of all the treaties that have ever been made with these Indians by this government. It overrides moral and legal obligations. The whole thing is wrong. I have the treaties here by me which I could read if necessary, but they have already been read and the case is well understood to be as I state it. I protest against the passage of this bill.

With the passage of the Curtis Act, the Cherokee land was allotted, the government of the Cherokee Nation was diminished and, subsequently, the State of Oklahoma was created in 1907. Senator Dawes stated, in 1883, that there was not a pauper in the Cherokee Nation. By 1920, the majority of the Cherokees lost their lands to white settlers and were reduced to a state of poverty. The prophesy of Senator Teller, in 1881, came true. The Cherokees cursed those responsible for allotment.

The Cherokee Strip Land Run vividly marks a bit of romantic American folklore that ignores the harsh reality to the Cherokee Nation and its people. It was the epitome of wrongful dealing by the federal government, violation of scared promises memorialized in Treaties, and the watershed event that lead to pain, suffering and poverty of the Cherokee people due to allotment.

How can the harsh dynamics of such an event be portrayed visually in a memorial? We do not know. We do know that continuing the romantic myth of the Cherokee Strip Land Run is unjust.