On the Margins of History: Native Americans and the Civil War

Abstract

In this paper, I examine the Civil War’s effects on Native Americans, both those who fought in the war and communities of women and children back home. I explore why this subject has so often been relegated to the periphery of Civil War history. I also discuss the conflicts of identity and tribal factionalism many Native Americans experienced in regards to the war, as well as the effects of location, class, and gender on these experiences. I argue that Native Americans of the nineteenth century faced a civil war within the Civil War, one furthered by federal legislation, Indian removal policy, westward expansion, and media of the time; it is critical that this subject be included in American and Civil War histories in order to create a more complete American historical narrative. To supplement my argument, I examine a few portrayals of Native Americans in art and print culture of the time, as well as how these portrayals contributed to the dual civil wars that many Native Americans faced.