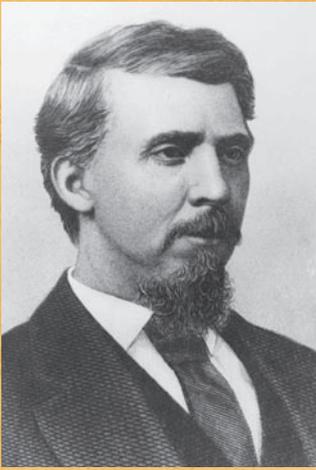


MORE ABOUT JUDGE ISAAC C. PARKER



During his twenty-one years at the federal court at Fort Smith, Judge Isaac C. Parker tried 13,490 cases and sent 79 lawbreakers to the gallows to be hanged. Though feared by many, Judge Parker was a just man who opposed the death penalty. But he believed in strict obedience to the law—and the law said that some crimes had to be punished with death. Judge Parker told prisoners, “I do not desire to hang you men. It is the law.” While Indians generally resented white people, they saw the judge as their friend and protector. In 1896 Congress closed Judge Parker’s court at Fort Smith. Six weeks later, he died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-eight.

MORE ABOUT INDIAN TERRITORY

Indian Territory became home to Native Americans who, in the 1830s, were forcibly moved there by the U.S. government. The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole came to be known as the Five Civilized Tribes because they adopted white ways. For some this included schools, housing, clothing, and even keeping black slaves.



Not all blacks in Indian Territory were slaves. And, in general, the Indians treated their slaves more kindly than whites did, sometimes like family members. Indians and blacks married and had children. Still, the slaves were not free.

After the Civil War, some Indians gave land to their former slaves. Many of these new landowners, along with other blacks who had migrated there, formed their own communities. By 1870 there were five black towns in Indian Territory with more to come. Although whites were not supposed to settle there, many moved into the territory illegally.

Before Judge Parker arrived, tribal police and a few deputy U.S. marshals enforced the law. But Indian police had no power to deal with lawbreakers who were not Indian. And there weren’t nearly enough marshals to control the huge area. The scarcity of peace officers attracted outlaws, gamblers, whiskey peddlers, swindlers, and squatters. Because government officials secretly wanted whites to settle Indian Territory, they didn’t make the squatters leave. Instead, they sent Judge Parker and his deputy U.S. marshals to make the area safe.