

As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs

If women, of all the subordinate groups in a society dominated by rich white males, were closest to home (indeed, *in* the home), the most interior, then the Indians were the most foreign, the most exterior. Women, because they were so near and so needed, were dealt with more by patronization than by force. The Indian, not needed—indeed, an obstacle—could be dealt with by sheer force, except that sometimes the language of paternalism preceded the burning of villages.

And so, “Indian removal,” as it has been politely called, cleared the land for white occupancy between the Appalachians and the Mississippi, cleared it for cotton in the South and grain in the North, for expansion, immigration, canals, railroads, new cities, and the building of a huge continental empire clear across to the Pacific Ocean. The cost in human life cannot be accurately measured, in suffering not even roughly measured. Most of the history books given to children pass quickly over it.

In the Revolutionary War, almost every important Indian nation fought on the side of the British. They knew that if the British, who had set a limit on the colonists’ expansion westward, lost the war, there would be no holding back the Americans. Indeed, by the time Jefferson became president in 1800, there were 700,000 white settlers west of the mountains. Jefferson now committed the federal government to promote future removal of the Creek and the Cherokee from Georgia. Aggressive activity against the Indians mounted in the Indiana Territory under Gov. William Henry Harrison.

As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs

When Jefferson doubled the size of the nation by purchasing the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803—thus extending the western frontier from the Appalachians across the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains—he proposed to Congress that Indians should be encouraged to settle down on smaller tracts and do farming. “Two measures are deemed expedient. First to encourage them to abandon hunting.... Secondly, to Multiply trading houses among them...leading them thus to agriculture, to manufactures, and civilization....”

Jefferson’s talk of “agriculture... manufactures... civilization” is crucial. Indian removal was necessary for the opening of the vast American lands to agriculture, to commerce, to markets, to money, to the development of the modern capitalist economy. Land was indispensable for all this, and after the Revolution, huge tracts of land were bought up by rich speculators, including George Washington and Patrick Henry. John Donelson, a North Carolina surveyor, ended up with twenty thousand acres of land near what is now Chattanooga. His son-in-law made twenty-two trips out of Nashville in 1795 for land deals. This was Andrew Jackson.

Jackson was a land speculator, merchant, slave trader, and the most aggressive enemy of the Indians in early American history. He became a hero of the War of 1812, which was not (as often depicted in American textbooks) just a war against England for survival, but a war for the expansion of the new nation, into Florida, into Canada, into Indian territory.

Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief and noted orator, tried to unite the Indians against the white invasion. “The land,” he said, “belongs to all, for the use of each....” Angered when fellow Indians were induced to cede a great tract of land to the United States government, in 1811 Tecumseh organized an Indian gathering of five thousand, on the bank of the Tallapoosa River in Alabama, and told them: “Let the white race perish. They seize your land; they corrupt your women, they trample on the ashes of your dead! Back whence they came, upon a trail of blood, they must be driven.”

The Creek Indians occupied most of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. In 1813 some of their warriors massacred 250 people at Fort Mims, whereupon Jackson’s troops burned down a Creek village, killing men, women, children. Jackson established the tactic of promising rewards in land and plunder.

But among Jackson’s men there were mutinies. They were tired of fighting and wanted to go home. Jackson wrote to his wife about “the once brave and patriotic volunteers...sunk...to mere whining, complaining, seditious and mutineers....” When a seventeen-year-old soldier who

had refused to clean up his food and threatened his officer with a gun was sentenced to death by a court-martial, Jackson turned down his plea and ordered the execution to proceed. He then walked out of earshot of the firing squad.

Jackson became a national hero when in 1814 he fought the Battle of Horseshoe Bend against a thousand Creeks and killed eight hundred of them, with few casualties on his side. His white troops had failed in a frontal attack on the Creeks, but the Cherokees with him, promised governmental friendship if they joined the war, swam the river, came up behind the Creeks, and won the battle for Jackson.

When the war ended, Jackson and friends of his began buying up the seized Creek lands. He got himself appointed treaty commissioner and dictated a treaty in 1814 which took away half the land of the Creek nation.

This treaty started something new and important. It granted Indians individual ownership of land, thus splitting Indian from Indian, breaking up communal landholding, bribing some with land, leaving others out—introducing the competition and conniving that marked the spirit of Western capitalism. It fitted well the old Jeffersonian idea of how to handle the Indians, by bringing them into “civilization.”

From 1814 to 1824, in a series of treaties with the southern Indians, whites took over three-fourths of Alabama and Florida, one-third of Tennessee, one-fifth of Georgia and Mississippi, and parts of Kentucky and North Carolina. Jackson played a key role in those treaties, using bribery, deception, and force to get more and more land, and giving jobs to his friends and relatives.

These treaties, these land grabs, laid the basis for the cotton kingdom, the slave plantations. Jackson's work had brought the white settlements to the border of Florida, owned by Spain. Here were the villages of the Seminole Indians, where some escaped black slaves were taking refuge. Jackson began raids into Florida, arguing it was a sanctuary for escaped slaves and for marauding Indians. Florida, he said, was essential to the defense of the United States. It was that classic modern preface to a war of conquest.

Thus began the Seminole War of 1818, leading to the American acquisition of Florida. It appears on classroom maps politely as “Florida Purchase, 1819,” but it came from Andrew Jackson's military campaign across the Florida border, burning Seminole villages, seizing Spanish forts, until Spain was “persuaded” to sell. He acted, he said, by the “immutable laws of self-defense.”

Jackson then became governor of the Florida Territory. He was able

As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs

now to give good business advice to friends and relatives. To a nephew, he suggested holding on to property in Pensacola. To a friend, a surgeon-general in the army, he suggested buying as many slaves as possible, because the price would soon rise.

Leaving his military post, he also gave advice to officers on how to deal with the high rate of desertion. (Poor whites—even if willing to give their lives at first—may have discovered the rewards of battle going to the rich.) Jackson suggested whipping for the first two attempts, and the third time, execution.

If you look through high school textbooks and elementary school textbooks in American history you will find Jackson the frontiersman, soldier, democrat, man of the people—not Jackson the slaveholder, land speculator, executioner of dissident soldiers, exterminator of Indians.

After Jackson was elected president in 1828 (following John Quincy Adams, who had followed Monroe, who had followed Madison, who had followed Jefferson), the two political parties were the Democrats and Whigs, who disagreed on banks and tariffs, but not on issues crucial for the white poor, the blacks, the Indians—although some white working people saw Jackson as their hero, because he opposed the rich man's bank.

Under Jackson, and the man he chose to succeed him, Martin Van Buren, seventy thousand Indians east of the Mississippi were forced westward. In New York, the Iroquois Confederation stayed. But the Sac and Fox Indians of Illinois were removed, after the Black Hawk War. When Chief Black Hawk was defeated and captured in 1832, he made a surrender speech:

[Black Hawk] is now a prisoner to the white men.... He has done nothing for which an Indian ought to be ashamed. He has fought for his countrymen, the squaws and papooses, against white men, who came year after year, to cheat them and take away their lands.... The white men are bad schoolmasters; they carry false books, and deal in false actions; they smile in the face of the poor Indian to cheat him; they shake them by the hand to gain their confidence, to make them drunk, to deceive them, and ruin our wives....

The white men do not scalp the head; but they do worse—they poison the heart.... Farewell, my nation!... Farewell to Black Hawk.

The removal of the Indians was explained by Lewis Cass, who served variously as secretary of war, governor of the Michigan Territory, minister to France, and a presidential candidate:

A principle of progressive improvement seems almost inherent in human nature.... We are all striving in the career of life to acquire riches

A People's History of the United States

of honor, or power, or some other object, whose possession is to realize the day dreams of our imaginations; and the aggregate of these efforts constitutes the advance of society. But there is little of this in the constitution of our savages.

Cass, pompous, pretentious, honored (Harvard gave him an honorary doctor of laws degree in 1836, at the height of Indian removal), took millions of acres from the Indians by treaty when he was governor of the Michigan Territory: "We must frequently promote their interest against their inclination.... A barbarous people, depending for subsistence upon the scanty and precarious supplies furnished by the chase, cannot live in contact with a civilized community."

If the Indians would only move to new lands across the Mississippi, Cass promised in 1825 at a treaty council with Shawnees and Cherokees, "The United States will never ask for your land there. This I promise you in the name of your great father, the President. That country he assigns to his red people, to be held by them and their children's children forever."

Everything in the Indian heritage spoke out against leaving their land. An old Choctaw chief said, responding, years before, to President Monroe's talk of removal: "I am sorry I cannot comply with the request of my father.... We wish to remain here, where we have grown up as the herbs of the woods; and do not wish to be transplanted into another soil." A Seminole chief had said to John Quincy Adams: "Here our navel strings were first cut and the blood from them sunk into the earth, and made the country dear to us."

Not all the Indians responded to the white officials' common designation of them as "children" and the president as "father." It was reported that when Tecumseh met with William Henry Harrison, Indian fighter and future president, the interpreter said: "Your father requests you to take a chair." Tecumseh replied: "My father! The sun is my father, and the earth is my mother; I will repose upon her bosom."

As soon as Jackson was elected president, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi began to pass laws to extend the states' rule over the Indians in their territory. Indian land was divided up, to be distributed by state lottery. Federal treaties and federal laws gave Congress, not the states, authority over the tribes. Jackson ignored this, and supported state action.

He had now found the right tactic. The Indians would not be "forced" to go west. But if they chose to stay they would have to abide by state laws, which destroyed their tribal and personal rights and made them subject to endless harassment and invasion by white settlers coveting their land. If

As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs

they left, however, the federal government would give them financial support and promise them lands beyond the Mississippi. Jackson’s instructions to an army major sent to talk to the Choctaws and Cherokees put it this way:

Say to the chiefs and warriors that I am their friend . . . but they must, by removing from the limits of the States of Mississippi and Alabama and by being settled on the lands I offer them, put it in my power to be such—There, beyond the limits of any State, in possession of land of their own, which they shall possess as long as Grass grows or water runs. I am and will protect them and be their friend and father.

That phrase “as long as Grass grows or water runs” was to be recalled with bitterness by generations of Indians. (An Indian GI, veteran of Vietnam, testifying publicly in 1970 not only about the horror of the war but about his own maltreatment as an Indian, repeated that phrase and began to weep.)

As Jackson took office in 1829, gold was discovered in Cherokee territory in Georgia. Thousands of whites invaded, destroyed Indian property, staked out claims. Jackson ordered federal troops to remove them, but also ordered Indians as well as whites to stop mining. Then he removed the troops, the whites returned, and Jackson said he could not interfere with Georgia’s authority. The white invaders seized land and stock, forced Indians to sign leases, beat up Indians who protested, sold alcohol to weaken resistance, and killed game that Indians needed for food.

Treaties made under pressure and by deception broke up Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw tribal lands into individual holdings, making each person a prey to contractors, speculators, and politicians. The Creeks and Choctaws remained on their individual plots, but great numbers of them were defrauded by land companies. According to one Georgia bank president, a stockholder in a land company, “Stealing is the order of the day.”

The Creeks, defrauded of their land, short of money and food, refused to go west. Starving Creeks began raiding white farms, while Georgia militia and settlers attacked Indian settlements. Thus began the Second Creek War. One Alabama newspaper sympathetic to the Indians wrote: “The war with the Creeks is all humbug. It is a base and diabolical scheme, devised by interested men, to keep an ignorant race of people from maintaining their just rights, and to deprive them of the small remaining pittance placed under their control.”

A Creek man more than a hundred years old, named Speckled Snake, reacted to Andrew Jackson’s policy of removal:

A People's History of the United States

Brothers! I have listened to many talks from our great white father. When he first came over the wide waters, he was but a little man... very little. His legs were cramped by sitting long in his big boat, and he begged for a little land to light his fire on.... But when the white man had warmed himself before the Indians' fire and filled himself with their hominy, he became very large. With a step he bestrode the mountains, and his feet covered the plains and the valleys. His hand grasped the eastern and the western sea, and his head rested on the moon. Then he became our Great Father. He loved his red children, and he said, "Get a little further, lest I tread on thee."

Dale Van Every, in his book *The Disinherited*, sums up what removal meant to the Indian:

The Indian was peculiarly susceptible to every sensory attribute of every natural feature of his surroundings. He lived in the open. He knew every marsh, glade, hill top, rock, spring, creek, as only the hunter can know them. He had never fully grasped the principle establishing private ownership of land as any more rational than private ownership of air but he loved the land with a deeper emotion than could any proprietor. He felt himself as much a part of it as the rocks and trees, the animals and birds. His homeland was holy ground, sanctified for him as the resting place of the bones of his ancestors and the natural shrine of his religion.

Just before Jackson became president, in the 1820s, after the tumult of the War of 1812 and the Creek War, the southern Indians and the whites had settled down, often very close to one another, and were living in peace in a natural environment that seemed to have enough for all of them. White men were allowed to visit the Indian communities and Indians often were guests in white homes. Frontier figures like Davy Crockett and Sam Houston came out of this setting, and both—unlike Jackson—became lifelong friends of the Indian.

The forces that led to removal did not come from the poor white frontiersmen who were neighbors of the Indians. They came from industrialization and commerce, the growth of populations, of railroads and cities, the rise in value of land, and the greed of businessmen. The Indians were to end up dead or exiled, the land speculators richer, the politicians more powerful. As for the poor white frontiersman, he played the part of a pawn, pushed into the first violent encounters, but soon dispensable.

With 17,000 Cherokees surrounded by 900,000 whites in Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee, the Cherokees decided that survival required

As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs

adaptation to the white man's world. They became farmers, blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, owners of property.

The Cherokees' language—heavily poetic, metaphorical, beautifully expressive, supplemented by dance, drama, and ritual—had always been a language of voice and gesture. Now their chief, Sequoyah, invented a written language, which thousands learned. The Cherokees' newly established Legislative Council voted money for a printing press, which on February 21, 1828, began publishing a newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, printed in both English and Sequoyah's Cherokee.

Before this, the Cherokees had, like Indian tribes in general, done without formal government. As Van Every puts it:

The foundation principle of Indian government had always been the rejection of government. The freedom of the individual was regarded by practically all Indians north of Mexico as a canon infinitely more precious than the individual's duty to his community or nation. This anarchistic attitude ruled all behavior, beginning with the smallest social unit, the family. The Indian parent was constitutionally reluctant to discipline his children. Their every exhibition of self-will was accepted as a favorable indication of the development of maturing character....

There was an occasional assembling of a council, with a very loose and changing membership, whose decisions were not enforced except by the influence of public opinion. Now, surrounded by white society, all this began to change. The Cherokees even started to emulate the slave society around them: they owned more than a thousand slaves. They were beginning to resemble that "civilization" the white men spoke about. They even welcomed missionaries and Christianity. None of this made them more desirable than the land they lived on.

Jackson's 1829 message to Congress made his position clear: "I informed the Indians inhabiting parts of Georgia and Alabama that their attempt to establish an independent government would not be countenanced by the Executive of the United States, and advised them to emigrate beyond the Mississippi or submit to the laws of those States." Congress moved quickly to pass a removal bill. It did not mention force, but provided for helping the Indians to move. What it implied was that if they did not, they were without protection, without funds, and at the mercy of the states.

There were defenders of the Indians. Perhaps the most eloquent was Sen. Theodore Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, who told the Senate, debating removal: "We have crowded the tribes upon a few miserable acres on our

southern frontier; it is all that is left to them of their once boundless forest: and still, like the horse-leech, our insatiated cupidity cries, give! give!... Sir...Do the obligations of justice change with the color of the skin?"

Now the pressures began on the tribes, one by one. The Choctaws did not want to leave, but fifty of their delegates were offered secret bribes of money and land, and the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed: Choctaw land east of the Mississippi was ceded to the United States in return for financial help in leaving. Whites, including liquor dealers and swindlers, came swarming onto their lands.

In late 1831, thirteen thousand Choctaws began the long journey west to a land and climate totally different from what they knew. They went on ox wagons, on horses, on foot, then to be ferried across the Mississippi River. The army was supposed to organize their trek but there was chaos. Food disappeared. Hunger came.

The first winter migration was one of the coldest on record, and people began to die of pneumonia. In the summer, a major cholera epidemic hit Mississippi, and Choctaws died by the hundreds. The seven thousand Choctaws left behind now refused to go, choosing subjugation over death. Many of their descendants still live in Mississippi.

As for the Cherokees, they faced a set of laws passed by Georgia: their lands were taken, their government abolished, all meetings prohibited. Cherokees advising others not to migrate were to be imprisoned. Cherokees could not testify in court against any white. Cherokees could not dig for the gold recently discovered on their land.

The Cherokee nation addressed a memorial to the nation, a public plea for justice:

We are aware that some persons suppose it will be for our advantage to remove beyond the Mississippi. We think otherwise. Our people universally think otherwise.... We wish to remain on the land of our fathers.... The treaties with us, and laws of the United States made in pursuance of treaties, guarantee our residence and our privileges, and secure us against intruders. Our only request is, that these treaties may be fulfilled, and these laws executed....

Now they went beyond history, beyond law:

We intreat those to whom the foregoing paragraphs are addressed, to remember the great law of love. "Do to others as ye would that others should do to you."... We pray them to remember that, for the sake of principle, their forefathers were compelled to leave, therefore driven from the old world, and that the winds of persecution wafted them over

As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs

the great waters and landed them on the shores of the new world, when the Indian was the sole lord and proprietor of these extensive domains— Let them remember in what way they were received by the savage of America, when power was in his hand.... Let them bring to remembrance all these facts, and they cannot, and we are sure, they will not fail to remember, and sympathize with us in these our trials and sufferings.

Jackson's response to this, in his second annual message to Congress in December 1830, was to point to the fact that the Choctaws and Chickasaws had already agreed to removal, and that "a speedy removal" of the rest would offer many advantages to everyone. He reiterated a familiar theme. "Toward the aborigines of the country no one can indulge a more friendly feeling than myself...." However: "The waves of population and civilization are rolling to the westward, and we now propose to acquire the countries occupied by the red men of the South and West by a fair exchange...."

Georgia passed a law making it a crime for a white person to stay in Indian territory without taking an oath to the state of Georgia. When the white missionaries in the Cherokee territory declared their sympathies openly for the Cherokees to stay, Georgia militia entered the territory in the spring of 1831 and arrested three of the missionaries, including Samuel Worcester. Refusing to swear allegiance to Georgia's laws, Worcester and Elizar Butler were sentenced to four years at hard labor. The Supreme Court ordered Worcester freed, but President Jackson refused to enforce the court order.

Jackson, reelected in 1832, now moved to speed up Indian removal. Most of the Choctaws and some of the Cherokees were gone, but there were still 22,000 Creeks in Alabama, 18,000 Cherokees in Georgia, and 5,000 Seminoles in Florida.

The Creeks had been fighting for their land ever since the years of Columbus, against Spaniards, English, French, and Americans. But by 1832 they had been reduced to a small area in Alabama, while the population of Alabama, growing fast, was now over 300,000. On the basis of extravagant promises from the federal government, Creek delegates in Washington signed the Treaty of Washington, agreeing to removal beyond the Mississippi. They gave up five million acres, with the provision that two million of these would go to individual Creeks, who could either sell or remain in Alabama with federal protection.

Almost immediately, the promises made in the treaty were broken. A white invasion of Creek lands began—looters, land seekers, defrauders,

whiskey sellers, thugs—driving thousands of Creeks from their homes into the swamps and forests. The federal government did nothing. Instead it negotiated a new treaty providing for prompt emigration west, managed by the Creeks themselves, financed by the national government. An army colonel, dubious that this would work, wrote:

They fear starvation on the route; and can it be otherwise, when many of them are nearly starving now.... You cannot have an idea of the deterioration which these Indians have undergone during the last two or three years, from a general state of comparative plenty to that of unqualified wretchedness and want.... They are brow beat, and cowed, and imposed upon, and depressed with the feeling that they have no adequate protection in the United States, and no capacity of self-protection in themselves.

Despite the hardships, the Creeks refused to budge, but by 1836, both state and federal officials decided they must go. Using as a pretext some attacks by desperate Creeks on white settlers, it was declared that the Creek nation, by making “war,” had forfeited its treaty rights.

The army would now force it to migrate west. An army of eleven thousand was sent after them. The Creeks did not resist, no shots were fired, they surrendered. Those Creeks presumed by the army to be rebels or sympathizers were assembled, the men manacled and chained together to march westward under military guard, their women and children trailing after them. Creek communities were invaded by military detachments, the inhabitants driven to assembly points and marched westward in batches of two or three thousand. No talk of compensating them for land or property left behind.

Private contracts were made for the march, the same kind that had failed for the Choctaws. Again, delays and lack of food, shelter, clothing, blankets, medical attention. Again, old, rotting steamboats and ferries, crowded beyond capacity, taking them across the Mississippi. Starvation and sickness began to cause large numbers of deaths.

Eight hundred Creek men had volunteered to help the United States army fight the Seminoles in Florida in return for a promise that their families could remain in Alabama, protected by the federal government until the men returned. The promise was not kept. The Creek families were attacked by land-hungry white marauders—robbed, driven from their homes, women raped. Then the army, claiming it was for their safety, removed them from Creek country to a concentration camp on Mobile Bay. Hundreds died there from lack of food and from sickness.

As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs

When the warriors returned from the Seminole War, they and their families were hustled west. Moving through New Orleans, they encountered a yellow fever plague. They crossed the Mississippi—611 Indians crowded onto the aged steamer *Monmouth*. It went down in the Mississippi River and 311 people died, four of them the children of the Indian commander of the Creek volunteers in Florida.

The Choctaws and Chickasaws had quickly agreed to migrate. The Creeks were stubborn and had to be forced. The Cherokees were practicing a nonviolent resistance. One tribe—the Seminoles—decided to fight.

With Florida now belonging to the United States, Seminole territory was open to American land grabbers. In 1834 Seminole leaders were assembled and the U.S. Indian agent told them they must move west. The Seminoles replied:

We were all made by the same Great Father, and are all alike His Children. We all came from the same Mother, and were suckled at the same breast. Therefore, we are brothers, and as brothers, should treat together in an amicable way.... If suddenly we tear our hearts from the homes around which they are twined, our heart-strings will snap.

When, in December 1835, the Seminoles were ordered to assemble for the journey, no one came. Instead, the Seminoles began a series of guerrilla attacks on white coastal settlements, all along the Florida perimeter, striking in surprise and in succession from the interior. They murdered white families, captured slaves, destroyed property.

One December day in 1835, a column of 110 soldiers was attacked by Seminoles, and all but three soldiers were killed. One of the survivors later told the story:

It was 8 o'clock. Suddenly I heard a rifle shot... followed by a musket shot.... I had not time to think of the meaning of these shots, before a volley, as if from a thousand rifles, was poured in upon us from the front, and all along our left flank.... I could only see their heads and arms, peering out from the long grass, far and near, and from behind the pine trees....

It was the classic Indian tactic against a foe with superior firearms. Gen. George Washington had once given parting advice to one of his officers: "General St. Clair, in three words, beware of surprise.... [A]gain and again, General, beware of surprise."

Congress now appropriated money for a war against the Seminoles. Gen. Winfield Scott took charge, but his columns of troops, marching

impressively into Seminole territory, found no one. They became tired of the mud, the swamps, the heat, the sickness, the hunger—the classic fatigue of a civilized army fighting people on their own land. In 1836, 103 commissioned officers resigned from the regular army, leaving only forty-six.

It was an eight-year war. It cost \$20 million and 1,500 American lives. Finally, in the 1840s, the Seminoles began to get tired. They were a tiny group against a huge nation with great resources. They asked for truces. But when they went forward under truce flags, they were arrested, again and again. In 1837, their leader Osceola, under a flag of truce, had been seized and put in irons, then died of illness in prison. The war petered out.

Meanwhile the Cherokees had not fought back with arms, but had resisted in their own way. And so the government began to play Cherokee against Cherokee, the old game. The pressures built up on the Cherokee community—their newspaper suppressed, their government dissolved, the missionaries in jail, their land parceled among whites by the land lottery. In 1834, seven hundred Cherokees, weary of the struggle, agreed to go west; eighty-one died en route, including forty-five children—mostly from measles and cholera. Those who lived arrived at their destination across the Mississippi in the midst of a cholera epidemic and half of them died within a year. Now the Georgia whites stepped up their attacks to speed the removal.

In April 1838, Ralph Waldo Emerson addressed an open letter to President Van Buren, referring with indignation to the removal treaty with the Cherokees (signed behind the backs of an overwhelming majority of them) and asked what had happened to the sense of justice in America: “You, sir, will bring down that renowned chair in which you sit into infamy if your seal is set to this instrument of perfidy; and the name of this nation, hitherto the sweet omen of religion and liberty, will stink to the world.”

Thirteen days before Emerson sent this letter, Martin Van Buren had ordered Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott into Cherokee territory to use whatever military force was required to move the Cherokees west. Five regiments of regulars and four thousand militia and volunteers began pouring into Cherokee country.

Some Cherokees had apparently given up on nonviolence: three chiefs who signed the Removal Treaty were found dead. But the seventeen thousand Cherokees were soon rounded up and crowded into stockades. On October 1, 1838, the first detachment set out in what was to be known as the Trail of Tears. As they moved westward, they began to die—of sickness, of drought, of the heat, of exposure. There were 645 wagons,

As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs

and people marching alongside. Survivors, years later, told of halting at the edge of the Mississippi in the middle of winter, the river running full of ice, “hundreds of sick and dying penned up in wagons or stretched upon the ground.” During confinement in the stockade or on the march westward four thousand Cherokees died.

In December 1838, President Van Buren spoke to Congress:

It affords sincere pleasure to apprise the Congress of the entire removal of the Cherokee Nation of Indians to their new homes west of the Mississippi. The measures authorized by Congress at its last session have had the happiest effects.

Exercises

1. Why did almost every important Indian nation fight on the side of the British during the American Revolutionary War?
2. What was Jefferson’s policy toward the Indians?
3. What prompted Tecumseh’s rebellion?
4. How was the Battle of Horseshoe Bend won?
5. Why would demanding that Indians own private property make them more vulnerable to losing their land than if they continued to use the land in common?
6. What reasons did Jackson give to explain his invasion of Spanish-owned Florida? What resulted from the Seminole War of 1818?
7. How did President Jackson’s Indian policy compare (in practice, rationale, and effect) to his predecessors’?
8. How did Jackson act unconstitutionally?
9. What caused the outbreak of the Second Creek War?

10. How did Speckled Snake describe the history of European-Indian relations? Do you agree with his synopsis? If not, how would you alter it?
11. If you went up to a Creek or Cherokee in the 1830s and asked if you could buy some of his or her land, what would he or she say to you?
12. Is there any parallel between Bacon's Rebellion and the Indian Wars preceding the War of 1812 with respect to the dynamics among Indians, poor whites, and rich whites? If so, explain how the situations are parallel. If not, what factors are different enough so that there is no structural parallel?
13. What strategy(ies) did the Cherokees adopt to fight removal?
14. What position did Senator Frelinghuysen take regarding Indian removal? What action did Ralph Waldo Emerson take to oppose the removal of the Cherokees? Does Frelinghuysen remind you of Bartolomé de las Casas (chapter 1)? Why or why not? Does the existence of ineffective white opposition to Indian removal indicate that white Americans were swept away by historical forces? Why or why not?
15. What happened to the Choctaws after they signed their treaty of removal? Were the terms of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek observed by both sides?
16. Why did the Georgia militia arrest Sam Worcester and Elizar Butler? Were the actions of the militia consistent with the Supreme Court's interpretation of the U.S. Constitution? Why did it not matter whether the Supreme Court ruled in favor of or against the Cherokees?
17. By 1832, how long had the Creeks been defending their lands against the Europeans?

18. Place the following events in the order in which they usually happened:
- a. Indians appeal to federal government to enforce treaty that protected the integrity of Indian land.
 - b. White settlers encroach on/invoke Indian land.
 - c. Federal government does nothing.
 - d. On Indian land (by federal treaty) whites and Indians attack each other.
 - e. Federal government orders Indians to move farther west.
 - f. [Are any steps missing?]

Why did this process repeat itself over and over again?

19. What were the conditions under which the Creeks moved west?
20. How did the Seminoles resist removal? How effective was the Seminole form of resistance?
21. If the Cherokee removal was so dreadful that it was to be known as the Trail of Tears, why did Van Buren feel that it had the “happiest effects?”
22. *Draw a map* that includes the following: Appalachians, Mississippi River, Rocky Mountains, Florida Territory, Tallapoosa River in Alabama, the state borders of Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, the location of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, the Trail of Tears.
23. *Debate Resolution:* Andrew Jackson’s Indian policy represented a fundamental change from the Indian policies of previous U.S. presidents.