

Trail of tears: the removal of the cherokee nation



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The old Cherokee nation was a large thriving tribe located in northern Georgia, North Carolina, Alabama, and Tennessee, which was a region known as Appalachia. Because of greedy landowners wanting more money, land for themselves and land for their crops, this forced the Cherokees out of their land and into another region. The government, specifically Andrew Jackson, wanted the land because it was land that he “ needed”. He needed this land because he felt it would increase the white population and give him more wealth and power. He enforced a removal of the Cherokee nation and all natives in the south.

This removal would later be known as “ The Trail of Tears. ” The Cherokee were a civilized tribe of natives, more civilized than most native tribes. They were considered civilized because a lot of them were educated and they had their own language. They used all of their natural resources to their advantage. They were a very agriculturally based people. The women in the Cherokee tribes did the majority of the farming and the men hunted and cleared the land for farming. Descent was matrilineal, meaning everything was passed down through the women, not the men like in most societies.

As more and more “ civilized” people came into contact with the Cherokee, the more and more they started to lose their customs and traditions. They were picking up habits and customs of the white settlers in order to assimilate with them. In 1783, the Treaty of Paris did not represent the Indians and had some of their land taken over by the United States. Henry Knox, Secretary of War, believed that by developing an Indian policy accepted by the Indians, would achieved the goal of the States. He figured that by “ civilizing” the Natives he could bring them a sense of “

Enlightenment. Knox wanted the Natives to stop hunting and be “ normal” farmers. Also, he wanted them to read and write in the English language, wear European style clothes, and most of all become Christians. He felt that by doing all of this he could make them better people and they could become part of the society. They would be able to assimilate to the “ American way” and be able to survive. If they did not then they would simply just disappear because according to Knox, “ uncivilized people could not live among the civilized. ” The Cherokee wrote heir own constitution, which emulated that of the United States Constitution. This was supposed to help them but it inevitably did not. This so called civilization of the Natives did not solve the problem. Andrew Jackson was a big advocate for removing the Cherokee nation. Elected president in 1828, Jackson did everything in his power to get rid of the natives in the south. He believed that they were not supposed to be there and they were in the way of westward expansion of the government. Jackson and his cabinet members had a few different ideas on how to deal with the Natives.

They were: allowing white settlers to violate Indian lands, having the federal government move in so they could enforce treaties, forcing the Indians to acclimate by taking away government protection, or removing them from the guaranteed land given to them by treaties and sending them to unsettled western lands. Andrew Jackson also said that, “ The consequences of a speedy removal will be important to the United States, individual states, and to the Indians themselves. ” This is to mean that he believes that removing the Indians from the south will help the United States in becoming a better nation.

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the bill for the Indian Removal Act. This bill proposed to exchange public lands out west for Indian territories down in the south and to give them money for the removal process in the sum of five-hundred thousand dollars. Since the Cherokees were considered an independent republic in the state of Georgia, they were trying to fight for themselves so they didn't lose their land. The Supreme Court case, Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, which was in 1831, stated that they were a "domestic dependent nation", not a republic.

John Marshall made the ruling and also said that since they had been living on that land for a long time, they had a claim to it. Just a year later, the decision was revoked. A year later in 1832, the Supreme Court case, Worcester v. Georgia, ruled that the Indians were able to create treaties which are the "law of the land". Jackson did not enforce this decision put in place by Marshall and was quoted saying, "John Marshall has made his decision, not let him enforce it." Andrew Jackson however was sneering as he said this and did not abide by the ruling put in place.

By 1835, the Treaty of New Echota was put into effect. The treaty essentially made it acceptable for the government to justify the Indian removal. The treaty was signed by representatives of the Cherokee Nation, who were unauthorized to do so. The land that they were at in the south was traded for land west of the Mississippi River, specifically Oklahoma. The Natives were also to get a promise of money, livestock, tools, and other essentials. Major Ridge, a Cherokee warrior and statesman, was the leader of the group of people who signed the treaty.

Moving out west, he said, was the best way for the Cherokee Nation to survive. Ridge was later shot and killed by Cherokee assassins because he signed the treaty. The Treaty Party as it was called included John Ridge and Elias Boudinot, who was also killed by Cherokees. Stand Watie, another member of the Treaty Party, escaped being killed by the Cherokee. Anyone who gave up tribal land would incur the death penalty, according to a law by the Cherokee Nation Council. Chief John Ross, who was part Cherokee, opposed the removal. Ross tried his hardest to fight against the government through the court.

Finally, after realizing it could not be halted, he stepped in and took charge of the removal. John Ross and the rest of the Cherokees finished the removal process on their own. Before the Cherokees were actually moved out west, they were put into groups at different camps. At these internment camps, the conditions were not good and some Cherokees died before making the long journey out west. Putting them into groups was easier for the government so they could round them up faster and hasten the removal process. They had been divided into sixteen groups of around one-thousand each.

The actual route that they traveled was named " The Trail of Tears", for it had been the trail where they had cried. Because of the harsh conditions faced on the long journey to the west, around four-thousand died. After a harsh outbreak of smallpox, they were not able to go into certain towns because of the fear of spreading the disease. Disease, famine, and prolonged exposure to the harsh elements were the main reason why they died along the way. The cold weather was brutal and a lot of times they had a hard time

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crossing the rivers because they were frozen and had chunks of ice floating in them. There was a land route and a water route to get to the west. (See Fig. 1). After settling in Oklahoma, they started rebuilding their lives again. They named their capital city, Tahlequah, and set up a government. They elected officials and formed a court system to reform their nation. During their recovery process of rebuilding again, the Civil War started. The majority of Cherokees took the side of the Confederacy because they were promised that they could become their own state after the war ended. Because the south lost, the Cherokee suffered.

The land that they were guaranteed from prior treaties was taken away from them. The story of the Cherokee Nation and how they were removed from their land by our own government is a tragedy. The cruel journey that they endured shows how badly the government wants things for themselves. It was based entirely off of prejudices and greed from a governing nation.

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