

# Andrew Jackson and the Indian removal



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

**ANDREW JACKSON: MACHINATIONS OF GREED AND BETRAYAL**

The Cherokee were vital to Andrew Jackson's success in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814, however, that did not stop him from double-crossing them. Jackson's actions reveal how he deceived the Cherokee. Andrew Jackson's betrayal of his allies, the Cherokee, is significantly responsible for their forced relocation because he desired the land they claimed as their own.

Historians who focus on the Indian removal era are often influenced by the socio-political ideas of their time. In the 1800s, Lewis H. Morgan, an anthropologist and social theorist, believed that Indians should be rescued "...from his impending destiny...reclaimed and civilized, and thus saved eventually from the fate which has already befallen so many of our aboriginal races..." by education and Christianity. In the early 1900s, Grant Forman, known as the Dean of American Indian historians, followed the "Indians as victims" belief, revealing the systematic removal of civilized Indians in the name of expansion. Policy Specialists in the 1960s, such as Vine Deloria Jr., a Standing Rock Sioux historian, wrote about Indian victimization and resistance. Theda Perdue, a New Historian in the 1990s, relied on Ethnohistory in her research and writing. Recent historians, such as Paige Raibmon, combine American Indian History, Ethnohistory, and Native American Studies to examine the global impact on Native Americans. While the history of Indian removal is unchanged, the way historians perceive and write about it fluctuates with the changes in socio-political ideas.

Although Andrew Jackson saw the Cherokee as allies to help win his battles, he also saw them as enemies and wanted to remove all enemies from the southern frontier. In a letter he penned to John Williams, a fellow military man, Jackson said that he was hoping that “ the government would seize the moment and extinguish the Cherokee and Chickasaw land claims in Tennessee.” The victory in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend awarded Creek lands in Tennessee to the US government. However, the boundary between the Creek and Cherokee lands was never drawn. After assessed, the land would be sold off in sections and Jackson wanted to be the first to buy the property.

Jackson, eager for the new opportunity to purchase the acreage, wrote to Secretary of War William Crawford, and President James Madison, and gave them his opinion that it was time to remove the Creek and Cherokee from the lands in Tennessee. Madison and Crawford viewed this as unethical. They ordered Return Jonathan Meigs, the Indian Agent to the Cherokee Nation, to protect the Cherokee’s interests while the boundary lines were established. Crawford feared Jackson would be difficult to handle when he learned that 4, 000, 000 of the 23, 000, 000 acres of land he demanded after the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, belonged to the Chickasaw and Cherokee tribes rather than the Creek. Unable to get Crawford and Madison to remove the Cherokee, Jackson recommended John Coffee, who served under him during the war, for the surveyor job. By placing trusted friends into strategic positions, Jackson could instigate Cherokee removal and receive insider information on land sales.

Land ownership was the way to wealth on the frontier, and that drove Jackson's scheme to capture vast Cherokee lands. For land speculators, Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River was a great opportunity. Jackson believed that the best place to put a town would be at the foot of Muscle Shoals because it was the beginning point for navigation on the Tennessee River going south to New Orleans. Getting ahold of this land, which other land speculators had coveted, would be a coup for Jackson. By counseling Coffee on where to put the boundary lines, Jackson could guarantee that they would get the most valuable plots. He was confident that Coffee would run the boundaries according to his plan and told him in a letter, "...act promptly and run the line agreeable to the best information you possess.... I have but little doubt that justice will be done by pursuing the information you possess as it respects the Cherokees..."

The Chickasaw people tried to prevent Coffee from carrying out his mission, so Jackson ordered twenty-five mounted gunmen to defend him. In a letter, he told Coffee that he did not have the authority to order the men, but they would be paid. The money would come from Jackson since he did not have the official authority to hire or pay them with government money. Jackson also wrote a letter to George Colbert, the leader of the Chickasaw people, telling him that if his people interfered, they would be punished. Although Jackson assured Colbert that the government only wanted the Creek lands, Coffee's surveys ran the boundaries that Jackson had given to him, including 2.2 million acres claimed by the Cherokee. Neither Crawford nor Madison had given approval for the surveys. In a letter to Jackson, Coffee wrote, "I

don't know the result of what I do. The government may or may not approve what I do..."

Coffee and Jackson encouraged white settlers to take over the land so Crawford and President Madison could not maintain Cherokee ownership. Crawford surprised Jackson by granting all 23,000,000 acres to the Cherokee. Enraged, Jackson wrote to President Madison arguing that giving the land to the Cherokee separated the union, blocked the passage of military supplies, and prevented the US from profiting off the valuable land. President Madison did not reply to Jackson. However, Crawford wrote to Jackson, reminding him that having been in charge of building the road; he should know that military supplies would be allowed to pass. Crawford continued to thwart Jackson by ordering him to remove white settlers from the land. In a letter to Jackson, Crawford declared, "their intrusion was in violation both of the law, and the proclamation..."

Jackson knew that Alabama would eventually become a state and he wanted Coffee to survey the land for the same reasons as in Tennessee, to take the Cherokee lands and increase Jackson's and his friend's holdings. Jackson wrote a letter to James Monroe in which he recommended Coffee as the surveyor for the Northern District, saying, "If the plan proposed is adopted... will immediately give to that section of country a strong and permanent settlement of American citizens." Later, Jackson explained to Coffee that he would buy the land for his constituents with his own money, retaining one-third of it for himself. Arthur Peronneau Hayne, a land agent, wrote to Jackson, stating that he had information on future land sales and they should

get a “handsome little speculation” Jackson’s plan to remove the Cherokee from their land was in action.

In 1820, President James Madison ordered Jackson to remove the white settlers from the Cherokee land in Tennessee. Jackson sent a letter to Return Jonathan Meigs in February, notifying him that there were no troops in the area and that Jackson did not have the authority to send a militia on any occasion. Jackson had his men clearing out shrubbery and building roads through Cherokee land. John Ross, the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, had served under Jackson in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend and knew that Jackson could move mountains if it served his purpose.

By the end of 1820, Jackson had personally forced the Cherokee to cede most of their lands in Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee and a valuable chunk of land in Mississippi. White settlers now owned nearly fifty million acres of Cherokee land. Before Alabama became a state, there was an increase in white settlements. Jackson’s friends, who had colonized the Tennessee Valley, were among the new state’s leading citizens. In 1827, Jackson saw an opportunity to turn his scheme into a more extensive operation by becoming President of the United States.

Elected President of the United States in 1828, Andrew Jackson continued his maneuvers to remove the Cherokee from their land. In his first annual message to Congress on December 8, 1829, he established state sovereignty over the Indians. Jackson quoted the Constitution of the United States saying, “no new State shall be formed or erected within the jurisdiction of any other State.” The Cherokee could no longer have their

own government or designated tribal areas inside a state. Jackson was able to put his new idea of state sovereignty to the test when Georgia had to contend with gold prospectors and Cherokee miners in the gold rush. Georgia recognized the value of the gold and the land. Governor William Lumpkin of Georgia was on board with Jackson's goal to remove the Cherokee and decided to have the land surveyed and sold. John Coffee was called upon to survey the area for Georgia. In a letter from Jackson to Coffee, Jackson explains, "...includes about one million acres of what the Cherokee Indians claim as their ancient boundary—The Georgians have taken possession of it, & want the Cherokees removed from this land..."

Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, on May 28, 1830, which ordered Southern Native Americans to either exchange their lands for lands west of the Mississippi River or submit to state laws. According to the Trade and Intercourse Acts passed by Congress since 1790, all land sales by the Cherokee to the United States had to take place through treaties. The Indian Removal Act violated every treaty signed between the Cherokee and the United States. The Cherokee stood behind the treaties, but to Jackson, treaties were "a wanton, hasty, useless thing," and the height of his ambition was to undo them.

Despite the treaties, Jackson maintained that the Cherokee were not sovereign, they were subjects of the United States government, and they should be treated accordingly. Unless they wanted to live as second-class citizens, the Cherokee needed to move west. Jackson wrote to John Pitchlynn the official US Interpreter, telling him that if the Cherokee refused to abide by the Indian Removal Act, they would suffer the consequences,

whatever they may be. Jackson refused to intervene on their behalf. To Major William B. Lewis, a friend, and advisor, Jackson wrote, " I have used all the persuasive means in my power...exonerated the national character from all imputation...leave the poor deluded Creeks and Cherokees to their fate and their annihilation..."

In 1832, the Cherokee won their legal case, *Worcester v. Georgia*, hoping that the state and Jackson would follow the Supreme Court's decision. Chief Justice John Marshall ruled that treaties already in place gave rights to the Cherokee and those rights were guaranteed. No individual state could establish new rules governing the Cherokee. Marshall declared that the treaties placed the Cherokees under federal jurisdiction. However, Jackson refused to enforce the ruling. In a letter to Coffee, Jackson wrote, " The decision of the Supreme Court has fallen still born, and they find that it cannot coerce Georgia to yield to its mandate..." Jackson expressed, that even if he wanted, he could not convince " one regiment of militia" to fight to protect the Cherokees from Georgia. If they resisted removal, Jackson declared, "... the arm of the government is not sufficiently strong to preserve them from destruction." Jackson selectively enforced the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1802, which mandated that all white intruders be removed from Indian lands. Federal Indian agents encouraged white settlements because they thought it would convince the Cherokee to exit their properties. Jackson advised his agents and Georgia to hassle the Cherokee. Georgia officials claimed that Jackson told a Congressman to " Build a fire under them. When it gets hot enough, they'll move." The Jackson administration declined to protect the Cherokee from the state. Lewis Williams, a Congressman of North



Carolina, wrote to Tennessee Congressman William Lenoir saying, " Jackson could by a nod of the head or a crook of the finger induce Georgia to submit to the law...promise or belief of his countenance and support that Georgia is stimulated to her disorderly and rebellious conduct." Although Jackson continued to instigate harassment, his adversaries understood that he could use his presidential powers to put an end to the provocation towards the Cherokee.

From 1814 until the end of his presidency in 1837, Andrew Jackson schemed to remove the Cherokee from their territories. Jackson's interests in securing Indian land were personal and strategic. In his position as Indian Commissioner and President, he appointed friends and relatives to positions as Indian agents, traders, treaty commissaries, surveyors, and land agents. Jackson hoped to gain better access to information and profit off his land speculations. In his quest to acquire land, Jackson ignored treaties negotiated by him and those who came before him. After his victory at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, he turned on the Cherokee and made plans to steal their lands because of his greed and to expand the territory of the United States. Jackson's actions of twenty-three years show a systematic process of duplicity resulting in the forced the Cherokee to relocate west of the Mississippi River.

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