

Background on Indian Removal

THE “INDIAN PROBLEM”

White Americans, particularly those who lived on the western frontier, often feared and resented the Native Americans they encountered: To them, American Indians seemed to be an unfamiliar, alien people who occupied land that white settlers wanted (and believed they deserved). Some officials in the early years of the American republic, such as President George Washington, believed that the best way to solve this “Indian problem” was simply to “civilize” the Native Americans with the goal to make Native Americans as much like white Americans as possible by encouraging them convert to Christianity, learn to speak and read English, and adopt European-style economic practices such as the individual ownership of land and other property (including, in some instances in the South, African slaves). In the southeastern United States, many Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, Creek and Cherokee people embraced these customs and became known as the “Five Civilized Tribes.”

Several states passed laws limiting Native American sovereignty and rights and encroaching on their territory. In a few cases, such as *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), the U.S. Supreme Court objected to these practices and affirmed that native nations were sovereign nations “in which the laws of Georgia [and other states] can have no force.” Even so, the maltreatment continued. As President Andrew Jackson noted in 1832, if no one intended to enforce the Supreme Court’s rulings (which he certainly did not), then the decisions would “[fall]...still born.”

1. What was the goal of the civilization program?
2. Who has the power to enforce laws in the United States? What happened when the court made its decision in the two cases above, did Jackson support it?

INDIAN REMOVAL

The law required the government to negotiate removal treaties fairly, voluntarily and peacefully: It did not permit the president or anyone else to coerce Native nations into giving up their land. However, President Jackson and his government frequently ignored the letter of the law and forced Native Americans to vacate lands they had lived on for generations.

1. How did the government break the act when it came to the removal of the Indians?

Document A: Andrew Jackson (Modified)

It gives me great pleasure to announce to Congress that the Government's benevolent policy of Indian removal has almost been achieved.

We have wept over the fate of the natives of this country, as one by one many tribes have disappeared from the earth. However, we must accept this the way we accept when an older generation dies and makes room for the younger.

We would not want to see this continent restored to the condition in which our forefathers found it. What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and occupied by a few thousand savages to our great Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, decorated with art and industry, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?

The United States will pay to send the natives to a land where they may live longer and possibly survive as a people.

Can it be cruel when this Government offers to purchase the Indian's land, give him new and extensive territory, pay the expense of his removal, and support him for the first year in his new home? How many thousands of our own people would gladly embrace the opportunity of moving West under such conditions!

The policy of the Government towards the red man is generous. The Indian is unwilling to follow the laws of the States and mingle with the population. To save him from utter annihilation, the Government kindly offers him a new home, and proposes to pay the whole expense of his removal and settlement.

Source: Andrew Jackson, State of the Union speech. December 30, 1830.

Vocabulary: Benevolent—kind; Annihilation—destruction

Questions... (Be sure to consider your newfound background knowledge when analyzing this document!)

1. Why does Jackson consider the policy of removal generous?
2. Why does Jackson believe that the country was better in 1830 than in 1609?
3. Why does Jackson think that the Cherokee will be better off in Indian Territory?
4. "The Indian is unwilling to follow the laws of the States and mingle with the population."
What is inherently wrong with this statement? (Think back to the background information)
5. Jackson uses many instances of loaded language, give three examples and explain why these are exaggerated?

Loaded language (also known as loaded terms or emotive language) is wording that attempts to influence an audience by using appeal to emotion or stereotypes.

