

The Indian Removal Act of 1830

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Today in the United States, there are 565 federally recognized Native American tribes in 35 different states (Aspen Institute). At the start of the 19th century, Americans began to push deeper into the western frontier and as a result, Native Americans were pushed back. This conflict led to a compromise known as the Indian Removal Act of 1830. As white families moved further west, they continued to have frequent encounters with Native Americans which created conflict. In an attempt to solve this issue, the United States government passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This act forced Native Americans off of their ancestral land.

Even before being removed from their land, an attempt was made by the U.S. government to “civilize” the Natives. This idea of “civilizing” Natives dates back to George Washington, who believed it was the best way to solve America's “Indian Problem”. A few of the tribes that conformed to the European way of life were; the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, Creek and the Cherokee who became known as the Five Civilized Tribes. Being civilized to them meant converting to Christianity, speaking English, owning individual land plots and in some instances, owning African slaves (Trail of Tears). The land the Natives would be forced to migrate to was bought during this time in the Louisiana purchase of 1803 (Timeline of Removal). When civilizing them did not work, they began to remove Natives.

Before the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the United States government was removing Natives from their land. In 1814, the Creek were forcefully removed from 22 million acres of their land, and eleven other treaties were signed; which stripped southern tribes of their land. The tribes who agreed to these various treaties only did so hoping to please the government and be left alone. This did not have the effect they had hoped. In the end, the government acquired three-quarters of Alabama and Florida, as well as parts of Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi,

Kentucky and North Carolina. This led to a time of voluntary migration. During this time, a few Creeks, Cherokees, and Choctaws moved across the Mississippi River (Indian Removal). About one-fourth of the Cherokee people voluntarily moved (Timeline of Removal). Later, a man named Andrew Jackson came into the picture.

Andrew Jackson was a forceful proponent of an Indian Removal plan (Manning p.203). He fought several wars against the Creek and Seminole Nations which made him anything but sympathetic towards Natives. He also worked to remove Natives from their homes in the East, which would pave the way for white citizens to take their land (Conflict with Natives). Jackson was then elected the seventh president of the United States in 1828. Also, in his first annual State of the Union Address, he spoke to Congress about the Indian Removal Act (Manning, p 203). He did this by saying, "It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government, steadily pursued for nearly thirty years, in the relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation" (Transcript of Jackson's Message). All of these events led to The Indian Removal Act of 1830.

While the white citizens pushed the western frontier, the government sought a solution. According to the article, Indian Removal Act, "by the mid-1820s, the white man could not even tolerate the presence of even peaceful Indians". It became clear that the settlers viewed the homes of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole Nations as obstacles in the way of them getting the territory to grow cotton and various other crops (Indian Removal). In 1829, Georgia expanded its territory onto Cherokee land, that was in fact, granted to the Cherokee in The Echota Treaty with the United States. Georgia was infringing on the rights of the Cherokee Nation and President Jackson refused to interfere with the situation. In place of that, he signed

the Indian Removal Act of 1830 on May 28th, which displaced Natives across the Mississippi (Conflict with Natives). In that same bill it stated, “Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress, That it shall and may be lawful for the President of the United States to cause so much of any territory belonging to the United States, west of the river Mississippi, not included in any state organized and to which the Indian title has been extinguished”. It was the first piece of major legislation pertaining to the legal and political rights of Natives. This bill stipulated that land could only be taken from the Natives with negotiation on the basis of them getting paid for their land. It talks about this by saying, “An Act to provide for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the river of Mississippi” (American Memory). Despite the bill stipulating there must be a negotiation, the President reverted to force (Indian Removal Act). He was solely working on behalf of the white citizens to get land, not all of the citizens (Trail of Tears). President Jackson began to do things he would not have been able to do otherwise.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 gave the president the right to remove several tribes from their homes on the east side of the Mississippi. The federal and state governments began to join forces to remove the Natives from their land. States started to pass laws that limited tribal sovereignty and rights (Trail of Tears). This act also allowed the president to place Indian tribes on unsettled land in the west in exchange for their more fertile land (Indian Removal Act). The Cherokee were not pleased with this. They publicly stated, as noted in a book by Appleby, Brinkley, Broussard, McPherson, & Ritchies; “We are aware, that some persons suppose it will be for our advantage to remove beyond the Mississippiour people universally think

otherwise....We wish to remain on the land of our fathers”. The Cherokee went to court in 1831 on the foundation of a law in Georgia that stated white citizens could not live on Indian territory after the 31st of May without a license from the state (Indian Removal). This law was only put in place to justify removing missionaries from the land of the people who were trying to help the Natives resist removal. In 1832, they appealed to the federal court once again, it was the case of Worcester V. Georgia. Georgia had discovered gold on Cherokee territory, which made them even more relentless (Interview with Wilkins). The Supreme Court had ruled that the state's actions were indeed unconstitutional and said that Georgia had no control over the Cherokees land. However, Georgia went against this ruling and further encroached upon the Cherokees land, and President Jackson refused to enforce the ruling. Due to President Jackson being a believer in the states individual rights, he did not support the federal ruling (Interview with Wilkins). Citizens were not happy with the President's lack of leadership (Trail of Tears).

Most of the resistance came from the Five Civilized Tribes, who refused to give up their land for unfamiliar territory in places like Oklahoma since they had already given up their way of life. Also, other citizens who were against the removal of Natives published newspapers, pamphlets and held mass meetings to bring attention to this issue. They also made satirical pieces which made light of this serious issue. Many non-Native citizens got involved as well, perhaps the most prominent of them was Reverend Samuel Worcester. Worcester was a missionary who challenged the government in Georgia regarding the extinguishment of land title on behalf of the Cherokee tribe (A Brief History). He was imprisoned for his beliefs and the action he took, but in the end proved his case (Interview with Wilson). Despite these attempts to stop the removal, it continued (Manning, 203).

After these attempts to stop the removal, the migration began. By 1831, the Choctaw were the first Indian Nation to be completely forced off of their land which began the decade of the Trail of Tears. When the Treaty of Payne's Landing was signed in 1832, the removal process of the Seminole Nation began and it would take 23 years and nearly 15 million dollars to remove them from Florida to Oklahoma (Timeline of Removal). The Cherokee were split, half wanted to stay and defend their land, whereas half wanted to leave peacefully in exchange for money. Appleby et al. say that the disputes about how to handle the imminent danger of removal would continue to divide tribes for years to come. Then in 1835, a few self-appointed men negotiated the Treaty of Echota that traded all Cherokee land east of the Mississippi River for five million dollars and help to relocate. The federal government thought it was a done deal, but the Cherokee felt betrayed. The negotiators did not represent the tribe's government or their people. Due to this of this John Ross, the principal chief at the time created a petition against the treaty that got 16,000 Cherokee signatures, however, the treaty was still approved. The Cherokee were forced by the government to walk on foot thousands of miles to new Indian Territory on the other side of the Mississippi in 1838 (Trail of Tears).

People often spoke of the impending removal, even young children. In one letter a Cherokee girl named Jane Bushyhead wrote to a friend in the spring of 1838 "If we Cherokees are to be driven to the west by the cruel hand of oppression to seek a new home in the west, it will be impossible." (Digital History). One man, Private John G. Burnett, who was a soldier that assisted in the removal of the Cherokee looks back on that time as one to remember solemnly. He wrote in a letter to his children, "One can never forget the sadness and solemnity of that morning. Chief John Ross led in prayer and when the bugle sounded and the wagons started

rolling, many of the children rose to their feet and waved their little hands goodbye to their mountain homes, knowing they were leaving them forever”. He also wrote, “ Somebody must explain the streams of blood that flowed in the Indian country in the summer of 1838.

Somebody must explain the 4000 silent graves that mark the trail of the Cherokees to their exile. I wish I could forget it all, ...” (A Soldier Recalls The Trail of Tears). These excerpts depict the sorrow felt at that time.

On this journey, people were in chains, held at bayonet point, had little to no food or supplies and no help from the government. Due to this; starvation, deprivation, exposure to the elements and abuse by the soldiers forced them to the new territory the Cherokees suffered monumental losses. Roughly 4,000 Cherokee people died (Indian Removal). Also by 1836, the Creek Nation had been completely removed from their territory. Out of the 15,000 Creek who made the journey, 3,500 died due to the horrible conditions (Trail of Tears). However, by 1838, only 2,000 Cherokee had been removed from their homeland in Georgia.

President Van Buren, the next president, was not content. He sent 7,000 troops to speed up the Cherokee removal process. After the troops had been sent, they began the dangerous journey whilst whooping cough, typhus, dysentery and cholera spread. A Choctaw leader spoke to an Alabama reporter and told him that it was a “trail of tears and death” due to the appalling circumstances. Due to this perilous journey for the Cherokee and Choctaw, they soon became known as the Trail of Tears (Trail of Tears). In the end, 100,000 tribal men were forced to march under physical force and 25% percent of all Cherokee died (Indian Removal Act). A newspaper in Georgia even reported on the topic by saying, “Georgia is at length rid of her red

population, and this country will now be prosperous and happy” (Cherokee Trail of Tears). This suffering was, however, not only limited to the southeastern tribes.

Removal also occurred in northern states such as Wisconsin and Illinois, which opened up millions of acres of land to white settlers (Trail of Tears). The Indian Removal Act affected many Indian nations, not just the tribes who were removed from their homes. In 1831, the Sauk and Fox tribes were forced to leave their villages along the Rock River in Illinois and were moved west to Iowa. Before being removed, many northern tribes peacefully moved to land in the west considered undesirable by white families. In 1832 the Sauk tribe retaliated and ventured back across the Mississippi. Governor John Reynolds sent his militia to fight them. This was the beginning of the Black Hawk War. During the Black Hawk War, the Sauk and Fox tribes were slaughtered and Black Hawk was captured. This shows that the Indian Removal Act did not only affect the tribes who were first removed in the south (Conflict with Natives).

By 1840 tens of thousands of Natives had been removed from their land and forced across the Mississippi to the new Indian territory (Trail of Tears). Appleby et al. noted that another war started in 1855 over the miniscule amount of land the Seminole nation still had after the Indian Removal period. The tribes were told that they would be undisturbed. However, Indian territory continued to diminish (Trail of Tears).

At the beginning of the 1830s, nearly 125,000 Native Americans lived in the southeastern United States and by the end of 1839 very few Natives remained anywhere in the southeastern United States. In 1907, Oklahoma, the area where the majority of Natives lived, became a state and was no longer Indian territory as promised to the Natives by the government (Trail of Tears). Today, however, Oklahoma has the largest Native American population of 8% as noted by

Appleby et al. As of 2018, there are 2.5 million Natives in America. This removal changed the entire layout of America as we see it now. Today, Native Americans have certain elements of tribal sovereignty but are still a subordinate of the United States government and their state governments. They are protected by the United States through laws that preserve their religious beliefs, languages and social practices, without discrimination. Natives also undergo the same hardships as those who have experienced long-term bigotry. They have disproportionately high rates of poverty, infant death, unemployment, and high school dropouts (Native Rights).

In conclusion, several conflicts arose between white citizens and Natives. The Natives were originally living on the east side of the Mississippi but were forcefully removed by the U.S. government to the west side. The compromise that permitted the government to do so was the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The removal of these Natives changed the entire layout of America. While white citizens pushed the western frontier, they continued to have frequent encounters with Natives. To solve this issue the federal government drew up and put into effect the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This conflict led to a significant compromise that changed the way citizens see each other and how some live their day to day lives.

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