

Manifest Destiny and Competing Voices on the Eve of the Cherokee Removal

Prentice T. Chandler

It is our manifest destiny to over spread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty.

— John O’Sullivan, editor of *The Morning Post* (1845)

Manifest Destiny, the idea that Providence guided the conquest and settlement of North America, is one of the most contested ideas in American culture and history. One’s opinion about this central aspect of American mythology depends heavily on one’s point of view. An open and informed discussion in a social studies class about the merits of “westward expansion”—including the impact that it had on the original inhabitants of North America, as well as its ramifications today—is an essential experience for high school students.

Primary Sources

By exploring the concept of Manifest Destiny with the use of primary historical sources, students might arrive at a more nuanced conclusion. Textbooks will, no doubt, have a passage on the term “Manifest Destiny”. In teaching this concept, I present multiple perspectives to high school students to allow them to examine the historical evidence and form opinions based on that evidence.

There are many primary documents relevant for presenting multiple perspectives. In the classroom activities that follow, students examine a sample of different perspectives in the years leading up to one tribe’s removal and what became known as the Cherokee Trail of Tears. There is Andrew Jackson’s 1830 statement in favor of removal, which can be contrasted with the 1829 writing of Elias Boudinot, editor of the Cherokee national newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, who argued strongly against the impending removal.

A Larger Context


The history of the Cherokee removal is complex and tragic. For example, fellow Cherokees killed Boudinot because he eventually gave way to the demand for removal and, with a faction of Cherokee leaders, ceded tribal lands without consent. The Cherokee Constitution, which is also excerpted in the handout for

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Teaching with Historic Places Lesson Plans

The Trail of Tears and the Forced Relocation of the Cherokee Nation

The caravan was ready to move out. The wagons were lined up. The mood was somber. One who was there reported that “there was a silence and stillness of the voice that betrayed the sadness of the heart.” Behind them the makeshift camp where some had spent three months of a Tennessee summer was already ablaze. There was no going back.



A white-haired old man, Chief Going Snake, led the way on his pony, followed by a group of young men on horseback. Just as the wagons moved off along the narrow roadway, they heard a sound.

(Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Benjamin Mance, photographer)

www.nps.gov/history/mr/twhp/www/ps/lessons/118/trail/118trail.htm

students, forbade selling land to whites. The murder of Boudinot and other factional leaders in 1839 began seven years of civil war among the Cherokees.

By the time the United States had its first president, conflicts between Indians and whites over land had evolved over three centuries. While it is not possible to review all of this history in a high school unit of study, there is great value in examining a specific case.

During the activity described on the following pages, students might notice that Andrew Jackson gave this speech 15 years before the term “Manifest Destiny” was actually coined by a journalist. They will realize that the relocation forced upon the Eastern tribes presaged the (more widely known) Indian Wars in the West. When reading the various perspectives, they might begin to see history apart from stereotypes and slogans, and more deeply understand the conditions that were faced and the choices that were made by all of the people involved.



Questions That Remain

After students read excerpts from documents on the eve of the Cherokee removal, engage the class with one of the activities that follow. During discussion, guide students as they grapple with some challenging questions that are specific to that era, such as

- How does Jackson’s vision of Manifest Destiny square with other writings from that era in newspapers and court decisions?
- Can students envision any way that the removal could have been avoided at that time in U.S. history?

The teacher can also pose more general, “big idea” questions, that help make this topic very relevant today:

- Does this episode reveal inherent dangers in government by majority rule?
- What is the proper balancing point for sharing power between the three branches of government? Between the state and federal governments?
- What are important issues facing Native Americans now living in your state?
- Do events that happened in the 1800s have any meaning for our personal lives, and our national life, today?

Background for Teachers

Ellis, Joseph J. *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies in the Founding of the Republic* (New York: Vintage, 2007), ch. 4.

Nash, Gary. *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2005).

Richter, Daniel K. *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

For Student Research Nonfiction Books

- Bruchac, Joseph. *Trails of Tears, Paths of Beauty*. National Geographic, 2000.
- Elish, Dan, et al., *The Trail of Tears: The Story of the Cherokee Removal* Tarrytown, N.Y.: Marshall Cavendish, 2001.
- Heidler David and Jeanne Heidler, *Indian Removal*. New York: Norton, 2006.
- Hoig, Stan, *Night of the Cruel Moon: Cherokee Removal and the Trail of Tears*. New York: Checkmark Books, 1996.

Fiction

- Bruchac, Joseph. *The Journal of Jesse Smoke: A Cherokee Boy, Trail of Tears, 1838*. New York: Scholastic, 2001.
- Conley, Robert. *Mountain Windsong: A Novel of the Trail of Tears*. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma, 1995.

Websites

- www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/118trail/118trail.htm. National Park Service, “The Trail of Tears: The Forced Relocation of the Cherokee Nation”
- www.cherokee.org/Culture/ToT/Default.aspx
Historical documents at the Cherokee Nation
- www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html
Historical documents in the Library of Congress
- www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2959.html
An overview of Indian removal
- www.pbs.org/kcet/andrewjackson/themes/
Interview with scholars and a video summary
- www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/
Episode 3. “We Shall Remain: Trail of Tears.” Text and video.
- georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/trailtea.htm
University of Georgia Libraries collection, Trail of Tears.


Primary Historical Documents

- Perdue, Theda and Michael Green, *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford, 2005).
- Rozema, Vicki. *Voices from The Trail of Tears* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair Publishing, 2003).
- Vogel, Virgil. *This Country Was Ours: A Documentary History of the American Indians* (New York: Torchbooks, 1976).

Cherokee Spirituality and Culture

- Nabokov, Peter. *Where the Lightning Strikes: The Lives of American Indian Sacred Places* (New York: Penguin, 2007), See “Between River and Fire,” pp. 52–69 and ch. 4 on the importance of the Cherokee capital town of Chota.
- Vine, Deloria. *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (New York: Fulcrum, 1973; 2003 ed.), ch. 4.

Pedagogy

- Potter, Lee Ann and Wynell Schamel, “General Orders Pertaining to Removal of the Cherokees,” *Social Education* 68, no. 7 (January/February 1999): 32–38.
- PBS, “We Shall Remain Teacher’s Guide,” www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/beyond_broadcast/teach_and_learn.
- Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian, “The Cherokee Response to Removal,” *Social Education* 68, no. 7 (November/ December, 2004): 466-469. 

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Document Analysis

After your students have read or listened to primary documents featured in the Handout, lead a class using the following questions (also on the student handout):

- What type of document is this?
- When was this text created?
- Who created it?
- What was the purpose of this document?
- What questions does the document raise?
- What case is the author trying to make? Are you convinced?

2. Pro-Con Debate/Document Focus

Divide the class into groups of four; then divide each group into student pairs. Provide each group with the Handout on pages 154–155 (excerpts from Jackson’s speech; *Worcester v. Georgia*; Cherokee Constitution of 1827; Cherokee Women’s petition; editorial by Elias Boudinot; and Evan Jones diary).

In each group, one pair represents the position of Andrew Jackson and the other represents the position of missionaries concerned about the plight of the Cherokee. In this exercise, the pairings will argue from the perspective of either President Jackson or Cherokee sympathizer Evan Jones. After a period of time (usually 15–20 minutes), have the pairings switch perspectives and argue the opposite point of view.¹

If your students have trouble arguing a point of view, you can direct them to a specific passage within a document, asking pointed questions like, “What did Evan Jones mean by writing, ‘It is due to justice to say, that, at this station, the officer in command treats his prisoners with great respect and indulgence. But fault rests somewhere. They are prisoners, without a crime to justify the fact.’” Also, ask students to consider what Andrew Jackson meant when he said, “Doubtless it will be painful to leave the graves of their fathers; but what do they more than our ancestors did or than our children are now doing?”

3. Fishbowl Discussion

Designate students to represent the major players in Native Removal in a Fishbowl Discussion. Start by assigning students to the following groups:

- Executive Branch (President Jackson),
- Judicial Branch (Supreme Court),
- Christian Missionaries (Cherokee sympathizers), and
- Cherokee who are resisting removal.

Using the six documents, have students discuss their points of view in groups of four and begin to argue various positions.

In the Fishbowl method, students “work in small groups discussing an issue or problem and send a representative from their

group to sit inside the fishbowl—an inner circle of concentric circles. Student representatives inside the fishbowl discuss the issue or problem and attempt to reach a consensus. Students outside the fishbowl may communicate with their representatives by passing notes,² or talking points, to the speakers. This method is uniquely suited to topics that are controversial and have multiple points of view.

After the representatives have debated their perspectives for a set period of time in the inner circle, have the outer circle members assume the role of the specific interest groups. Note how the U.S. executive and judicial branches were in sharp conflict, and have students comment on this power struggle. It is also instructive, given the multiple points of view in the documents, to address the complexity of this issue—how it was not simply the “U.S. government v. Indians” or a “white man v. red man” debate.

4. Brainstorming Discussion: “What if..”

Conduct a brainstorming session around the following question: “What were some possible alternatives to the Indian Removal Policy of the United States of the 1800s?” This invites students to imagine different possibilities in the unfolding of American history. It gives them a sense that events are not predetermined, that they might have taken a different course.³ Have students develop possible alternatives to Jackson’s policy of Indian Removal. Who would have resisted a specific point of compromise? What groups or social forces would have offered resistance to a particular outcome?

5. Extension Activity

Ask students to research specific treaties and battles between Native tribes and the U.S. government, or do research on tribes from your own area or state. Were tribes forcibly removed? Were reservations established? This research is a good opportunity to take advantage of the plethora of trade books on this subject as well as historical resources in your state.⁴

Notes for the Teaching Suggestions

- Robert Stahl, *Cooperative Learning in the Social Studies: A Handbook for Teachers* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1994), 306–331.
- Jeff Passe and Ronald Evans, “Discussion Methods in an Issues-Centered Curriculum,” in *Handbook on Teaching Social Issues*, eds. Ronald Evans and David Saxe (Washington, D.C.: NCSS, 1996), 81–88; Hess, Diana, “Discussion in the Social Studies: Is it Worth the Trouble?” in *Social Studies Today: Research and Practice*, ed. Walter Parker (New York: Routledge, 2009), 205–213.
- Shirley Engle, “The Commission Report and Citizenship Education,” *Social Education* 54 (1990): 431–434; Michael Whelan, “Teaching History: A Constructivist Approach,” in *Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems, and Possibilities*, ed. E. Wayne Ross (New York: SUNY, 2006), 37–50.
- See citations at the end of the Handout.

PRENTICE T. CHANDLER is an assistant professor of social studies education at Athens State University in Athens, Alabama.

**Document 1: Excerpt from Jackson's State
of the Union Address, 1830**

On December 6, 1830, President Andrew Jackson delivered his Second Annual Message to Congress in which he outlined his plan and justification for the forced movement of tribes west of the Mississippi.

It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government, steadily pursued for nearly thirty years, in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation...

The consequences of a speedy removal will be important to the United States, to individual States, and to the Indians themselves...It puts an end to all possible danger of collision between the authorities of the General and State Governments on account of the Indians. It will place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters. By opening the whole territory between Tennessee on the north and Louisiana on the south to the settlement of the whites it will incalculably strengthen the southwestern frontier and render the adjacent States strong enough to repel future invasions without remote aid. It will relieve the whole State of Mississippi and the western part of Alabama of Indian occupancy, and enable those States to advance rapidly in population, wealth, and power. It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites; free them from the power of the States; enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rude institutions; will retard the progress of decay, which is lessening their numbers, and perhaps cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community.

What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization and religion?

The present policy of the Government is but a continuation of the same progressive change by a milder process. The tribes which occupied the countries now constituting the Eastern States were annihilated or have melted away to make room for the whites. 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, and, at the expense of the United States, to send them to land where their existence may be prolonged and perhaps made perpetual. ...

Rightly considered, the policy of the General Government

toward the red man is not only liberal, but generous. He is unwilling to submit to the laws of the States and mingle with their population. To save him from this alternative, or perhaps utter annihilation, the General Government kindly offers him a new home, and proposes to pay the whole expense of his removal and settlement.

Document 2: Worcester v. Georgia, 1832

In this case, decided in 1832, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Cherokee sovereignty, but President Jackson ignored the ruling. (Chief Justice John Marshall delivered the opinion of the Court.)

The Constitution ... the supreme law of the land, has adopted and sanctioned the previous treaties with the Indian nations, and consequently admits their rank among those powers who are capable of making treaties. The words "treaty" and "nation" are words of our own language...We have applied them to Indians, as we have applied them to other nations of the earth. ...The Cherokee nation, then, is a distinct community, occupying its own territory ... in which the laws of Georgia can have no force, and which the citizens of Georgia have no right to enter, but with the assent of the Cherokee themselves, or in conformity with treaties...

**Document 3: Article 1, Section 2 of the
Constitution of the Cherokee Nation, 1827**

Cherokee leaders, many of them well educated, established a constitution and wrote laws to govern their own nation. These laws were sometimes counter to ideals of acculturation and integration with white society.

[Cherokee lands] shall remain the common property of the nation, but the improvements made thereon and in possession of the citizens of the nation, are the exclusive & indefeasible property of the citizens respectively ... [C]itizens of the nation ... shall possess no rights nor power to dispose of their improvements in any manner whatever to the United States individual states, nor to individuals citizens thereof ... [W]henver any such citizen or citizens shall remove with their effects out of the limits of this nation and become Citizens of any other government, all their rights and privileges as citizens of this nation cease...

Document 4: Cherokee Women's Petition, 1831

Cherokee leaders debated whether to escape problems by moving west, and indeed, some groups did emigrate before the forced march. Others made special agreements with Georgia officials to retain their farmlands and thus avoided expulsion. The women writing here argue against any compromise. The term "General Government" means the U.S. federal government.

To the Committee and Council,

We the females, residing in Salequoree and Pine Log, believing that the present difficulties and embarrassments under which this nation is placed demands a full expression of the mind of every individual, on the subject of emigrating to Arkansas, would take upon ourselves to address you. Although it is not common for our sex to take part in public measures, we nevertheless feel justified in expressing our sentiments on any subject where our interest is as much at stake as any other part of the community.

We believe the present plan of the General Government to effect our removal West of the Mississippi, and thus obtain our lands for the use of the State of Georgia, to be highly oppressive, cruel and unjust. And we sincerely hope there is no consideration which can induce our citizens to forsake the land of our fathers of which they have been on our possession since time immemorial, and thus compel us, against our will, to undergo the toils and difficulties of removing with our helpless families hundreds of miles to unhealthy and unproductive country.

Document Analysis

After reading these primary source documents, discuss the following questions with your teacher and classmates:

- What type of document is this?
 - When was this text created?
 - Who created it?
 - What was the purpose of this document?
 - What questions does the document raise?
 - What case is the author trying to make?
- Are you convinced?

Sources for Documents 1–6

- President Andrew Jackson's Message to Congress on December 6, 1830, www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html.
- John Marshall's Decision on *Worcester v. Georgia*, 1832, www.pbs.org/kcet/andrewjackson/edu/ps_doc_marshall_worcester.pdf.
- Constitution of the Cherokee Nation, July 1827, www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/indian_removal/cherokee_constitution.cfm.
- Although printed as "Petition of the Women's Council, October 17, 1821," this letter is most probably from 1831, as it was published in the *Cherokee Phoenix* in 1831, and matches the events of that year. Several petitions such as this one can be found in Theda Perdue and Michael Green, *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford, 2005).
- dlg.galileo.usg.edu; search on "Elias Boudinot."
- Perdue and Green, 172.

Document 5: Elias Boudinot June 17, 1829

Elias Boudinot was the editor of the Cherokee's national newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix. In 1832, when Boudinot tried to open the paper to debate on the issue of removal, the Cherokee Council forbid it, and he resigned.

It appears now from the communication of the Secretary of War to the Cherokee Delegation, that the illustrious Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Monroe were only tantalizing us, when they encouraged us in the pursuit of agriculture and Government, and when they afforded us the protection of the United States, by which we have been preserved to this present time as a nation. Why were we not told long ago, that we could not be permitted to establish a government within the limits of any state? Then we could have borne disappointment much easier than now. . . . There is, as would naturally be supposed, a great rejoicing in Georgia. It is a time of "important news"—"gratifying intelligence"—"The Cherokee lands are to be obtained speedily." It is even reported that the Cherokees have come to the conclusion to sell, and move off to the west of the Mississippi—not so fast. We are yet at our homes, at our peaceful firesides . . . attending to our farms and useful occupations.

Document 6: Diary of Evan Jones, June 16, 1838

Evan Jones was a Baptist missionary who worked among the Cherokees in North Carolina. He accompanied his congregation to the stockades and on the forced march to the West. Parts of his letters were published in the Baptist Missionary Magazine.

The Cherokee are nearly all prisoners. They have been dragged from their houses, and encamped at the forest and military posts, all over the nation. In Georgia, especially, multitudes were allowed no time to take any thing with them, except the clothes they had on. Well-furnished houses were left prey to plunderers, who, like hungry wolves, follow in the train of the captors. These wretches rifle the houses, and strip the helpless, unoffending owners of all they have on earth. Females, who have been habituated to comforts and comparative affluence, are driven on foot before the bayonets of brutal men. . . . It is a painful sight. The property of many has been taken, and sold before their eyes for almost nothing—the sellers and buyers, in many cases, being combined to cheat the poor Indians. . . . It is due to justice to say, that, at this station, the officer in command treats his prisoners with great respect and indulgence. But fault rests somewhere. They are prisoners, without a crime to justify the fact.