Andrew Jackson to the Cherokee Tribe, 1835

Introduction

Elected president in 1828, Andrew Jackson supported the removal of American Indians from their homelands, arguing that the American Indians’ survival depended on separation from whites. In this 1835 circular to the Cherokee people, Jackson lays out his case for removal. Using paternalistic and threatening language, Jackson urges the Cherokee to accept removal from Georgia and relocate westward peacefully. “I have no motive, my friends, to deceive you,” Jackson writes. He continues, “Circumstances that cannot be controlled, and which are beyond the reach of human laws, render it impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community . . . You have but one remedy within your reach. And that is, to remove to the west.” Jackson closes with an ominous tone and these threatening sentences: “The fate of your women and children, the fate of your people, to the remotest generation, depend on the issue.” Later that same year, a small group of 100 Cherokee delegates signed the Treaty of New Echota, paving the way for the Cherokee Nation’s removal to Oklahoma in 1838.

Excerpt

I have no motive, my friends, to deceive you. I am sincerely desirous to promote your welfare. Listen to me, therefore, while I tell you that you cannot remain where you now are. Circumstances that cannot be controlled, and which are beyond the reach of human laws, render it impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community. You have but one remedy within your reach. And that is, to remove to the West and join your countrymen, who are already established there. And the sooner you do this, the sooner you will commence your career of improvement and prosperity. . . .

As certain as the sun shines to guide you in your path, so certain is it that you cannot drive back the laws of Georgia from among you. Every year will increase your difficulties. Look at the condition of the Creeks. See the collisions which are taking place with them. See how their young men are committing depredations upon the property of our citizens, and are shedding their blood. This cannot and will not be allowed. Punishment will follow, and all who are engaged in these offences must suffer.

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction, examine the excerpt and if possible the entire transcript, and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

1. Explain what Andrew Jackson meant when he told the Cherokees that “Circumstances . . . render it impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community.”
2. American Indians correctly claimed that prior treaties with the US government were violated by Andrew Jackson. Why then, did they sign the Treaty of New Echota?
3. When Jackson referred to the Cherokees as “my friends,” why did they have serious concerns about his sincerity?
Andrew Jackson, “To the Cherokee Tribe of Indians East of the Mississippi [circular], March 16, 1835 (The Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC07377)
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