

Andrew Jackson on Native Americans, Second Annual Message (December 6, 1830)

In this excerpt from his second annual message to Congress in 1830, President Andrew Jackson defended his policy of Indian removal. As you read his account, consider whether he was accurate in his description of the Native American nations and the conditions and resources provided for their removal. How did Indian removal reduce the danger of conflict between the federal government (which had treaties with these sovereign nations) and the states (which were set upon opening Indian territory for white settlement)? Was Jackson accurate in his description of the Cherokee as a nation with "savage habits" and "rude institutions"? Why did Jackson continually label the Native American nations as "savages" when they were referred to as "civilized tribes" by all observers who had traveled through their towns and plantations and met with their learned leaders?

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. Two important tribes have accepted the provision made for their removal...and it is believed that their example will induce the remaining tribes also to seek the same obvious advantages.

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 parts 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...to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community....

Toward the aborigines of the country no one can indulge a more friendly feeling than myself, or would go further in attempting to reclaim them from their wandering habits and make them a happy, prosperous people....

Humanity has often wept over the fate of the aborigines of this country.... To follow to the tomb the last of his race and to tread on the graves of extinct nations excite melancholy reflections. But true philanthropy reconciles the mind to these vicissitudes as it does to the extinction of one generation to make room for another. In the monuments and fortresses of an unknown people, spread over the extensive regions of the West, we behold the memorials of a once powerful race, which was exterminated or has disappeared to make room for the existing savage tribes.... 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...and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?...

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. To better their condition in an unknown land our forefathers left all that was dear in earthly objects.... Can it be cruel in this Government when, by events which it can not control, the Indian is made discontented in his ancient home, to purchase his lands, to give him a new and extensive territory, to pay the expense of his removal, and support him a year in his new abode? How many thousands of our own people would gladly embrace the opportunity of removing to the West on such conditions!