



FORCED REMOVAL

For many, the West represented a chance for a wonderful new life. But for America's native people, the push westward resulted in quite the opposite experience. The story of the Cherokee Indians, the single largest Native American group in the Southeast, is just one example of the mistreatment of Indians during this time.

Before the arrival of the first Europeans, Cherokee country included most of present-day Kentucky and Tennessee, as well as parts of western Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and northern Georgia and Alabama. By the 1800s, settlers had taken most of this land.

Forced from their homes (above), the Cherokee Indians suffered on the Trail of Tears, which took its name from the Cherokee phrase *Nunna daul Tsuny*, meaning "The Trail Where They Cried."

The Cherokees were left with only a small section of northwestern Georgia. When gold was discovered there in 1828, the U.S. government wanted this land, too. Under a law passed by Congress called the Indian Removal Act of 1830, President Andrew Jackson ordered the Cherokees to leave.

Centuries of contact with white settlers already had decimated many native populations. Tens of thousands of Indians had died after exposure to diseases against which they had no immunity. In addition, as the number of settlers had increased in the 1700s, American Indian tribes had been pushed from their lands east of the Mississippi River. Now the Indian Removal Act decreed that all native people be resettled on land west of the river, which was seen as the American desert.

In May 1838, army troops began rounding up the Cherokees, removing them from their homes

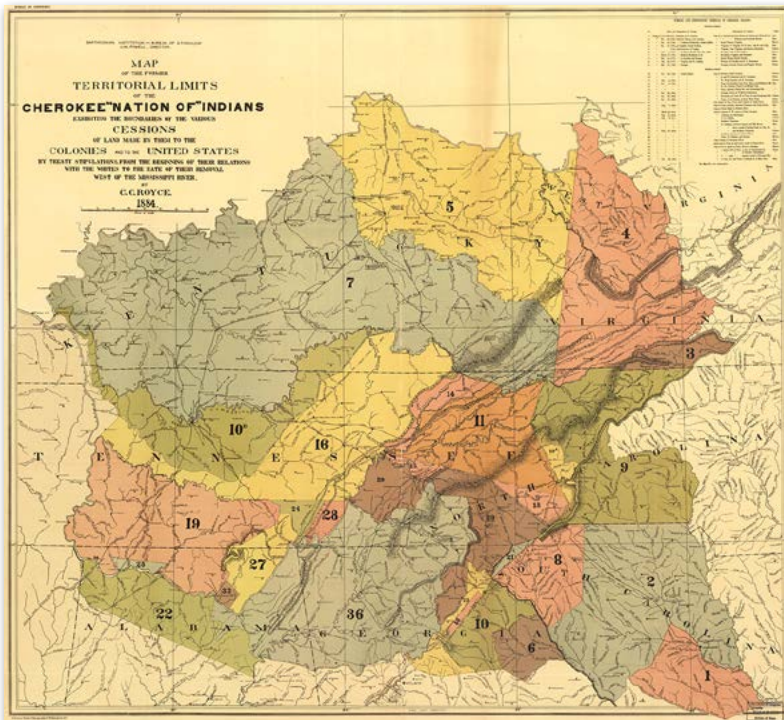
and imprisoning them in stockaded forts. In the fall, the Indians began a forced walk of almost 1,200 miles from Georgia to Oklahoma. The sick, the young, and the elderly rode in wagons, while the others trudged on foot through difficult weather. At night, exhausted, they slept on the frozen ground, covered only by thin blankets.

Hunger, exposure, and disease took their toll. At each stopping point, at least 15 shallow graves were dug in the frozen earth. This terrible forced migration became known as the “Trail of Tears.” Four thousand Cherokees, about one quarter of the population, died as a result.

The Trail of Tears would not be the last time that broken promises and treaties resulted in the U.S. government pushing a Native American

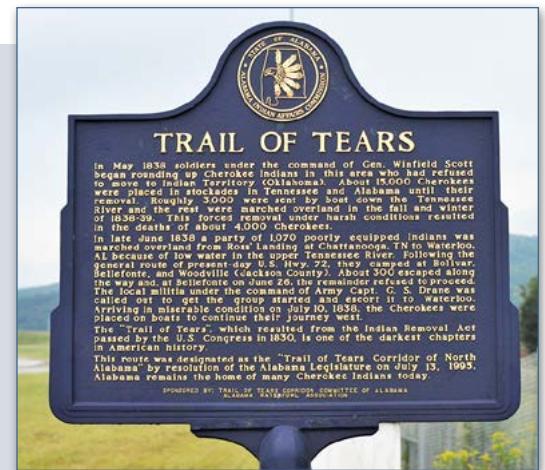
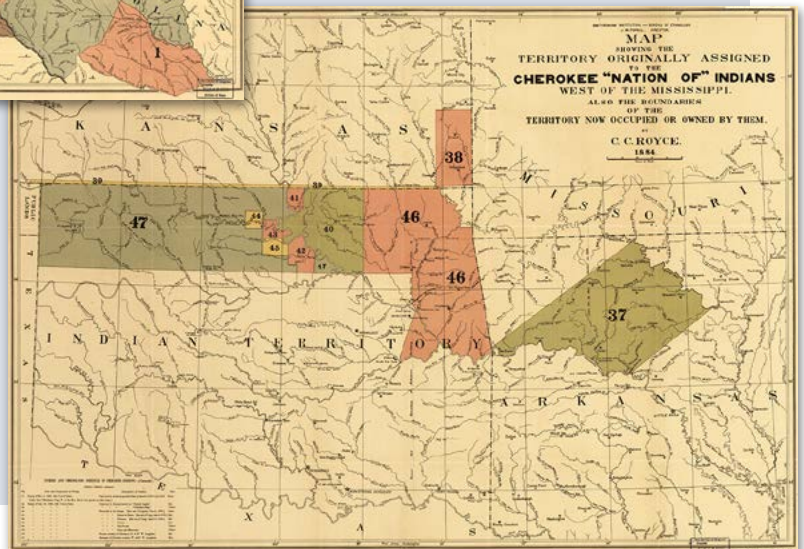
group from its lands. By the late 1800s, even those Indians who lived west of the Mississippi came into conflict with the growing presence of permanent settlers. In many parts of the West, traditional Indian hunting and farming lands were taken. Most of the bison that the Indians had relied on for food (meat), tools (bones), and shelter and clothing (hides) were killed.

Some, such as the Sioux and the Apaches, fought back and resisted efforts by the U.S. government to keep them on reservations. But they ultimately were no match for the U.S. Army. Unable to save their land or their way of life through either peaceful or violent methods, most Native Americans found themselves forced to live on reservations by the end of the 1800s.



The Cherokees’ homeland once included a large area of today’s southeastern United States (above). Most Cherokee villages were in the southern Appalachian Mountains.

After the Indian Removal Act, the Cherokee Indians were relocated to a reservation in Oklahoma (right).



A Trail of Tears sign in Alabama (above) marks the path of the Cherokees’ forced march.

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Maps: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

The Trail of Tears: A Native of Maine

At the beginning of the 1830s, nearly 125,000 Native Americans lived on millions of acres of land in Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina and Florida, the land their ancestors had lived on for generations. Sadly, as part of Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policy, the federal government forced them to leave their homelands and walk thousands of miles to a specially designated "Indian Territory" across the Mississippi River. The Cherokee people faced hunger and disease on this difficult journey, known as the "Trail of Tears." About 4,000 of the 16,000 Cherokee people died on this forced march. A Maine newspaper correspondent wrote the following account after watching the Cherokee people pass through Kentucky in 1838.

On Tuesday evening we fell in with a detachment of the poor Cherokee Indians. . . . That poor despised people are now on their long and tedious march to their place of destination beyond the Mississippi River. In the first detachment which we met, were about eleven hundred Indians—sixty wagons—six hundred horses, and perhaps forty pairs of oxen. We found them in the forest camped for the night by the road side, comfortable—if comfortable they might be in a December night, and under a severe fall of rain accompanied with heavy wind. With their canvass for a shield from the inclemency of the weather, and the cold wet ground for a resting place, after the fatigue of the day, they spent the night with probably as little of the reality as the appearance of comfort. We learned from the officers and overseers of the detachment in the morning, that many of the aged Indians were suffering extremely from the fatigue of the journey, and the ill health consequent upon it. Several were then quite ill, and one aged man we were informed was then in the last struggles of death. There were about ten officers and overseers in each detachment whose business it was to provide supplies for the journey, and attend to the general wants of the company. The cost of the journey is paid by the American Government as one of the conditions of the pretended treaty which many of the Indians still call fraudulent.

The officers informed us that the Indians were very unwilling to go—so much so that some two hundred had escaped, in collecting them together, and secreted themselves in the mountains in Georgia and the eastern part of Tennessee, and those who were on the way were so unwilling to pursue their

journey, that it was some days quite late in the evening before they could get them under way—and even then they went reluctantly. I know it is said that “only a few were unwilling to go”—“the most go willingly and think the remove on the whole, an advantage to the nation.” The testimony of the officers and observation have both tended to confirm the belief, however, in my mind that the great majority of the nation feel that they are wronged—grievously wronged, and nothing but arbitrary power compels them to remove . . .

The last detachment which we passed on the 7th, embraced rising two thousand Indians with horses and mules in proportion. The forward part of the train we found just pitching their tents for the night, and notwithstanding some thirty or forty wagons were already stationed, we found the road literally filled with the procession for about three miles in length. The sick and feeble were carried in wagons—about as comfortable for travelling as a New England ox cart with a covering over it—a great many ride on horseback and multitudes go on foot—even aged females, apparently, nearly ready to drop into the grave—were travelling with heavy burdens attached to the back—on the sometimes frozen ground, and sometimes muddy streets, with no covering for the feet except what nature had given them. We were some hours making our way through the crowd, which brought us in close contact with the wagons and the multitude, so much that we felt fortunate to find ourselves freed from the crowd without leaving any part of our carriage. We learned from the inhabitants on the road where the Indians passed that they buried fourteen to fifteen at every stopping place—and they make a journey of ten miles per day only on an average. . . . One aged Indian, who was commander of the friendly Creeks and Seminoles in a very important engagement in company with General Jackson, was accosted on arriving in a little village in Kentucky by an aged man residing there, and who was one of Jackson’s men in the engagement referred to, and asked if he (the Indian) recollected him? The aged Chieftain looked him in the face and recognised him, and with a down-cast look and heavy sigh, referring to the engagement, he said, “Ah! My life and the lives of my people were then at stake for you and your country. I then thought Jackson my best friend. But, ah! Jackson no serve me right. Your country no do me justice now.”