Everything I have learned in this course has been total novelty to me. All I knew before was that there was conflict between colonizers and native people, and that the native people became nearly extinct. Among all the amazing and interesting facts and theories I have learnt, what first stroke me as surprising was Columbus’s journal and his description of the native people.

At the very beginning of the journal, he stated that the native people were to be converted to Christianity, which continues to be a constant theme of his journal. It seemed Columbus’s exploration was highly driven by the goal of converting native population along with searching for gold. In his journal, much of his description and statements, instead of objectively recording the findings on the continent, basically served as a justification for the usefulness of the native people and in particular, how easy they could be converted. For example, he said in the beginning, “they should be good servants, … and easily made Christians” and later he said “these people have no creed, they are gentle, unwarlike, and timorous. they believe and know that there is a God in Heaven and they are sure that we come from heaven.” Together with such strong purpose, Columbus’s journal lacks many other elements such as the description for the culture and structure of the society of the so-called Indians. This in general gives me a sense that from the beginning, the Europeans never regarded themselves as guests or intruders to the land. Indeed, they somehow considered it natural and reasonable to change the native people the way they wanted and used them to serve their interest.

Another event that truly impressed me was the Cherokee removal, i.e. the Trail of Tears, and it provides me with deeper insights into the relation between whites and Indians. First of all, I was surprised that the conflict between Indians and the whites actually continued after the US was founded. Moreover, the conflicts were not between individuals or groups, but rather elevated to a nation vs nation level, as the removal was actually passed as a Federal law.

As Elias Boudinot suggested, the Indians, and in particular, the Cherokees, were initially promised protection by the US government, and they indeed followed the advice and instruction of the US government to adopt the European or white lifestyle, and establish a government of regular law. Also, as can be seen from Evan Jones’ articles, some of the Cherokees had converted to Christianity and many lands had been ceded through trading and other forms. It seems that the Cherokees, in fact as a nation and self-governed people, had been existed since the the first day of US and coexisted with the whites for a fairly long time, although sometimes conflicts did happen. However, when the relationship was challenged by higher interest, as Georgia attempted to extend her jurisdiction over the Cherokees, suddenly the Cherokees were not allowed to form a government or even stay in the lands they had lived in for thousands of years. Basically, the US, as a country, forced the people living on its falsely claimed territories to leave. Such fact is indeed shocking.

Together with such cruelty was the attitude of Andrew Jackson, the main initiator of the removal, towards the removal, as shown by his State of Union Address in 1830, the tone of which I find extremely problematic and unreasonable.

First, he spoke in the name of humanity and philanthropy. He claimed that philanthropy would allow the removal, in the name of greater good of humanity, as he essentially put the whites and their culture to a superior position than the Indians. “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…”. He also attempted to justify the removal by claiming that the extinction of one group to make room for another was somewhat natural.

I’m not sure whether this was some kind of political propaganda or the objective reflection of the mainstream opinions at that time, but such tone is to me shocking, and even ridiculous. The US was founded by people from various cultural backgrounds and various social status. However, the president and many of the ordinary people could not treat the Indians as part of the US, and when the Indians got in the way of their interest, they tried to “remove” them. Andrew Jackson did not even find a somehow justified excuse, and he essentially considered the removal natural. The whole article stood at the point of view of the white people and did not even consider for the native people for a little bit. Andrew Jackson even stated that the removal “was not only liberal, but generous”. He also made totally unreasonable comparison between the Indians being removed from their homeland to the Europeans immigrating to America. As we can see from the Memorial of Protest of the Cherokee Nation, the removal was indeed brutal and the name Trail of Tears does provide an accurate description to the event.