

PERSPECTIVE

The policy of Indian removal resulted in harms normally associated with genocide. The consequences of the policy were clearly genocidal.

The reckoning

By JEFFREY OSTLER

AMID WEEKS OF RECKONING with America’s history of white supremacy, protesters have brought down monuments to the Confederacy and statues of Christopher Columbus. This week, demonstrators tried to topple the most well-known statue of Andrew Jackson, featured on horseback in military attire, in Washington, D.C.’s, Lafayette Square.

President Donald Trump called it an attack on a “great monument” and said of the protesters, “They’re bad people, they don’t love our country, and they’re not taking down our monuments.”

But Jackson’s legacy is worth examining closely. Known to Creeks as “Sharp Knife” for his viciousness during the 1814 Creek War, Jackson went on to become an advocate of removing eastern Indians to west of the Mississippi. Elected president in 1828, he moved quickly to secure the Indian Removal Act and signed it into law on May 28, 1830.

The Jackson monument at Lafayette Square has copies that can be found in Nashville (Jackson’s hometown), New Orleans and Jacksonville, Fla. The statue’s immediate reference is to Jackson’s victory over the British in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans. More broadly, however, the statue celebrates the violent dispossession of Native Americans.

When President Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, he claimed that moving dozens of Native nations west of the Mississippi was an act of benevolence. Speaking before Congress, he called the policy “generous.” Instead of “utter annihilation” — the future Jackson foresaw if Indians remained in the East — his policy “kindly offers . . . a new home.”

Native people disagreed. Creek elders informed the president that eviction would be the “worst evil that can befall them.” Cherokees saw “nothing but ruin before us.”

The Creeks and Cherokees were right. The policy of removal had a catastrophic impact on these two Native nations and on dozens of other Native nations, both North and South.

North’s trail of tears

Many Americans have heard about the Cherokee Trail of Tears and the removal of the other “Civilized Tribes” — Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws and Seminoles — from the South. But removal was not just a project of white southerners to expand cotton production based on enslaved labor. In the free labor states of the North, federal and state officials, supported by farmers, speculators and business interests, evicted Shawnees, Delawares, Senecas, Potawatomis, Miamis, Wyandots, Ho-Chunks, Ojibwes, Sauks and Meskwakis. College-level textbooks touch on the southern removals but are silent about the northern trails of tears.

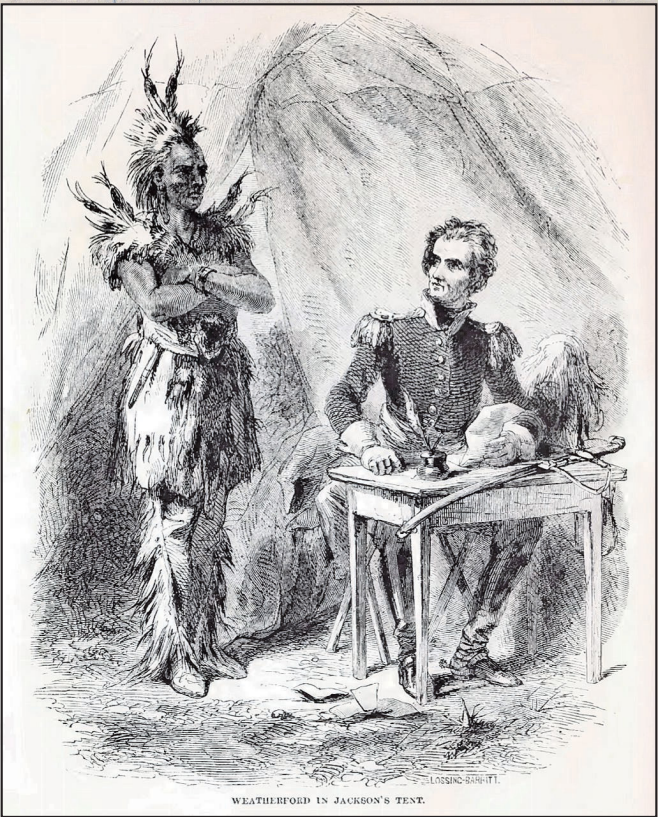
A few removals took place without great loss of life, but most were terribly deadly. Of the 80,000 Native people who were forced west from 1830 into the 1850s, between 12,000 and 17,000 perished. The U.S. Army and state militias killed some in wars to break the resistance of noncompliant communities, but the large majority died of interrelated factors of starvation, exposure and disease (malaria, cholera, typhus, smallpox and dysentery). To put this in perspective, the death toll would be equivalent to between 46 million and 62 million of the current U.S. population.

The story of removal does not end with the trails of tears. West of the Mississippi, the catastrophe continued. Conditions were worst for the northern nations that were squeezed into eastern Kansas. The

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Above, “General Jackson’s campaign against the Creek Indians 1813 & 1814, sheet 1” from the National Archives and Records Administration. **Right,** Chief William Weatherford in Jackson’s tent shortly after the Creek War. The 19th century engraving by Lossing-Barrett appeared in Harper’s Magazine in 1864. Elected president in 1828, Jackson moved quickly to secure the Indian Removal Act. Creek elders informed the president that eviction would be the “worst evil that can befall them.”



Courtney’s challenger makes a cuckoo national list

Last year, Republicans nominated a candidate to oppose U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney who stopped running and disappeared from public view in the middle of the campaign. This year they nominated a guy with an affinity for far-right conspiracy theories.

Concerning the latest nominee, Thomas Gilmer, former Republican state legislator Kevin Rennie wrote on his political blog that it is another indication “that the state’s Republican Party is in an advance state of disintegration.”

Indeed.

Granted, Courtney, 67, is a formidable Democratic candidate, seeking an eighth term in the district that sprawls across roughly the eastern half of the state. His moderate political demeanor fits the area well. And unlike some veteran lawmakers, he keeps a visible presence in the district.

And then there are the submarines. Democrats control the U.S. House



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of Representatives and will almost certainly keep their majority in the coming election. Courtney sits on the Armed Services Committee and chairs the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces. He sits in a great position from which to fight to assure submarine construction continues unabated. That means good-paying jobs, lots of them, at Electric Boat in Groton and at the many contractors that feed its supply chain.

Just last week the Navy announced it had awarded EB a \$9.5 billion

contract to build the first two of 12 planned ballistic missile submarines.

So, yes, convincing eastern Connecticut voters that they should dump that kind of political pull and risk budget priorities shifting elsewhere would be a daunting prospect for any Republican, even in a district once considered a tossup. It explains why no strong opponents are stepping up. Plus, the Republican bench is thin.

Still, the candidates put forward by Republicans the last two elections have been downright embarrassing.

In 2018, the Republican challenger, Dan Postemski, disappeared from the race. He stopped campaigning, did not update his Facebook campaign page and couldn’t be reached by phone.

This year the party has nominated a 29-year-old, conspiracy-following candidate who would seem a far better fit for a deep red state than the purplish Second District.

The candidate, Gilmer, finds him-

self on a list of 54 current or former congressional candidates who, based on tracking by Media Matters, have in some fashion supported the QAnon conspiracy theory website.

You might be asking, “What the heck is that?” It is hard to explain, so bizarre it would be rejected as a Twilight Zone script. It started as an anonymous account, known as “Q,” on the far-right message board 4chan, moved to 8chan, which re-launched as 8kun.

Isn’t the internet wonderful?

Its original premise was that President Donald Trump was secretly working with then-special counsel Robert Mueller to actually take down the president’s perceived enemies in the “deep state.” Some who were, of course, pedophiles. When that didn’t pan out, it expanded to tie any criticisms or investigations of Trump to deep-state plotters.

Media Matters points to Gilmer’s use of #QAnon on his Twitter account, including on a March

17 posting calling stay-at-home pandemic orders “a deep state attempt to destroy america and our economy.”

He also uses #StormIsUponUs, a reference to the QAnon claim that Trump’s deep-state political enemies will be arrested and tried in military tribunals.

Gilmer moved to the state a few years ago from Ohio, starting a commercial and industrial construction management company. He is a graduate of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., a Christian college founded by Jerry Falwell of Moral Majority fame. In March, current President Jerry Falwell Jr. gained attention when, at a time when all universities were closed to protect students from the virus, he reopened Liberty.

Makes sense, I suppose, when you realize this whole global pandemic thing was just a conspiracy.

Paul Choiniere is the editorial page editor.