

Indian Removal

“Manifest Destiny”: The phrase is evocative of so many things that Euro-Americans call progress: populating the west with hard-working settlers, expanding profitable agriculture and industry, sharing the attributes of democracy and Christianity, and removing the Indians. For the American Indian people, however, such “progress” brought cultural, political, economic, and spiritual genocide.

Yet despite the movement of Euro-Americans who believed that they had the God-given right to spread their “yearly multiplying millions” across continental North America, many Indian people resisted such encroachment. They united in peaceful and wartime opposition to the flood of westward expansion; they entered into trade agreements that encouraged strong economic ties with white Americans; they met with federal agents to plead for their survival; and they spoke in front of the Supreme Court in unsuccessful attempts to prove the unconstitutionality of state and federal actions. None of these efforts stopped the tide of Indian Removal, and no actions of the settlers could fully silence or stem the power and eloquence of Indian resistance.

Document-Based Questions

TECUMSEH’S SPEECH TO THE OSAGES

1. Why does Tecumseh need to convince the Osage people that the “white men” are dangerous and not to be trusted?
2. Do you think that Tecumseh’s grievances against the “white men” are an accurate reflection of nineteenth-century Euro-Americans attitudes about Indian people? Which of his grievances do you feel to be most egregious? How and why?
3. What does this speech tell you about Tecumseh? What kind of man was he? Do you think Tecumseh’s speech successfully united the Indian nations? How and why?

CHEROKEE NATION, 1829

1. What did the author of the Congressional message mean when he said, “The strength of the red man has become weakness” (p. 136)?
2. The authors claim that “In addition to that first of all rights, the right of inheritance and peaceable possession, we have the faith and pledge of the U[nited] States, repeated over and over again, in treaties made at various times. By these treaties our rights as a separate people are distinctly acknowledged, and guarantees given that they shall be secured and protected” (p. 138). What is meant by “the right of inheritance and peaceable possession”? How is this claim related to the issue of tribal sovereignty? What is a treaty? How do the Cherokee interpretations of the treaties differ from those of the United States?
3. The authors reference the 1790 Intercourse Act (www.tngenweb.org/tnland/intruders/17900722.html) that placed nearly all interaction between Indians and non-Indians under federal—not state—control, established the boundaries of Indian country, protected Indian lands against non-Indian aggression, subjected trading with Indians to federal regulation, and stipulated that injuries against Indians by non-Indians was a federal crime. The conduct of Indians among themselves while in Indian country was left entirely to the tribes. How do the grievances in this entry violate the spirit and law of the Intercourse Act?

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1. What are the authors’ primary arguments against removal? Which do you think is their strongest argument?
2. What do the authors’ believe will become of the Cherokee nation if they are forced to remove themselves from their ancestral lands?
3. Why do you think their arguments did not end the removal of the Cherokees?

BLACK HAWK’S SURRENDER SPEECH

1. Black Hawk’s message is one of defiance, dismay, and dignity. What specific examples illustrate each of these characteristics?

2. How does Black Hawk describe white men? How are these descriptions similar to those of other Indian descriptions of white men in this chapter?
3. What cultural differences between American Indians and the “white man” are evident in this entry? Do you think matters could have been handled differently to bridge the gap between such differences? How and why?

JOHN G. BURNETT

1. What is your reaction to this account of the Trail of Tears? How do you think Private Burnett’s description of this tragic event would compare and contrast with that written by a member of the Cherokee Nation? How might Burnett’s account have compared and contrasted with that of another soldier who was not so well acquainted with the Cherokee people?
2. The Trail of Tears was the official result of the Indian Removal Act in which land “exchanges” were to occur. What is the difference between a land exchange and forced removal? Does this account sound like a land exchange? Why, or why not?
3. If Burnett’s account of the Trail of Tears had been published in 1838 rather than recorded for his family in 1890, do you think that it would have prompted a public outcry? Why, or why not?

CHIEF JOSEPH OF THE NEZ PERCÉ

1. What is significant about Chief Joseph’s statement, “If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace” (p. 147)? Do you think most Indian nations would have been willing to coexist with the white settlers? Was conflict inevitable?
2. What is Chief Joseph’s complaint about reservations?
3. What does Chief Joseph want? Do you think his requests were reasonable, given the situation in North America in the late 1870s? How do you think federal government officials responded to his requests?

BLACK ELK

1. Accounts of Wounded Knee are usually referred to as either the Wounded

Knee Massacre or the Battle of Wounded Knee. What is the difference between a battle and a massacre? From Black Elk's account, what proof do you find of a massacre? Why do you think the federal government referred to it only as a battle?

2. Why was Wounded Knee the end of Black Elk's dream?
3. How are Black Elk's reactions to defeat similar to those of Black Hawk and Chief Joseph?

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 7, "Indian Removal"

After reading Chapter 7 in *Voices*, students should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points therein. Following are five possible main points.

1. Despite many eloquent speeches and organized attempts to resist westward expansion into Indian Territory, determined Indian resistance was no match for the congressional actions and the armed forces of the United States government.
2. The Era of Jacksonian Democracy was marked by the brutal treatment of American Indians.
3. During the early 1800s, congressional laws and the Supreme Court decisions eroded the sovereign status of Indian nations.
4. After losing battles on land and in court, Indian leaders demonstrated defiance and dismay at their betrayal by the white man, and dignity in the face of their losses.
5. Indian people were not just victims of genocidal policies; they were also survivors in the face of almost insurmountable odds.

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 7, "Indian Removal," and in *A People's History*, Chapter 7, "As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs"

If your students are also reading *A People's History*, they should be encouraged to

identify what they believe to be the main points in Chapters 7 in both books. Following are five additional points to be stressed when *Voices* and *A People's History* are used together.

6. Indian Removal was believed to be necessary for Euro-American progress in the West.
7. Because Indian people were perceived as obstacles to Euro-American settlement, federal Indian policy was built on paternalism and brute force.
8. When negotiating most treaties with Indian Nations, the federal government used pressure and deception.
9. The desire to assimilate and to “civilize” the Indians were only secondary goals of federal Indian-policy makers; their primary goal was to acquire land for Euro-American agriculture, mining, railroads, and settlement.
10. While history most often portrays American Indians as victims, it must also portray them as survivors—heroic people who, despite the genocidal policies of the United States government, have survived and revived their traditional cultures, languages, religions, and political structures.

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices*

While the following questions are designed for classroom discussion about all the voices read in Chapter 7, they can also be rewritten and included as evaluation tools.

1. The Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution (Article I, Section 8) declares that “[t]he Congress shall have Power . . . [t]o regulate Commerce with foreign Nations and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes.” Thus, the Constitution specified that there were three governmental entities within the United States with forms of sovereignty—Indian tribes, state governments, and the federal government. In short, Indian governments were sovereign. What is sovereignty? If Indian nations were sovereign at the time of Euro-American contact and their sovereignty was recognized in the United States Constitution, how has their sovereignty been compromised?

2. The official subtitle for the Indian Removal Act of 1830 was “An Act to provide for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the river Mississippi” (www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/removal.htm). What is a land exchange? Does the use of the word exchange mask the true intent and results of the law? How and why?
3. In his fifth annual message to Congress in December 1833, President Andrew Johnson made the following report about Indian Removal efforts: “That those tribes can not exist surrounded by our settlements and in continual contact with our citizens is certain. They have neither the intelligence, the industry, the moral habits, nor the desire of improvement which are essential to any favorable change in their condition. Established in the midst of another and a superior race, and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority or seeking to control them, they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and ere long disappear” (www.synaptic.bc.ca/ejournal/JacksonFifthAnnualMessage.htm). What is President Jackson’s message? How do his conclusions mirror federal policies in regard to westward expansion and its effect on Indian people?
4. What common grievances do the Indian voices of resistance share in regard to federal Indian policies and the effects of Euro-American frontier settlement?
5. These voices of resistance are articulate and their goals are clear. Why, then, do you think that none of those in power rose to the defense of the Indian people? Do you think that were other voices like those of John G. Burnett who protested Indian Removal policies? Why were these voices ignored?
6. The Indian voices of resistance echo a common theme—that sovereignty is a fundamental right. What does this mean? What specific portions of these speeches demonstrate this belief?
7. In Chief Joseph’s recollections of his trip to Washington, D.C., in 1879, he emphasized that he was “tired of talk that comes to nothing” (p.147). What evidence of such talk can you find in all the entries in this chapter? Why do you think that many Indian people were willing to engage in such talk during the early years of negotiations? Do you think the representatives of the United States government who engaged in such talk intended to keep their promises? How and why?

8. What are the similarities of the reactions to defeat described by Black Elk, Black Hawk, and Chief Joseph? How are their recollections evidence of the horrendous victimization and of the courageous survival of their people?
9. In Chief Black Hawk's 1832 surrender speech, he says, "The white men do not scalp the head; but they do worse—they poison the heart" (pp. 141–142). What did he mean? What examples can you find in today's society of people's hearts being "poisoned"? How, why, and by whom?
10. If the United States government consistently broke its treaties with American Indian nations, why do you think they negotiated treaties in the first place?
11. How did the voices in this chapter reinforce any of the five themes listed in "Main Points in *Voices*"?
12. Which of the voices in this chapter did you find most powerful? Least powerful? How and why?

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices* and *A People's History*

These general-discussion questions are additional questions for students who have read Chapter 7 in both books. For all questions, discussion must focus on ways the materials in both chapters help students formulate and articulate their answers.

13. What were the various methods United States policy makers used to take land from the Indians? How did the policy makers justify these actions?
14. According to Article II of the International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, genocide involves actions "committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." (See www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/index.htm#text for

the full text of the Convention.) Given this definition, do you think that the Indian Removal Act was genocidal in its intent and/or in its consequences?

15. Why do you think most of the largest and most powerful Indian nations fought with the British and against the Americans during the Revolutionary War? How were they rewarded at the War's conclusion?
16. How did American leaders define civilized? Is there anything you read in either chapter that leads you to believe that the Indian people were not civilized? Why did so many Euro-Americans believe the Indians were not civilized? How would your definition of civilized differ from that of nineteenth-century policy makers and the American public?
17. Before reading these chapters, what was your impression of Andrew Jackson as a soldier and as president? How and why has your impression changed? How did John Burnett's memories of fighting with Jackson influence your opinion? Why do you think much of the information on Indian removal contained in these two chapters has been ignored in more traditional interpretations of Jackson?
18. Do you think most of the 371 treaties enacted between 1776 and 1871 were "made under pressure and by deception" (*People's History*, p.134)? Explain.
19. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the United States government fought three wars with the Seminole Nation. One of them lasted eight years, cost \$20 million dollars, and took 1,500 lives. Why did the government find the Seminoles especially threatening? Why do you think this story is omitted from our textbooks?
20. How did the federal government negotiate the Treaty of New Echota? Why is this deception often called an example of the government's use of a divide-and-conquer strategy against the American Indians?
21. In the 2000 Census, 4.1 million Americans identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native, and another 1.6 million identified themselves as being American Indian or Alaskan Native and at least one other race. Yet our textbooks usually end their discussion of American Indians with the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. How does teaching about Indians as victims influence the way in which we think about Indians in the twenty-first century?

Evaluation Tools

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments can be adapted to meet any classroom need—homework, short- or long-term research projects, individual or group work. The end product should be flexible, depending on teacher interest and student abilities—papers, journals, oral reports, visual aides, and the like.

1. Andrew Jackson, the president who ushered in “The Era of Jacksonian Democracy,” was also the president who authorized Indian Removal. Examine the exact wording of the Removal Act of 1830, as well as several of Jackson’s annual presidential messages. (See www.synaptic.bc.ca/ejournal/jackson.htm.) What were Jackson’s attitudes about Indian people? About westward expansion? How did he define *progress*? Do you think his policies were genocidal in their intent? Provide exact quotes from the documents to support your answer.
2. Tecumseh, Black Hawk, Chief Joseph, and Black Elk were just four of many articulate Indian leaders who resisted white encroachment during the era of Manifest Destiny. Pick one of these famous men to study in more detail. Who were his people? Where was his ancestral land? How did Indian Removal policies affect his nation? What interactions did he and his people have with whites as they moved into his territory?
3. Understanding the geography of Indian Removal is essential to understanding nineteenth-century westward expansion. Examine various maps that illustrate removal patterns, especially the Trail of Tears, Indian land losses, confinement on reservations, and various wars the federal government declared on Indian Nations. What do these maps tell you about Indian endeavors to remain on their ancestral lands? What do they tell you about federal Indian policies? Pick one map that you found to be especially effective in demonstrating the overall effects of Manifest Destiny on American Indians. How and why was it more illustrative than the other maps you reviewed?
4. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/cherokee.htm>) the Supreme Court found, among other things, that “[t]he

acts of our government plainly recognize the Cherokee nation as a state, and the courts are bound by those acts. A question of much more difficulty remains. Do the Cherokee constitute a foreign state in the sense of the constitution?" After reading the decision in its entirety, what constitutional rights guaranteed to white Americans of the time were denied the Cherokee nation by the state of Georgia? What did the court decide? After reading the court's decision and rereading the arguments presented to the court by John Ross, do you think the Justices made the correct decision? Why, or why not? What was President Jackson's response to the ruling? How do you think the court's decision will change the course of federal Indian policy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

5. Learn as much as possible about resistance to the passage and implementation of the Indian Removal Act. Can you find other nonsupportive military voices like those of John G. Burnett? What were their primary objections to removal? What did they propose instead? Why do you think these voices were ignored?
6. The Wounded Knee Massacre was largely a response to the 1877 Battle at Little Big Horn. What were the goals and consequences of both battles? In order to better understand the American public's reaction to both battles, locate at least two newspaper accounts of each battle. Why is the 1877 battle commonly called Custer's Last Stand? How did the response to the first battle help to reinforce the public's attitude about the Wounded Knee Massacre? What did you find to be most interesting in these primary accounts? Most surprising? How and why?
7. Research the impact of American Indians on today's world, especially in terms of architecture, foods, social organization, medicines, or religion. For assistance, see Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1988), and Bruce Johansen, *Forgotten Founders: How the American Indian Helped Shape Democracy* (Boston: Harvard, 1982).
8. Learn as much as possible about the contents and rulings of the Marshall trilogy—the three Supreme Court cases that shaped the nature of federal Indian policy and Indian law from in the era of Manifest Destiny (*Johnson v. McIntosh*, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, *Worcester v. Georgia*). What were the particularly paternalistic aspects of the rulings? How did they erode

tribal sovereignty? Do you think they continue to affect federal Indian policy in the twenty-first century? Why, or why not?

SUGGESTED ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Using evidence from *Voices* (or from both books), support one of Howard Zinn's primary contentions in this chapter, that Indian people were obstacles to Euro-American settlement and thus "could be dealt with by sheer force, except that sometimes the language of paternalism preceded the burning of villages" (*People's History*, p.125).
2. The 1829 Cherokee statement to Congress stated, in part, "We have already said, that when the white man came to the shores of America, our ancestors were found in peaceable possession of this very land. They bequeathed it to us as their children, and we have sacredly kept it as containing the remains of our beloved men. This right of inheritance we have *never ceded*, nor ever *forfeited*. Permit us to ask, what better right can a people have to a country, than the right of *inheritance* and *immemorial peaceable possessions*" (*Voices*, p. 137)? How does this statement, as well as some of the other voices in this chapter (or in both books), support the historical and contemporary belief among Indian nations that sovereignty is an inherent right?
3. Do you think there is any contemporary truth to John Burnett's statement in his memories of the Trail of Tears: "Truth is, the facts are being concealed from the young people of today. School children of today do not know that we are living on lands that were taken from a helpless race at the bayonet point to satisfy the white man's greed" (*Voices*, p. 145). Do you think elementary and secondary schools have an obligation to teach this "truth"? Why, or why not?
4. Do you think conflict between white settlers and Indians could have been prevented, or was it inevitable? Explain.
5. Using as many examples as possible from *Voices* (or both books), demonstrate how Indian people were both victims and survivors of nineteenth-century federal Indian policies.
6. Many historians claim that from European contact forward, Euro-Americans deliberately used divide-and-conquer strategies to eliminate the

perceived threat posed by American Indians. What are divide-and-conquer strategies? Support this discussion with information from *Voices* (or both books).

7. Discuss the resisters you met in *Voices* (or in both books)—the Indians who resisted removal and other genocidal federal policies, as well as those Euro-Americans who spoke out against such policies. What were the goals of each group? The consequences of their efforts? Were their voices ignored?
8. The Indian voices in these chapters were eloquent and their battles were fiercely fought. Nonetheless, they were no match for congressional laws and the United States Army. Use as many examples of possible to explain why.
9. What voices of resistance in *Voices* (or in *Voices* and *A People's History*) were of most interest to you? How and why? Which did you find most compelling and why? Least compelling?
10. How do the voices and information in these two chapters improve your understanding of nineteenth-century federal Indian policies that resulted in genocide? What information was especially supportive of this understanding? How and why?

SIMULATIONS AND OTHER CREATIVE APPROACHES

1. Write and illustrate a short book for elementary students about the American Indians who originally lived in your community when Europeans first arrived in the Americas. Explain their history from first contact to the present with words, traditional stories, illustrations, and maps.
2. Create a large map of Indian Removal that can be shared with other students and then posted in your classroom. Be sure to include removal patterns of Indian Nations from across the country, as well as any artistic additions that will make the map a compelling illustration of the effects of removal.
3. Locate the discussion of Indian relations with Southerners and Indian Removal in either your assigned textbook or another textbook of choice. Rewrite that portion of the chapter to include multiple voices from the

Indian perspective, as well as important arguments before the Supreme Court in regard to Cherokee claims in Georgia. Be sure to include illustrations and maps.

4. Write an interior monologue from the perspective of a member of the Cherokee Nation in which he/she ponders the way contact with white society changed the Cherokee people.
5. Stage an imagined debate on the floor of the United States Senate in 1830 about passage or defeat of the proposed Indian Removal Act.