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To what extent did Andrew Jackson succeeded in preserving the Cherokee culture and traditions through his forced relocation of the Cherokees?

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On May 28, 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, a bill which allowed him to exchange unsettled land west of the Mississippi for the land claimed by the Native Americans in the east.[[1]](#footnote-1) The event which occurred as a consequence of this bill, the forced removal of the Cherokee Indians from their native land in the Southeast to the Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma) in the winter of 1838, is now considered as one of the darkest chapters of American history. Soldiers went from house to house, forcing around 16,000 Cherokees to leave immediately[[2]](#footnote-2) as the soldiers sacked their homes and even graves for valuables.[[3]](#footnote-3) As one Georgian soldier recalls: “I fought through the civil war and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I ever knew.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The Cherokees encountered many hardships during their walk west, such as diseases, inadequate food, and bad weather;[[5]](#footnote-5) estimates of Cherokee death toll by the walk ranges from 4,000 to 10,000.[[6]](#footnote-6) This walk west is now called *Nunna daul Isunyi* – “the Trail Where We Cried” in the Cherokee language.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Jackson, who promoted and signed the Indian Removal Act, may seem like a person who hated the Native Americans, but that was not exactly the case – this can be seen from how Jackson had actually taken a Native American orphan and raised him as his own son, which shows how his feelings towards the Native Americans weren’t blind hatred. In fact, though the passage of the bill was mainly motivated by economic reasons, Jackson actually believed that the relocation would also be beneficial for the Native Americans.[[8]](#footnote-8) He believed that attempts to “civilize” the Native American tribes were destroying their own culture, and thus justified relocation by arguing that the Native Americans would be able to strop conforming to white culture by relocating to a place with no white settlers – that relocation would allow them to “be Indians, not cultural white men.”[[9]](#footnote-9) However, Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act mostly failed in its goal of preserving the Cherokee culture and traditions. It was too late in a sense, for centuries of European contact had already caused significant changes to the Cherokee culture, which they brought along with them as they were forced to their new land; examples of this include the introduction of misogynistic ideas and the practice of slavery. Furthermore, the law didn’t free the Cherokees from white interventions against their cultural view, such as the passing of the Dawes Act in 1887.

Century of contact with the whites had already brought changes in the way women were viewed in the Cherokee society by the 1830s, making Jackson’s Indian Removal Act too late to protect their traditional views. Originally, Cherokees considered women as an equal counterpart to men, and they played an important role in their society. For example, unlike European nations, Cherokee descents were traced through female lines,[[10]](#footnote-10) and women held powers as leaders of their clan.[[11]](#footnote-11) Being the leader of the clan is significant because clans were very important in the Cherokee society. Clan kinship was the most lasting of relationships, and a Cherokee is considered a member of their clan for life, even after he married to someone belonging to another clan.[[12]](#footnote-12) In addition, early Cherokee women were very active in politics. They played an important and influential role in the tribe government, with powers to override decisions made by predominantly male council at times.[[13]](#footnote-13) The amount of political say Cherokee women had greatly contrasts that of white women, who were not even able to vote until the passage of the 19th amendment in 1920; and thus when one Cherokee attended to a meeting with the whites in Charleston, South Carolina, to find no women participating, he was so surprised that he asked whether it were true that white men as well as Red were born of women.[[14]](#footnote-14) This highlights how natural the Cherokees considered the involvement of women in politics were.

However, Women’s status started to diminish as the Cherokees started to intermarry the Europeans in the latter half of the eighteenth century.[[15]](#footnote-15) The idea of patrilineal society, brought in by the Europeans, undermined the traditional Cherokee way of kinship and descent,[[16]](#footnote-16) and brought a change to the traditional Cherokee family life, from the husbands moving in to live with their wives, to the wives moving to live with their husband’s homes.[[17]](#footnote-17) Furthermore, Cherokee women that married whites were often submissive to their husbands,[[18]](#footnote-18) which was also contrary to the equal, sometimes even dominant position women had over men in their society prior to European contact. The rise of mix-blooded children also decreased the power women held. As they watched and learned from their father’s treatment of women, many mix-blooded children grew to treat women as second-class citizens.[[19]](#footnote-19) By the time Jackson issued the relocation, a considerable part of the Cherokees were mix-blooded; and these notions that women are inferior to men, instilled from young age, stayed with them even after they moved from one place to another. Women also rapidly lost their influence in politics as European ideas spread. For instance, by 1827, 11 years before the forced relocation, no women participated in the drafting of the Cherokee constitution, which barred women from voting in election and from serving as government officeholder.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Still, Cherokee women’s status didn’t diminish to the same level as the white women. For example, in 1851, The Cherokee National Female Seminary at Park Hill was established, which was a school for Cherokee women.[[21]](#footnote-21) At a time when education was generally unavailable for females, the opening of this school were thought to be quite radical, and demonstrates how some aspects of traditional view towards female did stay. This may indicate that Jackson did achieve some levels of success in protecting the Cherokee culture through the relocation, though he was unable to reverse the changes that had already taken place.

Along with the notion that women are inferior, the practice of slavery was introduced to the Cherokees years before Jackson’s forced relocation, making it too late in protecting the Cherokees from white cultural influence. A system that forced people to do work for them did exist among the Cherokees even before the European contact in the sixteenth century, but that system was very different from the system of slavery created by the Europeans.[[22]](#footnote-22) The “slaves” Cherokees originally had were captives taken during war, and though not all of them received a humane treatment (they were sometimes tortured or killed),[[23]](#footnote-23) Cherokees viewed and treated the “slaves” as another human beings, not possession. In some cases, the “slaves” were even able to join the tribe and live as a full Cherokee.[[24]](#footnote-24)

However, Cherokee slave system changed as interactions with the Europeans increased over time. Some Cherokees, especially the mixed-blooded ones with white fathers, began embracing the European view towards slavery, and started to keep slaves and run large plantations.[[25]](#footnote-25) Cherokee women, traditionally in charge of agriculture, started to support slavery as it decreased their workload greatly, and men also appreciated slavery for creating more time for them to hunt and trap for trade.[[26]](#footnote-26) Still, not all Cherokees adopted slavery: For instance, Cherokees that were more conservative associated slavery with Southern whites who were trying to take their land,[[27]](#footnote-27) and thus were against the use of black slaves. This difference in views towards slavery created a cultural division between the two groups.

The relocation to the Indian Territory didn’t stop the slaveholding Cherokees from using slavery – instead they brought their slaves along to the new land[[28]](#footnote-28) – nor did it ease the tension between the two parties holding opposing view on slavery. Less than 25 years after the relocation, the Civil War started. Both the North and South reached out for support from Cherokee Nation; however, the Cherokees too were divided among themselves. As a result, the Cherokee Nation participated in the Civil War with Cherokees on both sides – the slaveholding Cherokees sided the Confederates while the traditionalists sided the North.[[29]](#footnote-29) Cherokees were fighting other Cherokees. Consequently, the Civil War ended with huge damages to the Cherokee Nation: Seven thousand Cherokees, more than a quarter of the population, were killed during the war,[[30]](#footnote-30) and, caught in the war, Cherokee land and crops were burned like the South.[[31]](#footnote-31) Not only that, the Civil War was also very destructive in terms of Cherokee culture. The Cherokees have a strong oral tradition,[[32]](#footnote-32) meaning many of their stories and history were passed down from one another by speech, not writings. The Cherokee lives lost during the Civil War meant pieces of Cherokee history and tales lost together, indicating more cultural loss. This demonstrates how Jackson’s belief that relocating the Cherokees to a place outside state boundaries would keep them out of white interventions did not hold true; though the Cherokees had moved to a land further away from the whites, they were still pulled into a war by the whites, due to the introduction to slavery, which was done in the years before Jackson’s relocation.

The relocation had been too late to save the Cherokees from the cultural damages of slavery and the Civil War, and neither did it relieve the Cherokees from white interventions that disrespected Cherokee cultures, such as the passing of the Dawes Act in 1887. Also known as the General Allotment Act, the Dawes Act granted 160-acre allotments to each Native American family, or eighty acres per individual,[[33]](#footnote-33) then used blood quantum to determine whether the allotted land would be held in federal trust, restricted from sales or taxation, or would it be the property of the allotted person, meaning the person would be able to sell the land while they would have to pay taxes.[[34]](#footnote-34) This act was inconsiderate to the Cherokee culture in two ways: it ignored Cherokee beliefs on land ownership, and it also ignored the way Cherokees viewed their identity.

Many Native Americans, including Cherokees, considered land “not as a possession but as a physical and spiritual domain shared by all living things.”[[35]](#footnote-35) The allotment of land by the federal government was the forcing of white view towards land onto the Native Americans, and were forcing them to give up their traditional idea of common ownership of land. This is opposite of Jackson’s campaign which claimed that the relocation of the Native Americans would give them a place where they “can live as Indians,” and shows how Cherokee culture continued to be ignored and lost even after the relocation.

In addition, the federal government’s decision to determine a Cherokee using their blood quantum was inconsiderate of their culture. The federal government treated Cherokees differently using a blood quantum: land allotted to those with one-half or more Cherokee blood were placed in federal trusts while land allotted to those with less than one-half Cherokee blood became their individual property.[[36]](#footnote-36) Blood “purity” was not a Cherokee concept; how much Cherokee blood a person had in their veins didn’t matter as much to the Cherokees, and these individual differences didn’t influence the way the Cherokee people thought of themselves or the others; in other words, the race and appearance of the Cherokee didn’t change the fact that that person is a Cherokee, and thus that person received equal treatment as full-blooded Cherokees. One of their chiefs, John Ross, for example, had only one-eighth Cherokee by blood[[37]](#footnote-37) and appeared white, but were and still are considered as one of their best Cherokee chiefs. The whites not treating all Cherokees the same way is another example of the whites ignoring the Cherokee tradition and forcing white views upon the Cherokees, which Jackson claimed would end through relocation.

In conclusion, Jackson’s forced removal of Cherokees from their traditional land was not very successful in conserving the Cherokee culture, as it did not reverse the changes already in place, such as misogyny and slavery, nor did it prevent later white interventions ignoring their cultural view, such as the land allotment through the Dawes Act. However, does that mean the relocation should not have happened at all? If one look at the fates of other southern tribes, the Mohegans, the Narragansetts, and the Delawares – none of these tribe exist today, due to the exploitation of their land and resource by their white neighbors.[[38]](#footnote-38) The existence of the Cherokee Nation today itself may be an indication that Jackson’s forced removal did have some level of success in the preservation of the Cherokee culture, even though there could have been better ways to relocate them.

Annotated Bibliography

Anderson, William L. (editor) *Cherokee Removal: Before and After.* N.A: University of Georgia Press, 1992

William L. Anderson, professor emeritus of history at Western California University and editor of the “Journal of Cherokee Studies,” put essays by eight scholars together to create a book that covers all aspects of the forced relocation of the Cherokees. The book is not long but is very useful; the author had collected only the best on the topic of relocation, and because of this, reading *Cherokee Removal: Before and After* would allow me to research very efficiently.

Bender, Margaret. "Cherokees, Prior to Removal." In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 6:*

*Ethnicity* 116-19. University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616582_ray.25>.

Dr. Margaret Bender, an anthropologist who specializes in the language and culture of the Cherokee people, is a reliable source of information for my project. In the article “Cherokees, Prior to Removal,” she writes specifically about the Cherokees before the forced removal at 1838, which is quite unique, since most sources focuses on the forced removal itself. One con to this article is the briefness; it covers lots of topics, from the impact of the Europeans to the Cherokees to the role of gender in their society in three pages. However, at the end of the article, it lists many sources that seems very helpful to my research, making this article quite useful as an overview and a help for my research.

Ehle, John. *Trail of Tears: the Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation.* N.A.: Anchor, 1997

John Ehle – author to numerous novels and nonfiction books who served on the National Council for Humanities – writes in his book *Trail of Tears: the Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* about how the whites had shaped the Cherokee nation. Though he himself is not an expert on Cherokees, his extensive research on the topic and the good review it has received makes this book quite trustworthy. Unlike many other sources that focus mainly on politics, this book also covers other aspects of the Cherokee such as Native American legends, lore and religion. This book’s thorough coverage of traditional, cultural sides of Cherokee, and how it writes about both before relocation and after relocation makes this source very helpful.

Mankiller, Wilma. *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999

This book, *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*, is an autobiography of Wilma Mankiller, the first female Cherokee Chief. Though this is an autobiography, it is a helpful source of information, providing many primary source information about the life and culture of a modern-day Cherokee and their views toward the forced removal from their traditional land. Since my research topic is on the changes in culture before and after the forced removal of the Cherokees, these information about the modern-day Cherokees are still relevant and would be interesting to include in my research paper. In addition, because Mankiller herself is a Cherokee, the cultural aspects of the book must be very credible.

Miles, Tiya. "Circular Reasoning": Recentering Cherokee Women in the Antiremoval Campaigns.” *American*

*Quarterly* 61, no.2 (June 2009): 221-243. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCO*host* (accessed November

28, 2016).

The focus in this scholarly article by University of Michigan history professor Tiya Miles, "Circular Reasoning": Recentering Cherokee Women in the Antiremoval Campaigns,” is quite different from other sources: in this article, the author writes about how Cherokee women reacted towards relocation with political activism, and how this influenced later political activities of white women led by leaders such as Catherine Beecher. This is not exactly on my topic, which is about how the forced relocation had changed the Cherokee culture while the article focus on the changes on white society; however, I think the information from this article would be interesting to include in my research paper, for it would show that the relocation of the Native Americans also had impact on whites in the society, not just to the Native Americans themselves.

Oswalt,Wendell H. *This Land Was Theirs: A Study of Native North Americans*, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford

University Press, 2006), v,

[http://questiaschool.com/read/117188092/this-land-was-theirs-a-study-of-native-n](http://questiaschool.com/read/117188092/this-land-was-theirs-a-study-of-native-north-americans)

[orth-americans](http://questiaschool.com/read/117188092/this-land-was-theirs-a-study-of-native-north-americans).

Dr. Wendell H. Oswalt, a Professor at UCLA in the department of anthropology, studies the traditional and contemporary lives of 12 Native American tribes, one of which is Cherokee. In writing this text, Dr. Oswalt had actually visited the Native American Tribes, and had constantly kept his text updated by visiting the tribes for every new edition releases. This is very relevant and helpful to my project, for it provides information about how Cherokee lives had changed, including how it changed due to the Indian Removal Act.

Remini, Robert V. *Andrew Jackson & His Indian Wars.* New York : Viking, 2001.

Robert V. Remini is a professor at the University of Illinois, a receiver of various awards such as American Historical Association’s Award for Scholarly Distinction, and a Historian of the House of Representative. He is also world’s leading scholars on Andrew Jackson – he has written 6 books on Jackson, and has been invited to deliver a lecture on Jackson at the White House, making this source very credible. The book discusses Jackson’s battle against Indians and his role for Indian Removal Act from a different perspective – Remini argues that the forced removal actually benefitted the tribes. This makes this source very useful for my research project, for it would allow me to look at different sides of Indian Removal Act, for most sources focuses on the negative impacts of the Indian Removal Act on the Native Americans.

Rozema, Vicki. *Cherokee Voices: Early Accounts of Cherokee Life in the East (Real Voices, Real History*

*Series).* N/A: John F. Blair Pub., 2002

Vicki Rozema is an author of three books on Cherokee history. She also serves on the board of the Trail of Tears Association in Tennessee and is a member of Chattanooga Indigenous Resource Center and Library, Chattanooga Area Historical Association, and other organizations related to the preservation of history, especially those of Native Americans. This specialization on the subject by the author makes her quite credible on the subject on Cherokees. For this book, *Cherokee Voices: Early Accounts of Cherokee Life in the East,* Rozema had collected primary source such as journal and letters from around the 1730s; many of them are about customs and lives of the Cherokee people. As my research topic is about the Cherokee removal before and after, this is useful in giving me information about the period prior to the forced removal.

Sturm, Circe. *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley, CA:

University of California Press, 2002),

<http://questiaschool.com/read/105670750/blood-politics-race-culture-and-identity-in-the>.

Dr. Circe Sturm, an Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Native American Studies at the University of Oklahoma, writes about the race, culture and identity in the Cherokees at Oklahoma in her book *Blood Politics*. The book starts from the race, culture and identity of the Cherokees in the 18th century, which is before the Indian Removal Act, then progresses chronologically onwards about the Cherokees, showing how their culture and identity changed with time. This is very useful for my project, for I would be able to compare the culture and identity of the Cherokees before the Indian Removal Act and after.

1. Remini, Robert V. *Andrew Jackson & His Indian Wars.* New York : Viking, 2001, p. 237 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sturm, Circe. *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002),<http://questiaschool.com/read/105670750/blood-politics-race-culture-and-identity-in-the>. p.63 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Anderson, William L. (editor) *Cherokee Removal: Before and After.* N.A: University of Georgia Press, 1992 p.79 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, p.79 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, p.77 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid, p.93 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid, p. 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Remini, p. 231 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, p.232 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Oswalt,Wendell H. *This Land Was Theirs: A Study of Native North Americans*, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), v,<http://questiaschool.com/read/117188092/this-land-was-theirs-a-study-of-native-north-americans>, p. 424 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bender, Margaret. "Cherokees, Prior to Removal." In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 6: Ethnicity* 116-19. University of North Carolina Press, 2007, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616582\_ray.25. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Strum, 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Rozema, Vicki. *Cherokee Voices: Early Accounts of Cherokee Life in the East (Real Voices, Real History Series).* N/A: John F. Blair Pub., 2002, Loc.644 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Mankiller, Wilma. *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999, p. 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Strum, 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bender [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Mankiller, 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid, 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Mankiller, 78 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Miles, Tiya. "Circular Reasoning": Recentering Cherokee Women in the Antiremoval Campaigns.” *American Quarterly* 61, no.2 (June 2009): 221-243. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCO*host* (accessed November 28, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Mankiller, 122 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Strum, 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid, 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid, 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Mankiller, 78 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Oswalt, 432 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Strum, 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid, 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Mankiller, 123 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid, 128 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Anderson, 116 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Rozema, Loc. 154 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Mankiller, 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Strum, 78 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Mankiller, 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Strum, 79 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Mankiller, 85 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Remini, 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)