

Andrew Jackson to the Cherokee Tribe, 1835

Introduction

Elected president in 1828, Andrew Jackson supported the removal of American Indians from their homelands, arguing that the American Indians' survival depended on separation from whites. In this 1835 circular to the Cherokee people, Jackson lays out his case for removal. Using paternalistic and threatening language, Jackson urges the Cherokee to accept removal from Georgia and relocate westward peacefully. "I have no motive, my friends, to deceive you," Jackson writes. He continues, "Circumstances that cannot be controlled, and which are beyond the reach of human laws, render it impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community . . . You have but one remedy within your reach. And that is, to remove to the west." Jackson closes with an ominous tone and these threatening sentences: "The fate of your women and children, the fate of your people, to the remotest generation, depend on the issue." Later that same year, a small group of 100 Cherokee delegates signed the Treaty of New Echota, paving the way for the Cherokee Nation's removal to Oklahoma in 1838. Excerpt

I have no motive, my friends, to deceive you. I am sincerely desirous to promote your welfare. Listen to me, therefore, while I tell you that you cannot remain where you now are. Circumstances that cannot be controlled, and which are beyond the reach of human laws, render it impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community. You have but one remedy within your reach. And that is, to remove to the West and join your countrymen, who are already established there. And the sooner you do this, the sooner you will commence your career of improvement and prosperity. . . .

As certain as the sun shines to guide you in your path, so certain is it that you cannot drive back the laws of Georgia from among you. Every year will increase your difficulties. Look at the condition of the Creeks. See the collisions which are taking place with them. See how their young men are committing depredations upon the property of our citizens, and are shedding their blood. This cannot and will not be allowed. Punishment will follow, and all who are engaged in these offences must suffer.

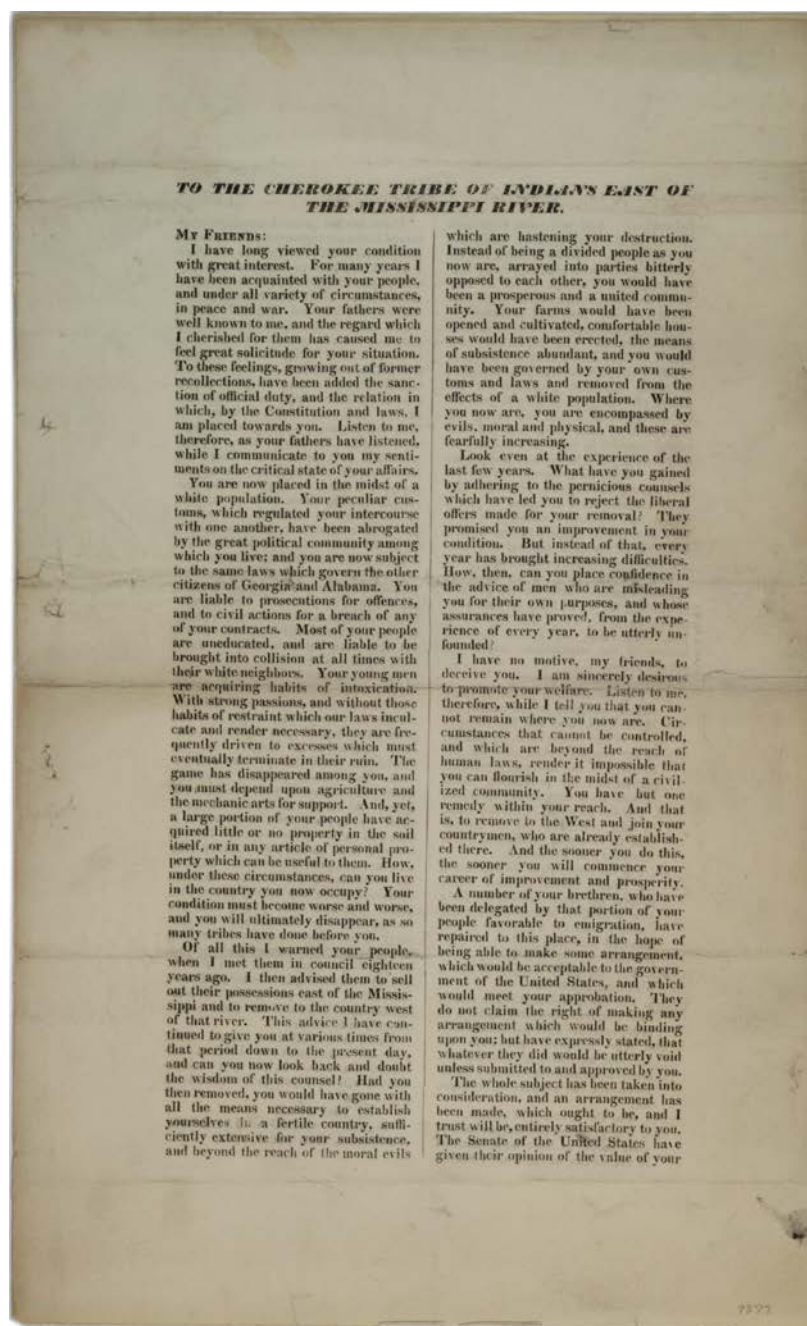
Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction, examine the excerpt and if possible the entire transcript, and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

1. Explain what Andrew Jackson meant when he told the Cherokees that "Circumstances . . . render it impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community."
2. American Indians correctly claimed that prior treaties with the US government were violated by Andrew Jackson. Why then, did they sign the Treaty of New Echota?
3. When Jackson referred to the Cherokees as "my friends," why did they have serious concerns about his sincerity?

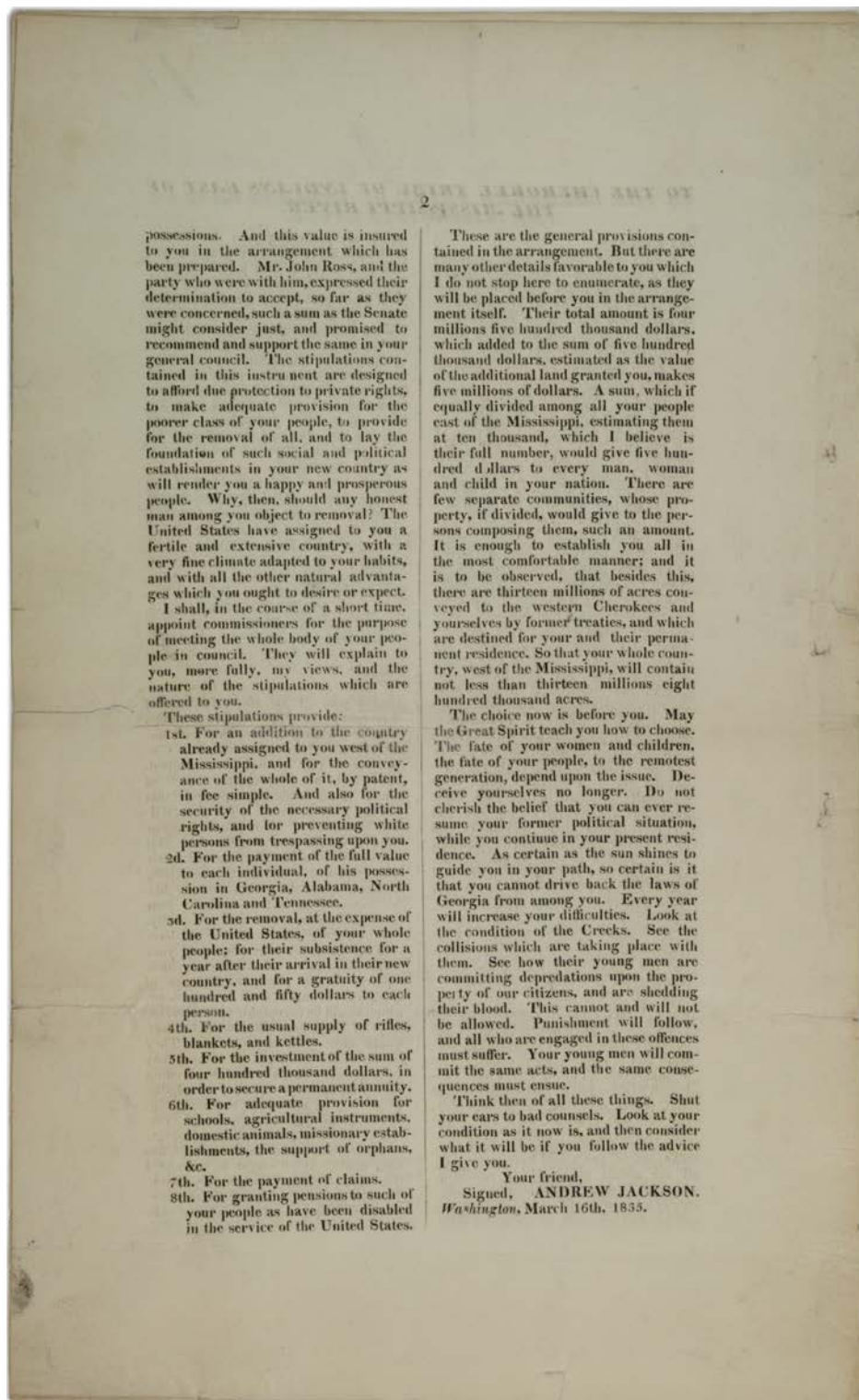
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Image



Andrew Jackson, "To the Cherokee Tribe of Indians East of the Mississippi [circular], March 16, 1835 (The Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC07377)

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possessions. And this value is insured to you in the arrangement which has been prepared. Mr. John Ross, and the party who were with him, expressed their determination to accept, so far as they were concerned, such a sum as the Senate might consider just, and promised to recommend and support the same in your general council. The stipulations contained in this instrument are designed to afford due protection to private rights, to make adequate provision for the poorer class of your people, to provide for the removal of all, and to lay the foundation of such social and political establishments in your new country as will render you a happy and prosperous people. Why, then, should any honest man among you object to removal? The United States have assigned to you a fertile and extensive country, with a very fine climate adapted to your habits, and with all the other natural advantages which you ought to desire or expect.

I shall, in the course of a short time, appoint commissioners for the purpose of meeting the whole body of your people in council. They will explain to you, more fully, my views, and the nature of the stipulations which are offered to you.

These stipulations provide:

- 1st. For an addition to the country already assigned to you west of the Mississippi, and for the conveyance of the whole of it, by patent, in fee simple. And also for the security of the necessary political rights, and for preventing white persons from trespassing upon you.
- 2d. For the payment of the full value to each individual, of his possession in Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina and Tennessee.
- 3d. For the removal, at the expense of the United States, of your whole people; for their subsistence for a year after their arrival in their new country, and for a gratuity of one hundred and fifty dollars to each person.
- 4th. For the usual supply of rifles, blankets, and kettles.
- 5th. For the investment of the sum of four hundred thousand dollars, in order to secure a permanent annuity.
- 6th. For adequate provision for schools, agricultural instruments, domestic animals, missionary establishments, the support of orphans, &c.
- 7th. For the payment of claims.
- 8th. For granting pensions to such of your people as have been disabled in the service of the United States.

These are the general provisions contained in the arrangement. But there are many other details favorable to you which I do not stop here to enumerate, as they will be placed before you in the arrangement itself. Their total amount is four millions five hundred thousand dollars, which added to the sum of five hundred thousand dollars, estimated as the value of the additional land granted you, makes five millions of dollars. A sum, which if equally divided among all your people east of the Mississippi, estimating them at ten thousand, which I believe is their full number, would give five hundred dollars to every man, woman and child in your nation. There are few separate communities, whose property, if divided, would give to the persons composing them, such an amount. It is enough to establish you all in the most comfortable manner; and it is to be observed, that besides this, there are thirteen millions of acres conveyed to the western Cherokees and yourselves by former treaties, and which are destined for your and their permanent residence. So that your whole country, west of the Mississippi, will contain not less than thirteen millions eight hundred thousand acres.

The choice now is before you. May the Great Spirit teach you how to choose. The fate of your women and children, the fate of your people, to the remotest generation, depend upon the issue. Deceive yourselves no longer. Do not cherish the belief that you can ever resume your former political situation, while you continue in your present residence. As certain as the sun shines to guide you in your path, so certain is it that you cannot drive back the laws of Georgia from among you. Every year will increase your difficulties. Look at the condition of the Creeks. See the collisions which are taking place with them. See how their young men are committing depredations upon the property of our citizens, and are shedding their blood. This cannot and will not be allowed. Punishment will follow, and all who are engaged in these offences must suffer. Your young men will commit the same acts, and the same consequences must ensue.

Think then of all these things. Shut your ears to bad counsels. Look at your condition as it now is, and then consider what it will be if you follow the advice I give you.

Your friend,

Signed, ANDREW JACKSON.
Washington, March 16th, 1835.

Andrew Jackson, "To the Cherokee Tribe of Indians East of the Mississippi [circular], March 16, 1835 (The Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC07377)