

The plight of Native Americans

No group experienced greater changes during this period than Native Americans. They were conquered and marginalized, denied the rights of citizens, expelled from their ancestral lands and forced to abandon traditional lifestyles, cultures and customs. In the new nations, the ruling élites, whether liberals or conservatives, saw the native peoples as an impediment to the expansion and growth of a Christian-based civilization in the New World. Approaches to the “native problem” varied; oppression came in many forms. For example, Canada established church-run residential schools to educate, assimilate and civilize (often abusively) young native children forcibly removed from their parents. In Latin America, natives were a source of forced cheap labour on the creole-owned haciendas. Other tribes fought back but were defeated and forced onto reservations where they became dependent on the government for the necessities of life and forgotten.

From the Great plains to Patagonia, indigenous peoples were displaced by territorially ravenous European cultures who believed they had been chosen by God to rule the new world and its inhabitants. If the natives of the New World shared one thing—it was this; they were a conquered people, strangers in their own land. To their credit, these cultures proved resilient and adapted to incredible changes and clung tenaciously to their way of life. Yet the cultures that emerged from this crucible of change would have been barely recognizable to previous generations.

Case study: The Trail of Tears

Andrew Jackson became president of the United States in 1830. During the campaign he promised to expel Native Americans from the southern states and elsewhere in the Americas. Jackson claimed to support the native way of life, but not if it impeded expansion. The five nations—the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creeks, Cherokee and Seminoles—lived in Jackson’s home territory and he wanted them moved and soon.

Jackson’s plan was to uproot the native people from their ancestral lands and march them west to the “Indian territories” or “Indian country” (present-day Oklahoma). The territory was to be permanently free of white encroachments but he did not take into account the many whites who already lived in the territory, and its appeal as a haven for escaped southern slaves. The region also had its own resident indigenous tribes, who might not react well to their imposed brethren. Jackson created a Bureau of Indian Affairs to administer the territory and keep it free of settlers but within 15 years land-hungry settlers began entering the territory *en masse*. No one stopped them.

Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act in 1830. The tribes were required to sign a treaty that legally ceded their homelands and accepted the compensation of designated lands in the new territory. The Government promised to protect and supply the tribes on their journey, but this did not happen. First to leave were the Choctaws

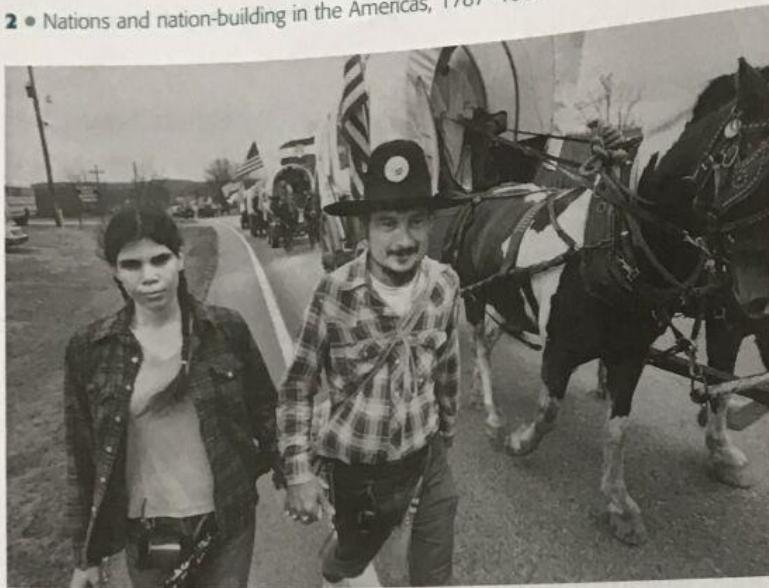
Activity

Comparative outcomes

Compare the treatment of Canada’s *métis* peoples with the *mestizos* in Perú, *ladinos* in Guatemala, *llaneros* in Venezuela, *mestiços* and *mulattos* in Brazil, and other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.



How do mixed white-indigenous cultures survive in the different nations?



The Trail of Tears, 1988. Tobi & Larry Brown walking along the Trail of Tears with horse-drawn covered wagons reenacting the 1,000-mile journey that the Cherokees traveled 150 years ago.

who left “voluntarily” after signing the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. The Removal Act encouraged voluntary compliance but left no doubt of the eventual outcome. Fourteen thousand Choctaws marched west, several thousand perished on the trail. Seven thousand stayed behind and suffered untold discrimination. No other tribal group in North America suffered more than the Cherokee. In 1835, they signed the Treaty of Echota, unsuccessfully contested its legality, and were forcibly evicted by the US army in 1838. About 15,000 people started the trek and one third perished on the death march christened the “Trail of Tears”.

By 1840, the clearances were complete. Over 46,000 natives had been expelled, ceding 25 million acres of prime agricultural land to the US government.

Discussion point

Clearances

Compare the forced removal of the Cherokees with the expulsion of the Acadians in 1755, Rosas’ campaign against Argentine Indians in 1833–34, the Scottish Clearances in the late 18th century, and the Armenian clearances during the First World War. Why were these peoples forced to leave their homes?

Activity

Indian removals

Reading the following documents relating to the Indian Removals of the 1830s and answer the questions that follow:

Source A

President Jackson’s second annual address to the nation, given on March 4, 1833, discussing Indian removals.

It will relieve the whole State of Mississippi and the western part of Alabama of Indian occupancy, and enable those States to advance rapidly in population, wealth, and power. It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites; free them from the power of the States; enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rude institutions; will retard the progress of decay, which is lessening their numbers, and perhaps cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community. 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 embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization and religion?

Source: Andrew Jackson: Second Inaugural Address. 1833. "Inaugural Addresses of the President of the United States." <http://bartelby.com/124/pres24.html>.

Source B

The French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville witnessed the Choctaw removals while in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1831, and later published his observations in his famous "Democracy in America."

In the whole scene there was an air of ruin and destruction, something which betrayed a final and irrevocable adieu; one couldn't watch without feeling one's heart wrung. The Indians were tranquil, but sombre and taciturn. There was one who could speak English and of whom I asked why the Chactas [sic] were leaving their country. "To be free," he answered, could never get any other reason out of him. We ... watch the expulsion ... of one of the most celebrated and ancient American peoples.

Source: de Tocqueville, Alexis. 1835. *Democracy in America*.

Source C

Historian Elisa Frühauf Garcia discussing Native American Indians in Brazil in the 19th century.

... the Indians that were not fully inserted in imperial society, commonly denominated "savages," had to be put in villages, also with the objective of preparing their absorption into the remaining population, or else be implacably fought in case they did not accept being put into villages or if they resisted the expansion fronts. In this way, the Empire projected a homogeneous population, with no space for the permanence of Indians as a differentiated group. It reserved, however, a place of prominence for the natives in the young nation's past. Despite significant differences, the intellectuals involved in building a national identity agreed to grant the Indians an important role in the founding of Brazil, symbolized by their union with the Portuguese.

Source: Frühauf Garcia, Elisa. 2010. *Revista Brasileira de História*. vol. 30, no. 59, June 2010. (A review of the book by Almeida, Maria Regina Celestino de. 2010. *Os índios na história do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV).

Source D

Lewis Cass, Governor of Michigan, 1813–31, was considered an expert on the topic of Native Americans. His views were popular with the public and politicians alike.

As civilization shed her light upon them [native Americas] why were they blind to its beams? Hungry or naked, why did they disregard, or regarding, why did they neglect, those arts by which food and clothing could be procured? Existing for two centuries in contact with a civilized people, they have resisted, and successfully too, every effort to meliorate their situation, or to introduce among them the most common arts of life. All this is without a parallel in the history of the world. That it is not to be attributed to the indifference or neglect of the whites, we have already shown. There must then

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be an inherent difficulty, arising from the institutions, character, and condition of the Indians themselves The Indians are entitled to the enjoyment of all the rights which do not interfere with the obvious designs of Providence, and with the just claims of others ... But there are two restraints upon ourselves [the U.S.], which we may safely adopt, —that no force should be used to divest them of any just interest they possess, and that they should be liberally remunerated for all they may cede. We cannot be wrong while we adhere to these rules.

Source: Cass, Lewis. January 1830. "Removal of the Indians." *North American Review*.

Source E

Cherokee letter protesting the Treaty of New Echota from Chief John Ross, "To the Senate and House of Representatives."

With a view to bringing our troubles to a close, a delegation was appointed on the 23rd of October, 1835, by the General Council of the nation, clothed with full powers to enter into arrangements with the Government of the United States, for the final adjustment of all our existing difficulties. The delegation failing to effect an arrangement with the United States commissioner, then in the nation, proceeded, agreeably to their instructions in that case, to Washington City, for the purpose of negotiating a treaty with the authorities of the United States. After the departure of the Delegation, a contract was made by the Rev. John F. Schermerhorn, and certain individual Cherokees, purporting to be a "treaty, concluded at New Echota, in the State of Georgia, on the 29th day of December, 1835, by General William Carroll and John F. Schermerhorn, commissioners on the part of the United States, and the chiefs, headmen, and people of the Cherokee tribes of Indians." A spurious Delegation, in violation of a special injunction of the general council of the nation, proceeded to Washington City with this pretended treaty, and by false and fraudulent representations supplanted in the favor of the Government the legal and accredited Delegation of the Cherokee people, and obtained for this instrument, after making important alterations in its provisions, the recognition of the United States Government. And now it is presented to us as a treaty, ratified by the Senate, and approved by the President [Andrew Jackson], and our acquiescence in its requirements demanded, under the sanction of the displeasure of the United States, and the threat of summary compulsion, in case of refusal. It comes to us, not through our legitimate authorities, the known and usual medium of communication between the Government of the United States and our nation, but through the agency of a complication of powers, civil and military.

Source: Cherokee Nation, September 28, 1836. Red Clay Council Ground.

Questions

- 1 To what extent do sources A and D support the views expressed in source C?
- 2 Compare the statements made regarding the nature of Native Americans in sources A and D.
- 3 Evaluate the points of view expressed in sources B and E on the impact of the expulsion of native peoples.
- 4 Using the documents and your own knowledge, why do you think the people of the United States overwhelmingly supported the expulsions in the 1830s?

Discussion point

The Canadian push to the west

French and Anglo Canadians lived mostly in the East. First Nations, or aboriginal Canadians, lived in Native Reserves, especially after Confederation in 1867. The spaces were mostly kept separate. As the fur trade caused more white male migration to the prairies and the Canadian West, intermarriage between white men and Indian women became more prevalent. Postcolonial scholarship has explored the mingling of spaces and peoples, particularly J.R. Miller in what has been called "native-newcomer relations."

Source: Wanhalla, Angela. "Women 'Living across the Line: Intermarriage on the Canadian Prairies and in Southern New Zealand." 1870–1900. *Ethnohistory*. Winter 2008, vol. 55, no. 1. Winter 2008. p. 29–49.

Questions

- 1 What advantages in access to resources did intermarriage offer for white trappers?
- 2 What challenges might acceptance of Christian marriages have had for native women?
- 3 What status was accorded to *métis* or "half-breed" children?