

Transcript of President Andrew Jackson's Message to Congress 'On Indian Removal' (1830)

Andrew Jackson's Annual Message

It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government, steadily pursued for nearly thirty years, in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation. Two important tribes have accepted the provision made for their removal at the last session of Congress, and it is believed that their example will induce the remaining tribes also to seek the same obvious advantages.

The consequences of a speedy removal will be important to the United States, to individual States, and to the Indians themselves. The pecuniary advantages which it promises to the Government are the least of its recommendations. It puts an end to all possible danger of collision between the authorities of the General and State Governments on account of the Indians. It will place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters. By opening the whole territory between Tennessee on the north and Louisiana on the south to the settlement of the whites it will incalculably strengthen the southwestern frontier and render the adjacent States strong enough to repel future invasions without remote aid. 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?

The present policy of the Government is but a continuation of the same progressive change by a milder process. The tribes which occupied the countries now constituting the Eastern States were annihilated or have melted away to make room for the whites. The waves of population and civilization are rolling to the westward, and we now propose to acquire the countries occupied by the red men of the South and West by a fair exchange, and, at the expense of the United States, to send them to land where their existence may be prolonged and perhaps made perpetual. Doubtless it will be painful to leave the graves of their fathers; but what do they more than our ancestors did or than our children are now doing? To better their condition in an unknown land our forefathers left all that was dear in earthly objects. Our children by thousands yearly leave the land of their birth to seek new homes in distant regions. Does Humanity weep at these painful separations from everything, animate and inanimate, with which the young heart has become entwined? Far from it. It is rather a source of joy that our country affords scope where our young population may range unconstrained in body or in mind, developing the power and facilities of man in their highest perfection. These remove hundreds and almost thousands of miles at their own expense, purchase the lands they occupy, and support themselves at their new homes from the moment of their arrival. Can it be cruel in this Government when, by events which it can not control, the Indian is made discontented in his ancient home to purchase his lands, to give him a new and extensive territory, to pay the expense of his removal, and support him a year in his new abode? How many thousands of our own people would gladly embrace the opportunity of removing to the West on such conditions! If the offers made to the Indians were extended to them, they would be hailed with gratitude and joy.

And is it supposed that the wandering savage has a stronger attachment to his home than the settled, civilized Christian? Is it more afflicting to him to leave the graves of his fathers than it is to our brothers and children? Rightly considered, the policy of the General Government toward the red man is not only liberal, but generous. He is unwilling to submit to the laws of the States and mingle with their population. To save him from this alternative, or perhaps utter annihilation, the General Government kindly offers him a new home, and proposes to pay the whole expense of his removal and settlement.

Questions

1. Based on the first paragraph, does President Jackson believe the government is correct in its Indian policy? How can you tell?
2. The second paragraph covers the advantages of a speedy removal. Rewrite or describe in your own words the last five sentences, which include the advantages for the government, territory, settlers, and Native Americans.
3. The third paragraph indicates Jackson's preference for cities rather than forests. Explain why he believes cities are more valuable.
4. According to President Jackson is this a new policy towards the Indians?
5. What happened to the tribes that lived in eastern North America?
6. How does he use the immigrant experience to justify the removal of Indians from their ancestral lands?
7. What might be the difference that President Jackson is missing in comparing the immigrant experience to the forced removal of Indians?
8. How does President Jackson believe that non-Indians would react to the offer given to Native Americans?
9. Does the last paragraph indicate that President Jackson believes the policy of removal is a just one? How can you tell?
10. Do you think this type of policy could happen today? Why or why not?

Answers

1. President Jackson is happy to announce the acceptance by some tribes and hopes that more will agree to the terms.
2.
 - a. Removes possible conflicts between the federal and state governments
 - b. It provides wide-open space for a lot of people
 - c. Strengthens the United States' ability to defend itself
 - d. Mississippi and Alabama will be open to white settlement, which means progress and wealth.
 - e. It helps Indians be free from government control, free from contact with whites, and might influence them to convert and become more civilized.
3. Cities provide the opportunity for art, business, larger population of people, freedom, religion, and in general a more civilized experience.
4. Not a new policy, it has been going on for a long time.
5. The tribes were killed or disappeared.
6. Immigrants left their homelands and all of their ties but no one complains about their loss, so therefore Native Americans should realize this is the same thing.
7. Immigrants chose to move away from their homelands, Indians are being coerced.
8. He believes that they would be very happy about it since the government is paying their moving costs and all expenses for a year and are moving into a wide-open land.
9. Jackson believes that it will save them, is fair and generous since they are not having to use any of their own resources to relocate.
10. Answers will vary and must include some reasons.