

Primary Sources: Trail of Tears

Handout E

The Trail of Tears was the forced relocation of the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole nations. It was caused by southern demand for land to grow cotton. Despite adopting some American cultural practices, these tribes faced pressure from settlers and the government. They had to give up their lands. In the 1820s, under President Andrew Jackson's influence, Congress and state governments pushed for their removal. They were sent west of the Mississippi River. This led to the displacement of thousands of Native Americans. Many Native Americans died on the journey.



Below are pieces of four primary source resources from the Trail of Tears period. They show first-hand accounts of significant individuals of this time.

Background and Primary Source Excerpt	Vocabulary
<p>Major Ridge was a Cherokee tribe leader. He supported the Treaty of New Echota which led to the Trail of Tears.</p> <p>“I know the Indians [Native Americans] have an older title than theirs [American settlers]. We obtained the land from the living God above. They got their title from the British. Yet they are strong and we are weak. We are few, they are many. We cannot remain here in safety and comfort.”</p>	<p>Obtained: received</p>
<p>Summarize the quote in your own words:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

President Jackson sent a letter outlining the treaty of New Echota and urging the tribes to accept it.

“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.”

Render: causes or results in

Flourish: grow and succeed

Remedy: solution or fix

Commence: begin or start

Prosperity: similar to flourish, positive growth

Summarize the quote in your own words:

Alexis de Toqueville was a French man travelling through America and writing a book about American Democracy. He witnessed a group of Choctaw people traveling the Trail of Tears and recorded his observations.

“It was then the middle of winter, and the cold was unusually severe; the snow had frozen hard upon the ground, and the river was drifting huge masses of ice. The Indians [Native Americans] had their families with them; and they brought in their train the wounded and sick, with children newly born, and old men upon the verge of death. They possessed neither tents nor wagons, but only their arms and some provisions. I saw 373 of them embark to pass the mighty river, and never will that solemn spectacle fade from my remembrance. No cry, no sob was heard amongst the assembled crowd; all were silent.”

Severe: intense, in this case very cold

Verge: edge or border

Provisions: supplies like food or tools for a journey

Solemn spectacle: a serious event

Remembrance: memory

Summarize the quote in your own words:

Chief John Ross was the leader of the Cherokee nation. He wrote a letter to the Senate and House of Representatives to protest the Treaty of New Echota that led to the Trail of Tears.

“We are stripped of every attribute of freedom and eligibility for legal self-defence. Our property may be plundered before our eyes; violence may be committed on our persons; even our lives may be taken away, and there is none to regard our complaints. We are denationalized; we are disfranchised. We are deprived of membership in the human family! We have neither land nor home, nor resting place that can be called our own.”

Eligibility for legal

self-defence: No laws are left to protect them

Plundered: stolen

None to regard our

complaints: there is no one to hear their problems

Denationalized: their ability to govern themselves has been taken away

Disfranchised: their legal rights have been taken away

Deprived: suffering due a loss

Summarize the quote in your own words:
