



Report on Indian Removal Andrew Jackson (1830)

In 1830, Congress passed—and president Andrew Jackson signed—the Indian Removal Act, which authorized the president to negotiate land exchanges with indigenous nations who were then living on reservations within the boundaries of US states. The aim of the land exchanges was to dissolve reservations east of the Mississippi River, thereby opening those lands to white settlement, and to resettle the indigenous nations on new reservations within the United States’ not-yet-colonized territory west of the Mississippi River. (This was the territory that the United States had obtained from France via the Louisiana Purchase, three decades earlier.) Empowered by the Indian Removal Act, the federal government successfully pressured most indigenous nations living east of the Mississippi to migrate west over the course of the 1830s.

Presented here is a selection from Jackson’s annual presidential message to Congress, equivalent to a present-day State of the Union address, which he delivered at the end of 1830. In this selection, Jackson reports on the progress of Indian Removal and defends the removal policy to its critics. Included are appeals Jackson makes involving religion.

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 settlements 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. [...]

Towards the aborigines of the country, no one can indulge a more friendly feeling than myself or would go further in attempting to reclaim them from their wandering habits and make them a happy, prosperous people. [...] With a full understanding of the subject, the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes have, with great unanimity, determined to avail themselves of the liberal offers presented by the act of Congress and have agreed to remove beyond the Mississippi River.

[...T]hey were made to understand their true condition, and they have preferred maintaining their independence in the western forests to submitting to the laws of the states in which they now reside. These treaties, being probably the last which will ever be made with them, are characterized by great liberality on the part of the government. They give the Indians a liberal sum in consideration of their removal and comfortable subsistence on their arrival at their new homes. [...]

Humanity has often wept over the fate of the aborigines of this country, and philanthropy has been long busily employed in devising means to avert it. But its progress has never for a moment been arrested, and, one by one, have many powerful tribes disappeared from the earth. To follow to the tomb the last of his race, and to tread on the graves of extinct nations, excite melancholy reflections. But true philanthropy reconciles the mind to these vicissitudes, as it does to the extinction of one generation to make room for another. In the monuments and fortresses of an unknown people, spread over the extensive regions of the west, we behold the memorials of a once powerful race, which was exterminated, or has disappeared, to make room for the existing savage tribes. Nor is there anything in this which, upon a comprehensive view of the general interests of the human race, is to be regretted. Philanthropy could not wish to see this continent restored to the condition in which it was found by our forefathers. 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 twelve millions of 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 a 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. [...] Can it be cruel in this government, when, by events which it cannot 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 towards 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. [...]

May we not hope, therefore, that all good citizens, and none more zealously than those who think the Indians oppressed by subjection to the laws of the states, will unite in attempting to open the eyes of those children of the forest to their true condition and, by a speedy removal, to relieve them from all the evils, real or imaginary, present or prospective, with which they may be supposed to be threatened.

Source: U.S. Congress, *House Journal*, 21st Cong., 2nd sess., December 7, 1830, 25-28, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.a0004367504>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy and Henry Testerman. Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation emended in line with modern American conventions. The terms *government*, *general* (meaning “federal”), and *state*, capitalized in the source publication, have been converted here to lowercase. Conversely, *Mississippi River* (rendered *Mississippi river* in the source) has been capitalized here for the sake of modernization.

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