

Primary Source

Jackson on Indian Removal

Like Thomas Jefferson before him, Andrew Jackson regarded the proliferation of independent, white farmers as the key to the continued prosperity of the United States. Americans, to be really free and self-reliant, needed to own their own land. But with population rising, this required each new generation to move farther west, onto lands that in many cases were already occupied by Native Americans. In Jackson's eyes, because Whites grew crops and built settlements, while Indians mostly hunted, there was no doubt about who would make better use of the lands. Indians, Jackson predicted, would inevitably suffer from contact with these land-hungry Whites, making it in their own best interest to move West of the Mississippi River. The following excerpt is taken from Jackson's second annual message to Congress, months after the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

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.

Source: James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), vol. 2, pp. 519-520