

## The Trail of Tears: Why Were the Cherokees Removed?

One of the great tragedies of American history began right here in Georgia. Starting in the late 1830s, about 16,000 Cherokee Indians were forcibly removed to Oklahoma from their homeland in northwest Georgia. Along the way, approximately 4,000 Cherokees died. In the Cherokee language, this event is known as *nu na hi du na tlo hi lu I*, which translates to “the trail where they cried.” Historians refer to it as the **Trail of Tears**.

A number of early white settlers in Georgia thought that the best way to get along with the Cherokees was to “civilize” them: Teach them to be good Christians, encourage them to give up hunting and take up farming, and become American citizens just like everyone else.

A surprising number of Cherokees did exactly this.

They gave up hunting, farmed land, and lived in houses. Some even owned slaves. In fact, this **civilization policy** was so successful that the Cherokees developed their own written language, published their own newspaper, and wrote their own constitution. In short, the Cherokees did everything asked of them.

But Georgia, like the rest of the country, was growing rapidly. In 1790 the state population was 58,000. Just 40 years later, it was ten times that, with a population of over 500,000. These new Georgians wanted land and the Cherokees had some of the best land in the state. A popular Georgian song of the time told the story best:

*All I want in this creation  
Is a pretty little wife and a big plantation  
Way up yonder in the Cherokee Nation.*

Settler pressure grew even more when, in 1828, gold was discovered on Cherokee land. White Georgians rushed in. The state passed laws which reduced Cherokee rights. The government even set up a lottery system and gave away Cherokee land to lucky winners. Fights between white settlers and Cherokees broke out. Many came to believe that the best way to protect the Cherokees was to move them far away.

In 1830 President Andrew Jackson signed the **Indian Removal Act**, which

ordered Native Americans to move to Oklahoma. Some Cherokees followed the order and prepared to leave. Others, led by Chief John Ross, fought for their right to stay. They even won a Supreme Court victory

in the case of *Worcester v. Georgia*. However, President Andrew Jackson ignored the court’s ruling and plans for removal went forward.

In 1835 some Cherokees signed the Treaty of New Echota, which **ceded** all Cherokee land to the federal government in exchange for \$5 million. However, most of the Cherokees, including Chief John Ross, wanted to fight until the end. This came in 1838 when the US Army was ordered to remove the Cherokees to Oklahoma. Their removal became the disaster known as the Trail of Tears.

Our focus now turns to the reasons for this removal. These reasons can be divided into three main categories: **politics**, **social prejudice**, and **economics**. Look at the documents that follow and then answer the question: *The Trail of Tears: Why were the Cherokees removed?*

