

Note: Students should only receive the documents for the date under discussion and not all of the documents at once.

Handout 1: Cherokee Documents

1818

Petition to the Cherokee National Council by Cherokee women. Women, such as Nancy Ward, one of the document's signers, held power in the tribe and could speak on tribal issues in the National Council. Ward and others also became agents for the Cherokee in negotiations with the national government.

“We well remember that our country was formerly very extensive, but by repeated sales, it has become circumscribed to the very narrow limits we have [at] present. Our Father and President [of the United States] advised us to become farmers, to manufacture our own clothes, & to have our children instructed. To this advice we have attended in every thing as far as we were able. Now the thought of being compelled to remove to the other side of the Mississippi is dreadful to us, because it appears to us that we, by this removal, shall be brought to a savage state again, for we have, by endeavor of our Father the President, become too much enlightened to throw aside the privileges of a civilized life.

“We therefore unanimously join in our meeting to hold our country in common as hitherto.”¹

1830

Members of the Cherokee National Council presented this address to the American people, and it was published in the Niles Weekly Register on August 21, 1830.

“We are aware, that some persons suppose it will be for our advantage to remove beyond the Mississippi. We think otherwise. Our people universally think otherwise. Thinking it would be fatal to their interests, they have almost to a man sent their memorial [petition] to congress, deprecating the necessity of a removal.

“We are not willing to remove; and if we could be brought to this extremity, it would be not by argument, not because our judgment was satisfied, not because our condition will be improved; but only because we cannot endure to be deprived of our national [the Indian nations were legally seen as independent nations within the US] and individual rights and subjected to a process of intolerable oppression.

“But if we are compelled to leave our country, we see nothing but ruin before us.”²

¹ American Past and Present Online, “Memorial of the Cherokee Nation, 1830” http://occawlonline.pearsoned.com/bookbind/pubbooks/divine5e/medialib/timeline/docs/sources/theme_primarysources_Native_Americans_5.html. See also Kilcup, Karen L., ed., *Native American Women's Writing 1800-1924: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000)29.

² Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project, 2002, <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/teachers/lesson5-groupd.html>

1836

Chief John Ross of the Cherokee wrote a series of letters to the US Congress and President Andrew Jackson. While he participated as a member of the Cherokee Council in treaty negotiations, he ultimately called for the Treaty of New Echota to be considered void because it advocated the sale of Cherokee lands and the removal of the Cherokee people to west of the Mississippi River.³

“Neither myself nor any other member of the regular delegation to Washington, can, without violating our most sacred engagements, ever recognize that paper as a Treaty, by assenting to its terms, or the mode of its execution. They are entirely inconsistent with the views of the Cherokee people. Three times have the Cherokee people formally and openly rejected conditions substantially the same as these. We were commissioned by the people, under express injunctions, not to bind the nation to any such conditions. The delegation representing the Cherokees, have, therefore, officially rejected these conditions themselves, and have regularly protested before the Senate and House of Representatives, against their ratification.

“In conclusion I would observe, that I still strongly hope we shall find ultimate justice from the good sense of the administration and of the people of the United States.”

1837

Major Ridge, one of the Cherokee negotiators of the Treaty of New Echota, which provided for the removal of the Cherokee to lands west of the Mississippi River, justifies his position. He made a speech in December of 1837 in New Echota and this is an excerpt from that speech.⁴

“The Georgians have shown a grasping spirit lately; they have extended their laws, to which we are unaccustomed, which harass our braves and make the children suffer and cry...I know the Indians have an older title than theirs. We obtained the land from the living God above...Yet they are strong and we are weak. We are few, they are many. We cannot remain here in safety and comfort. I know we love the graves of our fathers...We can never forget these homes, I know, but an unbending, iron necessity tells us we must leave them.”

³ Prucha, Francis Paul, *Documents of United States Indian Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975) 32 as quoted from Ghere, David L. and Jan F. Spreeman, *U.S. Indian Policy, 1815-1860: Removal to Reservations: A Unit of Study for Grades 8-12* (Los Angeles: Organization of American Historians and The Regents, University of California, 2000) 66.

⁴ Williams, David, *The Georgia Gold Rush: Twenty-Niners, Cherokees, and Gold Fever* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993)111.