



The Trail of Tears: The Forced Removal of the Five Civilized Tribes

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures

*Includes eyewitness accounts of the Trail of Tears

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“I fought through the War Between the States and have seen many men shot, but the Cherokee Removal was the cruelest work I ever knew.” – Georgia soldier on the Trail of Tears

The “Five Civilized Tribes” are among the best known Native American groups in American history, and they were even celebrated by contemporary Americans for their abilities to adapt to white culture. But tragically, they are also well known tribes due to the trials and tribulations they suffered by being forcibly moved west along the “Trail of Tears”.

Though the Trail of Tears applied to several different tribes, it is most commonly associated today with the Cherokee. The Cherokee began the process of assimilation into European America very early, even before the establishment of the United States, but it is unclear what benefits that brought the tribe. Throughout the colonial period and after the American Revolution, the Cherokee struggled to satisfy the whims and desires of American government officials and settlers, often suffering injustices after complying with their desires. Nevertheless, the Cherokee continued to endure, and after being pushed west, they rose from humble origins as refugees new to the southeastern United States to build themselves back up into a powerhouse both economically and militarily. The Cherokee ultimately became the first people of non-European descent to become U.S. citizens en masse, and today the Cherokee Nation is the largest federally recognized tribe in the United States, boasting over 300,000 members.

The Creek became known as one of the Five Civilized Tribes for quickly assimilating aspects of European culture, but in response to early European contact, the Muscogee established one of the strongest confederacies in the region. Despite becoming a dominant regional force, however, infighting brought about civil war in the early 19th century, and they were quickly wrapped up in the War of 1812 as well. By the end of that fighting, the Creek were compelled to cede millions of acres of land to the expanding United States, ushering in a new era that found the Creek occupying only a small strip of Alabama by the 1830s.

With the Spanish Empire foundering during the mid-19th century, the young United States sought to take possession of Florida. President Andrew Jackson’s notorious policy of Indian Removal led to the Seminole Wars in the 1830s, and that was already after General Andrew Jackson had led American soldiers against the Seminole in the First Seminole War a generation earlier. The Seminole Wars ultimately pushed much of the tribe into Oklahoma, and the nature of some of the fighting remains one of the best known aspects of Seminole history among Americans.

The Trail of Tears comprehensively covers the history and legacy of the events that brought about the removal of the Southeastern tribes. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Trail of Tears like you never have before, in no time at all.

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