Was Expelling The Cherokees From Their Ancestral Lands Right Or Wrong?

Posted on September 5, 2019

View this essay online:
https://academic-master.com/was-expelling-the-cherokees-from-their-ancestral-lands-right-or-wrong/

The Cherokee were a group of people who lived in the land south of the Appalachians before it was called the United States. These people lived in the valleys of the land whose rivers drained into the southern Appalachians, where they practiced their farming and hunting culture. They made homes in this place and buried their dead ones in this land. They practiced hunting and gathering for survival besides farming in these lands, which were later called Virginia and Kentucky, respectively. Later, around 1838, the US troops with authority from Georgia State invaded the Cherokee's land to expel them from where they called home (Bowes 7). They were removed to the Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma. The Cherokees were removed from their ancestral lands due to the demand for arable land when cotton growing became rampant in southeastern areas, gold discovery in these lands, and the racial prejudice harbored by the whites towards the American Indians.

The Debate Over Cherokee Removal

A major debate has been seen in the past about whether it was really just to expel the Cherokees from their ancestral lands. While some groups claim they should have been removed as it was done, other people feel that Cherokees should not have been removed from their ancestral lands (Bowes 7). Despite the fact that white consensus settled for the removal of the Cherokees from their lands, the Cherokees were against the removal, and individuals from the opposing side of the debate completely disagreed with the final decision of removing the Cherokees from their own lands. The Cherokee Indians deserved removal from their homeland since they would not really be in a position to survive on their own, considering the lifestyle they lived. They would not be able to easily coexist with the whites, and their removal by the whites enabled them to create a new and even more prosperous civilization.

Arguments Based on Subsistence and Survival

Considering the outdated lifestyle of the Cherokees in the lands they predominantly occupied, their chances of survival were limited (Meyer 270). Since they primarily depended on hunting and gathering, life was getting tough for them, given that the deer and buffalos they hunted had moved westward. They sold their seaboard to move westward in pursuit of the animals, but since the animals had become scarce, their food was diminishing, and they predominantly could only survive on roots

and other plants gathered from the forest. This was a clear indication of a struggling community whose survival was becoming a problem.

Their staple food was deer and buffalos, but with the diminishing number of these animals in the forests, since they hunted approximately fifty thousand yearly, their lives were getting worse and worse. Most of the time, they would also trade the deerskins for foods brought by the Europeans (Meyer 273). It, therefore, means that deer was not only their source of food but also their source of income. This is evident in their trade with the Europeans, where they exchanged deerskins for their goods.

Expansion, Gold, and Political Pressure

The forced removal of the Cherokees ended the long debate on whether they should be removed or not. As the whites expanded their settlements towards the west, the quest to deal with the Native Americans rose repeatedly, more so when the natives refused to sell their lands to the whites by treaty. Besides survival purposes, the whites were also interested in the lands, first because of the availability of gold in these lands. Secondly, Andrew Jackson's position on the fate of Indians' existence was well known, and it is one of the reasons that led to his victory, and so he had to fulfill the promise (Meyer 275). Lastly, the new legislation passed by Georgia extended its jurisdiction to the territory of the Cherokee lands within the borders of Georgia.

Federal Assimilation Policy

Since neither the whites nor the American Indians were ready to sacrifice their interest in favor of the other, the government decided to use a more creative, even though costly, method to eliminate the Native Americans from their places of interest. They spent lots of money and time trying to communicate and intervene in the talks of making the Native Americans move from the lands they wanted. At last, the new workable system fortunately fell into the hands of President George Washington's war secretary, Mr. Henry Knox. Henry Knox is attributed to the new and peaceful relationship between the Native Americans and the whites. Both President Washington and his Secretary Knox believed that the uncivilized Indian life was just because of the little knowledge they had (Denson 12). Looking into the idea critically, the inferiority of these Native Americans was cultural and not racial.

Cherokee Adaptation and Cultural Change

This made the government make a major announcement in 1791 that Cherokees should be led to transform and become more civilized in society, hence stopping the hunting and gathering they were used to. Soon after this major step towards incorporating the Cherokees in the civilized community, they began to weave clothes and plant crops, which made them rich gradually, and soon afterwards,

the law that stopped theft of horses was established and the Cherokees came up with a system of writing their own language.

The Indian Removal Act and Land Distribution

Indian removal policy began during the time of Andrew Jackson and was lastly passed in 1830. A lottery system was introduced in 1970 by the Georgia legislature, and this lottery system planned land distribution. This lottery system qualified citizens to register and win the lands from which the Indians were removed. Moreover, in late 1827, the General Assembly of Georgia declared it constitutional that the Federal Government at any point has no direct rights in the land distribution procedure.

Economic Arguments for Removal

The removal of the Cherokees was indeed justified by the kind of projects and activities that were carried out in those lands. The government implemented projects that yielded much more than expected back to the economy of the country (Denson 13). The lands became extremely valuable to the government. In these lands, future rights of railway alignment occurred, and road communications connected the eastern Piedmont side, the slopes of the Appalachian Mountains, the Ohio River in the regions of Kentucky, and lastly, the Tennessee Valley in Chattanooga. The location was strategic in the tremendous success of Atlanta, Georgia, in its economic development. The regional transport and logistics development was very efficient due to the good location of this area. Even though the appropriation of the Cherokee land kept the wealth from the place out of their hands, it really contributed to the economic development economically.

Cotton Production and Employment

After the removal of the Cherokees from their lands, one of the major projects that were put up was cotton farming. This land’s fertile cotton plantations not only did well but also surprised many by the unexpected produce harvested in the first harvesting year. The massive production of cotton made North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee rise drastically in that year, from 750,000 bales to approximately 2.85 million bales. This made the region earn the name King Cotton due to the success experienced. This increase in cotton farming not only led to improved economic growth in the produce but also created employment opportunities for many in the region. This was more of an economic use of the land, with the small subsistence farms plowed by the Cherokees before their removal from the land (Denson 12). Their removal from the land was, therefore, an improvement to the economic use of the land. Capitalists would say the idea of removing them was exactly a perfect idea.

Gold Mining and Land Value

Besides cotton farming in the lands, the discovery of gold in Dahlonega around Georgia made the area even more valuable to the United States government. The only way this gold could be mined was if the residents relocated to other areas. As we all know, gold is a very important mineral, and it has economic value for society and the entire nation. The gold mines contributed positively to the states, and more people got employment in the gold mining and processing factories.

Assessing the Claimed Benefits of Removal

In summary, Cherokee removal from the lands around Georgia was a perfect move. Comparing the positive and the negative impacts of their removal, it is clear that the positive effects of their removal are much more than the negative effects. I therefore support the move that was taken by the federal government in making the Cherokees evacuate the land. Many people got employment from the cotton farms, and others were employed in the gold mining factories as well. Through the employment opportunities created by these sectors, the living standards of the majority of both the Cherokees and the Americans who were employed improved greatly.

Work Cited

Bowes, John P. *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal*. Vol. 13. University of Oklahoma Press, 2016. Pp 7-9.

Meyer, Sabine N. “From Federal Indian Law to Indigenous Rights: Legal Discourse and the Contemporary Native American Novel on the Indian Removal.” *Law & Literature*29.2 (2017): 269-290.

Denson, Andrew. *Monuments to Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Contest Over Southern Memory*. UNC Press Books, 2017. Pp 12-13.