Trail Of Tears: Main Points

In 1836, thousands of Native American Indians were being rounded up like savages and crowded into tiny stockades. Each tribe carried with them the story of their people as they were being ripped from their ancestral lands. Many feared the road ahead and knew their lives and those of their loved ones were in grave danger. The Trail of Tears was a tragic and immoral historical event caused by the negligence in authority the government truly had over its people of this time and could have been avoided with proper authority.

Of the five Civilized Tribes in the East, The Cherokees, Chickasaws, Seminoles, Creeks, and Choctaws, The Cherokees became a large focus of the Trail of Tears seeing as they were one of the largest tribes. The word “civilized” meant these five tribes were more willing to compromise and live among the American colonies, whereas tribes in the West, such as the Comanches, Kiowas, and Witchitas, lived more hostile lives (Sturgis, Pg. 65). The Cherokee’s lives revolved around the lands of the Earth. Cherokees relied on the Earth and soil for their lives and “constituted themselves as people of great importance and reason” (Ehle, Pg.1). Sun, fire, earth, and water were considered the great gifts of the Creator. Cherokee people constantly gave thanks to the Earth for allowing them to live and use its elements for their lives.

Tensions began to arise around 1810 as the American government set out to govern the Indian population (Kennedy, 9). Seeing as there were over eighty-five different tribes the Federal government did not have enough power to go around. Therefore, the American Colonists began to require the Indians to convert to their ways (Sturgis, 67). This meant living a nomadic lifestyle, converting to Christianity, and learning the English language.

Unfortunately for the Americans the Indians worked to change their ways in hopes of keeping their land and lives the same. Many began to completely change their lifestyle, some began to attend Christian masses regularly and develop literary skills such as reading and writing (“Exiles in Their Own Land”). A large majority still refused to change their ways and were outraged the Americans were raining havoc on their natural given freedom of life. This change on the part of the Indians is considered the 18th Century Enlightenment.

When the Americans saw that most of the Indians had little to no trouble working to be like the colonists they began a constant battle to scare and intimidate the tribes into moving on their own accord westward. The American government required the tribes to bring conflict to court instead of resolving among one another. This was difficult for tribes such as the Cherokee who were very closed off in these types of matters. Along with this, each family was required to have a designated male member that ran the household and farmland. This put Native American women in a powerless state and required them to do minimal household tasks instead of bearing larger weight on their backs in tribe needs.

Native Americans who kept their traditions chose to do so because they saw no reason to change if there was going to be no change on the Americans’ part. The just concluded American Revolution lead the American Colonists into being arrogant and believing everything was theirs to own because of their independence. The American government promised equality among the colonists and the Indians if the Indians were to change their ways.

Unfortunately this was not the case and was a completely empty promise. The sad truth was Native Americans could become rich, civilized, and live high class lives but they would never be white. Because of this the Cherokee were deemed ignorant people and sluggish in their work ethic. The Native American people as a whole just wanted respect and could find no right way to earn it.

The Cherokee Nation refused to give up proving they could be a united and civilized nation. In the year 1827 the Constitution of the Cherokee Nation was created. This Constitution was meant to show the US how developed and civil the Cherokee could truly be. The Cherokee people promoted a man named John Ross to be their principal chief of the tribe. The first order of business John Ross got on immediately was establishing the law stating anyone who sold tribal land without authority was to receive the death penalty. This extremity was taken in order to ensure no sacred land was to be lost in the already present fight for it.

The seventh president of the US, Andrew Jackson, was inaugurated on March 4th, 1829. Andrew Jackson's support came from the American colonists who had been eyeing the Indian lands for years. President Jackson was willing to do anything to gain power and public approval (Rozema, 7). Andrew Jackson created the Indian Removal Policy in hopes of removing the Cherokees, as well as the other tribes present, without resistance. His reasoning for this was that he had no choice other than to remove the Indians from their present state and move them West or they would cease to exist as a whole.

As more issues began to arise the Cherokee took to contacting President Jackson themselves. The people wrote to him out of anguish and fear of the future. Moving West would mean moving into the territory of the uncivilized Indians, which was a threat to the safety of the tribes. Andrew Jackson responded, stating there was nothing he could do. This basically told the Cherokee people there was no true leader among the Americans. seeing as the opinion of the Americas dictated the final decisions of Jackson. Parts of the Cherokee tribe began to move willingly to the West to avoid Jackson's further rulings.

On May 28, 1830, Andrew Jackson passed the Indian Removal Act. Jackson refused to protect the Indians from any of Georgia's rulings from there on. The Indians had truly been tantalized from the beginning with the acceptance of the American Colonists through the change of their people.

The Native American Tribes had truly become outraged and wanted to fight back in every way possible. In 1832 the Cherokee people fought the American law in court. This would later be known as Cherokee vs Georgia, or Worcester vs Georgia. Samuel Worcester represented the Cherokee and all Indians in their fight in court. He stated the state of Georgia and its people had no right to the Indian lands as well as no right to evict the tribes from them. John Marshall, the Justice of this case, agreed with Mr. Worcester and proceeded to ratify his statement. This angered President Jackson and truly showed his dysfunction and lack of order in the government.

Although Justice Marshall agreed Georgia had no right to take away Indian lands, Andrew Jackson proceeded with the eviction. A man of the Cherokee tribe named John Ridge went to the president himself and pleaded for his mercy. His answer to him was to return home and tell his people the only hope for their survival was to move out West and abandon their home.

Three Cherokee men, Elias Boudinot, Major Ridge, and John Ridge joined together to make a deal with the Federal government out of desperation. These men, also referred to as the Treaty Party, made a deal with the Federal Government if they were to assist with the removal of the Indian Tribes then they would leave. These men went to the government behind the backs of many and did not consult the tribes. They had made a grand statement of wanting to give up when there was still a fight and this enraged those still of traditional lifestyle.

In December of 1835 the Indian Removal Treaty was ratified. Not long after, the Treaty of New Echota was also ratified and signed by the US Senate and the Treaty Party. This set the legal ground of the forced removal and traded the Indian lands for assistance in the journey and compensation. The Removal would give American Colonists lands in Tennessee, North Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia. This land was to be exchanged for land in present day Oklahoma and Arkansas. The Indians were expected to simply leave behind sacred land on which their ancestors lived and were buried in.

In the year 1836 John E. Wool, along with around a thousand troops, were given orders by President Jackson to begin the roundup of the Indians. Stockades had been prepared for this roundup. Indians were not allowed any possessions from their homes and were pulled out of them at gunpoint (Rozema, XIII). As soon as the tribes' homes became empty, greedy American Colonists raided and tore them apart looking for anything of value. All goods, such as food supply, provided by the Federal government proved to be inadequate and contaminated with parasites or mold. The stockades caused extreme illnesses by unsanitary conditions, proving to be a problem in itself. Illnesses included smallpox, diarrhea, malaria, and cholera.

On August 28th, 1838, the Indian tribes in detachments of 13, thousands of people per detachment, began their 1,554 mile long trek to their new unwanted home. The land given to them by the higher Being was no longer theirs to inhabit. It is said as they began their journey the tribes gave thanks to the mountains and lands surrounding them for allowing them to live on them and wished only the best for it in the future to come. Many already battled illnesses as they walked. Others had to witness their loved ones struggle to stay alive as they went along. When the Indians arrived in Oklahoma after over four months of travelling they arrived with almost no past and barely any future, meaning the young lives of the tribes as well as the elders had been lost on the trail.

In conclusion, the Trail of Tears proved to be a wicked, cruel event promoting the uprooting of tribal Indians and forced removal from their native homelands. All decisions made under Andrew Jackson proved to be made only for the Colonists' benefit. This therefore shows a nation is only as strong as its ruler's unswayed integrity.