Trail Of Tears: We Shall Remain America Through Native Eyes

The Trail of Tears was a heartbreaking and tragic event in America's history. Thousands of Native Americans were forced to leave their Appalachian home to move West, under President Andrew Jackson's command. The events that led up to that forceful removal are outlined well in Chris Eyre's ?Trail of Tears: We Shall Remain. ?Through cinematic reenactments with actors, and historic narration, ?We Shall Remain? accurately depicts this chapter in history and successfully relates to themes and characters in ?High Mountains Rising? edited by Richard Straw and H. Blethen.

The focus of the film is on the gradual removal of Native Americans from the East, culminating into the event known as the "Trail of Tears". To start from the beginning, the Cherokee people have inhabited the North American continent, specifically the "southern Appalachians [since] perhaps 3,500 years ago, based on language differences between these groups"(Straw 7). So it is factual that the Native Americans had occupied the land long before settlements came. The traditional way of life for the Cherokees began to change in the late 1600s due to English traders coming in tribal territory. Eventually, the Cherokee people became dependent on the goods from Europeans. It is often forgotten how originally the European settlers and Native Americans were sometimes cordial early on. Native Americans fought for during the French and Indian War, certain tribal leaders were recognized by, and they had a happy bartering system (Sraw 9-10). However, the white man's greed and racism overrode this correspondence. A treaty was signed in 1794 to establish peace between the native Americans and American colonial militias. The US government made many attempts to force the Cherokees to assimilate into their society, resulting in 3 groups of Cherokees: the Anglo Cherokees, nontraditionalist Cherokees, and traditionalist Cherokees. The Cherokees broke the "savage" stereotype with their developed "written language, democratic government, and economic growth", but racism and Manifest Destiny persisted(Straw 11). Americans wanted to move west and cilize the frontier, and passed the the Indian Removal Act of 1830, to relocate all Indians of southeastern states to west of the Mississippi River. Many moved, until there were still about 16,000 Cherokees in North Carolina. A notable figure, John Ross, the principal chief of the Cherokee people in North Carolina, adamantly desisted removal. Major Ridge, another Cherokee, encouraged the tribe to move west and signed a removal treaty. In Spring 1838, the US Army forced the Cherokees west onto the "Trail of Tears". As many as 8,000 Cherokees died before reaching their new territory(Straw 11).

Evidently, this story is one of violence, determination, and sadness. I think the film did an adequate job of representing it. I enjoyed the way it offered the message of attempt of agreement that I read in our class book, ?High Mountains Rising?.

Works Cited

1. Straw, Richard Alan., and Tyler H. Blethen. ?High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place?. University of Illinois Press, 2004.