

# NATIVE AMERICANS AND THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Brady Kondek

Honors American History

October 27, 2020

The history of relations between Native Americans and the federal government of the United States has been fraught. The government wanted to take away the land that the Native Americans have lived on for generations and send them to reservations far away through the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The cultural assimilation of Native Americans was an effort made by the government to transform the Natives' culture to European-American culture. With miners discovering things such as gold and silver, more and more land was being taken away from the Native Americans. The U.S. government weren't big fans of the Native Americans and through things like the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Westward Expansion, and assimilation, tried to eliminate their culture.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized the president to negotiate with American tribes for their removal to federal-owned territory west of the Mississippi River in exchange for white settlement of their ancestral lands.<sup>1</sup> This law paved the way for the forced expulsion of thousands of Native Americans from their land to the west, which you may know as "The Trail of Tears." Many tribes, including the Seminoles, did not leave their land peacefully. Tribes were threatened with invasion by the U.S. Army if they did not leave their land.<sup>1</sup> The Cherokee people were divided when it came to deciding on what to do in terms of handling the government's determination to get its hands on their territory. Some wanted to stay on their land and defend it, while others thought it was better to just leave and in return for money and other concessions. Many tribes refused to leave their land even with the threats made by the government, which one of these instances sparked the Seminole Wars. By 1840, tens of

---

<sup>1</sup> "Trail of Tears." History.com. A&E Television Networks, November 9, 2009.  
[www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears](http://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears).

thousands of Native Americans had been driven off their land in the southeastern states and forced to move across the Mississippi to Indian Territory.<sup>1</sup>

Cultural assimilation is the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble a society's majority group or assume the values, behaviors, and beliefs of another group. “Kill the Indian and save the man.” That was the mindset under which the U.S. government forced tens of thousands of Native American children to attend “assimilation” boarding schools.<sup>2</sup> An example of one of these schools is the Carlisle Indian School, which was located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. This school was the first such school to assimilate Indians. The school was created by Richard Henry Pratt, a U.S. cavalry captain. Carlisle and other boarding schools were part of a long history of U.S. attempts to either kill, remove, or assimilate Native Americans.<sup>2</sup> Decades after the forced removal of Native Americans to move West, the U.S. was worried it was running out of places to relocate them to. Many of these schools were susceptible to deadly infections, such as tuberculosis and the flu. As the white population grew in the United States and people settled further west in the late 1800s, there was increasing pressure on the recently removed groups to give up some of their new land. Since there was no more Western territory to push them towards, the U.S. decided to remove Native Americans by assimilating them.<sup>2</sup> In these schools, Native Americans were forbidden from using their names and languages, as well as from practicing their religion and culture. They were given new names, haircuts, and clothes. They had to abandon their way of life because it was inferior to

---

<sup>2</sup> Little, Becky. “How Boarding Schools Tried to 'Kill the Indian' Through Assimilation.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, August 16, 2017. [www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian-through-assimilation](http://www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian-through-assimilation).

white people's. Though the schools left a devastating legacy, they failed to eradicate Native American Cultures as they had hoped to.<sup>2</sup>

The Westward Expansion was the 19<sup>th</sup>-century movement of settlers into the American West. This movement had a connection with the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The reason for this forced removal was to make westward expansion for American settlers easier. Because of the discovery of gold, and many other things, many people wanted to go out west to find some themselves. The land of the Native Americans was the ideal location for them to stay at and removing them from there helped create more space for the settlers.

Through things such as The Indian Removal Act of 1830, assimilation, and the Westward Expansion, Native Americans were shut off from society. The Indian Removal Act forced the Natives to move away from the land they have lived on for generations to far-away places, assimilation was an attempt to force them to get rid of their culture for them to accept the American culture, and the Westward Expansion even further pushed the actions of the Indian Removal Act. These actions showed that the country wasn't fans of them then, and to this day they still fight for their equal place in our modern-day society.

## Bibliography

“Trail of Tears.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, November 9, 2009.  
[www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears](http://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears).

Little, Becky. “How Boarding Schools Tried to 'Kill the Indian' Through Assimilation.”  
History.com. A&E Television Networks, August 16, 2017. [www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian-through-assimilation](http://www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian-through-assimilation).