

## Lewis Cass Justifies Removal (1830)

*By the mid-1820s, Lewis Cass, governor of the Michigan Territory between 1813 and 1831 and future presidential candidate for the Democratic Party, had become widely regarded as one of the best informed, most experienced, and highly thoughtful experts in the country on U.S.-Indian policy and the histories and cultures of the tribes. As superintendent of Indian affairs, an office all territorial governors held, he was certainly familiar with the details of U.S. relations with the Indians of the Great Lakes. He had toured the region, visited many tribes in their home countries, and arranged several treaties with them. He also was reputed to be a hardheaded, tough, but fair negotiator who supported the attempts of the government and the missionaries to “civilize” the Indians. The policy of changing the cultures of the Indians—turning them into plow farmers who produced surplus crops for sale in the marketplace, was the only way, Cass and many others believed, that the Indians could survive. If they remained “uncivilized,” they would perish.*

*Cass made his reputation outside of government circles through a series of essays published in national magazines. The North American Review, one of the nation’s leading literary journals, published several of his essays. Written as extended reviews of books and articles about Indians, Cass used these essays to put forth his opinions about Indian policy and U.S. relations with the tribes. His most significant essay appeared in the January 1830 issue of the North American Review in the guise of a commentary on the publication of several letters, addresses, and resolutions in support of removal. Cass’s essay, fifty-nine pages in length, was the first extended pro-removal document to appear in the popular press, written by an expert, since the election of Andrew Jackson and the passage of Georgia’s legislation to extend its civil and criminal jurisdiction into the Cherokee Nation.*

A barbarous people, depending for subsistence upon the scanty and precarious supplies furnished by the chase, cannot live in contact with a civilized community. As the cultivated border approaches the haunts of the animals, which are valuable for food or furs, they recede and seek shelter in less accessible situations....

...From an early period, their rapid declension and ultimate extinction were foreseen and lamented, and various plans for their preservation and improvement were projected and pursued. Many of them were carefully taught at our seminaries of education, in the hope that principles of morality and habits of industry would be acquired, and that they might stimulate their countrymen by precept and example to a better course of life. Missionary stations were established among various tribes, where zealous and pious men devoted themselves with generous ardor to the task of instruction, as well in agriculture and the mechanic arts, as in the principles of morality and religion....Unfortunately, they are monuments also of unsuccessful and unproductive efforts. What tribe has been civilized by all this expenditure of treasure, and labor, and care? . . .

The cause of this total failure cannot be attributed to the nature of the experiment, nor to the character, qualifications, or conduct, of those who have directed it. The process and the persons have varied, as experience suggested alterations in the one, and a spirit of generous self-devotion supplied the changes in the other. But there seems to be some insurmountable obstacle in the habits or temperament of the Indians, which has heretofore prevented, and yet prevents, the success of these labors....

We have made the inquiring respecting the permanent advantage, which any of the tribes have derived from the attempts to civilize them, with a full knowledge of the favorable reports that have been circulated concerning the Cherokees. Limited as our intercourse with those Indians has been, we must necessarily draw our conclusions respecting them from facts which have been stated to us, and from the general resemblance they bear to the other cognate branches of the great aboriginal stock....

That individuals among the Cherokees have acquired property, and with it more enlarged views and juster notions of the value of our institutions, and the unprofitableness of their own, we have little doubt. And we have as little doubt, that this change of opinion and condition is confined, in great measure, to some of the half-breeds and their immediate connexions. These are not sufficiently numerous to affect our general proposition....

...But, we believe, the great body of the people are in a state of helpless and hopeless poverty. With the same improvidence and habitual indolence, which mark the northern Indians, they have less game for subsistence, and less peltry for sale. We doubt whether there is, upon the face of the globe, a more wretched race than the Cherokees, as well as the other southern tribes, present. Many of them exhibit spectacles as disgusting as they are degrading. Only three years since, an appropriation was made by Congress, upon the representations of the authorities of Florida, to relieve the Indians there from actual starvation.

We are as unwilling to underrate, as we should be to overrate, the progress made by these Indians in civilization and improvement. We are well aware, that the constitution of the Cherokees, their press, and newspapers, and alphabet, their schools and police, have sent through all our borders the glad tidings, that the long night of aboriginal ignorance was ended, and that the day of knowledge had dawned. Would that it were so. None would rejoice more sincerely than we should. But this great cause can derive no aid from exaggerated representation; from promises never to be kept, and from expectations never to be realized. The truth must finally

come, and it will come with a powerful reaction. We hope that our opinion on this subject may be erroneous. But we have melancholy forebodings. That a few principled men, who can secure favorable cotton lands, and cultivate them with slaves, will be comfortable and satisfied, we may well believe. And so long as the large annuities received from the United States, are applied to the support of a newspaper and to other objects, more important to the rich than the poor, erroneous impressions upon these subjects may prevail. But to form just conceptions of the spirit and objects of these efforts, we must look at their practical operation upon the community. It is here, if the facts which have been stated to us are correct, and of which we have no doubt, that they will be found wanting....

...Existing for two centuries in contact with a civilized people, they have resisted, and successfully too, every effort to meliorate their situation, or to introduce among them the most common arts of life. Their moral and their intellectual condition have been equally stationary. And in the whole circle of their existence, it would be difficult to point to a single advantage which they have derived from their acquaintance with the Europeans. All this is without a parallel in the history of the world. That it is not to be attributed to the indifference or neglect of the whites, we have already shown. There must then be an inherent difficulty, arising from the institutions, character, and condition of the Indians themselves....

...It is difficult to conceive that any branch of the human family can be less provident in arrangement, less frugal in enjoyment, less industrious in acquiring, more implacable in their resentments, more ungovernable in their passions, with fewer principles to guide them, with fewer obligations to restrain them, and with less knowledge to improve and instruct them....

...And equally fruitless and hopeless are the attempts to impart to them, in their present situation, the blessings of religion, the benefits of science and the arts, and the advantages of an efficient and stable government. The time seems to have arrived, when a change in our principles and practice is necessary; when some new effort must be made to meliorate the condition of the Indians, if we would not be left without a living monument of their misfortunes, or a living evidence of our desire to repair them.

...If the Christian and civilized governments of Europe asserted jurisdiction over the aboriginal tribes of America, and, under certain limitations, a right to the country occupied by them, some peculiar circumstances must have existed to vindicate a claim, at first sight revolting

to the common justice of mankind....The Indians are entitled to the enjoyment of all the rights which do not interfere with the obvious designs of Providence, and with the just claims of others.

There can be no doubt, and such are the views of the elementary writers upon the subject, that the Creator intended the earth should be reclaimed from a state of nature and cultivated; that the human race should spread over it, procuring from it the means of comfortable subsistence, and of increase and improvement. A tribe of wandering hunters, depending upon the chase for support, and deriving it from the forests, and rivers, and lakes, of an immense continent, have a very imperfect possession of the country over which they roam. That they are entitled to such supplies as may be necessary for their subsistence, and as they can procure, no one can justly question. But this right cannot be exclusive, unless the forests which shelter them are doomed to perpetual unproductiveness. Our forefathers, when they landed upon the shores of this continent, found it in a state of nature, traversed, but not occupied, by wandering hordes of barbarians, seeking a precarious subsistence, principally from the animals around them. They appropriated, as they well might do, a portion of this fair land to their own use, still leaving to their predecessors in occupation all that was needed, and more than was used by them.

In the progress of society in the old world, no similar circumstances had existed to render necessary any inquiry into the relative rights and duties of a civilized and barbarous people...or to settle the principles of intercommunication between them. The nations of Christendom agreed in the general assumption of sovereignty, and of the ultimate dominion of the soil, as the consequence of discovery; but their farther pretensions seem to have been a matter of internal policy, depending on the peculiar views of each power. 'The relations,' says Chief Justice John Marshall, in delivering the opinion of the Supreme Court, in the case of Johnson versus McIntosh, 'which were to exist between the discoverer and the natives, were to be regulated by themselves. The right thus acquired, no other power could interpose between.'....

....In accordance with this view, the ultimate dominion of the soil was asserted, by the European powers, to attach to the sovereign making the discovery. 'Thus has our whole country been granted by the Crown, while in the occupation of the Indians. These grants purport to convey the soil, as well as the right of dominion, to the grantees.'...

What has a Cherokee to fear from the operation of the laws of Georgia? If he has advanced in knowledge and improvement, as many sanguine persons believe and respect, he will find these laws more just, better administered, and far more equal in their operation, than the

*regulations* which the chiefs have established and are enforcing. What Indian has ever been injured by the laws of any state? We ask the question without any fear of the answer. If these Indians are too ignorant and barbarous to submit to the state laws, or duly estimate their value, they are too ignorant and barbarous to establish and maintain a government which shall protect its own citizens, and preserve the necessary relations and intercourse with its neighbors....

... Let the whole subject be fully explained to the Indians. Let them know that the establishment of an independent government is a hopeless project; which cannot be permitted, and which, if it could be permitted, would lead to their inevitable ruin. Let the offer of a new country be made to them, with ample means to reach it and to subsist in it, with ample security for its peaceful and perpetual possession, and with a pledge, in the words of the Secretary of War, 'that the most enlarged and generous efforts, by the government, will be made to improve their minds, better their condition, and aid them in their efforts of self-government.'...If a paternal authority is exercised over the aboriginal colonies, and just principles of communication with them, and of intercommunication among them, are established and enforced, we may hope to see that improvement in their condition, for which we have so long and so vainly looked.

Sources: *The North American Review* 30 (1830), excerpts from pages 62-100; Theda Perdue, *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History With Documents*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016), 110-114.