



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Cherokee campaign against displacement, 1827-1838

**Time period notes:** *The exact time period is a bit hazy because the Cherokee were organizing and resisting displacement pressures for a long time before the formal campaign began. However, for the purposes of this database, the campaign began when the Cherokee declared independence and sovereignty as a nation.*

1827

to:

1838

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** Cherokee Nation

**Location Description:** Cherokee lands in the state of Georgia

**Goals:**

The Cherokee goals were to retain possession of their lands and to exist as a sovereign and independent nation.

## Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 013. Deputations
- 015. Group lobbying

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 013. Deputations
- 015. Group lobbying

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 015. Group lobbying
- 091. Refusal of a government's money
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 015. Group lobbying
- 091. Refusal of a government's money

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 013. Deputations
- 015. Group lobbying
- 091. Refusal of a government's money
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials
- 145. General administrative noncooperation

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 013. Deputations
- 091. Refusal of a government's money

**Notes on Methods:**

In this campaign there were not too many specific organized actions, but rather continuous lobbying of politicians, appealing to support in the North, and non-cooperation with the government.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

**Group characterization:**

- Members of Cherokee Nation

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Chief John Ross

**Partners:**

Not Known

**External allies:**

Missionaries and other supporters from the North

**Involvement of social elites:**

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote letters to Washington DC in opposition to the Cherokee eviction

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Cherokee peoples

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- Missionaries and other supporters from the North

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

Supporters from the North were not a part of a formal organization so their participation in the campaign was scattered, but the ones who were arrested joined the campaign in 1831.

**Segment Length:** 2 years

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

United States government, Georgia state government

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not Known

**Campaigner violence:**

Not Known

**Repressive Violence:**

Georgia officials exercised violence against both Cherokees and missionary supporters who they detained. Among other acts, Georgia police beat them and forced them to walk 35 miles while loaded with chains.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

1 point out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

The Cherokee people were unable to retain their land and are not recognized as a sovereign nation. They are a federally recognized tribe with established territory, so they received a 1 for success. Despite the significant loss of life that occurred on the Trail of Tears, they were able to retain much of their tribal organization. Their campaign received national attention and drew significant outside support, resulting in a 2 for growth.

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Through the 1830s, the Cherokee owned incredibly rich, fertile land that was desired by their white neighbors. In 1828, gold was discovered in Cherokee nation, setting off the Georgia gold rush. Though the Cherokee had been resisting social forces trying to displace them, legal pressure began to mount to allow access to the land and to remove the Cherokee from it. In 1830 President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, forcing the Cherokee in Georgia and other areas east of the Mississippi River to relocate to other Indian lands in the West, primarily in Oklahoma. In addition, the state of Georgia expanded its state laws over the Cherokee territory-- effectively prohibiting meetings of the Cherokee, confiscating land, outlawing digging for gold on their own land, and many other restrictions. The Cherokee mounted a nonviolent campaign to resist the displacement forces of the Georgian and Federal government.

In the years preceding the Removal Act the Cherokee nation took actions to organize and establish themselves as a people. In 1825, they established a capital at New Echota, Georgia. On July 26, 1827, they established a constitution declaring independence and claiming sovereignty as a nation. At the front of the Cherokee leadership were chief John Ross and his fellow councilors.

At the beginning of the campaign the Cherokee began by trying to challenge the expansion of Georgia state law onto their land. The case went to the Supreme Court, but was not heard because the court did not recognize the Cherokees as a sovereign nation. At the same time, the Cherokees began spreading propaganda supporting their cause. They called on supporters in the North, particularly in Ohio and New England, where there was a concentration of allies. Cherokee delegations visited churches and other mass meetings to draw attention to their situation. John Ross led delegations to Washington DC to argue their case in as many forums as possible. The efforts of the Cherokee were documented each week in the Cherokee publication, the Cherokee Phoenix.

Following the ratification of the Removal Act by Congress in May of 1830 and the efforts of the Cherokee in the North, there were a number of white missionaries who traveled south to support the efforts of the Cherokee people. The state of Georgia banned the white missionaries from the land and in March of 1831 three of them were arrested. In July, Georgia officials arrested ten more missionaries for occupying Cherokee lands, as well as the editor of the Phoenix. The detained were beaten, reviled, and loaded with chains. They were forced to walk 35 miles to the jail. Almost all of them pleaded guilty and were released, but the two who did not were found guilty and sentenced to four years of hard labor.

At this time, the Jackson administration was raising the amount of money that it was offering to the Cherokee to leave. Some of the Cherokee began accepting significant individual offers for leaving. The council drafted testimonies of Cherokee grievances and sent them to politicians and media sources in Washington and the North. The testimonies raised debate in Congress and Northern newspapers and the administration began to feel competing pressures from the North and the South. The administration was stuck trying to meet the demands of Georgia, without losing the respect of states in the North. As a result, Jackson continued to raise the amount of money he was offering the Cherokee for the land. He raised the offer first to \$3 million and then \$4.5 million.

In 1832, there began to be a divide between two factions of the Cherokee—those who wanted to accept the money and sign a treaty with the government, and those who wished to carry on the resistance campaign. The pro-treaty group was led by Major and John Ridge, and was called the Ridge Party. The resisters, led by John Ross, were called the National Party. Though there were significantly more people in the National Party, the congeniality that the Ridge Party displayed towards the administration gave them extra negotiation power. In February 1835, John Ross led another delegation to Washington to argue the Cherokee cause. He was met there by another Cherokee delegation from the pro-treaty faction. The pro-treaty group made a stronger claim to representation of the Cherokee people than Ross' delegation.

In November, John Ross was arrested in Spring Place, Georgia, but the campaign continued in his absence. In December, the administration appointed a new treaty commissioner named John Schermerhorn. At the end of the month, Schermerhorn traveled to Cherokee territory, planning to have the Cherokee sign a treaty to hand over their land. He declared a council meeting and required Cherokee attendance. Out of thousands of members of the Cherokee nation, only several hundred came to the council, while the other members held a boycott. Schermerhorn declared that all members who were not present were to be counted in the

affirmative. However, Schermerhorn was only able to gather 79 signatures out of the thousands, so instead he chose to recognize 20 members of the pro-treaty group as representatives of the Cherokee people. He gathered their signatures and had the treaty taken by a group of Ridge supporters to be presented in Washington DC. The treaty exchanged all Cherokee land east of the Mississippi River for \$5 million. Some members of the US government opposed the move, recognizing its illegitimacy. Major W.M. Davis wrote a letter to Washington saying that it was not in fact a treaty and that this group did not represent the mass opinions of the Cherokee people.

Ross continued to lobby supporters in the North to travel to Washington. In February 1836, Ross presented the signatures of 13,000 Cherokee in opposition to the treaty to Congress. Despite the efforts of Ross and supporters, on May 23, 1836, Congress ratified the treaty by one vote. The Cherokee were given two years to evacuate the land and travel west. Ross and his supporters continued to protest the treaty through 1837. The Cherokee refused any rations and clothing that the government offered them for the trip, so as to not compromise their position. Their efforts were to no avail, though, and in 1838, the Cherokee began the migration west along what is often called the Trail of Tears. In the summer of 1838, many Cherokee were placed in internment camps. Though estimates vary, approximately 4000 Cherokee died during the trip from dysentery, exposure, and other diseases.

## Research Notes

### Sources:

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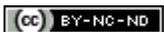
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Sachie Hopkins-Hayakawa, 29/04/2011

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