*Chapter 7:* As Long As Grass Grows or Water Runs Zinn Excerpts

And so, Indian Removal, as it has been politely called, cleared the land for white occupancy between the Appalachians and the Mississippi, cleared it for cotton in the South and grain in the North, for expansion, immigration, canals, railroads, new cities, and the building of a huge continental empire clear across to the Pacific Ocean. The cost in human life cannot be accurately measured, in suffering not even roughly measured. Most of the history books given to children pass quickly over it.

Statistics tell the story. We find these in Michael Rogin's *Fathers and Children*: In 1790, there were 3,900,000 Americans, and most of them lived within 50 miles of the Atlantic Ocean. By 1830, there were 13 million Americans, and by 1840, 4,500,000 had crossed the Appalachian Mountains into the Mississippi Valley-that huge expanse of land crisscrossed by rivers flowing into the Mississippi from east and west. In 1820, 120,000 Indians lived east of the Mississippi. By 1844, fewer than 30,000 were left. Most of them had been forced to migrate westward. But the word "force" cannot convey what happened.

In the Revolutionary War, almost every important Indian nation fought on the side of the British. The British signed for peace and went home; the Indians were already home, and so they continued fighting the Americans on the frontier, in a set of desperate holding operations. Washington's war- enfeebled militia could not drive them back. After scouting forces were demolished one after the other, he tried to follow a policy of conciliation. His Secretary of War, Henry Knox, said: "The Indians being the prior occupants, possess the right of the soil." His Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, said in 1791 that where Indians lived within state boundaries they should not be interfered with, and that the government should remove white settlers who tried to encroach on them.

But as whites continued to move westward, the pressure on the national government increased. By the time Jefferson became President, in 1800, there were 700,000 white settlers west of the mountains. They moved into Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, in the North; into Alabama and Mississippi in the South. These whites outnumbered the Indians about eight to one. Jefferson now committed the federal government to promote future removal of the Creek and the Cherokee from Georgia. Aggressive activity against the Indians mounted in the Indiana territory under Governor William Henry Harrison.

When Jefferson doubled the size of the nation by purchasing the Louisiana territory from France in 1803-thus extending the western frontier from the Appalachians across the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains-he thought the Indians could move there. He proposed to Congress that Indians should be encouraged to settle down on smaller tracts and do farming; also, they should be encouraged to trade with whites, to incur debts, and then to pay off these debts with tracts of land. ".. . Two measures are deemed expedient. First to encourage them to abandon hunting... - Secondly, To Multiply trading houses among them ... leading them thus to agriculture, to manufactures, and civilization...."

Jefferson's talk of "agriculture . . . manufactures . . . civilization" is crucial. Indian removal was necessary for the opening of the vast American lands to agriculture, to commerce, to markets, to money, to the development of the modern capitalist economy. Land was indispensable for all this, and after the Revolution, huge sections of land were bought up by rich speculators, including George Washington and Patrick Henry. In North Carolina, rich tracts of land belonging to the Chickasaw Indians were put on sale, although the Chickasaws were among the few Indian tribes fighting on the side of the Revolution, and a treaty had been signed with them guaranteeing their land. John Donelson, a state surveyor, ended up with 20,000 acres of land near what is now Chattanooga. His son-in-law made twenty-two trips out of Nashville in 1795 for land deals. This was Andrew Jackson.

Jackson was a land speculator, merchant, slave trader, and the most aggressive enemy of the Indians in early American history. He became a hero of the War of 1812, which was not (as usually depicted in American textbooks) just a war against England for survival, but a war for the expansion of the new nation, into Florida, into Canada, into Indian territory.

Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief and noted orator, tried to unite the Indians against the white invasion:

**The way, and the only way, to check and to stop this evil, is for all the Redmen to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land, as it was at first and should be yet; for it was never divided, but belongs to all for the use of each. That no part has a right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers-those who want all and will not do with less.**

Angered when fellow Indians were induced to cede a great tract of land to the United States government, Tecumseh organized in 1811 an Indian gathering of five thousand, on the bank of the Tallapoosa River in Alabama, and told them: "Let the white race perish. They seize your land; they corrupt your women, they trample on the ashes of your dead! Back whence they came, upon a trail of blood, they must be driven."

The Creeks, who occupied most of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, were divided among themselves. Some were willing to adopt the civilization of the white man in order to live in peace. Others, insisting on their land and their culture, were called "Red Sticks." The Red Sticks in 1813 massacred 250 people at Fort Mims, whereupon Jackson's troops burned down a Creek village, killing men, women, children. Jackson established the tactic of promising rewards in land and plunder: ". .. if either party, cherokees, friendly creeks, or whites, takes property of the Red Sticks, the property belongs to those who take it."

Not all his enlisted men were enthusiastic for the fighting. There were mutinies; the men were hungry, their enlistment terms were up, they were tired of fighting and wanted to go home. Jackson wrote to his wife about "the once brave and patriotic volunteers .. . sunk ... to mere whining, complaining, seditioners and mutineers.. .." When a seventeen-year-old soldier who had refused to clean up his food, and threatened his officer with a gun, was sentenced to death by a court-martial, Jackson turned down a plea for commutation of sentence and ordered the execution to proceed. He then walked out of earshot of the firing squad.

Jackson became a national hero when in 1814 he fought the Battle of Horseshoe Bend against a thousand Creeks and killed eight hundred of them, with few casualties on his side. His white troops had failed in a frontal attack on the Creeks, but the Cherokees with him, promised governmental friendship if they joined the war, swam the river, came up behind the Creeks, and won the battle for Jackson.

When the war ended, Jackson and friends of his began buying up the seized Creek lands. He got himself appointed treaty commissioner and dictated a treaty which took away half the land of the Creek nation. Rogin says it was "the largest single Indian cession of southern American land." It took land from Creeks who had fought with Jackson as well as those who had fought against him, and when Big Warrior, a chief of the friendly Creeks, protested, Jackson said:

**Listen.. . . The United States would have been justified by the Great Spirit, had they taken all the land of the nation.. .. Listen-the truth is, the great body of the Creek chiefs and warriors did not respect the power of the United States-They thought we were an insignificant nation-that we would be overpowered by the British... . They were fat with eating beef- they wanted flogging. .. . We bleed our enemies in such eases to give them their senses.**

As Rogin puts it: "Jackson had conquered 'the cream of the Creek country,' and it would guarantee southwestern prosperity. He had supplied the expanding cotton kingdom with a vast and valuable acreage." Jackson's 1814 treaty with the Creeks started something new and important. It granted Indians individual ownership of land, thus splitting Indian from Indian, breaking up communal landholding, bribing some with land, leaving others out-introducing the competition and conniving that marked the spirit of Western capitalism. It fitted well the old Jeffersonian idea of how to handle the Indians, by bringing them into "civilization."

If the Indians would only move to new lands across the Mississippi, Cass promised in 1825 at a treaty council with Shawnees and Cherokees, "The United States will never ask for your land there. This I promise you in the name of your great father, the President. That country he assigns to his red people, to be held by them and their children's children forever."