

*President Jackson proudly announced to Congress in 1830 that the “benevolent policy of the government . . . in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a conclusion.” To the Indians being removed, the policy did not appear benevolent. In 1836, Congress ratified the Treaty of New Echota, which provided that the Cherokees would relinquish all claims to land east of the Mississippi in return for land west of the Mississippi, a large cash payment, and help moving to their new homes. The treaty bitterly divided the Cherokees. The largest group, led by the principal chief, John Ross, opposed the treaty and insisted that the Cherokees not give up their lands. A minority group, led by Elias Boudinot, signed the treaty and urged other Cherokees to accept its terms. The following selections from the letters of Ross and Boudinot reveal the clashing assessments among Cherokees about the threats they confronted and how best to respond to them.*

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## John Ross

### *Answer to Inquiries from a Friend, 1836*

I wish I could acquiesce in your impression, that a Treaty has been made, by which every difficulty between the Cherokees and the United States has been set at rest; but I must candidly say, that I know of no such Treaty. I do not mean to prophesy any similar troubles to those which have, in other cases, followed the failure to adjust disputed points with Indians; the Cherokees act on a principle preventing apprehensions of that nature—their principle is, “endure and forbear”; but I must distinctly declare to you that I believe, the document<sup>1</sup> signed by unauthorized individuals at Washington, will never be regarded by the Cherokee nation as a Treaty. The delegation appointed by the people to make a Treaty, have protested against that instrument “as deceptive to the world and a fraud upon the Cherokee people.” . . .

With your impressions concerning the advantages secured by the subtle instrument in question, you will, no doubt, wonder at this opposition. But it possesses not the advantages you and others imagine; and that is the reason why it has encountered, and ever will encounter opposition. You suppose we are to be removed through it from a home, by circumstances rendered disagreeable and even untenable, to be secured in a better home, where nothing can disturb or dispossess us. *Here is the great mystification.* We are not secured in the new home promised to us. We are exposed to precisely the same miseries, from which, if this measure is enforced, the United States’ power professes to relieve us, but does so entirely by the exercise of that power, against our will.

If we really had the security you and others suppose we have, we would not thus complain. . . .

One impression concerning us, is, that though we object to removal, as we are equally averse to becoming citizens of the United States, we ought to be forced to remove; to be tied hand and foot and conveyed to the extreme western frontier, and then turned loose among the wild beasts of the wilderness. Now, the fact is, we never have objected to become citizens of the United States and to conform to her laws; but in the event of conforming to her laws, we have required the protection and privileges of her laws to accompany that conformity on our part. We have asked this repeatedly and repeatedly has it been denied. . . .

In conclusion I would observe, that I still strongly hope we shall find ultimate justice from the good sense of the administration and of the people of the United States. I will not even yet believe that either the one or the other would wrong us

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From John Ross, *Letter in Answer to Inquiries from a Friend*, July 2, 1836; Elias Boudinot, *Letters and Other Papers Relating to Cherokee Affairs: Being a Reply to Sundry Publications by John Ross, 1837*, in *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents*, eds. Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green (Boston: Bedford Books, 1995), 147–51, 153–59.

<sup>1</sup>the document: The Treaty of New Echota.

with their eyes open. I am persuaded they have erred only in ignorance, and an ignorance forced upon them by the misrepresentation and artifices of the interested. . . . The Cherokees, under any circumstances, have no weapon to use but argument. If that should fail, they must submit, when their time shall come, in silence, but honest argument they cannot think will be forever used in vain. The Cherokee people will always hold themselves ready to respect a *real* treaty and bound to sustain any treaty which they can feel that they are bound to respect. But they are certain not to consider the attempt of a very few persons to sell the country for themselves, as obligatory upon them, and I and all my associates in the regular delegation, still look confidently to the effect of a sense of justice upon the American community, in producing a real settlement of this question, upon equitable terms and with competent authorities. But, on one point, you may be perfectly at rest. Deeply as our people feel, I cannot suppose they will ever be goaded by those feelings to any acts of violence. No, sir. They have been too long inured [accustomed] to suffering without resistance, and they still look to the sympathies and not to the fears, of those who have them in their power. In certain recent discussions in the representative hall at Washington, our enemies made it an objection against me and against others, that we were not Indians, but had *the principles* of white men, and were consequently unworthy of a hearing in the Indian cause. I will own that it has been my pride, as Principal Chief of the Cherokees, to implant in the bosoms of the people, and to cherish in my own, *the principles* of white men! It is to this fact that our white neighbours must ascribe their safety under the smart of the wrongs we have suffered from them. It is in this they may confide for our continued patience. But when I speak of *the principles* of white men, I speak not of such principles as actuate those who talk thus to us, but of those mighty principles to which the United States owes her greatness and her liberty. To principles like these even yet we turn with confidence for redemption from our miseries. When Congress shall be less overwhelmed with business, no doubt, in some way, the matter may be brought to a reconsideration, and when the representatives of the American people have leisure to see how little it will cost them to be just, we are confident they will be true to themselves, in acting with good faith towards us. Be certain that while the Cherokees are endeavouring to obtain a more friendly consideration from the United States, they will not forget to show by their circumspection how well they merit it; and though no doubt there are many who will represent them otherwise, for injurious purposes, I can assure you that the white people have nothing to apprehend, even from our sense of contumely<sup>2</sup> and unfairness, unless it be through the perverse and the treacherous manoeuvres of such agents as they themselves may keep among us.

## Elias Boudinot

### *A Reply to John Ross, 1837*

“What is to be done?” was a natural inquiry, after we found that all our efforts to obtain redress from the General Government, *on the land of our fathers*, had been of no avail. The first rupture among ourselves was the moment we presumed to answer that question. To a portion of the Cherokee people it early became evident

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<sup>2</sup>contumely: Humiliating insults.

that the interest of their countrymen and the happiness of their posterity, depended upon an entire change of policy. Instead of contending uselessly against superior power, the only course left, was, to yield to circumstances over which they had no control.

In all difficulties of this kind, between the United States and the Cherokees, the only mode of settling them has been by treaties; consequently, when a portion of our people became convinced that no other measures would avail, they became the *advocates of a treaty*, as the only means to extricate the Cherokees from their perplexities; hence they were called *the treaty party*. Those who maintained the old policy, were known as the *anti-treaty party*. At the head of the latter has been Mr. John Ross. . . .

To advocate a treaty was to declare war against the established habits of thinking peculiar to the aborigines. It was to come in contact with settled prejudices—with the deep rooted attachment for the soil of our forefathers. Aside from these natural obstacles, the influence of the chiefs, who were ready to take advantage of the well known feelings of the Cherokees, in reference to their lands, was put in active requisition against us. . . .

It is with sincere regret that I notice you [John Ross] say little or nothing about the moral condition of this people, as affected by present circumstances. I have searched in vain, in all your late communications, for some indication of your sensibility upon this point. . . . Indeed, you seem to have forgotten that your people are a community of moral beings, capable of an elevation to an equal standing with the most civilized and virtuous, or a deterioration to the level of the most degraded, of our race. . . . Can it be possible that you consider the mere pains and privations of the body, and the loss of a paltry sum of money, of a paramount importance to the depression of the mind and the degradation and pollution of the soul? That the difficulties under which they are laboring, originating from the operation of the State laws, and their absorption by a white population, *will* affect them in that light, I need not here stop to argue with you: that they have *already* affected them, is a fact too palpable, too notorious, for us to deny it: that they will *increase* to affect them, in proportion to the delay of applying the remedy, we need only judge from past experience. How, then, can you reconcile your conscience and your sense of what is demanded by the best interest of your people. . . . How can you persist in deluding your people with phantoms, and in your opposition to that which alone is practicable, when you see them dying a moral death?

To be sure, from your account of the condition and circumstances of the Cherokees, the public may form an idea different from what my remarks may seem to convey. When applied to a portion of our people, confined mostly to whites intermarried among us, and the descendants of whites, your account is probably correct . . . but look at the mass, look at the entire population as it now is, and say, can you see any indication of a progressing improvement, anything that can encourage a philanthropist? You know that it is almost a dreary waste. I care not if I am accounted a slanderer of my country's reputation; every observing man in this nation knows that I speak the words of truth and soberness. In the light that I consider my countrymen, not as mere animals, and to judge of their happiness by their condition as such, which, to be sure, is bad enough, but as moral beings, to be affected for better or for worse by moral circumstances, I say their condition is wretched. Look, my dear sir, around you, and see the progress that vice and immorality have already made! see the spread of intemperance, and the wretchedness and misery it has already occasioned! I need not reason with a man of your

sense and discernment, and of your observation, to show the debasing character of that vice to our people; you will find an argument in every tipping shop in the country; you will find its cruel effects in the bloody tragedies that are frequently occurring in the frequent convictions and executions for murders, and in the tears and groans of the widows and fatherless, rendered homeless, naked, and hungry, by this vile curse of our race. And has it stopped its cruel ravages with the lower or poorer classes of our people? Are the higher orders, if I may so speak, left untainted? While there are honorable exceptions in all classes . . . it is not to be denied that, as a people, we are making a rapid tendency to a general immorality and debasement. What more evidence do we need, to prove this general tendency, than the slow but sure insinuation of the lower vices into our female population? Oh! it is heart-rending to think of these things, much more to speak of them; but the world *will* know them, the world *does* know them, and we need not try to hide our shame. . . .

If the dark picture which I have here drawn is a true one, and no candid person will say it is an exaggerated one, can we see a brighter prospect ahead? In another country, and under other circumstances, there is a *better* prospect. Removal, then, is the only remedy, the only *practicable* remedy. By it there *may* be finally a renovation; our people *may* rise from their very ashes, to become prosperous and happy, and a credit to our race. Such has been and is now my opinion, and under such a settled opinion I have acted in all this affair. My language has been: "fly for your lives"; it is now the same. I would say to my countrymen, you among the rest, fly from the moral pestilence that will finally destroy our nation.

What is the prospect in reference to *your* plan of relief, if you are understood at all to have any plan? It is dark and gloomy beyond description. Subject the Cherokees to the laws of the States in their present condition? It matters not how favorable those laws may be, instead of remedying the evil you would only rivet the chains and fasten the manacles of their servitude and degradation. The final destiny of our race, under such circumstances, is too revolting to think of. Its course must be downward, until it finally becomes extinct or is merged in another race, more ignoble and more detested. Take my word for it, it is the sure consummation, if you succeed in preventing the removal of your people. The time will come when there will be only here and there those who can be called upon to sign a protest, or to vote against a treaty for their removal; when the few remnants of our once happy and improving nation will be viewed by posterity with curious and gazing interest, as relics of a brave and noble race. Are our people destined to such a catastrophe? Are we to run the race of all our brethren who have gone before us, and of whom hardly any thing is known but their name, and, perhaps, only here and there a solitary being, waking, "as a ghost over the ashes of his fathers," to remind a stranger that such a race *once* existed? May God preserve us from such a destiny.

1. For Ross, what did the formula endure and restrain suggest the Cherokees should do? In what sense did Ross believe disputation was a weapon?
2. What was Ross's view of the "principles of white men"? How did they differ from the principles of Cherokees?
3. According to Boudinot , why was removal the only course left? Why was the moral specify of the Cherokees an inducement for removal?
4. According to Boudinot, what would be the result of following Ross's plan and not leaving ancestral lands to the East?
5. How did Ross and Boudinot differ in their views of whites and of state and federal government? How did they differ in their views of Cherokees? What did each see as the most important sources of security and safety?