Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____
Advanced Placement United States History Mr. Gallucci

THE REMOVAL OF THE CHEROKEE

By the 1820s, white demands for Indian lands had reached fever pitch. They rejected the federal government's "civilization" policy that permitted Indians who embraced white culture to retain their lands. Andrew Jackson, a notorious Indian hater, argued that the government was not obliged to honor its treaties with Indian nations. His position was very popular among the southerners and westerners who helped him win the presidency in 1828.

Determined to honor this political debt, President Jackson implemented a coercive removal policy in 1829. In 1830, Jackson persuaded Congress to pass the Indian Removal Act, granting the president authority to remove Indians forcibly if necessary. At the same time, southern states moved against local tribes. After the discovery of gold on Cherokee property, the Georgia legislature attempted to invalidate Cherokee laws and to confiscate tribal lands.

These developments infuriated the Cherokee. Having adopted white culture more than any other tribe, the Cherokee farmed, owned slaves, had a written language and legal code, and embraced evangelical Christianity. They appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court to stop Georgia's actions. In Worcester v. Georgia (1832), the Court ruled on behalf of the Cherokee, claiming that no state had the right to invalidate a federal treaty made with a "domestic dependent nation." Jackson ignored the ruling. In 1835, federal officials negotiated the Treaty of New Echota with a small group of Cherokee. The treaty ceded all Cherokee lands east of the Mississippi in exchange for $5.6 million and relocation. Other Cherokees later murdered those who signed the agreement. Between 1835 and 1838, approximately 15,000 Cherokee were moved westward to the Indian Territory. About 4,000 died on the so-called Trail of Tears.

Document 1: In this selection, the Cherokees protest the state of Georgia's attempts to relocate them:

We are aware, that some persons suppose it will be for our advantage to remove beyond the Mississippi. We think otherwise. Our people universally think otherwise. Thinking that it would be fatal to their interests, they have almost to a man sent their memorial to congress, deprecating the necessity of a removal. This question was distinctly before their minds when they signed their memorial. Not an adult person can be found, who has not an opinion on the subject, and if the people were to understand distinctly, that they could be protected against the laws of the neighboring states, there is probably not an adult person in the nation, who would think it best to remove; though possibly a few might emigrate individually. There are doubtless many, who would flee to an unknown country, however beset with dangers, privations and sufferings, rather than be sentenced to spend six years in a Georgia prison for advising one of their neighbors not to betray his country. And there are others who could not think of living as outlaws in their native land, exposed to numberless vexations, and excluded from being parties or witnesses in a court of justice. It is incredible that Georgia should ever have enacted the oppressive laws to which reference is here made, unless she had supposed that something extremely terrific in its character was necessary in order to make the Cherokees willing to remove. We are not willing to remove; and if we could be brought to this extremity, it would be not by argument, not because our judgment was satisfied, not because our condition will be improved; but only because we cannot endure to be deprived of our national and individual rights and subjected to a process of intolerable oppression.

We wish to remain on the land of our fathers. We have a perfect and original right to remain without interruption or molestation. The treaties with us, and laws of the United States made in pursuance of treaties, guarantee our residence and our privileges, and secure us against intruders. Our only request is, that these treaties may be fulfilled, and these laws executed....

The removal of families to a new country, even under the most favorable auspices, and when the spirits are sustained by pleasing visions of the future, is attended with much depression of mind and sinking of heart. This is the case, when the removal is a matter of decided preference, and when the persons concerned are in early youth or vigorous manhood. Judge, then, what must be the circumstances of a removal, when a whole community, embracing persons of all classes and every description, from the infant to the man of extreme old age, the sick, the blind, the lame, the improvident, the reckless, the desperate, as well as the prudent, the considerate, the industrious, are compelled to remove by odious and intolerable vexations and persecutions, brought upon them in the forms of law, when all will agree only in this, that they have been cruelly robbed of their country, in violation of the most solemn compacts, which it is possible for communities to form with each other; and that, if they should make

themselves comfortable in their new residence, they have nothing to expect hereafter but to be the victims of a future legalized robbery!

Such we deem, and are absolutely certain, will be the feeling of the whole Cherokee people, if they are forcibly compelled, by the laws of Georgia, to remove; and with these feelings, how is it possible that we should pursue our present course of improvement, or avoid sinking in to utter despondency? We have been called a poor, ignorant, and degraded people. We certainly are not rich; nor have we ever boasted of our knowledge, or our moral or intellectual elevation. But there is not a man within our limits so ignorant as not to know that he has a right to live on the land of his fathers, in the possession of his immemorial privileges, and that this right has been acknowledged and guaranteed by the United States; nor is there a man so degraded as not to feel a keen sense of injury, on being deprived of this right and driven into exile.

Document 2: John G. Burnett, a private in the United States army, witnessed the removal of the Cherokee:

Being acquainted with many of the Indians and able to speak their language, I was sent as an interpreter into the Smokey Mountain Country in May, 1838, and witnessed the execution of the most brutal order in the history of American warfare. I saw the helpless Cherokees arrested and dragged from their homes, and driven at bayonet point into the stockades. And in the chill of a drizzling rain on an October morning, I saw them loaded like cattle or sheep into 645 wagons and started toward the west.

One can never forget the sadness of that morning. Chief John Ross led in prayer and when the bugle sounded and the wagons started rolling many of the children rose to their feet and waved their little hands good-bye to their mountain homes, knowing they were leaving them forever. Many of these helpless people did not have blankets and many of them had been driven from home barefooted.

On the morning of November 17th we encountered a terrific sleet and snow storm with freezing temperatures and from that day until we reached the end of the fateful journey on March 26th, 1939, the suffering of the Cherokees were awful. The trail of the exiles was a trail of death. They had to sleep in the wagons and on the ground without fire. And I have known as many as 22 of them to die in one night of pneumonia due to ill treatment, cold, and exposure. Among this number was the beautiful wife of Chief John Ross. This noble-hearted woman died a martyr to childhood, giving her only blanket for the protection of a sick child. She rode thinly clad through a blinding sleet and snow storm, developed pneumonia and died in the still hours of a bleak winter night…

Document 3: Wahnenauhi, a Cherokee woman, sent the following letter to the American government in 1889. Here she describes a scene from the removal of her tribe:

Perish or remove! It might be remove *and* perish! A long journey through the Wilderness – could the little ones endure? And how about the sick? The old people and infirm, could they possibly endure the long tedious journey; Should they leave?

This had been the home of their Ancestors from time out of mind. Everything they held dear on earth was here, *must* they leave? The graves of their kindred forsaken would be desecrated by the hand of the White Man. They very air seemed filled with an undercurrent of inexpressible sadness and regret…Some of the Cherokees remained in their homes, determined not to leave. For these soldiers were sent, by Georgia, and they were gathered up and driven, at the point of the bayonet, into camp with the others. They were not allowed to take any of their household stuff, but were compelled to leave as they were, with only the clothes which they had on. One old, very told man, asked the soldiers to allow him time to pray once more, with his family in the dear old home, before he left it forever. The answer was, with a brutal oath, "No! no time for prayers! Go!" at the same time giving him a rude push toward the door. Indians were evicted, the whites entered, taking full possession of everything left.

Questions: Please answer on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Why do the Cherokee reject the removal policy in the first document? Provide several examples.
2. How does Private Burnett characterize the events of 1838 – 1839?
3. How are Burnett's and Wahnenauhi's accounts similar? How are they different?
4. Explain why the Cherokees' experiences in 1838 – 1839 are known as the Trail of Tears.