



## Handout B

### Background:

In the 19th century, the population in the United States grew rapidly, and so did the demand for new land. Settlers wanted to expand their territory and cultivate the land that belonged to the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole nations.

In particular, President Andrew Jackson pushed for the relocation of Indian tribes, believing that it would benefit them. In 1830, he strongly advocated for the Indian Removal Act, which Congress passed. The law forced Native Americans living east of the Mississippi River to move west, so that their homelands could be developed for economic purposes. Tribes that agreed to the conditions moved peacefully. The members of tribes that resisted were forcefully removed. For example, the Cherokee tribe filed a lawsuit in an effort to stay on its land, but the request was denied and eventually the tribe signed an illegitimate treaty. After one group of Cherokee tribe members refused to relocate, 7,000 U.S. troops forced them off their land. They were not allowed time to gather their belongings, and as they left, whites looted their homes. Many Cherokees had to make their way westward in a march that became known as the Trail of Tears. Along the way, 4,000 Cherokees died from cold, hunger and disease.

By 1840, more than 70,000 Native Americans had moved to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River. As the population of the United States grew and more settlers moved westward, Indians fought unsuccessfully to keep their lands. In 1887, Native Americans had roughly 138 million acres of land, compared to the 55.7 million acres of land that today comprise U.S. government reservations specifically designated for Native Americans.

#### Sources:

PBS. "Africans in America: Indian Removal: 1814-1858."  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2959.html>

Powersource. "Cherokee Removal: The Trail Where They Cried."  
<http://www.powersource.com/cocinc/history/trail.htm>

National Atlas of the United States. "Indian Lands of the United States."  
<http://www.nationalatlas.gov/mld/indlanp.html>

PBS. "New Perspectives on the West: Events in the West: 1880-1890."  
[http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1880\\_1890.htm](http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1880_1890.htm)

### Scenario:

Your tribe has lived on an Indian reservation since the mid-1800s, after U.S. troops unfairly and brutally forced your ancestors to leave the land where they had lived for hundreds of years. Your tribe feels no historical connection to the land on the reservation. Your life there has been very difficult. There are few job opportunities, and your tribe has constantly struggled with poverty. You believe that having your tribe's historic land returned is the key to restoring your people's dignity and rights and will provide opportunity for greater economic prosperity.

The U.S. government has pledged to return to your tribe a percentage of its historic homeland. As part of this process of restitution, you have submitted a land claim with evidence that your tribe used to live on the land in question. So far, the current landowners have not agreed to

move off of the land, arguing that the process is unconstitutional. They plan to file suit against the U.S. government and tie things up in the court system. However, you believe they should leave the land because they have unjustly benefited from the actions of early American settlers who wrongly took the land from your ancestors. Your tribe is concerned that the government is not acting quickly enough to restore the lands. Will this be another example of broken promises made to your people by the U.S. government?

**React:**

Take a few minutes to react in writing to the above scenario from your given perspective. What benefits would receiving this land bring to your tribe? In your view, should the U.S. government force current landowners to sell their land and move? Why or why not?