



Trail of Tears: An American Tragedy

John Heird

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Before the first non-Indians arrived on our shores, there were over ten million Native Americans on this continent. Within the next three centuries, over nine million of the original population had been destroyed by disease, famine, or warfare. By the early nineteenth century, governmental plans through a European mindset of racial superiority – and the seeds of manifest destiny – stirred the greed in American’s hearts. One of the most tragic and regrettable periods of this disaster involved the tribes east of the Mississippi and is referred to as the Trail of Tears. Although many tribes were affected – nearly all of the “five civilized tribes” – the Cherokee are most associated with this calamity.

Presidents’ Washington, Jefferson, and especially Andrew Jackson, all had the policy and strong desire to remove Native Americans – by means – West to the land beyond the Mississippi. Broken promises, treaties, and governmental lies all contributed to policies where this was accomplished. The policy came to a head during the 1820’s and 30’s in the State of Georgia (and, with some degree in Tennessee, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi). There, the Georgia state government (the last of the thirteen colonies to cede their land to the federal republic) was exceedingly aggressive in passing laws, sometimes in violation to federal policy, to claim Native American lands and forcibly remove them.

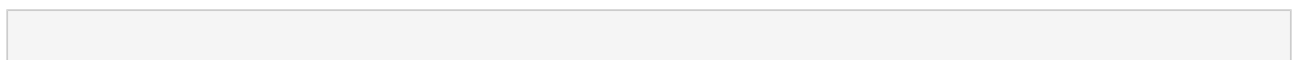
All of the actions by the white government and aggressive settlers were wrapped in a public policy to “educate and civilize” the heathen to bring them into line with white society. The Cherokee, especially, bought into this “lie” that would never happen, no matter how much they tried to abandon their culture and to assimilate. Under the shadowy cover of laws, court decisions, stubborn determination, and the ultimate truth of an unstoppable white expansion, the Cherokee where, time after time, defeated in their attempt to “become white and part of society.”

In the decade of 1830, fueled by an unchecked Georgia government support militia, tensions between Georgia and the Cherokee Nation were brought to a crisis by the discovery of gold near Dahlonega, Georgia in 1829. This resulted in the Georgia Gold Rush, and the Indian Removal Act passed through Congress by President Andrew Jackson (in direct reversal of his promises and support of the Cherokee). Now the tragedy began in force.

Bigotry took its mask – and gloves – off and the Cherokee were forced to move at bayonet point. In the years, 1838-39, over 16,000 Cherokee were forcibly removed and over 4,000 died tragically on the 800-mile forced march. It was called in Cherokee, NUNNA DAUL TSUNY: “The Trail Where We Cried.”

The goal of *The Trail of Tears – The Screenplay*, is a faithful representation of these tragic events as seen through the eyes of Elias Boudinot, an educated Cherokee leader. Although Boudinot gave up his heritage and, through his faithful attempts to become “civilized,” he received nothing but bigotry, sorrow, and death. This is a story that is far past the time to be told. It will be presented, not only in absolute historical accuracy, but in a moving story of dreams, hopes, pride, determination, and love—all betrayed and tragically destroyed. It is a true American tragedy.

Trail of Tears was written under contract for a film production company that went under financially before principal photography could begin. Thereupon, the author was left with the project to develop and “put in the mill” by himself. This screenplay is currently (as of 2014) in process of making the rounds. The writer felt the story was important enough to find a readership audience; therefore, he has submitted the work to Amazon (CreateSpace and Kindle) for that purpose. If you enjoyed the story of one of America’s great tragedies, please check out *Digger’s Moon*, the author’s full-length novel on the United States Marshals in the Indian Territory of 1875.



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