Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s

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Andrew Jackson's request to Congress in December 1829 for federal monies to remove Southeast Indians beyond the Mississippi River generated the most intense public opposition that the United States had witnessed. In six short months, removal opponents launched massive petition drives that called on Congress to defeat removal and to uphold Indian rights to property. To block removal, Catharine Beecher and Lydia Sigourney organized the first national women's petition campaign and flooded Congress with antiremoval petitions, making a bold claim for women's place in national political discourse. The experience of opposing removal prompted some reformers to rethink their position on abolition and to reject African colonization in favor of immediatism.

The strength of antiremoval forces stunned Martin Van Buren who, writing of the events over twenty years later, portrayed the government's side as besieged from all quarters and stated flatly that “a more persevering opposition to a public measure had scarcely ever been made.” Though Jackson's former vice president consistently defended removal, he believed that the issue of Indian removal “unlike histories of many great questions which agitate the public mind in their day will in all probability endure . . . as long as the government itself, and will in time occupy the minds and feelings of our people.” It was an issue, Van Buren concluded, in which the nation was responsible “to the opinion of the great family of nations, as it involves the course we have pursued and shall pursue towards a people comparatively weak.”

Andrew Jackson had placed Indian removal at the top of his administration's priorities. Though Jackson himself wrote comparatively little about legislative goals, Mar-

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tin Van Buren, who served as Jackson's secretary of state, vice president, and confidant, wrote of the Indian Removal Act that "no other subject was of greater importance than this. . . . General Jackson staked the success of his administration upon this measure." From the beginning of his administration, Van Buren wrote, the president's policy goals were plainly prioritized and Indian removal headed the legislative agenda: "First, the removal of the Indians from the vicinity of the white population and their settlement beyond the Mississippi. Second, to put a stop to the abuses of the Federal government in regard to internal improvements. . . . Third, to oppose as well the existing re-incorporation of the existing National Bank." When the removal bill was introduced into Congress, one representative noted that it "came recommended to us as the peculiar favorite of the executive."2

President Jackson's proposed legislation to move the Southeast Indians across the Mississippi was not new. The heart of Indian land policy had always been nothing less than massive Indian cessions to white markets, and treaties were the preferred weapons of transfer. The removal crisis of Jackson's administration was precipitated by the Georgia Compact of 1802 between the national government and Georgia (an agreement to which no Indian group was party), which provided that Georgia would relinquish all claims to western lands in return for Washington's assuming the costs of moving Indians off land that Georgia claimed "as soon as the same can be peaceably obtained on reasonable terms." Between 1802 and 1819, federal treaties with the southern Indians transferred 20 million acres of land to white settlers, a greater expansion of the territory open to slaveholding than the Missouri Compromise had provided. By 1819 only 5 million acres of land were left to the Cherokee, and when they refused to cede any more land, Georgia officials called on the federal government to remove the Indians by force, if necessary. For years the federal government resisted those demands, but Jackson's election brought, for the first time, an executive who wholeheartedly favored such removal.3

President Jackson offered two rationales for Indian removal: one, that having an independent Indian nation residing within the borders of any state was an intolerable situation, and two, that for their own survival, southeastern Indians had to move across the Mississippi away from white encroachment. Jackson and other removal proponents insisted that should the southern Indians remain east of the Mississippi, they would shortly become "extinct" as whites steadily invaded their land and destroyed Indian life and culture. Moving the Indians west, Jackson argued, would

2 Ibid., 275–76; "Maysville and Lexington Roads," Niles' Weekly Register, June 19, 1830, pp. 308–9. Andrew Jackson's first federal appointments indicated his removal priorities. He named ardent proponents of removal to government positions crucial in carrying it out: John Eaton as secretary of war (succeeded by Lewis Cass) and the Georgian John M. Berrien as attorney general.

solve both of those difficulties and preserve the Indians. Critics pointed out that the removal solution conveniently increased vast and valuable acreage for white settlers and that land transfer was the real goal, humanitarian concerns to halt Indian “extinction” notwithstanding.\(^4\)

Andrew Jackson’s pursuit of Indian removal took by surprise many Americans who had believed that under presidents James Monroe and John Quincy Adams the federal government’s Indian policy was becoming more, rather than less, beneficent. The dismay aroused by President Jackson’s position was followed by shock at the speed with which Georgia legislators moved to reap the benefits of his election. Indian removal by force, if necessary, simultaneously dispossessed Indians and increased demand for slave labor in the seized territory. As such, it involved the political issues of the day that roiled American politics most: relations with Indians, relations with Africans, states’ rights, and the potential growth of the system of slave labor. That American reform organizations, originally formed to improve the American character through voluntary moral persuasion, organized a powerful challenge to Jackson’s removal goals was not coincidental. As a proposed federal action, Indian removal symbolized to them a rupture in the national fabric, a portentous triumph of the market values of aggressive acquisitiveness that placed a monetary value on everything and encouraged human exploitation for commercial gain. “How long shall it be that a Christian people . . . shall stand balancing the considerations of profit and loss on a national question of justice and benevolence?” asked the young theological student George Cheever in response to Andrew Jackson’s removal bill. Benevolence involved a search for the general good, for principles of universal application, a willingness to sacrifice for the benefit of those in need. Indian removal appeared to Cheever the direct opposite—an unrestrained striving for individual gain at the expense of the less fortunate. If Indian removal was a striking example of commercial injustice, equally so was its consequence—millions of additional acres for an intensified slave labor system that carried those market values to their destructive end. It is not surprising that throughout the 1820s and into the following decade, issues of Indian policy and Indian removal received more attention in the nation’s periodicals than did issues of tariffs and the Bank of the United States.\(^5\)


\(^5\) Lydia Sigourney summed up these sentiments when she wrote that President James Monroe’s benevolent regard for “our aborigines” seems now to be pervading the higher ranks of society, promising to overcome that stern indifference which has too long been entertained towards the sons of the forest, by a nation which coveted their glory.” L. H. Sigourney, Traits of the Aborigines of America (Boston, 1822), 284. See also “News From the Panoplist,” Boston Recorder, Aug. 21, 1819, p. 138. On the other hand, Martin Van Buren praised Jackson for breaking presidential tradition on removal. John Quincy Adams had, in fact, restored to the Cherokee some land they had signed away under duress. See Fitzpatrick, ed., Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, 276–88. George B. Cheever, “The Removal of the Indians: An Examination of an Article in the North American Review and an Exhibition of the Advancement of the Southern Tribes in Civilization and Christianity,” American Monthly
Opposition to removal can be measured through the new denomination-based periodicals of the 1820s and 1830s, which developed an early and decisive stance against removal. These religious organs were by far the most widely circulated of all periodicals at the time, enjoying a readership far larger and more diverse than that of the traditional party and secular periodicals, whose circulations rarely exceeded 1,500 copies and whose audiences were primarily male and elite. At a time when the esteemed *North American Review* had a circulation of only 3,000, thirty religious periodicals reported subscription lists of 3,000 or more, with fifteen of those having over 5,000 subscribers each. The Methodist *Christian Advocate and Journal* had a subscription list of 25,000, the Presbyterian *New York Observer* over 6,000, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Congregational) *Missionary Herald* 14,000, the *Religious Intelligencer* 5,000, *Zion's Herald* 6,000, and the Congregational *Boston Recorder* over 5,000. Arthur Tappan’s evangelical *New York Journal of Commerce* far outsold every other newspaper in New York. All of these periodicals opposed removal on grounds that it violated legal treaties and that the southern Indians’ practices of agriculture and commerce had made them virtually indistinguishable from the white farmers of Georgia. When southern officials portrayed Southeast Indians as nomadic hunters who could not make their land productive, these papers responded by characterizing removal proponents as motivated primarily by greed, favoring removal because of the considerable Indian assets it transferred, at little cost, to whites.  

Another indicator of deep dissent from Indian removal was the organized opposition of women in towns and communities across the nation. Denied political standing by the nation’s founders, women in the new republic had developed the concept of republican motherhood, which implied that women’s interests could diverge from those of the male electorate and recognized women’s role in promoting public virtue. Republican motherhood sanctioned women’s petitions on widows’ pensions and employment and on behalf of the needy in their communities. In these experiences, women made themselves subjects in the early republic, a status removed from full citizenship but one that laid on women an obligation to act as moral guardians of the nation’s virtue, a duty that required a public presence and public activities. To

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achieve these ends, women created their own organizations and societies to improve social life and alleviate the harsher consequences of the market economy for urban and rural life.7

The new denomination-based newspapers undermined traditional political hierarchies in their pages by according women's work a status equal to men's public activities. They printed side by side accounts of women's benevolent activities, men's political campaigns and elections, articles on the health of women and children, marriage announcements, details of legislative activity, reports of mission achievements. In the new newspapers, the sharp partisanship that characterized the traditional political press was absent. That absence implicitly de-emphasized the importance of a formal politics that excluded women while it justified women's public work on behalf of others within civic society.8

Many women's charitable organizations made their priority the missions and schools for American Indians in the American South and the Northeast, and their philanthropy was markedly personal; they corresponded regularly with missionaries and Indian students at the mission schools and spoke of them as personal friends. This activity reflected established patterns. Women's associations often provided clergymen with financial support. For example, Charles Finney's first missionary commission came from the Utica Female Missionary Society in March 1824. About half of the donors listed in the Missionary Herald's reports appear to be women or women's organizations. Indeed, the first bequest to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions came from Sally Thomas, a domestic worker who bequeathed to it her life's savings. Women organized collections of foodstuffs, fabric, writing materials, books, and money to educate Indian youths, whose names and life stories they knew, and to support the missionaries who taught them. During the 1820s, women regularly sponsored Indian youth and community leaders from the Southeast as they toured northern areas and spoke to overflow public crowds about the schools and agricultural progress in their communities. In 1824, when Georgia representatives opposed federal appropriations of money for schools and agriculture in Cherokee territory, arguing that the Cherokees were becoming "extinct" anyway and had hardly any schools and even less agriculture, denominational periodicals ran lengthy responses from southern Indians and printed tables detailing the number of Cherokee schools and scholars, their extensive agriculture and com-

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8 The lead article in the largest of these papers, the Christian Advocate, was frequently a report of a female association's activities and meetings. The contributors were usually anonymous, but women appear to have written many of these pieces. A phrase such as "let us, beloved sisters," for example, indicates female authorship. See, for example, "New York Female Association Society Report," Christian Advocate, Jan. 15, 1830, p. 1.
mer. Furthermore, they pointed out, the history of white dealings with Indian tribes contained many “blots on the character of our ancestors and of our nation.” In this climate, the Missionary Herald found it instructive to print an account of the 1782 massacre by a white mob of over ninety Moravian Indians at Gnadenhutten.9

By 1830, the benevolent community, imbued with a vision of a nation governed by universal principles of justice, aided by mission reports throughout the religious periodicals that stressed the perspective of the Indians, and benefitting from the inclusion of women’s concerns and work, had developed a clear position against the coerced removal of southern Indians that was forcefully expressed in the widely circulated religious press. Opponents of removal believed that Americans had made an implicit promise to the Indians: If they adopted European agricultural practices, they would be granted the same rights and privileges as white settlers. The Cherokees’ success in mastering European techniques and culture, along with the enormity of the Cherokee removal, the organized and articulate opposition of the Cherokee themselves, and the fact that removal would open vast new areas to the slave labor system, made this case appear unique to antiremovalists. Each time that the state of Georgia wrested new land concessions from the Cherokee or demanded federal aid in forcing their removal, protest increased. Readers of the denomination papers read regular reports such as the Boston Recorder’s account of a cession of Cherokee territory in 1824 that quoted an elderly Indian as saying that he was “afraid of the white people and distressed for his children lest they be driven from the earth. . . . White people kill my people and no notice is taken of it.” The Missionary Herald printed a Cherokee woman’s lengthy protest against land expropriation, which concluded that “white people seem to aim at our destruction. . . . This grieves me more than I can tell . . . we shall be driven away from the land of our fathers, which is as dear to us as our lives.” The Religious Intelligencer went beyond merely defending the Indians to placing them in a superior moral position:

Were any arguments necessary to prove the doctrine of total depravity, we might among other proofs, refer to the treatment which some of the Indian Tribes receive from the whites. . . . white men make inroads into the Indian Territories, destroy their game, and steal their furs. If the natives, indignant at such outrages, make any resistance, we immediately find articles in newspapers, headed with “Indian Barbarities, Murders, &c. &c.!”

When Georgia surveyors marked out Cherokee lands for distribution to white farmers in 1829, religious periodicals attacked state officials. The Journal of Commerce said that the proceedings “awaken our indignation and lead us almost to wish that the Cherokees had the power to vindicate their rights and chastise their oppressors.” The Missionary Herald declared that Georgia state officials were engaged in a massive land grab and told its readers that “now is the time when every Christian, every philanthropist and every patriot in the United States ought to be exerting themselves to save a persecuted and defenceless people from ruin.” The Hamilton [Ohio] Intelligencer asserted that the Indians were “the living monuments of the white man’s wrongs.”

After Jackson’s election in 1828, Georgia legislators added, by fiat, Cherokee lands to the northwestern counties of Georgia, forbade Cherokee gold mining, nullified all Cherokee laws, and prohibited Indians from testifying against whites in court. Alabama and Mississippi quickly followed suit. For men and women attentive to Indian issues, the time was short. The president-elect would be inaugurated in March 1829, and a new Congress would convene the following December. Denominational periodicals already carried antiremoval sentiments, and voluntary reform associations provided an organizational network for opposing the legislation. The first attacks on removal came from these quarters, and they initially followed the established boundaries of political tradition: Public meetings were called on the issue, petitions drawn up, and pamphlets printed.


This early opposition came from every region of the country: from the South, even from Georgia itself; from the Northwest, throughout Ohio and the city of Pittsburgh; from the New England states; and from northeastern cities, including Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. It particularly captured the imagination and fervor of the nation's young adults, the second generation of reformers. When Angelina Grimké left Charleston for Philadelphia in 1829, before she became a Quaker or an abolitionist, the strongest political references in her letters back home were sharp objections to the Indian Removal Bill. Likewise, the only political references in the letters of young Harriet Beecher are enthusiastic reports of her work in the women's petition campaign to oppose Indian removal. George Cheever, a future leader in the abolitionist movement and a student at Andover Seminary during the removal crisis, led antiremoval efforts there, organizing public meetings and petitions and even taking on Lewis Cass, governor of the territory of Michigan and a strong proponent of Indian removal. “Nothing can save us,” Cheever wrote in castigating Cass's defense of Indian removal, “unless the public mind be universally aroused from its lethargy, and an appeal made, so loud, simultaneous, and decisive, as shall astonish the world at the power of moral feeling in the heart of the country, and cause the most inveterate and bold supporters of national iniquity to tremble.”

At Western Reserve College in northern Ohio, opposition to removal was so pronounced that it formed the subject of the student speech at ceremonies following the annual exams in 1830. The speech, entitled “The Present Policy of our Government Towards the Indians,” attacked the removal bill for robbing the Indians of the improvements they had made to their land, for violating all previous legal treaties, and for besmirching the nation's international reputation. The quantifiable evidence of Indian progress abundantly laid out in the evangelical periodicals appealed to the student orator, and he challenged Jackson's assertions that the Indians had proved incapable of settled agriculture, pointing out that the Cherokee alone had:

- 80,000 domestic animals—750 looms—2500 spinning wheels—3000 ploughs—
- 10 sawmills—31 grist mills—62 smith shops—8 cotton gins—10 schools—9
turnpikes and 20 public roads. They now have a printing press, a weekly paper and
a national academy.

Removal would violate the “sacred and inalienable rights of the Indian and the
pledged faith and honor of our nation,” he asserted; it would leave “a stain on the American character which the lapse of time will never efface. The finger of scorn will be
turned from the infamous despoilation of Poland and pointed at America.” Could
the Indians be saved? Could this ignominious future be averted? Yes: “let every
patriot speak out with honest indignation . . . let the moral power of the press be

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arrayed against this disgraceful and ruinous policy . . . wait but a little, and they will be driven beyond our reach.” The role of the federal government came in for especial criticism—federally funded removal at the behest of the state of Georgia was a “national crime,” one critic charged.14

Protestors in the South opposed removal efforts by the Georgia legislature even before Jackson was elected. In August 1828, Robert Campbell, a lawyer in Savannah, offered one hundred dollars to anyone who drew up the best petition to be signed and presented to the Georgia General Assembly denouncing the state’s effort to remove the Cherokees. “It will justly entail upon Georgia the odious charges of being faithless—covetous—ungrateful and inhumane,” he wrote, “because in modern times in civilized countries there is no instance of expelling the members of a whole nation from their homes or driving an entire population from its native country. The notoriously disgraceful partition of Poland involved no such stigma of cruelty. It will bring enduring shame to Georgia’s posterity.”15

When the Georgia legislature passed a law declaring that “no Indian and no descendant of an Indian, not understanding the English language, shall be deemed a competent witness in any Court of Justice in Georgia,” Campbell sent a copy of the law to northern newspapers to fan the protest against removal. Indeed, much of the information that the national press carried on Georgia’s legislative moves came from regular reports sent by removal opponents in Georgia itself. Some Georgia periodicals also opposed removal. The Savannah Georgian printed reports from opponents of Indian removal, and the Savannah Mercury opened its pages to the Indians themselves, one of whom lamented that he had heard too many of Andrew Jackson’s exhortations to Indians: “I have listened to a great many talks from our great father, but they always began and ended with this: get a little further; you are too near me.”16

As the campaign against removal spread, Jeremiah Evarts, a lawyer and commissioner of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, pulled removal opponents’ broad arguments into a legal treatise known as The “William Penn” Essays. The essays offered detailed information on the past treaties between the Southeast Indians and the United States that had established the Indians as legal possessors of their then remaining lands. Evarts argued eloquently that forced removal would constitute a grave legal breach, and his appeal for justice found a ready audience. The mass public bought, read, and discussed the Penn essays, which were reprinted in more than a hundred newspapers and published as pamphlets that


blanketed the country. They were, according to a contemporary, read by more than half a million people during the summer of 1829.17

Even before the Indian Removal Act was introduced in Congress in 1830, petition drives against it spread throughout the nation, and the religious periodicals uniformly endorsed them, reporting on local petition efforts and reprinting a steady stream of newspaper accounts of petition campaigns in other areas. In Washington, Pittsburgh, Boston, Hartford, Philadelphia, New York, and towns in the Midwest and South, opponents called public meetings and drew up petitions to defeat the removal bill. The petitions poured into Washington. “Having nearly exhausted my stock of memorials, I must ask for more,” a professor at Amherst College wrote on February 20, 1830, “I should want 15 or 20 copies more, at least.” College presidents exhorted students to send petitions to Congress; at other colleges, students led the opposition. In some cities, mayors chaired the public meetings called to draw up petitions. In New York City two thousand people gathered in the Masonic Hall to draw up a petition against removal.18 A Pennsylvania representative noted in disbelief that in his notably quiet district, people were holding large and enthusiastic public meetings to petition Congress on the bill. In Brown County along the Ohio River just east of Cincinnati, over two hundred men signed a petition calling the removal act “cruel, unjust, and disgraceful.” At a meeting in Boston to consider a petition to Congress on Sunday mails, the petitioners also drew up one on Indian removal and sent it to Congress. In Tallmadge, Ohio, over one hundred men signed petitions opposing Indian removal. “The tables of the members (of Congress) are covered with pamphlets devoted to the discussions of the Indian question,” the congressional correspondent for the Journal of Commerce wrote in late March. “There is a mighty movement in the land on this subject.” The Christian Watchman, the largest-circulation Baptist periodical, declared that “it must be gratifying to every citizen who loves equal and exact justice to notice the feeling which is now excited in the community in relation to the rights of the Aborigines of this country.”19

17 The essays by Jeremiah Evarts were first printed in July 1829 and later distributed in pamphlet form and reprinted in other newspapers, including the Cherokee Phoenix. See Jeremiah Evarts, Cherokee Removal: The “William Penn” Essays and Other Writings, ed. Francis Paul Prucha (Knoxville, 1981). See John A. Andrew III, From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America (Athens, Ga., 1992).


Popular opposition to Jackson's removal bill overwhelmed traditional forms of political participation. The massive outpouring of pamphlets and petitions itself was unprecedented. The demand for Jeremiah Evarts's Penn essays was so great that they were more widely distributed and read in the summer of 1829 than any political pamphlet since Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Not only did men send an unprecedented number of petitions, women began to draw up and circulate their own petitions opposing removal, the first time that they did so on a national political issue. Ultimately, some opponents of removal went to prison rather than comply with Georgia's removal laws. The political crisis that the popular political activism created resulted in two Supreme Court decisions against the administration's position on removal, decisions that an embattled and defiant president ignored.

To defeat removal, Catharine Beecher initiated the first national petition drive by women. During the summer of 1829, she heard Jeremiah Evarts speak in Boston on the prospect of Indian removal. He asked her, Beecher recalled in her memoirs, published in the 1870s, to do what she could to avert the tragedy. When Beecher returned to the Hartford Female Seminary, where she was director, she called together some friends, including Lydia Sigourney, a popular writer and poet, to discuss the impending removal bill. The women immediately resolved to draw up a petition opposing removal and to send copies to female acquaintances throughout the country.20

A national women's petition drive was unprecedented, and the Hartford group decided to conceal its own role in organizing it. In her memoirs, Beecher did not indicate why she opted for anonymity. It was not because she hoped that the public would assume the petition was organized by men, for the circular asserted that it was prepared and sent solely by women. Perhaps she feared personal condemnation. If so, she was certainly vindicated, for removal proponents in Congress seized the women's circular as a point of attack on removal opponents. In any case, the requirements for organizing a petition campaign anonymously impeded it; Beecher even felt compelled to swear the printer to secrecy. To compile their mailing list, the Hartford women relied on the network of benevolent women's associations, drawing up names and addresses of their friends and acquaintances throughout cities across the nation. It was remarkable, Beecher said, how many names they collected in this first step. Sending out the circular from Hartford would risk exposing their involvement, so Beecher arranged to have all of the petitions sent on the same day from four different cities, but none from Hartford itself. Each recipient was asked to send copies of the circular to friends, or to draw up her own petition, and to assemble public meetings on behalf of the Cherokees, gathering as many signatures as possible to sway the representatives in Congress. Through it all, they were asked to pray "for the intervention of the National Government to protect the Indians." The Hartford

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20 Catharine E. Beecher, *Educational Reminiscences and Suggestions* (New York, 1874), 62–64. Beecher does not provide the names of the other women, one of whom was married to Thomas Chester, and another to Daniel Wadsworth, who was an architect and benefactor of the Hartford Female Seminary.
women maintained their secrecy so completely that they began to be solicited to sign copies of their own petition.21 

The Ladies’ Circular, as it came to be called, addressed itself first to “benevolent ladies of the United States” and urged them to combine piety and politics by using both “prayers and exertions to avert the calamity of removal.” It depicted the Indians of the United States as “saviors” of the Europeans in times past, supplying their necessities in crucial periods and, by now, as “fitted by native talents” as any other American for intellectual and refined pursuits. Legal treaties guaranteed the southern Indians their lands, the circular argued, and Beecher inserted parts of past treaties to prove the point. The claims that Georgia made on the Cherokee rose primarily from acquisitive, not legal, motives, the circular said: “the lands of this people are claimed to be embraced within the limits of some of our southern states, and as they are fertile and valuable they are demanded by the whites as their own possessions, and efforts are making to dispossess the Indians of their native soil.”22 

The circular then appealed directly to women to join the political struggle against removal. “Have not the females of this country some duties devolving upon them in relation to this helpless race?” it asked. Indeed, the circular asserted, women should exercise the same benevolent influence in alleviating the plight of the Indians as they already did in aiding the needy in their own communities. Benevolent women could exert legislative pressure in this instance because the Indians needed it—that itself represented a moral imperative. Beyond that, the circular drew on a biblical model for dealing with a people in crisis, the account of Esther, who approached the king to plead for her people’s existence. Women, the circular argued:

are protected from the blinding influence of party spirit, and the asperities of political violence. They have nothing to do with any struggle for power, nor any right to dictate the decisions of those that rule over them. But they may feel for the distressed; they may stretch out the supplicating hand for them, and by their prayers strive to avert the calamities that are impending over them. It may be, that female petitioners can lawfully be heard, even by the highest rulers of our land. . . . It may be this will be forbidden; yet we still remember the Jewish princess who, being sent to supplicate for a nation’s life, was thus reproved for hesitating even when death stared her in the way: “If thou altogether hold thy peace at this time, then shall deliverance arise from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed. And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

The circular urged haste. “A few weeks must decide this interesting and important question, and after that time sympathy and regret will be in vain.” It asserted its female authorship and called all women to action: “This communication was written and sent abroad solely by the female hand. Let every woman who peruses it, exert that influence in society which falls within her lawful province, and endeavour

21 Ibid., 63.
by every suitable expedient to interest the feelings of her friends, relatives, and acquaintances, in behalf of this people, that are ready to perish."

The result of their petition efforts, Beecher wrote, “exceeded our most sanguine expectations.” The women who received the Hartford petitions called public meetings against removal where they drew up their own petitions for signatures, and they set out to enlist friends and neighbors in the campaign. The petition campaign spurred other political activities; some women organized the Ladies Association for Supplicating Justice and Mercy Toward the Indians, which met regularly to send antiremoval petitions to Congress. Petitions signed by hundreds of women began pouring into Congress, a feat that many newspapers noted with astonishment. The largest single petition came from Pittsburgh, where 670 women signed and sent it to the Senate. In organizing to defeat removal, many women viewed themselves as continuing work to which they had long been accustomed. For twenty years they had donated money and materials for Indian schools. In their periodicals they read regular reports from Indian missions that provided an Indian perspective on removal. Women were familiar with local petitioning for the welfare of specific individuals and groups; they had grown accustomed to seeing women’s concerns given equal status in their periodicals; they felt a sense of mission as guardians of national virtue. Allocating federal funds to force Indian removal threatened Indians whom they had heard speak in their churches and homes, whose writings they had read in their periodicals, and who appeared fully deserving of legal protection.24

The circular succeeded in deluging Congress with women’s petitions, but fear of being found out took its toll on Catharine Beecher. She frequently found herself in conversations that turned to the question of the circular’s author, and she had, she said, “many narrow escapes from falsehood in efforts to preserve our secret.” When someone asked her once who she supposed wrote the circular, she replied that, though some attributed it to Lydia Sigourney, she thought it was not like Sigourney’s writing style but more like that of a man whom Beecher named, thereby “escaping” without revealing her own authorship but directly contradicting the circular itself, which flatly declared its female origin. In writing of the campaign years later, she said that “not at all aware of the consequences of this additional excitement, I suddenly found myself utterly prostrated and unable to perform any school duty without extreme pain and such confusion of thought as seemed like approaching insanity.” She went to recover at the home of friends, leaving others, including her Harriet, to carry out her duties at the Hartford Female Seminary. Harriet

23 Ibid.
thrive[d] in her new responsibilities, sending enthusiastic letters to Catharine about the work involving the circular. “Last night we teachers sat up till eleven o’clock finishing our Cherokee letters,” she wrote, adding that speculation still abounded about the likely author. The success of the circular, and her knowledge that it was written by her older sister, inspired the future author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin to write that “the excitement, I hope, is but just begun. So ‘great effects come from little causes.’”

The women’s petition campaign drew criticism from some antiremovalists and from congressional Democrats, with one crucial difference: objections from the former were muted and temporary, while the latter offered harsh and persistent criticism. Some editors of denomination periodicals initially expressed dismay at women’s political petitions to Congress, but they also printed the circular in their newspapers, thereby spreading public awareness of the campaign and increasing its success. Among antiremovalists, objections to the Ladies’ Circular were undercut by the realization that it represented a new source of political assistance. Henry Clay, for example, noted the practical advantage of using women’s political organizing in defeating removal when he pointed out to Jeremiah Evarts that “the female sex is generally on [the Indians’] side, and a cooperation between that and the clergy would have a powerful, if not decisive, influence.”

Many religious periodicals first responded to the circular by urging women to limit their political activity to the traditional task of influencing their husbands, sons, and fathers but then printed the entire circular without further comment or ceased their objections. The Christian Watchman, for example, hoped that “God would preserve our Congress so pure and enlightened as not to need the organization of all the females in the land into ‘societies’ to get a question righteously decided,” and it reminded women that the biblical Esther appealed to her husband when she made a political appeal on behalf of her people. Still, subsequent issues of the Watchman offered no further objections. Some periodicals carried the entire Ladies’ Circular without any criticism. The Christian Advocate, the largest of the religious periodicals, implied an endorsement by printing the circular on its front page with a note saying only that it had been sent by “a female friend of humanity.” And the antislavery periodical the Genius of Universal Emancipation quickly urged unreserved support. That urging came in the paper’s “Ladies’ Repository” section, which Elizabeth Margaret Chandler edited anonymously.

25 Widespread public speculation on its authorship centered on Benjamin Silliman, a professor at Yale University and the most prominent scientist in America at the time. Beecher, Educational Reminiscences, 64–65. Kathryn Kish Sklar attributed Beecher’s breakdown to Zilpah Grant’s rejection of Beecher’s offer to be associate principal of the Hartford Seminary. Beecher placed her breakdown in relation to the Ladies’ Circular and the strain of secrecy that followed. See Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity (New Haven, 1973); and Beecher, Educational Reminiscences, 65–70. See also Hedrick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, 60.

26 Evarts, Cherokee Removal, 30.

In contrast, congressional Democrats subjected the women’s petitions to unalloyed criticism, castigating antiremoval men for failing to keep their women out of political debate and faulting the petitions for undermining political order and the norms of chivalry. They scorned women for taking up congressional time with their petitions and depicted the benevolent men who supported women’s political activity as effeminate. Thomas Hart Benton, chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, summed up Democratic sentiments when he mockingly described a “vision” he had of the antiremovalists, both men and women marching under a single banner, the females, he said, having “earned the place by the part they are acting in the public meetings for the instruction of Congress on the subject of these Georgia Indians.” Benton added that he meant “no disrespect” to the benevolent women; indeed, he said, he preferred their company to that of the “unbenevolent males” and would himself rather appear in the feminine than in the masculine gender; had rather march in bonnet, cloak, and petticoats, than in hat, coat, and pantaloons. With the aid of the famous corset-maker Madame Cantalo, to draw me up a little, I had rather trip it along as a Miss, in frock and pantalets, than figure as a war chief of the Georgia Cherokees bedecked and bedizened in all the finery of paint and feathers. I had rather be on foot among the damsels, than on horse among the leaders, white, black, and red. I apprehend these leaders will be on foot on the return march, dismounted and discomfited, unhorsed and unharnessed, better prepared for the flight than the fight, and leading the ladies out of danger after having led them into it. In that retreat, I would recommend it to the benevolent females to place no reliance upon the performances of their delicate little feet. Their unequal steps would vainly strive to keep up with the ‘double quick time’ of their swift conductors. No helping hand would then be stretched back for the ‘little lulus’. . . . I would recommend it to these ladies, not to douse their bonnets, and tuck up their coats, for such a race, but to sit down on the way side, and wait for the coming of the conquerors.28

Andrew Jackson had placed Indian removal at the top of his policy priorities, and the storm of opposition it created seemed to baffle the president, who tried, unsuccessfully, to counter the organized opposition by manufacturing an alternative base of benevolent support for removal. Thomas McKenney, head of the Indian Office in the War Department, formed what he called the Indian Board for the Emigration, Preservation, and Improvement of the Aborigines of America and set out to recruit religious figures to promote removal. He hoped to duplicate the antiremovalists’ tactics by organizing public meetings, drawing up a public petition for removal, and publishing proremoval pamphlets. But the Indian Board generated scant support beyond McKenney’s office, and it soon collapsed. Another administration effort cultivated Isaac McCoy, a former Baptist missionary who supported removal. Although McCoy had gone on the government payroll in 1828 as a surveyor of Indian lands,

the Jackson administration used his former status as a Baptist missionary to claim that removal had Baptist support. McCoy was not representative of the Baptist mission board’s position, and tensions between him and that board grew more pronounced as the removal crisis intensified. In 1830 the Baptist board flatly refused to endorse McCoy’s petition favoring removal. The Baptist Christian Watchman subsequently printed on its front page a stinging criticism of McCoy’s efforts to put the Baptist stamp of approval on removal. Because of McCoy, the article said, it was now necessary “to correct the false impression that is now going on in the public mind that the Baptists are engaged with the Georgians or others in removing the Indians against their will.” Baptists were completely opposed to removal efforts, the article said, and for good measure the editor signed the writer’s name as “Veritas.” McCoy later began his own separate Baptist Mission Board, which was supported by the Southern Baptist churches after the split over slavery in the 1840s.29

Opposition to the removal bill made its passage more difficult than Jackson had envisioned. The Senate passed the bill by a vote of 28 to 19 on April 24, 1830. The House margin on May 26 was narrower: 102 to 97. Southern representatives, their numbers swelling by the three-fifths clause, voted heavily in favor of the bill; representatives from the rest of the country voted two to one against it. The House vote was so close that Jackson held his veto of the Maysville Road project in check, fearing that if aid to the road were vetoed first, Congress would reject Indian removal. When the veto came down immediately after the removal act passed the House, congressional opponents tried to retrieve the bill before it reached the president’s desk, hoping that Congress could reconsider it, but it was beyond their legislative reach.30

The Cherokees immediately appealed to the Supreme Court to strike down Georgia’s attempt to legislate for them. Spirited public meetings continued, petitions poured once again into Congress, and periodicals carried lengthy articles defending Cherokee rights. In March 1831, in Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, the Supreme Court concurred that the laws of the state of Georgia could have no force over the Cherokee, who were protected by federal treaties that gave them full rights to their lands. Though the Court also acknowledged that the legal status of the Cherokee placed them outside its jurisdiction, opponents of removal were cheered by its endorsement of their position.31 The president remained determined to coerce Indian removal, and he responded by defiantly withdrawing federal troops from Georgia, leaving no


30 For the removal bill’s passage and the party maneuvering involved, see Donald B. Cole, The Presidency of Andrew Jackson (Lawrence, 1993), 109; and Francis Paul Prucha, ed., Documents of United States Indian Policy (Lincoln. 1975), 52–53. George Cheever wrote that the expectation of the bill’s passage led him “almost to despair with a dejection of feeling which nothing can express.” Cheever, "Removal of the Indians," 715; Editorial, Nile’s Weekly Register, June 5, 1830, p. 1.

31 5 Pet. 1 (1831).
buffer between the Cherokee and the state, which moved immediately to force the Indians out.

The Georgia legislature then passed a law aimed at missionaries in Cherokee territory, requiring that all white men living within the now-appropriated Cherokee lands apply for, and receive, licenses from the state of Georgia or face prison. Applying for the license included swearing an oath of allegiance to all of Georgia's laws, and most of the missionaries refused to do so. In repeated incidents over a dozen missionaries were chained and marched to prisons where they were unsuccessfully pressured to sign documents promising to leave Georgia. Female missionaries were not included in the legislation, and as the male missionaries were arrested over the next months, they took over the running of mission operations. The denomination periodicals covered these events with outraged astonishment, printing dispatches from the missionaries describing their repeated and lengthy detainment and harassment by Georgia state officials in violation of civil and criminal laws. One missionary wrote to the Missionary Herald that the official who arrested him told him that “it would probably be better for missionaries and Christians to wander in the mountains and caves of the earth, clad in sheep-skins and goat-skins as they did of old; and that this would probably produce an increase of piety.” The official threatened him with re-arrest if he did not leave the area entirely. The Herald went on to say:

Our citizens have been accustomed to see offenders against the laws arrested by civil officers, acting in obedience to the warrant of a civil magistrate; but now see armed soldiers, without any civil precept, scouring the country, arresting whom they please, detaining them as long as they please, and releasing them when and where they please. . . . They see those who make no attempt to resist or escape, loaded with irons, forced to travel great distances on foot, vilified, reproached, and threatened by their captors. Such scenes as these are strange and unexpected in this country.32

When the Jackson administration ignored Georgia's actions, officials there brought charges against the missionaries for refusing to apply for the newly required license. In September 1831 a Georgia jury convicted eleven of the missionaries on this charge. They were sentenced to expulsion or four years' hard labor in the penitentiary. Nine were expelled, but two, Samuel Worcester and Elizur Butler, elected to serve their terms and appeal to the United States Supreme Court. They were marched in chains to the state penitentiary in Milledgeville. As their appeal wound its way through the court system, petitions pleading for legislative redress for the missionaries poured into Congress. The Supreme Court's decision, Worcester v. Georgia, came down in early 1832, ruling that, based on previous treaties, the Cherokee nation was a “distinct community” over which the laws of Georgia were null and void and ordered that the missionaries be released.33

33 For the arrests and trials, see “Arrest of the Missionaries of the Board in the Cherokee Nation,” Missionary
The court’s decision granted the opponents of the removal bill one brief euphoric moment of victory. Arthur Tappan carried the news directly from Washington to Boston where, one observer said, “no event since the organization of the government, except perhaps the treaty of peace, has created a livelier sensation of joy . . . than this decision of the Supreme Court.” In Boston, Lyman Beecher heard the news of the Court’s decision from Elias Boudinot, the Cherokee editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, who was then on a lecture tour in the Northeast. When Beecher heard the news, Boudinot said, he “jumped up, clapped his hands, took hold of my hand and said ‘God be praised,’ and rushed out to tell his family.” At that moment Boudinot believed that the Court’s decision “creates a new era on the Indian question.” But it soon became clear that the ruling would never be enforced. Georgia threatened violent resistance if blocked and refused to release Worcester and Butler. After Andrew Jackson was reelected that year, the state of Georgia expelled the two missionaries.34

The deep divisions over removal touched even the vice president’s family. Martin Van Buren recalled that his own niece, whom he admired, fiercely denounced him for his role in removal. During the 1832 election season, when he was a guest in her house, she told him sharply that she earnestly hoped that he and Jackson would lose the election because “such a result ought to follow such acts!” Though the Indians were finally removed, Van Buren wrote, it was a hard struggle because opponents of Indian removal received what he called a “full and unfair measure of cooperation” from “the Press, the Courts of law and last, tho’ far from the least in power and influence, the Church.” Writing in 1854, Van Buren reflected that

it is scarcely possible now . . . to realize the extent to which many of our religious societies were agitated and disturbed by the imprisonment of those missionaries, and there was no doubt that not less than eight or ten thousand voters, in the state of New York alone, were controlled at the succeeding Presidential election in the bestowal of their suffrage by that single consideration.35

In looking back on the passage of the removal bill, Van Buren gave generous credit to the president that he had served under. “It was his judgment, his experience, his indomitable vigor and unrestrained activity that secured success. There was


no measure in the whole course of his administration of which he was more exclusively the author than this. His was the hand, mind, and spirit that controlled throughout." But the former president also concluded that the widespread and fierce opposition to the Indian Removal Act and the success of its opponents in portraying removal as unjust had forever diminished Jackson's legislative victory. Van Buren lamented that "the credit which has been awarded to him for the effective aid he rendered to his country by his policy in respect to Indian affairs and by the success with which it was executed has fallen far short of his desserts." Thomas Hart Benton also remembered the fight over the removal act as unusually memorable, and like Jackson, he blamed the opposition on partisan interference from those who had no direct interest in the case. It was, he said, "one of the closest and most earnestly contested questions of the session; and finally carried by an inconsiderable majority. . . . The removals were eventually effected; but with great difficulty, chiefly on account of a foreign, or outside influence from politicians and philanthropists."36

Andrew Jackson, who viewed politics primarily in terms of mobilizing a narrow electorate around its economic self-interest, charged that removal opponents objected to removal only because it threatened their access to federal money for Indian schools. After the Indian Removal Act passed, he summed up his own sentiments by saying that "thus far we have succeeded against the most corrupt and secrete combination that ever did exist." He placed any blame for injury to the Indians on the antiremovalists. "I have exonerated the national character from imputation," he wrote after the Cherokees appealed to the Supreme Court,

and now leave the poor deluded Creeks and Cherokees to their fate, and their annihilation, which their wicked advisers has induced. I am sure the stand the Executive has taken was not anticipated by their wicked advisers. It was expected that the more the Indians would hold out, and oppose the views of the Government, the greater would be the offers made by the Executive and all the missionary and speculating tribe would make fortunes out of the United States. The answer sent has blasted these hopes and if I mistake not, the Indians will now think for themselves and send to the city a delegation prepared to cede their country and move X [across] the M [Mississippi].37

Antiremovalists failed to defeat the removal bill, but the experience provided reform women with political skills valuable in subsequent antislavery and woman suffrage campaigns. Writing antiremoval petitions and gathering signatures for them required attention to legal details and skill in defining public issues in compelling and persuasive language. Petitioning provided women with a means of measuring

36 Ibid., 295, 275–76. On the removal issue, Benton lamented, Jackson was subjected to "misrepresentations which have survived the object of their creation and gone into history." Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years View: or, a History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, From 1820 to 1850 (2 vols., New York, 1854–1865), I, 285, 690–91.
37 Bassett, ed., Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, IV, 177–78. In his farewell address in 1837, Jackson summed up his triumph on Indian removal by declaring that "the States which had so long been retarded in their improvement by the Indian tribes residing in the midst of them are at length relieved from the evil." James D. Richardson, ed., A Compilation of Messages and Paper of the Presidents, 1789–1897 (20 vols., Washington, 1896–1899), II, 1511–27; Blau, ed., Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy, 2.
support in their communities, opportunities to educate other women on issues, and a sense of achieving concrete results. It could also be discouraging. Catharine Beecher's writings contain no response to the congressional attacks on the Ladies' Circular, but her unsettling experience in that endeavor seems to have contributed to the end of both her work at the Hartford Seminary and her advocacy of women's political petitioning. In 1837, after Congress had responded to the flood of petitions on slavery by passing the Pinckney gag rule, Beecher wrote a lengthy treatise on the role of women in the antislavery struggle, and she dealt with the issue of women's petitions in a manner that recalled Thomas Hart Benton's attacks on her petition campaign:

If petitions from females will operate to exasperate; if they will be deemed obtrusive, indecorous, and unwise, by those to whom they are addressed; if they will increase, rather than diminish the evil which it is wished to remove; if they will be the opening wedge, that will tend eventually to bring females as petitioners and partisans into every political measure that may tend to injure and oppress their sex, in various parts of the nation, and under the various public measures that may hereafter be enforced, then it is neither appropriate nor wise, nor right, for a woman to petition for the relief of oppressed females.38

The case of Esther, Beecher concluded, was a suitable precedent only when a woman was faced literally with the destruction of herself and her nation; when death was imminent, "then she may safely follow such an example." But when a woman was asked to join an abolition society or put her name on a petition to Congress, "the case of Queen Esther is not at all to be regarded as a suitable example for imitation." In this country, Beecher went on, "petitions to congress, in reference to the official duties of legislators, seem, in all cases, to fall entirely without the sphere of female duty." Women's responsibility, she said, was to induce men to petition for just legislation. Beecher's breakdown over the stress of the petition campaign marked a retreat from political activity. She became a critic of both immediatism and women's political rights.39

If the experience of mass political petitioning ultimately made Beecher opt for traditional politics, it had a different effect on others. For example, from the time of her marriage in 1819, Lydia Sigourney had published all her writings anonymously because her husband did not want her to use her name in her writings. In 1832, after her considerable efforts in the antiremoval campaign, Sigourney's writings began appearing under her own name despite her husband's objections. Angelina Grimké, who was captivated by the women's petition campaign, subsequently adopted the position that women had the right to petition

38 After the Indian Removal Act passed, women's antislavery petitions to Congress outnumbered men's. Some legislators claimed that there would be but few abolition petitions "if the ladies and Sunday School children would let us alone." In 1835 Andrew Jackson urged Congress to ban all antislavery petitions and, with the crucial help of the vice president, Congress passed the first "gag" rule. See James Freeman Clarke, Anti-Slavery Days (New York, 1883); Gerda Lerner, The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History (New York, 1979), 117, 126; Richards, "The Jacksonians and Slavery," 110; and Filler, Crusade against Slavery, 99--100, 179. Catharine E. Beecher, An Essay on Slavery and Abolition with Reference to the Duty of American Females (1837; New York, 1970), 103--4.

Congress on all issues. “The fact that women are denied the right of voting for members of Congress, is but a poor reason why they should also be deprived of the right of petition. If their numbers are counted to swell the number of representatives in our State and National legislation, the very least that can be done is to give them the right of petition in all cases whatsoever; and without any abridgement,” Grimké declared in a public reply to Beecher’s argument against women’s right to petition.40

Experience in opposing Indian removal also dampened support for African colonization. Before 1830, colonization efforts received broad political support and colonization societies raised large sums. As the debate over Indian removal intensified, colonization supporters who opposed removal grew discomforted by the strong similarities between the two issues, discovering that they opposed removal in one case but supported it in the other. If he worked for African colonization while opposing Indian removal, an uncomfortable rationalizer wrote in late 1829, it was only because colonization was, in part, “a remuneration of past injury.” Delineating differences between the two removals could not obscure their similarities, and ultimately the experience of opposing Indian removal prompted some reformers to rethink their stand on slavery, rejecting African colonization in favor of immediatism and embarking on a determined campaign to stop what they feared would be a second removal injustice.41

Most of the immediatist leaders of the 1830s had been colonizationists during the 1820s. They had also been antiremovalists at the turn of the decade. Roberts Vaux, Angelina Grimké, Theodore Weld, Beriah Green, Charles Storr, Elizur Wright Jr., Lydia Maria Child, Arthur Tappan, Benjamin Lundy, and James Birney, among many others, supported colonization efforts during the 1820s, but all of them opposed removal and later became outspoken immediatists. William Lloyd Garrison delivered a supportive Fourth of July colonization address in 1829, but by January 1831 he had made what he called a “full and unequivocal recantation” of the “pernicious doctrine of gradual abolition.”42

Historical explanations for the remarkable surge of a new abolitionism after 1830 have usually centered on three factors: the abolitionists’ sense of social displacement,

42 “To the Public,” *Liberator*, Jan. 1, 1831, p. 1. At that time Garrison said that he had similarly recanted in “To the Public,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Sept. 2, 1829, p. 5. But although the 1829 article by Garrison declared that “the slaves are entitled to immediate and complete emancipation,” it also supported colonization efforts. He was not an impassioned immediatist until Congress passed the removal bill. The post-1830 attack on colonization by its erstwhile supporters, historian Ronald Walters has written, marks a break with prior antiislavery thought so complete and inexplicable that it “haunts everything written on the subject.” Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore, 1976), xi.
their ethical commitment to the oppressed, or their religious beliefs. Some of the most prominent abolitionist leaders also drew explicit parallels between their opposition to Indian removal and their opposition to colonization. At the very time when Garrison delivered the Fourth of July colonization address in Boston’s Park Street Church in 1829, he began to denounce removal in harsh terms. As coeditor, with Benjamin Lundy, of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Garrison regularly printed strong denunciations of removal in the paper, often including excerpts from the *Cherokee Phoenix* and the *Savannah Mercury*. When Jackson brought in federal government troops to help Georgia dispossess Indians, the *Genius* declared that forcible removal “would brand this country with eternal infamy,” and Garrison declared that “we are a nation of tyrants, and the bent of our legislation is oppressive. God of heaven! When shall equity prevail on the earth and the rights of thy creatures be protected from domestic invasion?” In December 1829 the *Genius* printed Jackson’s annual message in its entirety and urged readers to pay especial attention to the portion that related to the Cherokee.

The heated congressional debates over removal occurred while Garrison was imprisoned for libel in April 1830 for a written attack on a slave trader. He passed

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his time in prison reading the congressional speeches on the removal bill and was particularly seized with Sen. Theodore Frelinghuysen's eloquent denunciations of it. From his cell, Garrison wrote a lengthy poem extolling the senator's speech in defense of Indian rights and harshly denouncing the Democrats for supporting removal. "If the dominant party in the Senate had not [had] hearts more impenetrable than polar ice," Garrison wrote, "his speech would have . . . rescued the American name from eternal infamy." After Arthur Tappan, another antiremovalist, paid his fine, Garrison began publishing the *Liberator*. The paper first appeared in January 1831 with a plain front heading, but in April, immediately after the *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* decision, Garrison replaced his plain heading with a graphic illustration of the link he drew between Indian removal and the abolitionist cause. The *Liberator*'s new heading depicted scenes of a slave auction and a flogging, and under these were sheaves of trampled paper printed with the words "Indian treaties." The new masthead enlarged slavery's context, depicting European Americans as beginning a pattern of injustice against Indians and continuing it against Africans. Garrison then used the removal act to denounce colonization directly. In 1832, when he published *Thoughts on African Colonization*, his powerful attack on the American Colonization Society, Garrison devoted half of that argument to describing Negro rejection of colonization and chose a comparison that many of his fellow reformers would instantly understand: "they are as unanimously opposed to a removal to Africa, as the Cherokees from the council-fires and graves of their fathers," he asserted. The *Liberator*
continued to carry the latest news on the removal crisis, and for years Garrison distributed pamphlets on what his children called the "wrongs of the red man." 45

The prominent abolitionist James Birney also linked African colonization to Indian removal. When Birney, who had provided legal services to the Cherokee during the 1820s, resigned as vice-president of the Colonization Society of Kentucky, he wrote a widely distributed open letter explaining his new opposition to colonization as stemming from its parallels with the recent removal act. Birney pointed out to his readers "the very great resemblance this case bears in its most prominent features to that of the Indians who have been moved upon, in nearly the same measure to "consent" to leave their lands within the limits of several of the states." Slaves often were freed only on the condition they go to Liberia, he said, and sometimes consent was gained by unfair pressures, often the same kind of consent that he had seen extorted from the Indians. In summing up his opposition to colonization, Birney noted that Thomas Jefferson had portrayed African colonization in terms reminiscent of the Indian removal that Birney and his contemporaries were witnessing. The former president, Birney said, had referred to African colonization as a "desirable measure which could be adopted for gradually drawing off this part of our population. . . . It may perhaps be doubted whether many of these people would voluntarily consent to such an exchange of situation . . . this should not, however, discourage the experiment nor the early trial of it." Birney objected that Jefferson's characterization of African colonization as humanitarian was erroneous because its supposed beneficiaries vehemently opposed it. Likewise, the Indians themselves, Birney reminded his readers, had long ago said of whites that they "create the necessity which makes it expedient for us to remove to a wilderness, and then . . . claim the praises of philanthropy and humanity." Colonization, Birney concluded, was like Indian removal because both policies "supposed it was easier to remove from the country those who were the subjects of this degradation, than to successfully combat and overthrow the prejudices and false principles which produced it." 46

Another prominent abolitionist, Elizer Wright Jr., also supported the American Colonization Society through 1829, when he presented its Fourth of July fund-raising address in his hometown. That fall Wright helped lead opposition to removal at


46 James Gillespie Birney, Letter on Colonization, Addressed to the Reverend Thornton J. Mills, Corresponding Secretary of the Kentucky Colonization Society (New York, 1838); Betty Gladland, James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist (Ithaca, 1955), 37, 86; Beriah Green, Sketches of the Life and Writings of James Gillespie Birney (Utica, 1844), 17. Thomas Jefferson suggested removing only young African Americans and noted that separating infants from their mothers "would produce some scruples of humanity. . . . But this would be straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel," he concluded. See H. A. Washington, ed., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (9 vols., Washington, 1853–1855), VII, 332–35.
Western Reserve College, where he was a professor of mathematics. After the removal bill passed, he publicly repudiated colonization and funneled his energies into the American Anti-Slavery Society, becoming its secretary for domestic correspondence. Wright charged that colonization to Liberia merely repeated in Africa the same pattern that had been followed with American Indians, and he set out to convert others to immediatism. His colleagues at Western Reserve College, Beriah Green and Charles Storrs, were also antiremovalists who went from that cause directly into immediatism. After Theodore Weld spent several weeks at Western Reserve College in October 1832, he likewise abandoned colonization for immediatism. 47

The abolitionist Beriah Green believed that Indian removal was an instructive lesson in the probable outcome of even the most benign efforts at voluntary African colonization. Green warned that colonization, like Indian removal, would quickly turn into a scheme of forced repatriation to Africa whenever ridding the country of Africans appeared expedient to a majority of those in Congress. In a sermon preached at Western Reserve College in 1833, Green pointed out that the same language used in the tactics of Indian removal was already appearing in speeches by legislators. Such men advocated colonization even if consent were extorted from Negroes by a series of oppressions, including beatings, calculated to render their situation in the United States insupportable. Of his friend Birney, Green wrote that “from the Indian to the Negro, the transition was easy and natural. He could hardly fail to see, when the wrong of the Indians had thoroughly aroused him, that the suffering of the Negro flowed from the same bitter fountain.” 48


48 Beriah Green, Sermons Preached in the Chapel of the Western Reserve College (Cleveland, 1833), 45; Green, Sketches of the Life and Writings of James Gillespie Birney. 10. Colonization opponents also pointed to the catastrophic mortality rate of immigrant African Americans in Liberia as an argument against colonization. See Antonio McDaniel, Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago, 1995).
citing opposition to removal. He became an early advocate of immediatism, and the board of the American Anti-Slavery Society asked him to be its first president. 49

George Cheever, the student at Andover Seminary who led the antiremoval campaign there, well expressed the passion that antiremovalists carried with them into radical abolition. "The passage of the Indian bill has disgraced us as a people, has wounded our national honor, and exposed us to the merited reproach of all civilized communities in the world," he concluded when the bill passed. "We would rather have a civil war, were there no other alternative, than avoid it by taking shelter in crime," Cheever said later of his opposition to Indian removal. "We would take up arms for the Indians in such a war," he went on, anticipating sentiments that many abolitionists later expressed in opposition to slavery. The Ladies' Circular had similarly raised the prospect of a civil war over the removal issue, saying that the president had the power "to command the whole military force of our nation to protect and sustain the Indian in his rights." 50

Protesting Indian removal encouraged antiremovalists to challenge slavery directly. The antislavery upsurge in the early 1830s benefitted from the deep disappointment of antiremovalists who vowed not to repeat that process by removing Africans through colonization policies, and to defeat the Democratic party—the party of removal—on slavery. The Indian Removal Act made abolitionists bolder in acting against slavery and more determined to achieve their goals.

Whether Andrew Jackson's presidency fostered an increase in democratic participation may be debated, but credit for an enlarged democracy may accrue to him by default, for his determination to carry out Indian removal generated the deepest political movement that the country had yet witnessed. It also ushered in a new age of popular politics that saw energized antiremovalists transfer their techniques of removal protest to the struggle against slavery: massive and continuous pamphletting and petitioning by both women and men, persistent reports in periodicals that sought to present slavery from the perspective of the slave, and a willingness to challenge laws that they believed were deeply unjust.
