

PRIMARY DOCUMENT B

Speech in Congress from Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen in 1830

John Ross, also known as Guwisguwi (a mythological or rare migratory bird), was the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation from Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen of New Jersey was among the fiercest opponents of Indian removal policy. In April 1830, he delivered a six-hour speech on the floor of Congress in opposition to it. Below, is an excerpt.

God, in his providence, planted these tribes on this Western continent, so far as we know, before Great Britain herself had a political existence. I believe, sir, it is not now seriously denied that the Indians are men, endowed with kindred faculties and powers with ourselves; that they have a place in human sympathy, and are justly entitled to a share in the common bounties of a benignant Providence. And, with this conceded, I ask in what code of the law of nations, or by what process of abstract deduction, their rights have been extinguished? ...

Several years ago, official reports to Congress stated the amount of Indian grants to the United States to exceed two hundred and fourteen millions of acres. ... The confiding Indian listened to our professions of friendship: we called him brother, and he believed us. Millions after millions he has yielded to our importunity, until we have acquired more than can be cultivated in centuries—and yet we crave more. We have crowded the tribes upon a few miserable acres on our Southern frontier: it is all that is left to them of their once boundless forests: and still, like the horse-leech, our insatiated cupidity cries, give! give! ...

Our ancestors found these people, far removed from the commotions of Europe, exercising all the rights and enjoying the privileges, of free and independent sovereigns of this new world. They were not a wild and lawless horde of banditti, but lived under the restraints of government, patriarchal in its character, and energetic in its influence. They had chiefs, head men, and councils. ...

[The Indian] opened the hand of his bounty wider and wider. By and by, conditions are changed. His people melt away, his lands are constantly coveted; millions after millions are ceded. The Indian bears it all meekly; he complains, indeed, as well he may; but suffers on: and now he finds that this neighbor, whom his kindness had nourished, has spread an adverse title over the last remains of his patrimony, barely adequate to his wants, and turns upon him, and says, "Away! We cannot endure you so near us! These forests and rivers, these groves of your fathers, these firesides and hunting grounds, are ours by the right of power, and the force of numbers." Sir, let every treaty be blotted from our records, and in the judgment of natural and unchangeable truth and justice, I ask, who is the injured, and who is the aggressor? ...

Every administration of this Government, from President Washington's, have, with like solemnities and stipulations, held treaties with the Cherokees; treaties, too, by almost all of which we obtained further acquisitions of their territory. Yes, sir, whenever we approached them in the language of friendship and kindness, we touched

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the chord that won their confidence; and now, when they have nothing left with which to satisfy our cravings, we propose to annul every treaty—to gainsay our word—and, by violence and perfidy, drive the Indian from his home. ...

How can we ever dispute the sovereign right of the Cherokees to remain east of the Mississippi, when it was in relation to that very location that we promised our patronage, aid, and good neighborhood? ... How were these people to remain, if not as they then existed, and as we then acknowledged them to be, a distinct and separate community, governed by their own peculiar laws and customs? We can never deny these principles, while fair dealing retains any hold of our conduct. ...