Texans fighting the Mexicans. In December 1837, the U.S.-born Rennselaer Van Rennselaer led a small group of men across the Niagara river to establish a beachhead for the return of a well-known Canadian rebel; but Jackson's successor as president, Martin Van Buren, dealt aggressively with this group of American adventurers. Van Buren issued a proclamation denouncing the actions, alerted customs agents and U.S. marshals along the border, and eventually sent General Winfield Scott to manage relations in the region. Despite the heavy military presence, Canadian Patriots and their American supporters coordinated attacks along the border throughout the year. Pressed by armies on both sides, the men went underground in early 1838, but sporadic attacks occurred into 1841.

Neither the Texas nor the Canadian episodes received official government support, but Jackson's hands-off approach offered implicit support for the former. Mexico had only recently freed itself from Spanish control and many Americans viewed it as a weak neighbor, ripe for American conquest. Texas independence angered the Mexicans and America's harboring of Canadian rebels angered the British. In both situations, America negotiated solutions that demonstrated its rising status as a continental power but also one that remained loose at the seams.

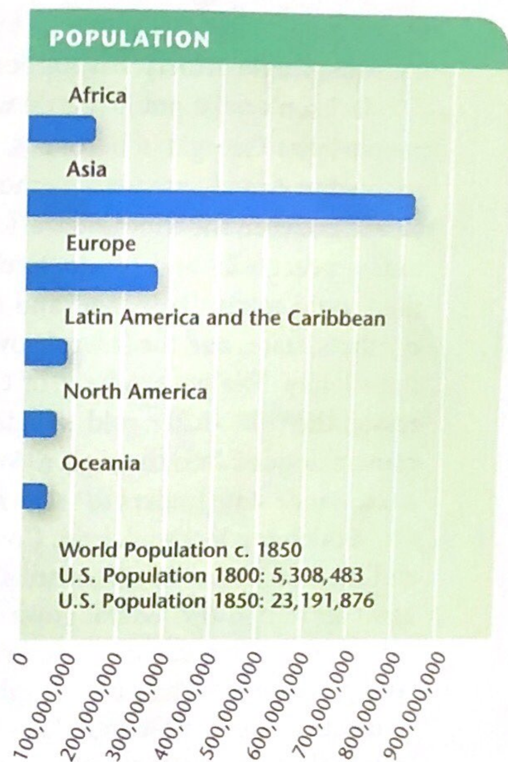
AN EXPANDING NATION

The three decades of peace following the War of 1812 gave Americans an opportunity to consolidate the territory that had been won permanently from the British. But even as settlers pushed west and traders sailed around the world, American control of the land within the boundaries of the original colonies remained incomplete, underscored by the extensive Cherokee and Creek landholdings in Georgia. Two substantial obstacles blocked American expansion west of the Mississippi River: Mexican control of most of today's Southwest and the presence of substantial numbers of Native Americans. West of the Mississippi, the United States claimed only a few military forts strung out across a vast expanse of plains and mountain territory controlled by a variety of Indian communities. Intermingled with the Western Indians lived tens of thousands of Spanish-speaking residents, most born while Spain still ruled the region. Anglo settlers who headed west into this landscape embodied the dynamism of the era. At the same time, many other Americans moved against their will, including enslaved people moved from Eastern states to the emerging cotton belt and Indians removed from the Southeast to Oklahoma. A growing population and a robust economy encouraged the United States to expand, but that expansion created new problems. Military difficulties arose as the settlers and explorers encountered people with existing claims to the land; political problems developed as leaders wrestled with whether the United States should follow the pattern of previous empires; and cultural conflicts grew as the country sought to incorporate people of widely different backgrounds into an already diverse nation.

Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears

Strong native communities stood opposed to the United States in the East as well. In the Southeast alone, the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Creek counted

75,000 members compared to 330,000 white people and 230,000 black people in the region in 1820. Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan likewise included large numbers of native peoples. The state and federal governments worked sometimes in cooperation and other times at odds with each other to push Indians farther to the west. Andrew Jackson came to the presidency strongly opposed to the presence of Indians in territory that could be profitably settled by whites and strongly opposed to the practice of the federal government negotiating with Indians as equals. As early as 1817, Jackson had described "treaties with the Indians as an absurdity." Born in the Carolina backcountry during the Revolutionary period, when native peoples contested U.S. borders, Jackson matured in Tennessee when that state was still inhabited by them. From his earliest encounters he developed a strong antagonism toward those he regarded as "blood thirsty barbarians." Jackson sought "to reclaim them [Indians] from their wandering habits and make them a happy, prosperous people," and



THE CHEROKEE REMOVAL The forced removal of Indians by the U.S. government created a demographic and historical catastrophe for Indian communities. Cherokee removal, represented here, began in the winter and imposed physical hardships as it alienated Indian people from their ancestral homelands.

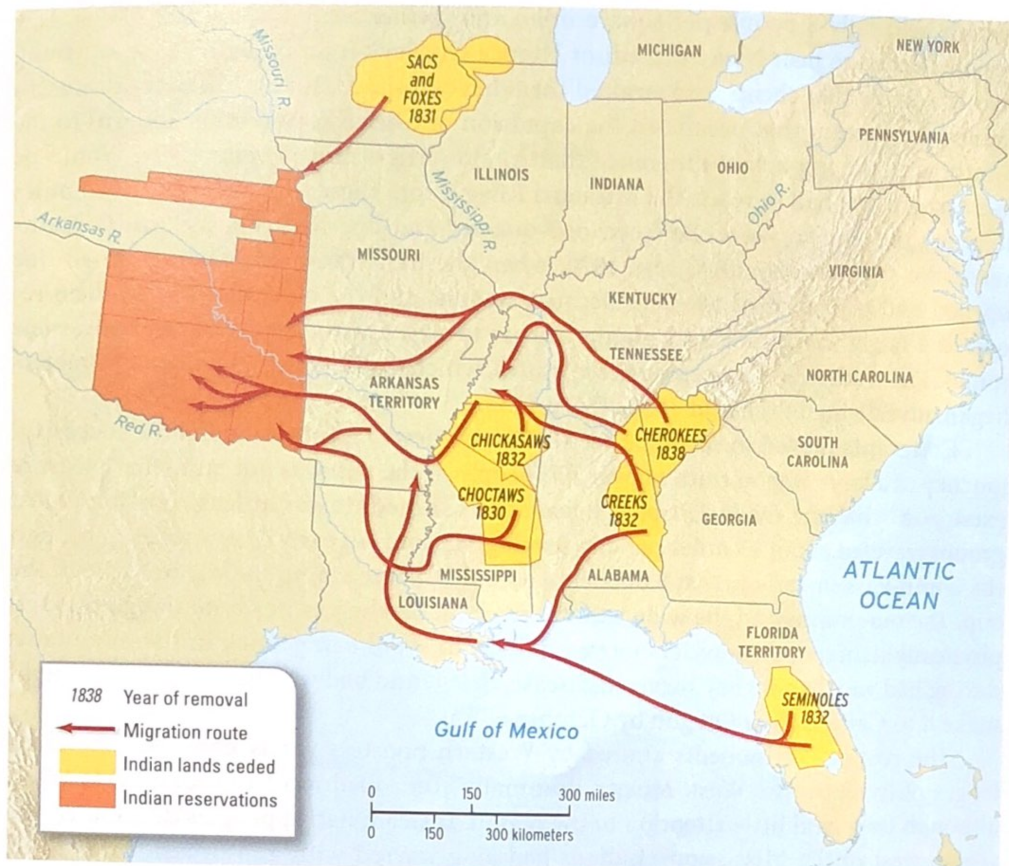
as president he used the executive power to force this policy on Indians across the country. Most Anglo-Americans supported his policies.

Jackson's most public battle with Indians resulted from the expulsion of Cherokee people from Georgia. Cherokees, the largest native community in the Southeast, had adapted to American customs more than neighboring tribes. According to the treaties passed between the tribe and the federal government, the good faith efforts of Cherokees to live peacefully and productively alongside their American neighbors ensured that they could retain their land and their autonomy. But as new Anglo settlers generated conflicts, states and the federal government steadily increased pressure on Indians to sell their lands. The government of Georgia, where most Cherokee landholdings lay, harassed the tribe. After gold was discovered on Cherokee-controlled land in 1829, white miners flooded into the region. With their numbers nearing 10,000, they had the clout to convince state leaders to seek the complete expulsion of the tribe.

Following Jackson's lead, Congress passed the **Indian Removal Act of 1830**, which nullified 50 years' worth of treaties between the United States and many tribes. The law committed the federal government to creating an Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma and to moving Indians by force into this new region. Cherokees, well-educated and protective of their treaty rights, vigorously resisted. Cherokee leaders sought legal protection against Georgia laws that asserted authority over the tribe. In a series of seminal cases, the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice John Marshall, declared the Cherokee, like all recognized Indian tribes, "domestic dependent nations." Marshall intended this description to establish the sovereignty of tribes in relation to state governments, although not in relation to the federal government. In the 1832 *Worcester v. Georgia* decision, the court ruled against Georgia's claim that it held authority over the tribe, but the state and federal government ignored the ruling. Without recourse to the army, which could have protected Indian lands from settler encroachment, Marshall could not enforce the decision.

Under Georgia's protection, white settlers continued to move into Cherokee territory in the early 1830s. In 1835, the federal government negotiated a new treaty with a minority group of Cherokee. This new agreement exchanged all Cherokee claims to land in the East for claims in Indian Territory and a cash settlement. When U.S. forces arrived in early 1838, few Cherokee had prepared for the trip, and soldiers rounded up and confined people over the summer. Contaminated water, inadequate food, and disease killed many of those restricted in stockades; and many more perished on the 800-mile journey west. Estimates of fatalities connected with the "**Trail of Tears**," as Indians referred to the forced march, range from 4,000 to 8,000 (Map 11.1). The blatant violation of property rights backed by clear title to the land worried many white citizens, even those who disliked Indians. Davy Crockett, the legendary frontiersman, lost his congressional seat for opposing Jackson's policy. The violence and trauma of the forced march to the new Western lands created more political enemies for Jackson and a shameful legacy for the American government. Reformers, especially in New England, had protested the Indian Removal Act, and reports of the expulsion and death of so many Cherokees added new urgency to their calls for a more humane Indian policy.

While Jackson and white Georgians were expelling Cherokees from the northern reaches of the state, the Second Seminole War raged in the South. Instead of the Cherokee's legal maneuvering, Seminole fighters used their knowledge of the land and ecology to stymie American forces for years. In 1818, Jackson had led the U.S. Army



MAP 11.1 ▲ Indian Removals, 1830s This map shows the routes along which Indians were driven by the U.S. Army during the forced relocations of the 1830s. Jackson's policies moved the last large Indian communities living east of the Mississippi River into the frontier regions of the Oklahoma Territory.

during the First Seminole War, and he eagerly supported efforts to pacify the region at the end his presidency. Most of the fighting in the second conflict occurred within the Okefenokee Swamp and its hinterlands, a shifting maze of wet and dry ground that disoriented all but the most experienced soldiers. Led by Osceola, a skilled commander, Seminole fighters developed a pattern of attacking and retreating that frustrated and debilitated American troops, who also suffered disease and discomfort in the swamps. Despite the high cost to U.S. forces, the Army persevered; and by 1842, a staggering 90 percent of the Seminole community had been killed. The remaining 600 were permanently expelled into the wild region of southern Florida.

Re-Peopling the West

In the late 18th and early 19th century, settlers moved out of the Northeastern region—with a population density of 31 people per square mile—into the Midwestern territories

(which held only 8 people per square mile) and farther west to the Great Plains. Few people needed to hear New York editor Horace Greeley's injunction to "go west, young man" to know that cheap land awaited them beyond the Mississippi. The result was an emigration stream that paralleled the expulsion of Cherokee and other Indians to the South, with the important difference that Anglo settlers moved voluntarily. Would-be Westerners first had to reach the Missouri River. From there, they traveled 2,000 miles to reach the Pacific shore. Between one-quarter and one-half of a million migrants made the trip between 1843 and 1870, when the first transcontinental railroad line opened and transformed the trip. Because wagons and the oxen that pulled them required a fairly easy grade and regular access to water, travelers could use only a few routes. Fur traders had pioneered these routes, which California and Oregon promoters began advertising in the mid-1830s (Map 11.2).

Emigrants moved in earnest after 1842 when news reports heralded the successful journey of a large wagon train of over 100 people. If the trip was not quite the "pleasure excursion" that the *Daily Missouri Republican* claimed, it was at least possible. Most groups traveled about 15 miles per day, leaving Missouri in early May, crossing through the South Pass in early July at 8,000 feet and only then reaching the hardest part of the trip. The mountains and the wide western rivers made the journey both dangerous and physically demanding; travelers moved quickly to avoid being stuck in the mountains during bad weather. If they survived disease, thirst, and bad weather, the settlers might make it to California or Oregon by October.

The rosy advertisements crafted by Western boosters rarely conveyed the challenges of living in the West. Mexico nominally controlled most of today's U.S. West, although they paid little attention to the region. Instead, native peoples dominated the region west of the Mississippi. Indians had long warred with and occasionally allied with the Spanish, but except for those Southwestern tribes who had to contend with a persistent Spanish presence, Plains Indians viewed each other as their most important threats. The few French traders who came through the area maintained amicable relations with native peoples to facilitate business deals. But the American settlers, who started arriving in the 1830s and then increasingly after 1841, posed a threat. Unlike the Spanish or French, these new inhabitants did not come to trade; they built farms and forts and intended to stay. Americans sometimes recognized differences within the larger native population and even established friendly relations; but generally, settlers' attitudes displayed their ignorance and fear.

In the deeper Southwest, many American settlers regarded the Mexican and Indian residents, whom they rarely distinguished, with a mix of loathing and disgust. At best, settlers treated them as obstacles to the expansion of American power in the region. An 1846 issue of the *Illinois State Register* described Mexicans in the region as "reptiles in the path of progressive democracy . . . they must either crawl or be crushed." The combination of biology and politics in the paper's explanation reflected contemporary American thinking that certain races might die out because they were "unfit" for the modern world. Few Americans demonstrated much sympathy for Indians or Mexicans displaced by settler encroachment. Ethnographers and scientists such as Harvard's Louis Agassiz added scientific weight to the biological explanation by using skull-size measurements to generate an intellectual hierarchy of the races. Agassiz's methods were hardly scientific—his data were faulty, and he failed to rigorously test and separate evidence from hypothesis—but white Americans accepted his results as natural, even inevitable.

MAP 11.2 ▲ Major Overland Trails Western emigrants followed well-established routes across the continent. Starting at the Missouri River, the paths converged in the narrow passes through the Rocky Mountains and then diverged to head toward northern or southern towns on the Pacific Coast.

Spanish-speaking residents proved another obstacle to U.S. expansion. Mexican independence in 1821 barely affected the northern provinces of New Mexico and California. Living on Mexico's northern edge, far from the administrative center in Mexico City, these settlers maintained their largely pastoral and agricultural economy and Catholic beliefs. In 1834, Mexico had moved to reduce the power of the Catholic Church over the country by secularizing the mission lands, but this allowed elite landholders in many places to acquire still more property and social control. In some cases, especially the California territory, the ranchero elite allied themselves with Anglo settlers, but in others

they maintained autonomy. In other cases, the villages created out of mission lands ensured local control and mutual dependency among the Hispanic residents, who retained control over land and resources into the 1870s despite Americans' efforts.

Latin American Filibustering and the Texas Independence Movement

As legal settlers ventured into U.S. holdings across the Mississippi, adventurers such as John A. Quitman and Rennselaer Van Rennselaer pushed south and west into the Spanish borderlands or north into Canada. Americans launched some of these expeditions while living outside the United States, but other groups organized within the United States proper and then invaded foreign soil. Between 1800 and 1860, U.S. citizens launched at least 19 separate expeditions into Spanish colonies or Latin American republics. The Spanish themselves offered mixed signals by periodically inviting Anglo settlers who took an oath of allegiance to the Spanish government into the northern reaches of their Mexico territory, even though few settlers seem to have respected these vows. Americans described these actions and the people who took them as filibusters, from the Spanish *filibustero* and before that, the Dutch term for "freebooter."

Filibusters clearly violated the U.S. Neutrality Act of 1818, which outlawed private warfare. Yet because so many people supported the cause of American expansion, Americans often regarded filibusters as heroes despite their frequent executions as spies and insurrectionaries in the countries they invaded. After tapering off in the 1840s, a new wave of filibusters pushed into Central America in the 1850s. John Quitman and Henry Maury—a southern lawyer and sea captain—recruited men for an expedition to liberate Cuba from the Spanish. William Walker—who invaded Mexico once and Nicaragua three times—became famous across America as the most successful and infamous filibuster of the age. The following poem ran in Southern newspapers at the time:

> Success to Maury and his men
> They'll safely cross the water
> Three cheers for Southern enterprise
> Hurrah for General Walker

Walker succeeded briefly in Nicaragua, occupying the post of "president" for several months in 1856, only to be expelled and later executed in Honduras. As the poem indicates, Southerners led most of the efforts in the 1850s, intending to add new slaveholding territory to the Union. As a result, filibustering in this decade became embroiled in the larger sectional conflicts over slavery.

Filibusters raised a set of questions related to American expansion and power, although few at the time considered the issue in such systematic detail. Who acted for the United States? Did privately organized ventures represent the interests of the nation? Would American expansion happen violently or peacefully? To what extent would the residents of a place be consulted before American acquisition? Did this style of expansion constitute imperialism? American leaders offered vague and shifting answers to these questions. As filibustering demonstrated, private ventures could sometimes serve as an advance guard for national expansion. Force and persuasion operated simultaneously as Americans expanded their borders.