

A. J. Langguth. *Driven West: Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears to the Civil War*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010. Pp 466. Hardcover, \$30.00, 978-1-4165-1.

The story of the creation and development of the United States is most often told from the perspective of the white men who settled the land, with little mention of the native population that was present long before and remained long after European settlement began. These Native Americans helped to shape the fledgling nation, and continued to do so despite their rejection from its social and political institutions. Without the inclusion of these people and their influence in the story of America, the history is incomplete. The few stories that are included, like that of the infamous Trail of Tears, often seem isolated and are told without context or consequence. In *Driven West: Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears to the Civil War*, A. J. Langguth attempts to change that by retelling the history of the decades leading up to the Civil War to include how Native Americans and United States' policies toward them helped to divide the nation. In telling this compelling narrative, Langguth forces Americans to confront their past.

Langguth's focus is on the Cherokee and other tribes of the land of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi who were forcibly removed from their homes to make room for the expansion of the white population. This removal, executed under the authority of President Jackson, resulted in the deaths of thousands of Native Americans and is a well-documented black-mark on American history. In this book Langguth seeks to provide the essential context for this well-known removal and to create much needed connection between this event and others that happened in the same time period. In particular, the author attempts to draw a direct line from Indian removal to the Civil War, arguing that congressional debates over Indian policy deepened the already growing divide between the North and South, as Northerners defended the Cherokee, and Southerners saw this defense as growing resistance to their ways of life and institutions. By linking the events and people of the period to the issues involving Native American policy,

Langguth successfully exposes history as web of connected events, each with causes and sometimes serious repercussions.

Langguth, an emeritus professor in the Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California, has much experience with this type of research and writing. He is an acclaimed novelist and non-fiction writer who, in addition to his work with this book, has written about other defining conflicts in American history such as the American Revolution, War of 1812, and Vietnam War. Here he presents the unique argument that the debates over Indian removal were actually “the first civil war,” though this time a political war with little bloodshed and violence, which “pitted North against South and ended in defeat for the North” (396). The victims in both this and the “second civil war” in the 1860s included the men, women and children of the Cherokee Nation and their Native American neighbors. While it is true that the Cherokee lost a higher percentage of their population during both events than did any one Southern state, labeling Indian removal as a civil war is an overstatement that is not well supported in the book. On the other hand, Langguth’s argument that Georgia’s removal of Indians, despite the federal government’s resistance, paved the way for states’ resistance to federal laws later on holds more validity.

Though there are some critical weaknesses in argument, the strengths of the book come from Langguth’s use of an impressive bibliography of sources. These include secondary works, mostly about the histories and experiences of the Cherokee and other native tribes and the leaders of the United States, as well as primary documents like letters, diaries, and memoirs of both political leaders and natives. Using these sources the author paints a colorful picture of the nation’s key characters in connection to Indian removal, with extensive use of details, from the type of beverage served at an event to the hair accessories worn by the first lady. Much of the narrative is driven by biographies, through which we are introduced to people like John

Marshall, Winfield Scott, and of course Andrew Jackson. In addition to these well-known U.S. leaders, Langguth also includes the stories of people like Major Ridge, a Cherokee leader; Daniel and Elizabeth Butrick, missionaries who traveled along with a Cherokee detachment and reported their experiences; and Sequoyah, who fought alongside Jackson in the War of 1812. While other works tend to leave women and Native Americans out of the story, this book offers a good balance of male and female, white and Indian characters. Though the book appears to be a bit heavy on political elections and references to Henry Clay, the backgrounds and summaries of the achievements, decision-making processes, and personal lives of the dozens of individuals the author references are both the interesting and informative.

The book is organized chronologically with twenty chapters spanning from 1825 to 1865, each named for a person or event of significance at the time. This provides a clear and effective order to the broad array of people and events the book references. It opens with a chapter on Henry Clay and how his decision to support the election of John Quincy Adams for president in exchange for appointment to a cabinet position “set off repercussions that transformed the character of his young country, uprooted the earliest Americans from their homes in the Southeast, and led ultimately to massive bloodshed” (1). This type of bold statement certainly draws the reader in, but Langguth falls short of proving it. The second chapter then switches gears to introduce the history and relations of the Cherokee Nation. In the chapters that follow Langguth develops the relationship of the United States, and certain of its leaders in particular, to the Cherokee Nation and its leaders. The first quarter of the book sets the stage for Jackson’s policies toward Native Americans, and the remainder of the book discusses the enactment of those policies.

Langguth provides concise summaries of major events without oversimplifying them too much, making this book an enjoyable and accessible read for anyone interested in learning more

about Indian removal and the key people and events of the decades before the Civil War. The author also successfully shows how the questions surrounding the presence and assimilation of Native Americans were at least indirectly linked to many of the major events of the antebellum era. However, while the stories provided are vivid and informative, the book is seemingly too broad in context and offers no revelations about either Indian removal or the Civil War that are substantially supported. Without a prologue, epilogue, or traditional endnotes, it is written and can be read more like a novel than an historical work. (Note: The chapter titled “Prologue,” which brings the reader from Franklin Pierce’s inauguration in 1853 to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, serves as an introduction to the war, not the book.) This work would benefit greatly from an introduction chapter laying out the main argument and evidence. The argument suggested by title is not as clear or as well-footnoted as readers may be used to finding in scholarly works. Without this clarity, it is often difficult to find the connections between the book’s content and the title chosen for the book, which can be seen as a major flaw.

The book’s strengths do, however, make it worth the attention of teachers in the classroom for several reasons. Langguth provides a plethora of back-stories that would enrich any lecture about the key people, elections, and decisions that appear in the book. In addition, his descriptions of the men and women in the book and their decisions reveal their complexities; readers can see these individuals more as humans who are influenced by the world around them and who sometimes make decisions based on their own interests, as opposed to the bronze statues that history texts often portray them as. This is apparent in looking at Jackson’s support for states’ rights in Indian removal policies, but not during the nullification crisis in South Carolina. Often students of history, teachers included, struggle to see people of the past as anything but clearly and logically thinking people. Lastly, while I would be hesitant to teach Langguth’s argument about Indian Removal being the first civil war, his process of showing the

linear flow of events from the election of 1824 through the Civil War may help students to see more clearly the connectivity and consequences of events in history. For these reasons Langguth's work, despite its flaws, may serve as a valuable teaching tool.