Socratic Seminar: Jackson, Indian Removal, and the Trail of Tears

GROUP A:

1. Do you think we like to think of America as being a “GOOD” country - therefore it’s hard to think of the negative actions of our people/government? Most of us would say that we would never do anything like this to people. What do you think - is it possible that people would repeat this today under similar circumstances?

2. Jackson sounds racist to us today. Do you think he should be forgiven since HE believed that he had good intentions? Students in the past who have said racist things have said (similarly) - "I didn't MEAN it in a bad way." How do we handle this - intentions vs. how someone else understands/takes it? Who should be seen as the “villain” here?

3. Georgia state passed some of the most notorious laws to put the Indians at a disadvantage - including: not allowing the Cherokee to mine for gold - on their own land, Native Americans could not testify against white people, etc.

How does this relate to our class discussions about “mob rule?” Did Congress and the President merely represent the people of America (the people get to make decisions in a republic) – did this act reflect the wishes of the American people?

4. Jackson said, “we would not want to see this continent restored to the condition in which our forefathers found it. What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and occupied by a few thousand savages to our great Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, decorated with art and industry, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?”

Why do you think "civilization" or removal seemed at the time to be the only options? Could these different cultures have coexisted?

GROUP B:

5. The Cherokees’ efforts to coexist didn’t prevent some frontier Whites from trying to steal their property. Ironically, most of those who harassed the Indians couldn’t read the English section of the Cherokee newspaper.

A Congressman from Georgia perpetuated the image of the Cherokee “savage” by publicly declaring that the Native Americans of his state lived on a crude diet of roots and reptiles. During a Washington dinner party, a visiting Cherokee leader made a point of asking the legislator to pass “those roots”—by which he meant the potatoes. In this case, it could be said that “savagery” was in the eye of the beholder.

Why do you think the Indians’ DIFFERENCES allowed them to be taken advantage of? Should this be considered ethnic cleansing?

6. Tsali, from the Cherokee tribe, fought against US soldiers (he and 2 of his sons were killed by other Cherokees). The Seminoles fought 3 wars with the US government. The Sauk and Fox tribes, under the leadership of Black Hawk, fought the US army in Illinois over territory.

What were problems with fighting back?

7. How could the US have handled the “Indian problem” (as they will continue to call it) differently?

8. What might be the danger of thinking, "this happened in the past, why can't we move on?”
“Fishbowl” Socratic Seminar Directions

IN-CLASS PROCEDURES: Each group will have ≈12 minutes to discuss its question while the rest of the class listens. The room will be set up with an inner circle (about 15 chairs, for the discussers) and an outer circle (about 15 chairs, for the listeners). This is a “fishbowl” or “inner-circle/outer-circle” format.

INNER-CIRCLE RESPONSIBILITIES: You are the discussers. You will run the conversation almost entirely on your own. I may pose a question here or there, or jump in to correct a factual error or referee a heated argument. Otherwise it’s all up to you.

Here are a few rules:
Do not raise your hand.
Do not look at me to call on you. Just jump right in.
If more than one person starts to speak at the same time, one should show deference to the other and speak first; then the other student will speak next before any other members of the group chime in.
Don’t hog the floor.
Disagree directly, but politely with each other.

Tips on how to hold a conversation:
Use evidence directly from the text to support your arguments.
Be sure to first give directions on how to find the passage you are looking at.
Do analyze any passages you choose.
Ask each other questions – for example, of clarification or extension.
Listen to your peers, and think before you speak, so that you do not simply repeat each other’s points.
If you haven’t heard from someone in the group, you might ask them for their opinion – make sure that everyone has a chance to engage.

OUTER-CIRCLE RESPONSIBILITIES: You will have two different roles. For one discussion, you will be assigned a partner, and you will fill out Observation Form #1 for your partner’s discussion. There will be an opportunity for you to debrief Observation Form #1 with your partner. For the other discussion, your job is to observe the conversation as a whole, and you will fill out Observation Form #2.

GRADING (25 points total):
Seminar Prep (12 points)
Participation in the seminar (5 points) You must make at least 1 positive contribution to earn full credit; I will also be evaluating the quality of your participation as a whole (Note: more is not better … please do share the floor).
Observation Form (8 points)