Letter from Chief John Ross of the Cherokee to Congress

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

A spurious Delegation *[ false or unofficial representatives of the Cherokee]…* proceeded to Washington City with this pretended treaty, and by false and fraudulent representations supplanted *[took the place of ]* the legal and accredited Delegation of the Cherokee… And now it *[The Treaty of New Echota]* is presented to us as a treaty, ratified by the Senate, and approved by the President *[Andrew Jackson]*…

By the stipulations of this instrument *[because of the Treaty of New Echota]*, we are despoiled *[deprived]* of our private possessions… We are stripped of every attribute of freedom and legal self-defense. Our property may be plundered before our eyes; violence may be committed on our persons; even our lives may be taken away… We are denationalized *[left without a nation];* we are disfranchised *[left without political rights]*. We are deprived of membership in the human family! We have neither land nor home, nor resting place that can be called our own.

We are overwhelmed! Our hearts are sickened, our utterance *[voice]* is paralyzed, when we reflect on the condition in which we are placed, by the audacious practices of unprincipled *[immoral]* men…

The instrument in question *[The treaty of New Echota]* is not the act of our Nation; we are not parties to its covenants *[agreements]*; it has not received the sanction *[acceptance]* of our people. The makers of it sustain *[hold]* no office nor appointment in our Nation…they [have no authority] to make bargain and sale of our rights, our possessions, and our common country.

… And, therefore, we, the parties to be affected by the result *[of the treaty],* appeal with confidence to the justice, the magnanimity *[nobility, fairness]*, the compassion, of your honorable bodies*[Congress]*, against the enforcement, on us, of the provisions of a compact*[treaty]*, in the formation of which we have had no *[role]*.

In truth, our cause is your own; it is the cause of liberty and of justice; it is based upon your own principles, which we have learned from yourselves; for we have gloried to count your *[George*] Washington and your [*Thomas*] Jefferson our great teachers… We have learned your religion also. We have read your Sacred [*holy*] books. Hundreds of our people have embraced their doctrines [*ideas/beliefs*], and practiced the virtues they teach

We are, indeed, an afflicted people! Our spirits are subdued *[Low]!* Despair has well nigh seized upon our energies! But we speak to the representatives of a Christian country; the friends of justice; the patrons of the oppressed. … To you, therefore, we look! Before your august *[honorable]* assembly *[Congress]* we present ourselves. On your kindness, on your humanity, on your compassion, on your benevolence [*good will*], we rest our hopes. Spare our people! Spare the wreck of our prosperity! Let not our deserted homes become the monuments of our desolation!

Source: John Ross, *Letter from John Ross, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation of Indians*

*Edited and annotated by Mr. O’Mara*.

Discussion Questions: **(Answer in complete sentences & on a separate sheet of paper)**

1. To whom is this letter addressed?
2. In this letter, what is the main point John Ross’s trying to make about the Treaty of New Echota? (underline a quote to prove your answer)
3. What impact does he say this treaty will have on his people? (underline a quote to prove your answer)
4. What examples does Ross use to demonstrate that the Cherokee have adopted some of the cultural and political beliefs of white America? (underline a quote to prove your answer)
5. What was the main purpose of this letter?