Manifest Destiny and the Diminishing of a Nation:

Displacement of the Catawbas

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The removal of Native American tribes from the southeastern United States marked an especially dark era of American History. The United States' adoption of the Indian Removal Act in 1830 vindicated and legalized the forced expulsion of Native tribes from their ancestral homeland. The ideology of racial imperialism, later known as manifest destiny, advanced the removal legislation and led to the displacement of many Native American tribes. The Catawba, a small aboriginal tribe of upstate South Carolina, encountered much adversity from this racial ideology. While the Indian Removal Act never directly addressed the Catawba Nation, it sparked a national drive for the removal of all native tribes. The Catawba met a similar marginalization as those tribes relocated by the Indian Removal Act. History largely overlooked the Catawba Nation and the individual factors that resulted in their displacement.

My thesis will approach the displacement from the racial, cultural, economic, and religious disparity of these Native Americans by Southern white society. Since race played a crucial role in antebellum Southern society and government, I expand on these dynamics in my thesis to show how the South Carolina state government and its citizen regarded the Catawba Nation. This approach will allow me to explore the racial and cultural aspects of the removal. My thesis will investigate the Catawbas' adoption of certain aspects of white society, such as racial hierarchy and miscegenation rules, in an effort to avoid relocation. The Catawba embraced the practices of racial-based slavery and assisted in the capture of runaway slaves at the behest of white plantation owners. These actions demonstrate how
the Catawba Nation attempted to fit into the established racial hierarchy of white culture to preserve their civilization and ancestral homeland.

Most of the remaining accounts of the Catawba come from governmental records, newspapers, and the personal accounts of white settlers. My thesis will heavily feature content from these reports to compile the most accurate account of the Catawba and the white society around them. I will also look in-depth at the actions taken by the Catawbas to avoid the encroachment of white settlers on their land and meet the expectations of white society.

My thesis will concentrate heavily upon the United States’ antebellum period. To give a comprehensive look into the history of the complex racial views of South Carolina during the era of removal, I will include retrospective elements from the 1750s colonial period through the establishment of the United States in the 1780s.

My approach will provide a comprehensive look into the history of the tribe and the complex racial views of the white settlers. By adding a special emphasis on the racial views towards Native Americans by white South Carolinians, I can comprehend the change in opinions of the white population that led to the displacement of the Catawba Nation.