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“We Will Hold Our Land:” The Cherokee People in Postrevolutionary North America, 1781-1792

In June of 1783, Spain’s newly-appointed Governor of Louisiana Estevan Miro convened a conference of southeastern Indians in Pensacola with representatives from the dominant regional Amerindian groups, including the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creeks in attendance. Among the attendees at the West Florida congress was a small contingent of Chickamauga Cherokee, led by their principal chief Dragging Canoe. During the parlay, Governor Miro implored the Indians to “not be afraid of the Americans,” promised to provide guns and ammunition in their ongoing efforts to prevent the further loss of their lands, and urged them to “continue to fight against American” westerners.¹ Two years later, Upper Creek chief Alexander McGillivray presented Spain’s Governor of West Florida, Arturo O’Neill, a memorial “for the Chiefs of the Creek, Chickasaw, and Cherokee Nations” requesting that Spain “object to... any title land claims or demands the American Congress may set up against our lands.” The métis mico also pleaded with “His most Gracious Catholic Majesty the King of Spain” to offer “his assurances of protection to us, our respective properties, and Hunting Grounds.”² In May 1789, “the Kings and Chiefs of the Cherokee Nation” sent another memorial to “His Majesty George the Third of Great Britain” lamenting their shared defeat during the American Revolution and expressing hope “that the day is not far off when we shall see our [British] Fathers and take them by the hand.” The memorial’s signatories expressed their anger at Britain’s abandonment of their southern Indian allies (“left us like children”) to the Americans who “everyday... remove our lives and take our land.” The Cherokee leaders

¹ John P. Brown, *Old Frontiers: The Story of the Cherokee Indians from Earliest Times to the Date of Their Removal to the West, 1838* (Kingsport, TN: Southern Publishers, Inc. 1938), 221-222; Robert J. Conley, *The Cherokee Nation: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 73-4; Grace Steele Woodward, *The Cherokees* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 102-103.

² John Walton Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938), 90-92.

stated that they had met with Britain's northern Indian allies (probably Shawnee) and that they had pledged their support in their war against the Americans. The chiefs closed their memorial by begging the British monarch to "send some of your Warriors to direct us in our wars" as the Cherokee had "lifted the hatchet to destroy those who were against you" during the Revolution.³ Finally, in a May 1789 report from United States Secretary of War Henry Knox to President George Washington, Knox informed Washington that "the Cherokee have taken refuge from the violence of the frontier people of North Carolina within the limits of the Creeks" and that the Spanish "endeavor to form and cement [a confederacy] of Southern Indians" to serve as an "impassable barrier" to America's western advance.⁴

These four historical vignettes offer a sense of the complexity and sophistication of the Cherokee strategy for dealing with their new postrevolutionary geopolitical reality on the southern frontier. From the myriad of diplomatic interactions to the formation of powerful and effective pan-Indian alliances, the Cherokee people relied upon a multi-dimensional approach in their efforts to maintain their political, socioeconomic, and territorial sovereignty amidst the threats posed by American western encroachment, speculative land pressure, and unrelenting extermination efforts. This presentation offers a window into the Cherokee world during a particularly transformative and precarious decade for the native communities. The period between the signing of the Treaty of Long Island (on the Holston River) in 1781 to the death of Chickamauga resistance leader Dragging Canoe and the replacement of Estevan Miro as Governor of Louisiana with Francisco Luis Hector (The Baron of Carondelet) in 1792 marked a period of both intense violence and far-reaching diplomacy for the Cherokee people. It was also a transitional decade between the protracted Indian warfare that dominated the second half of the 18th century and the so-called "civilization efforts" that preceded Indian removal in the 1830s. Despite ultimately being beaten into submission in 1794 and forced to accept the authority of the United States

³ Kings and Chiefs of the Cherokee Nation to George III, 6 May 1789, Cherokee Documents in Foreign Archives, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

⁴ Henry Knox to George Washington, 23 May 1789, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 52-53.

under the Treaty of Tellico Blockhouse, the effectiveness of the Cherokee's postrevolutionary stratagem placed the tribe at the epicenter of the contest to control the southern backcountry and compelled the region's Euroamerican and Indian competitors to accept the Cherokee as key players in the unfolding regional struggle.

As the guns fell silent across the southern frontier at the end of the American Revolution, the Cherokee people confronted the harsh reality of the devastation wrought by their participation in decades of Euroamerican colonial warfare. Revolutionary wartime raids on Cherokee towns by American military forces resulted in the burning of nearly all of the tribe's communities and farmland and crippled the tribe's economy by disrupting the fur trade, killing cattle and horses, and obliterating orchards. In addition to the ravages of war, smallpox epidemics in 1780 and 1783, decades of coerced land cessions, the death of talented leading men (like Oconostota), and the political fragmentation of the remaining tribal leaders (more on this in a moment), had, in the words of ethnographer James Mooney, "reduced [the Cherokee] to the lowest level of misery, almost indeed to the verge of extinction."⁵

As the Cherokee plotted a course that they hoped would restore their communities, lost territory, market economy, and political stability, voracious American land speculation and advancing western settlements increasingly threatened the tribe's territorial sovereignty and position in the trans-Appalachian West. In 1781, Overhill Cherokee leader Old Tassel informed the governor of North Carolina that his citizens "are daily pushing us out of our lands. We have no place to hunt on. Your people built houses within a day's walk of our towns."⁶ As regional land speculators and commercial farmers enviously eyed Cherokee lands, the defense of their remaining western territory quickly became the

⁵ Russell Thornton, *The Cherokee: A Population History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 37-39; William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 8-11; James Mooney, *History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees* (Asheville, NC: Bright Mountain Books, 1992), 46-61, Kevin T. Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin: America's First Secession* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 33-34, 97-99.

⁶ Kevin T. Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 100-101.

dominant consideration driving Cherokee postwar policies. Unsurprisingly, not all Cherokee leaders agreed on the most expedient tactic to accomplish this goal. While the Cherokee people had never really been unified into anything resembling a “nation,” controversial revolutionary-era treaty negotiations and resulting land cessions resulted in further tribal political polarization. Beginning with the infamous Transylvania Purchase by Judge Richard Henderson in 1775 that resulted in the exchange of 20 million acres of Cherokee lands for 12,000 British pounds worth of specie and trade goods, younger Cherokee leaders, led by Dragging Canoe and Bloody Fellow, bristled at the land deal and pledged to fight to restore lost tribal territory and prevent future cessions. In 1777, Dragging Canoe and his followers broke away from the main body of Overhill Cherokee, living in modern-day East Tennessee, and settled on Chickamauga Creek (near modern-day Chattanooga). After several destructive American raids on the Chickamauga towns in 1782 (and the belief the creek was possibly “infested with witches”), Dragging Canoe and his followers emigrated further south down the Tennessee River. By 1783, the Cherokee people had divided themselves into two main clusters of communities, the Upper Towns (on the upper portion of the Tennessee River) and the five Lower Towns. These two town clusters continued to maintain close contact throughout the period, however both groups pursued quite different strategies for dealing with white territorial encroachment and military threats. To quote Cherokee historian William McLoughlin, tribal “factionalism [among the Cherokee was] a creative response to internal pressures.”⁷

⁷ McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*, 7-8, 30-31; William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 20-23; Kristofer Ray, *Middle Tennessee, 1775-1825* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press), 4-5; Pat Alderman, *Dragging Canoe: Cherokee-Chickamauga War Chief* (Johnson City, TN: The Overmountain Press, 1978), 67-9; Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 209-210; Henry Thompson Malone, *Cherokees of the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1956), 40-1; Woodward, *The Cherokees*, 103; Stanley W. Hoig, *The Cherokee and Their Chiefs in the Wake of Empire* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 58-59; William Blount to Henry Knox, 14 January 1793, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 431-433; E. Raymond Evans, “Notable Persons in Cherokee History: Bob Benge,” *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 1:2 (Fall 1976): 98-106.

Perhaps what is most remarkable about the Cherokee's postrevolutionary program for maintaining their position in the rapidly transforming trans-Appalachian West is the breadth and scope of their diplomatic efforts. The Cherokee maintained a labyrinthine of high level diplomatic contacts with British, Spanish, American, and Upper Creek officials (just to name the most important ones). Through these diplomatic channels, the two primary factions of the Cherokee pressured Euroamerican leaders to come to their aid and rallied regional Indians to join their resistance efforts. A brief survey of postrevolutionary Cherokee diplomacy reveals the extent and effectiveness of these efforts. Beginning with the 1781 peace Treaty of Long Island (on the Holston) that ended Cherokee participation in the American Revolution, Cherokee diplomats cultivated intimate ties to the new American government. Intensifying violence between American westerners and southeastern Indians following the Revolutionary War placed considerable pressure on the new American government to foster peace between the two warring sides. The intersection of postrevolutionary Cherokee military efforts and America's fiscal woes resulted in the first remotely equitable negotiations between the United States and Cherokee at Hopewell, SC in November of 1785 (the Chickamauga did not attend). The terms of the Treaty of Hopewell were remarkable (reserving western territory for the Cherokee and creating mechanisms to prevent further white encroachment) and reveal the effectiveness of the Cherokee resistance movement. Unfortunately, the American government proved unable (or unwilling) to enforce the provisions agreed upon at Hopewell, but repeated pleas to the US Congress and President Washington by the Upper Towns and the further escalation of Indian attacks on white western settlements by the Lower Towns kept pressure on the American government to attempt to abide by the treaty terms. In June of 1788, Secretary of War Henry Knox warned the US Congress that he believed that America's failure to enforce the terms of Hopewell would give the Cherokee "good grounds... for waging perpetual war against the citizens of the United States." In September of 1788, Congress responded to Knox's warning by passing a resolution to "provide a sufficient number of troops in the

service of the United States... [for] the protection of the Cherokees... and for dispersing all the white inhabitants settled upon or in the vicinity of the hunting grounds, secured by” the Treaty of Hopewell. Responding to continued pleas from the Cherokee for federal intervention, in August of 1790, President Washington issued a proclamation stating his intention to “enforce the Hopewell provisions.” The simultaneous efforts of the Upper Towns, under the leadership of chiefs Old Tassel, Little Turtle, and Hanging Maw, to forge strong diplomatic ties with the US and the Lower Towns, under the leadership of Dragging Canoe and his lieutenants, to utilize targeted attacks on controversial western settlements, like Cumberland, Franklin, and Muscle Shoals, played a critical role in America’s decision to create a federal Indian department in 1786. Indian Agents for the Southern District, like James White and Joseph Martin, quickly emerged as key diplomatic conduits in which the Cherokee and southern tribes negotiated with the American government.⁸

While the Upper Cherokee Towns relied heavily upon postrevolutionary diplomatic relations with the United States, the Lower Cherokee Towns turned to the Spanish colonial government and their southeastern Indian allies for support. Most historians who have explored the postrevolutionary relationship between Spanish colonial officials in Louisiana and West Florida argue that Spain ignored the Cherokee as Indian allies until 1791, when Governor Carondelet initiated his “grand strategy” to “bring the Cherokee within the Spanish orbit” through arms shipments, trade relations, and diplomatic

⁸ Mooney, *History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*, 59-62; Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin*, 105-106, 152-153; Conley, *The Cherokee Nation*, 74-75; Woodward, *The Cherokees*, 147; William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Borderlands: Pantan, Leslie, & Company and John Forbes and Company, 1783-1847* (Pensacola: University of West Florida Press, 1986), 84-85, 178; Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 24-29; Hanging Maw “Talk,” 24 March 1787, Cherokee Collection, Knoxville, Tennessee State Library and Archives; Old Tassel “Talk,” 1787, Cherokee Collection, Knoxville, Tennessee State Library and Archives; Old Tassel to Joseph Martin, 19 September 1785, Cherokee Collection, Knoxville, Tennessee State Library and Archives; Bennett Ballew to George Washington, 22 August 1789, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 56; Reginald Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy, 1783-1812* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 51-2; Thomas D. Clark, ed. *The Voice of the Frontier: John Bradford’s Notes on Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 113-114; McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, 20-23; Alderman, *Dragging Canoe*, 67-69, 72-74; John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontier: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 107; Malone, *Cherokees of the Old South*, 33-4; Ray, *Middle Tennessee, 1775-1825*, 10-12; Hoig, *The Cherokees and Their Chiefs*, 70-71.

support. These historians assert that, under the colonial leadership of Governor Estevan Miro, Spanish officials believed that the Cherokee were too “remote and distant” from Spain’s North American colonies and regarded the tribe “as beyond its sphere of influence.”⁹ A deeper look into the inner workings of Iberian-Amerindian relations challenges this conclusion. What most of these scholars fail to consider is the web of relationships involving Iberian-aligned non-Cherokee southern Indian intermediaries and the Chickamauga Cherokee. It is true that very little direct communication occurred before 1791 between the Cherokee and Spanish colonial officials (Miro confirmed this fact on several occasions); however, Spanish officials relied heavily upon Creek and Chickasaw chiefs to serve as intermediaries between Spain and the Cherokee.¹⁰ Between 1783 and 1784, Chickamauga leaders attended several meetings with Estevan Miro and then Governor of West Florida Bernardo de Galvez in the Spanish-controlled cities of Pensacola and Mobile. During these meetings, Cherokee and Spanish diplomats hammered out the details of political, military, and economic alliances.¹¹ During those same years, Spain constructed at least one trading post in Cherokee country on the upper Tennessee River and sent several licensed traders among the Lower Towns.¹² Beginning in 1785, Upper Creek Chief and Spain’s most influential and skilled Indian ally, Alexander McGillivray began to serve as a diplomatic spokesman and “go-between” for the Lower Towns and Spain. In July of 1785, McGillivray “orchestrated a general council” in which “his friends among the Chickasaw and Cherokee” produced a memorial to

⁹ Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Borderlands*, 158-159; Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 208; John Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee: From its Earliest Settlement up to the Year 1796 Including the Boundaries of the State* (Nashville: W.H. Haywood, 1891), 145; Jack D.L. Holmes, “Spanish Policy toward the Southern Indians in the 1790s,” in *4 Centuries of Southern Indians*, ed. Charles M. Hudson (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1975), 66-67; Arthur P. Whitaker, “Spain and the Cherokee Indians, 1783-1798,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 4 (1927), 253-254.

¹⁰ Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee*, 145; Estevan Miro to Daniel Smith, 24 April 1789, Pontalba Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

¹¹ Whitaker, “Spain and the Cherokee Indians, 1783-1798,” 253; Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 222, 224; Conley, *The Cherokee Nation*, 73; Woodward, *The Cherokees*, 102.

¹² Malone, *Cherokees of the Old South*, 64-66, Mooney, *History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*, 64-68.

Spain's monarch Carlos III asking for his help dealing with the Americans.¹³ In May of 1786, Miro informed Francisco Cruzat, Spain's Commandant at St. Louis, that the "Creek, Cherokee, and Chickasaw...continue firm in their friendship to us." Perhaps explaining the absence of direct evidence of contact between Spain and the Cherokee, Miro cautioned Cruzat "to observe the greatest secrecy in order not to give the slightest cause of suspicion to our neighbors [Americans], but you should not lose sight for one moment of the necessity of drawing the [Indian] nations more and more to our friendship."¹⁴ Beginning in 1787, Spanish efforts to maintain the allegiance of the Cherokee expanded as Spanish diplomats began giving "gifts" to tribal leaders.¹⁵ Perhaps the strongest evidence supporting the existence of a close Iberian-Cherokee alliance prior to 1791 are the repeated pleas from America's western leaders, like John Sevier (Governor of the state of Franklin) and James Robertson (prominent leader of the Cumberland settlements) to intercede on their behalf with the Chickamauga Cherokee in order to halt Indian raids on their settlements. These western leaders clearly believed that Spain had tremendous influence over the actions of the Lower Towns.¹⁶ By the time Carondelet arrived in New Orleans to replace Miro as Governor of Louisiana in 1791, Spanish and Cherokee officials had already opened up diplomatic channels and forged strong military and economic ties between the two parties. From 1792 to 1794, Carondelet simply built upon this preexisting framework to expand Spanish support for the Cherokee war against the Americans.¹⁷

¹³ Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 93.

¹⁴ Estevan Miro to Francisco Cruzat, 5 March 1786, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1945: Spain In the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794, Volume III*, ed. Lawrence Kincaid (Washington: The United States Printing Office, 1946), 170; Cruzat Papers, George A. Smathers Library, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

¹⁵ Arturo O'Neill to Estevan Miro, 2 June 1787, D.C. Corbitt, ed. "Papers from the Spanish Archives Related to Tennessee and the Old Southwest, 1783-1800," *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications* 11(1937): 153-55.

¹⁶ John Sevier to Diego de Gardoqui, 12 September 1788, Foreign Documents, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC; James Robertson to Estevan Miro, 2 September 1789, Corbitt, ed. "Papers from the Spanish Archives Related to Tennessee and the Old Southwest, 1783-1800," 21 (1946).

¹⁷ Alexander McGillivray to William Panton, 20 May 1789, D.C. Corbitt, ed., "Papers Relating to the Georgia-Florida Frontier, 1784-1800," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 21 (1937): 284-287; James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiations on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999); Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Borderlands*, 78-79; Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Borderlands*, 158-159; Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 313.

While not as extensive or as entrenched as American and Spanish contacts, the Cherokee also maintained diplomatic relations with Great Britain and France (primarily through trade exchanges and military alliances with British-allied northern Indians).¹⁸ As critical as these Euroamerican relationships were to the Cherokee postrevolutionary strategy, the pan-Indian alliances the tribe established with neighboring Indian groups proved to be equally as essential to Cherokee survival. Without question, the relationship between Alexander McGillivray's Upper Creeks stood as the Cherokee's most important diplomatic and military alliance following the Revolution. Alexander McGillivray, the son of Lachlan McGillivray, a successful and well-connected Scottish trader, and Sehoj Marchand, an influential member of the Creek Wind Clan, rapidly ascended through the leadership ranks within the developing Creek Nation in the second half of the 18th century. By the time McGillivray began collaborating with the Cherokee, he had already established connections with some of the most important Euroamerican and Amerindian leaders in North America. Alexander McGillivray's birth, education, and life experiences forged him into the ideal Cherokee ally, as comfortable brokering contracts with European trade firms (such as Panton, Leslie, & Company out of Pensacola, Florida) as commanding Indian warriors in their shared struggle to resist white encroachment.¹⁹

McGillivray served as the linchpin connecting the Upper Creeks, Cherokee, and the Spanish. Following the Revolution, the Spanish colonial government, desperate to protect their own imperiled territories in the lower Mississippi River Valley, funneled weapons and ammunition to McGillivray's Creek resistance movement through the Florida trading firm of Panton, Leslie, and Company.²⁰ The

¹⁸ Conley, *The Cherokee Nation*, 75; Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 270-271; Woodward, *The Cherokees*, 102-103; Alderman, *Dragging Canoe*, 72-74.

¹⁹ Amos J. Wright, Jr. *The McGillivray and McIntosh Traders on the Southwest Frontier, 1716-1815* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2007), 217-223; Linda Langley, "The Tribal Identity of Alexander McGillivray: A Review of the Tribal and Ethnographic Data," *Louisiana History* 46:2 (2005): 231-239; Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 67-72; Michael D. Green "Alexander McGillivray," in R. David Edmunds, ed., *American Indian Leaders: Studies in Diversity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 41-45.

²⁰ Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 22-26, 28-33; *Cherokee and Creek Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), 121-124; Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O'Neill, 10 October 1886, Antonio Valdes to Estevan Miro, 10 April

Spanish hoped to bolster Creek defenses, attract neighboring Indian groups, and ultimately secure the southeastern Indian communities as a buffer to check American western encroachment.²¹ After finalizing the logistics during repeated meetings between 1783 and 1785, McGillivray's Creek warriors, amply supplied by Spain, began joining Chickamauga forces on raids across the southern frontier. In May of 1786, Arturo O'Neill informed Bernardo Galvez that Creek and Cherokee forces "are making the rounds of their Frontiers with the idea of expelling all Americans settled on their lands." Creek warriors joined Chickamauga war chief Bloody Fellow on raids of the Cumberland River settlements (modern-day Nashville, TN) and "a party of the Creek nation" joined with Chickasaw and Cherokee forces to drive off American settlers near Muscle Shoals (on the contested "bent of the Tennessee River"). Clearly pleased with the pan-Indian attacks, O'Neill informed Galvez that he had "ordered some [additional] powder and balls... be distributed to the Indians."²² Throughout the summer and fall of 1786, "bands of Upper Creek and Cherokees patrolled" the southern backcountry attacking settlements in Georgia and North Carolina (including the future states of Tennessee and Kentucky).²³ Despite the efforts of the peace-seeking Upper Town Cherokee chiefs to "restrain their young warriors" and United States Indian Agents to halt the pan-Indian raids, Cherokee and Creek warriors continued their Spanish-supported attacks on western settlements throughout 1787 and 1788 in an effort to "hold [their land] at whatever cost."²⁴

1790, Mississippi Provincial Archives (Spanish Dominion 1779-1798), Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson; Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 67-88, Whitaker, "Spain and the Cherokee Indians," 252-253; Holmes, "Spanish Policies Towards Southern Indians in the 1790s," 66-67.

²¹ Alexander McGillivray to Estevan Miro, 28 March 1784, "Papers From the Spanish Archive Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest, 1783-1800," *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 9 (1938): 117-118; Antonio Valdes to Estevan Miro, 10 April 1790, Mississippi Provincial Archives (Spanish Dominion 1779-1798), Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson; Jay Feldman, *When the Mississippi Ran Backwards: Empire, Intrigue, Murder, and the New Madrid Earthquakes* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 28-9.

²² Arturo O'Neill to Bernardo de Galvez, 20 May 1786, "Papers from the Spanish Archive Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest, 1783-1800," *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 10 (1938): 139-140.

²³ Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 125-127 (reprinted letter from O'Neill to the Marquis de Sonora written on August 10, 1786).

²⁴ Arturo O'Neill to Estevan Miro, 16 November 1786, "Papers From the Spanish Archive Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest, 1783-1800," *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 10 (1938): 152-155; Hoig, *The Cherokee and Their Chiefs*, 58-60; McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*, 7-9; Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 125-127.

While not completely abating, the Indian raids on western settlements slowed toward the end of 1789 as Spanish colonial officials, under considerable pressure from the United States and a weakened colonial economy, began limiting their material support for Indian forces and encouraging the southern tribes to seek peaceful solutions to resolve their territorial disputes. Despite declining Iberian support and to the chagrin of western leaders, Chickamauga and Upper Creek communities retained their close diplomatic and military “Alliance and Amity” and continued to wreak havoc across the southern frontier.²⁵

While relying primarily on Euroamerican and Indian diplomacy and military alliances to advance their postrevolutionary agenda, the Cherokee also embraced additional tactics to preserve their foothold in the southern backcountry. As the once lucrative trade in whitetail deerskins with the British “was shattered after the American Revolution,” the Cherokee attempted to reinvent their tribal economy. Utilizing their connections with Alexander McGillivray’s Upper Creeks and Spain, Cherokee merchants, traders, and hunters opened up new commercial relationships with Spanish-aligned trade firms such as Panton, Leslie, & Company (Pensacola), Daniel Smith (New Orleans), and John McDonald (former Tory trader now working for Spain on the Gulf Coast). Despite the efforts of the Cherokee, by 1794, the fur trade effectively ceased to exist and the tribe had lost most of its hunting grounds.²⁶ Finally, as diplomatic, military, and economic efforts failed to bring about solutions to the Cherokee’s postrevolutionary problems, many of the tribe’s leading men embraced a tactic that tragically foreshadowed the tribe’s impending trans-Mississippi removal forty years later. Voluntary emigration became a last resort for Cherokee families and communities who were exhausted and terrified by the prolonged period of violence terrorizing their lives. From 1782 until their removal in 1838, small groups

²⁵ Alexander Johnston to Alexander McGillivray, 29 November 1788, D.C. Corbitt, ed., “Papers Relating to the Georgia-Florida Frontier, 1784-1800,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 21 (1937): 291-292; Ray, *Middle Tennessee, 1775-1825*, 20-21.

²⁶ Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Borderlands*, 161-162; Whitaker, “Spain and the Cherokee Indians, 1783-1798,” 257; also see the voluminous Panton, Leslie, & Company Papers located at the University of West Florida Special Collections (microfilm); McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*, 11-12.

of Cherokee chose to abandon their 18th century homeland and resettle away from the chaos of the Indian wars. Once again, Spain and the Upper Creeks played critical roles in aiding many of these fleeing refugee Cherokee communities. In 1782, a contingent of Cherokee met with Spanish officials to discuss their possible emigration to Spanish-controlled Louisiana and in 1783 and 1785 Governor Miro gave permission to other groups to settle in the future state of Arkansas (origins of the so-called Arkansas Cherokee).²⁷ As the Chickamauga War against the American western settlements intensified in 1787 and 1788, Cherokee migrations increased. In 1788 after a brutal and misplaced retaliatory raid on the peaceful Cherokee capital of Chota and neighboring Upper Towns by the Franklin militia, most of the residents fled south and settled in the town of Ustanali (east of the Chickamauga towns in Georgia). The migration led to a brief reunification of the Upper and Lower Towns but the resumption of full-scale warfare after 1792 with the Americans once again factionalized the communities. Throughout the remaining years of backcountry warfare (ending in 1794), members of the Cherokee continued to petition Spanish colonial officials to relocate to Spain's Mississippi Valley communities such as New Orleans, New Madrid, and Natchez.²⁸

Despite the effectiveness of the Cherokee diplomatic, military, and economic tactics at delaying America's western advance, forging transnational and pan-Indian alliances, and forcing the United States to rethink its southern Indian policies, by 1791, the Cherokee people stood on the precipice of a transformative gulf that would irreparably alter their lives and lifestyle. The first signs of change emerged during a treaty held on the twisting banks of the Holston River in 1791 between Southwest Territorial Governor William Blount (a man the Cherokee called "The Dirt King" for his gluttonous

²⁷ Tom Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians Through the Era of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 227-228; Thornton, *The Cherokees*, 43-44; Mooney, *History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*, 99-101.

²⁸ Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 209-211; Conley, *The Cherokee Nation*, 74-75; Henry Knox to George Washington, 23 May 1789, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 52-53; Perez to Alvarez, 10 May 1788, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1945*, 254; Perez to Estevan Miro, 31 May 1788, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1945*, 255; Whitaker, "Spain and the Cherokee Indians, 1783-1798," 252-254.

appetite for their lands) and forty Cherokee leaders representing all of the major towns (including the Lower Towns). Predictably, the Treaty of Holston included another unpopular massive Cherokee land cession that once again redrew the tribe's territorial boundaries. However, the articles of the treaty contained two provisions that again augured America's developing Indian policies, the establishment of the nation's first annuity payments and the first federally-sanctioned "civilization" program. The United State's reliance upon annual payoffs to prevent an Amerindian backlash and Article #14 of the Holston treaty, calling for "the Cherokee to be led to a greater degree of civilization" by sending farming "implements" and "interpreters" to transform hunters into "cultivators," both quickly became essential parts of America's Indian policy.²⁹

Unsurprisingly, the Treaty of Holston did not end backcountry warfare between the Cherokee and American westerners. Despite renewed Spanish support under Louisiana Governor Carondelet and the continuation of the pan-Indian alliance with the Upper Creeks, the rapidly swelling American western population and increasingly effective American raids on southern Indian communities undermined Cherokee efforts to preserve their place in the dynamic trans-Appalachian frontier. Several devastating events signaled that the year 1792 truly stood as the beginning of the end of the Cherokee resistance movement. At the end February of that year, the Chickamauga celebrated several recent native victories over American forces by holding boisterous festivals in all of the Lower Towns. In his hometown Lookout Mountain Town, sixty-year old Dragging Canoe joined his townspeople in the Eagle Tail (or Scalp) Dance. As the aging Chickamauga chief circled and whooped with a feather in his right hand and a recently removed scalp in his left, plans were already in motion for another pan-Indian, Spanish-supported spring offensive against America's western settlements. The next day, Dragging Canoe was

²⁹ Treaty of Holston 1791, 2 July 1791, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 123-125; Conley, *The Cherokee Nation*, 75-77; Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy*, 73-74; McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*, 23-24; Alderman, *Dragging Canoe*, 72-73; Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 133-135; Mooney, *History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokee*, 68-70; Malone, *Cherokees of the Old South*, 35-37; Watson & Coker, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands*, 162; Ray, *Middle Tennessee, 1775-1825*, 24-25; Hoig, *The Cherokees and Their Chiefs*, 74-75.

dead.³⁰ That same fall, after months of declining health, Cherokee ally and Upper Creek leader Alexander McGillivray passed away at his home on the Coosa River.³¹ The deaths of the two men instrumental to the forging of the Muscogee-Cherokee alliance signaled a new phase in the Cherokee struggle with the Americans. With renewed Spanish support and a new group of militant (perhaps less diplomatically skilled) leaders, the Cherokee launched a two year offensive on the United States. As with many insurgencies, the final months of warfare proved to be unbelievably destructive. By 1794, the debilitating loss of key tribal leaders and hundreds of irreplaceable warriors, the growing strength of the United States military apparatus, and the abrupt end of Spanish support caused by the Napoleonic Wars forced the Cherokee to sue for peace with the Americans. The November 7 & 8 Treaty of Tellico Blockhouse ended the Cherokee resistance movement forever and the remaining tribal members embarked on the long and tragic path of civilization and ultimately removal.³² In the end, despite the efforts of tribal diplomats, military leaders, and warriors, the Cherokee efforts to cling to their territorial and political sovereignty failed, but that does not diminish the remarkable strategy they crafted in their pursuit of freedom.

³⁰ Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee*, 273-274; Alderman, *Dragging Canoe*, 72-73; Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 138-139; Conley, *The Cherokee Nation*, 75-77; Cynthia Cumfer, *Separate Peoples, One Land: The Minds of Cherokee, Blacks, and Whites on the Tennessee Frontier* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 57-58; Frank Gouldsmith Speck, Leonard Broom, and Will West Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 64-65; Pat Alderman, *The Overmountain Men* (Johnson City, TN: The Overmountain Press, 1970), 262-263; Mooney, *History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokee*, 70-71; Hoig, *The Cherokees and Their Chiefs*, 77.

³¹ Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 50-52.

³² Thornton, *The Cherokees*, 40-41; Alderman, *The Overmountain Men*, 276-277; McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*, 6-7; Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy*, 76-78; Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee*, 327; McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, 25-27; Alderman, *Dragging Canoe*, 74; Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 137-146; Malone, *Cherokees of the Old South*, 41-45; Hoig, *The Cherokees and Their Chiefs*, 88-90.