

Dragging Canoe (Tsi'yu-gûnsi'ni)
Chickamauga Cherokee Patriot

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While the colonists waged war against Britain, a war for independence raged between interior tribes and white settlers. In the settlers' intercolonial struggle, young men who favored the Revolution found an avenue for political and social leadership. As a voice of Cherokee youth, Dragging Canoe (ca. 1732–1792) demonstrates another intergenerational struggle over the preservation of hunting territories and long-standing definitions of manhood. In opposition to his elders, including his own father, Dragging Canoe refused to give up hunting lands in exchange for peace with the American colonials. By leaving the Cherokee Nation and creating a new multiethnic community, the Chickamauga militants, patriots to their own cause, declared independence from the peace initiatives of Cherokee leadership.

Dragging Canoe and the Chickamaugas were fighting, as Jon Parmenter argues, for “life, liberty, and the pursuit of hunting,” and using methods that American revolutionaries should have understood best: resistance. Why, then, did American raiders, who violated Cherokee-American treaties of 1777, often fail to distinguish between the peaceful eastern Cherokee and the Chickamauga? To unify the Cherokee Nation, Dragging Canoe had worked with Lachlan McGillivray's son, Alexander, to try to persuade the Chickasaw to join the Shawnee-Creek-Chickamauga confederacy. By 1783 the Cherokee had lost three-quarters of the territory it held before the Revolution, and many of its towns had been destroyed. Meanwhile, Britain ceded to the United States land upon which Indian allies resided. Was the Chickamauga strategy of raiding American settlers more successful in uniting the Cherokees than in resisting white encroachment? Why did the terms of the peace treaty of 1783 not signal the end of Dragging Canoe's militant efforts? When Dragging Canoe died, his forces were still intact, but a year and a half later the Chickamauga sued for peace. Given that Dragging Canoe had appealed originally to discontented young Cherokee warriors, how might he have maintained his authority among the Chickamauga until his death, perhaps in his sixtieth year?

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In March 1775 a large delegation of Cherokee headmen and warriors traveled to Sycamore Shoals (near modern Elizabethton, Tennessee) on the Watauga River for a meeting with Richard Henderson, a North Carolina lawyer and organizer of the Transylvania Land Company. Ignoring the ban on Indian land sales to private individuals, established by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, Henderson sought to purchase from the Cherokees a huge tract of 27,000 square miles between the Cumberland and Kentucky Rivers, or most of the modern state of Kentucky. Upon learning of Henderson's intent, Tsi'yu-gûnsi'ni, a Cherokee war leader known to the settlers as "Dragging Canoe,"¹ delivered an impassioned speech against the proposed transaction. If the elder Cherokee leadership did not stop the ongoing cycle of land cessions, Dragging Canoe warned, the Cherokee Nation would soon be compelled

to seek refuge in some distant wilderness. There they will be permitted to stay only a short while, until they again behold the banners of the same greedy host. Not being able to point out any further retreat for the miserable Cherokees, the extinction of the whole race will be proclaimed. Should we not therefore run all risks, and incur all consequences, rather than submit to the loss of our country? Such treaties may be all right for men who are too old to hunt or fight. As for me, I have my young warriors about me. We will have our lands.²

Despite Dragging Canoe's opposition, his own father Attakullakulla and two other prominent Cherokee "beloved men" (elder political leaders of Cherokee communities) signed Henderson's deed on March 17, 1775, and exchanged the Cherokees' best hunting grounds for a reported £10,000 in trade goods. Dragging Canoe, outraged over the sale and "stamping his foot on the ground" for emphasis, warned Henderson that "a black Cloud hung over the country they were selling" and promised that "it was the bloody Ground, and would be dark, and difficult to settle it."³

Although best known for this promise to transform Kentucky lands into the "dark and bloody ground," Dragging Canoe's career in the American revolutionary era holds much more significance than his ability to issue (and deliver on) colorful threats. Dragging Canoe's precise date of birth is unknown, but contemporary

descriptions of his pock-scarred face suggest that he survived the devastating smallpox epidemics that ravaged the Cherokee in the late 1730s. Born into an "Overhills" Cherokee family (so called from their homelands in what is modern eastern Tennessee), he earned his name as a young boy by literally dragging a canoe across a portage in order to accompany his father's war party against the Shawnees (who, ironically, would later become his closest allies). By 1774, Dragging Canoe was identified by British Deputy Indian Superintendent Alexander Cameron as "the only Young Warrior of Note now over the Hills,"⁴ and after 1775, his determined leadership and the widespread dissemination of his message of resistance drew a following that transcended traditional Native American patterns of loyalty to kin, village, or nation. Dragging Canoe recognized the need for solidarity among diverse Indian peoples in the face of an expanding settler population, and through his constant, spirited recruiting efforts, he forged a distinct, multiethnic community (eventually known as the Chickamauga Cherokee) dedicated to preserving the territorial integrity of the Cherokee Nation.

Dragging Canoe's speech at Sycamore Shoals represented a "declaration of independence" for himself and the followers he would attract both within the Cherokee Nation and from other neighboring Indian peoples. Eighteenth-century Cherokee society lacked coercive institutions, which meant that political decisions depended on the ability of recognized leaders to persuade others to accept their viewpoint. Achievement of consensus on matters of foreign policy often was contingent on the maintenance of harmony between the elder beloved men and the young warriors. In 1775, Dragging Canoe and the young warriors broke with the Cherokee leadership, which favored peace and accommodation with colonial settlers after the conclusion of the "Cherokee War" against the southern colonies in 1761. Dragging Canoe devoted the rest of his life to fighting his own "revolution," attempting to forge a new consensus among the Cherokee, one that would preserve Cherokee homelands and the way of life those lands made possible.

John Stuart, British superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern Department, learned in the autumn of 1774 of the growing dissatisfaction among Cherokee young men with the beloved men's policy of trading land for peace. With the young people "ripe for mischief," the chiefs and leading men "were falling into contempt."⁵ Outside "pan-Indian" diplomatic influences from the Shawnees and Delawares of the Ohio Valley, and the growing internal threat to the established pattern of masculine roles in Cherokee society, complicated the traditional generational conflict inherent in the Cherokee political structure. As early as 1770,

Shawnee and Cherokee representatives began to discuss their mutual problems from settler encroachment on their homelands and the prospects for a cooperative response. By the time of the 1775 Henderson Purchase they were being pushed to extreme limits, but emboldened by an expanding range of contacts with militants from other Native groups. Dragging Canoe spoke for many young Cherokee warriors when he denounced the progressive surrender of their hunting grounds. The loss of the ability to hunt threatened the very identity of young Cherokee men, since only those with proven competence in providing for a family could marry, start their own families, and hope to achieve a place of prominence in village life. With the curtailment of opportunities for male social advancement through warfare after 1761 (owing to increased friendly contacts between the Cherokee and their Indian neighbors and to the resolve of the Cherokee leadership to avoid the indiscriminate retaliation of white colonists for transgressions committed by their warriors), hunting assumed still greater importance in the minds of Cherokee young men. By 1775, even the ample gifts obtained by the beloved men in exchange for land cessions could no longer satisfy the warriors.

The "anarchy and distraction"⁶ prevalent in the Cherokee Nation after the Henderson Purchase became more pronounced after news of the April 1775 outbreak of hostilities between Britain and the American colonies reached the Cherokees. The Continental Congress organized its Indian Department in July 1775 and sent representatives into the field to urge the Indians to remain neutral in the war. Superintendent John Stuart also tried to keep the southern Indian nations at peace, while reminding the Cherokees that "there is a difference between the White People of England and the White People of America, this is a matter which does not concern you, they will decide it among themselves."⁷ Yet Cherokee involvement in the Revolutionary War would come on their own terms and at their own time. Dragging Canoe and his warriors regarded the outbreak of hostilities as an opportunity to reassert their claim to lands lost in the preceding decades.

Dependent on the British for military supplies, Dragging Canoe traveled to Mobile in March 1776 to meet John Stuart's brother, Henry Stuart, who was then employed as an agent in the British Indian Department. Dragging Canoe complained bitterly of the shortages of ammunition among his people and enhanced his case by pointing out that the Cherokee "were almost surrounded by the white people, that they had but a small spot of ground left for them to stand upon, and that it seemed to be the intention of the white people to destroy them from being a people." When Henry Stuart told Dragging Canoe that the Cherokees only had them-

selves to blame for making so many private sales, Dragging Canoe disavowed any role in those transactions and "blamed some of their old men who he said were too old to hunt and who by their poverty had been induced to sell their land, but that for his part he had a great many young fellows that would support him and that they were determined to have their land."⁸

Stuart, accompanied by thirty horses loaded with ammunition, slowly made his way to the Cherokee town of Chota (near modern Loudon, Tennessee), arriving in late April 1776. Here he and Deputy Superintendent Cameron tried to encourage the Cherokee to use the ammunition for hunting, not against the nearby white settlements. Their efforts proved fruitless, however, after the arrival of a delegation of fourteen deputies from the Shawnees, Mohawks, Ottawas, Delawares, and Nanticokes in early May 1776. Painted black to symbolize their preparedness for war, the northern Indians described the great numbers of settlers they had seen on their seventy-day journey to Chota from Fort Pitt (modern Pittsburgh). A formal conference followed ten days after their arrival, at which the delegates offered belts of wampum to the Cherokees, containing messages that expressed the militants' desire "to drop all their former quarrels and join in one common cause," and stating their preference to "die like men [rather] than to dwindle away by inches." Dragging Canoe received these belts in public council, and then his followers joined in singing war songs with the northern deputies. The principal chiefs who opposed the militants' position, when confronted with this open display of defiance from their young men, could only sit down "dejected and silent."⁹

Dragging Canoe and his warriors made a dramatic statement for war by joining the representatives from the northern nations. They did so over the heads of their own elders and in opposition to the intentions of their British allies. Indeed, from the outset of the Revolutionary War, Cherokee and British purposes never meshed. Although Stuart received orders from General Thomas Gage in December 1775 to employ the Indians against the American "rebels," he refrained from encouraging the Cherokee to make indiscriminate attacks on the frontier settlements, concerned that through such tactics "the innocent might suffer and the guilty escape."¹⁰ Throughout the Revolutionary War, as Stuart endeavored to restrain his Indian allies from all military involvement except that under the direct supervision of British army or Indian Department officers, it became increasingly clear to Dragging Canoe that he would be fighting his own fight.

Inspired by the visit of the northern deputies to Chota, Dragging Canoe sent off messages inviting Creek Indians to join his warriors, but Creek headman Emistisguo rejected these overtures.

Somewhat chastened, Dragging Canoe and his followers "seemed to repent of their having been so precipitate, but they had gone too far to retreat."¹¹ Determined to strike first, Dragging Canoe led one of three parties of Cherokee warriors against the white settlements on the Holston River, within the bounds of the Henderson Purchase. Unfortunately for the Cherokee militants, Dragging Canoe's own cousin, Nancy Ward (a respected "beloved woman"), betrayed their plans to traders in the Cherokee Nation, and they rushed back to the settlements to give advance warning of the impending attack. Two hundred warriors under Dragging Canoe engaged a frontier militia force sent out from Eaton's Station at Long Island Flats (near modern Kingsport, Tennessee) on July 20, 1776, but the frontiersmen turned them back, and Dragging Canoe suffered gunshot wounds in both legs and lost thirteen men. Undeterred, Dragging Canoe's party continued to fight for another three weeks, driving off settlers and burning cabins as far north as modern Abingdon, Virginia. Returning to Chota with a few scalps and plunder probably saved Dragging Canoe's reputation as a warrior after his July 1776 defeat, but his initial campaign proved costly in two ways. The Americans learned the value of keeping informants in the Cherokee country, and subsequently Dragging Canoe and the militants experienced serious problems with "security leaks." Only rarely in subsequent years would they have the ability to launch large-scale attacks with the element of surprise. Also, by raiding settlements across the boundary line, Dragging Canoe forfeited any hopes, however slim, for reconciliation with the new United States.

With the southern seacoast free from the threat of British invasion in the summer of 1776, armies from Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia turned their attention to retaliating against the Cherokees. Some idea of the Americans' mindset may be gained from this July 1776 statement of William Henry Drayton, chief justice of South Carolina, urging the military commanders to "make smooth work as you go—that is you cut up every Indian corn field and burn every Indian town—and that every Indian taken shall be the slave and property of the taker; that the nation be extirpated, and the lands become the property of the public."¹²

Four American expeditionary forces swept through Cherokee country from August to October that year, destroying food, supplies, and entire towns as they went. Unable to mount effective resistance against such overwhelming odds, the ammunition-strapped Cherokees fled to the west and south. Colonel William Christian of Virginia reached the Big Island Town, home village of "a chief called the Dragon Canoe [*sic*] lately raised to Power . . . [who] was the principal agent in hastening the War" in late Octo-

ber. Here he found the Indians "had ran off hastily, some of them had shut their doors and some had not: they had carried off their cloathes and the best of their household goods," but left behind most of their provisions. Christian then destroyed what he estimated to be "between forty and fifty thousand Bushels of corn and ten or fifteen thousand bushels of potatoes."¹³

The extent of destruction created by wandering American armies drove many Cherokee to seek clemency. Meeting with Colonel Christian in November 1776, Overhills "beloved men" Attakullakulla and Oconostota sued for peace and dissociated themselves from the actions of the young warriors. Dissatisfied with the professions of the old men, and knowing that he would eventually need to deal with the young warriors, Christian demanded that the headmen surrender Dragging Canoe and Alexander Cameron (whom the Americans mistakenly believed had encouraged the Cherokee to take up arms). Threatened with further destruction, Oconostota agreed to try and bring in the two men.

Although he lacked the authority to deliver on his promise, Oconostota's pledge revealed the extent to which Dragging Canoe's actions divided the Cherokee Nation. The experiences of the summer of 1776 led many Cherokees to conclude that further hostilities against the United States were to be avoided at all costs. Not so for Dragging Canoe. Outraged by Oconostota's betrayal, and attempting to secure further supplies from the British at St. Augustine, Florida, Dragging Canoe dictated a letter to Cameron on November 14, 1776, in which he made a necessary and appropriate statement of loyalty to the crown, and warned Cameron of the price on both their heads: "They [the Americans] offered at last £100 for you, and £100 for me, to have us killed. Let them bid up and offer what they will, it will never disturb me. My ears will always be open to hear your Talks and our Father's [the King of England]. I will mind no other, let them come from where they will. My thoughts and my heart are for war as long as King George has one enemy in this country."¹⁴

Dragging Canoe also communicated his continued defiance to the Americans, dismissing an invitation to hear a message left for him by Colonel Christian with the statement that he "had already heard all the talks."¹⁵ Unwilling to participate in the beloved men's diplomacy with the United States, Dragging Canoe led what historians have called a "secession" of his followers from the Overhill Cherokee towns of Big Island, Tellico, Toqua, and Chilhowie to Chickamauga Creek (north of modern Chattanooga, Tennessee), where they were joined by refugees from other parts of the Cherokee Nation. Chosen for its remoteness from American settlements,

its location astride several major land and water communication routes, and its proximity to British commissary John McDonald (who had a supply line to St. Augustine), Chickamauga Creek became home for an estimated "4 or 5 hundred warriors, separated from the rest of their Nation with sentiments of determined Hostility to the United States" by March 1777.¹⁶

Known afterwards as "Chickamaugas," Dragging Canoe's faction of militant Cherokees continued the war on their own terms, disregarding efforts of peace-minded Cherokees to come to an understanding with the United States. By characterizing the Chickamauga migration as a "secession movement," however, historians have misunderstood Dragging Canoe's objectives and overemphasized the extent to which the initial movement of an estimated 20 to 30 percent of all Cherokee warriors compromised the position of the Cherokees in the Revolutionary War.

By the winter of 1776-77, relocating away from the accommodationists represented the only viable option for Dragging Canoe and his followers. Although viewed negatively from the perspective of state societies operating under monarchical or constitutional governments, factional politics and the subsequent "fissioning" or "segmentation" of individuals unable to abide by the decisions of the established leadership represented the very lifeblood of the Cherokee polity. Paradoxically, only by putting approximately two hundred miles between his own followers and those Cherokee willing to make peace with the United States could Dragging Canoe hope to set his own example of leadership and eventually reunite his Nation behind a consensual position of resistance. That winter circumstances still permitted Dragging Canoe to exploit the flexible and dynamic nature of the Cherokee political system for what he considered patriotic ends. The Chickamaugas' "secession" represented not a selfish movement of rash individuals determined to bring down the wrath of the United States upon their relatives, but a calculated risk undertaken by Dragging Canoe to preserve the territorial integrity of the entire Cherokee Nation.

We have only a limited understanding of Chickamauga demography, owing to the understandably keen interest of contemporary literate observers in the number of Chickamauga fighting men. Certainly, women, children, and the elderly were present in Chickamauga towns, as family and kin connections figured prominently in individual decisions to migrate. Women played an especially critical role among the Chickamauga by growing corn in great quantity to support their warrior husbands, brothers, cousins, and sons. A few noted beloved men, such as Ostenaco (a longtime rival of Attakullakulla), also joined the Chickamauga and lent credibility to the movement by their presence. Yet the admittedly imper-

fect sources indicate that Chickamauga towns contained a significantly greater proportion of young men than the usual 20 to 25 percent established by modern scholars for "normal" eastern Native American societies.

The radical choice made by Dragging Canoe and his followers did not come without bitter feelings and almost immediate consequences for the Cherokee Nation. Shortly after moving southward, the Chickamaugas referred to themselves as the *Ani-yunwiya* (real people) and labeled the accommodationist Cherokees "Virginians." Chickamauga raids on white settlements after 1777 often brought retaliation on peaceful eastern Cherokee communities by American armies unable or unwilling to distinguish between the two groups. On the other hand, the relocation of the Chickamauga dissidents enabled accommodationist Cherokee leaders to free themselves from responsibility for the militants' actions in their negotiations with the United States. More important, Dragging Canoe always welcomed new arrivals from the ranks of the accommodationists to his Chickamauga towns. His "open door" policy extended to warriors from other Indian nations, sympathetic white settlers and traders, and runaway slaves willing to share in his cause. While other Cherokees cast their hopes on the benevolence of the United States, Dragging Canoe and the Chickamaugas persisted in their struggle to eliminate "the amazing great settlements" in their hunting grounds.¹⁷

In late March 1777, American Colonel Nathaniel Gist (formerly a well-known trader among the Cherokee) sent a message to Dragging Canoe, ostensibly from the Shawnees, expressing hope that the Chickamaugas "would no more listen to the lying bad talks carried you by some of their foolish people"¹⁸ and advising them to make peace with the United States at a treaty scheduled for that spring. Dragging Canoe turned down the invitation and issued a cryptic promise to Gist not to do "anything that will make you ashamed of me among your people."¹⁹ In this way, Dragging Canoe communicated, through his words and his subsequent actions, what he believed the Americans understood and respected: ongoing violent resistance and an absolute refusal to surrender.

Dragging Canoe and the Chickamaugas stayed away from the two American peace treaties with the Cherokees in early 1777. Between these two treaties (DeWitt's Corner, negotiated with Georgia and South Carolina on May 20, 1777, and Long Island of the Holston, negotiated with Virginia and North Carolina on July 20, 1777), the accommodationist Cherokees ceded another five million acres of land to the United States. Yet news of these proceedings only stiffened Chickamauga resolve. Dragging Canoe led a bold raid in April 1777 within a few miles of the Virginia negotiators,

killing two men and stealing horses to demonstrate his contempt for the proceedings. When word of the Virginians' intent to secure twenty Cherokee hostages (to ensure the Nation's compliance with the terms of the 1777 Long Island treaty) reached the Chickamauga towns, the militants declared "that all the hostages they can keep will not save them."²⁰

Alarmed by the willingness of some Cherokees to make peace with the Americans, Superintendent Stuart ordered Cameron to supply food and ammunition only to those still engaged in hostilities, and to remind the Cherokees "that they themselves are Principals in this War, that the defense of them and their land is one of the great causes of it."²¹ These strong words and the inability of the United States to deliver promised supplies to the distraught Cherokees swelled the ranks of the Chickamaugas to nearly one thousand warriors by 1778.

During the campaigns of 1777 and 1778, the Chickamaugas cooperated with the British war effort in the south, raiding the western settlements to prevent frontiersmen from joining the Continental Army, and disrupting American communications and supply routes in the lower Ohio Valley in tandem with the Shawnees. Food shortages after 1776 limited the size and geographic range of Chickamauga war parties, but their superior knowledge of the country, their effective use of advance scouts and field signals, and their ability to strike hard against their targets and then disappear before effective retaliation could occur rendered them a serious threat to the southwestern backcountry settlements. The very mention of the names of prominent Chickamauga warriors such as Dragging Canoe, Bloody Fellow, Doublehead, and John Watts intimidated frontier families for years to come.

Despite the potential advantages to be gained by utilizing the effective guerrilla tactics of the Chickamaugas, British generals never took full advantage of the potential services of their southern Indian allies. While the Indians grew impatient with repeated suggestions that they wait until their movements could be coordinated with regular troops, the British officers minimized their dependence on the warriors, partly to reduce the expense of outfitting the Indians and partly out of fears of alienating loyal and neutral white settlers if they were known to back Cherokee raids. Even after the British shifted their attention after 1779 to concentrate on winning the war in the south, Indian allies figured hardly at all in Secretary of State Lord George Germain's strategy to "Americanize"²² the conflict by relying on loyalist forces to police and defend territory liberated by British regular troops.

Nevertheless, the Chickamaugas cooperated occasionally with British troops, if only to ensure a continued supply of military

goods. After John Stuart sent up a pack train of three hundred horses with £20,000 worth of goods to John McDonald in the spring of 1779, three hundred Chickamauga warriors responded to a call from Lieutenant Walter Scott of Cameron's Loyal Refugees to attack the frontiers of Georgia and South Carolina. News of the departure of the Chickamauga warriors reached Joseph Martin, Virginia's agent to the Cherokee, who had married into the family of Nancy Ward and, under the terms of the 1777 Long Island treaty, resided at Chota. Martin sent word to Virginia governor Patrick Henry, who ordered Colonel Evan Shelby to march against the Chickamauga towns during the absence of so many of their warriors. Shelby's force of seven hundred men killed only six of the "seceding Cherokees of Chiccamagga," but he destroyed eleven towns and twenty thousand bushels of corn, and plundered the bulk of the goods at McDonald's storehouse.²³

Chickamauga warriors rushed home after learning of Shelby's advance against their towns, but arrived too late to prevent the destruction. Alexander Cameron reported the Chickamaugas "in very great confusion"²⁴ after Shelby's attack, but it had occurred prior to their planting of spring crops, and the presence of the British at Savannah and Augusta gave hopes for replenishment of their supplies. Most important, the attack did not break the will of the Chickamaugas. Twenty years after the event, Dragging Canoe's brother, Turtle-at-Home, recalled in an interview the warriors' feelings of anger and disgust, not despair, on their return to the Chickamauga settlements, "to see our Nation, from the want of unanimity, insulted with impunity."²⁵

The temporary devastation of the Chickamaugas' home base prompted Dragging Canoe to renew his efforts to secure outside Indian allies to help forge the elusive, but in his view critically necessary, unanimity of purpose within the Cherokee Nation. The convenient visit in July 1779 of the messenger from the British commander of Detroit, Kissingua, a "half Ottawa, half Miamis" man who "speaks most languages [and] is acute, resolute, and artfull,"²⁶ provided an opportunity for Dragging Canoe to notify the northern Indians of his resolution to continue fighting the war they began together in 1776:

We cannot forget the Talks you brought us some years ago into this Nation, which was to take up the Hatchet against the Virginians—we heard and listened to it with attention, and before the time that was appointed to lift it we took it up & struck the Virginians, our Nation was alone and surrounded by them, they were Numerous and their Hatchets sharp, and after we lost some of our best Warriors we were forced to leave our Towns & corn to be burnt by them, and now we live in the Grass as you see. But

we are not yet conquered, and to convince you that we have not thrown away your talk . . . we now give you beads from us to be delivered to all the red men of our way of thinking, that they must never let the Hatchet stand still.²⁷

The Chickamaugas spent the next two years concentrating on their own objectives, partly because of their need to recover from Colonel Shelby's campaign, and partly owing to administrative chaos in the southern district of the British Indian Department after the death of John Stuart in March 1779. The continuing encroachments of white settlers into eastern and middle Tennessee in the wake of the 1776 and 1779 American attacks violated even the generous boundaries of the two Cherokee-American treaties of 1777. This unceasing movement of people initiated a cycle of conflict, which began with Chickamauga raids, followed by frontier militia forces retaliating against the peaceful eastern Cherokees, followed by more young warriors leaving the eastern towns to join the Chickamaugas for renewed raiding.

Even after the Chickamaugas learned of the British surrender to the United States at Yorktown in October 1781, they continued their hostilities and eluded American expeditionary armies by sending false messages of their own intention to come in for a peace treaty. By September 1782, North Carolina governor Alexander Martin had lost patience with the Chickamaugas and ordered an expedition against their towns. Assuming the success of the expedition, Martin wanted his state's Cherokee treaty commissioners (some of whom were officers leading the campaign) to dictate the following terms to the Chickamaugas: they were to return to the original Cherokee settlements "from whence they are emigrants"; to relinquish their claim to their current settlements; to surrender all their American prisoners, loyalist refugees, runaway slaves, and stolen property; and finally to make a cession of land, which would reduce them to a "harmless and inoffensive situation."²⁸

With the prospect of peace on those terms, the Chickamaugas chose to resist, and they succeeded in rendering the North Carolinians' expedition a failure. Romanticized as the "last battle of the American Revolution," the engagement at Lookout Mountain on September 20, 1782, consisted of burning abandoned towns and vandalizing cornfields; the Chickamauga suffered no casualties. Forced to admit that the Chickamauga remained at large, the frustrated Governor Martin marveled at these obstreperous Indians who asked "no favours, being still determined to do all the injury they can."²⁹

Dragging Canoe and the Chickamaugas relocated still farther down the Tennessee River in 1782, establishing the "Five Lower Towns" (near the intersection of modern Alabama, Georgia, and

Tennessee), in very defensible locations. Dragging Canoe made his home at Running Water Town (near modern Haleson, Tennessee), and these settlements would prove to be a thorn in the side of the United States for the next twelve years. Still determined to advance his objectives, Dragging Canoe's stubborn resistance earned the respect of Virginia governor Benjamin Harrison, who in November 1782 indicated his belief that the "Indians have their rights and our Justice is called upon to support them. Whilst we are so nobly contending for liberty, will it not be an eternal blot on our national character, if we deprive others of it who ought to be as free as ourselves?"³⁰

All too few Americans of the revolutionary generation shared Harrison's opinion. Assuming that the "Indians who have assisted the British king, and waged war against the frontier inhabitants, are now in our power and at our mercy,"³¹ congressional Indian policymakers believed that the Indians shared in the defeat of Great Britain, and that all former Indian lands within the territory ceded by King George III would become part of the new nation's domain. By 1783, the Cherokee Nation had lost 75 percent of the territory it had held prior to the Revolution, and over half of their towns lay in ashes. The Chickamaugas, far from being at anyone's mercy, continued to look far and wide for assistance in keeping up their struggle.

In January 1783 a large delegation of Chickamaugas traveled to St. Augustine accompanied by Shawnees, Delawares, Ottawas, and Iroquois, "to establish a firm league and confederacy amongst the different tribes of Indians in [the British] alliance for their mutual safety and defence."³² Here the Indian speakers reminded Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown (one of Stuart's replacements in the reorganized southern Indian Department) of their expectation of continued support. Brown followed his orders and informed the Indians of the king's desire for them to end offensive operations, but advised that they should remain vigilant in defending their homelands against potential American incursions. With promises of traders with British goods coming to visit their nations, Brown sent the Indians home satisfied for the moment. Yet when he received orders on June 1, 1783, to withdraw all officials and traders from the Indian country (in advance of news of the Peace of Paris), Brown knew that he would be unable to help his former allies. He feared especially for the Cherokees, who, he believed, would be forced by the United States to relinquish some of their hunting grounds "for the temporary preservation of the rest."³³

The 1783 Treaty of Paris ignored the Indians, and the Chickamaugas responded by paying it no attention. Dragging Canoe's brothers Badger and Little Owl journeyed to Detroit in March 1783

to request military supplies. Other Chickamaugas visited Esteban Miró, the new Spanish governor of Florida, in June 1783. Miró sought Indian allies as an insurance policy in the event of American aggression against Florida, and in 1784 he promised the Chickamaugas a supply of arms and ammunition. Above all, Dragging Canoe heeded the advice of the Shawnees, who advised him to "visit all your brothers the red people, and make everything straight and strong."³⁴

Dragging Canoe renewed his raids on frontier settlements, fortified with a large supply of arms and ammunition given by Miró at Pensacola in June 1784. The Chickamaugas' resistance during the mid-1780s, however, relied more on the initiative of their leadership than on Spanish assistance. Although Virginia agent Joseph Martin considered Dragging Canoe "much attached to the Spanish interest,"³⁵ Miró never again gave supplies to the Chickamaugas, since he had come to the conclusion that the Chickamauga villages lay outside the jurisdiction of either Spanish Florida or Louisiana. Dragging Canoe continued to seek allies among the Creeks, Chickasaws, and Shawnees. He also continued to set a consistent example of resistance with guerrilla attacks on nearby settlements in eastern Tennessee and the Cumberland region (in the vicinity of modern Nashville, Tennessee) and by failing to attend the 1785 Hopewell Treaty meeting between the Cherokee and the United States.

Jurisdictional disputes between the United States, North Carolina, and the short-lived state of Franklin (carved out of western North Carolina) prevented anyone from observing the boundary line negotiated at Hopewell, and the flood of white settlers to the southwest continued unabated. The Americans who appropriated the Indians' lands only alienated potential friends in Indian councils, and the settlers' bellicosity only strengthened the position of militant Native leaders such as Dragging Canoe, who kept up resistance and bided their time.

Dragging Canoe found his quest for unanimity among the Cherokees very nearly fulfilled in 1788. After frontiersmen murdered neutralist Cherokee headman Old Tassel under a flag of truce in June 1788, many of the formerly peaceful Cherokees responded to the standing invitation of Dragging Canoe and joined the Chickamaugas in large numbers to avenge the brutal killing of their revered leader. Hanging Maw, Old Tassel's successor, could only watch as the Chickamaugas "led off many of his men to do mischief."³⁶

The Chickamaugas repulsed Joseph Martin's invasion force at the second Battle of Lookout Mountain in mid-August 1788 and then pursued the retreating Americans into eastern Tennessee and Virginia, overrunning many settlements in their path. Chicka-

mauga military strength peaked between 1788 and 1791, as Dragging Canoe's "confederacy" included 100 Shawnee warriors residing at Running Water, 350 Upper Creek warriors, and his own force of 700 Chickamauga fighting men.

The ongoing resistance of the Chickamaugas contributed to a shift in federal Indian policy in the south after 1790. Appointed governor of the territory south of the Ohio River in 1790, William Blount had a mandate from President George Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox to secure peace with the southern Indians at almost any price. Fully half of the territory under Blount's jurisdiction remained in Indian possession, and Blount was charged with the impossible task of satisfying Indian complaints while simultaneously securing further land cessions and transportation rights for the United States. Furthermore, Blount's unyielding belief that the land losses of the Cherokee amounted to wartime conquests did little to satisfy the Indians who complained of encroachments beyond the 1785 Hopewell Treaty boundary line, and his well-known involvement in land speculation prior to his governorship earned him the nickname "Dirt Captain" among the southern Indians.

Dragging Canoe, predictably, would have nothing to do with Blount. Instead, he worked tirelessly during these years to promote unified Indian resistance to the United States. He forged ties with William Augustus Bowles, a former loyalist adventurer and self-appointed "Director-General of the Creek Nation," employing Bowles' associate George Welbank at Running Water to keep up a correspondence with Alexander McKee, the British Indian Agent at Detroit. Dragging Canoe sent sixty Chickamauga warriors to join the northern Indian confederate army under Miami headman Little Turtle that crushed General Arthur St. Clair at the Battle of Kekionga (near modern Fort Wayne, Indiana) on November 4, 1791. Inspired by the drubbing of St. Clair, Dragging Canoe began to work closely with mixed-blood Creek leader Alexander McGillivray (see Chapter 2 of this volume), who sent the Chickamauga headman to try to bring the Chickasaw Nation into the developing Shawnee-Creek-Chickamauga Indian confederacy during the winter of 1791-92.

The year of Dragging Canoe's greatest activity and success also proved to be his last. He died at Running Water Town on March 1, 1792, to the best of our knowledge, of natural causes. Blount characterized Dragging Canoe as a great warrior, who "stood second to none in the nation,"³⁷ and on June 28, 1792, Chickamauga headman Black Fox delivered a simple eulogy to the Cherokee National Council: "The Dragging Canoe has left the world. He was a man of consequence in his country."³⁸

The Chickamaugas' resistance continued for two more years under the mixed-blood headman John Watts, eventually becoming so troublesome that congressional delegates considered a motion to grant the president (as opposed to Congress) the right to call out the army to defend the frontier against them. With assistance from Miró's successor, the Baron de Carondelet, Watts's Chickamaugas, fighting with the Creeks and Shawnees, made life miserable for settlers in the Southwest Territory until the summer of 1794, when an expeditionary force of 550 mounted men from Tennessee under Major James Ore attacked and burned the Chickamauga towns at Running Water and Nickajack, killing 50 Chickamauga. With their remote settlements at last breached, the Chickamaugas sued for peace at Tellico Blockhouse (near modern Lenoir City, Tennessee) on November 7–8, 1794. A relieved Blount granted them relatively lenient terms, asking only for an exchange of prisoners and promising that "the Lower Towns have only to keep peace on their part and it will be peace."³⁹

Dragging Canoe left the world with his forces intact and ready to continue his struggle. In 1793, Governor Blount, who sent a brief historical account of the Chickamaugas to Secretary of War Knox, described the Five Lower Towns as home to "the young and active more or less from every town in the [Cherokee] nation," and he characterized the Chickamaugas as "the most formidable part" of the Cherokees, "not only from their disposition to commit injuries on the citizens of the United States, but from their ability to perform it."⁴⁰ More important for assessing Dragging Canoe's accomplishments is Turtle-at-Home's recollection of the Cherokee Nation on the eve of Dragging Canoe's death as "more unanimous than I had ever seen our people before."⁴¹

Critics of Dragging Canoe's "schism" point to the abandonment of traditional, town-based government by the Chickamaugas, as leadership became centralized under Dragging Canoe's charismatic authority. Detractors of the Chickamauga migration also note the subsequent loss of spirituality among the migrants, as the six major calendric rituals of Cherokee society telescoped into a single Green Corn festival at the Five Lower Towns during the 1780s. With the young men freed from the restraint of the old beloved men and perpetually at war, Chickamauga society, in the eyes of one observer, became one in which "the fearsome governed the fearful, and the strong ruled the weak. . . . Probably, the Chickamaugas experienced, as nearly as any human group has, the law of the jungle."⁴² Dragging Canoe's "secession" undoubtedly came with a heavy price for the Cherokee Nation after 1776, as his incessant raids elicited punitive expeditions from the Americans that continued the war in Cherokee country and cost many Cherokee lives.

The divided nature of Cherokee politics and diplomacy after 1776 enabled the different factions to cultivate relations with different powers simultaneously, but this proved very dangerous on the revolutionary frontier. Finally, one could argue that Dragging Canoe's attempt to forge unanimity and consensus by separating from the main body of the Cherokee Nation ultimately failed to prevent extensive land losses during and after the Revolutionary War, which made their previous life-style of subsistence agriculture and long-range hunting untenable, and resulted in the rapid transition of the Cherokee to commercial agriculture in the nineteenth century.

To dismiss Dragging Canoe as a reckless incendiary, however, would be a mistake. In his refusal to barter Cherokee hunting grounds, Dragging Canoe was a "patriot" who fought for the integrity of the Cherokee Nation. He expressed his commitment to traditional Cherokee values through his rejection of policies that diminished the Cherokee resource base, through his continual warfare, and through his efforts to build consensus for this viewpoint throughout the Cherokee Nation. Dragging Canoe followed his chosen path with consistency and determination and fought for much longer than anyone expected. The loyalty of Dragging Canoe to the Cherokee people made agreements such as that at Tellico Blockhouse possible and helped to ensure the survival of Cherokee culture into the nineteenth century, when it flourished (albeit in new and unfamiliar ways) under the leadership of individuals from the Chickamauga faction.

Dragging Canoe's story, like that of so many Indians in American history, flits through the pages of governmental dispatches, lurid accounts of frontier atrocities, and popularized versions of his utterances. Yet from these scattered and frequently oblique passages, an image emerges of a patriot in his own right. Dragging Canoe's career helps remind us that the Indians were not helpless victims unable to resist their eventual subjugation and removal to the west by the United States. Even after the Revolution, Indians played a critical role in shaping their own destiny. Dragging Canoe's struggle for life, liberty, and the pursuit of hunting involved a relentless and bitter fight against American patriots. Nevertheless, his story deserves consideration if we are to remember all who strove for their own vision of freedom and justice in the American revolutionary era.

Notes

1. James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, Bureau of American Ethnology, *Nineteenth Annual Report, 1897–98* (Washington, DC, 1900), 538.