



A Talk from the Honorable {William} H. Drayton One of the Beloved Men¹ of South Carolina To the Beloved Men, & Warriors of The Cherokee Nation

[September 25, 1775]

Friends & Brother Warriors

....I sent to you, to come to me that I might explain to you, the causes of the unhappy quarrel between a part of the People in Great Britain & your Brothers the White People living in America. Also, that I might tell you why our People have put on their Shot Pouches, & hold their Rifles in their hands....

Before our Forefathers left England, they made an agreement with the Great King, that when they came over to America, they and their children after them, should there continue to have and to enjoy the same Rights & Privileges that the People of England who you know were their own Brothers did actually enjoy. And to this Agreement, the Great King put his hand & his seal; and declared that all the Great Kings after him should be bound by the Agreement he had made.

...And we say so for this plain and good reason: because the Great King has no right to send any officers to take any money out of the Pockets of our Brothers the People of England, or to bind them by any laws but by their own consent given by their Wise Men, who they themselves elect & appoint to make laws for them. For as this is the right and privilege of our Brothers in England, so this agreement declares we have the same right and privilege.

But notwithstanding these things, the Men about the Great King, have persuaded him, that he and the Men in England whom we never elected and appointed to make laws for whom we never elected and appointed to make laws for us, have a right to take our money out of our pockets without our consent, and to make laws to drag us away from our own Country across the great water

Friends and Brother Warriors, it is not now as plain as the sight at the end of your Rifles that these laws and proceedings are like so many hatchets chopping our agreement to pieces? Are not these unjust things enough to make us put on our shot pouches, and especially when we find that our Brothers over the great Water will not only hearken to the many good Talks which we have sent them about these matters: but have really sent over People to take the hatchet up against us?

Oh my Brother Warriors, it is a lamentable thing, that our Brothers beyond the great water should use us in this cruel manner! If they use us, their own fleash [sic] and blood in this unjust way, what must you expect: you who are red People; you whom they never saw; you whom they know only by the hearing of the ear; you who have fine lands? You see by their treatment of us, that agreements even under hand and seal go

¹ "Beloved Man" or "Beloved Woman" was a title given to Cherokee elder leaders who had achieved a high level of regard, achievement, and trust.



as nothing with them. Thing of these things my Friends and reflect upon them day and night....

And in particular they ordered that if we drink Tea, we must pay so much money to the Great King. I must tell you, this Tea is somewhat like your black drink.²

....Some foolish People say it is better to pay this money for the Tea, than to go to War about it. But I tell you it is not about this money alone that we quarrel, for the money itself we do not regard as two corn stalks; but, we are afraid bad consequences will follow if we pay the money, as I will shew to you directly.

We find that the Men in England talk among themselves that they intend to make us in America pay to them a great sum of money every year.... therefore, we refuse to pay this money for the Tea, least, if we paid it, they would be encouraged to go on time after time to lay duties upon a great many other things, which we are accustomed to purchase, in order they may at last get from us, that great sum of [money] which they want, and which perhaps is all we have. [By] which means, as your Brothers the White People will be obliged to give more money than usual, for those blankets, strouds,³ checks, linens, guns, powder, paint & Rum with which you are supplied; so if money is thus taken out of our pockets without our consent, & against our agreement, it is plain and certain, that you and your People, must pay two and three deer [skins] for those goods, which you used to purchase of the Traders [for] one deer skin. And thus you see, ~~my Friends and Brother Warriors~~, that we do not quarrel only upon our own account; but that we have put on our shot pouches, not only to ~~save~~ preserve our own money, but also to preserve your deer skins....

Therefore, as your people and our people were born upon and live in the same land—as we are old acquaintances, and have thereby contracted a regard for each other—as our interest in this quarrel is the same, for the Men over the great water cannot take our money ~~without~~ against our consent without taking your deer skins also—as you see that no agreement is kept with us, so you cannot expect to be better treated by them who want all that you and ourselves have. I say, as all these things shew you that if we are hurt, you must be hurt also—if we lose, you must lose also—if we fall, you must fall also: so I tell you in time, that you and ourselves ought to join together, in order to ~~prevent any~~ to save all of us from being hurt, or from losing or from falling. Let us therefore exert ourselves, you at the end of the chain of Peace,⁴ and we at our end, in order that we may keep this chain bright and shining. So shall we act to each other like

² Some Southeastern Indigenous people consumed black drink, an herbal tea beverage made from yaupon holly, as a regular beverage like coffee is today and also in ceremonial and medicinal contexts, in which it was used to promote vomiting.

³ Although historians often note the importance of the weapons trade, textiles were at the foundation of the European trade with American Indians. Strouds, the most prominent of the cloths traded, were preferred because the wool remained insulating when wet, came in a variety of bold colors (red, black, blue, and white among the most popular), and could be patterned with wide stripes on the borders that Native consumers preferred. See Laura E. Johnson, “Goods to clothe themselves’: Native Consumers and Native Images on the Pennsylvania Trading Frontier, 1712-1760,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2019), 115-140.

⁴ Although the covenant chain is the best-known use of the image of chains to indicate diplomatic alliance (see glossary), the metaphor of chains of friendship was also used by Indians in the Southeast.



Brothers—so shall we be able to support and assist each other against our common enemies...

I am informed that you have been told, that your Brothers the White People in Charles Town, used you ill, when they seized on amunition [sic] which your Traders intended to have sent you. It is true my Friends, that we did seize this amunition, ...⁵ But I tell you also, the Men about the Great King are the only Persons to be blamed in this affair. For as we found, that these Men persuaded the Great King to send Soldiers against us, & to stop all kinds of amunition from coming to us as usual in order that we should not be able to defend ourselves...and accordingly we greedily seized the amunition that was intended for your hunting, in order to have in our heads the means of defending our lives, our money and your deer skins, as I told you before, against our oppressors. And this behaviour of ours was so natural and just, that we knew, that when we came to talk to you on the matter, you would think we did nothing but what was just, and what you would have done had you been in our situation. However, the ammuniton that was seized, was intended to be sold to you: but, to show you that we regard you as Brothers, we intend to make you a present of some. We wish we were able to give you, as much your occasions require: but as the Great King has so ordered it, that we cannot get much for ourselves; & as we expect to fight our enemies, therefore we cannot afford to give you much of what we have. I know your good sense will inform [you] that this is perfectly reasonable; and that we ought not to give away so much ammuniton, as would leave us, & you exposed to enemies, who, as I told you before, cannot hurt us without hurting you also.

It is a concern to us when we reflect, that the present quarrel occasions a scarcity of goods in your Nation. But goods scarce with us also; and we submit to this inconvenience chearfully, rather than purchase those goods, which if we did purchase, would strengthen the hands of our oppressors against us. We hope our example will encourage you to suffer this scarcity as patiently as we do. When the Public Peace shall be restored by our rights & privileges being restored to us... then will you and your children after you be plentifully supplied again as usual. In the mean time we advise you to be patient; and to shew you, that we look upon you as Brothers; and that we will give you all the friendly aid, assistance & supplies in our power. I say, as a token of this I take the Coat off my own back, & I give it to you. For my part in this unhappy time, I will be content to wear an Osnaburg Split Shirt.⁶

I hear that one of your People has lately been killed and that two others were at the same time wounded by some of the White People on the ceded lands⁷ in Georgia. I feel great grief at this news. Mr. Wilkinson is just come from Seneka, and has brought me a

⁵ "We" here includes Drayton himself, who led the plunder of British armories and magazines for the Patriot militia in April 1775. See Mercantini, *Who Shall Rule at Home? The Evolution of South Carolina Political Culture, 1748-1776* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 241-3.

⁶ Osnaburg was a coarse fabric, and a split shirt was a homely garment often worn by hunters (Native and Euro-American alike).

⁷ In the 1773 Treaty of Augusta, the Creeks and Cherokees were obligated to cede more than two million acres of land (the "Ceded Lands") to the Georgia colony in repayment for trade debts. See Joshua David Bellin, "Wicked Instruments: William Bartram and the Dispossession of the Southern Indians," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 51, no. 3 (1995): 1-23.



talk... In this talk the Warrior Sawney says, he and the other warriors remember that in the last treaty of Peace it was agreed, that if white Man should be killed by their People, the Perpetrators of the Murder should be put to death, and that the same satisfaction should be given by the White People in case one of your people should be murdered by ours. Sawney also says, that the Warriors & Beloved Men will wait to see if this will be complied with or not, & in the mean time they will not think of resentment, or of saying any thing to lessen our friendship... I tell you, that this matter shall with all possible speed be fully enquired into, and if the White people have done wrong, and without provocation have killed your Countryman, you may be assured that those White People who were concerned in such a wicked & black affair shall be punished, and thereby your People will have satisfaction according to the Treaty. I desire you will tell the Relations of the Poor Man who has been killed, how much I am concerned at their loss. I am told he has left a widow & children: I give these presents; to them...

Friends & Brother Warriors

This talk I give to you, as a talk of Peace & friendship; a talk to open your eyes; and as a good talk from all the Beloved Men & White People of this Country, to you & your Beloved Men, & all the red Men of your Nation. I give you this talk as so much oil to keep the chain of peace and friendship between us, bright & shining, like the sun. And, as in the corn-planting Season, the sun warms the earth, & makes the Corn to sprout & to grow for the good of the people; so, I hope this talk will warm your hearts & make thoughts of friendship and good will sprout and grow in you and your People, for the mutual good of our people, and of your Nation.⁸

Discussion Questions

1. **What arguments does William Drayton employ to convince to the Cherokee to join the cause?*
2. *What rhetorical strategies does Drayton use to sway the Cherokee head men and warriors to his side?*
3. *What and who does Drayton blame for the emerging conflict between colonial Americans and Great Britain?*
4. *What can this letter teach us about interactions between American Indians and settlers in the backcountry?*
5. *How convincing would you find this speech if you were its recipient?*

**Questions included in the Collection Essay.*

⁸ The Ayer manuscript copy of the speech presents significant damage below the word "chain." Portions of this last paragraph of this transcription are filled in from John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution: From its commencement to the year 1776, inclusive, as relating to the state of South-Carolina and occasionally referring to the states of North-Carolina and Georgia* (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1821), 427.