

Cherokee

YOUR PEOPLE HAVE LIVED for centuries in the area the whites call “Georgia.” This is your land. At times you’ve had to fight to keep it.

You’ve had a hard time with whites. Ever since they began settling in Georgia they have continued to push west, plowing the land, growing cotton and other crops. Long ago, as early as 1785, the Cherokee Nation won the right to their land by a treaty with the United States government. The United States recognized the Cherokee people as part of an independent country and not subject to the laws of the United States. After the U.S. Constitution was approved, the U.S. government signed another treaty with the Cherokee—in 1791, when George Washington was president. Article Seven of the Hopewell treaty said, “The United States solemnly guaranty to the Cherokee nation all their lands not hereby ceded.” In other words, the U.S. government agreed not to push the Cherokee out of the land where they were living.

But now the U.S. government is about to break its own treaty and steal your land. Many whites have already bribed and tricked some of your people out of their land. The whites say they need it to grow cotton and other crops, and miners have been trespassing in the foothills looking for, and finding, gold. These whites say you have no right to the land, that you’re savages. Last year, in December of 1829, the state of Georgia passed a law saying that you are under *their* control, and must obey their laws, their wishes. This

new law forbids anyone with any Cherokee blood from testifying in court, or protesting the plans to move you out of your land. But you didn’t vote for this Georgia government, and besides, you have a treaty with the federal government that says you are citizens of an independent country. When the U.S. government made a treaty with you, that proved you are a nation.

The Cherokee are one of the five “civilized tribes.” It was the whites themselves who taught you much of this “civilization.” You have well-cultivated farms. By 1826, members of your Cherokee nation owned 22,000 cattle, 7,600 horses, 3,000 plows, 2,500 spinning wheels, 10 saw mills and 18 schools. Like southern whites, some of you also owned black slaves. In 1821, Sequoyia, a brilliant Cherokee Indian, invented an 85-character alphabet and now most Cherokee can read and write. It’s said that more Cherokee people are literate than are whites in Georgia. You even have a newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix. You’ve adopted a written Constitution very similar to that of the United States. Many of your leaders attended white schools in the East. Even by the white man’s standards you’re as “civilized” as they are, if not more so. But still they want to kick you off your land and move you to a place west of the Mississippi River—a place you’ve never even seen. You must continue to argue your case if you are to survive as a people. ■