

THE CIVIL WARRIORS

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, STAND WATIE,
AND THE BALANCE OF POWER
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Author of The Holy Warrior: Osama Bin Laden and His Jihadi Journey in the Soviet-Afghan War and The Red Warrior: U.S. Perceptions of Stalin's Strategic Role in the Allied Journey to Victory in the Second World War

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For the people I love, and to the memories, wisdom, and courage of two
barrier-breaking patriots and statesmen, U.S. Marshal Frederick Douglass
and Brigadier General Stand Watie, C.S.A., this volume is dedicated
in honor and respect.

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PREFACE

James Reagan Fancher
Texas Woman's University

"I have never felt myself isolated since I entered the field to plead the cause of the slave, and demand equal rights for all."

- Honorable Frederick Douglass in his 1892 revised edition of
*Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*¹

"I have always been opposed to killing women and children although our enemies have done it, yet I shall always protest against any acts of that kind."

- Colonel Stand Watie, C.S.A., in a 24 April 1864 letter to his wife Sarah, quoted in *Cherokee Cavaliers: Forty Years of Cherokee History as Told in the Correspondence of the Ridge-Watie-Boudinot Family* by Edward Everett Dale and Gaston Litton²

In American history, few challenges have shaped our republic's development as powerfully and dramatically as the Civil War (1861-1865) and Reconstruction Era (1865-1877). These two intertwined episodes saw the United States of America divided, reunited, nearly divided again, and ultimately rebuilt, both physically and socially. These eras also saw the rise to prominence of two doggedly determined non-white American men whose efforts and struggles on behalf of their respective peoples propelled them to prominence and distinguished them among their contemporaries as truly *civil* warriors in an otherwise quite *uncivil* war and fragile peace. During and after the fratricidal conflict, the Honorable Frederick Douglass and Brigadier General Stand Watie persevered in serving their people's interests in resisting discrimination, winning the respect of friends and foes alike, and proving to be more similar than different in their character and actions.³

Frederick Douglass and Stand Watie: what, the reader may ask, could an escaped ex-enslaved man-turned-influential abolitionist politician and a slaveholding Southern Cherokee principal chief and Confederate States Army (C.S.A.) brigadier general possibly have in common? After all, did these two men not support and serve on opposite sides during the American Civil War? Of course, and they both similarly persevered against the odds stacked against them, led by example, and secured their respective places in American history in remarkably similar fashion as non-white men who rose to leadership and

influence during the same era. Both contributed, in their unique, respective ways, to the country's development while fighting rhetorically and physically for what they perceived to be the basic, God-given rights of their peoples. Douglass and Watie each made a mark and stood boldly for what they believed to be right, just, and honorable in defense of the people they loved, and their wartime and postwar actions contributed to the reshaping of a nation.⁴

Far from being passive onlookers during the war that ripped the republic in half, Douglass led by example and contributed to the liberation of the enslaved Black southerners via his recruitment work for the Union Army, and Watie did no less regarding his Southern Cherokee brethren, leading them first in fighting for the Confederacy and next into a lasting peace.⁵ The successes of these Black American and Southern Cherokee pioneers of leadership, their conquests of the odds, cannot and must not be forgotten by history. It is my hope to address some ongoing historiographical debates on both the freedmen's champion Douglass and the often-overlooked Southern Cherokee statesman Watie and emphasize each man's respective rise to leadership and prominence as well as the "how and why" surrounding their actions and decisions.

Had Frederick Douglass followed the path of abolitionist militant John Brown, or that of rebellious enslaved man Nat Turner, for example, he may not have risen from the shackles of slavery to national success as a persuasive and potent abolitionist speaker, writer, and leader, and his liberty crusade may have floundered in defeat like the uncivil revolts of Turner and Brown. Equally, had Stand Watie chosen the path of vengeance and sought violent retribution against his hated Northern Cherokee tormentors, his Southern Cherokee people and the Cherokee Nation overall may have suffered many more years of fruitless, sectarian bloodshed during and beyond Reconstruction. Both Watie and Douglass, however, rejected such uncivil and excessively vindictive paths, sometimes at great personal costs to themselves, but always in the perceived best interests of the people whom they sought to serve, liberate, and defend. Frederick Douglass and Stand Watie consistently proved to be calculating men in their respective journeys of triumph, rejecting the counterproductive path of personal political profit, and rising to leadership and respect among their peoples.⁶

That they both suffered defeats and setbacks along their respective journeys of triumph cannot erase the fact that they each struck powerful blows in defense of their causes, comrades, and fellow citizens, winning the respect of their allies and baffling their foes alike along the way. In doing so, both also set enduring examples of leadership and courage for those aspiring to lead others and accomplish great things in the present. While the white supremacist Democrat politicians of the postbellum American "New South" managed to gradually reverse the tide of progress to which Douglass, Hiram Rhodes Revels,

Joseph Hayne Rainey, and their fellow Black Republican champions of justice contributed, this regressive reversal cannot alter the fact that Black American men, including former enslaved people, not only voted but *won* election and, sometimes, *reelection* to public office for nearly a quarter century after the end of the Civil War.⁷

Equally, although his Southern Cherokee half of the Cherokee Nation found itself, like the majorities of the other Five Civilized Southern Indian Republics, on the losing side of the Civil War, Brigadier General Stand Watie's battlefield exploits and the inspiring leadership example that he set for his men could not be erased. General Watie and his comrades surrendered willingly as unconquered warriors whose desire to ease the suffering of their long-besieged people served as their chief motivation to lay down their arms.⁸ Even if strategically defeated in their respective struggles – unobstructed civil rights in the case of the Black Republicans and their white allies, and sovereignty for their people in “Indian Territory” (modern-day Oklahoma) for the Southern Cherokees – their great and numerous tactical victories resulted in an avalanche of achievements that survived every defeat handed to them and transcended time.⁹

Indeed, in just one of many intriguing similarities, both Douglass and Watie fathered five children, two daughters and three sons in each man's case, and both men were preceded in death by their first wives and several of their precious children. Frederick Douglass's 10-year-old daughter, Annie, passed away on the eve of the Civil War in 1860 and he lost his first wife Anna in 1882, while Stand Watie's first wife, Besty, died during childbirth in 1836 along with their baby girl and Stand's 12-year-old son, Cumiskey, passed away in 1863 in exile during the fratricidal conflict in and around Indian Territory. Both of Stand's other sons, Saladin and Watica, likewise passed away two-to-three years before their father, in 1868 and 1869, respectively, and Frederick suffered a similar blow three years before his own passing with the 1892 death of his second-eldest son, Frederick Douglass Jr.¹⁰

Yet these setbacks, excruciatingly painful as they doubtlessly were for both men having to bury their children, served as only some of the most difficult obstacles thrown across their respective paths on which they persevered nevertheless and along which they broke many barriers for their people as they overcame these daunting difficulties. Like the other determined men and women of color discussed in the preceding chapters of this work who served as some of their closest associates, neither Douglass nor Watie surrendered to the adversaries (and adversity) that they faced. Both men, rather, behaved as *actual* civil warriors before, during, and after a very uncivil war and emerged as barrier-breaking pioneers in their respective journeys in spearheading the causes of their peoples and conquering great heights, achieving victories that cannot be erased from history.¹¹

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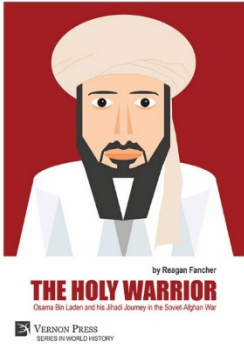
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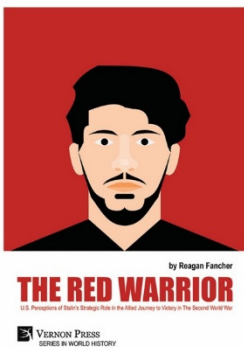
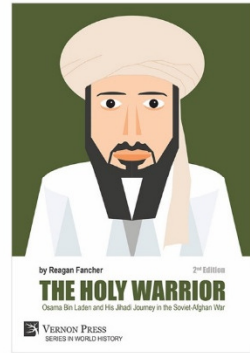
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