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Author

Collins, Robert Keith

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Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century. By Fay A. Yarbrough. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. 184 pages. \$55.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

Written in clear and persuasive prose and taking American Indian agency as the focal point for analysis, *Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* embodies the type of historical research that should be considered by—if not on the shelves of and read by—every scholar of American Indian history and cultural changes. Organized into seven chapters that stress the interdependence of demographic, ethnographic, and legal historic records, Yarbrough begins her book boldly by engaging the question central to her analysis: to what extent were interracial relationships common among American Indians during the nineteenth century?

Yarbrough's decision to make this question central seems to stem from her concern that the answer to it lies at the intersections between what American Indians—individually and collectively—thought about interracial unions with Africans, Caucasians, and one another. Answering this question could illuminate whether or not American Indian attitudes toward interracial relations varied according to the race and gender of the partner. To get at answers to these questions in a culture-specific manner—as opposed to making generalizations about all American Indians—Yarbrough chose the sovereign Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. Her rationale for choosing the Cherokee is supported by the fact that nineteenth-century records are printed in English, Cherokees actively engaged in the enslavement of individuals of African descent, the nation lived in close proximity to Caucasians, and, historically and contemporarily, African Americans and Caucasians frequently claim Cherokee ancestry more than any other Native American ancestry.

Utilizing the incredible wealth of historical documents (for example, marriage records, court testimonies, land records, and legislation) produced by the sovereign Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Works Progress Administration slave narratives from Cherokee freedmen, and the thorough historical and demographic works of scholars like Theda Perdue and Russell Thornton, Yarbrough describes how these resources lent readily to the examination of the evolution, manipulation, and maintenance of legal citizenship within the nation. This explanation is followed by a detailed overview of Cherokee history and cultural changes from 1750 to the Civil War and maps the evolutions of racial attitudes within the Cherokee nation before and after Removal. Yarbrough's dense and ethnographically centered introduction prepares the reader with enough vital Cherokee history (for example, changing kinship patterns, slavery, Cherokee agency behind removal, the creation of the Cherokee Constitution, and Cherokee allegiance to the Confederate South) to ponder and digest the subsequent chapters critically.

Yarbrough's first chapter begins with a discussion of the evolution of racial legislation among the Cherokee. In 1834, a Cherokee National Council resolution implemented the use of racial terminology to make distinctions between residents within the nation: "Cherokee, 'negro' slave, and whites married to Cherokees" (25). She describes how prior to 1824 Cherokee

being and belonging were defined in terms of matrilineal clan membership and how this resolution began to limit the fluidity of traditional Cherokee existence. Yarbrough uses the story of Molley to provide an example of this fluidity. Molley was an African slave woman who replaced her owner's wife as a member of the Deer Clan after the wife died from his abuse during pregnancy. To save his own life from clan retaliation, Dent—Molley's owner—negotiated the replacement to the acceptance of the Deer Clan; however, shortly after Molley's adoption Dent deceitfully sold her to the Hightowers.

Yarbrough explains that Molley's story provides context for explaining Cherokee marriage and adoption practices. Despite Molley's African ancestry she was able to become a full member of the Deer Clan and her descendants full free citizens of the Cherokee Nation. It would be the Deer Clan and the Cherokee Nation—which considered Molley a Native Cherokee—that would support Molley's claim that she was free when her freedom was challenged by the Hightowers. Yarbrough's most persuasive discussion in this section integrates Molley's story—and others—into the process of undermining clan membership that occurred indirectly as Cherokee legislators sought to formalize their citizenship based on race. The consequences of such legislative efforts would be a shift in the determinative criteria of who is and who is not a Native Cherokee from family and clan to public policy and opinion.

Yarbrough reinforces her previous arguments with a focus on Shoe Boots in chapter 2. Shoe Boots was a Cherokee warrior, hero, and slave owner who petitioned the Cherokee council chiefs on 10 October 1824 to recognize—as citizens—the children he had conceived with an African slave woman named Danell (39). Shoe Boots's letter was driven by the conviction that he could not reconcile his conscience with the idea that his children and grandchildren could be forced by law to remain in servitude. Yarbrough argues that Shoe Boots's life experiences further illuminate the diversity of interracial relations that existed between Cherokees and individuals of African descent and the familial bonds they formed. In a similar vein, it was the recognition of his children by the council with an insistence that he cease to have children with his slave women that illuminated the growing concern that the Cherokee elite had not just for race but also for African ancestry.

This concern coincides with a clause written in 1827 into the Cherokee Constitution that manipulated traditional rules for being and belonging. This clause denied the children of Cherokee men and women of African ancestry from citizenship, which meant no rights. The only exceptions were the part-black children of Cherokee women with clear clan affiliation; however, under the same clause neither would be allowed to hold political office. Yet this exact same clause extended citizenship to the children of Cherokee men and Caucasian women living in the nation as husband and wife. By 1827 Cherokee authorities commonly recognized the children of Cherokee women and Caucasian men as citizens of the nation, and by 1843 the Cherokee National Council passed an act that legalized intermarriage with "White Men" (53). This move, Yarbrough argues, further exemplifies Cherokee acceptance of Caucasian admixture over African in order to align what it meant to be Cherokee more closely with being white; however, she

cautions the reader to assess the implications that such policies held for the creation of legitimate Cherokee citizens and the Cherokees that were being negated due to their African ancestry critically. She further cautions the reader to remember that during this time of transition from family-based to policy-based legitimacy many Cherokee did not seek formal recognition of their marriages. Therefore, even though Cherokee authorities did not recognize marriages between Cherokees and individuals of African descent as legal, these policies may not have held much significance for Cherokees who adhered to traditional matrilineal marriage patterns. The clan—not policy—determined legitimacy.

Further acts of manipulation and redefinition of the parameters of Cherokee membership along racial lines are described by Yarbrough in chapter 3, “The 1855 Marriage Law.” This law required Caucasian men to obtain a signed petition by tribal members, take an oath, and provide character witnesses in order to marry Cherokee women. The disproportionate numbers of Caucasian men to Caucasian women in the Indian Territory made Cherokee wives lucrative. Landless Caucasian men could gain access to Cherokee land through their wives and become members of the land-owning class. Yarbrough provides examples of the high numbers of intermarriages between Cherokee women and Caucasian men that resulted after this act and the shifting dynamics of Cherokee spouse-choice patterns. For example, Cherokee women marrying Caucasian men could gain status and a spouse who shared actively in agricultural endeavors. This also increased the chances of a Caucasian husband for any daughters born. Cherokee men did not marry with Caucasians as frequently, as there were few unmarried Caucasian women in Indian Territory. Such practices furthered, Yarbrough argues, the maintenance of a new Cherokee racial hierarchy that placed Cherokees and whites as social and racial equals and excluded individuals of African ancestry: a racial hierarchy that mirrored that of the larger United States.

In chapters 4 and 5, Yarbrough’s main focus is the maintenance of this Cherokee racial hierarchy and the values it shared with the Confederate South. She explains how these racial values—rooted in the notion of African inferiority—shaped the experiences and legal rights afforded to Cherokee freedmen before and after the Civil War. It is my own personal belief that lived experiences make policy real or insignificant, not the other way around. In chapter 6, Yarbrough reassured me that this was the case with the Cherokee. She opens this chapter with a seldom engaged question: what did Cherokee slaves think about interracial sex and relationships? Her discussion of freedmen’s lived experiences shed light on the concerns of individuals who remembered the interracial relations that they were born from, denied, participated in, or observed, and revealed great variation in opinion. Some individuals took great pride in their Cherokee ancestry; others were angered by the humiliation they were forced to endure and rejected their Native American ancestry.

According to Yarbrough, slaves—particularly female slaves—were usually aware of their masters’ sexual appetites, the consequences that could result should they go unsatisfied, and the potential rewards should they be satisfied;

however, such knowledge did not always warrant blind allegiance. The experiences presented by Yarbrough include slaves protesting sexual relations between slave women and their Cherokee masters because such unions would test incest taboos, slaves protesting the pursuit of a slave woman by a Cherokee man due to fear of public backlash, and even free men of color (for example, African, Cherokee, and other Native Americans) making themselves slaves in order to be close to their female partners in bondage. The experiences explored in this section reveal an overwhelmingly significant racial variation among Cherokee freedmen—usually assumed by policy to be black—and encourages one to assess the construct of legitimacy among the Cherokee and how it relates to the practices of Caucasians of the slave-holding south critically.

Yarbrough's final chapter brings this riveting discussion to a close with an examination of the continuing significance of the lived experiences of Molley, Shoe Boots, and others that parallel the contemporary fight for recognition waged by freedmen descendants within the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. These individuals—like their ancestors—are forced to navigate racist policies masked by a seemingly commonsense Cherokee sovereignty that is evoked to exclude them from citizenship. The significance of this point can be seen in the recent 2007 vote to revoke the citizenship of Cherokee freedmen descendants; however, instead of attacking this decision, with homage to Cherokee sovereignty, Yarbrough closes with two fundamental questions that challenge the reader to become more curious about the long-term implications of these actions and the relationship between sovereignty and racism: as the full-blood Cherokee population continues to decrease and the inclusion of individuals with little attachment to Cherokee cultural practices increase, how is one to understand how Cherokee identity is being defined? Is it blood, culture, self-identification, or legal status? (130).

Regardless of which position one takes on this subject, whether one is status or nonstatus Native American, FBI (full-blooded Indian), of Caucasian or African admixture or both, or non-Native American, one should be motivated by Yarbrough's work to investigate the demographic, ethnographic, and legal historic records revealed further; increase one's knowledge of the evolution, manipulation, and maintenance of racial hierarchies within Native American nations; expose oneself to the good and bad that can arise through the exercising of sovereignty (that is, an independent or domestic dependent state with the ability to make laws); recognize the reprobates created when racism is a part of this exercise; and understand why it is important never to overlook the validity and interdependency of both sides to arguments concerning legitimacy and illegitimacy and sovereignty.

Robert Keith Collins
San Francisco State University