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Review of *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907* By Carolyn Ross Johnston

Rowena McClinton

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, rmcclin@siue.edu

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Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907. By Carolyn Ross Johnston. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003. xiv + 227 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$53.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Johnston begins her book by sharing family stories passed down by her Cherokee female relatives whose narratives probably emanated from another ancestor, Caledonia, a victim of Cherokee Forced Removal (1838-1839). To quench her desire to learn more, Johnston seeks to furnish additional information about the sustaining power of women during times of extreme upheavals: forced displacement from the American South (1838-1839); the

Civil War and its aftermath (1861-1877); and allotment in severalty of Cherokee lands (1887-1907). Following two other path-breaking studies of Cherokee women, Theda Perdue's *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (1998) and Sarah H. Hill's *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry* (1997), *Cherokee Women in Crisis* both augments and complements these previously published monographs. Perdue's and Hill's investigations highlight women's roles within the confines of Cherokee society, though obviously affected by outside forces.

Johnston argues that her book is not about women's struggle for freedom, but rather their fight to maintain their time-honored freedoms. Traditionally, Cherokee society held women in awe: the matrilineal and clan- and land-based matriarchal society had provided Cherokee females with opportunities to exercise control over their families, economy, political arenas, ecological systems, and spirituality. While their pervasive influence faced compromises during tragic displacement and the Civil War and Reconstruction, the death knell to the traditional matriarchy and female ties to land occurred in the Dawes Commission meeting in 1897, the sequel to the 1887 Dawes Act. Though land and its resources no longer belonged to the female, Johnston argues that women continued to sustain a strong sense of self and power. Johnston sees the twentieth-century lives of past female chiefs of the Cherokee Nation—Wilma Mankiller of Oklahoma and Joyce Duggan of the Eastern Band (North Carolina)—as emblematic of Cherokees' unbelievable tenacity and respect for female leadership.

Johnston identifies globally with other ethnic groups that have remained extraordinarily cohesive in times of severe persecution and displacement by resonating with the world of Elie Wiesel, who attributes his sense of identity to the importance of stories. Storytelling is an art, and Johnston makes her case clear that this venue offers the historian a valuable resource. By combining the historic record and extensive research, she reinforces her premise

that the Cherokee Nation still reveres the role of women and does so naturally. Well written and refreshingly honest, I recommend the book both to general and scholarly audiences.

ROWENA MCCLINTON

Department of Historical Studies
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville