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Review of *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* By Celia E. Naylor

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African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens. By Celia E. Naylor. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. xii + 360 pp. Photographs, maps, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.

In *African Cherokees in Indian Territory*, Celia E. Naylor tackles the controversial issue of slave-owning by Cherokee Indians and cuts through wishful myths to the truth that slavery is not somehow better when one's master is also nonwhite. In her remarkable book, Naylor traces the lives of African slaves and freedmen from 1839 when the forced removal over the Trail of Tears dumped the Cherokees of the southern Appalachians and their black slaves on the Great Plains to 1907 when Indian Territory became the state of Oklahoma. Naylor is thorough in searching out all the primary source material, and she gives voices to the former slaves themselves via the treasure trove of life histories collected in the 1930s by the federal government's Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Naylor successfully argues that slaves and freedmen among the Cherokees became culturally Cherokee and that the Cherokee Nation was where they were grounded. Many spoke the Cherokee language and dressed in a distinctly Cherokee style. The foods they prepared and ate were part of the Cherokee cuisine emphasizing corn and including dishes such as bean bread. For generations the only traditions with which slaves, freedmen, and their descendants identified were Cherokee, and the only lands they knew as theirs were the Plains of Oklahoma.

African Cherokees is not only well-written history but timely as well. As Naylor points out in her afterword, the nineteenth-century issues she explores in her book have been resurrected here in the twenty-first century. The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, one of three federally recognized groups of Cherokees, is unusual among Native Americans in not defining tribal membership based on a minimum Indian blood quantum. To be a Cherokee citizen, one

needs only to have one Cherokee ancestor who was counted on the Dawes Roll of 1906. The descendants of Cherokee freedmen who have at least one such ancestor have Cherokee citizenship. Freedmen descendants who do not have such a Cherokee ancestor, but for generations have lived among the Cherokees as both slaves and free people, have been denied citizenship for decades. In March 2006 the Cherokee Supreme Court ruled that the descendants of freedmen with no known Cherokee ancestors were full citizens of the Cherokee Nation with all the rights of such citizens, including the right to vote. A year later, in March 2007, a constitutional amendment was passed that stripped the freedmen descendants of their Cherokee citizenship. A final decision on the issue of citizenship is yet to be settled in the courts. *African Cherokees* puts today's news in context and should be a must read for anyone researching Native Americans, ethnicity, or race relations.

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