

Choctaw Confederates: The American Civil War in Indian Country. By Fay A. Yarbrough. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 280 pages. \$32.95 cloth; \$27.99 ebook.

Historians have and will continue to debate why Americans and Confederates fought the Civil War. The conflict was, however, a three-cornered war driven by Native motivations and agendas just as much as any settler's sense of patriotism, need to defend their homes, desire for vengeance, and—at least for southerners—intentions to preserve the institution of slavery. Annie Heloise Abel's problematic *Slaveholding Indians* trilogy (1915–25) has long dominated the historical narrative. It's fortunate that a growing number of scholars led by Mary Jane Warde (*When the Wolf Came: The Civil War in Indian Territory*, 2013) and Bradley Clampitt (*The Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory*, 2015) have retrained their focus on why Natives took up arms in Indian Territory. Historian Fay Yarbrough of Rice University offers a rich and nuanced contribution to this discussion. In her examination of how and why Choctaws fought, she argues that the “desire to protect Native sovereignty and Choctaw identity” (11) motivated leaders to ally with the Confederacy.

Yarbrough does impressive archival work, digging through the overlooked *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations Raised Directly by the Confederate Government* found at the National Archives. Although Colonel Douglass H. Cooper boasted that the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations could “furnish 10,000 warriors if needed,” far fewer served in his regiment. Yarbrough claims that about 3,100 Choctaws served according to these extant enlistment documents, or approximately 20 percent of the Choctaw population (excluding enslaved individuals). While well below Cooper's optimistic assurances, these revised totals are much higher than previous estimates ranging between 1,200 and 1,900 (115–121).

So why did Choctaws fight? According to Yarbrough, Choctaws had several rationales: the Confederate States of America (CSA) nominally guaranteed Native sovereignty, presented an option for seating a representative in the new Confederate Congress, agreed to assume all previous financial obligations the tribe made with the United States (including annuity payments), established a path for male social advancement in line with cultural traditions, and offered to protect Choctaw borders from US military invasion, as well their right to retain “enslaved property.”

By portraying Choctaws not only as invested in preserving their sovereignty but specifically as southerners—Yarbrough calls the Choctaw experience “a southern experience” (8)—*Choctaw Confederates* complicates Warde's argument that leadership preferred neutrality, even if that path was not a realistic option. Central to sovereignty was access to the labor of enslaved people, even if the conditions of enslavement differed between Choctaws and American slave owners in southern states. Choctaws

relied on enslaved labor to grow corn and manage livestock, with only minimal attempts at cotton, which stood in contrast to the plantation enterprises established by settlers across the Choctaws' ancestral lands in the Black Belt. Choctaw leadership appreciated the increasingly vocal states' rights arguments by southern diplomats as closely aligned with their own sovereign claims previously confirmed by treaty. Yarbrough also stresses how Choctaws significantly differed from white southerners, especially in the postwar context. The society that emerged in Indian Territory after the war paralleled but did not replicate the racial binary that defined the reconstructed and redeemed South. The Choctaw general council did regulate a racial order in the postwar world through the passage of interracial marriage laws. It was Choctaw identity, however, and not white supremacy that informed these legislative measures. Because matrilineal descent continued to determine Choctaw identity, the "one-drop rule" did not automatically apply to those of African descent living in Choctaw Nation.

Yarbrough therefore stresses that Choctaw decision-making can only be understood within the nation's longer cultural and political histories. If at the national level the Choctaw alliance with the CSA fit into a history of preserving sovereignty at all costs, at a more individual level Yarbrough follows the line of argumentation pursued by Greg O'Brien (*Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age*, 2002) and Christina Snyder (*Great Crossings: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in the Age of Jackson*, 2017), linking power to martial masculinity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively. Between the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the outbreak of the US Civil War, advancement opportunities for young men were limited, reserved to the accumulation and distribution of resources that came with successful ranching and landholding operations, as well as service as a deputized Lighthorseman. It's curious that Yarbrough mentions only in passing the possibility of ishtaboli (stickball) games serving as another avenue for young men to prove their prowess in low-stakes situations (at least, compared to warfare), even though vivid accounts of the ferocity of organized games by passersby through Choctaw Nation in the 1840s and 1850s exist. Instead, she focuses on the Lighthorsemen as a more significant substitute, noting how many enlisted for the CSA in pursuit of the "reclamation of a warrior identity" (176).

As the war progressed, enlistments in the First Regiment Mounted Rifles under Cooper's command fell precipitously, even as the CSA offered an additional cash bounty as a term of enlistment (136). Compared to eastern theaters, Indian Territory saw infrequent engagements between Confederates, their Native allies, and US forces, although that did not stop military campaigns from depopulating significant portions of the region. The outcome of the largest battle in Indian Territory, at Honey Springs in July 1863, wrested control of Fort Gibson away from the Confederacy and may have signaled to potential Choctaw and Chickasaw enlistees that volunteering in support of the CSA may have been a waste of time and energy. Yarbrough notes that in the years following Honey Spring, service records show that only fifty-seven (1864) and one (1865) Choctaws decided to enlist (134–35).

This is an important work that demands attention from Native and Civil War scholars. Chapter four, which offers an extended discussion about Yarbrough's methodology and the limitations of the specific set of war records she relies on, would make

for an excellent discussion in a graduate research seminar. Yarbrough admits that this is not an authoritative work on how the Civil War unfolded in all Indian Territory, but simply Choctaw Nation. This book leaves scholars with questions, but in a good way. *Choctaw Confederates* deals primarily with *tvshka* (warriors). But how did elders and women react to the changes wrought by an American war in Indian Territory? Were there transformations in the work and responsibilities of *alikhchi* (doctors) in Choctaw Nation or perhaps even on deployment? And if we extend our view past the borders of the Choctaw Nation, what stories can the *Compiled Service Records* still tell us? Yarbrough did not analyze separate records for Chickasaw soldiers, so the total number of Chickasaws who served remains murky. Her conclusions will without doubt inspire new research for years to come.

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