

Choctaw Resurgence in Mississippi: Race, Class and Nation Building in the Jim Crow South, 1830–1977. By Katherine M. B. Osburn. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. 322 pages. \$65.00 cloth; \$25.00 paper and electronic.

Recently, following the lead of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, scholars employing decolonizing methodology are moving away from Eurocentrism to reframe American Indian history by critically interrogating the past from an indigenous perspective. As the tribal political histories of mainstream academic scholarship have given way to critical analyses of US colonialism and how it dispossessed, subjugated, pauperized, and marginalized indigenous peoples from the late eighteenth century to the present, works by authors such as Waziyatawin, Barbara Mann, and Amy Lonetree build a body of history outside of a celebratory master narrative that obfuscates, whitewashes, and omits the truth. Unfortunately, Katherine Osburn's *Choctaw Resurgence in Mississippi* is an old-school political history which does not recognize that the Mississippi Choctaws were situated in a system of settler-led colonialism that bounded their actions, events, and human relations.

US settler-colonialism is a history of forced assimilation and subjugation of Native peoples lasting almost two centuries, but Osburn localizes the struggle of the Choctaw as if it were apart from a larger system of white federal and state government throughout the country, instead presenting a chronological history of isolated events, policies, laws, and practices that is unrelated to any larger whole. The result is a book that is long on detail and short on analysis. Terrible conditions and events that were deliberately and systematically inflicted on indigenous peoples become random events with no explanation or agency. This approach exculpates white America and does not do justice to the struggle of the Mississippi Choctaws, who not only overcame many years of unimaginable poverty, injustice, racial discrimination, constant white harassment, and lynching, but also struggled against a rigged system of power—colonialism—that encased white supremacy and its support systems in state and federal law, policy, traditions, and economics.

This work covers the period from 1830 to 1977, with a heavy emphasis on the mid-twentieth century. For more than one hundred and fifty years the Mississippi Choctaws were subjected to the full range of settler-colonial tools, including violence; repeated, forced dispossessions; economic destruction; expulsion from all but the lowest-paid occupations; lack of education and opportunities for their youth; and unrelenting discrimination in many forms. In the post–World War II era, the Choctaws found greater latitude, but only within the boundaries dictated by the federal government. Despite these well-known facts, Osburn chooses to show how eventually the Mississippi Choctaws overcame all, resulting in self-determination and the “Choctaw Miracle.” Osburn’s book is organized around three “sets of narratives” that she argues ultimately led to the “Choctaw Miracle,” which she defines as the achievement of economic and political recovery. First, the promotion of the Choctaws as military allies with the US and the Confederacy resonated with the militaristic traditions of white Southern society and was framed to evoke important Southern traits such as patriotism and loyalty to the South. Second, although the Mississippi Choctaws were

dispossessed by white settlers they framed their refusal to leave Mississippi and go west as a stance against the federal government. By not blaming Mississippi or white settlers, they supported the ideology of states' rights and the mythology of the Lost Cause, so important to the Southern psyche. Third, in the binary racial hierarchy of Mississippi, the Choctaws presented themselves as a race apart. Their insistence that they were not African Americans helped them carve out a useful and distinct third racial identity. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, this supposedly allowed racist whites to sympathize with the plight of the Choctaws, providing some political support in the battle for federal relief.

This story, although pleasant, requires more careful analysis of the historical record. The author is presenting a Horatio Alger story, weaving a tale of overcoming adversity through adaptation, accommodation, and assimilation; a determined tribe that is mired in poverty casts off its oppressed status to reach for and achieve the golden ring of self-determination, federal recognition, and material success. While this may be satisfying to hear for those who do not want to be held accountable for the theft of the lands and wealth of Native America, the genocide and forced assimilation of the boarding schools, and the rampant injustice and inequality backed up by American law and policy, the "Choctaw Miracle" is nonetheless hollow because, in essence, it embraces the Christian, capitalist, materialist, individualistic society of the United States. Arguably, had the Mississippi Choctaws achieved true self-determination, they might have wanted to retain or recover some of their traditional beliefs and way of life, which emphasized sharing, generosity, communalism, shared landholding, and rejection of materialism and hoarding. Gender relations empowered women as equal members of the society who were accorded respect, personal freedom, and decision-making powers. Instead, the Mississippi Choctaws, like all American indigenous nations, were forced to assimilate in order to obtain even a modicum of self-determination.

Osburn's narrative is not without merit. The bulk of the text focuses on the twentieth century, primarily the years following World War II. She documents the endless meetings, policies, and skirmishes between the Choctaws and the BIA and other government entities in the post-World War II era. Her accounts of how Choctaw women had to dress and appear white in order to enter the work force in the 1950s is interesting, but again, there is no critical analysis addressing the colonial relations that pervaded white-Indian relations. Although Osburn gives repeated examples of how US and state officials forced Choctaw women to conform to white expectations and cultural norms, she never discusses patriarchy, Choctaw traditional gender roles, or the ideology being imposed on the Choctaws to force them to assimilate or outwardly accommodate white beliefs and values.

In fact, Osburn dedicates only twenty-seven pages to the entire nineteenth century. The generations of Mississippi Choctaws living in constant fear of dispossession, inequality under the law, unbelievable poverty, and almost no educational opportunities is glossed over and provides little context for more than a superficial understanding of what they had to overcome. The explanatory framework of US settler-led colonialism would make sense of the myriad details, minor political skirmishes, long-term struggle for recognition, and other important aspects that

seem to float through Osburn's text and would unite these episodes into one tribe's monumental struggle to overcome white supremacy and the system of colonialism perpetrated not just by the state and federal government, but led by white citizens against indigenous peoples throughout America.

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Dispatches from the Fort Apache Scout: White Mountain and Cibecue Apache History through 1881. By Lori Davisson with Edgar Perry and the original staff of the White Mountain Apache Cultural Center. Edited by John R. Welch. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016. 150 pages. \$19.95 paper and electronic.

Essentially a history of the White Mountain Apache tribe as published in serial form in the tribe's newspaper the *Fort Apache Scout* from 1973 to 1977, this small volume holds many voices. At once an assemblage, a commemorative, a history, and a post-modern edition, it speaks for many people, some of whom have passed away. Arizona and Apache historians will readily recognize those who have contributed to the publication of this book. Beginning in the 1970s, Edgar Perry and the White Mountain Apache Cultural Center worked closely with the Arizona Historical Society's long-term research librarian, the incomparable Lori Davisson. Davisson's synthesis of historical documents, anthropologists' fieldwork, and Apache oral tradition was one product of this long collaboration, which resulted in a series of articles in the *Scout* as well as several journal articles not included in this volume.

The series begins with thoughts about Apache origins and moves on through the Spanish colonial era, the Mexican period, and, most thoroughly, the American era. While Chiricahua Apache history is more familiar to most western scholars than White Mountain Apache history, this is precisely the value of the book. Davisson's stories inform the reader of the notable headmen and internal political changes they encountered when the US military invaded their homeland. Faced with virtually no choice, they worked in concert with the Army in the decade and a half of warfare against the Chiricahuas that followed. Most historically important, Davisson corrected the fatal error contained in Grenville Goodwin's comprehensive *Social Organization of the Western Apache* (1942). Just why researchers will forever be grateful is addressed in the current volume, and new Apache scholars should take note before wading into Goodwin's massive tome.

Edgar Perry's presence is welcome too. As the long-time leader of the White Mountain Apache Cultural Center and an amiable and enthusiastic culture broker, he and a handful of dedicated Apache elders recognized the political imperative to control the historical Apache narrative earlier than many contemporary tribes, perhaps because of the tribe's long association with the US government as scouts, soldiers, and Indian police. After being lauded in the late nineteenth century for cooperating with the Army in capturing Geronimo and the Chiricahua Apaches, Americans became