

Book Review by Walter L. Williams. *The Journal of American History* 1979. pp. 666-667.

*The Cherokee Freedmen: From Emancipation to American Citizenship*. By Daniel F. Littlefield. (Westport: Greenwood, 1978).

This volume makes a significant contribution to the study of Indian-black relations. Daniel F. Littlefield has effectively utilized federal records, Cherokee Nation records, and local newspapers to produce a balanced assessment of a complex problem: the destiny of black slaves of the Cherokees. In the process, he recounts tribal factionalism and explains a major factor that weakened the Cherokee Nation.

The status of these blacks was decided by the Treaty of 1866, in which the United States forced the Cherokees to emancipate their slaves and adopt them as equal members of the tribe. The treaty specified that the freedmen must be in the nation within six months. Trouble began as a result of this provision, because a large percentage of Cherokee slaves had scattered during the Civil War. Many did not know of the treaty, or did not have the means to return to their homes until several years after the war. Those who did qualify for citizenship had better living conditions than most Afro-Americans, because Cherokee communal landowning meant that they could homestead as much free land as they could farm. They had access to civil and political rights enjoyed by few blacks in the post-Reconstruction South. But the noncitizen blacks had little security, especially as others migrated from the South into Indian Territory. Cherokees became alarmed over "intruders" (white as well as black), and pressured the federal government to remove them. Non-enrolled freedmen, meanwhile, countered with their own appeals to the United States to have their status in the Cherokee Nation secured.

While some United States officials reacted in sympathy for the freedmen's situation, this controversy offered the government an opportunity to restrict Cherokee autonomy. Littlefield criticizes the Cherokees for refusing to adopt the legitimate freedmen, which would have ended the controversy. By the 1890s the issue had grown into a comedy of errors, as one United States census roll after another attempted to define which black individuals should be granted citizenship. Cherokees were divided over the issue, which caused a critical loss of faith in tribal leaders.

Federal involvement led to infringements on Cherokee internal self-rule, and by 1898 Congress had imposed the Curtis Act on them. This law abolished tribal governments and divided their lands into individual allotments, with "surplus" lands being opened to white settlement. Littlefield's claim that the freedmen issue was critical may be overemphasized; after all, other Indian governments were abolished even where there were no divisive internal controversies. But he is undoubtedly correct that this issue weakened the Cherokees at a critical time. By 1907 the issue was resolved, and over 4,000 black people managed to get allotments. Ironically, their situation after they became United States citizens was worse than it had been under Cherokee rule. The white Oklahoma government passed segregation and disfranchisement

laws that reduced black rights. Many soon lost their allotted lands through debts or outright fraud by whites, who fleeced Indians and blacks alike. Littlefield sees no heroes in the whole affair, but shortsightedness among both Indians and blacks which kept them from unifying against whites.

While Littlefield's research and conclusions are excellent, the reader sometimes becomes bogged down in a mass of names and dates that should have been relegated to footnotes. More pages are devoted to the accuracy of the different censuses than to the freedmen themselves. In all, the book needs condensing. Littlefield makes important points, which should not be obscured by an excessively detailed text.

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

WALTER L. WILLIAMS