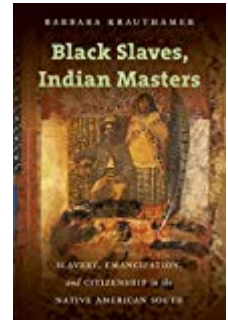


**Barbara Krauthamer.** *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. xiii + 211 pp. \$29.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-0710-8.



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Barbara Krauthamer presents an authoritative account of African American slavery and emancipation within the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations during the nineteenth century. As she argues, the majority of studies about slavery in Indian Country revolve around Native peoples themselves, their transition from captive-taking in the seventeenth century to racial slavery by the nineteenth century, and the cultural continuities and changes embedded within indigenous practices of enslavement. In contrast, Krauthamer shifts the focus to the African and African American people “enslaved and emancipated by a Native American master,” privileging the stories of those like Dinah, an African American woman born within the Chickasaw Nation in the late eighteenth century (p. 1). Dinah was not only enslaved, but she also lived through Indian Removal and the New Madrid Earthquakes (1811-12), converted to Christianity and used her faith to negotiate her slavery, worked as an interpreter with white missionaries and emerged as a go-between for white Americans and Chickasaws, and successfully hired out

her services and earned enough money to purchase her freedom. The stories of individuals like Dinah open the doors to a history that “we do not know [much] about,” and allow us to penetrate how “black people in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations identified themselves” and understood “the Diasporic conditions of racism and slavery as well as the particularities of their personal, familial, and historical experiences among Indian peoples” (pp. 12-13). In addition, Krauthamer’s work thoroughly complicates our understandings of racial slavery in Indian Territory, as she demonstrates how enslavement and emancipation were intimately tied to the assertions of Native sovereignty in the nineteenth century. The intersections of slavery, citizenship, and sovereignty also had repercussions for the United States, particularly during the sectional crisis and the Civil War, during which “Indian Territory, black slaves, and Indian masters were very much on the minds of many Americans” (pp. 9-10). As a consequence, it must be recognized that a “history of slavery in the Indian nations is very much a part of south-

ern history and U.S. history,” which itself is tied to a “complicated history of Indian sovereignty” (p. 1). Needless to say, this is an important book.

The first chapter is a historical and historiographical overview of indigenous captivity, slavery, and the meanings of freedom and un-freedom in the Native South during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Krauthamer illustrates the ways in which “Choctaw and Chickasaw men inserted themselves directly into the business of chattel slavery” as either slave traders, catchers, or buyers. She also traces the emergence of a slaveholding elite among the Choctaw and Chickasaw, composed predominately of men from two worlds (Native and Euro-American), who increasingly transformed black slaves from “objects of negotiation” to personal property they “accumulated, sold, and exploited for individual prosperity” (pp. 23, 30). Such changes in the dynamics of slavery were a product of a nascent racial hierarchy in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations at the turn of the nineteenth century, as indigenous peoples formulated their own “ideas about the inferiority of blackness” and then codified race in their constitutions and societies (pp. 31, 35). In fact, Native sovereignty itself was predicated upon racial slavery, used by the Choctaw and Chickasaw to showcase their “civilization” to the federal government. Ironically, though, the mutual understandings of race, and shared institutions of slavery, did not avert Indian Removal for the Choctaw and Chickasaw.

In subsequent chapters, Krauthamer shifts the narrative from Native peoples to the black slaves who lived and labored in Indian Territory after Removal. For instance, she examines the complex web of “white missionaries, Indians, and black slaves” among the Choctaw and Chickasaw, as well as their negotiations with one another during the 1830s-50s, which created a combustible mix of conversion, sovereignty, and slave resistance (p. 47). Of greatest importance, Krauthamer reveals how enslaved peoples forged

their own spiritual paths and spaces in Indian Territory, by attending missionary schools to learn how to read and write, hiring their services out to ministers and churches, organizing “their own spiritual gatherings apart from the direction and supervision of both missionaries and masters,” and in some cases, mobilizing ecclesiastical support to “secure their freedom” (pp. 59, 69). In addition to spiritual resistance, enslaved blacks “knew a great deal about the physical world around them and also about the political and social climate in Indian Territory and beyond,” and at times utilized such knowledge in “moments when they might alter the course of things through their own actions” (pp. 77-78). For example, as the sectional crisis heated up in nearby Kansas and Nebraska—inciting fears among Choctaw and Chickasaw slave owners that the violence would spill over into Indian Territory—African American slaves seized the opportunity to run away, destined for Texas and Mexico. At the same time, runaways from Texas and Arkansas similarly used the chaos to hide out in Indian Territory, which only heightened Choctaw and Chickasaw anxieties. However, such negotiations of the master-slave relationship produced a violent backlash, as the nations introduced restrictive slave codes, expelled freed blacks from their territories in 1840, and strengthened “Indian law and custom [that] unequivocally linked blackness with servitude and defined citizenship in terms of race” (p. 71). Ultimately, Choctaw and Chickasaw fears of slave empowerment and resistance prompted their negotiations and alliance with the Confederacy during the Civil War.

Krauthamer’s final chapters deal with the conflicts between the Choctaw and Chickasaw, the federal government, and the newly emancipated black population between 1865 and 1907, which pivoted around questions of black citizenship and Indigenous sovereignty. Only this time, African Americans were intimately involved in those conversations and negotiations. But at first, in the aftermath of the Civil War, the freedpeople endured

a torturous two years in which the United States and the Choctaw and Chickasaw tip-toed around emancipation. As Krauthamer states, it was not a question of *when* slavery would be abolished in Indian Territory, but “whether [or not] the nations would abolish slavery and establish black people’s freedom at all” (p. 105). Eventually, in the Treaty of 1866, the black slaves were freed but the question of whether or not they could become citizens of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations was left unresolved. To make matters worse, the freed population faced a “volatile, if not openly hostile, climate” within Indian Territory, as they were subjected to new black codes, labor contracts that resembled the conditions of slavery, legislation that promoted racial segregation, and a rabid violence against black bodies, families, and communities (p. 110). Yet this failed to deter former slaves from taking matters into their own hands, and between 1866 and 1870, African Americans organized publicly and politically “to discuss their options and agree upon a course of action” (p. 120). For example, when talks between the federal government and the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations stalled in 1868, which included resolutions concerning black citizenship, it was freedpeople who forced the issue and revived negotiations. At the same time, African Americans exerted a new-found agency by controlling and shopping their labor, attaining the ownership of land, articulating their voice politically, and migrating back and forth between Indian Territory and the United States. These people thereby “insisted upon their cultural, historical, and legal claims to inclusion in the nations as citizens,” at the same time they “identified themselves as a distinctive group within the nations” (p. 136).

As one can imagine, though, the Choctaw and Chickasaw—based upon their historical experiences and racial hierarchies—contested the freed population every step along the way. In the minds of indigenous policymakers, conceding black citizenship “threatened to undermine the stability of the nations’ governments as well as their land ti-

tle” (p. 133). Faced with assimilation and allotment in the late nineteenth century, the Choctaw and Chickasaw feared freedmen would not only take away significant portions of their land now being carved up by the United States, but would secure political representation in their nations. Therefore, the Choctaw and Chickasaw enacted legislation restricting black title to land, paid unequal wages and hired white laborers in lieu of black, and implemented a virulent racial segregation in their territories. Consequently, the war over African American citizenship raged on into the 1870s and 1880s up until the passage of the “Act to Adopt the Freedmen of the Choctaw Nation” in 1883. However, that bill deliberately restricted the acreage freedpeople could own, limited their access to political office, outlawed and even criminalized intermarriage, and altogether created a “racially defined ... category of citizenship” (p. 140). This racially based citizenship also intersected with the introduction of tribal allotment rolls and blood quantum theory within the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, which then affirmed the “racial classification scheme ... [that] isolated black people as a racially distinct class within each tribe” (pp. 147-148). As Krauthamer argues, this inferior and racialized type of citizenship still haunts the descendants of the Choctaw and Chickasaw freedpeople today. But all is not lost. As the author concludes, by “situating the history of black people’s slavery and freedom, as well as the history of Native peoples’ struggles to maintain sovereignty, in a larger context of domination and colonialism,” this helps “us to see a history of ... overlapping contests for power and justice,” which—rather than perpetuating the “entrenched antagonism of black freedom and Indian sovereignty”—might act as a basis for mutual understanding and compromise between Native peoples and African Americans today (p. 154).

To say, then, that Krauthamer’s work is powerful is an understatement, but at the same time we must recognize there are limitations to this book. Surprisingly, the author omits the experi-

ences of Choctaw and Chickasaw slaves during the Civil War. It should go without saying that the war not only engulfed Indian Territory, but undoubtedly created the opportunities—as well as the dangers—for enslaved blacks to escape or combat their circumstances. However, this part of the story is altogether missing, and that unto itself is troubling. While we get a brief sense of how the Choctaw and Chickasaw navigated the exigencies of war by joining the Confederacy, the same cannot be said for the African American slaves in Indian Territory. Also, while Krauthamer does an excellent job of describing the tripartite contest over black citizenship and indigenous sovereignty after the Civil War, we never get a feel for why African Americans—being formerly enslaved and subjected to violence and restriction during the 1860s-70s—wanted to remain a part of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. While she deploys work by Celia Naylor and Michael Vorenberg’s concept of “affective citizenship,” this is hardly convincing or illustrative for why former slaves desired to stay in Indian Territory and live alongside former masters. I suspect there were familial and kinship, if not clan, dynamics at play in these decisions, as well as former slaves’ having to weigh the cost of staying or leaving, a la “better the devil you know than the devil you don’t.” However, such explanations are left to the reader’s imagination. Finally, there are times when Choctaw and Chickasaw experiences are used interchangeably without distinction from each other, despite the fact these two peoples were and are quite distinct from one another, which undoubtedly extended to the African Americans they enslaved. While it is understandable that the author can at times claim a “unified Choctaw/Chickasaw Nation,” they were also distinct polities and communities before Removal and then again after 1855, and even when the Chickasaw were incorporated temporarily into the Choctaw Nation after Removal, they remained a distinct people with social, cultural, and political structures all their own (p. 80). For instance, when ex-

amining how enslaved blacks hired out their labor to white missionaries in Indian Territory, Krauthamer concedes that “most cases, however, occurred at the Choctaw missions” (p. 69). Why is this the case, and what does this tell us about the differences between the Choctaw and Chickasaw, their institutions of slavery, and the experiences of their slaves? In short, I am at times uncomfortable with equating Choctaw and Chickasaw histories as representative of one or the other, or for Indian Territory writ large.

With that said, Krauthamer’s book is a critically important contribution to the study of African and Native American slavery. By illustrating the lived experiences of enslaved blacks in the Native South and Indian Territory during the nineteenth century, as well as the connections of racial slavery, emancipation, and black citizenship to Native sovereignty, the author restores agency and humanity to a people who have long been voiceless within the American narrative. And for that alone, in addition to all of her other insights, Krauthamer should be commended.

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