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Clarissa W. Confer. *The Cherokee Nation in the Civil War.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. xii + 199 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8061-3803-9.

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The Cherokee Nation, Union and Confederate

The western branch of the Cherokee Nation, having been relocated to Indian Territory under the Indian Removal Act some thirty years prior, had their own problems on the eve of the Civil War. Clarissa W. Confer describes how the Civil War fueled the factionalism and tensions left over from the Treaty of New Echota, and the now-infamous Trail of Tears. In this work, Confer attempts to illustrate the attributes–cultural, historical, and political–that set the western Cherokee experience apart from the "American" experience during the Civil War.

Confer's overarching notion is that the Cherokee Nation's Civil War experience set them apart from the rest of the country. She argues that both cultural and historical experience informed the decisions of the Cherokee people, perhaps more strongly than did external pressures. While all residents of Indian Territory felt similar outside pressures and shared certain similarities with internal pressures, Confer maintains that the Cherokee experience was unique. Although she acknowledges the struggles of the four other "civilized tribes" in Indian Territory, she argues that the Cherokee were a larger, more visible group that exemplified the influence of cultural and historic factors in their decisions during the conflict. This, she claims, was largely because of the level of existing factionalism carried over from the removal era. The political antagonists often acted in accordance with regional ideologies (for example, pro-slavery); however, as Confer demonstrates, "many Native decisions had far less to do with mainstream American events than with internal power struggles" (pp. 5-6).

Confer explains the cultural baggage carried by the western Cherokee at the outset of the war, describing long-standing disputes, political positions, and feuds. As a part of this, she necessarily discusses the social divisions within the nation. A great deal of attention, as should be expected, is focused on the leadership of John Ross and his opponent Stand Watie. She explains the historical rift between the two and their followers and the choices made by each as a consequence of the rivalry. Confer effectively draws a strong correlation between events in the 1830s and the choices made during the Civil War. Primary documents often determine the way historians (and their readers) view the past. However, much of the firsthand, or primary, information available comes from the Cherokee elite, thus giving us a sense of Cherokee history from the top-down, rather than the currently popular bottom-up social history. It is her argument, however, that although much of the leadership among the western Cherokee may have had mixed Cherokee-white bloodlines, and were often more acculturated to the mainstream, both factions truly had Cherokee identities and were working for what they felt was best for the Cherokee Nation.

When comparing the Cherokee Nation of Indian Territory to the nation at large, she argues that the Cherokee experience was nearer that of war-torn Southerners and border state residents than Northerners. They shared in the devastation of land and crops, loss of livestock, danger from partisan raiders, displacement, etc. As commonly seen in the border states, the Cherokee and other residents of Indian Territory held divided loyalties between the Union and Confederacy. Confer acknowledges the fact that although Indian Territory was on the periphery of American consciousness generally, both the Union and the Confederacy realized that this was a critical border region, not only for buffer-type purposes but also for troops (recognized first by Confederates) and for its wealth of resources. For these reasons and others, Confer notes that the Union *and* the Confederacy were compelled to pay attention to this region and its residents.

Confer examines the recruitment process undertaken by the Confederacy, as well as the initial lack of Union

attention paid to the tribes. Although her description of some of the early battles in Indian Territory under the command of Douglas Cooper could have used some clarification from a narrative standpoint, she explains well the desertion of some native Confederate troops and the movement of formally neutral natives to Union lines and sympathy. Confer also explains well the differences in Union and Confederate acquisitions of native troops, and the differences in the way those troops were perceived and employed by their white counterparts.

In this work, Confer uses primary sources nicely. Sources range from personal letters and government documents to photographs local newspapers, and personal narratives found in the Indian Pioneer Papers. She balances these with some strong secondary sources, including the works of noted historian Theda Perdue whose expertise includes Cherokee history. Overall, this work provides an excellent overview. Because the work spans a considerable range of time, space, and experience during a period of great crisis, the book is often limited to more breadth than depth.

An area of particular note in Confer's work is the refugees from numerous tribes, including the Cherokee, from Indian Territory. A great deal of attention is paid to the refugees under the Creek leader Opothleyahola who fled to Union Kansas with an intertribal following after fighting with Cooper's Confederate troops (including many from Indian Territory) at the beginning of the war. She examines their status as refugees and the physical and psychological toll it took on many of the people who feared to return home. She considers those who were starving and freezing because Federal officials were not prepared to care for them, those who joined Union troops going into Indian Territory in hopes of winning security and a return home, and those who lost their homes and lands to Confederate and partisan raiding while they were away. Confer makes clear that there were also Confederate refugees, many of whom tried to set up homes in Texas until they could return to their lands in Indian Territory. She explains that both factions created and faced hard times in Indian Territory generally, and in their own communities.

Confer does many things well in this book. She provides a manageable read for newcomers to native, and specifically western Cherokee, history. The contents are complex, but not presented in an overly complicated fashion. Confer contextualizes her work in terms of Cherokee cultural worldviews and past experiences, and makes clear the reason why Indian Territory suddenly became important to Americans (North and South) during the conflict. She also clearly illustrates the long-term negative impact of the war in Indian Territory, and proves that this is a story that belongs in the larger history of the U.S. Civil War.

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