

John Ross descendant offers diatribe on Freedmen leader  
 March 26 2007 at 12:02 AM David Cornsilk

The following is a letter to the editor sent to the Native American times by a thin blood member of the Cherokee Nation who bills herself as a storyteller and descendant of Cherokee chief John Ross. Her attack on Ms. Vann throughout her diatribe is neither unexpected, nor is it anything new. The letter could have been written during the 1960s in Alabama by any number of hood wearing denizens of the old South, all you have to do is replace Ms. Vann's name with that of Martin Luther King and the Cherokee Nation with Alabama and you have a repeat of history. My comments follow are interspersed with hers:

Letter was titled:  
 Letter to the Editor - issue of Cherokee rolls is Cherokee business

My response:  
 Since the Freedmen are Cherokees, many with blood of the tribe and all having rights of citizenship, it is their and all of our business.

3/22/2007

GR said:  
 My name is Gayle Ross and I am an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation. I want to respond to the remarks made by Marilyn Vann, but first I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak and to thank those who take the time to listen.

**DC responds:**  
 At least she got her name right. Or did she? We'll have to check on that. But Ms. Ross is NOT an "enrolled" member of the Cherokee Nation. There is no "roll" of Cherokees. There is a registry of descendants of citizens of the Cherokee Nation and Ms. Ross' name does appear on that list. Since there is NO CHEROKEE NATION ROLL, it is impossible for Ms. Ross or any descendant of a Dawes enrolled citizen to be "enrolled."

GR said:  
 You may know that Ms Vann has conducted extensive campaigns of both legal and public relations attacks on the Cherokee Nation.

**DC responds:**  
 Ms. Vann has never conducted a "campaign" legal, public or otherwise against the Cherokee Nation. Her efforts to secure her and all Cherokee citizens right to vote is against the tyrannical rule of Chad Smith, an avowed racist who seeks to destroy the rights of Cherokee citizens simply because they have ancestry traceable to the continent of Africa. Her campaign is to educate the Cherokee people on the truths of the Freedmen, that they have Cherokee blood, they have treaty rights, they are eligible to vote in the elections for the office of Principal Chief and the efforts to expel them are rooted in racism and fear of their vote.

GR said:  
 She represents herself as a victim of "racism" and to do that, she finds it necessary to distort our history and the facts. I can no longer listen to her shrill, strident invective smearing the Cherokee Nation in the name of "her rights". There is too much at stake to stand silently by as she continues her attacks.

**DC responds:**  
 Ms. Ross is just beginning to hear the shrill and strident voices of the Freedmen of the Cherokee Nation. She better get some really good ear plugs, because the cocophony of their cries for justice and those who support them may cause Ms. Ross to lose what little mind she has left.

GR said:  
 Ms Vann says Cherokee people were slaveowners and signed a Treaty with the Confederacy. What she hasn't told you is the majority of Cherokee wished to be neutral or remain loyal to the Union.

**DC replies:**  
 At the time of the signing of the Treaty with the Confederate States of America (CSA), the Cherokee Nation was virtually divided in half. One half, constituted predominately by full bloods and near full bloods supported continued relations with the U.S. The other side, comprised of mixed bloods, mostly slave-holders and slavery sympathizers, supported a treaty with the CSA. There was no majority on either side. There is little evidence, except in the words of John Ross himself, that even gives an indication that neutrality was considered an option. The rank and file citizenship of the Cherokee Nation had very strong opinions and the divisions in the Nation were aligned mostly on racial lines.

GR said:  
 The treaty with the Confederacy was signed under duress while Southern

troops occupied our country.

**DC replies:**  
 This statement is blatantly false. There were no "southern troops" in the Cherokee Nation. Albert Pike had been sent to the Cherokee Nation to negotiate a treaty. He was rebuffed several times by John Ross and the National Council. But as the deal kept getting sweeter, Ross acquiesced and signed, as did many tribes now resident in Oklahoma. Certainly, the federal troops had abandoned the CN to go where the fighting was, which means that's where the CSA troops were too; not in the Cherokee Nation.

GR said:  
 It was repudiated in less than a year and many more Cherokees fought and died to end slavery than practiced it.

**DC replies:**  
 The CSA treaty was repudiated by followers of John Ross, but was NEVER repudiated by Ross until the end of the war; very convenient. I'd like to see the document that shows where more Cherokees died fighting to end slavery than practiced it. Every Cherokee member of a slave-holding household practiced slavery, from the oldest granny to the youngest baby. All profited by the labor and free time afforded by the chattel slavery of human being in the Cherokee Nation. Much of the education attainment possible by Gail Ross' own ancestors, which has provided her with the legacy that instilled a love of books and education in her own family and self. She owes much to the slaves owned by her ancestor John Ross.

GR said:  
 President Lincoln assured Principal Chief John Ross that he understood the Cherokee situation and that the Cherokees would not be treated harshly, but our hopes of fair treatment died with him.

**DC replies:**  
 The Cherokee Nation got fair treatment. The truth of the negotiation process which created the Treaty of 1866 shows an astute negotiating force headed by William Potter Ross, a Princeton educated lawyer and nephew of John Ross. Nine points were offered by the United States and four of those were accepted without reservation. Among those four points was the citizenship of the Freedmen. In fact, the Cherokees responded to the point on Freedmen citizenship by saying to the U.S. negotiators, "Tell us what you wish us to do with them and that we will do."

GR said:  
 The Treaty of 1866 was a "reconstruction" treaty demanding many concessions Cherokees felt were unfair. The United States responded by threatening to sign a Treaty with the very Confederate Cherokees who actually had taken up arms against them. The Cherokees had been willing to offer land and certain rights to their freed slaves. The United States included the article calling for the "rights of native Cherokees."

**DC replies:**  
 "Reconstruction" use to be a code word for federal oversight in the old South. Anyone who reads the Treaty of 1866 and its attendant historic documents can easily see that very little "reconstructionism" went into its wording. Certainly, there were points that were not negotiable. First, slavery had to end. On that issue we can say that the U.S. forced its hand. But even there, the Cherokees came out better than other tribes because we had ended slavery in 1863, a good three years before the end of the Civil War. And Ms. Ross is a wrongheaded historic revisionist when she says that the U.S. included the article giving rights to Freedmen "equal to native Cherokees." That provision was not just presented to the Cherokee delegation, it was actually written by William Potter Ross himself. The evidence is apparent in the words used in the phrase itself. The term "native Cherokee" was one coined by the Cherokees themselves. The negotiators of the time might have been familiar with it, but most likely not. The Cherokee delegation and most assuredly W.P. Ross would be familiar with the term, as it had been used in records created by the Cherokees themselves for decades.

GR said:  
 Ms. Vann did not tell you that freed slaves did not want tribal citizenship either. Congress, in 1865, sent Gen. John Sanborn to report of the status of the freed slaves of the Five Tribes and he reported that they wanted and expected the United States to procure a separate tract of Indian Territory for them.

**DC replies:**  
 Sanborn toured Indian Territory and did not visit a single freed slave. His information came from the whites and mixed Cherokees who had owned the former slaves. In fact, when Sanborn toured the Cherokee Nation, many of

the former slaves were not even present in the Nation. They had been carried south to Texas and Choctaw Nation by their masters. The few remarks Sanborn records as "wishes of the freed slaves" no more represented the views of the whole freed slave population than did the recent vote to oust the Freedmen represent the views of the whole Cherokee people. And then again, why wouldn't the former slaves want their own space. They had been held in bondage and abused. If they could get their own space, live under their own laws and have their own plot of land, what's wrong with that? The mixed blood southern Cherokees were advocating the same thing at the same time. Ms. Ross doesn't seem to hold them to the same standard she would have us judge the Freedmen's ancestors.

GR said:  
 They wanted to own their own land rather than in common. They wanted autonomy under territorial law rather than tribal jurisdiction. The United States declined. Federal officials put Cherokees and Freedmen on the same path, knowing they wanted to go in different directions.

**DC replies:**  
 Ms. Ross just does not understand what she is saying here, or she intentionally distorts history to promote her own racist agenda. The views of the few freed slaves still in the Cherokee Nation in 1866 are not reflective of the desire of the whole Freedmen population to enjoy citizenship in the Cherokee Nation or on their own. And the United States did not decline anything regarding the Freedmen. The Freedmen were not parties to the negotiations of the Treaty of 1866, their wishes were not considered, either by the U.S. agents or the Cherokees. The freed Cherokee slaves were a people without a country and the Cherokees, reflective of our inclusiveness, empathy and love for our former servants, caused the our Cherokee ancestors to adopt them as full citizens of the Nation. Ms. Ross, a steadfast supporter of Chad Smith and someone who has profited from the cash cow casino Smith operates, Ross is merely protecting what she sees as her meal ticket.

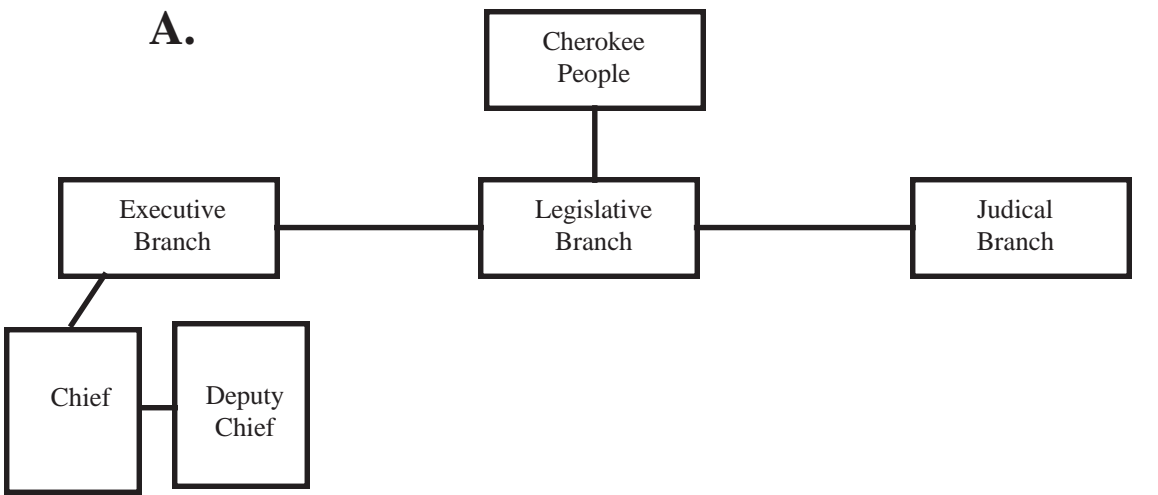
GR said:  
 It was a rocky road. The majority of Freedmen advocated allotment and the dissolution of the Cherokee government.

**DC replies:**  
 This statement is blatantly false. The Freedmen, much like the full bloods, were very opposed to statehood and dissolution of the tribal government, and they voted overwhelmingly against it in 1901. Had the full bloods voted, the mixed bloods who supported destroying the Cherokee Nation would have been defeated. The Freedmen opposed statehood for one main reason. The blacks in the south were suffering greatly under a developing "Jim Crow" system of segregation and oppression. Despite some of the same sentiments in the Cherokee Nation from whites and thin blooded Cherokees, for the most part, Black Cherokees enjoyed a better standard of living, access to the land base of the tribe and could even get themselves elected to public office in the Nation where they constituted the smallest minority. Statehood would open the doors of the territory to the virulent racism practiced throughout the south. Why would the Freedmen want that? The truth is they didn't and they did not support closing the tribal government. Gail Ross' own ancestors, who voted in the 1901 election supported closing the tribal government and allotment of land. If how your ancestor voted in 1901 could get you kicked out of the tribe, there'd be a lot fewer Cherokees named Ross on the registry.

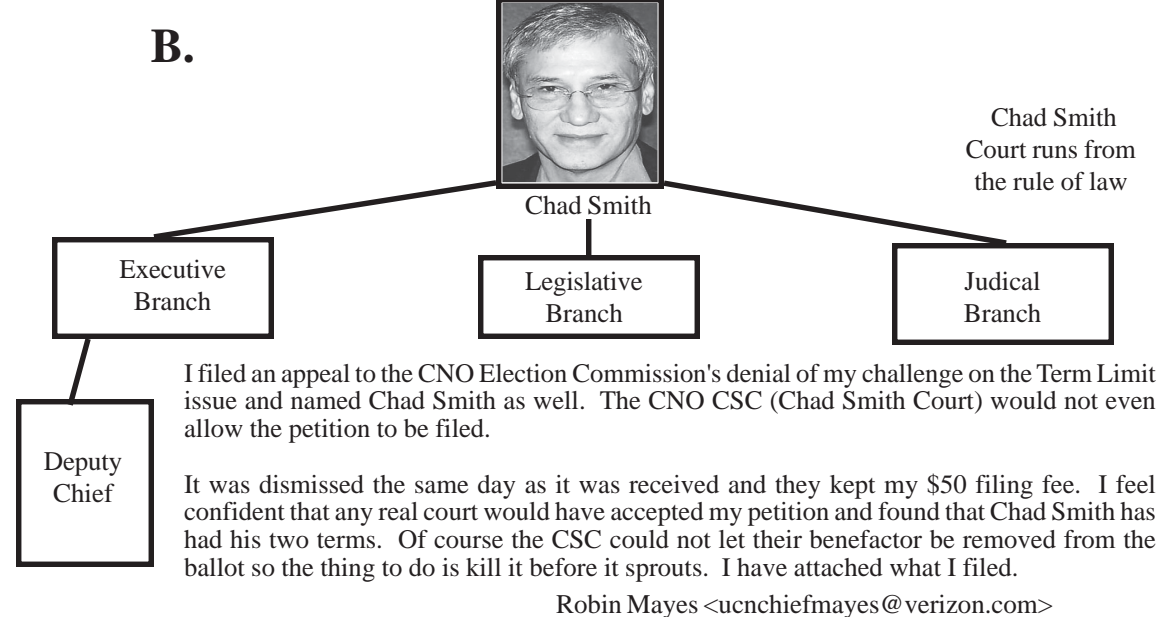
GR said:  
 Cherokees struggled to hold on to their land and their nation. Forty years later overwhelmed by forces from both within and without, our borders were obliterated and our government all but paralyzed. Freedmen interests were served. The United States' interests were served. The Cherokee Nation was devastated.

**DC replies:**  
 The voting population of the Cherokee Nation, comprised of mostly mixed bloods and their white spouses sold the Cherokee Nation out. Gail Ross' ancestors were among them. Slavery served the interests of her ancestors as they built wealth, absorbed education and climbed to the top of the Cherokee heap on the backs of the full bloods and the slaves. Yes, the Cherokee Nation was devastated, but the source of the devastation from within cannot be laid at the feet of the full bloods or the Freedmen. The destruction that came from within the Cherokee Nation came from the mixed bloods and their white spouses.

**What will the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma look like, if Stacy Leeds & Cherokee's with a Cherokee heart win?**



**What will the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma look like, if Chad Smith & his slate win?**



**Which one of these structures is constitutional? A or B**

GR said:  
 Throughout the coming decades, African-Americans fought a long and noble fight for their civil rights as Americans. Indian people fought to remain Indian. Our battles were against the policies of "forced assimilation"; boarding schools, termination of our governments, allotment of our lands, the banning of our ceremonies and the destruction of our cultures and our languages. We fought not just for the rights of our people, but for our rights to exist as nations.

**DC replies:**  
 I seriously doubt that Gail Ross fought for anything but her next book deal or speaking engagement. She is and has always been more concerned with promoting herself as an "Indian" storyteller than doing something for Indian people. Even her so-called storytelling is nothing more than repeating the stories collected by a white anthropologist living among the Eastern Cherokees. Her family did not preserve any traditional stories, as they had none to preserve. In her efforts to feel and act more "Indian" Ms. Ross cleaves herself to one of the most infamous administrations to govern the Cherokee Nation. She shouts about being an "Indian" and a "Cherokee" all the while decrying the identity and rights of the Freedmen. Her efforts speak loudly about her own self-doubt about her identity as she seeks to destroy the Cherokee heritage of others to make herself feel more Indian. Destroying the rights of others is NOT an Indian thing.

GR said:  
 The Cherokee Nation survives today because Cherokee people refused to let it die.

**DC replies:**  
 This is true; and the Freedmen have been there all along. They, like the Delawares, Shawnees, Keetoowahs and other Cherokees by blood have participated in the revitalization of our national identity as a tribe and government. Interestingly enough, Gail Ross' family were not there. Not a single member of her immediate family appears on the list of voters from 1970, 1971, 1975. It was not until there was something for her to gain that Ross herself became a member of the CNO. She's one of those jonnny-come-lately whites with an Indian ancestor who puts on a "tear dress", braids her blackened hair and starts telling stories she only read in a book. If it had been left up to Gail Ross and her immediate family, the Cherokee Nation would have died as they lived it up among the white folks.

GR said:  
 The first Freedmen supported the dissolution of our government to relinquish Cherokee citizenship for American citizenship. This was right...for Freedmen. Our own people voted to accept allotment, but it proved to be wrong for Cherokees. Now Ms. Vann would wreak devastation on the Cherokees to demand citizenship.

**DC replies:**  
 Again, the Freedmen did not support allotment or dissolution of the Cherokee government. It was the mixed bloods and their white spouses who did that. And the amendment to remove the Freedmen purports to exclude the intermarried whites, yet their descendants, the thin blooded Cherokees on the Dawes Rolls continue to enjoy their citizenship. Ms. Ross is right when she says that "her" own people voted to accept allotment. Even though she descends from John Ross, she obviously got little of his world view. It is not Ms. Vann who would wreak devastation on the Cherokees to demand citizenship. That is being wrought by Ross' beloved leader Chad Smith. He has wrought devastation on the Cherokee Nation in his effort to promote ethnic cleansing and protest his position by preventing the Freedmen from voting.

GR said:  
 In order to make this about race, Ms Vann has shrieked to the press about our citizens with low quantum of Cherokee blood, saying we accept "white" Cherokees but not "black" Cherokees. This is a lie. Our paperwork is color-blind. The citizens Ms. Vann sneers at may very well be part Cherokee, part white, part some other tribe, part Hispanic and part Black! We do not tell our children whom they may marry. Our enrollment is determined by a direct connection to a specific list of Cherokee citizens on the Dawes Rolls.

**DC replies:**  
 Ms. Ross obviously cannot read. Ms. Vann has stated accurately, time and time again, that there are white people on the by blood section of the Dawes Roll. They have no blood quantum next to their name, yet the recent amendment does not exclude them because they are on the by blood section. Ms. Vann is 1/8 Cherokee by blood. Yet, because of their negro ancestry and complexion, her ancestors were enrolled as Freedmen instead of Cherokee Indians. She has more Cherokee blood than some who now serve on the Council and certainly more than Ms. Ross. Ms. Vann has ancestors on the same citizenship roll that Ms. Ross extols. Yet, because that roll of citizens was segregated by color in 1902, Ms. Ross would punish those on it because racism in 1902 prevented them from declaring their Cherokee blood.

GR said:  
 Ms. Vann arrogantly says the Cherokee Nation "misapplies" the Dawes. That was what the vote was about, Ms. Vann. How to apply the Dawes. There are literally hundreds of thousands of "Cherokees" some with blood who cannot meet enrollment criteria. Different tribes use different rolls. It is our right to establish what we require for citizenship.

**DC replies:**  
 Ms. Ross needs to consult an attorney regarding the right of the Cherokee Nation citizens and their descendants to determine who is eligible to vote in the election for Principal Chief. Congress has closed the citizenship rolls of our Nation. We who are members of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma are merely descendants eligible under the 1970 Principal Chiefs Act to vote for Principal Chief. This right is extended by Congress to ALL citizens of the Cherokee Nation and their descendants in accordance with the Act itself. Congress gave the tribes of Oklahoma the right to recreate their governments and reestablish their citizenship Deputy Chief criteria based on their own desires. This law is called the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act (OIWA). The Cherokee Nation, identical to the Seminoles, has never taken advantage of this law. Our citizenship roll remains closed and our tribe is nothing more than a descendency group known as CNO. The members of the CNO claim to have the right to remove from its ranks other members, but they cannot change or destroy the rights of citizens of the Cherokee Nation and their descendants to vote for the office of Principal Chief. That right is guaranteed by Congress to us all. That also means there can never be a residency requirement or a blood quantum requirement to vote.

GR said:  
 Ms. Vann has asked Indian people to imagine how it would feel if this happened to your family. She doesn't know that most Indian people don't have to "imagine" this. I know many Indian people from many tribes who either have relatives or know a family with relatives who can no longer meet their tribe's legal requirements for enrollment. But mostly, when Indian relatives drop below a quantum requirement or a residence restriction, they go on being proud of their heritage, being active in their community and culture, honoring their ancestors. They know these things are not defined by enrollment, citizenship is.

**DC replies:**  
 Ms. Ross most certainly does know lots of fakes and wannabes. Her social and professional associations, just like Chad Smith, have always been with wannabes. She obviously feels more comfortable among whites because she does not socialize among real Cherokees. She did not grow up in an Indian community and does not now live in an Indian community. The Freedmen, in the face of great odds and much unwarranted hatred by people like Gail Ross, do treasure their heritage. And one of the greatest treasures of their heritage is the right to vote in the Cherokee Nation. If they are not members of CNO, they, like Ross will still be proud of their ancestors, proud of their Cherokee blood, proud of the contributions they have made to the Cherokee people and the tribe. But Ms. Ross has one thing she is proud of the Freedmen do not have. Ms. Ross is a racist and

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