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Book Review: The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction

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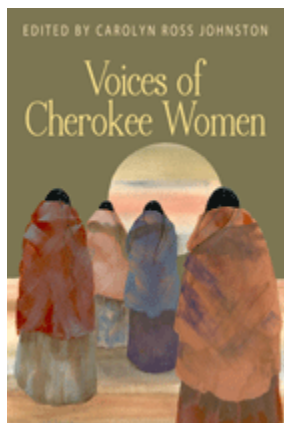
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those interested in New Orleans folklore and the supernatural, primarily public libraries.

Jennifer Culley
The University of Southern Mississippi

Voices of Cherokee Women. Edited by Carolyn Ross Johnston. Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, Publisher, 2013. ISBN 978-0-89587-599-0. 256 p. \$12.95 paperback.



Many who might wish to read and review Carolyn Ross Johnston's new book, "Voices of Cherokee Women" are those like me who were introduced on summer family weekend vacations to Cherokee women, children, men and the Cherokee Indian Reservation in Western North Carolina. Frequent trips to see "real Indians" in our North Carolina mountains were summer adventures we happily joined our parents and friends, gleefully expecting we might come home with a tom-tom, an Indian head dress, a Pocahontas doll or if we were lucky bows and arrows! Little did we focus upon the real people—the Indians—, or the food they ate, the rituals they valued, their health and wellness, their strange language we ignored, or their customs of hunting and gathering food.

From a child's view, the Cherokee Indians we saw were like make-believe characters—super human warriors with spears, women who made baskets and pots and carried babies and small children on their chests or backs in woven cloth sacks. Colorful painted faces for the men and scant clothes for children made us think they may have arrived by some type of space ship to the mountains of North Carolina.

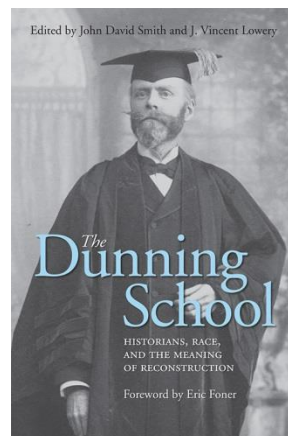
From those long ago days to today, many Indian tribes in the United States living on reservations in various states in the northern, southern and western regions of our country may provide these same impressions to children whose parents take them on summer weekend visits to "see the Indians". However, Carolyn Ross Johnston provides a documented and beautifully researched collection of stories, letters, diaries, newspaper accounts, oral histories to

paint a deeply moving panorama of the lives of the Cherokee culture and society.

Upon first read, I was overly impressed with the quality of research and sensitivity of Dr. Johnston's determination to give the reader truth and justice in her selection and variety of documents. Reading Dr. Johnston's research documents on the lives of Cherokee women revealed to me the misguided early American beliefs --social, political, religious, and folk lore--of the lives of our first American women. Additionally my childhood impressions were enlightened and my adult prejudices were shattered about the role of women in Cherokee life and culture. For anyone who explores and seeks to understand the role of women in the United States, Dr. Johnston's "Voices of Cherokee Women" is a critical research text.

Carol Walker Jordan, Ph. D.
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The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction. Edited by John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8131-4225-8. 338 p. \$40.



Who said, "history is written by the winners" ?

This phrase continued to flow through my thoughts as I grappled with the introduction and ten essays written by the doctoral students who surrounded Professor William Archibald Dunning (1857-1922) at Columbia University's graduate studies program on the reconstruction period following the American Civil War. Brilliant Professor Dunning was of such great charisma and intellectual rigor that he immediately attracted the brightest and most passionate of graduate students. Their desire to record, analyze and interpret the evolving American historical landscape following reconstruction of the southern states was passionate.

In those early days after the Civil War, Professor Dunning seemed to believe and promote opinions and passions of American citizens who said, "black people did not belong in American political society and had no business wielding

power over white people “ (p. 38). Dunning’s students’ writings affirm they enthusiastically invested great energy in engaging research to prove those beliefs and expand the prejudice and intolerance of those who questioned what reconstruction meant or what it was to offer and ensure to black individuals.

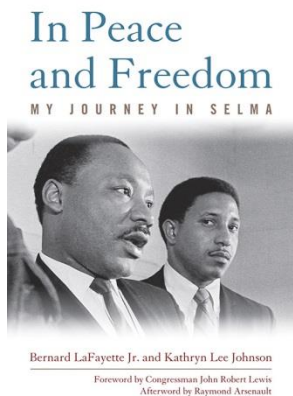
Over the ten essays included in this book, all graduate student authors held highly respected academic credentials but the tolerance and openness to discussion and debate over long held biases emerged rarely. Professor Dunning and his followers in the higher levels of academia shock and alarm us today. We see the highest goal of education as tolerance for others rights and beliefs. The greatest success of a debate is to bring a black and white issue to gray.

Any students or faculty of history of America after the period of the Civil War and throughout the era of Reconstruction will find this collection of essays of great interest. John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery have provided an intellectually rigorous text for students and faculty who study reconstruction and the influence of academia on historical events.

Yes, history is written by the winners but sometimes it is rarely won without time being the ultimate deciding factor.

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In Peace and Freedom: My Journey in Selma.
LaFayette, Jr., Bernard and Kathryn Lee Johnson.
Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2013.
ISBN: 978-0-8131-4386-6 240 p. \$35.00.



As the civil rights movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s recedes into the past it becomes more important than ever to hear the stories of those who directly participated in the struggle while there still is a chance. Bernard LaFayette, Jr. is not a name as immediately recognizable as some in the pantheon of civil rights heroes but his behind-the-scenes work (by design) was crucial in setting the stage for

one of the civil rights era’s greatest triumphs. His story is remarkable and inspiring.

LaFayette (born 1940) became interested in civil rights starting with the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56. Inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr. and then by his study of Mohandas Gandhi’s ideas concerning nonviolence and social change, LaFayette quickly became active in the movement shortly after starting college. He participated in the Nashville lunch counter sit-ins, the Freedom Rider campaigns of 1961, and the Mississippi Nonviolent Movement before joining the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s (SNCC) Southern Regional Council’s Voter Education Project. Promised a directorship in the Project, LaFayette was initially disappointed when he was informed there were no vacancies but leapt at the chance to take on the Selma, Alabama Voter Registration Campaign. Others had deemed it a hopeless endeavor thanks to the longtime brutal regime of white supremacy and the resulting hopelessness and “complacency” of Selma’s black population.

LaFayette provides a fascinating account of his courageous organizing work as, slowly and carefully, he organized the few local black activists willing to participate in a campaign to register black voters. Crucial to his ultimate success was LaFayette’s ability to get local people to start taking control of the movement. His preference was to work behind the scenes once he had established his credibility with local activists. In the process he had to contend with the fearsome brutality of such arch-segregationists as the infamous Dallas County Sheriff, Jim Clark: “his posse was tantamount to a legalized state-sponsored lynch mob” (28). LaFayette took courageous risks and at times encountered physical violence and was thrown in jail as well. Carrying him through the struggle was his strong belief in using nonviolence. For LaFayette, nonviolence included the capacity to recognize the humanity of one’s oppressor.

LaFayette’s other main insight was to use a strategy of legal point of challenge. The Voter Registration campaign had two main goals: to implement nonviolent direct action and to build a case for the federal government to prove that Dallas County was discriminating against black people’s right to register to vote. Getting federal power behind the cause was crucial to its success. In fulfilling both goals LaFayette and those he encouraged to work as advocates and organizers, were successful. The event now known as “Bloody Sunday” in March 1965 as peaceful, nonviolent marchers were brutally attacked while they attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge going out of Selma, received national television exposure. The actual Selma to Montgomery march which took place after a cooling off period drew in thousands of participants including celebrities such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Harry Belafonte, and the resulting publicity that dramatized the sheer injustice of denying African Americans the vote, helped ensure that President Lyndon B. Johnson would sign the Voting Rights Act, thus guaranteeing federal enforcement.