

Angela Y. Walton-Raji

July 31, 2020

Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Madam Speaker:

I write to you as a descendant of Choctaw Freedmen. My name is Angela Walton-Raji, a writer, author, and researcher. I am also a descendant of people held in bondage in the Choctaw Nation, and who also arrived in Indian Territory in 1831 during the first Indian removal. I write in response to the many issues being directed to you and other members of Congress about Freedmen in the Choctaw Nation, those people once held enslaved by citizens in the Choctaw Nation.

My childhood was spent on the border of Arkansas and Oklahoma in the city of Ft. Smith, Arkansas, the city where the treaty of 1866 was signed. My early childhood years were spent around two elders---one of whom was my great grandmother---Sallie Walton who was a Choctaw Freedwoman on the Dawes Roll. Countless hours were spent with her as she tended to her garden and prepared Pashofa, and other Choctaw dishes for me. Her history and culture were clearly evident and were no secret to the family, nor to anyone who knew her.

Sallie was Choctaw, and she spoke Choctaw. An early family memory occurred, when Uncle Joe, her only living sibling came to visit her, and my brother and I were fascinated as we watched and tried to eavesdrop as these two elders both sat in the yard, both smoking their corn pipes and speaking to each other in Choctaw. We knew that the Choctaw community was the world from which she came, and it somehow reflected also the world from which we also came.

Sallie was born in the Choctaw Nation in the Skullyville District, in 1863. Her mother Amanda, and grandmother Kitty were enslaved by the Perry family that arrived in the Territory, in 1831, from Yalobusha Mississippi. Our frequent family excursions into nearby Oklahoma during summer months took us through groves of alfalfa fields, numerous pecan groves, and corn fields to visit other cousins, who also would frequently speak about their Choctaw ties. But all of it came through Sallie—our Nana.

When she died, Sallie left a small document folded inside an old family Bible. It was a plat map, bearing her name, and location of lands allotted to her. She, like others in my family received allotments of 40 acres each. However, during the Dawes era, Choctaws deliberately stacked the deck against the Freedmen when it came to land allotments.

Sallie would not speak often about that land that was eventually sold, but she would simply suggest that some got more land than she did. Both of my great grandparents, Sam and Sallie Walton, along with my grandfather Sam Jr., were all classified as Choctaw Freedmen and thus, were allotted **40 acres of land each**. But I later learned that those whose names were placed on the roll of Choctaws by Blood, were given **320 acres each**. Put in a different way---Freedmen were given 1/8th the opportunity to establish generational prosperity. They began their lives after allotment with “one slice of the pie” while Choctaws by blood, and whites who had no Choctaw blood ties as all---each person---got 8 slices—the entire pie.

The fact is that the Choctaw Nation gave their former slaves 1/8th of what was given to those who did not have African blood. This included inter-married whites who were also given 8 times the amount given to Freedmen. So it must be stated again---if one was white with no blood tie to the nation, they too were given 8 times the amount given to Freedmen.

The Choctaw Nation is a nation that has sent representatives to you and others, and written official statements that address how the U.S. allowed a systematic racism to assign an economic under-privilege to people of African descent. Yet, they do not speak to the their *own* assignment of economic under-privilege to their own African Choctaw people. Their continued disenfranchisement of Freedmen descendants is a carefully disguised system of hidden anti-black racism. Truly, this oppressed federally recognized tribe, which is now a wealthy tribe, ignores their oppression of African Choctaws. Please note the following points:

- Anti-black racism prevailed in the Choctaw Nation in the immediate years after the Civil War. The Choctaw Nation passed a law making it a felony to marry anyone of African Descent. Yet there was no law against inter-marriage with whites. My great grandmother Sallie was the daughter of a Choctaw man and a half Choctaw, half black enslaved woman, but her parents could not marry. Nor could they marry after freedom, without being considered “felons” And Sallie being a daughter of a Choctaw meant nothing to a nation that only saw her African-ness being enough to treat her and the family differently.
- I have relatives today, living in Broken Bow Oklahoma, who have lived there for several generations who cannot apply for membership in the Nation of their family’s birth. My cousins who could benefit from more adequate housing in Broken Bow, and Idabel, and Lukfatah speak about hearing their “white” co-workers mention benefits that they have gotten to make improvements on their house. When asked how they could afford it, they

will mention that they have a tribal card. These “white” Choctaws have privileges extended to them that they cannot have, simply because their ancestors were darker skinned Choctaws, having African ancestry.

Madame speaker, please understand that Choctaw Freedmen descendants consider themselves to be Choctaw, and some still practice aspects of culture at social gatherings and events, but they are well aware of the historical mistreatment that have been hurled at them by the Nation to which they know that they have ties. Although there was always an odd “old-South sentiment” towards black people, the reasons behind it were never addressed, and thus, not fully understood. And today, my family living in SE Oklahoma and nearby Arkansas, know that though they are Choctaw, they come from a nation that continues to hold them at a distance.

I ask you Madam speaker to take note that many Freedmen understand that their tax dollars fund many of the funds given to the federally recognized tribes, but they too, are tax payers, Choctaw Freedmen however, are forced to pay for their own disenfranchisement from the nation to which they belong.

Choctaw Freedmen are not unattached, intruders into their Choctaw space. But the leaders have retreated to another space to hide behind a “blanket” of tribal sovereignty. Tribal sovereignty however, should never be a code word for “states’ rights” was a code word from the Civil War to the Civil Rights era, to mean that the state had a “right” (or sovereignty) to treat their African descended people in a heavy handed, racist, exclusive way.

Choctaw Freedmen understand and respect issues of tribal sovereignty and but we are also fully aware when the term is misused to establish policies that negate them, that negate their history, negate their heritage—and negate their presence within that same Choctaw space.

An appeal is extended to you, and others in Congress to support Choctaw Freedmen, because they are forced to be wear a “badge of slavery” by this exclusion, while the leaders of the Choctaw Nation and their lobbyists find comfort in this exclusion, under the name of “sovereignty”.

We watch as the tribal leaders appeal to you and to your heartfelt compassion as they speak of their loved ones, but please know that many Freedmen have blood ties to the same families that the Choctaw speak of with such familial sorrow, yet they speak to you, freely without any familial feelings for their African-Choctaw kin.

The appeals from the Choctaw Nation to you and to others in Congress, speak to only selected parts of their history. They walk past the presence of Africans once in bondage, who became Choctaw by culture, by language, by food ways, and many by family ties.

Madam Speaker, Choctaw Freedmen are not enemies of the Choctaw Nation. We *are* Choctaws.

We are not aliens from Arkansas, or intruders from Texas, or other states. We are a part of the world into which we were born. Although our citizenship was tossed out in the 20th century, that act did not obliterate who we are, nor did their racist actions erase our history, our heritage, our historic presence in the Choctaw Nation.

My hope is that you will consider to show sustained interest and support of Choctaw Freedmen descendants. We ask this support of you.

Respectfully,

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Author,

[Freedmen of the Frontier Volume 1](#),
[Freedmen of the Frontier Volume 2](#),
[Black Indian Genealogy Research](#)

Blog Posts:

[Africans in the Indian Removal](#)
[Sam and Sallie Walton, Choctaw Freedmen](#)

cc: The Honorable Maxine Waters