

*Growing Up with the Country: Family, Race, and Nation after the Civil War.* By Kendra Taira Field (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). Pp 256. Cloth, \$38.00.

*Growing Up with the Country: Family, Race, and Nation after the Civil War* follows the lives of three African American men as they migrated west from the South in the post-emancipation period. Using the migration stories of Thomas Jefferson Brown, Monroe Coleman, and Alexander “Elic” Davis, Kendra Taira Field illustrates how each man navigated the complex racial dynamics of the immediate post-Civil War period, Reconstruction, and the rise of Jim Crow. By studying African Americans’ post-emancipation migration from the South to Indian Territory, Oklahoma, and eventually countries abroad, Field argues that this movement was far more multiracial and multinational than previous historians have presented. Field enriches the narration of post-Civil War African American migration by incorporating Native Americans and international movements into a historiography that has largely focused on northward and urban migration.

The choice to follow the migration stories of Brown, Coleman, and Davis allows Field to move chronologically from the end of the Civil War to the early-twentieth century. Each man’s story offers a case study, detailing various methods through which black southerners acquired land, established a sense of permanence for their families, and navigated the complex racial dynamics of the South, Indian Territory, and Oklahoma. Field directly ties Brown’s relocation to Indian Territory to a greater association between land ownership and freedom in the aftermath of the Civil War. By marrying Creek and Seminole black women, whom he needed to obtain lands in Indian Territory, Brown was able to bypass land acquisition laws that prevented land ownership by non-native peoples. He eventually acquired one-thousand acres, which he divided into plots for his children, thus ensuring their freedom through land acquisition as well.

The increasingly hostile treatment of African Americans and Creek freedpeople following Oklahoma statehood, however, truncated this process of land ownership. Pressure from white settlers who disdained land ownership by people of color and competition for oil-rich property led black families such as the Browns to sell their holdings in search of education and job opportunities in urban areas. The Brown family’s loss of land showcases the ties between land loss and increasing biracialism. Increasingly, government officials used race, instead of historical connections to Native communities, to decide whose land was protected from white settlers. This meant that African Americans unable to prove they were full-blooded Creeks or Seminoles quickly lost their land, thus eliminating the preceding complex multiracial system of land acquisition and ownership.

Field narrates the trend of increasing biracialism in the South and Indian Territory with her description of Monroe Coleman’s migration experience. As the probable son of a white planter and a formerly enslaved mother, Coleman’s mulatto identity provides informative context for his migration to Indian Territory in 1904. Following the Civil War, this previously distinct population required erasure because it was a constant reminder of the sexual exploitation of enslaved women by their white masters, a problem for both masters and their white families in a society that valued racial purity. In the decades following Reconstruction,

mulattoes were ultimately grouped into the black population, which Field argues helped erase the diverse multiracial nature of migration to Indian Territory in the early-twentieth century.

While the first two migration stories demonstrate the multiracial aspects of African American migration to Indian Territory, the story of Elic Davis, a cousin of Monroe Coleman, focuses on poverty, violence, and prohibition of political participation that spurred many rural black Americans to migrate out of the South. Instead of striving to acquire land to reinforce his freedom, Davis migrated as an act of black nationalism. Initially, Davis and his family moved to all-black communities in Mississippi and Oklahoma. Due to the worsening political and social experiences of African Americans in Oklahoma following statehood in 1907, however, he eventually emigrated to the Gold Coast of Africa as part of the Chief Sam “back-to-Africa” movement. His experience adds a multinational layer to the post-Reconstruction black experience, illuminating how hundreds of African Americans emigrated to Africa, believing it to be the only solution to escape suffering in the United States.

As a descendent of Thomas Jefferson Brown, Field uses interviews with other descendants to outline the family’s experience in Indian Territory, which she then supplements with government documents such as Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands to support her assertion of the multiracial and multinational nature of post-emancipation migration. This section is Field’s strongest as she successfully blends family history with official documents, which ultimately adds a new layer to this stretch of the post-emancipation period. The complete story of the Brown family provides a detailed personal account of the way federal policy impacted individuals. Additionally, Field uses the 1920 federal census to identify the point at which “mulatto” was removed as a racial category for citizens, bolstering her claim that multiracialism was essentially eliminated in the early-twentieth century. As she goes through the migration story of Davis, Field relies heavily on a 1988 interview conducted by Cecil Cade and Mark A. Phillips with his daughter, Lomie Reed, as well as Davis family papers. She also turns to contemporary newspaper articles that chronicle the popularity of emigration to Africa in the early-twentieth century. Due to limited sources on Coleman and Davis, Field’s research in these sections has fewer layers than the first portion of her monograph. Overall, by reading the experiences of Brown, Coleman, and Davis back into official documentation, Field’s microhistorical approach allows the reader to glimpse the consequences of federal policy for ordinary people.

Field asserts that *Growing Up with the Country* occupies a new space in the post-emancipation African American historiography. Building on the work of Michele Mitchell and Steven Hahn, two scholars who have identified the connection between western and transnational migration, Field extends these works by centering land acquisition and highlighting the relationship between black settlements in Indian Territory and emigration to the Gold Coast.<sup>1</sup> By uniting separate waves of African American migration out of the post-Civil War and Jim Crow South, this author widens the scope of the Great Migration, placing

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<sup>1</sup> See Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

movement at the center of the African American experience in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

One clear weakness of this monograph, which Field acknowledges, is the missing stories of women in each family. Field correctly notes that a continued effort to identify their perspectives is necessary to forming a complete picture of African American migration in the post-Civil War period. In addition to the perspectives of women, how other family members weathered constant movement is an intriguing question this book leaves with the reader. How children's relationships with siblings, friends, and extended family changed with or survived despite movement that caused geographic separation is a topic that requires attention. Ultimately, *Growing Up with the Country* is a valuable contribution to the historiography of African Americans in the post-emancipation period that is useful for both historians and general audiences. By uniting Indian Territory, Oklahoma, and emigration to Africa in three different stories, the book provides a new lens for viewing western expansion that takes into account the realities of an increasingly biracial society in the United States.

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