

June 1, 2021

TO: The Honorable Chief Gary Batton Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
FROM: A Committee of Choctaw Freedmen Descendants

**RE: Discussions Regarding Choctaw Freedmen Citizenship
in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

Dear Chief Batton,

We are writing to you as Choctaw Freedmen descendants in response to your May 28th Open Letter addressing the topic of citizenship for Choctaw Freedmen. Your letter has been examined with great interest and we are respectfully reaching out to you, in response.

As members of a small committee of Choctaw Freedmen, we welcome the opportunity to engage with you and others about our shared history that began more than 190 years ago.

Our association with Choctaw people began decades before the Constitutional changes of 1983, before the Dawes Era 1898-1914, before Citizenship was granted in 1885, before the Treaty of 1866 was signed in Ft. Smith, before the Removal in the 1830s, and before the 1829 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.

As a people, our shared history is one that is deep and far reaching. As our ancestors traveled the same painful journey in the 1830s to Indian Territory and who lived to see freedom, they emerged as “Freedmen” who remained in the only land they knew as “home”. They lived among Choctaw people, many of whom were now kin. They became a people who were also Choctaw proud, absorbing the culture into which they had been immersed, embracing the culture of Choctaw people, that had become their own. This self-identity of Choctaw Freedmen, along with proven documentation of who they were, has been passed down to us through our own family histories and the historical record.

Chief Batton, your great grandparents as well as ours, spoke the same language that they all shared as their mother tongue. Later, 20th century racial codes, Jim Crow laws and social restrictions of the day, sought to change that. Yet, through all of those times, we have still among ourselves spoken about our history and have known that we are still a Choctaw people.

We, as descendants of Choctaw Freedmen come to you as a group of writers, researchers and preservationists, who have been documenting our history and ties for over 30 years, both independently and collectively. We have authored books about our history, published journals, established blogs, created documentaries, organized community groups, and given numerous lectures, speaking to this history that is part of our shared past.

You expressed in your letter an interest in engaging with us, and we truly welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the topic of citizenship. Therefore, we are writing to you, to request an opportunity to meet and to discuss our areas of common interest. We

are willing to be available for a zoom meeting, at your convenience in the near future.

For your information we shall follow up with you with some basic background information about who we are, and also our activities (writings, blogs, preservation initiatives and more).

We thank you for your opening this topic for discussion, and for also acknowledging us, because yes, we are here, where we have always been.

We look forward to hearing from you or your representatives, in the near future. Our hope is that soon we can also meet in real time, no longer as strangers.

Yakoke,

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