

Practicing Ethnohistory: Mining Archives, Hearing Testimony, Constructing Narrative.
Patricia Galloway. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. 544 pp.¹

Reviewed by Joshua Piker

What stands out in the title of Patricia Galloway's new book are the verbs: mining, hearing, constructing, and, especially, practicing. Yes, the book is about ethnohistory, the always-difficult to define combination of anthropology and history. And, yes, the book will be of interest to any scholar whose work centers on ethnohistory in general or on Galloway's own particular speciality, the pre-removal Native American Southeast and especially the Choctaws. In fact, any specialist in either ethnohistory or the Native Southeast should most definitely read this book. That said, this book is not finally about either ethnohistory or the Native Southeast. Rather, it's about those verbs, and so the potential audience for Galloway's book extends to anyone with an interest in the reconstruction of the past.

This is as it should be because it has always been clear that Galloway's work can profitably be read on two levels. She is a superb explicator of the historical record, a person whose answers to questions such as "How did the Choctaws emerge as a coherent polity?" or "What did it mean when the Choctaws referred to the French as 'fathers'?" have been widely accepted by her peers. Her work, however, can also be read as a primer in how to investigate the Native past—how to read documents critically; how to integrate archaeological, ethnographic, and document-based research; how to use theoretical models from a variety of social sciences. All too often, the latter aspect of her work is obscured by the former. Scholars, understandably enough, go to Galloway's work with a specific historical question in mind and do not pause to consider her methodological contributions. With this new book, as the verbs in the title show, that is no longer possible. This book should be read as a seminar in how ethnohistorians do what we do. We mine; we hear; we construct. But most importantly, we practice.

This volume offers us a chance to watch Galloway practice her craft. Many of the essays in *Practicing Ethnohistory* are, in fact, just that: practice. The volume republishes some of Galloway's earlier essays, a service in itself since most of us do not have back issues of the *Newsletter for the Association of Documentary Editing* or the *Proceedings of the Data Management and Mathematical Methods in Archaeology Section* on our shelves. Equally important, however, is the fact this volume brings together those fully finished essays with a number of Galloway's less-polished, unpublished conference papers. The latter, of course, have been cleaned up and expanded for inclusion here, but many still read like the experiment-pieces that they originally were. In other words, *Practicing Ethnohistory* offers readers the chance to observe Galloway trying out ideas, testing evidence, and working toward conclusions. Practice of this sort does not, of course, always lead to the desired result, and so some of the essays are

¹ Posted to the *Museum Anthropology* weblog on February 24, 2007. See: <http://museumanthropology.blogspot.com/2007/02/practicing-ethnohistory-mining-archives.html>. Posted to *Museum Anthropology Review* February 27, 2007. © 2007 Joshua Piker.

more satisfying than others. All of them, though, show Galloway at her rigorous, critical, practice-oriented best.

After an introductory essay that provides background on Galloway's own intellectual history and her decades-long engagement with the field of ethnohistory, the essays themselves are divided into four parts, "Historiography: Deconstructing the Text," "Positive Methods: Constructing Space, Time, and Relationships," "Essays in Ethnohistory: Making Arguments in Time," and "Ethnohistory and Ethics: Defining the Situation." Of the book's twenty-one essays, only one—"Revising the South's Colonial History for a Postcolonial Museum Audience"—is fundamentally centered on museum practices, although several others (including especially her discussion of Euro-American uses and abuses of Native remains) touch directly on museum-related issues. More to the point, since so much of museum work involves the sorts of practices—mining, hearing, constructing—that Galloway interrogates throughout her book, readers of *Museum Anthropology* will have no trouble relating the book's other essays to their own concerns.

There are, to be sure, aspects of this book that practice has not yet made perfect. For example, Galloway's writing is always very precise, but it is also, at times, dense and studded with phrases like "a lot of disambiguation of names" (p. 14), "a clash of ideolects" (p. 27), "declarative data structures" (p. 62); she is also a bit hit-or-miss when it comes to providing definitions for terms used by specialists. This is not, then, a book for the general reader, but historically oriented scholars and scholars-in-training will find it well worth their while. It is also true that, as is often the case with volumes that bring together several decades' worth of a scholar's essays, some of these offerings should have been updated. It is, for example, disappointing to read a discussion of the role of a Choctaw *fanimingo* (and to see citations to Galloway's 1989 article focused on that institution) early in the book, and then in an essay (originally published in 1982) that follows to read that *fanni mingo* "seems to be a title ... but its functions if it is a title is not known" (p. 262). Perhaps Galloway might have made better use of her endnotes (which show signs of having been updated in spots) to discuss changes in interpretation and advances in knowledge since a given essay was published? Doing so would have furthered both the book's emphasis on 'practice' and the continuing effort to refine our narratives about the past. Still, these are quibbles and should not in any way detract from what Galloway has accomplished here. *Practicing Ethnohistory* offers a window onto the methods, thought processes, and conclusions of one of our finest ethnohistorians. The practices that we observe in this book provide a set of lesson that are at once daunting and inspiring.

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