



After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans

Donald R. Shaffer

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The heroics of black Union soldiers in the Civil War have been justly celebrated, but their postwar lives largely neglected. Donald Shaffer's illuminating study shines a bright light on this previously obscure part of African American history, revealing for the first time black veterans' valiant but often frustrating efforts to secure true autonomy and equality as civilians.

After the Glory shows how black veterans' experiences as soldiers provided them for the first time with a sense of manliness that shaped not only their own lives but also their contributions to the African American community. Shaffer makes clear, however, that their postwar pursuit of citizenship and a dignified manhood was never very easy for black veterans, their triumphs frequently neither complete nor lasting

Shaffer chronicles the postwar transition of black veterans from the Union army, as well as their subsequent life patterns, political involvement, family and marital life, experiences with social welfare, comradeship with other veterans, and memories of the war itself. He draws on such sources as Civil War pension records to fashion a collective biography—a social history of both ordinary and notable lives—resurrecting the words and memories of many black veterans to provide an intimate view of their lives and struggles.

Like other African Americans from many walks of life, black veterans fought fiercely against disenfranchisement and Jim Crow and were better equipped to do so than most other African Americans. They carried a sense of pride instilled by their military service that made them better prepared to confront racism and discrimination and more respected in their own communities. As Shaffer reveals, they also had nearly equal access to military pensions, financial resources available to few other blacks, and even found acceptance among white Union veterans in the Grand Army of the Republic fraternity.

After the Glory is not merely another tale of black struggles in a racist America; it is the story of how a select group of African Americans led a quest for manhood—and often found it within themselves when no one else would give it to them.

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