

African American Faces of the Civil War: An Album

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Review

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Coddington, Ronald S. *African American Faces of the Civil War: An Album*.
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Face to Face with the Civil War

The sesquicentennial observance of the Civil War era will be marked by numerous publications of works. Few books will be as fascinating and informative as *African American Faces of the Civil War: An Album*. The third volume in a series about Civil War soldiers and seamen, *African American Faces* is a collection of previously unpublished identified photographs, accompanied by brief biographies, of seventy-seven men. With President Abraham Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863 paving the way for their participation in the war that now would end slavery, over 200,000 black men enlisted and participated in the war. These profiles are representative of all types of men who served in the Civil War in multiple ways.

Using *cartes de visites*, ambrotypes, and tintypes that he discovered at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, in museums, in archives, and in private collections, and drawing information from military records, pension files, the United States Census, slave schedules, regimental histories, correspondence, newspapers and family stories, Ronald Coddington reveals a remarkable portrait of the human side of the Civil War. The profiles document the lives of men before, during, and after the Civil War.

A foreword by Civil War historian J. Matthew Gallman and a preface by the author introduce the reader to the technological developments in photography that marked the expansion of commercial photography, which coincided with the outbreak of the Civil War, and demonstrated the transition of the war from a conflict to save the Union to one of liberation. There is no mistaking the expressions of pride, self-respect, and consciousness of manhood on the faces of these brave African American soldiers.

The profiles open with Major Martin Delany, a familiar figure to scholars and general readers of Civil War literature. Other familiar figures profiled include seaman Robert Small, known as “the Pilot,” who captured the *Planter*, and Sergeant Major Lewis Douglass, son of abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Less familiar, perhaps, are Lieutenant James Monroe Trotter, father of political activist and editor of the *Boston Guardian*, William Monroe Trotter; William Henry Scott, a fourteen-year-old attendant to a Union officer, who became a founding member of W.E. B. DuBois’s Niagara Movement; as well as Sergeant Kendrick Allen and Private Solomon Starks who enlisted in the Ninth U.S. Calvary and became known as “buffalo soldiers” in Texas.

Probably unknown to scholars and general readers are Private Charles Mudd, who was one of five brothers who served in the United States Colored Troops, and Major Louis Snaer, who was wounded in battle, saw duty at the Freedmen’s Bureau, and was elected to two terms as state representative on the Republican ticket in Louisiana during Reconstruction. Other soldiers’ profiles appearing in *African American Faces of the Civil War* include Medal of Honor recipients Sergeant Major Christian Abraham Fleetwood, whose wife served as a wartime nurse, Sergeant William Carney, Sergeant Milton Holland. Chaplain Jeremiah W. Asher is also featured. His grandfather served in the American Revolutionary War and fought at the battle of Bunker Hill.

The men whose profiles appear in the album represent more than a dozen units of the United States Colored Troops. They served in the Union army in infantry and artillery units and in the Union navy. These men proved themselves in battle, held garrison duty at forts, and guarded prisoners of war. They had various supporting roles in the war as cooks, attendants, musicians, drummer boys, and workers in the quartermaster department. Most of them were ex-slaves from the South, especially the border slaveholding states. Other soldiers were free and came from northern states, from Iowa, and even from Canada, as was the case with Captain Anderson R. Abbott, a surgeon assigned to an 800-bed facility in Washington, D.C. that became known as the Freedmen’s Hospital. Some of these courageous soldiers did not survive the conflict, being fatally wounded in battle, dying of wounds received in battle, or succumbing to diseases like dysentery and meningitis. Other soldiers mustered out of the military and lived into their seventies, eighties and nineties.

Beyond documenting their military service, these profiles contain a wealth of information and offer a unique perspective of these men after the Civil War.

Some veterans applied for and received pensions as a result of lingering and incapacitating wounds from the war. Most of the veterans returned to their wives and children or married and started families. They worked as day laborers, farmers, clergymen, educators, businessmen, barbers, janitors, firemen, and night watchmen. A particularly successful businessman in this group was former 1st Sergeant. Dandridge Meekins, who owned and operated a saloon, a restaurant, an ice dealership, and a coal and wood delivery service. Some men never married or outlived their wives and families and died in soldiers' homes in Ohio and Illinois... A few entered politics and public service. While most the men featured in the album remained in the South, others returned to or moved to the North. Some men and their families moved west, becoming part of the group known as "Exodusters."

African American Faces of the Civil War closes with a profile of Private Charles Henry Arnum, who survived the war by more than fifty years. Arnum, a native of North Adams, Massachusetts, mustered into the 54th Massachusetts Infantry at age twenty and served in that regiment from 1863-1865. He participated in battles in South Carolina and Georgia. After mustering out in 1865, Arnum returned home to North Adams and became a trucker, hauling various goods. In 1872 he married. Arnum and his wife had a girl and a boy and he later started his own trucking business with his son, Harry.

On the evening of 7 August 1919, Arnum, then seventy-five years old, dressed in his blue uniform to serve as the guest of honor at a reception in North Adams held in honor of local soldiers and sailors returning from service in World War! Charles Henry Arnum died in 1934 at the age of ninety and was buried with full military honors.

Ronald S. Coddington is assistant managing editor of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He also is a passionate collector of *cartes de visites* and an excellent researcher and writer. He regularly contributes a column to *The Civil War News*. This third book on soldiers in the Civil War, *African American Faces of the Civil War: An Album*, is a well-written, well-documented, and a valuable work. It is an outstanding contribution to the scholarship on the Civil War and African American History in general.

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