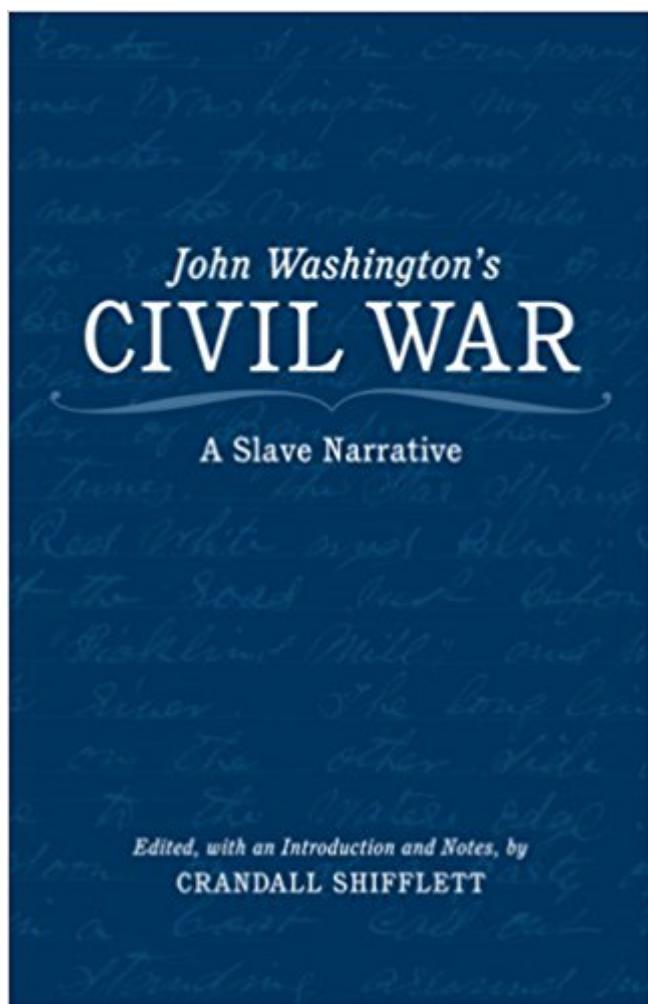


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John Washington's Civil War: A Slave Narrative



Synopsis

In 1872, just seven years after his emancipation, a thirty-four-year-old former slave named John Washington penned the story of his life, calling it "Memorys of the Past." One hundred and twenty years later, in the early 1990s, historian Crandall Shifflett stumbled upon Washington's forgotten manuscript at the Library of Congress while researching Civil War Fredericksburg. Over the ensuing decade, Shifflett sought to learn more about this Virginia slave and the people and events he so vividly portrays. John Washington's Civil War presents this remarkable slave narrative in its entirety, together with Shifflett's detailed annotations on the life-changing events Washington records. While joining the canon of better-known slave narratives by Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Solomon Northup, Washington's account illuminates a far different world. The son of a slave woman and an unknown white man, Washington never lived outside the seventy-five-mile radius that included Richmond and Fredericksburg, until his emancipation. His narrative spans his experiences as a household slave, a laborer in the Fredericksburg tobacco factory, and a hotel servant on the eve of the Civil War. He also tells of his bold venture across Union lines and his experiences as a slave under Union officers. Washington's recollections allow for a singular look at the more personal aspects of slave life. Forced attendance at the slaveowner's church, much-anticipated gatherings of neighboring slaves at harvesttime, even a brief episode of courtship among slaves are among the events described in this remarkable narrative. On a broader scale, Washington was a witness to key moments of the Civil War, and his chronicle includes his thoughts about the wider political turmoil surrounding him, including his dramatic account of watching the Union Army mass around Fredericksburg as it prepared to invade the town. An excellent introduction and expert annotations by Shifflett reconstruct Washington's life through his death in 1918 and provide informative historical background and context to Washington's recollections. An unprecedented window into the life of a Virginia bondsman, John Washington's Civil War communicates with real urgency what it meant to be a slave during a period of extreme crisis that sounded the notes of freedom for some and the end of a way of life for others.

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Customer Reviews

Washington, a contemporary of Frederick Douglass, was born a slave in Virginia, the son of a slave and a white man. Seven years after his emancipation in 1872, Washington wrote "Memories" sic of the Past, recalling his life as a house slave, a laborer, and servant on the eve of the Civil War, and his experiences as a slave under Union officers during the war. Washington's account details the struggles within families, black and white, as the war approached and, with it, the end of economic and social relationships as they had known them. He recalls the pain and sorrow of family breakups as slaves were sold, the great fortune of his mother teaching him to read, and the use of religion by his mistress to control the slaves. This memoir triggered excitement in history circles as a firsthand account of slavery and its ending, not a narrative collected by WPA writers from elderly subjects recalling dim memories. At the end of each chapter, Shifflett provides historical context based on public records and other supporting evidence to this amazing slave narrative. --Vanessa Bush

Crandall Shifflett is a professor of history at Virginia Tech University. He is also the author of Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South: Louisa County, Virginia, 1860-1900, Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960, and Victorian America, 1876 to 1913.

It is a sad time in history when a man or woman is owned like livestock, beaten like a wild animal, but many slaves were. John was a brave slave who was very smart who escaped to freedom right under their noses. I am proud of those who run and made their escape to freedom. I total know what it's like to be like a slave in a similar manner, I have been beaten, cheated on, forced to perform sexual oral act against my will. I was molested twice once by a pastor and another time when I was a teen when my granddad died, and so I got an adopted grandpa, and he took me out to eat at nice

restaurant every day with him before I went to work ,when we were in his car he put his hands up my dress and started touching me,i pushed him away and I said I got to get to work,after that I never spoke to him again,he died not too long after of some disease.anyway I am in extreme pain everyday because of my Ra and hips,knees,waists,fingers,shoulder etc, my bones are coming apart. I had 3 abusive husband's abusive father.of course I was never in chains. I feel for those people. I don't believe in slavery unless it is for murderer's, rapists,drug Lords,women beater, and men beater,child abusers ,porno people,etc.All men should be created equal except homosexuals they should be put in insane institutions,because there is something wrong with their minds, and they need o realize God created Adam and Eve to be one not Adam and Adam orEve and Eve .

It's so great to read such a rare slave narrative from the Civil War period. It left me wanting more.

A good study of the war from the eyes of the watchers. While only some of the African population in our country fought in the American Civil War of the States, all were impacted by its outcome.

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