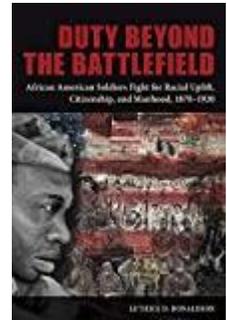


Le'Trice D. Donaldson. *Duty beyond the Battlefield: African American Soldiers Fight for Racial Uplift, Citizenship, and Manhood, 1870-1920.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2020. Illustrations. 216 pp. \$29.50, paper, ISBN 978-0-8093-3759-0.



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Le'Trice D. Donaldson's *Duty beyond the Battlefield* analyzes how African American soldiers constructed and performed their citizenship and manhood through a mutually reinforcing connection with the broader Black community. Donaldson aims "to reexamine the black soldier from the era of Reconstruction to the end of the First World War and to contextualize the black soldier's unique experience fighting for race and country." Central to this study is a detailed examination of gender as Donaldson argues that Black soldiers' masculine identity was directly tied to their racial identity and a reflection of the broader Black community. She further argues that Black soldiers fought and served for two principal reasons: "as a means of exercising their citizenship and as a means of demonstrating that they were real men in an era when proving one's manhood was a national obsession" (p. 4).

Donaldson engages with recent scholarship in African American military history, specifically around citizenship and war and society, including Chad Williams's *Torchbearers of Democracy:*

African American Soldiers in the World War I Era (2010), Jeffery T. Sammons and John H. Morrow's *Harlem's Rattlers and the Great War: The Undaunted 369th Regiment and the African American Quest for Equality* (2014), and Adriane Lentz-Smith's *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (2009), and such older works as Willard Gatewood's "*Smoked Yankees*" and *the Struggle for Empire* (1971). However, instead of focusing on the impact of a single conflict, Donaldson takes a longer view, examining the evolution of how African American soldiers viewed their service, citizenship, and status as leaders in the Black community during the fifty-year period between the Civil War and the end of World War I. Additionally, Kristen Hoganson's *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (1998) provides strong framing for Donaldson's gender analysis. While *Fighting for American Manhood* examines how the broader culture of American masculinity helped drive the United States into conflict with Spain and the Philippines,

Donaldson is concerned with answering the question of how African American soldiers constructed and performed their masculinity and its connection to race and citizenship.

The book is organized into two sections. The first, made up of three chapters, focuses on the “transition and evolution” of African American soldiers into symbols of racial pride and leaders in the Black community (p. 9). Chapter 1, “Bullets and Torches: The Making of the Race Warrior on the Western Frontier, 1870-96,” looks at the service of African Americans during the post-Reconstruction era. Donaldson states that after emancipation Black men redefined their manhood to center on “power and autonomy over their families and political rights” (p. 14). She argues that military service, though often brutal, provided a means for Black men to challenge demeaning notions of Black manhood while also giving them the ability to defend themselves, their families, and their communities from white supremacist violence. Throughout the chapter, she shows that Black soldiers were often openly defiant of white supremacy and explores issues of education, militancy, and religion, and of migration and the frontier, particularly the complicity of Black soldiers acting to subdue Native Americans.

Chapter 2, “My Home, My Country,” details how African American soldiers used military service to “advance the civil rights of Black Americans” (p. 40). This was done primarily through the examination of the Spanish American War and the participation of Black soldiers in the Philippines. Donaldson finds that Black men took pride in their performance as soldiers, and their ability to participate in war, seen as a “manly act,” helped to solidify their masculinity and images as community leaders. The outbreak of the Spanish American War provided a highly visible opportunity for Black men to represent the best qualities of their entire race, and many were eager to participate. After the war ended, many Black soldiers chose to settle in the Philippines in large part due to their

ability to exercise their economic rights as American citizens in the new territory free of the overbearing Jim Crow.

In chapter 3, “For Race and Country, We Never Forget,” Donaldson looks at the service of Black soldiers during World War I and the growing militancy of Black veterans in its aftermath. Donaldson shows that such events as the Houston Uprising of 1917 and exposure to war in Europe invigorated the African American community and Black soldiers and primed both for new ideas regarding civil rights. This militancy is encapsulated through the idea of the “New Negro,” a philosophy espoused by writer Herbert Harrison, which called for the rejection of older and more conservative Black leaders in favor of a more radical and militant approach to gaining equal citizenship in the United States (p. 93).

The second section is made up of two chapters in which Donaldson analyzes what it meant to be a “race man” by comparing and contrasting the lives and military careers of Henry Ossian Flipper and Charles Young, the first and third Black graduates of West Point. Donaldson’s examination of Flipper is the strongest and most novel part of this section. She deftly draws out the nuances of his life and his ideas about his service and shows that Flipper’s rejection of African Americans’ collective notions about masculinity and freedom left him ostracized and without support when he was framed and unduly discharged. This is contrasted with the career of Young, whose service and stature as the first Black colonel in the US Army garnered him great acclaim and support among the African American community.

Donaldson’s examination of the complexities between African American soldiers and Native and colonial populations is one of the book’s greatest strengths as is her exploration of the deep racial and gendered dynamics present in African Americans’ service in an “imperialist and racist army” (p. 65). While Black soldiers often sympathized and found kinship with their opponents,

many viewed themselves as carrying forward a mantle of civilization and were perfectly willing to exercise violence to see it through. This dynamic is exemplified through writer Spencer Hall's description of the life of Green Trice, a formerly enslaved man who joined the US Army during this period: "someone stolen from birth, given to a sort of freedom, which he then for a time loaned to the United States in service of enslaving someone else." [1] What Donaldson draws out is that the evolution of Black soldiers as "defiant warriors" against white racism also, over time, led them to

more radical stances, which fundamentally rejected many of the notions they had originally embraced in the nineteenth century (p. 178). *Duty beyond the Battlefield* is illuminating work and a strong contribution to the study of African American military history.

Note

[1]. Spencer Hall, "Buffalo: Also Known as the American Bison," *Banner Society* (blog), September 2, 2016, <https://www.bannersociety.com/2016/9/2/20840137/buffalo>.

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