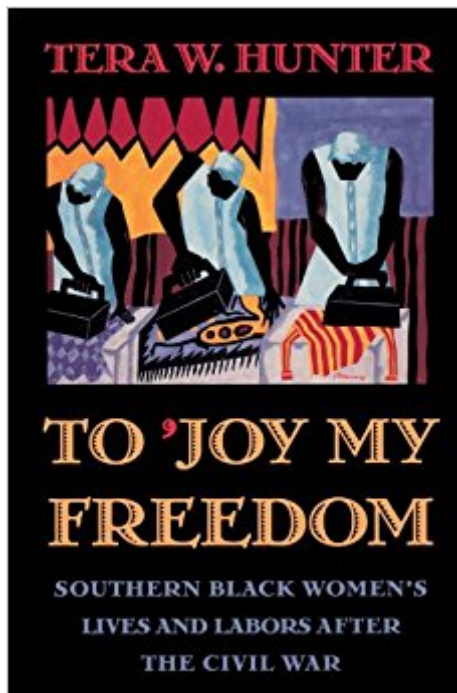


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# To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives And Labors After The Civil War



## Synopsis

As the Civil War drew to a close, newly emancipated black women workers made their way to Atlanta--the economic hub of the newly emerging urban and industrial south--in order to build an independent and free life on the rubble of their enslaved past. In an original and dramatic work of scholarship, Tera Hunter traces their lives in the postbellum era and reveals the centrality of their labors to the African-American struggle for freedom and justice. Household laborers and washerwomen were constrained by their employers' domestic worlds but constructed their own world of work, play, negotiation, resistance, and community organization. Hunter follows African-American working women from their newfound optimism and hope at the end of the Civil War to their struggles as free domestic laborers in the homes of their former masters. We witness their drive as they build neighborhoods and networks and their energy as they enjoy leisure hours in dance halls and clubs. We learn of their militance and the way they resisted efforts to keep them economically depressed and medically victimized. Finally, we understand the despair and defeat provoked by Jim Crow laws and segregation and how they spurred large numbers of black laboring women to migrate north. Hunter weaves a rich and diverse tapestry of the culture and experience of black women workers in the post-Civil War south. Through anecdote and data, analysis and interpretation, she manages to penetrate African-American life and labor and to reveal the centrality of women at the inception--and at the heart--of the new south.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 might have signaled the end of slavery, but the beginning of freedom remained far out of sight for most of the four million enslaved African Americans living in the South. Even after the Civil War, when thousands of former slaves flocked to southern cities in search of work, they found the demands placed on them as wage-earners disturbingly similar to those they had faced as slaves: seven-day workweeks, endless labor, and poor treatment. In *To 'Joy My Freedom*, author Tera W. Hunter takes a close look at the lives of black women in the post-Civil War South and draws some interesting conclusions. Hunter's interest in the subject was initially sparked by her research of the washerwomen's strike of 1881. This labor protest by more than 3,000 Atlanta laundresses is symbolic, Hunter posits, of African American women's ability to build communities and practice effective, if rough-and-ready, political strategies outside the mainstream electoral system. *To 'Joy My Freedom* is a fascinating look at the long-neglected story of black women in postwar southern culture. Hunter examines the strategies these women (98 percent of whom worked as domestic servants) used to cope with low wages and poor working conditions and their efforts to master the tools of advancement, including literacy. Hunter explores not only the political, but the cultural, too, offering an in-depth look at the distinctive music, dance, and theater that grew out of the black experience in the South. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Hunter (history, Carnegie Mellon Univ.) examines the rich dimensions of the lives of ordinary black Southern women, who were mainly confined to household labor as maids, nannies, cooks, and washerwomen in urban centers from the postbellum era through the Great Migration during World War I. In Atlanta, these freedwomen "were committed to balancing the need to earn a living with needs for emotional sustenance, personal growth, and collective cultural experience." Hunter offers valuable explorations into the complexities of African American feminine laborers and the contextualization of their lives. She is to be applauded for providing scholars with easier access to source materials, particularly primary sources. An important contribution to suffragist activism, feminist scholarship, and African American studies. ?Edward G. McCormack, Univ. of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast, Long Beach Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I really wanted to like this book because of the subject, and the carefully researched information it contained. But I had a very hard time reading it because of the style of writing. It read more like an academic dissertation, where the author has to prove him/herself competent by martialing all the

relevant data, at the expense of telling a story that compels the attention of the reader. So I would recommend it highly as an academic study, because it does contain some stories, but if, like me, you react badly to abstractions and generalizations, preferring instead to draw your own conclusions from a well-told tale, this is not the book for you.

Although it is not perfect, Hunter provides an engrossing look at southern black women's labor (especially in Atlanta) from the end of the Civil War to the Great Migration. With emancipation, these women searched for identity as free women, as paid workers, and as African Americans. White southerners developed institutions and laws to restrict the newfound freedom black southerners sought to enjoy. Black women workers responded through community awareness and activism, showing intelligence and the desire to better their lives. Hunter's innovative use of sources shapes her work and helps the women's voices come alive. Because of limited African-American literacy in the early Reconstruction period, Hunter turned to newspapers and white southerners' diaries to flesh-out black women's experiences. Although problematic, the attention given in them to black women domestics demonstrated the division of both race and gender. Hunter also incorporates unique sources like dance steps to show the many ways newly freed women sought to define themselves. Her haunting use of illustrations reinforces the oppression and struggle for freedom black women laborers faced. As someone who knew very little about this aspect of history, Hunter's work has developed my interest in this time.

Needed this book for a class. had it for a great price.

Fact filled and thought provoking. Answers many of the questions and addresses many situations that we continue to confront today.

Amazing, insightful, deep and powerful history.

My daughter enjoyed it more than I.

Used for a history Day project

A++++

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