

BLACK ♦ STARS OF CIVIL WAR TIMES



written by

JIM HASKINS
CLINTON COX
OTHA RICHARD SULLIVAN, ED. D.
ELEANORA TATE
BRENDA WILKINSON

JIM HASKINS, GENERAL EDITOR



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION



The Civil War began in 1861, but the seeds of that long and drawn out conflict between the states were planted some two hundred years earlier. Slavery had long been a source of controversy among the American colonies. Although slaves were employed in both Northern and Southern colonies, the agriculture-based Southern colonies became highly dependent on their labor. Slaves in the North tended to be few by comparison and were more likely to be educated and learn skilled trades.

By the time the American colonies won their independence from England, many Northerners believed that a free land should not allow slavery. Most Southerners, however, were determined to maintain it. To reach a consensus on uniting the thirteen states under one federal government, the writers of the U.S. Constitution chose to ignore the paradox of slavery in a free nation. The words *slave* and *slavery* do not appear anywhere in the U.S. Constitution or in the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to that document). Instead, there are references

to “persons owing service or labor.” The new nation was established without a unified stand on slavery. Over the next decades, as new states joined the Union, debates raged over whether they should be admitted as slave states or free states. The issue of slavery in the United States was finally settled by a war that tore the nation apart.

African Americans, slave and free, played important roles in that war, as well as in events that led up to it. Throughout the nation, the number of free blacks rose steadily as slaves purchased their freedom or were granted it, pursued education, and acquired property. Free blacks in the North campaigned for the abolition of slavery and assisted runaway slaves from the South who took their future in their own hands and escaped to the free states and Canada.

Eventually, all attempts to compromise over the issue of slavery and keep the Union together failed. Seven Southern states left the Union to form the Confederate States of America, and a civil war resulted. Blacks were determined to be part of the fight. Despite the fact that many Northern whites did not want blacks to serve in the Union army, calling the conflict a “white man’s war,” African Americans persisted and, in the end, tipped the balance in favor of the Union side.

Union troops occupied the vanquished Confederate states in the aftermath of the Civil War. Blacks also played important roles during that period, which was called Reconstruction. Sixteen African Americans were elected to Congress from the South. Many more served in Southern legislatures and helped write new state constitutions guaranteeing free public education for all. After ten years, however, the occupying Union troops withdrew, returning the South to former slave owners and pro-slavery people. Most freedmen and women wound up working for their former owners or for other whites under a sharecropping system that was little better than slavery.

The people who are profiled in this book distinguished themselves in one way or another throughout the Civil War era. Some succeeded

against great odds in business or the professions. Some fought for the abolition of slavery, while others helped escaped slaves find their way to freedom. Some served in the Union military during the war, and others tried to build a new, free South. Some of their names are still well known today, while others have been largely forgotten. All were people who actively sought to control their own lives, even those whose circumstances made that nearly impossible. Together, their stories make up an important, and often little known, chapter in American history.

SOJOURNER TRUTH

(1797–1883)



Before the Civil War, most slaves faced endless days of labor and harsh treatment. Slaves who dared show defiance were subjected to severe beatings and other savage acts of punishment. Many blacks risked all by running away. Among those who ran was the bold and brave woman who came to be known as Sojourner Truth.

Sojourner Truth was born in Ulster County, New York, in 1797. Her name was Isabella, and she was owned by a Dutchman named Ardinburgh. During her youth, she was separated from her parents and passed among a succession of cruel masters, two of whom were named Baumfree and Hurley. Tall of stature and large of frame, she was exploited for her size and made to work excessively hard.

Sojourner watched her mother's grief as her siblings were sold away to other masters. She grew up to experience the same horror, giving birth to children only to have them torn from her arms. It is not known how many children she had, but when she escaped in 1826, she took only an infant son with her.