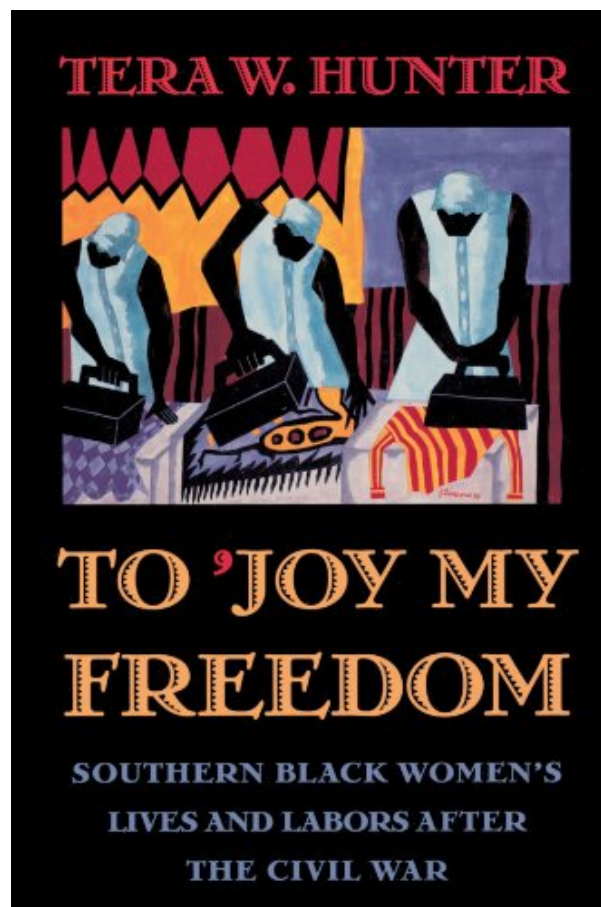


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TERA W. HUNTER



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Amazon.com Review

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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.

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important contribution to suffragist activism, feminist scholarship, and African American studies. Edward G. McCormack, Univ. of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast, Long Beach
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TO 'JOY MY FREEDOM: SOUTHERN BLACK WOMEN'S LIVES AND LABORS AFTER THE CIVIL WAR BY TERA W. HUNTER PDF

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.

- Sales Rank: #243754 in Books
- Published on: 1998-09-15
- Released on: 1998-07-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .84" w x 6.13" l, 1.15 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 322 pages

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Oh dear.

By mary k. wakeman

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.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

A worthy read

By L. Naylor

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.

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