



A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten

Julie Winch

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In *A Gentleman of Color*, Julie Winch provides a vividly written, full-length biography of James Forten, one of the most remarkable men in 19th-century America.

Forten was born in 1766 into a free black family. As a teenager he served in the Revolution and was captured by the British. Rejecting an attractive offer to change sides, he insisted he was a loyal American. By 1810 he was the leading sailmaker in Philadelphia, where he became well known as an innovative craftsman, a successful manager of black and white employees, and a shrewd businessman. He emerged as a leader in Philadelphia's black community and was active in a wide range of reform activities. He was especially prominent in national and international antislavery movements, served as vice-president of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and became close friends with William Lloyd Garrison, to whom he lent money to start up the *Liberator*. Forten was also the founder of a remarkable dynasty. His children and his son-in-law were all active abolitionists and a granddaughter, Charlotte Forten, published a famous diary of her experiences teaching ex-slaves in South Carolina's Sea Islands during the Civil War.

When James Forten died in 1842, five thousand mourners, black and white, turned out to honor a man who had earned the respect of society across the racial divide. This is the first serious biography of Forten, who stands beside Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the pantheon of African-Americans who fundamentally shaped American history.

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