



African American Life in South Carolina's Upper Piedmont, 1780-1900

W. J. Megginson

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Encyclopaedic in scope, yet intimate in detail, "African American Life in South Carolina's Upper Piedmont, 1780-1900" delves into the richness of community life in a setting where blacks were relatively few, notably disadvantaged, but remarkably cohesive. W. J. Megginson shifts the conventional study of African Americans in South Carolina from the much-examined lowcountry to a part of the state that offered a quite different existence for people of colour. In Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens counties - occupying the state's northwest corner - he finds an independent, brave, and stable subculture that persevered for more than a century in the face of political and economic inequities. Drawing on little-used state and county denominational records, privately held research materials, and sources available only in local repositories, Megginson brings to life African American society before, during, and after the Civil War. He portrays relationships - variously cordial, patronizing, and harsh - between African Americans and whites; the lives of free people of colour; the primal place of sharecropping in the post - Civil War world; and the push for education and ownership of property as the only means of overcoming economic dependency. Megginson's work joins a growing chorus of books that demonstrate the success of Reconstruction across the South. Black Republicans and even some black Democrats took up the rights and duties of leadership and made great strides in redressing antebellum wrongs. He underscores the fact that although the white Democrats' "redemption" of South Carolina government in 1876 greatly curtailed the black political movement, African Americans in the upper piedmont quietly continued to assert their place in the political realm. Through detailed vignettes of individuals and families coupled with deft analysis of overarching social contexts, "African American Life in South Carolina's Upper Piedmont, 1780-1900" adds a new dimension to our understanding of the African American experience in South Carolina and in the South.

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