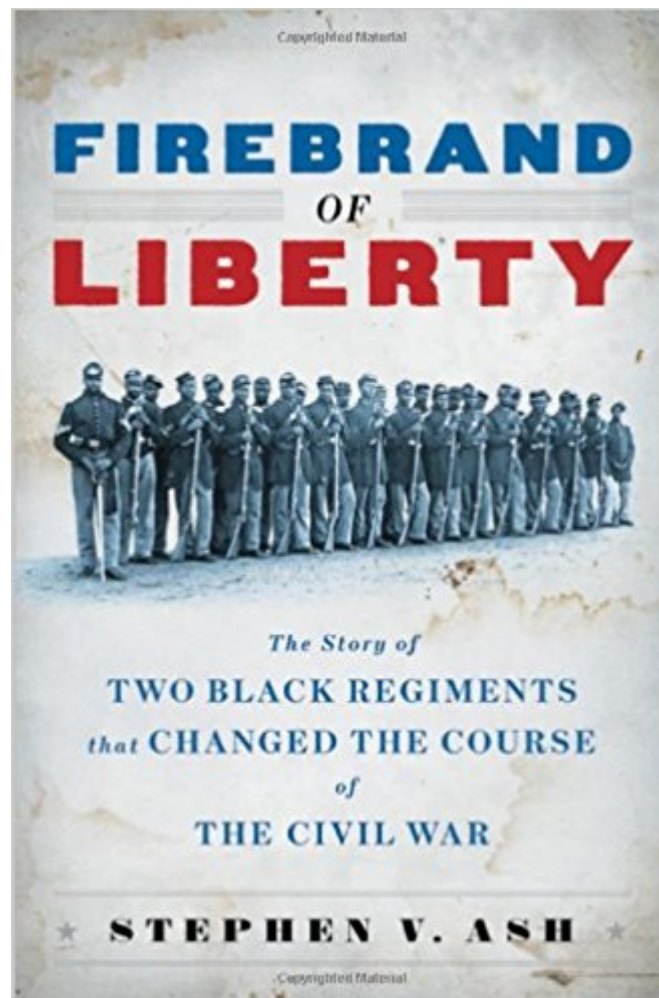




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# Firebrand Of Liberty: The Story Of Two Black Regiments That Changed The Course Of The Civil War



## Synopsis

A nearly forgotten Civil War episode is restored to history in this masterful account. In March 1863, nine hundred black Union soldiers, led by white officers, invaded Florida and seized the town of Jacksonville. They were among the first African American troops in the Northern army, and their expedition into enemy territory was like no other in the Civil War. It was intended as an assault on slavery by which thousands would be freed. At the center of the story is prominent abolitionist Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who led one of the regiments. After waging battle for three weeks, Higginson and his men were mysteriously ordered to withdraw, their mission a seeming failure. Yet their successes in resisting the Confederates and collaborating with white Union forces persuaded President Abraham Lincoln to begin full-scale recruitment of black troops, a momentous decision that helped turned the tide of the war. Using long-neglected primary sources, historian Stephen V. Ash's stirring narrative re-creates this event with insight, vivid characterizations, and a keen sense of drama.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The titular firebrand in this revealing history is not an individual but a curious and ambitious project: the establishment, in March 1863, of a permanent Union outpost in Florida to serve as a haven for fugitive slaves and to help ignite the destruction of Southern slavery from within. In readable prose and relying exclusively on primary sources, historian Ash (*When the Yankees Came*) tells the little-known but crucial story of how 900 newly freed slaves, under the leadership of white

abolitionist officers, captured Jacksonville. They fought alongside white Union troops and liberated slaves until their mission was abruptly aborted by their commanding officer, Gen. David Hunter, one of the dimmest stars in the Union Army firmament. Ash makes a strong case that the successes of the two black regiments changed the course of war by convincing President Lincoln to authorize the full-scale enlistment of African-Americans. By the end of the war, some 200,000 black troops had served in the Union Army. Without them, Ash contends, the Union might very well have failed to conquer the Confederacy. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The award-winning film *Glory* publicized the valor of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts and their assault on Fort Wagner. However, the Civil War's first black regiments to see combat were the First and Second South Carolina. Ash, a professor of history, has told their story in an exciting and inspiring book. Unlike the men in the Fifty-fourth, the black soldiers in these regiments were almost exclusively liberated slaves. In March 1863, they were sent to Confederate-controlled Florida, where they quickly captured Jacksonville. The long-range goal was to create a liberated zone where runaway slaves from all over the South would flee, further draining the manpower resources of the South. The regiments were led by Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a loud, brash white abolitionist who had advocated violent resistance to slavery before the war. Although the military effects of the campaign were negligible, Ash asserts that the courage of these black troops encouraged Lincoln to recruit black regiments on a much wider scale. Ash effectively uses primary sources to provide an intense chronicle of the battlefield while illuminating an obscure but gallant episode of the Civil War. --Jay Freeman

*Firebrand of Liberty* is a little known story of the 1st South Carolina colored regiment which was commanded by Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Stephen Ash tells a riveting story about former slaves who, under the teaching of Higginson, become Union soldiers as brave and disciplined as any white troops. They were the first black regiment to fight for the Union and the first regiment to fight alongside white soldiers. But this book not only tells the story of their fighting history but it also tells about their lives and feelings. Higginson took every opportunity to get to know his men and he enjoyed listening to their stories. They also develop a mutual respect and affection that is touching. One feels it is too bad that they lost their designation as the 1st South Carolina and became the US 33rd. They, of course, were overshadowed by the 54th Massachusetts who became known as the first black regiment. But thanks to this book, they are in their proper place.

This was such an interesting read!! It's a historical nonfiction about two black regiments during the Civil War in Jacksonville, Florida. The author argues that these two troops, although not the first, changed the Civil War and subsequently the outcome of Union victory and slavery. The story is told from the point of view of Colonel Thomas Higginson, a man beyond his time in regard to his political thoughts on African Americans and women. Higginson was a great man who is very easy to like and relate to.

Great book. Need for research.

I enjoyed this book and would recommend it at a good place to start on the topic. Since this is history I suppose I don't have to worry about a plot spoiler, but there was a little bit of suspense that ended in disappointment me to me. The author indicates that the capture of Jacksonville and the related raids had much greater military significance than had been thought. Basically his case is that the moderate success of the mission allowed the decision for full scale employment of black soldiers to go ahead. The evidence while pretty good is mostly circumstantial.

Stephen V. Ash has written another winner. Absolutely fantastic book about the Sea Islands of South Carolina during the Civil War. Superb scholarship, and reads like a novel to boot. Would be a great Christmas gift for anyone interested in US history, black history, the Civil War, and a great story.

**FIREBRAND OF LIBERTY: The Story of Two Black Regiments that Changed the Course of the Civil War** by Stephen V. Ash describes the actions behind two Black regiments, the 1st and 2nd South Carolina, which encouraged President Abraham Lincoln to actively enlist Black soldiers into the army during the Civil War. At first, it was assumed, even by their commander, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, that perhaps it wasn't the best idea because the White soldiers had issues with fighting alongside Black ones. The White soldiers entertained themselves by performing in black face and using racial slurs. A strong reaction from the Black soldiers could have caused many problems. The Black troops, however, tended to ignore them and go about their business of freeing their fellow slaves. In addition, in the towns where Black soldiers were located, the White citizens frequently had issues, such as White women complaining of being insulted, etc. by the Black soldiers. It hardly ever panned out as described and more frequently, the Black soldier had reacted

to some slur from the White person. Higginson's men carried themselves bravely through the conquest of Jacksonville, Florida and there was not one incident of cowardice among them. Even though General Hunter withdrew the troops before the mission was complete, their outstanding performance encouraged President Lincoln to rethink the idea of regularly enlisting Black soldiers, thus changing the face of the Civil War. Stephen V. Ash has written a sensitive, interesting history of Black soldiers during the civil war. He writes of their hardships, their courage when everything was against them, the racial discrimination they had to endure and their energy to keep going. He describes how they attempted to find others like themselves and free them, bringing them back to their base. It is a history well worth reading to understand just how this country operated during the Civil War. Reviewed by Alice Holman of the RAWSISTAZ(tm) Reviewers

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