



Freedom's Shore: Tunis Campbell and the Georgia Freedmen (Brown Thrasher Books Ser.)

Russell Duncan

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For the first time since the early years of the American republic, the period following emancipation held out the promise of a true colorblind democracy. The freed slaves hoped for forty acres and a mule by which they could work as small farmers, erect houses, establish families, and live free from the gaze of planter and overseer. In this first light of freedom, blacks needed help to learn how to function in a democracy and how to protect themselves from whites eager to find a new way to exploit their labor.

In *Freedom's Shore*, Russell Duncan tells of the efforts of Tunis Campbell, a black carpetbagger and fellow abolitionist and friend of Frederick Douglass, to lift his race to equal participation in American society. Duncan focuses on Campbell's determined work to push radical reforms, draft a new constitution for Georgia, and pass laws designed to ensure equality for all citizens of the state. Campbell made significant contributions at the state level, but his true importance was in his home district of Liberty and McIntosh counties on the Georgia coast. There he forged the black majority into a powerful political machine that controlled county elections for years. He successfully protected black rights, always promoting freedom-in-fact, not merely freedom-by-law. Yet, as many black politicians throughout the South were discovering, radical strength at the local level was insufficient to stop the growing strength of reactionary white politics at the state level.

After years of struggle, Campbell was finally defeated by the white Democrats. Charged with political corruption, he was removed from his state and local political offices; at the age of sixty-four, over the protests of President Grant among others, Campbell was sentenced to Georgia's hire-out convict labor program. The black machine in McIntosh County, however, was not destroyed in Campbell's defeat, but instead remained an active force in county politics for forty years, returning a black legislator to the General Assembly in every election, except for the decade of the 1890s, until 1907.

Presenting the beginnings of the battle for civil rights in the South, *Freedom's Shore* tells of the tenacity and achievements of one black political figure, of the hopes and dreams of a legally free people amid the political and social realities of Reconstruction Georgia.

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