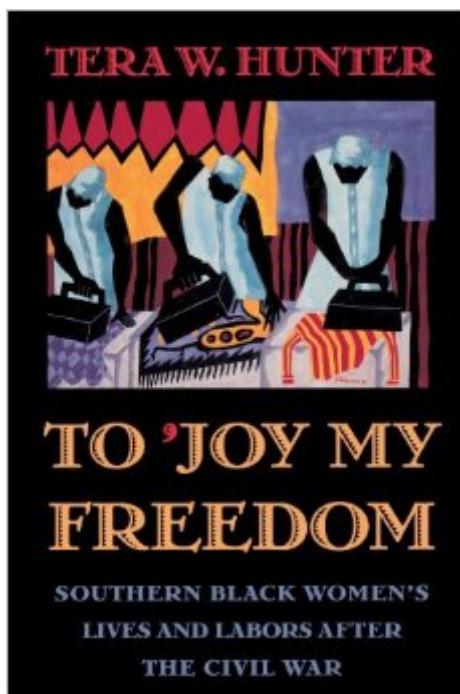


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# To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives And Labors After The Civil War



## **Synopsis**

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.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

For those of you who were tantalized by the community, culture, and hints of deeper history in Kathryn Stockett's recent bestseller *The Help*, Tera W. Hunter's *To 'Joy My Freedom* provides an intellectually stimulating and readable history of black women's urban work and politics in the American South following the Civil War. It provides a full-bodied history of the dynamics that seem so well-established in *The Help*. Stockett's work narrates the dynamics between black and white Southern women in the 1960s and the complexities that labor added to those habits, but leaves the intrigued reader begging for more of the history behind those relational and economic dynamics. Hunter's historical work, centering on the 1881 Atlanta washerwomen's strike, creates a groundbreaking context for an examination of black females' efforts to create independent political, cultural, economic and labor identities in the postbellum South. Tera Hunter's work, published in 1997, collects personal diaries, newspaper articles, court documents, letters, statistics, political cartoons, bank statements, early photographs and other primary documentation, in addition to secondary sources, to craft the first narrative of these southern black women's lives. Her excellent source work not only grants a new in-road to the academic study of this generation, but also gives depth to the stories of the women themselves. Hunter's sources enable her work to sufficiently challenge the historian reader yet remain accessible to the general reader.

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