LONG ROAD TO HARD TRUTH
LONG ROAD TO HARD TRUTH

THE 100-YEAR MISSION TO CREATE THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Robert L. Wilkins

Proud Legacy Publishing
Washington, DC
To Amina; as Stevie says, I’ll be loving you always

And in memory of the millions of people of African descent who have passed from this Earth, without proper acknowledgement of their sacrifices for, and contributions to, the United States of America
## CONTENTS

*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prologue: Why this Book?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Grand Omission</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Quest for Honor Inspires a Plan</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. From Memorial to Museum</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Death and Indifference</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A Proposal without a Patron</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Enter John Lewis—And the Smithsonian</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. An Office in the Basement</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The Improbable, Unstoppable Coalition</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. A Great Commission</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Location, Location, Location</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue: Over the Finish Line</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research and writing for this book has been nearly 20 years in the making, so I know that I have forgotten some who helped me along the way. To those of you, I apologize. Please charge it to my head and not my heart.

When I first began this journey, most of my time was spent in the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center of the Howard University Library. The staff members at those three institutions were absolutely magnificent. I also benefited greatly from the assistance of the Hampton University Archives, the archives of the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission, and the presidential libraries of Presidents Coolidge, Hoover and Roosevelt. My colleague, Brett Kavanaugh, and my court’s librarian, Patricia Michalowskij, graciously helped me track down sources. My cousin Craig Wilkins also provided valuable feedback and research assistance. Many provided vital moral support in the early stages of my research, including my cousin Norman Scott El-Amin, my former church family at Union Temple Baptist Church, and my former colleagues at the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia and at Venable LLP. Djakarta Jacobs, Tammy Boyd, LaRochelle Young, Donnice Turner, Kerri Watson, Tom Downs and Ron Christie provided critical insight to the behind the scenes activity within the commission staff, on Capitol Hill and in the White House, and these reflections helped round out the later chapters of the book.

When I first began writing in earnest, Conrad Rippy, my dear friend and former agent, imparted valuable guidance, and Susanna Margolis greatly helped with organizing my thoughts and drafting a marketing plan. Many people gave me great advice on the book writing and publishing process, including Ken Mack and Peter Slevin. My former law clerk, Clair Tzeng, provided critical writing and editorial assistance for the beginning chapters, and Savannah Frierson also helped with editing the first half of the book. I could not have gotten all of the writing finished without the able drafting assistance
of Brenda Windberg and the expert editing of her business partner, Lorin Oberweger. An army of my former law clerks provided invaluable editing, cite checking, and proofreading help, including Michael Shenkman, Julie Dona, Leon Kenworthy, Justin Baxenberg, Cyril Djoukeng, Richard Caplan, Matthew Sharbaugh, Calvin Nelson and Moxila Upadhyaya. I will be forever grateful to Delores Simmons and Michal Belayneh for helping to keep me organized and on track these past five years.

As described in these pages, I would not have been able to devote myself to this project without the tremendous support and sacrifice of my wonderful wife, Amina. She, and of course, our sons, Bakari and Alim, my mother, Joyce Wilkins, and my brother, Larry Wilkins, provided the inspiration to keep me going whenever I felt like giving up.

Last, and certainly not least, I thank God. In the words of Marvin Sapp, without Him, I “never would have made it.”
Lewis Fraction was proud and confident, with a personality that could fill a room. He was a wise, God-fearing man who helped to mentor coming-of-age boys in our church youth program. He was also highly skilled in the fine art of trash-talking. Once, during a rap session about a man’s duty to protect his home and family, he proclaimed that he could beat down any man who broke into his house and threatened his family—even Mike Tyson. “No man can take me in my own house,” he said, because his will to protect his family and defend his home would help him overpower any threat. A bold statement indeed, especially for a man in late middle-age.

Perhaps no man could take him, but God could. In 1996, a few short years after that memorable proclamation, Brother Fraction was called from labor to rest. I respected him and had enjoyed getting to know him at our church activities, so my wife Amina and I went to his home to share our sympathies with his family.

It was a glorious evening. I sat there for hours, stuffing my face with delicious, down-home Southern food brought in by the deaconry, and listening. Many of the elders had gathered, and they were telling stories. All sorts of stories. Stories about growing up in the rural south or growing up in the city. About the myriad joys of youth—the courtship rituals, old dance steps, swooning over Sam Cooke, and marveling over the landing of the “Mothership” at a Parliament Funkadelic concert. There were also stories about all-Black, one-room ramshackle schoolhouses, and the nurturing but stern teachers who presided over the classrooms. Some of the elders
remarked that they never saw a whole piece of chalk or a new textbook when they were growing up because their schools only ever got the worn, broken bits of chalk and beaten-up books that were the leftovers from the White schools. There were stories about countless indignities, both major and minor, and the psychological wounds they inflicted. There were stories of sit-ins, marches, and arrests. Stories that provoked laughter, tears, anger, and spirited debate.


As we drove home that evening, I said to Amina, “why don’t we have a museum to tell all of those stories?”

That’s how this all began for me: with what seemed like a simple question. As I began to look deeper, I became committed—**obsessed**—with finding the answer.

The question was a complicated one, its answer even more so.

But nothing shook my belief that these stories deserved a home. Indeed, a prominent home. I also knew deep in my bones that the home should be in the nation’s capital.

This was the crucible time for my devotion to the idea of a museum to commemorate Black history, its culture and stories, but my interest dated back much further. In 1987, I had been the Black History Month chair of our organization of African American law students. Our motto, emblazoned in black lettering on gold t-shirts, declared that, “every month is Black History Month.” We organized a play, a concert, and other events on campus. It was loads of fun, and I became enamored with the importance of preserving and celebrating African American history and culture. I don’t remember it, but I’m told that I talked about creating a national Black history museum during my interview for a job with the D.C. Public Defender Service in 1989.

Although any earlier talk may have been just that, talk, by 1996 I was serious. Since graduating from Harvard Law School, I had spent six years on the front lines of the criminal justice system as a public defender. I had seen far too many tragic stories of failed families and squandered opportunities.

When I started on the job, the nation was still in the middle of the crack epidemic, and Washington, D.C., was in the midst of a homicide epidemic. Indeed, the city that should have shone brightly as the nation’s capital was infamous, instead, for being the “murder capital of the world.” I had seen, up close and personal, too many gunshot wounds, patches where eyeballs used to be, autopsy reports, and bloody crime scene photos. I had visited far too many victims in hospital beds, clients in jail cells, family members in crappy little apartments, and witnesses on dangerous street corners. I still vividly
WHY THIS BOOK?

remember being out with another lawyer looking for a witness in the middle of the afternoon, in broad daylight, when a dilapidated station wagon came slowly down the street toward us. There were four or five guys inside. The front passenger held an AK-47 rifle pointed upward but clearly at the ready. We tried to remain calm, and the car drove past without incident.

Back then, folks called those "war wagons."

But I was weary of the war. I was weary of the despair. I was weary of the seemingly never-ending negative news stories about the Black community. My clients and their broken lives were emblematic of those stories. Indeed, an eight-part series in the Washington Post about one of my clients, along with his mother and grandmother, won the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for Leon Dash as an epic "profile of a District of Columbia family's struggle with destructive cycles of poverty, illiteracy, crime and drug abuse." I wanted to be a part of something positive. I wanted to create something. I wanted to help build a museum, so that those wonderful, painful, and profound stories that I heard all the time, not just in memory of Brother Fraction on that fateful evening, would finally have a home.

In my mind, those stories could serve a broader purpose. As a public defender, I represented kids who routinely skipped school and found themselves in trouble with the law. I wanted those kids to have a place where they could learn about the brave children of prior generations who were threatened, cursed, and spat upon as they sought to attend better schools. Perhaps a visit to the museum could show those kids why they should value the books, teachers, and educational opportunities that they had.

My clients were overwhelmingly African American, and so many of them, young and old, were devoid of genuine hope or self-esteem. I wanted them to have a place where they could see and hear the countless stories of how African Americans with seemingly little hope and even fewer resources were able to fight for freedom, seek justice, and change laws and attitudes. How, against all odds, African Americans won their freedom from slavery and their right to vote. I wanted them to have a place where they could see all of the contributions that African Americans have made to the United States, through service in the military, scientific inventions, and innovations in music and the fine arts. I wanted a place where poor Black people could go and see that they should have some hope, to see that they have the potential to do anything with their lives.

And after seeing so much racial division throughout my life, those stories could serve another important purpose: Unity. While working on this project with Sam Brownback, then Senator of Kansas, I heard him say that,
“America needs to lance the boil in this country that is race,” and that a national museum in Washington could help move us in that direction. The stories about the fights for abolition and for civil rights are stories of unity; they are stories of people of all races, income levels, and ages coming together in pursuit of the equality and justice found in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. This could be a place where we have the much-needed and long-overdue national conversation on race that will help us to understand each other and come together.

In 1916, a group of African American leaders organized a not-for-profit corporation that would endeavor to construct a "National Memorial Building" dedicated "as a tribute to the Negro's contribution to the achievements of America." They had the same mission as I did: to tell these stories. So, I picked up the mantle they set down and, along with many others, carried on with it.

The journey of those brave and visionary souls, and of the many more who would come together over the next one hundred years to bring the dream of this museum into reality in the face of many obstacles, is a story that deserves recognition and remembrance. It is also a story that deserves a home.

That home is *Long Road to Hard Truth.*
CHAPTER ONE

THE GRAND OMISSION

In the days before radio, television, and the Internet, wondrous parades of marching troops called military reviews presented spectacles unlike any other. These reviews provided much more than entertainment. They served as symbols of strength, valor, and purpose, and provided a way for the civilian public to not only thank the soldiers, but affirm the worthiness of these soldiers’ mission.

Because of its long tradition and storied role in the public consciousness, the call for a military review after four long, bloody years of conflict rang throughout the nation upon the Union’s victory over the Confederacy in the American Civil War. In fact, the *Army and Navy Journal*, a weekly newspaper that closely covered all aspects of the war, expressed:

[Hope that by some ceremony a formal expression of the gratitude of the country may be conveyed to its defenders. We trust that a magnificent Review may reveal to the troops themselves and to the people, some idea of the great strength, the fine material, and the superb condition of their Army.]

The *New York Times* predicted such a review of the troops, “will be the greatest event of its kind...and its moral significance, as the closing scene in the drama, will be very striking.” Affirming the moral significance of the war was important as the Union’s victory came at great cost to the nation. The conflict claimed the lives of more than 600,000 men in the Union and Confederate armies, and approximately one out of every fifty persons living in the United States had perished. Even the president of the United States,
Abraham Lincoln, fell victim, assassinated on Good Friday in 1865 by John Wilkes Booth. It would have indeed been passing strange for Union soldiers simply to muster out and go back to their homes without a fitting coda after so much loss and the almost complete destruction of the Republic. As David Blight, a prominent Civil War historian, insisted, "death on such a scale demanded meaning."³

Washington, D.C., became electric. The preparations for the Grand Review were so extensive and massive that they interrupted the most important legal proceeding in the nation: the trial of the eight conspirators in President Lincoln's assassination, which had been underway before a military commission in the Old Arsenal Building. The military commission thus deemed it appropriate to suspend the trial for those two days. In fact, all branches of government and public businesses were closed due to the Grand Review.

Tens of thousands of people crowded the sidewalks, balconies, windows, and rooftops to get a view of the soldiers who would march from the Capitol to the White House. Schoolchildren lined the parade route, cheering the soldiers and singing patriotic songs. Young ladies bestowed flowers and kerchiefs upon the heroic men. Banners hung from buildings all over the city, displaying patriotic and thankful messages on behalf of organizations, cities, and states from near and far. Reviewing stands were also set up in front of the White House and decorated with flags, stars, and flowers for President Andrew Johnson, cabinet members, General Ulysses S. Grant, the diplomatic corps, and various other dignitaries to view the parade. Even Secretary of State William H. Seward, still recovering from the grave wounds he had suffered during the attempt on his life carried out on the same night as Lincoln's assassination, attended the ceremonies.

Around 200,000 soldiers marched over the course of two days, with every colossal assemblage of troops requiring six hours to proceed in formation down Washington, D.C.'s main boulevard. Bands played while crowds cheered, saluted, and tossed flowers as each column of men passed through the throngs of humanity. Newspapers speculated that if these men had marched in single file, the line would have reached all the way to Richmond, Virginia, the erstwhile capital of the Confederacy.

As one popular publication stated, "[T]hey deserved an ovation of no ordinary character, and they received such a one as will forever remain green in their memories."⁴ The event was declared a "splendid pageant,"⁵ the "grandest spectacle of the age,"⁶ and just about any other superlative one could imagine. The Grand Review truly had lived up to its name.
Or had it?
Rather than being represented in the Review as gallant, fighting soldiers, Blacks were shown as road-building auxiliary troops who supported the intrepid White soldiers, or as subservient and grateful former slaves who had been rescued by those White soldiers. In fact, out of those many thousands of soldiers, not a single member of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) made an appearance during those two celebratory days. The only African American presence consisted of a smattering of individuals who had accompanied Sherman’s army, and none had engaged in combat.

These Black Soldiers on display in the Grand Review were not only meant to be subservient but to provide comic relief. Newspaper stories crowded with stories of the crowds ridiculing the Black soldiers, such as, “[T]wo Black soldiers of the largest size, riding very small mules, their feet nearly touching the ground, was regarded as a comic scene in connection with this part of the display, and occasioned general laughter.” There are numerous other accounts of sneers heaped upon the colored “pickaninnies,” vagabonds, and “negroes blacker than Erebus” scattered among the gallantry.

While most newspapers gave fawning coverage of the event without any mention of the missing colored combat troops, their absence did not go unnoticed. General Benjamin Butler, who had commanded USCT regiments during the war, gave a speech in his native Massachusetts decrying the omission, asking, “What shall we say of those colored men who [served] with instinctive loyalty and patriotism...shall he be denied even the poor honor of participating in the review of the troops who won those great victories, at the national capital?” The Emancipation League passed a resolution at its annual meeting in Boston declaring the snub “insulting” to the colored troops and a shameful act of deference by the Union leadership to the rebels’ hurt feelings.

Many questioned how, and why, such an oversight could have occurred. Several newspapers recounted the exculpatory explanations of unnamed Union officials: that the omission was merely coincidence, as all of the USCT regiments were being deployed to locations in the West and the South and were therefore unavailable to participate in the event. Thus, the story went:

There were no colored soldiers at that time nearer Washington than City Point (Virginia) where one or two brigades were stationed. It was contemplated by the Secretary of War and General Grant to order them to Washington for the sake of having them make part of the review...but it was finally
decided otherwise on the ground that it would occasion great trouble and expense, as other troops would have to be brought from other points to put in their place.\textsuperscript{11}

This explanation was rather weak, given that some of those USCT deployments surely could have been delayed or adjusted. The official line became more implausible when one considered the 24th Regiment of the USCT was stationed right across the Potomac River at Camp Casey in Arlington, Virginia, on the very day the Grand Review had begun.\textsuperscript{12}

Most of the press accepted the official explanation, and they exercised editorial privilege to criticize the “overzealous friends of the colored race” for making the “silly” suggestion the colored troops were left out of the procession.

Even famed abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison joined the many others willing to give the Union leadership the benefit of the doubt, proclaiming, “Our generals are more just than to refuse due honor to any soldier, white or black, who has battled nobly for the cause of the Union.”\textsuperscript{13}

Regardless if the exclusion of the colored troops from the Grand Review was intentional or coincidental, many African Americans felt the omission demanded remedy. So saying, a committee of Black citizens in Pennsylvania organized a reception for the colored troops in the state capital of Harrisburg.\textsuperscript{14} Hundreds of soldiers from USCT regiments and detachments from various states came to participate in the festivities, and several thousand joyous and thankful Black residents cheered the marching soldiers and accompanied them on the procession through the city.

The parade paused at the mansion of former U.S. Senator and former Secretary of War Simon Cameron to receive his gracious remarks.

I never doubted that the people of African descent would play a great part in the struggle, and am proud to say that all my anticipation has been more than realized. Your services, offered in the early part of the war, were refused, but when the struggle became of life and death, then the country gladly received you, and, thank God, you nobly redeemed all you promised. Like all other men, you have your destinies in your own hands, and if you continue to conduct yourselves hereafter as you have done in the struggle, you will have all the rights you ask for—all the rights that belong to human beings.\textsuperscript{15}

And that, indeed, was the burning question: what would be the rights of the freedmen now that the war was over?
The Christian Recorder, the official newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and considered by many as the voice of Black America, undoubtedly spoke for countless freedmen when it demanded equal rights, including voting rights. In its view, the USCT had earned suffrage for the colored race, asking the nation, "Would you be guilty of depriving a race of people of the inestimable right of franchise and equality before the law, who, when the country was tottering under the throes of revolution and secession, and the terrible wings of eternal dissolution were hovering over her crushed and shattered institutions, shouldered the musket, and went bravely forward, in the face of all the contumely and prejudice which surrounded them and rescued the bleeding country from the murderous grasp of a power which the White man was unable to overcome?"\(^{16}\)

These postwar declarations were unsurprising because many African Americans had long believed fighting in the Civil War would pave a path to full citizenship for all members of the colored race. As Frederick Douglass asserted in a famous speech to recruit Black men to join the USCT:

Once let the Black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder, and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States.\(^{17}\)

USCT regiments took this message to heart, as manifested by the motto on the flag of the 24th Regiment, "Let Soldiers in War Be Citizens in Peace!"

The colored troops knew why they went to war. They were not just fighting to end slavery; they were also fighting to become full citizens. But instead of being allowed to carry that battle flag, and its message, in the Grand Review, the 24th Regiment had been kept away from the Capitol and the White House—just the other side of the river but a world apart.

Another reminder of the gulf between Black and White Union soldiers appeared in newspapers on May 23, 1865, the first day of the Grand Review. The New York Times reported an "account of Negro revenge for the Fort Pillow massacre in Memphis." The story said that "the influx of poor old rebel troops into Memphis has caused a great excitement among the Negro troops. They got up a plot to assassinate every rebel soldier in Memphis in revenge for the Fort pillow massacre." According to the newspaper, "the Negroes refused to obey the order [to return to the fort] and a fight forthwith ensued. After a sharp conflict, twenty of the Negroes were killed and wounded and driven back in confusion into the Fort."\(^{18}\) Similar reports
appeared in dozens of other publications around the country, both large and small.

The Fort Pillow Massacre was an atrocity that occurred in April 1864, when forces under the command of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, a slave trader who would later found the Ku Klux Klan, overtook Fort Pillow screaming “no quarter!” and proceeded to indiscriminately slaughter the occupants of the fort, including all of the Black soldiers who failed to escape.19 A Joint Committee of Congress concluded that “men, women, and even children, wherever found, were deliberately shot down, beaten, and hacked with sabres; some of the children not more than ten years old were forced to stand up and face their murderers while being shot; the sick and the wounded were butchered without mercy, the rebels even entering the hospital building and dragging them out to be shot, or killing them as they lay there unable to offer the least resistance.”20 While there was much outrage among Black troops about Fort Pillow, the inflammatory story about revenge printed in the New York Times was nonetheless a hoax and, three days later, the Gray Lady reported that General Cadwallader C. Washburn, the commander of the Union fort at Memphis, called the report “false in every respect.”21 Many believed that the hoax was maliciously and deliberately spread to damage the reputation of the Black soldiers and to undermine the quest for the right of Black suffrage.22 Whatever the motive, the fabricated story of insubordination and revenge by Black troops in Memphis stood in stark contrast to the multitude of news stories of disciplined gallantry by the White troops in the Grand Review.

Perhaps because of the controversy that stemmed from USCT’s exclusion from the Grand Review in Washington; perhaps because of the attention garnered by what would become known as the USCT Grand Review in Harrisburg; or perhaps because of his own desire to acknowledge USCT’s service, President Johnson arranged to receive the First Regiment of the District of Columbia USCT at the White House. This invitation was fitting because the First Regiment was the original body formed pursuant to War Department General Order No. 143, which created the Bureau of Colored Troops in May 1863. This formal action allowed African Americans to serve as regular combat soldiers in the Union Army rather than as volunteers.

Led by its chaplain, Reverend (and later Bishop) Henry McNeal Turner of the AME Church, the First Regiment had served honorably and contributed its fair share to the Union victory. The infantry regiment fought in several battles in Virginia in 1864, and it participated in the Campaign of the Carolinas alongside General Sherman’s troops in March and April 1865.
It was even present for the surrender of General Johnston and his Confederate army shortly after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox. Nevertheless, the First Regiment did not escape the hostility and indignities suffered by other colored regiments. They too had suffered racially motivated attacks, threats, and other hostilities from District of Columbia residents from the moment they had formed.23

But all of those indignities would be forgiven in October 1865 when the regiment gained an audience with the President of the United States, with all of the pomp and circumstance attendant to such an occasion. Washington, D.C.’s African American community was ecstatic that the First Regiment was coming home, and even more so because the President would greet the troops. Newspapers called the event remarkable and historic. A veritable feast was planned to honor the returning heroes. A lengthy parade accompanied the troops as they proceeded through the city to the White House grounds. The First Regiment marched in formation, presented their arms, and showed the rigor and discipline that had acquitted them so well in battle.

Following these exercises, President Johnson addressed the colored troops. His speech, already noteworthy because it was his first address to colored troops since the close of the war, was even more significant because it spoke to the burning question: What should be the rights and position of the colored race following the Union victory?

President Johnson, while thanking the troops for their service, delivered his verdict. The defeat of the Confederacy did not necessarily mean Black freedmen would become full, or even partial, citizens of the land of liberty. In fact, the majority of the speech was an exhortation for colored troops to attend to all of their many obligations now that the war was over and to forgive any prior transgressions. He maintained the freedmen needed to prove themselves worthy before they could be deemed full citizens, even though they had already served honorably and valiantly in the defense of the Union. He even issued a challenge:

Will you now, when you have returned from the Army of the United States and taken the position of the citizen; when you have returned to the avocations of peace, will you give evidence to the world that you are capable and competent to govern yourselves?...[F]reedom is not simply the privilege to live in idleness; liberty does not mean simply to resort to the low saloons and other places of disreputable character. Freedom and liberty do not mean that the people ought to live in licentiousness; but liberty means simply to
be industrious, to be virtuous, to be upright in all our dealings and relations with men...\textsuperscript{24}

In President Johnson's opinion, the colored soldiers would be required to pass a character and fitness evaluation before they could become eligible for citizenship. "You must give evidence that you are competent for the rights that the government has guaranteed to you." Citizenship had to be earned.

The President had essentially notified these soldiers that they were now on some form of "citizenship probation." Unlike the White soldiers who had been feted and granted, according to the Washington Evening Star, "[the opportunity to] resign their power and pomp, and return to the avocations of civil life, to enjoy the peaceful fruits of their sacrifices and heroism,"\textsuperscript{25} the First Regiment would not get the power, much pomp, or the peaceful fruits of their sacrifices—at least not immediately.

Nearly every newspaper in the country reported the President's speech to the First Regiment. Many of them reprinted the entirety of the address verbatim. Most of the Northern newspapers complimented the President on his speech, with the Daily National Republican newspaper noting he had provided "sound practical advice to the colored people."\textsuperscript{26}

Others understandably took offense. The National Anti-Slavery Standard insisted Johnson's speech was not just to the First Regiment, for it would "reach...the ears of two hundred thousand colored troops who wear or have just laid off the national uniform."\textsuperscript{27} The paper contrasted this speech, in which he spoke to the colored troops "like a pedagogue or a drill master," with a recent speech he gave to former Confederates, whom he "greeted...as brothers." It also highlighted the "supreme hypocrisy" of Johnson's "lecture about licentiousness" to the colored troops, considering the Black Codes enacted throughout the South prohibited African Americans to have well-paid jobs or even to marry. The paper expressed its disbelief in Johnson's words with scathing bluntness, "the inconceivable impertinence to talk to these colored soldiers of colonization [...] the speech as a whole [was] discreditable to the President, and an insult to the four millions of loyal citizens whom it consigns to a political purgatory."\textsuperscript{28}

Considering President Johnson's address, perhaps the omission of the colored regiments from the Grand Review was a metaphorical rebuke of their proclamation that they had earned the right to full citizenship through their service in combat.

Ultimately, President Johnson's address informed the colored troops their war was not truly over. While they had prevailed in the war against the
Confederate Army, the colored troops would still have to fight for an equal place in America. They would have to fight for the right of suffrage, to serve on a jury, to own property, and for other basic civil liberties. Still, as the Harrisburg Review had shown, those veterans were proud of their service to the nation, and they wanted their legacy to be recognized appropriately.

Who would remember their sacrifice, and how would it be remembered? George Washington Williams, perhaps the most prolific African American historian of the nineteenth century, lamented:

The deathless deeds of the White soldier’s valor are not only embalmed in song and story, but are carved in marble and bronze. But nowhere in all this free land is there a monument to brave Negro soldiers, 36,847 of whom gave up their lives in the struggle for national existence. Even the appearance of the Negro soldier in the hundreds of histories of the war has always been incidental. These brave men have had no champion, no one to chronicle their record, teaming with interest and instinct with patriotism.\textsuperscript{29}

Williams argued Congress should establish such a monument and suggested placing it in a park adjacent to Howard University’s campus in Washington, D.C. In Williams’s mind, “a government of a proud, patriotic, prosperous, and free people would make a magnificent investment by erecting at the capital of the nation a monument dedicated to its brave Black soldiers.”\textsuperscript{30} Williams was not alone. Around this same time, the Colored Soldiers and Sailors League, a Union veterans’ organization founded immediately after the war, was also calling for a monument to the colored troops in Washington.\textsuperscript{31}

Williams was not just talk. He drafted legislation to create the monument to colored troops and led the lobbying efforts to gain support. In December 1886, Massachusetts Senator George Frisbie Hoar rewarded Williams’s efforts by introducing the bill to Congress. Williams’s testimony before the Senate Library Committee helped the bill gain committee approval, and his advocacy helped secure the bill’s passage by the full Senate. It languished in the House of Representatives, however, unable to get out of committee. Williams’s bill never became law.\textsuperscript{32}

During the Grand Review, a banner hung from the Capitol asserting, “the only national debt we can never repay is the debt we owe the victorious Union soldier.”\textsuperscript{33} George Washington Williams and others rightfully asked, what of the debt due the colored Union soldier?\textsuperscript{34}
CHAPTER TWO

* 

THE QUEST FOR HONOR INSPIRES A PLAN

Unfortunately for African Americans, the country made little attempt in the fifty years following the Civil War to repay the debt owed to them for their service—whether in a soldier’s uniform or in tattered clothing on sweltering plantations. Instead, America seemed to double down on its failings by accruing new insults to Black people every time a slight step toward progress was made. While a gradual shift toward equality was to be expected, what African Americans often faced varied between “inclusion” in name only or outright rejection and degradation not much different from what plagued them before that Great War.

As much as the United States Colored Troops’ exclusion from the original Grand Review had been a serious affront to those who had valiantly served, its reenactment fifty years later by the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), and the circumstances surrounding the event, added almost equal insult to the injury.

Formed the year after the end of the Civil War, the GAR was the preeminent organization of Union veterans. Black and White Union soldiers alike were allowed to participate in state and national encampment activities under its auspices. In September 1915, the GAR held its 49th National Encampment in Washington, DC, and this encampment coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the Union’s Civil War victory. The reenactment of the Grand Review promised to celebrate the milestone; and this time, Black soldiers who had fought for the Union would march alongside the White soldiers.

Despite its progressive veneer, however, the GAR was a segregated organization and prevailing attitudes toward race influenced its operations.