



# **We Ask Only for Even-Handed Justice: Black Voices from Reconstruction, 1865-1877**

*John Smith*

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The sesquicentennial of the Civil War and Reconstruction invites reflection on the broad meaning of American democracy, including the ideals of freedom, equality, racial justice, and self-determination. In *We Ask Only for Even-Handed Justice*, John David Smith brings together a wealth of primary texts—editorials, letters, newspaper articles, and personal testimonies—to illuminate the experience of emancipation for the millions of African Americans enmeshed in the transition from chattel slavery to freedom from 1865 to 1877.

The years following Appomattox offered the freed people numerous opportunities and challenges. Ex-slaves reconnected with relatives dispersed by the domestic slave trade and the vicissitudes of civil war. They sought their own farms and homesteads, education for their children, and legal protection from whites hostile to their new status. They negotiated labor contracts, established local communities, and, following the 1867 Reconstruction Acts, entered local, state, and national politics.

Though aided by Freedmen's Bureau agents and sympathetic whites, former slaves nevertheless faced daunting odds. Ku Klux Klansmen and others terrorized blacks who asserted themselves, many northerners lost interest in their plight, and federal officials gradually left them to their own resources. As a result, former Confederates regained control of the southern state governments following the 1876 presidential election.

*We Ask Only for Even-Handed Justice* is a substantially revised and expanded edition of a book originally published under the title *Black Voices from Reconstruction, 1865–1877*.

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