



Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913

Kathleen Ann Clark

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The historical memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction has earned increasing attention from scholars. Only recently, however, have historians begun to explore African American efforts to interpret those events. With *Defining Moments*, Kathleen Clark shines new light on African American commemorative traditions in the South, where events such as Emancipation Day and Fourth of July ceremonies served as opportunities for African Americans to assert their own understandings of slavery, the Civil War, and Emancipation--efforts that were vital to the struggles to define, assert, and defend African American freedom and citizenship.

Focusing on urban celebrations that drew crowds from surrounding rural areas, Clark finds that commemorations served as critical forums for African Americans to define themselves collectively. As they struggled to assert their freedom and citizenship, African Americans wrestled with issues such as the content and meaning of black history, class-inflected ideas of respectability and progress, and gendered notions of citizenship. Clark's examination of the people and events that shaped complex struggles over public self-representation in African American communities brings new understanding of southern black political culture in the decades following Emancipation and provides a more complete picture of historical memory in the South.

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