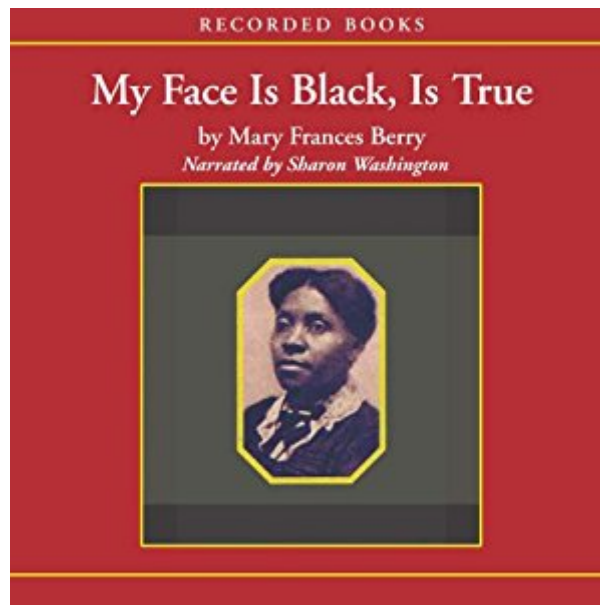




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My Face Is Black Is True: Callie House And The Struggle For Ex-Slave Reparations



Synopsis

“My face is black is true but it's not my fault but I love my name and my honest in dealing with my fellow man.” ~Callie House (1899)

In her groundbreaking new book, *My Face Is Black Is True*, historian Mary Frances Berry resurrects the forgotten life of Callie House (1861-1928), ex-slave, widowed Nashville washerwoman and mother of five who, seventy years before the civil rights movement, headed a demand for ex-slave reparations. House was born into slavery in 1861 and sought African-American pensions based on those offered Union soldiers. In a brilliant and daring move, House targeted \$68 million in taxes on seized rebel cotton (over \$1.2 billion in 2005 dollars) and demanded it as repayment for centuries of unpaid labor. Dr. Berry tells how the Justice Department, persuaded by the postmaster general, banned the activities of Callie House's town organizers, violated her constitutional rights to assembly and to petition Congress, and falsely accused her of mail fraud; the federal officials had the post office open the mail of almost all African-Americans, denying delivery on the smallest pretext. Berry shows how African-American newspapers, most of which preached meekness toward whites, systematically ignored or derided Mrs. House's movement, which was essentially a poor person's movement. Despite being denied mail service and support from the African-American establishment of the day, Mrs. House's Ex-Slave Association flourished until she was imprisoned by the Justice Department for violating the postal laws of the United States; suddenly deprived of her spirit, leadership and ferocity, the first national grassroots African-American movement fell apart. Callie House, so long forgotten that her grave has been lost, emerges as a courageous pioneering activist, a forerunner of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. *My Face Is Black Is True* is a fascinating book of original scholarship that reclaims a magnificent heroine. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A well told story about the largest African American protest movement you've never heard about. Seriously, black history of the post reconstruction era is typically about Jim Crow, black schools and colleges, black clubwomen, sharecropping, or Ida B Wells and the anti-lynching movement if you're looking for something to alleviate the grimness. Callie House should be recognized as Wells' comrade, though they never met and House's Ex-Slave Pension and Bounty movement was largely illiterate formerly enslaved Southern blacks who believed they should be paid something for their uncompensated centuries of labor. This was the origin of the reparations movement.

Very informative. Dr. Berry cleared-up many questions lurking in my mind as to what happened to the freed slaves after the emancipation, esp. how did they survive and many more. Besides being informative, the book is very-well written in a style that holds the reader's interest; that is, it is not monotonous. I highly recommend it for reading for all Americans.

COURAGE! STRONG! INTEGRITY! These are the words that come to mind after reading about Callie House. A women who challenge the system, IN THE 1800s!! Asking for what was only right, Reparations for ex-slaves, a subject that is still more alive today, but not the priority it should be! This should be a Text Book in all The Historic Black Colleges and Schools through out America, this Women needs to be studied more!! ...Peace.

Collectors item

A gift for a friend.

This book is powerful and sadly overdue. Who knew that ex-slaves fought for reparations themselves right after emancipation? As an American, I am outraged to learn that the United States government denied them their First Amendment right to petition the government for reparations by falsely imprisoning all the movement's leaders! I am also amazed to learn that the first mass movement of Black people for justice in this country was led by a woman -- Callie House. She and

all those imprisoned for this well organized, peaceful, and just effort must be exonerated. Our President and the Members of Congress can and must exonerate them now!

Born a slave in the latter years of slavery, Callie House deserves to be remembered for her work on behalf of former slaves. In *My Face is Black is True*, historian Mary Frances Berry tells the story House's efforts seeking reparations for former slaves. Even while working as a washerwoman, supporting her large family, House travelled about to enlist other former slaves in the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty, and Pension Association. It was, in part, a mutual aid society, providing for burial and health care for its members. In a larger sense, it was a lobbying movement, seeking to obtain pensions for ex-slaves, much like soldiers' pensions. The military pension comparison was apt, since many slaves were recruited to serve the Union army as laborers, but received little if any pay. For funding, House targeted a large pool of proceeds from the sale of confiscated cotton. It was logical: the cotton was cultivated, harvested, and processed with the coerced labor of slaves. The proceeds from the sale of the cotton should reasonably be returned to those responsible for its production. Would that life were so simple. . . . As you might expect, House and her colleagues faced opposition in the South. More surprising to me was the repression she faced from the federal government. Using laws against mail fraud, the postal service restricted her use of the mail to promote membership in her organization and to collect dues. They claimed, falsely, that she was promising pensions when, in fact, she spoke about the efforts to persuade congress to enact a pension. It's not clear to me that House accomplished anything tangible. She was a role model, an inspiration, a pioneer seeking equal rights long before the equal rights movement, to be sure. Unfortunately for her, the opposition was simply too strong. Later leaders took up her mantle, but I think the reparations movement should be put to bed. There are no living slaves or slave owners. (I know there is modern slavery around the world. I'm talking about U.S. slavery-era slaves.) Determining who is eligible for reparations and who should pay is impractical. Many blacks and whites in the U.S. are descendants of immigrants who arrived after the Civil War, thus would have no connection to slavery. Some blacks perhaps should pay reparations, like Barack Obama, who is likely descended from slave traders in Africa and slave owners in the U.S. I appreciate House's campaign, and am sickened by the treatment ex-slaves received after emancipation. But the reparations movement has no place in the 21st century. Berry does a wonderful job of telling House's story and placing her in context. *My Face is Black is True* is a rich resource for both a personal and a political history of the decades after the end of the Civil War. I especially enjoyed Berry's personalization of the story. She grew up in the same area of Nashville

where House raised her family. The citizens and the government of the United States did not uphold the ideals of our nation in the post-Civil War era. Reading about House and her co-laborers for justice should inspire us to look forward, seeking to leave our world more just and free tomorrow than it was yesterday, every day.

Wow, this book was very shocking! I never heard of this woman before. It is very sad that the majority of African Americans have never heard of her. I truly have an understanding of reparations, and know that the African American will never be accepted as human beings in America. This book really brought this home to me. This book and Callie House's struggle should be in every school in the United States. It's very sad how our history has been denied to us and how we as Black People are treated in these United States. The Book was EXCELLENT. Praises to the author for her research and writing this unknown historic event.

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