

The Health of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War

The American Civil War, fought between 1861 and 1865, was a tumultuous period in United States history. While the war primarily focused on issues of slavery and state rights, it also had profound effects on the health and well-being of the soldiers involved. This article explores the health challenges faced by black soldiers during the Civil War, shedding light on their experiences and resilience in the face of adversity.

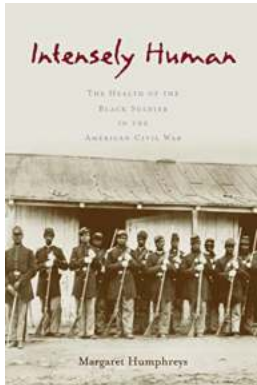
The Enlistment of Black Soldiers

When the Civil War began, black men were initially barred from enlisting in the Union Army. However, as the war progressed, the need for additional manpower became increasingly apparent. In 1862, a law was passed allowing free African Americans to serve in the military, and by 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation further opened the doors for black enlistment. Around 180,000 African Americans eventually served in the Union Army, comprising approximately 10% of its total strength.

Health Conditions in the Camps

Life as a soldier during the Civil War was far from easy, and black soldiers faced unique challenges due to the prevailing racial prejudice of the time. They were often assigned to segregated units and endured poorer living conditions compared to their white counterparts. Many black regiments were stationed in disease-ridden areas, leading to higher rates of illness and mortality.

**Intensely Human: The Health of the Black Soldier
in the American Civil War**



by Margaret Humphreys (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 3670 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 220 pages
Lending : Enabled



Inadequate sanitation facilities, overcrowded tents, and limited access to clean water contributed to the spread of diseases such as typhoid, dysentery, and pneumonia. Black soldiers also suffered from malnutrition and exposure to harsh weather conditions. In addition to these physical challenges, they also faced psychological strains, including discrimination, mistreatment, and the constant fear of being captured and sold back into slavery.

The Role of African American Nurses

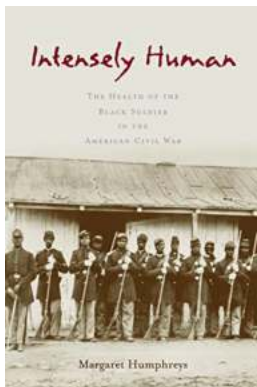
Despite the obstacles they encountered, black soldiers and civilians alike played a crucial role in establishing hospitals and medical facilities to tend to the sick and wounded. African American nurses, often former slaves themselves, worked tirelessly to provide care and comfort to the soldiers. They faced criticism and discrimination from white nurses and doctors, but their dedication and compassion saved countless lives.

The Legacy of Black Soldiers' Health Struggles

The hardships endured by black soldiers during the Civil War had a lasting impact on their health, both physically and mentally. Many soldiers returned from the war

with chronic illnesses, disabilities, and emotional trauma. The lack of adequate medical care and support for black veterans contributed to their continued suffering long after the war ended.

The health challenges faced by black soldiers during the American Civil War were significant and often overlooked. Despite facing discrimination, unfair treatment, and unsanitary living conditions, they fought for their freedom and the future of the nation. Their resilience and determination serve as a testament to their strength and their unwavering commitment to a better future for themselves and generations to come.



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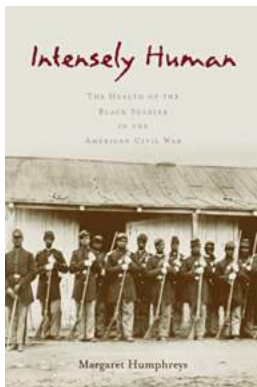
This “informative” look at the causes of high mortality rates among black Civil War soldiers “gives readers some insight into current health disparities” (JAMA).

Black soldiers in the American Civil War were far more likely to die of disease than were white soldiers. In *Intensely Human*, historian Margaret Humphreys explores why this uneven mortality occurred and how it was interpreted at the

time. In doing so, she uncovers the perspectives of mid-nineteenth-century physicians and others who were eager to implicate the so-called innate inferiority of the black body.

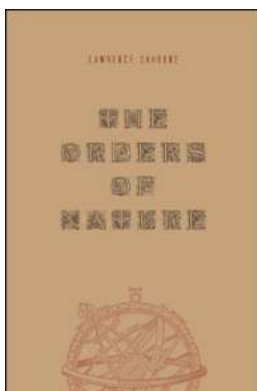
In the archival collections of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, Humphreys found evidence that the high death rate among black soldiers resulted from malnourishment, inadequate shelter and clothing, inferior medical attention, and assignments to hazardous environments.

While some observant physicians of the day attributed the black soldiers' high mortality rate to these circumstances, few medical professionals—on either side of the conflict—were prepared to challenge the “biological evidence” of white superiority. Humphreys shows how, despite sympathetic and responsible physicians' efforts to expose the truth, the stereotype of black biological inferiority prevailed during the war and after.



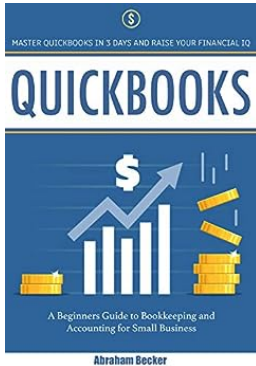
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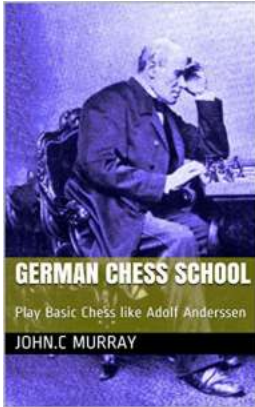
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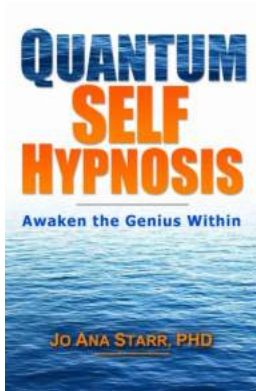
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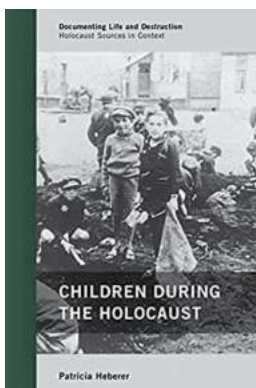
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