
In *The Fire of Freedom*, David Cecelski reveals the captivating story of Abraham Galloway, an escaped slave from Smithville, North Carolina, who became an abolitionist in the North, a recruiter around New Bern for black Union regiments, an important spy behind Confederate lines, and, during Reconstruction, a North Carolina state senator. Among Galloway’s other exploits are his escape to the North by ship, his helping slaves escape through Ohio into Canada, and a trip to Haiti where he worked to establish a colony for former slaves and discussed the possibility of fostering slave revolts. During the Civil War, he was captured by Confederates in Mississippi but escaped and later led a group from New Bern to meet with President Lincoln to advocate for equality and full citizenship for African Americans.

While telling the story of Galloway’s activities and accomplishments, Cecelski effectively tells a much larger story of struggle. He demonstrates that freed slaves were far from passive and disorganized, as some have claimed. The particular importance of African American women and of churches in all aspects of the social and political movements of former slaves is well portrayed. He shows that protecting slavery was a core issue for the Confederacy from the start, but that the Union had an ambiguous stance on the matter until later in the war when former slaves served essential roles in the Union as spies, guides, boat pilots, laborers, support staff, and troops. The struggle to overcome racial insults and inequality, including from Union troops during the Civil War and from North Carolinian legislators after the war, is palpable throughout, as is the consistent efforts to obtain equal treatment from the Union, which never paid black troops as much as white troops.

Cecelski is an independent historian who has written widely on North Carolina coastal history. He is a graduate of Duke University and the Harvard Graduate School of Education and has held visiting professorships at Duke, UNC–Chapel Hill, and East Carolina University. *The Fire of Freedom* is the highly informative result of ten years of detailed research, to which the thorough index, lengthy bibliography, and the copious annotated endnotes attest. Materials from distant research collections have been seamlessly fused to produce an engaging narrative.

Cecelski has made an important contribution to North Carolina history, African American history, and Civil War history. This account of Galloway’s remarkable life and influence makes the history of the Civil War era understandable through vivid descriptions of the people and places, photographs, and excerpts from letters and journals. Cecelski’s accessible writing style further supports this successful popular history. Teachers will find this an excellent supplementary text. Scholars and students will enjoy a rich historical synthesis that will spark further research. The North Carolina public will read engaging stories about their state’s influential role. For these reasons, academic, public, and high school libraries throughout North Carolina and far beyond are highly encouraged to add *The Fire of Freedom* to their collections.

C. William Gee
East Carolina University