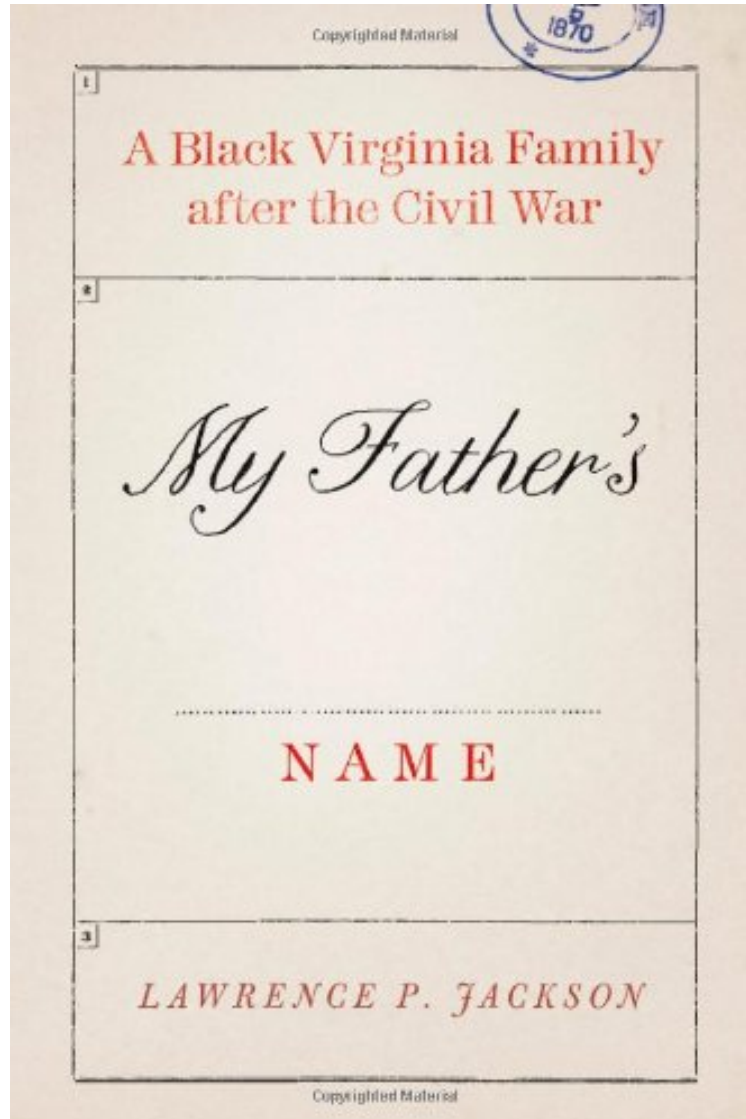


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## My Father's Name: A Black Virginia Family after the Civil War

Lawrence P. Jackson

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**Lawrence P. Jackson : My Father's Name: A Black Virginia Family after the Civil War** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised My Father's Name: A Black Virginia Family after the Civil War:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A "must read" for fellow family researchers...By Dr. BA must read for anyone searching for their black relatives during and shortly after the enslavement period especially in Virginia. Gives you an intimate perspective from the personal journey of the author. Easy to read and quite interesting ...helps

one to understand more the very difficult context in which our relatives lived, endured and died. Not sure if I will ever grasp the fullness of it all... but it sure underscores what it means to be a "survivor". America has some deep wounds from its conquest and occupation of this land... and the gross mistreatment and injustices to its native inhabitants and enslaved African immigrants... wounds even today... it is still trying to heal after all of this time. RLJ0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. past to presentBy sernua7 wonderful source for the genealogist5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. That the racial schism persists, and some of the reasons whyBy R. M. PetersonFor a long time, I have toyed with the notion of expunging race-descriptors from my vocabulary, both in talking and writing. That would be a logical extension of my credo to try and treat everyone I encounter as a unique individual, worthy of respect (at least initially) and unburdened as much as possible of all manifestations of stereotyping. And I have sometimes thought that society as a whole might be better off if it officially dispensed with racial classifications. For example, in my fantasy all governmental entities would be barred not only from making decisions based on race, but even from recording race and then classifying and categorizing according to race. (An exception might have to be made for various medical reasons - such as sickle cell anemia - but even that probably could now be handled purely by reference to genetic markers rather than less precise "race" classifications.)Well, the sensitive and wrenching book MY FATHER'S NAME may persuade me that my fantasy is quixotic, that current conditions simply would not permit the people of this country - paradoxically, perhaps most notably those whose ancestors once were slaves - to proceed without racial classifications. And, obviously, it would be difficult for me to write this review without referring to the fact that the author, Lawrence P. Jackson, is black.Jackson is a professor at Emory University. In MY FATHER'S NAME he searches for his forebears in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, and, as he gradually uncovers new information concerning his grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents, he also reconstructs as much as possible what their lives must have been like.One aspect of the book is a history of slaves and former slaves, in the years before, during, and after the Civil War, centered primarily around Danville, Virginia, in tobacco-growing Pittsylvania County. In Jackson's telling, it is a history richer, more complicated, and crueler than much of my previous reading (not that I am especially well-read on the subject). One of the most notable points was how, for twenty years after the Civil War, there was a glimmer of promise and a narrow window of opportunity for hard-working blacks - an opportunity that Jackson learns his great-great-grandfather doggedly availed himself of - to carve out an independent existence of economic self-sufficiency and relative dignity, but then the rug was pulled out from under them as, after Reconstruction, diabolical state and local laws were enacted, and a new era of oppression and exploitation was sanctioned by Plessy v. Ferguson and callous indifference. And just as families before the Civil War had been torn asunder and scattered by slave-owners and -merchants, now families were fractured and scattered by economic and social forces too harsh to endure. One tiny but touching by-product of this familial dislocation was that many blacks, including Jackson, were left with no information concerning the origins of their father's name.The second major aspect of the book is the psychological scarring, and attendant bitterness, that marks Jackson, even though he went to Stanford and has distinguished himself in the academic world (among other things, he has written an acclaimed biography of Ralph Ellison). He is saddled with being black in ways that are beyond my comprehension and empathy, as a white. He clearly tries to be level-headed and thoughtful, but anger quickly bubbles to the surface like molten lava. And I realize that I have no clue as to whether or not, or to what extent, that anger is justified. Thus, for me, MY FATHER'S NAME, is a trenchant reminder of how stubbornly the brand of slavery has persisted.I have some minor quibbles about the book. One concerns Jackson's occasional tendency to indulge in what appear to be overgeneralizations and, perversely, stereotyping of whites. (One such instance that was particularly bothersome given my own family history was Jackson's sweeping assertion that the "extraordinary prosperity" of his white students at Emory "was owed to the nation's unhappy engraftment with servitude.") The book is marked with some odd quirks of language, and for the life of me I cannot follow several of Jackson's arguments or understand a few of his points. And there was confusion in his narrative as to whether a trip back to Pittsylvania County looking for relatives occurred in 2004 or 2003 (compare page 4 with page 116) - not a major point, to be sure, but it plants a seed of doubt as to the accuracy of other information. Also, as ironic as this might sound given the particular mission of the book, I would have appreciated a family tree.Notwithstanding those quibbles, MY FATHER'S NAME was an important book for me, and I believe that wide readership and consideration of it would be a positive thing, given the still poisoned racial milieu of this country.

Armed with only early boyhood memories, Lawrence P. Jackson begins his quest by setting out from his home in Baltimore for Pittsylvania County, Virginia, to try to find his late grandfather's old home by the railroad tracks in Blairs. My Father's Name tells the tale of the ensuing journey, at once a detective story and a moving historical memoir, uncovering the mixture of anguish and fulfillment that accompanies a venture into the ancestral past, specifically one tied to the history of slavery.

"Lawrence P. Jackson's matter-of-fact prose is accessible and is strangely and beautifully evocative of the Civil War era. We not only learn about the deprivations, inhumanity, and constant humiliations perpetrated on black people in

the nineteenth century, but we gain a deeper understanding of what constitutes American culture and society today. It is amazing that Jackson's family survived to produce such a splendid writer able to share their story with us."