

Freedom's Shore: Tunis Campbell and the Georgia Freedmen. By Russell Duncan. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, c. 1986. Pp. xvi, 175. \$20.00.)

Tunis Campbell was a black northerner who moved to St. Catherines Island during the Civil War and attempted to establish a self-supporting and apparently democratic community of free blacks under the aegis of the Freedmen's Bureau. He was something of an idealist and a visionary, for after being fired from the bureau in 1866 he used his own money in an attempt to build a similar community of black freeholders on the former BelleVille Plantation in McIntosh County. A charismatic leader, he built and led a political machine during radical Reconstruction and served in the state constitutional convention, in the state senate, and as a justice of the peace in McIntosh County. In the legislative positions he was a predictably vigorous proponent of equality; in the judgeship, a vigorous—perhaps unusually vigorous—defender of black workers from abuse at the hands of employers. His machine survived Redemption in 1870. Indeed, it survived his imprisonment in 1875 on charges that were the result of a Redeemer

conspiracy. Clearly, Campbell was an extraordinary person, well worth the attention of historians for what he wrought and for what he believed.

In writing a book about Tunis Campbell, Russell Duncan faced a serious challenge. Manuscript sources are thin or nonexistent on virtually every part of this man's life and thought except for his contested elections to the Georgia state legislature and his trials, convictions, appeals, and imprisonment at the hands of Redeemer authorities. Nevertheless, from the very little that is known or can be discovered about Campbell, Duncan extrapolates his actions and his beliefs and places those suppositions or conclusions within a broadly drawn portrait of political developments in McIntosh County and in the state of Georgia. The result is a sympathetic work that, of necessity, hovers on the edge between fiction and history.

Many who read this book may therefore resist Duncan's unsubstantiated attribution of motivation and ideology to Campbell. There is not much evidence about what Campbell did, let alone what he thought. For example, the enterprise at BelleVille may well have been rooted in black separatism, and Campbell may have favored "Separatism for Strength," as the title of the first chapter of the book suggests, but there is not much evidence about BelleVille, and there is no evidence in any known source that would establish whether Campbell understood or described his actions in that or in some other way.

Some historians might suggest that this book should not have been written. They would be mistaken. *Freedom's Shore* makes an interesting character as accessible as he is likely ever to be. It should be appreciated as a speculative portrait. It should also, however, be used as a source by others paying close attention to endnotes to distinguish between what can be established and what is supposed about Tunis Campbell.