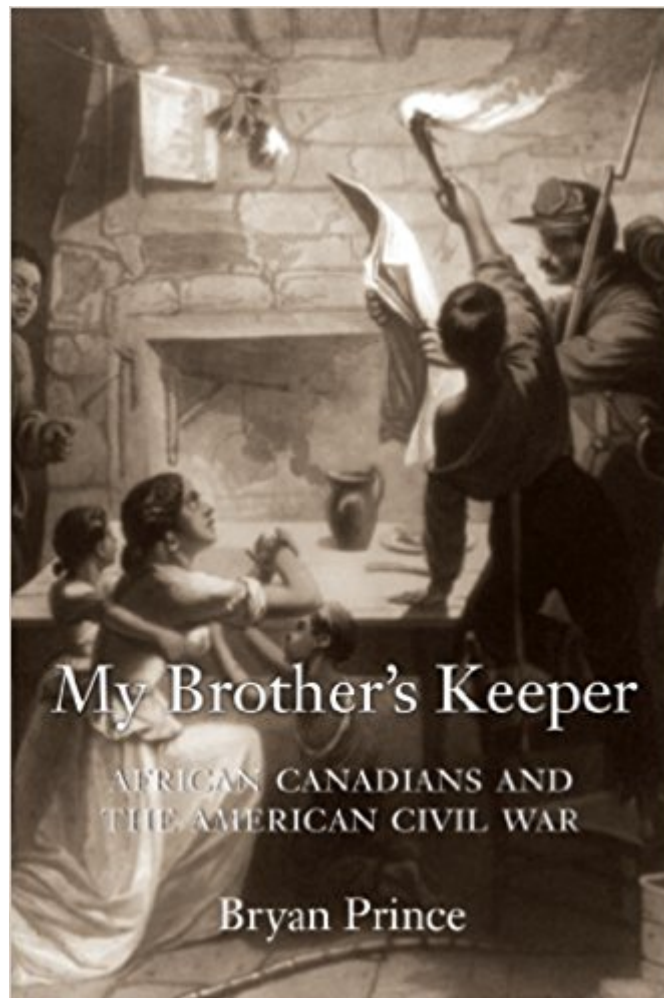




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My Brother's Keeper: African Canadians And The American Civil War



Synopsis

The story of African Canadians who fled slavery in the United States but returned to enlist in the Union forces during the American Civil War. On New Year's Eve in 1862, blacks from across British North America joined in spirit with their American fellows in silent vigils to await the enactment of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. The terms declared that slaves who were held in the districts that were in rebellion would be free and that blacks would now be allowed to enlist in the Union Army and participate in the civil war that had then raged for more than a year and a half. African Canadians who had fled from the United States had not forgotten their past and eagerly sought to do their part in securing rights and liberty for all. Leaving behind their freedom in Canada, many enlisted in the Union cause. Most served as soldiers or sailors while others became recruiters, surgeons, or regimental chaplains. Entire black communities were deeply affected by this war that profoundly and irrevocably changed North American history.

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Customer Reviews

During the final few decades of slavery in America, Canada was often the last stop on the underground railway for runaway slaves. But for many, the United States would always be 'home' and after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, when blacks were finally allowed to enlist in the Union army, many returned to the US to fight. In his book, *My Brother's Keeper*, author Bryan Prince looks at the African Canadians who would return to the US to fight, why they chose to go, and, in many cases, what their lives were like in Canada and what happened to them both during

the war and after. A few of these men were tricked into enlisting by unscrupulous recruiters who then cheated them out of part or all of their enlistment bonuses but most chose to return to fight voluntarily. Many of them would die to end slavery. Prince tells many of their individual stories, of their heroism and courage, and frequently of their deaths as the result of battle but more often disease. Many of them were soldiers but many enlisted as doctors, recruiters, or chaplains. Prince also looks at what life had been like in Canada for many African Americans. He looks mainly at southern Ontario or, as it was then, Canada West. For many, it was no better and often, worse, than it had been in the US because the racism was more subtle. Blacks had the same freedoms in Canada as whites to attend school, to act as jurists, to own property etc, but legal didn't always mean actual. Still, it did mean that many were able to gain knowledge and skills that were forbidden to slaves and, after the war, many returned to the US to teach. But it wasn't only slaves who fled north across the border. Many white Americans fled to Canada to escape debt or, once the war started, to avoid conscription on both sides.

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