

# Susie king taylor essay



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Susie King Taylor In any war, there are people who are a part of the efforts that make it successful, but go unrecognized as a major “ player” in it. The Civil War was no different and Susie (Baker) King Taylor is one of the many African-Americans that served in the “ colored” regiments that helped the Union win the civil war. The fact that she was a woman makes her even more unique. Susie Baker was born under the slave law in Georgia, in 1848. She was raised by her grandmother in Savannah, Georgia.

It was Susie’s grandmother that ensured she learned to read and write. Susie was sent discretely to study with a friend of the family, and tutors were sought out wherever they could be found. Discretion was necessary because some southern states such as Georgia and South Carolina had reenacted its Act of 1740, which imposed a penalty to anyone who taught slaves or caused slaves to be taught (p. 65, Woodson). In 1862, as the Civil War approached, Susie was sent back to the country to stay with her mother. When Fort Pulaski was taken, Susie’s uncle took her and the other seven members of his family, under the protection of the Union fleet to St.

Catherine Island. Two weeks later they were taken by a gunboat to St. Simon’s Island, where Susie finally got to see the “ Yankee. ” At the young age of fourteen Susie became a freedwoman. The ability to read and write helped Susie Baker land a job teaching school for the children on St.

Simon’s Island. She taught the children during the day, but it was the adult Negroes that came to her by night, “ eager to learn to read, to read above anything else” (p. 11, Taylor). In August of 1862, Captain C. T.

Trowbridge came to St. Simon's Island to find men to finish filling his regiment. In late October of the same year Captain Trowbridge received orders to evacuate everyone to the Beaufort, South Carolina. Trowbridge was considered a gentleman and staunch friend to the black Americans that formed the 1st South Carolina Infantry Volunteers (later renamed the 33d Regiment, U. S. Colored Troops).

It was at this time that Susie Baker was enrolled as laundress of these troops. Susie's memoirs give us an idea of the difficulties the Black African-American volunteers faced. " The first suits worn by the boys were red coats and pants, which they disliked very much, for, they said, ' The rebels see us, miles away. '" (p. 15, Taylor) In addition, the first colored troops didn't get any pay, and had to rely on what they " received from the commissary" to support themselves and their families. Because of this, " wives were obliged to support themselves and children by washing for the officers of the gunboats and the soldiers, and making cakes and pies which they sold to the boys in camp" (p.

16, Taylor). It wasn't until 1864, that the government " granted them full pay, with all the back pay due" (p. 16, Taylor). Despite these hardships, Susie Baker took over the responsibilities of teaching the regiment's former slaves the lessons in reading and writing that she had secretly learned as a child.

In addition, Susie also tended the men in the regiment who were sick or injured. She recounts that " In February, 1863 several cases of varioloid (small-pox) broke out among the men in the regiment. Many died of the

disease, however Susie “ was not in the least afraid of the small-pox” (p. 17, Taylor) because she had been vaccinated. She also attributed her immunity to drinking sassafras tea all the time.

She felt the tea kept her blood purged and kept her from getting sick. As in most wars the horrors that a person, tending the wounded, would see became common place. Susie frequently saw such horrors, she remembers them as seeming “...strange how our aversion to seeing suffering is overcome in war, -how we are able to see the most sickening sights, such as men with their limbs blown off and mangled by the deadly shells, without a shudder; and instead of turning away, how we hurry to assist in alleviating their pain, bind up their wounds, and press the cool water to their parched lips, with feelings only of sympathy and pity. ” (Taylor, 31-32) Susie Baker met and married a sergeant in the regiment named Edward King.

Together, they both “ served the 33d Regiment until it was mustered out (disbanded) in February of 1866” (par. 4, Leonard). Even though she was hired as a laundress for the regiment, her determination to help in anyway possible, found her preparing food for non-commissioned officers (p. 29, Taylor), as well as, learning to handle a musket. Susie King “...could shoot straight and often hit the target” and she “...assisted in cleaning the guns and used to fire them off, to see if the cartridges were dry, before cleaning and reloading, each day” (p. 26, Taylor).

Her duties were not limited to just washing clothes. In conclusion, Susie King and her husband returned to Savannah after the Civil War was over. Life was difficult and “ prejudice against his race” was still “ too strong to insure him

much work at his trade" (p. 54, Taylor). Susie had opened a school in her home and taught children, until the free public schools drew all her students away. Edward died in 1866 and left her "soon to welcome a little stranger alone" (p.

54, Taylor). Susie found employment as a housekeeper for several different women. Susie worked in the Civil War and gave her "services willingly for four years and three months without receiving a dollar" (p. 1, Taylor).

In 1872, she "put in a claim for my husband's bounty and received on hundred dollars..." (p. 55, Taylor). In 1879, Susie married Russell Taylor and spent much of her later life involved with the Woman's Relief Corps. This organization was founded in 1873 and was a support group for female Civil War veterans. It is not known when Susie King Taylor died, however she spent her life in service of others and her country. Her own words say it best; "my interest in the boys in blue has not abated.

My hands have never left undone anything they could do toward their aid and comfort in the twilight of their lives. (par. 6, Leonard) Works Cited  
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