



The Colored Cadet at West Point Henry Ossiian Flipper

Henry Ossiian Flipper--born into slavery in Thomasville, Georgia on March 21, 1856--did not learn to read and write until just before the end of the Civil War. Once the war had ended, Flipper attended several schools showing a great aptitude for knowledge. During his freshman year at Atlanta University he applied for admittance to the United States National Military Academy at West Point. He was appointed to the academy in 1873 along with a fellow African American, John W. Williams. Cadet Williams was later dismissed for academic deficiencies. Flipper and Williams were not the first African Americans to attend West Point, however. Two others came before them: James Webster Smith in July of 1870, and Henry Alonzo Napier in 1871. Cadets Napier and Smith were eventually dismissed for academic deficiencies.

In 1876, Johnson Chestnut Whittaker another African American, was admitted to the academy. But one day he was discovered beaten, bound and unconscious in his room. An investigation was conducted by a lengthy courts martial; however, this proceeding--tainted by racism--determined that Whittaker's injuries were "self-inflicted" and that he had tied himself up. Secretary of War, Robert Todd Lincoln, later declared the court martial invalid, but this did nothing to save Cadet Whittaker's career as he was preemptively dismissed from the academy because of academic deficiencies.

Henry Ossiian Flipper graduated from West Point as a Second Lieutenant in June of 1877 earning his place in history as the first African American to do so. His first permanent duty assignment was to the famed 10th Calvalry Regiment. (Introduction by James K. White)

Read by James K. White. Total running time: 10:32:43

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