



Joe, the Slave Who Became an Alamo Legend

Ron J. Jackson, Lee Spencer White

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If we do in fact “remember the Alamo,” it is largely thanks to one person who witnessed the final assault and survived: the commanding officer’s slave, a young man known simply as Joe. What Joe saw as the Alamo fell, recounted days later to the Texas Cabinet, has come down to us in records and newspaper reports. But who Joe was, where he came from, and what happened to him have all remained mysterious until now. In a remarkable feat of historical detective work, authors Ron J. Jackson, Jr., and Lee Spencer White have fully restored this pivotal yet elusive figure to his place in the American story.

The twenty-year-old Joe stood with his master, Lieutenant Colonel Travis, against the Mexican army in the early hours of March 6, 1836. After Travis fell, Joe watched the battle’s last moments from a hiding place. He was later taken first to Bexar and questioned by Santa Anna about the Texan army, and then to the revolutionary capitol, where he gave his testimony with evident candor.

With these few facts in hand, Jackson and White searched through plantation ledgers, journals, memoirs, slave narratives, ship logs, newspapers, letters, and court documents. Their decades-long effort has revealed the outline of Joe’s biography, alongside some startling facts: most notably, that Joe was the younger brother of the famous escaped slave and abolitionist narrator William Wells Brown, as well as the grandson of legendary trailblazer Daniel Boone. This book traces Joe’s story from his birth in Kentucky through his life in slavery—which, in a grotesque irony, resumed after he took part in the Texans’ battle for independence—to his eventual escape and disappearance into the shadows of history.

Joe, the Slave Who Became an Alamo Legend recovers a true American character from obscurity and expands our view of events central to the emergence of Texas.

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