



Tennessee's Radical Army: The State Guard and its Role in Reconstruction, 1867-1869

Dr. Ben H. Severance

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In Tennessee's Radical Army, author Ben H. Severance draws upon a wealth of new research to argue that the State Guard successfully enforced the Reconstruction policies of the Radical Republican government from 1867 until its dissolution in 1869. Historians have often accused Governor Brownlow of abusing executive power during his administration; Severance argues, however, that although it was a partisan law enforcement body, the State Guard usually conducted itself with a high degree of discipline and restraint. When it was deployed during the political campaigns of 1867 and under the martial law decrees of 1869, the State Guard effectively subdued the intimidation and violence that ex-Confederates frequently used to suppress freedmen and to unseat Republicans. Severance contrasts these two campaigns with incidents in 1868, when the Klan terrorized large portions of the state. The State Guard was not deployed in 1868, and both the Republican party and freedmen suffered as a result. In this first in-depth examination of the Tennessee State Guard, Severance describes the militia's origins, personnel, activities, and accomplishments, and he places the history of the State Guard within the larger story of the hard-fought battle for Reconstruction in Tennessee. The result is a profile of an organization that became an important tool of political policy and a force that should have been used for a greater length of time during the period of Reconstruction.

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