

# **Black Men, Red Coats: The Carolina Corps, Race and Society in the Revolutionary British Atlantic**

By Gary Sellick

The Carolina Corps were both a product and driver of British military zeal during the Age of Revolution. Created in South Carolina in the final years of the American Revolutionary War, the unit was the only black fighting force that survived the conflict on the British side. Evacuated at the end of the conflict as free men, the Carolina Corps straddled the liminal boundaries of military–civil society in the highly racialized eighteenth century British Caribbean. Although former slaves, the men of the Corps were nonetheless crucial to the defense of the region. This gave the men opportunities and legal standing that was unattainable to most other blacks in the British West Indies. The Carolina Corps leveraged their position to ensure they achieved the greatest possible level of social advancement. In addition, these black troops helped to change the racial perceptions of many white commanders, laying the groundwork for the later expansion of black units within the British Caribbean.

This dissertation looks at the career of this revolutionary regiment, from its initial inception to its incorporation in the brand new West India Regiments in 1797. The study looks at the ways in which the Carolina Corps interacted with the diverse populations they encountered, and dealt with complex societal issues such as ethnicity and nationalism. It will also show how the unit was successful in using a unique set of temporal circumstances and their own understanding of their military worth to attain a unique, liminal situation in the British Caribbean. White attitudes and perceptions towards the soldiers will also be assessed. Overall, this dissertation will show how a relatively-unstudied group of 300 former slaves were critical to the evolution of the British military establishment in the West Indies during the final decades of the eighteenth-century.