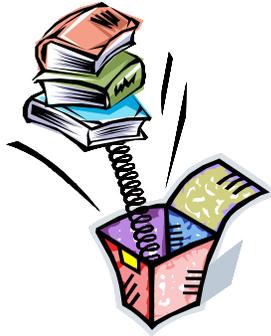




Whittier Public Library's

Book Club in a Box



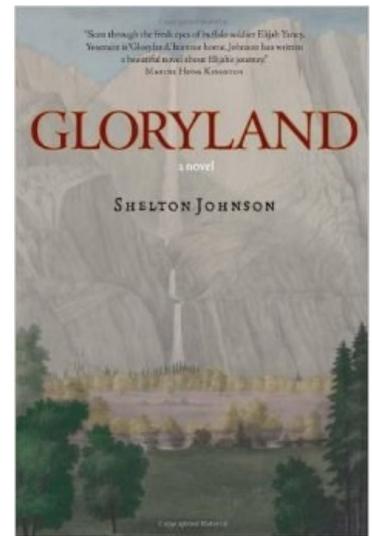
WHITTIER PUBLIC LIBRARY

GLORYLAND

Sponsored by the Friends of the Whittier Public Library

About the Book

Born on Emancipation Day, 1863, to a sharecropping family of black and Indian blood, Elijah Yancy never lived as a slave - but his self-image as a free person is at war with his surroundings: Spartanburg, South Carolina, in the Reconstructed South. Exiled for his own survival as a teenager, Elijah walks west to the Nebraska plains - and, like other rootless young African-American men of that era, joins up with the U.S. cavalry. The trajectory of Elijah's army career parallels the nation's imperial adventures in the late 19th century: subduing Native Americans in the West, quelling rebellion in the Philippines. Haunted by the terrors endured by black Americans and by his part in persecuting other people of color, Elijah is sustained only by visions, memories, prayers, and his questing spirit - which ultimately finds a home when his troop is posted to the newly created Yosemite National Park in 1903. Here, living with little beyond mountain light, running water, campfires, and stars, he becomes a man who owns himself completely, while knowing he's left pieces of himself scattered along his life's path like pebbles on a creek bed.



Contents	
About the Book	1
About the Author	1-2
Further Reading	2
Discussion Questions	3

About the Author



Shelton Johnson dreamed of mountains as a boy, living in inner city Detroit. He had never been to a mountain range in the United States and his only experiences with nature and wildlife came through television and movie screens.

Enrolled in an MFA program at the University of Michigan, Shelton applied to be a seasonal worker at Yellowstone, thinking the park would provide a quiet place to work on his writing. "I got off a bus in Gardiner, Montana," Shelton remembers, "right outside the north entrance....And as I

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

was stepping down onto the ground, there was a bison – a 2,000-pound animal – walking by. There was no one else around and the bison was just strolling by! I looked up at the driver and I said, 'Does this happen all the time?' And he looked at me and said, 'All the time.' And I said to myself, 'I have arrived.'"

Shelton has been working in national parks ever since, spending time in Yellowstone, [Great Basin](#), and as an interpreter at [Fort Dupont Park](#) in the Anacostia section of Washington, DC. There, he met students like himself and his friends who had grown up in Detroit – tough inner-city black kids whose understanding of nature was about as distant as Mars. "That's when I first made the resolution that I had to figure out how to connect these kids with nature, to get them to have a nature experience."

Shelton found his key for connecting with audiences after being transferred to [Yosemite](#). Deep in the archives of the park, he stumbled across a faded photo of buffalo soldiers who had patrolled Yosemite at the turn of the 20th century. Since 1998, Shelton has told the story of the Buffalo Soldiers in the national parks – [in print](#), on camera, and in person. He has traveled to public schools and spoken with kids throughout America. He has tracked down descendents of the soldiers, authored an award-winning website, and been lauded by civic groups and governments for his work. During evening programs and daytime ranger walks in

Yosemite, he tells the story through the dramatic portrayal of a character he's developed: Sergeant Elizy Boman.

All the while, Shelton has remained true to the reason he started this work. "I can't forget that little black kid in Detroit," he says. "And I can't not think of the other kids, just like me – in Detroit, Oakland, Watts, Anacostia – today. How do I get them here? How do I let them know about the buffalo soldier history, to let them know that we, too, have a place here? How do I make that bridge, and make it shorter and stronger? Every time I go to work and put the uniform on, I think about them."

<http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/people/nps/johnson/>

Further Reading

If you liked *Gloryland*, you might like:

American Patriots: the Story of Blacks in the Military from the

Revolution to Desert Storm by Gail Lumet Buckley

Buffalo Soldiers by Tom Willard

High Country by Nevada Barr

The National Parks: America's Best Idea by Dayton Duncan

You Have Seen Their Faces by Erskine Caldwell

Discussion Questions

1. Did the author seem to appear in some way in the book?
2. What are some of the book's themes? How important were they?
3. How are the book's images symbolically significant? Do the images help to develop the plot, or help to define characters?
4. How realistic was the characterization?
5. How does the setting figure into the book? Is the setting a character? Does it come to life? Did you feel you were experiencing the time and place in which the book was set?
6. Talk about your thoughts/ feelings regarding this phrase (pg. 180)
"A colored man running in the wild and no one chasing him. Just running for the joy of running and breathing and seeing and hearing and feeling..."
7. How do you feel experiencing nature? Do you feel a sense of freedom such as the author does?
8. Did the story read more like poetry? If so did you enjoy reading the novel in this form?
9. Even though the book is fictional in nature what is included in the novel that rings true to US history?
10. Elijah learns about himself in the novel and what it means to be free-what does freedom mean to you?