



## Beat the Drum for Justice

**Christopher C. Cross**

Denizen Publishing

(622pp)

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*In the sensitive historical novel Beat the Drum for Justice, a humane man fights against slavery and racial discrimination.*

Focused on complex relationships between white and Black people and Southern and Northern families in a nation on the verge of profound change, Christopher C. Cross's vibrant historical novel *Beat the Drum for Justice* covers the intense cultural and political shifts in the United States during the late 1800s.

Born into an abolitionist family as the son of a reverend, Gabe works alongside his parents to provide refuge for runaway slaves in Ohio. Knowledgeable about the depravity of slavery and the work of John Brown, he clashes with pro-slavery Missourians too. Later, Gabe proves himself as a soldier for the Union Army, surrounded by people including Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. And still later, he becomes aware of the Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow-era restrictions. In addition to witnessing great historical moments, his sweeping saga includes elements of romance and fights for justice.

The novel is edifying as it covers a period of fifty years in Gabe's life. Though it moves with speed, Gabe's narration remains consistent, marked by his reigning compassion and the thought-provoking questions he asks regarding himself and the world. His soul aches as he muses through topics like slavery versus how the world should be, holding up tolerance and love as his primary values. He also goes through turbulent times and faces tragedies while working in the name of justice, resulting in suspense that propels the novel forward. Sacrifices are made in the face of horrific events, but instances of empowerment arise too.

The prose is clear, and it includes details that help to flesh out the nineteenth-century Midwest, down to the furniture in people's households. The Underground Railroad and the battles that Gabe partakes in are also described in thorough terms. The dialogue is less natural, though, as with a discussion of differing court cases:

*[The Civil Rights Act of 1875] goes a long way to help the Negroes by overriding Dred Scott and affording Negroes citizenship and equal protection of the laws, but the Milligan case will make it harder for the Bureau to enforce it... [W]e can't try a civil or criminal complaint brought by a Black man against a white man if a state has a judicial system in place.*

Further, the differences between the voices of white and Black Americans are too stark at times, falling into stereotypes that undermine the book's message of equality.

Still, *Beat the Drum for Justice* is a sensitive historical novel in which a humane man fights against slavery and the racial discrimination that continued after its abolition.

JENNIFER MAVEETY (December 3, 2024)

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