

Honor 123 Years Late

On Sept. 22, 1997, the United States Army commissioned West Point Military Academy's first black cadet – 123 years after expelling him.

James Webster Smith, a former slave, entered West Point in 1870. For the next four years, he was harassed for the color of his skin. White students refused to talk to him. He was forced to eat by himself, and others poured slop on him.

Twice he was court-martialed. He had to repeat a year. Finally, the academy expelled him after his junior year for failing an exam.

Smith died of tuberculosis at age 26. Seemingly, that was the sad, final note for a life scarred by injustice.



This illustration shows James W. Smith addressing the military court during his court martial in January 1871.

But 123 years later, the Army endeavored to some degree to right its wrong. Because he had no known descendants, the commissioning certificate and gold second lieutenant's bars of James Webster Smith were presented to South Carolina State University. In the end, a courageous man finally received his due.

In this world, people who deserve honor may temporarily receive dishonor. But it is only temporary. Eventually, such people will be vindicated. Honor will come.

Sometimes, the honor that is deserved comes in this world, but that honor always comes to believers in the Kingdom of God.

And the honor that comes from God is what really matters.

– Beecher Hunter