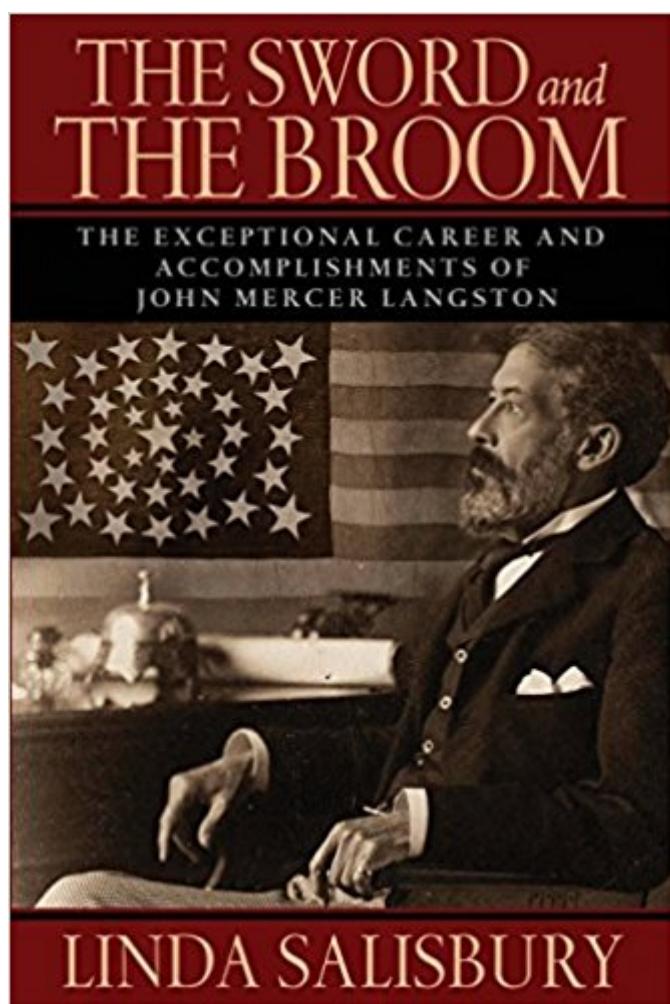


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# The Sword And The Broom: The Exceptional Career And Accomplishments Of John Mercer Langston



## **Synopsis**

Linda Salisbury's retelling of John Mercer Langston's autobiography From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capital brings to life to this almost forgotten African-American statesman. Despite discrimination and blatant racism before and after the Civil War, Langston's achievements are many in the field of education, as an attorney, as an elected official before he had the right to vote, as inspector general of the Freedmen's Bureau, as founder of Howard University's law school and its dean and later acting president. He received two degrees from Oberlin College, was an abolitionist, and was the first president of Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in Petersburg, Virginia (now Virginia State University). He was a contemporary and rival of Frederick Douglass, and finally was seated in the disputed election of 1888 as the first black congressman from Virginia. Salisbury has added photos and images to her book, as well as additional details to provide historical context.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Linda Salisbury is the author of 18 books, including the 11-book Bailey Fish Adventure series; Mudd Saves the Earth; Mother's: a novel of hoarding friending and mischief; and But You Don't Look Funny. She retired from a career in journalism with the Sarasota Herald-Tribune and lives in Virginia.

John Mercer Langston, the black leader of the Civil War era, is presented by Linda Salisbury, in this biography with an accessible style of writing which is especially appealing for the youthful reader. Langston accomplished many significant firsts for black Americans in the 68 years he lived,

half before and half after, the Civil War Years. He was the first black state attorney general, the first black US Congressman for Virginia, founder and dean of the Howard University School of Law, a US Ambassador, and holder of many other major positions. The author, Linda Salisbury, offers introductions which explain how this leader came to interest her through a shared Oberlin College connection, shows a clear time line for Langston's life, and discusses his family which extends down to the poet Langston Hughes. This biography lends itself particularly well to further research. Readers will be quickly tempted to look on the internet to learn more about historical events referred to. The book ends with an extensive resource list in which Salisbury describes the nature and content of the material covered. This unusual feature makes the list seem especially relevant and approachable.

Very interesting read. For someone who accomplished so much in his lifetime, I was surprised that he is not better known.

As an Oberlin grad (classmate of author), history buff, and writer, I had a slight familiarity with the name John Mercer Langston (1829-1897). Oberlin named a dorm after him, I'd read about the Wellington rescue in *The Town That Started the Civil War* by Nat Brandt, and I knew he was a forbear of Langston Hughes. But I had no idea what a fascinating character Langston is, as a brilliant, pre-Civil War biracial student of theology and law, rival of Frederick Douglass, reconstruction era Congressman from Virginia, and later ambassador to Haiti. More amazing to me is that I taught English at Howard University in DC for 5 years but never heard that Langston founded the Law School. The book is a very easy read with many illustrations and a list of sources but no footnotes that distract. This book is an important addition to understanding a period of history and race relations that reverberates to the present.

Linda Salisbury, in her narrative of John Mercer Langston's life, coaxes us to a rich understand of the challenges facing a black man in post-Civil War times. It is not only a scholarly work, filled with notes and archival pictures, but also a very readable account. As a teacher of middle school, I feel this book is suitable, and, indeed I would highly recommend it for ages 12 and above. It is surely a piece of history most of us have not learned in school. As such it is also an eye-opening account for the adult reader. John Mercer Langston's life is an inspiration to all. With his education from Oberlin College, he had the knowledge, but also the persistence to break many barriers. He was the first black attorney in the state of Ohio, as well as

the first black man accepted to practice law before the Supreme Court. After a bitter election of 1888, he was also the first black Congressman from Virginia, the state he left with his brothers when he was orphaned at four years old. A stunning and eye-opening book for all Americans!

This is a great piece of history that is both informative and easy to read. Although I have been familiar with Louisa county Virginia for half a century this book introduced me to a piece of local history I had never known. It also introduced me to a very intelligent and accomplished man, that I had never known before. The author did a good job of presenting his life and accomplishments in a chronological and understandable way. A great book for anyone interested in the history of slavery and civil rights in our society.

As a Virginia native, I love the Commonwealth's history and people. Langston's story tells his accomplishments dealing with racism and discrimination and championing rights for all under the Constitution. Labeled Black, his father was a white plantation owner and his mother was a slave. An inspirational story for all ages, even though it is written for young adults.

Linda Salisbury, researched and wrote an excellent biography John Mercer Langston. History became alive under her skillful crafting, demonstrating the trials of an educated black free man during the time of the American revolution. A great read for all Americans.

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