

Black Soldiers, Military Laborers, and Refugees



Resistance toward Black enlistment

- Many African Americans wanted to enlist but were turned away
 - History of Black military service in Revolution and War of 1812
 - But a 1792 law in fact barred them from serving in the militia
- Belief that African Americans would not fight was widespread, and not just among Confederates
 - January 1865, Confederate politician Howell Cobb:
 - *"Use all the negroes you can get, for all the purposes for which you need them, but don't arm them. The day you make soldiers of them is the beginning of the end of the revolution. If slaves will make good soldiers our whole theory of slavery is wrong but they won't make soldiers. As a class they are wanting in every qualification of a soldier."*
 - Even Lincoln initially feared that, if African Americans were armed, the weapons would quickly end up in the hands of enemies

1st Kansas Colored Infantry

- By late summer of 1862, some African Americans were forming their own units
- Began recruiting as a state unit in August 1862
 - Fought against Missouri guerilla bands
- Lead recruiter Sen. James Henry Lane
 - Prominent anti-slavery politician since the 1850s
 - Veteran of “Bloody Kansas” conflicts
 - Lane predicted: *“the effect of marching an army on the soil of any slave State will be to instill into the slaves a determined purpose to free themselves; and...will crush out everything that stands in the way of acquiring that freedom”*
 - Believed there would be *“a colored army marching out of the slave States while the army of freedom was marching in.”*

Capt. William Matthews

- Black businessman; active with the Underground Railroad
- Recruited formerly enslaved men for company of the 1st Kansas Infantry
 - *“Now is our time to strike. Our own exertions and our own muscle must make us men. If we fight we shall be respected. I see that a well-licked man respects the one who thrashes him.”*
- Oct. 1862: Skirmish at Island Mound (Missouri): First time a regt. of Black troops fought in the Civil War



Formation of Colored Regiment s

- Only gets underway in earnest in mid-1863
- May 1863: Government established the Bureau of Colored Troops
- Key Black leaders urged enlistment on the grounds that it would lead to citizenship rights
 - Frederick Douglass: *“Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.”*



COME AND JOIN US BROTHERS.

PUBLISHED BY THE SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE FOR RECRUITING COLORED REGIMENTS

1210 CHESTNUT ST. PHILADELPHIA.

MEN OF COLOR TO ARMS! TO ARMS! NOW OR NEVER

This is our golden moment! The Government of the United States calls for every Able-bodied Colored Man to enter the Army for the

Three Years' Service!

And join in Fighting the Battles of Liberty and the Union. A new era is open to us. For generations we have suffered under the horrors of slavery, outrage and wrong; our manhood has been denied, our citizenship blotted out, our souls seared and burned, our spirits cowed and crushed, and the hopes of the future of our race involved in doubt and darkness. But now our relations to the white race are changed. Now, therefore, is our most precious moment. Let us rush to arms!

FAIL NOW, & OUR RACE IS DOOMED.

Strike the soil of our birth. We must now awake, arise, or be forever fallen. We value Liberty. If we wish to be free in this land, if we love our country, if we love our families, our children, our home, we must strike now while the country calls; we must rise up in the dignity of our manhood, and show by our own right arms that we are worthy to be freemen. Our enemies have made the country believe that we are recreant cowards, without soul, without manhood, without the spirit of soldiers. Shall we die with this stigma resting upon our graves? Shall we leave this inheritance of Shame to our Children? No! a thousand times NO! We WILL Rise! The alternative is upon us. Let us rather strike the blow, and let the world know that we are men, and that we are willing to stand by our country, to defend it, to protect it, to defend people that cannot fight may be pitied, but cannot be respected. If we would be regarded men, if we would forever silence the tongue of Calumny, of Prejudice and Hate, let us Rise Now and Fly to Arms! We have seen what Valor and Heroism our Brothers displayed at Port Hudson and Milliken's Bend, though they are just from the galling, poisoning grasp of Slavery, they have startled the World by the most exalted heroism. If they have proved themselves heroes, cannot WE PROVE OURSELVES MEN?

ARE FREEMEN LESS BRAVE THAN SLAVES

More than a million White Men have left comfortable homes and joined the armies of the Union to save their Country. Cannot we leave ours, and swell the hosts of the Union, to save our liberties, vindicate our manhood, and deserve well of our Country. MEN OF COLOR! the Englishman, the Irishman, the Frenchman, the American, has been called to assert their claims to freedom and a manly character, by an appeal to the sword. The day that has seen an enslaved race in arms has seen the world scared. We call upon this land, and all the world over, to rally to our standard. We call upon the English, the Irishmen, White Americans and other Races, we can show it now. Men of Color, Brothers and Fathers, we appeal to you, by all your concern for yourselves and subterfuge, to do nothing that will deter you from rallying for the Army. Come Forward, and at once Enroll your Names for the Three Years' Service. Strike now, and you are henceforth and forever Free men.

E. D. Bussett,	Rev. J. Underdue,	P. J. Armstrong,	Rev. J. C. Gibbs,	Elijah J. Davis,
William D. Forten,	John W. Price,	J. W. Simpson,	Daniel George,	John P. Burr,
Frederick Douglass,	Augustus Dorsey,	Rev. J. B. Trusty,	Robert M. Adger,	Robert Jones,
Wm. Whipper,	Rev. Stephen Smith,	S. Morgan Smith,	Henry M. Cropper,	O. V. Catto,
D. D. Turner,	N. W. Depee,	William E. Gipson,	Rev. J. B. Reeve,	Thos. J. Dorsey,
Jas. McCrummell,	Dr. J. H. Wilson,	Rev. J. Boulden,	Rev. J. A. Williams,	I. D. Chir,
A. S. Cassey,	J. W. Cassey,	Rev. J. Asher,	Rev. A. L. Stanford,	Jacob C. White,
A. M. Green,	James Needham,	Rev. Elisha Weaver,	Thomas J. Bowers,	Morris Hall,
J. W. Page,	Ebenezer Black,	David B. Bowser,	J. C. White, Jr.,	J. P. Johnson,
L. R. Seymour,	James R. Gordon,	Henry Minton,	Rev. J. P. Campbell,	Franklin Turner,
Rev. William T. Catto,	Samuel Stewart,	Daniel Colley,	Rev. W. J. Alston,	Jesse E. Glasgow.

*A Meeting in furtherance of the above named object will be held

And will be Addressed by

U. S. Steam-Power Book and Job Printing Establishment, Ledger Buildings, Third and Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia.



THE ESCAPED SLAVE IN THE UNION ARMY.—[SEE PAGE 422.]

“The Escaped Slave in the
Union Army,”
Harper’s Weekly,
July 2, 1864

USCT

- In the end, roughly 186,000 black men served (10% of the Union Army) in 166 segregated regiments called the U.S. Colored Troops (USCT)
- Where did they come from?
 - 93,000 from Confederate states
 - 40,000 from border slave states
 - 53,000 from free states or Canada
- Very diverse lot
 - Illiterate freedmen
 - Well-educated freedmen from cities like Boston, Philadelphia
- Another 19,000 served in the Navy

Discrimination in the military

- Prevented from serving as commissioned officers
- Often commanded by racist officers
- Often the last to get needed supplies
- Unequal pay
 - 54th Mass. refused pay ***for a year***
 - July 1864: Congress finally passed an equal pay law
- Disciplined more harshly
 - **21%** of soldiers executed were black
 - **80%** of those who were executed for mutiny were black
- Often kept from combat; put in labor battalions

High morbidity rates from disease

- Around 18% (twice as high as white)
- But *lower* morbidity rate for battlefield deaths/injuries
 - 4% of white Union soldiers died in battle
 - 1.5% of Black soldiers
- Medical care for Black soldiers poor
- Not enough doctors
- Still, conditions were even worse for blacks in contraband camps
 - Army allowed for regular rations, pay, and rudimentary medical care

Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom*

- Questions purely celebratory accounts of Emancipation
 - Focuses on medical consequences: many did not survive to enjoy fruits of freedom
 - “Greatest biological catastrophe of the 19th century”
 - Massive dislocation and exposure results in widespread disease
 - Out of four million freed people, a quarter became sick or died
 - Severe smallpox epidemic: Killed a minimum of 60k
 - Emphasizes how Emancipation was bound up with concerns about access to labor
 - Medical Division of the Freedman’s Bureau
 - Separating the “able-bodied” from the rest

Downs, cont.

- Started project after noticing many references to sick and suffering slaves in the writings of middle-class Northerners
 - Especially Black women, who went to assist the freedmen
 - Harriet Jacobs
- Why are these deaths not counted as war deaths?
- Why is the emphasis ‘wartime sacrifice’ always on soldiers?
- Who is a casualty of war?

Coerced enlistment

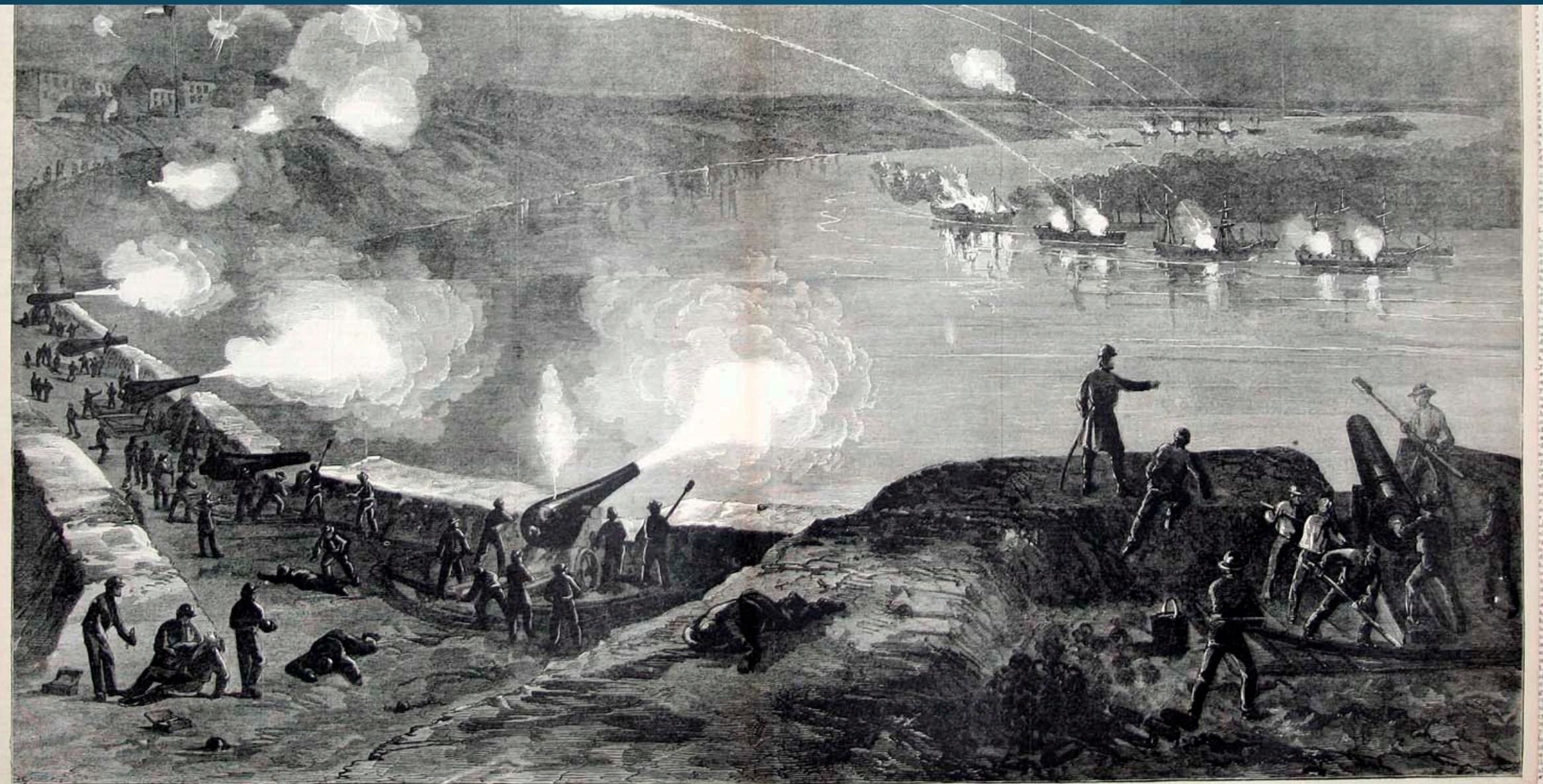
- New scholarship on African American visions of freedom
 - Some resisted defining citizenship via military service
- After July 1864, states could seek to fill their enlistment quotas by sending agents to sign up newly freed African Americans
 - Led to exploitative practices
 - One Treasury Department employee denounced the whole system, stating, *“I can conceive nothing worse on the coast of Africa.”*
 - Claimed that freedmen were “*hunted like wild beasts, dragged from their families*” and given only a fraction of the bounties promised
 - A Massachusetts officer decried the “*traffic of New England towns in the bodies of wretched negroes, bidding against each other for these miserable beings who are deluded, and if some affidavits that I have in my office are true, tortured into service.*”

Port Hudson, Louisiana (May 1863)

- While Grant was trying to take Vicksburg, Gen. Nathaniel Banks was ordered to take Port Hudson
- Initial attack failed, but Black troops showed great courage and suffered many casualties
 - Capt. Robert F. Wilkinson wrote, *“One thing I am glad to say, that is that the black troops at P. Hudson fought & acted superbly. The theory of negro inefficiency is, I am very thankful at last thoroughly Exploded by facts. We shall shortly have a splendid army of thousands of them.”*
- Convinced others to assign Black troops to combat roles
- Changed many white Unionists' attitudes
- Union troops were often first to express altered views

Port Hudson

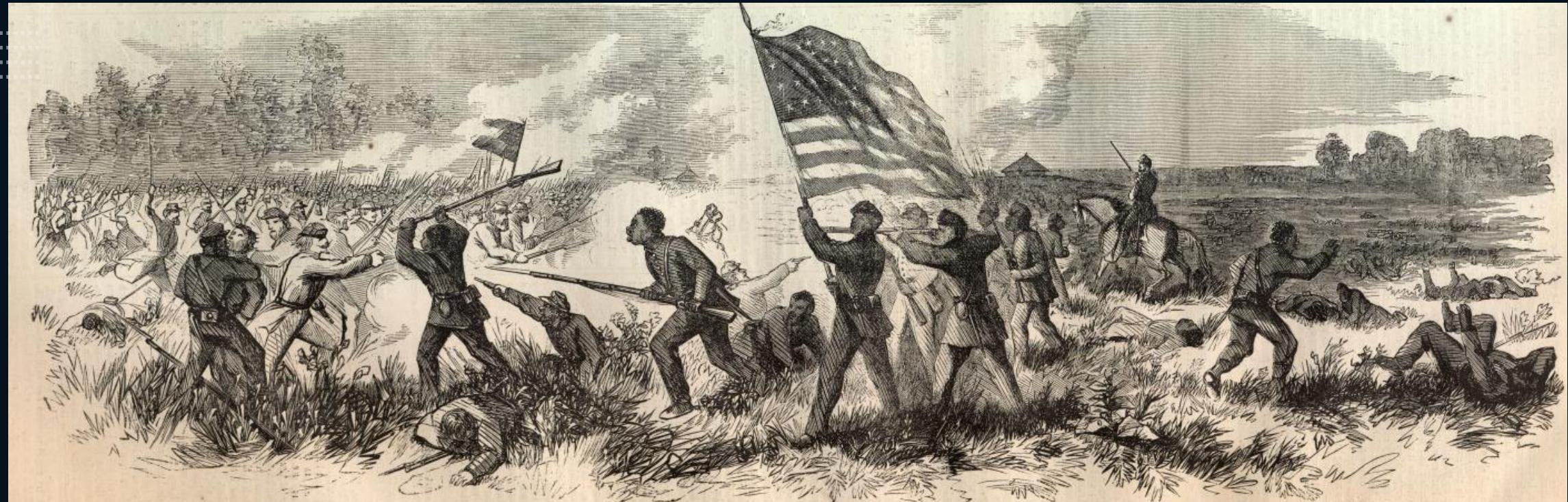




BOMBARDMENT OF PORT HUDSON BY ADMIRAL FARRAGUT'S FLEET, MARCH 14-15, 1863.—SKETCHED BY MR. HAMILTON.—[SEE PAGE 264.]

Battle of Milliken's Bend (June 1863)

- Largely untrained regiment of Black troops held off a bayonet attack by a larger Confederate force
- Hand-to-hand combat
- Stayed in the field even as the white soldiers retreated



Fort Wagner in SC (July 1863)

- Most famous Civil War battle involving USCT
- Movie *Glory* ends with this battle scene
- 54th Mass. Colored Infantry
 - Led by Robert Gould Shaw, from abolitionist family
- Sent to storm the ramparts
 - Essentially a suicide mission
- Something like 120 casualties (killed, wounded, and missing) out of 600 men
 - Shaw was killed

54th
Massachusetts
Colored Infantry,
Fort Wagner, SC
Currier and Ives
Lithograph,
1863



Monument in Boston Commons, 1897



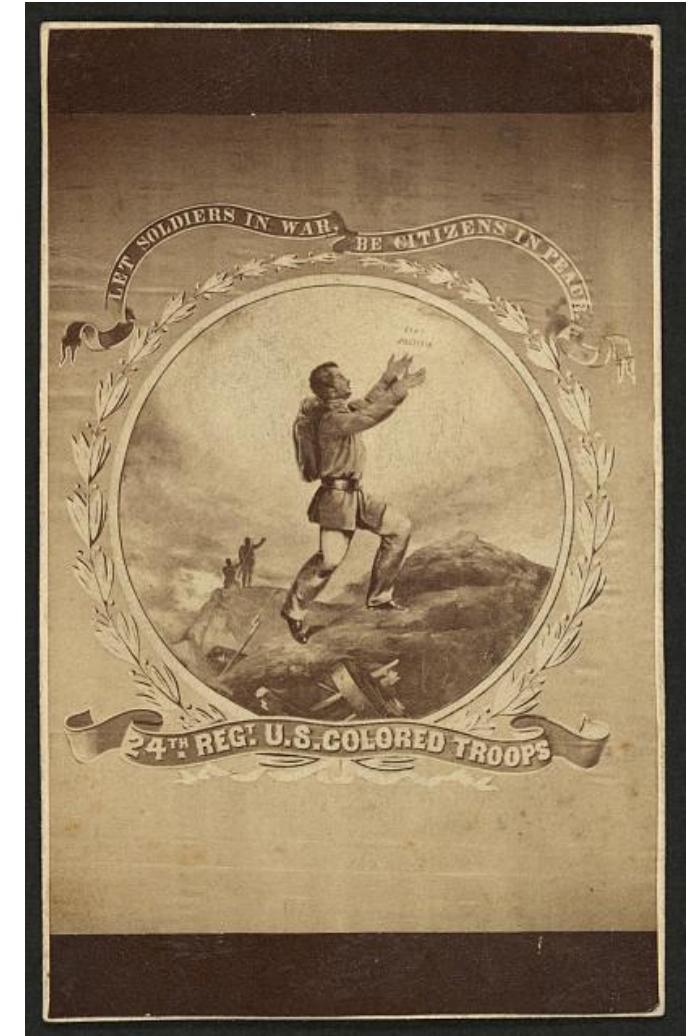
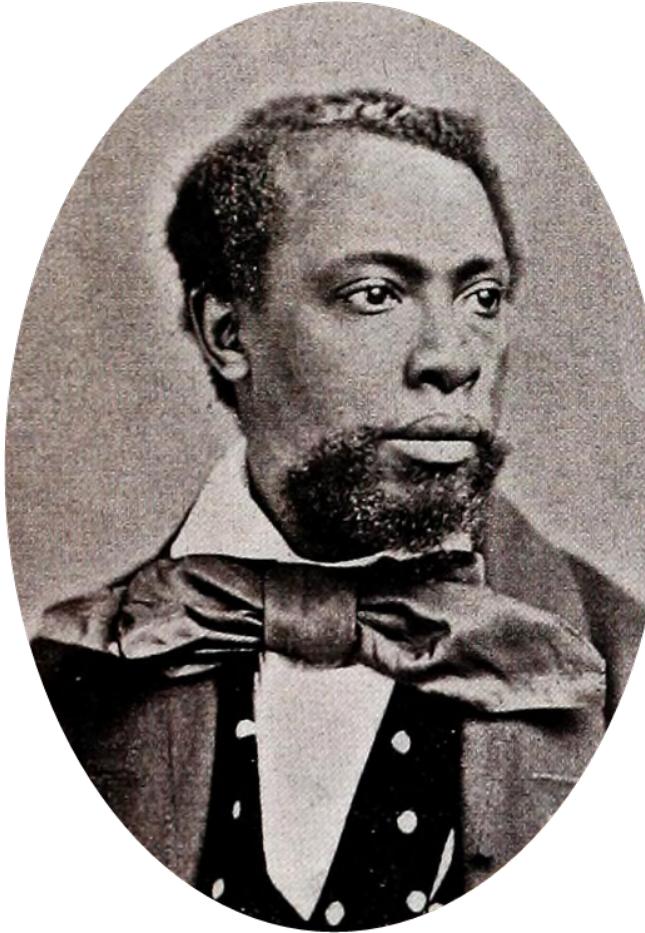
Meaning of military service

- Fighting two wars
 - Against the South
 - Against discrimination in the Union army
 - Stakes much higher for them personally
 - Confederates often refused to take Black prisoners
 - Killed them or enslaved them
 - Fort Pillow Massacre (April 1864)
 - Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest; later leader of the KKK
 - Out of 295 whites, 168 taken prisoner
 - Out of 262 blacks, only 68 taken prisoner
 - “Remember Fort Pillow” became a rallying cry

Harper's Weekly, “The Massacre at Fort Pillow”



Carte de visite of the
24th UCST battle flag
designed by African
American artist David
Bustill Bowser, “Let
Soldiers in War, Be
Citizens in Peace”



127th UCST
“We Will
Prove
Ourselves
Men”





-
- 22nd USCT Inf. Regt.

Meaning of military service, cont.

- Opportunities to travel; meet new people
- Education
 - In camp much of the time
 - Created schools; formed various societies
 - Well-educated and illiterate African Americans spent time together
 - Former taught the latter
 - Contact with newly emancipated African Americans expanded northerners' sense of racial identification
- Manhood
 - Military service as the quintessential means of demonstrating manhood and fitness for citizenship

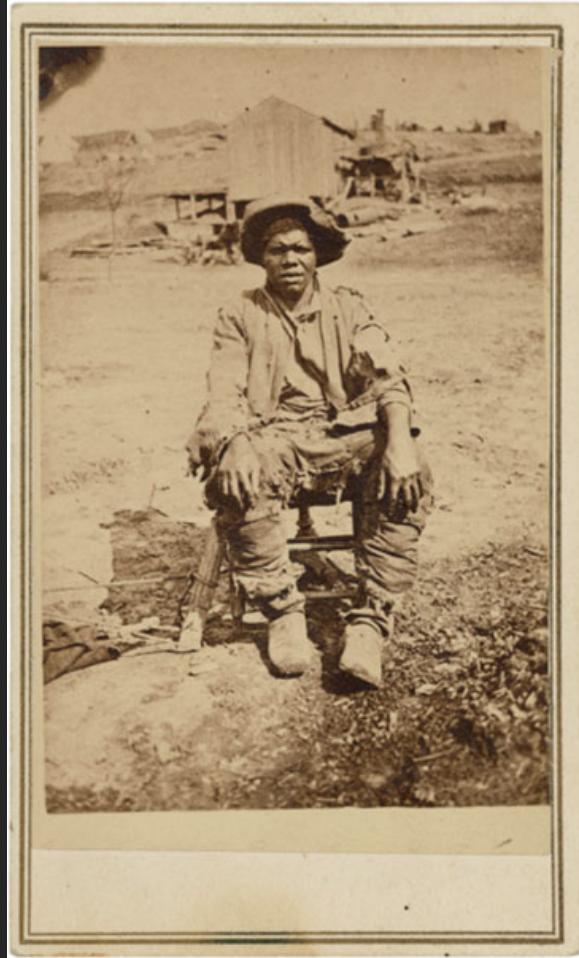


Contraband Jackson
Servant in Confederate Army.



Drummer Jackson
79th U.S.C.T.

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- “Contraband Jackson”
 - “Drummer Jackson”



Private Hubbard Pryor
before and after
enlistment in the 44th U.S.
Colored Infantry, October
10, 1864



Harriet Jacobs

- Escaped slavery; fled from North Carolina to the North
- Active in abolitionist movement
- Wrote *Incidents in the Life a Slave Girl* under pen name Linda Brent
- Went to DC area to work in refugee camps in 1862
- “Life among the Contraband” appeared in *The Liberator*
- Documented both massive suffering/illness/death and moments of joy – family reunification