

# Before Emancipation

Fighting to Join

# Have We a War Policy?

Editorial, *Weekly Anglo-African*

April 27, 1861

The only method yet proposed is to raise volunteer companies, and to offer them to the General Government. A word or two upon this point is sufficient. No Governor would allow colored soldiers to muster into service, and if he did, the General Government would reject such aid. It is the evident intention of the Republicans and the North generally, to make this a white man's war. It cannot be done, because, though a dark-skinned man may not now be recognized by the powers that be, yet the fact remains, and will always assert itself, that it is for and against slavery, and that alone. But in view of the evident determination to disregard colored men as personalities, is it wise for them to put themselves in a position to have fresh contumely poured upon them? Therefore, our opinion is against the policy indicated by the movements in this city, Boston, and elsewhere, to organize volunteer companies, to be offered to the Government.

But we have a very positive duty, from which a palpable policy would naturally follow. Our duty, we again repeat, is to aid in making the slave free. Our policy will be dictated by our object. It certainly is not to fight *for* the Government. Let us, however, organize for military purposes, drill efficiently, procure arms, and hold ourselves as Minute Men, to respond when the slave calls. This

This we say, for the benefit of the large majority who desire to aid effectually their brethren in bonds. For those who do not or cannot take up arms, there is work to do. For the large population who are looking to emigration as a means of amelioration, no better opportunity will present itself, to very actively aid in the work of hastening the jubilee of freedom.

The Cotton States will of a certainty be closely blockaded—Cotton will be King no longer. Yet the mills of England will need a supply. Her immense capital will be freely used to create such a supply. Inviting fields of labor are at our very doors—Hayti, the West Indies, Central America, all ask labor at our hands. Those who will not or cannot give back bullets to the South, can from Hayti overwhelm her with cotton bales.

The *Weekly Anglo-African* published this editorial barely two weeks after the First Battle of Fort Sumter. The editor demonstrated that African Americans already understood slavery was the core cause of the Civil War. He wrote that even white "liars and drivellers know... that it is slavery alone which has cast a thunder cloud of civil war." Furthermore, the war represented a rare opportunity for change through violence: "out of this strife will come freedom."

Free blacks saw themselves as responsible for fighting on behalf of the slaves who had no voice—"the dumb and bound Black Samson." The editor reminded readers that they have no duty towards the federal government outside of helping slaves. Even if African Americans wanted to support the Union, they were not optimistic about the chances of being allowed to fight. Black leaders recognized that the North wanted "to make this a white man's war," despite the war being "for and against slavery, and that alone." The author also worried that blacks in the army would simply be vulnerable "to have fresh contumely poured upon them."

The author proposed alternative approaches to preparing for the call of slaves independent of the government. The first was to prepare militarily, to be ready as a fighting force, if the Union caved to the South's demands. The second suggestion focused on limiting the South's access to international recognition: "Those who will not or cannot give back bullets to the South, can from Hayti overwhelm her with cotton bales."

# Colored Americans and the War

George Lawrence Jr., *Pine and Palm*

May 25, 1861

Therefore, that we tender our services to the Governor of this State, to serve during the war, either as firemen, during the absence of those firemen who may enlist for the war—to act as a Home Guard, or to go South, if their services should be required. In view of the latter contingencies, they call upon the Governor to furnish them with arms, and a place to drill in. Mr. H. H. Hunter, on a motion for the adoption of the report, took the floor, and in a well-written address, which showed much meditation, earnestly opposed the adoption of the report; and Mr. Wright, in a speech which gave evidence of ability, also opposed it. These gentlemen, who are quite young, found a powerful ally in Prof. W. J. Wilson. As this gentleman's arguments were of a peculiar character, we feel that we might do him much injustice if we did not notice them, particularly as he had assisted them in drawing up the report. He first stated that he approved the action of the meetings previously held in the city of New York, and elsewhere; but inasmuch as the offers of those patriotic black men had been refused, he did not think that we should offer ourselves to be kicked and insulted, as others had been. On mature reflection, he had come

The President. The proposal to go South at this time, implies a willingness to be led in battle by such men as Gen. Butler, of Massachusetts, and Lieut. Slemmer, of Fort Pickens; the first of whom has offered the services of the Massachusetts troops to suppress an insurrection in Maryland, and the latter, having already returned many poor slaves, who, through incredible hardships, had reached his stronghold, will doubtless return to their masters, those 39 men who are now laboring at the U. S. defensive works around Fort Pickens.

Gentlemen, are you willing to trust the cause of liberty, and your own precious bodies, in the hands of such men as these? The Government knows that it can have our services for the asking, at any time; do you not think that we had better wait until the time of need has come? For we well know that time will bring forth such leaders as we can trust; men, who will not only be true to us, but will be true to Liberty and the Union

George Lawrence Jr., owner of the *Pine and Palm*, outlined the proceedings of a meeting amongst abolitionist leaders. At the meeting, one Mr. Taylor proposed that blacks offer their services to the government in a variety of capacities: "as firemen, during the absence of those firemen who may enlist... to act as a Home Guard, or to go South, if their services should be required."

Although most black leaders were eager to join the cause and fight against the Confederacy, the government's repeated repudiations alienated many African Americans. Another attendee argued that other black men had made similar offers and been rudely rejected. Since "the whites knew that [they] were willing to fight... there was no need of laying [themselves] liable to insult." Others argued still that pride should be pushed aside for the greater cause of liberty, but to no avail, as the majority shot down the proposal.

As expressed by the *Weekly Anglo-African* editor as well, abolitionists worried about the maltreatment of black soldiers if they were accepted into service. Lawrence specifically criticized the white leadership, including such "men as Gen. Butler of Massachusetts." Despite the contraband policy, Butler and other military men had lost the trust of black leaders by suppressing slave insurrections and returning runaways to their masters. Black leaders therefore preferred waiting for "such leaders as we can trust" than risking the loss of their liberty and lives. They believed that with time, the Northern government would see the power and necessity of enlisting black forces.

# Let Us Drill!

Editorial, *Weekly Anglo-African*  
October 5, 1861

It is pride rather than prejudice which shuts colored men from the military ranks. The white men of the North believe themselves able to whip and subjugate the white men of the South. With numbers, money, arms and provisions in their favor, they look upon it as a confession of weakness if they call black men to their aid. We must not forget that this privilege to fight in their ranks is almost the only one which they now refuse us. By giving passports to black men the present Administration admits our citizenship: by employing us in the Custom House in this city in clerical positions, this Administration is in advance of any of its predecessors. Two steps in advance is quite as much as we can reasonably expect from a Cabinet composed of men all of them born in slaveholding States and brought up in slaveholding times. Our expectation of all rights should not shut our eyes to the admission of some rights.

We can see the coming necessity for black soldiers and officers. Within the first hundred miles that they march due South from Washington, the commanders of our armies will see it also. They will have a hundred thousand slaves to control, and will not have white men enough to spare for the controlling of them. The question as to what

In either event, whether the Federal Government by emancipation shall conquer the South, or whether the Federal Government by withholding emancipation shall be conquered by the South and forced to submit to secession—in either event there will be a great and pressing need for colored men well drilled in military tactics, and accustomed to military organization.

Almost half a year after the war began, another editorial from the *Weekly Anglo-African* argued that the North would soon need black troops, and free men should begin to prepare. The editor recognized the significance of the Northern embarrassment that DuBois would criticize many years later—the resistance to reliance on black strength. He wrote, “It is pride rather than prejudice which shuts colored men from the military ranks. The white men of the North believe themselves able to whip and subjugate the white men of the South... they look upon it as a confession of weakness if they call black men to their aid.” The author claimed the matter was merely of “pride” and not “prejudice” because the same government that refused black soldiers permitted other civil liberties. They went so far as to give “passports to black men” and hire them “in the Custom House.”

Soon, however, the author believed black officers would be needed. The large numbers of former slaves running to Union lines created a new need for management. This chain of causation illustrates how the independent actions of ex-slaves, accepted as contraband, pushed the government’s hand regarding black soldiers. On the other hand, the author worried that the government would resolve the issue of contraband through colonization. This “wicked proposition,” said to be “hardly less infamous than the ferocious purpose of some slaveholders,” would continue to cause concern and debate.

Black leaders like Frederick Douglass realized early on that emancipation and slave manpower were critical for the Union’s victory. The editor wrote, “whether the Federal Government by emancipation shall conquer the South, or whether the Federal Government by withholding emancipation shall be conquered by the South... there will be a great and pressing need for colored men well drilled.” Military concerns aside, he emphasized the psychological benefits of using training to move away from the mindset of the oppressed. The author argued that African Americans had “hitherto been simply acting on the defensive—the prey of individual or class... Such drill will add to our carriage and demeanor... the firm self-confident, self-reliant tread of the soldier-citizen.” Drilling therefore became not only a physical task, but also an emotional exercise.

# After Emancipation

Joining to Fight

# Letter from H. Ford Douglas

Hezekiah Ford Douglas, *Douglass'*

*Monthly*

February 1863

The slaves are free! How can I write these precious words? And yet it is so unless twenty millions of people cradled in christianity and civilization for a thousand years commit the foulest perjury that ever blackened the pages of history. In anticipation of this result I enlisted six Months ago in order to be better prepared to play my part in the great drama of the Negroe's redemption. I wanted its drill, its practical details for mere theory does not make a good soldier. I have learned something of war for I have seen war in its brightest as well as its bloodiest phase and yet I have nothing to regret. For since the stern necessities of this struggle have laid bare the naked issue of freedom on one side and slavery on the other—freedom shall have in the future of this conflict if necessary my blood as it has had in the past my earnest and best words. It seems to me that you can have no good reason for withholding from the government your hearty co-operation. This war will educate Mr Lincoln out of his idea of

the deportation of the Negro quite as fast as it has some of his other pro slavery ideas with respect to employing them as soldiers.

regulates itself. And so this question of the colonization of the negro it will be settled by laws over which war has no control. Now is the time for you to finish the crowning work o' your life. Go to work at once and raise a Regiment and offer your services to the government and I am confident they will be accepted. They say we will not fight. I want to see it tried on. You are the one to me of all others, to demonstrate this fact.

Hezekiah Ford Douglas, the author of this letter to Frederick Douglass, was a mulatto abolitionist. Because he believed slavery was the sole cause of discrimination between African Americans and whites, Douglas was pessimistic about the possibility of equality in America and supported emigration. Once the war began, however, Douglas saw an opportunity to overturn slavery for good. He joined as a soldier and eventually became the only black man to raise and command a company.

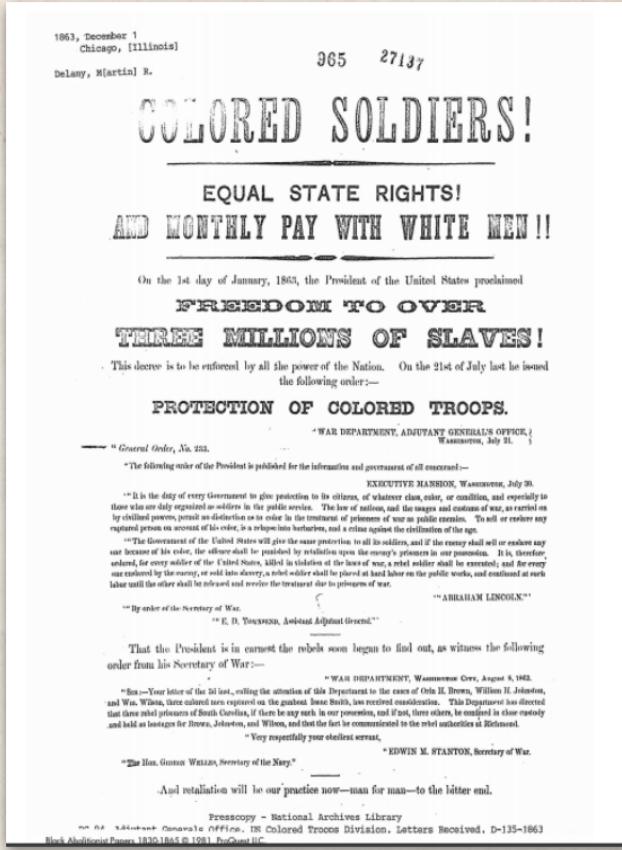
Douglas's letter, sent immediately following the final Emancipation Proclamation, speaks to the primary motivation for blacks to join the army: the hope to fight for freedom, for liberty, for the slaves. He wrote, "The slaves are free! How can I write these precious words?... I enlisted six Months ago in order to be better prepared to play my part in the great drama of the Negroe's redemption... I have nothing to regret. For since the stern necessities of this struggle have laid bare the naked issue of freedom on one side and slavery on the other." He and other black soldiers were willing to lay down their lives for this cause.

Douglas called for Douglass to participate in the war directly by recruiting soldiers and offering his services to the government. He hoped to disprove claims that blacks would not fight, and to "educate Mr. Lincoln out of his idea of the deportation of the Negro." Douglas understood the significance of turning former slaves into soldiers. From a utilitarian perspective, they would provide much-needed force; from a symbolic perspective, they would be performing the roles of citizens.

Douglas had high hopes for reparations to former slaves. He argued that whites must make up for "the dehumanizing character of slave institutions of America" through "the patient toil and self denial of this proud and haughty race. They must now pay back to the negro in Spiritual culture in opportunities for self improvement what they have taken from him for two hundred years." Such payback would not play out within his lifetime, and may still be lacking today.

# Colored Soldiers!

Martin Robinson Delany  
December 1, 1863



Martin R. Delany was a prominent black leader during the Civil War in both military and activist spheres. He held a career as a physician, worked with Frederick Douglass on the North Star, and joined the Union army as a recruiter near the beginning of the Civil War. He eventually earned a promotion to the rank of major in recognition of his successes.

Delany's poster demonstrates the selling points that he believed to be important to black soldiers. He emphasized first that black soldiers were to be equal to white soldiers, which held both practical and psychological meaning. Furthermore, he reminded African Americans of emancipation to show that the Union was their ally.

There is a focus on the "protection of colored troops," pointing out that all soldiers are valued equally by the government. The poster publicizes a story in which "three rebel prisoners" are held hostage, meant to be of similar value, to "three colored men." This was a particularly relevant concern to black troops because of the harsh treatment by Confederates against blacks who opposed them.

The final appeal is the importance and privilege of black leadership. As Lawrence expressed in "Colored Americans and the War," Delany stated that black agents were better able to recruit black soldiers, strengthening his own position and influence. He wrote, "the contract for raising the troops has been given to a Colored Man; and Connecticut is the first State... which has been thus liberal and considerate. This fact alone should be an inducement for COLORED MEN to rally to her standard." Instituting African Americans as leaders not only increased the trust of new troops, but also established a precedent for social mobility.

# Letter to Edwin M. Stanton

Martin Robinson Delany  
December 15, 1863

*raising in each regt. I to command all of the effective.*  
We are, able, sir, to command all of the effective, Black men as Agents in the United States, and in the event of an order from your Department giving us the authority to recruit colored Troops in any of the Southern or Seceded states, we will be ready and able to raise a Regiment, or Brigade if required, in a shorter time than can be otherwise effected.

With the belief sir, that this is one of the measures in which the claims of the Black Man may be officially recognized, without seemingly infringing upon those of other citizens, I confidently ask sir, that this humble request, may engage your early notice.

All satisfactory references will be given by both of us.

I have the honor to be sir,

Your most obt. & very humble Servt.

*M. R. Delany*

*No. Mo. Vagaries, Secy.*

Continuing his recruiting efforts, Delany wrote to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and requested to expand his work to the South. Just as in recruiting posters, he leveraged his race, stating that “the Agency of intelligent competent black men adapted to the work must be the most effective means of attaining Black Troops; because knowing and being of that people as a race, they can command such influences as is required to accomplish the object.” Delany thus argued that he would be more efficient than others. Notably, the targeted areas of said recruiting were “any of the Southeast or seceded states,” as the flow of ex-slaves to the Union army increased over the course of the war.

Delany was careful to advertise his qualifications and racial advantage while maintaining humility. He wrote “that this is one of the measures in which the claims of the Black Man may be officially recognized, without seeming to infringe upon those of other citizens.” While he does not explicitly compare between races, Delany avoided sounding cocky or implying his superiority over white men. At the same time, his use of “other citizens” reminded the reader that he too was American.

# To the Free Colored Men of Charleston

Martin R. Delany  
April 28, 1865

CHARLESTON, S. C., April 28, 1865.

*To the Free Colored Men of Charleston:*

The free colored men in this city, between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, are hereby earnestly called upon to come forward to join the

**CHARLESTON REGIMENT,**

now to be organized. It is the duty of every colored man to vindicate his manhood by becoming a soldier, and with his own stout arm to battle for the emancipation of his race. I urge you by every hope that is dear to humanity, by every free inspiration which a sense of liberty has kindled in your hearts, to be soldiers, until the freedom of your race is secured. The prospect of your future destiny should be enough to call every man to the ranks. But in addition, you are to have the

**PAY, RATIONS, AND CLOTHING,**

our other soldiers receive.

Let a full Regiment of the Colored Freedmen of Charleston be under arms, to protect the heritage which has been promised to your race in this department.

*Pay of Artillery, Infantry, and Cavalry Soldiers.*

Grade.	Pay per month.	Pay per year.
Sergeant Major of Cavalry, Artillery, and Infantry,	\$26	\$312
Quartermaster Sergeant, Cavalry, Artillery, and Infantry,	22	264
Commissionary Sergeant,	22	264
Orderly Sergeant,	24	288
Sergeants,	20	240
Corporals,	18	216
Privates,	16	192
Musicians,	16	192
Principal musicians,	22	264

In addition to the pay as above stated, one ration per day and an abundant supply of good clothing are allowed to each soldier. Quarters, fuel, and medical attendance are always provided by the government, without deduction from the soldier's pay. If a soldier should become disabled in the line of his duties, the laws provide for him a pension; or he may, if he prefers it, obtain admission into the "Soldier's Home," which will afford him a comfortable home so long as he may wish to receive its benefits. It is the intention to make this an excelsior regiment. All desired information given at Recruiting Office, No. 64 St. Philip Street, corner Calhoun.

M. R. DELANY,

*Major 104th United States Colored Troops.*

By April of 1865, Delany had extended recruiting even to Charleston, South Carolina. Southern attempts to force slaves into the military had catalyzed his promotion in February 1865, and he was still drafting former slaves by the end of the war. He continued fighting for black rights after the war as part of the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina.

In contrast to the 1863 poster, this pamphlet focuses more on ideology and less on protection. He wrote, "It is the duty of every colored man to vindicate his manhood by becoming a soldier, and with his own stout arm to battle for the emancipation of his race... The prospect of your future destiny should be enough to call every man to the ranks." Delany highlights the fact that all blacks share a fate, and therefore a duty, when it came to obtaining freedom.

Delany's poster also advertised equal pay for black soldiers and a comfortable life after the war. "If a soldier should become disabled in the line of his duties," it stated, "the laws provide for him a pension; or he may... obtain admission into the 'Soldier's Home.'" In spite of such promises, other soldiers' accounts speak to unequal compensation and discriminatory treatment. Black soldiers were needed by the Union to win the war, but their contributions were quickly forgotten after.

