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ABSTRACT

This lesson focuses on the black soldiers of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Students use primary source materials from the National Archives for classroom research. Students analyze featured documents, engage in creative writing, present oral reports and conduct further research on the topic of the black Civil War experience. The lesson is designed to be cross-curricular and help the classroom teacher with history, government, and language arts instruction. A brief essay for historical background is included along with numerous examples of archival material and suggestions for classroom use. (EH)

Teaching with Documents

ED 460 911

The Fight for Equal Rights: Black Soldiers in the Civil War

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Lesson Plan

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SO 029 481



TEACHING WITH DOCUMENTS

The Fight for Equal Rights: Black Soldiers in the Civil War

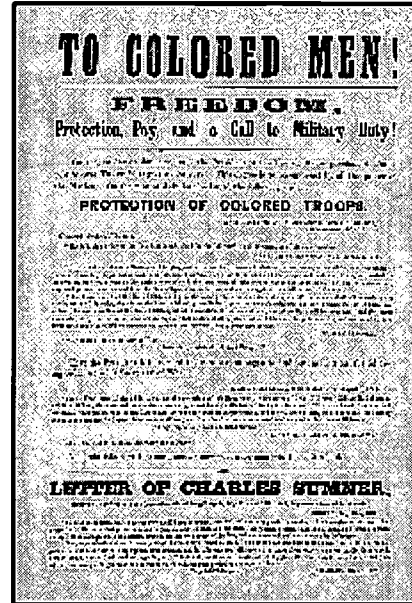
This lesson correlates to the National History Standards.

Era 5-Civil War and Reconstruction (1850 - 1877)

- **Standard 2A**-Demonstrate understanding of how the resources of the Union and the Confederacy affected the course of the war.

This lesson correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

- **Standard II.B.1**-Explain how a history of slavery distinguishes American society from other societies.
- **Standard II.D.3**-Evaluate, take, and defend positions on what the fundamental values and principles of American political life are and their importance to the maintenance of constitutional democracy.



Cross-curricular Connections

Share this exercise with your history, government, and language arts colleagues.

Historical Background

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.

—Frederick Douglass

The issues of emancipation and military service were intertwined from the onset of the Civil War. News from Fort Sumter set off a rush by free black men to enlist in U.S. military units. They were turned away, however, because a Federal law dating from 1792 barred Negroes from bearing arms for the U.S. army (although they had served in the American Revolution and in the War of 1812). In Boston disappointed would-be volunteers met and passed a resolution requesting that the Government modify its laws to permit their enlistment.

The Lincoln administration wrestled with the idea of authorizing the recruitment of black troops, concerned that such a move would prompt the border states to secede. When Gen. John C. Frémont (photo citation: 111-B-3756) in Missouri and Gen. David Hunter (photo citation: 111-B-3580) in South Carolina issued proclamations that emancipated slaves in

their military regions and permitted them to enlist, their superiors sternly revoked their orders. By mid-1862, however, the escalating number of former slaves (contrabands), the declining number of white volunteers, and the increasingly pressing personnel needs of the Union Army pushed the Government into reconsidering the ban.

As a result, on July 17, 1862, Congress passed the Second Confiscation and Militia Act, freeing slaves who had masters in the Confederate Army. Two days later, slavery was abolished in the territories of the United States, and on July 22 President Lincoln (photo citation: 111-B-2323) presented the preliminary draft of the Emancipation Proclamation to his Cabinet. After the Union Army turned back Lee's first invasion of the North at Antietam, MD, and the Emancipation Proclamation was subsequently announced, black recruitment was pursued in earnest. Volunteers from South Carolina, Tennessee, and Massachusetts filled the first authorized black regiments. Recruitment was slow until black leaders such as Frederick Douglass (photo citation: 200-FL-22) encouraged black men to become soldiers to ensure eventual full citizenship. (Two of Douglass's own sons contributed to the war effort.) Volunteers began to respond, and in May 1863 the Government established the Bureau of Colored Troops to manage the burgeoning numbers of black soldiers.

By the end of the Civil War, roughly 179,000 black men (10% of the Union Army) served as soldiers in the U.S. Army and another 19,000 served in the Navy. Nearly 40,000 black soldiers died over the course of the war—30,000 of infection or disease. Black soldiers served in artillery and infantry and performed all noncombat support functions that sustain an army, as well. Black carpenters, chaplains, cooks, guards, laborers, nurses, scouts, spies, steamboat pilots, surgeons, and teamsters also contributed to the war cause. There were nearly 80 black commissioned officers. Black women, who could not formally join the Army, nonetheless served as nurses, spies, and scouts, the most famous being Harriet Tubman (photo citation: 200-HN-PIO-1), who scouted for the 2d South Carolina Volunteers.

Because of prejudice against them, black units were not used in combat as extensively as they might have been. Nevertheless, the soldiers served with distinction in a number of battles. Black infantrymen fought gallantly at Milliken's Bend, LA; Port Hudson, LA; Petersburg, VA; and Nashville, TN. The July 1863 assault on Fort Wagner, SC, in which the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers lost two-thirds of their officers and half of their troops, was memorably dramatized in the film *Glory*. By war's end, 16 black soldiers had been awarded the Medal of Honor for their valor.

In addition to the perils of war faced by all Civil War soldiers, black soldiers faced additional problems stemming from racial prejudice. Racial discrimination was prevalent even in the North, and discriminatory practices permeated the U.S. military. Segregated units were formed with black enlisted men and typically commanded by white officers and black noncommissioned officers. The 54th Massachusetts was commanded by Robert Shaw and the 1st South Carolina by Thomas Wentworth Higginson—both white. Black soldiers were initially paid \$10 per month from which \$3 was automatically deducted for clothing, resulting in a net pay of \$7. In contrast, white soldiers received \$13 per month from which no clothing allowance was drawn. In June 1864 Congress granted equal pay to the U.S. Colored Troops and made the action retroactive. Black soldiers received the same rations and supplies. In addition, they received comparable medical care.

The black troops, however, faced greater peril than white troops when captured by the Confederate Army. In 1863 the Confederate Congress threatened to punish severely officers of black troops and to enslave black soldiers. As a result, President Lincoln issued General Order 233, threatening reprisal on Confederate prisoners of war (POWs) for any mistreatment of black troops. Although the threat generally restrained the Confederates, black captives were typically treated more harshly than white captives. In perhaps the most heinous known example of abuse, Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest shot to death black Union soldiers captured at the Fort Pillow, TN, engagement of 1864.

The document featured with this article is a recruiting poster directed at black men during the Civil War. It refers to efforts by the Lincoln administration to provide equal pay for black soldiers and equal protection for black POWs. The original poster is located in the Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's–1917, Record Group 94.

Teaching Activities

Analyzing the Document

1. Make a copy of the featured document for students, and direct them to read the poster and answer the following questions:

- a. Who do you think is the intended audience for the poster?
- b. What does the Government hope the audience will do?
- c. What references to pay do you find in this document?
- d. What references to treatment of prisoners of war do you find in this document?
- e. What evidence of discrimination during the Civil War do you find in this document?
- f. What evidence of Government efforts to improve conditions for black soldiers do you find in this document?
- g. What purpose(s) of the Government is/are served by this poster?
- h. How is the design of this poster different from contemporary military recruitment posters?

After the students have completed the assignment, review it and answer any questions they might raise. Then discuss more generally the contribution and status of black soldiers in the Civil War. Ask students to read the additional documents provided with this article to encourage further discussion.

Creative Writing Activities

2. Share with students the information in the introductory note; then assign them to draw on information from the note and the document to write one of the following:

- a journal entry of a member of the U.S. Colored Troops
- a letter from a U.S. Colored Troops soldier to a son who wants to enlist
- an account of the role of black soldiers for either an abolitionist or Confederate newspaper
- an interior monologue of the wife of a soldier in the U.S. Colored Troops reflecting on the circumstances of her family during his absence.

Oral Reports

3. President Harry S. Truman's Executive Order 9981, issued in 1948, marked the transition of the black military experience from a period of segregated troops to one of integrated forces. The order provided for "equal treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services" and commanded the desegregation of the military "as rapidly as possible."

Divide the class into six groups: Civil War, Indian wars, World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam, and Persian Gulf War. Assign each group the task of locating information about black troops engaged in these conflicts and presenting the information they discover in an oral report. Encourage imaginative presentations. Students should collect information about pay, equipment, service assignments, promotion potential, treatment of black prisoners of war, and the relation of combat service to the struggle for equal rights in each instance. Each group should attempt to locate statistical information about the numbers of black soldiers in arms for their assigned conflict and the numbers of black casualties, decorations, and commissioned officers. Outstanding individual or unit contributions in engagements should be described as well.

For Further Research

4. Select one of the following activities as a followup:

- a. Arrange with the school or public library to set up a reserved reading shelf for your students on the topic of the black Civil War experience.

b. Assign students to read a copy of Robert Lowell's poem "Colonel Shaw and the Massachusetts' 54th," alternately titled, "For the Union Dead." (The poem can be located in the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*.) Ask students to consider the following questions:

- Why does Lowell say "their monument sticks like a fishbone in the city's throat"?
- Why do you think Shaw's father wanted no monument "except the ditch, where his son's body was thrown"?
- What is Lowell's attitude toward the "stone statues of the abstract Union Soldier"?
- Lowell altered the inscription on the Shaw Memorial that reads "Omnia Reliquit Servare Rem Publicam" ("He leaves all behind to serve the Republic") to his epigraph "Relinquent Omnia Servare Rem Publicam" ("They give up everything to serve the Republic"). How is the inscription typical of attitudes in 1897, when the memorial was dedicated? How is the epigraph, written in 1960, different, and what does that say about Lowell's attitude toward these soldiers?

The Web site of the National Gallery of Art provides valuable information about the Shaw memorial.

c. Ask for volunteers to watch the film *Glory*, a fictional account of the 54th Massachusetts, then the American Experience documentary, *The 54th Colored Infantry*. (If that tape is not available, you might use the segments on black units in Ken Burns's series *Civil War*.) Students should then review *Glory* for historical accuracy.

For More Information

Many of the documents included in this project were selected by the project manager of the National Archives and Records Administration's Civil War Conservation Corps (CWCC). You can read more about this volunteer project in an article that originally appeared in the summer 1997 issue of *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration*.

The photographs included in this project are available through the National Archives Information Locator (NAIL) database. NAIL is a searchable database that contains information about a wide variety of NARA holdings across the country. You can use NAIL to search record descriptions by keywords or topics and retrieve digital copies of selected textual documents, photographs, maps, and sound recordings related to the Civil War and thousands of other topics.

TO COLORED MEN!

FREEDOM, Protection, Pay, and a Call to Military Duty!

On the 1st day of January, 1863, the President of the United States proclaimed Freedom to over THREE MILLIONS OF SLAVES. This decree is to be enforced by all the power of the Nation. On the 21st of July last he issued the following order:

PROTECTION OF COLORED TROOPS.

WAR DEPARTMENT, ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, July 21.

General Order, No. 233.

The following order of the President is published for the information and government of all concerned:—

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, July 20.

"It is the duty of every Government to give protection to its citizens, of whatever class, color, or condition, and especially to those who are duly organized as soldiers in the public service. The law of nations, and the usages and customs of war, as carried on by civilized powers, permit no distinction as to color in the treatment of prisoners of war as public enemies. To sell or enslave any captured person on account of his color, is a relapse into barbarism, and a crime against the civilization of the age.

"The Government of the United States will give the same protection to all its soldiers, and if the enemy shall sell or enslave any one because of his color, the offense shall be punished by retaliation upon the enemy's prisoners in our possession. It is, therefore, ordered, for every soldier of the United States, killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved by the enemy, or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works, and continued at such labor until the other shall be released and receive the treatment due to prisoners of war.

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN."

"By order of the Secretary of War.

"E. D. TOWNSEND, Assistant Adjutant General."

That the President is in earnest the rebels soon began to find out, as witness the following order from his Secretary of War:

WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON CITY, August 8, 1863.

"Sir: Your letter of the 2d inst., calling the attention of this Department to the cases of Orin H. Johnston, William H. Johnston, and Wm. Wilson, three colored men captured on the gunboat Isaac Smith, has received consideration. This Department has directed that three rebel prisoners of South Carolina, if there be any such in our possession, and if not, three others, be confined in close custody and held as hostages for Brown, Johnston and Wilson, and that the fact be communicated to the rebel authorities at Richmond.

"Very respectfully your obedient servant,

"EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War.

"The Hon. Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy."

And retaliation will be our practice now—man for man—to the bitter end.

LETTER OF CHARLES SUMNER,

Written with reference to the Convention held at Foughkeepsie, July 15th and 16th, 1863, to promote Colored Enlistments.

BOSTON, July 13th, 1863.

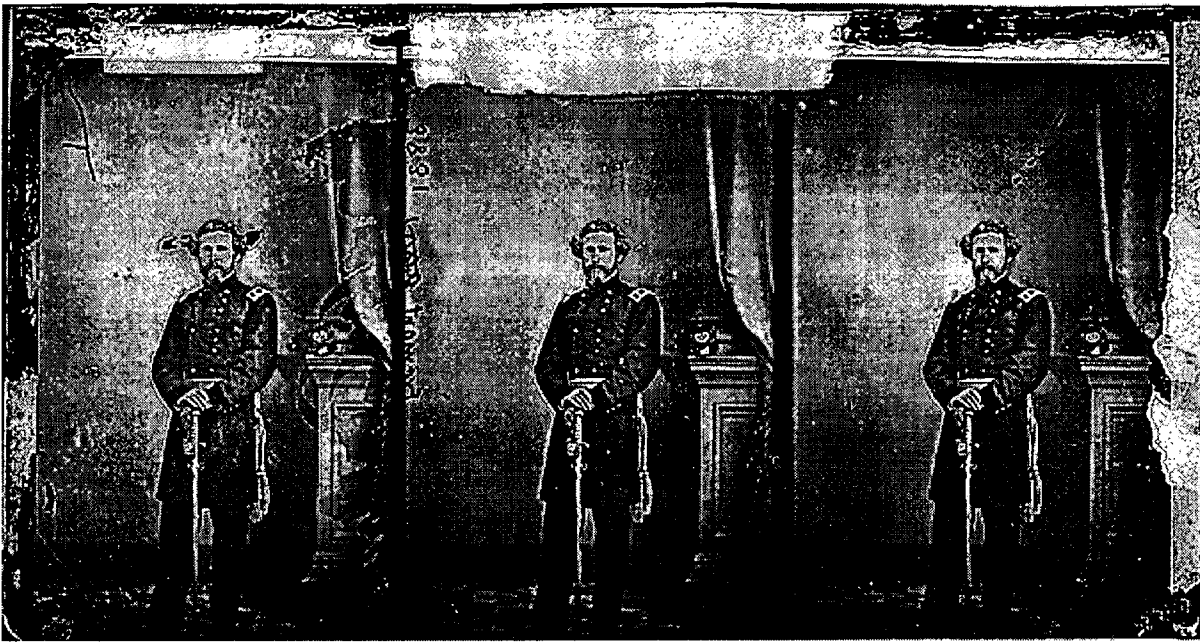
"I doubt if, in times past, our country could have expected from colored men any patriotic service. Such service is the return for protection. But now that protection has begun, the service should begin also. Nor should relative rights and duties be weighed with nicety. It is enough that our country, aroused at last to a sense of justice, seeks to enrol colored men among its defenders.

"If my counsels should reach each person, I would say: enlist at once. Now is the day and now is the hour. Help to overcome your cruel enemies now battling against your country, and in this way you will surely overcome those other enemies hardly less cruel, here at home, who will still seek to degrade you. This is not the time to hesitate or to hizzle. Do your duty to our country, and you will set an example of generous self-sacrifice which will conquer prejudice and open all hearts.

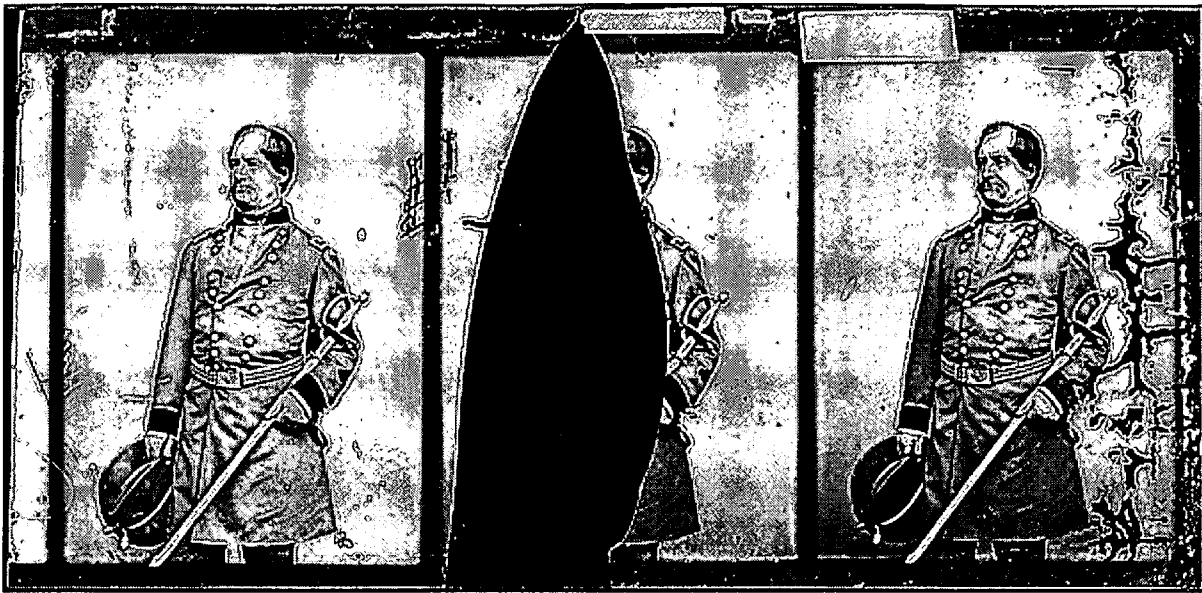
"Very faithfully yours,

"CHARLES SUMNER."

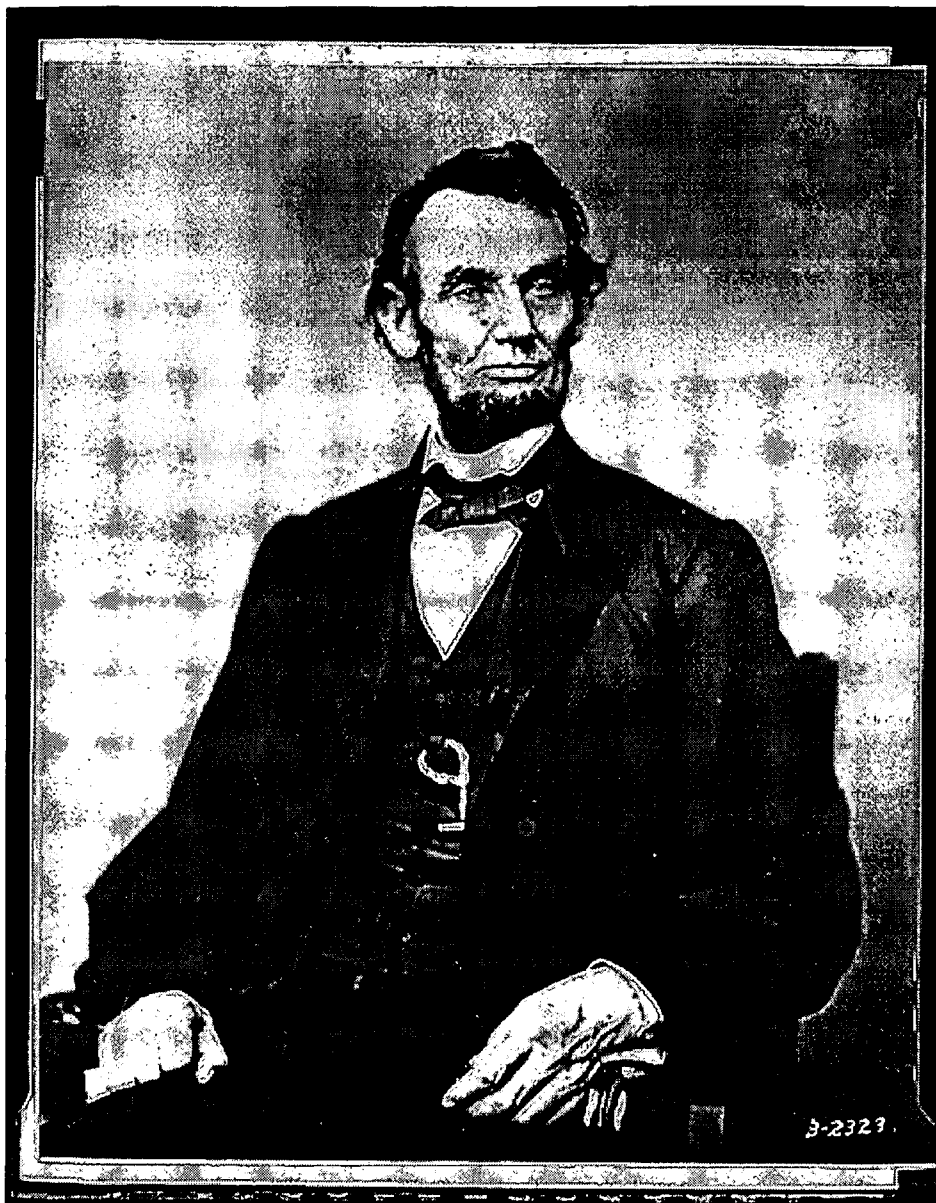
Recruiting Poster



General John C. Fremont



General David Hunter



President Abraham Lincoln



Featured Document

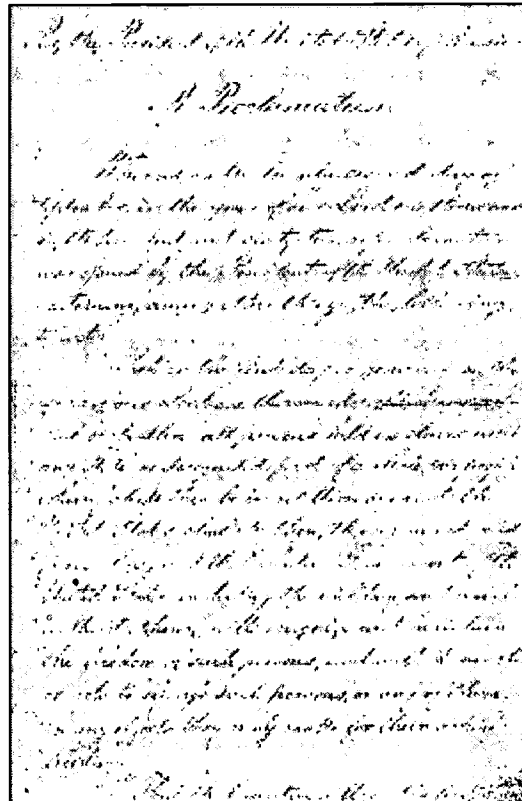
The Emancipation Proclamation

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, as the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free."

Despite this expansive wording, the Emancipation Proclamation was limited in many ways. It applied only to states that had seceded from the Union, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal border states. It also expressly exempted parts of the Confederacy that had already come under Northern control. Most important, the freedom it promised depended upon Union military victory.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not immediately free a single slave, it fundamentally transformed the character of the war. After January 1, 1863, every advance of federal troops expanded the domain of freedom. Moreover, the Proclamation announced the acceptance of black men into the Union Army and Navy, enabling the liberated to become liberators. By the end of the war, almost 200,000 black soldiers and sailors had fought for the Union and freedom.

From the first days of the Civil War, slaves had acted to secure their own liberty. The Emancipation Proclamation confirmed their insistence that the war for the Union must become a war for freedom. It added moral force to the Union cause and strengthened the Union both militarily and politically. As a milestone along the road to slavery's final destruction, the Emancipation Proclamation had assumed a place among the great documents of human freedom.



The original of the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, is in the National Archives in Washington, DC. It is written on two large sheets of paper, folded to make four leaves, or eight pages. The last three pages are blank. The document was originally tied with narrow red and blue ribbons, which were attached to the signature page by a wafered impression of the seal of the United States. Most of the ribbon remains; parts of the seal are still decipherable, but other parts have worn off.

The document was bound with other proclamations in a large volume preserved for many years by the Department of State. When it was prepared for binding, it was reinforced with strips along the center folds and then mounted on a still larger sheet of heavy paper. Written in red ink on the upper right-hand corner of this large sheet is the number of the Proclamation, 95, given to it by the Department of State long after it was signed. With other records, the volume containing the Emancipation Proclamation was transferred in 1936 from the Department of State to the National Archives of the United States.

The Emancipation Proclamation

January 1, 1863

A Transcription

By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation,

designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States."

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth[]), and which excepted parts, are for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of
January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight
hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the
United States of America the eighty-seventh.

By the President: ABRAHAM LINCOLN
WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.

By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to refuse such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom."

" of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate
" the States and parts of States, if any, in which the
" people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion
" against the United States, and the fact that any
" State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in
" good faith, represented in the Congress of the United
" States by members chosen therein at elections
" wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such
" State shall have participated, shall, in the absence
" of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed con-
" clusive evidence that such State, and the people
" thereof, are not then in rebellion against the
" United States."

Now, therefore, I, Abraham
Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue
of the power in me vested as Commander-in-
Chief, of the Army and Navy, of the United
States in time of actual armed rebellion against the
authority and government of the United States,
and as a fit and necessary war measure for sup-
pressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of
January, in the year of our Lord one thousand
eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance
with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed
for the full period of one hundred days, from this

Emancipation Proclamation - Page 2

day first above mentioned, order, and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James, Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans), Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkeley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Lancaster, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth, and which excepted parts are, for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued).

And by virtue of the power, and for the purposes aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive

government of the United States, including
the military and naval authorities thereof,
will recognize and maintain the freedom of said
persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so
declared to be free to abstain from all violence,
unless in necessary self-defence, and I recom-
mend to them that, in all cases where allowed,
they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known,
that such persons of suitable condition, will
be received into the armed service of the United
States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and
other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in
said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be
an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution,
upon military necessity, I invoke the consider-
ate judgment of mankind, and the gracious
favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set
my hand and caused the seal of the United
States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this first
day of January, in the year of our Lord

government of the United States, including
the military and naval authorities thereof,
will recognize and maintain the freedom of said
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In witness whereof, I have hereunto set
my hand and caused the seal of the United
States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this first
day of January, in the year of our Lord

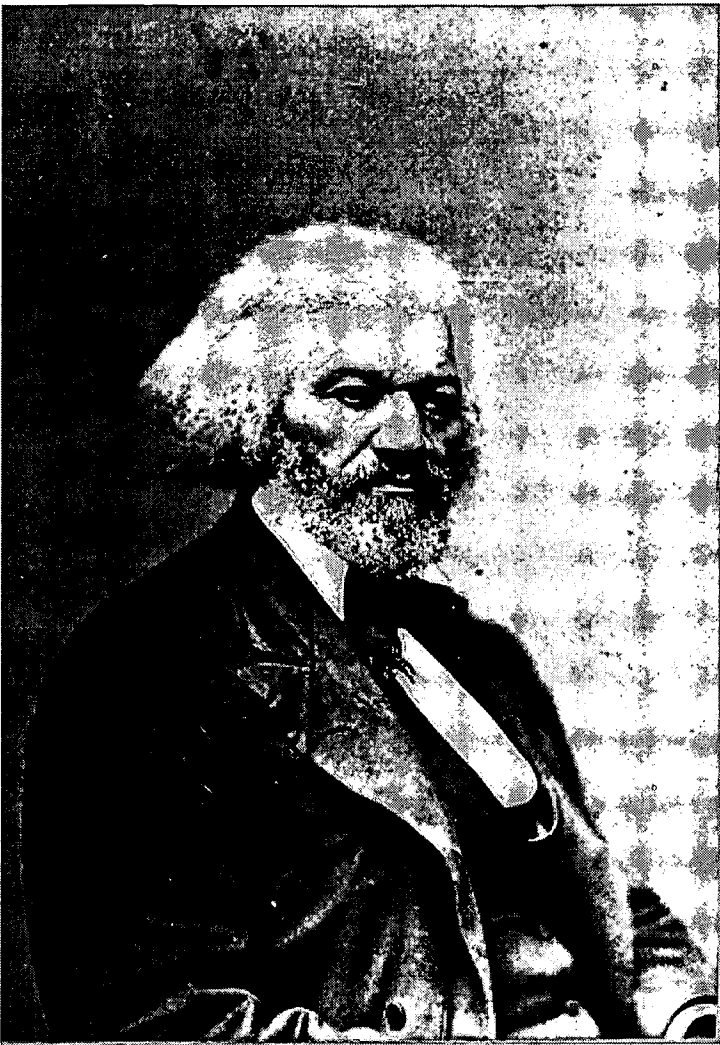


one thousand eight hundred
and sixty three, and of the
Independence of the United
States of America the eighty-
seventh

Abraham Lincoln

By the President:

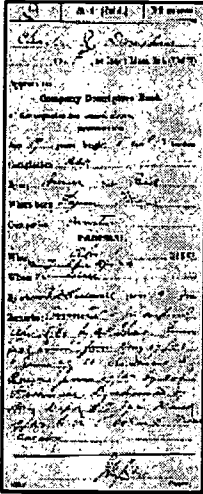
William H. Seward
Secretary of State



Frederick Douglass

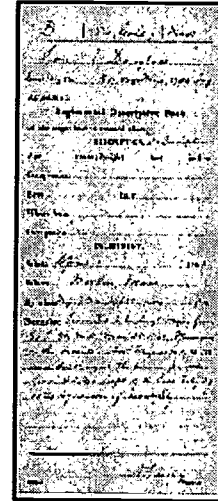


Frederick Douglass's Sons



Company Descriptive Book for Charles Douglass, 54th Massachusetts

Frederick Douglass's sons, Charles and Lewis, lived with him in Old Anacostia in Washington, DC, but traveled to Massachusetts to join the 54th Infantry in April 1863. According to his Company Descriptive Book, which is part of his compiled service record, Charles transferred to the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry to become its 1st sergeant. Lewis was the sergeant major of the 54th and was wounded in the assault on Fort Wagner, as is noted on his Regimental Descriptive Book.



Regimental Descriptive Book for Lewis Douglass, 54th Massachusetts

Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, RG 94, National Archives and Records Administration.

9	5-1 (Cont.)	Mass.
Charles J. Douglass		
Co. E, 54 Reg't Mass. Inf. (Col'd)		
Appears on		
Company Descriptive Book		
of the organization named above.		
DESCRIPTION.		
Age	17 years	Height 5 feet 11 inches
Complexion	Rus	
Eyes	Brown	
Where born	Green, Mass.	
Occupation	Printer	
ENLISTMENT.		
When	Apr 20, 1863	
Where	Greenhill	
By whom	J. P. Sullivan ; term 3 yrs.	
Remarks:	Promoted to be corporal Apr 25 in 54th Mass. Inf. for 1 month from May 1/63 to June 22 '63. Resigned at Green, Mass. 1/63 by capt. Sullivan. Discharged by Maj. Genl. S. C. Fairbanks Apr 20 '63 at Green, Mass. Sovain.	
J. P. Sullivan		

**Company Descriptive
Book for Charles Douglass
(Son of Frederick Douglass),
54th Massachusetts**

8 | 54, (son of) | Mass
 Lewis C. Douglass
 54th Regt Mass Col'd Inf
 Appears on
 Regimental Descriptive Book
 of the organization named above.
 DESCRIPTION. See Description
 Age years; height feet inches
 Complexion
 Eyes; hair
 Where born
 Occupation
 ENLISTMENT.
 When 1863
 Where Boston, Mass.
 By whom term y/ea
 Remarks: Promoted to be Lieut Major from
 Co. F. 54th M. G. Mar 25 1863. Wounded
 on the assault on Fort Wagner July 18 1863
 and thereafter the service was continued
 from the 1st Regt of the Col'd Inf July 29
 1864 by reason of disability

**Regimental Descriptive
 Book for Lewis Charles Douglass
 (Son of Frederick Douglass),
 54th Massachusetts**



Compiled Service Records

Compiled service records consist of both a jacket-envelope for each soldier, labeled with his name, rank, and unit, and several information cards. The compilation of service records of Union soldiers began in 1890 under the direction of Col. Fred C. Ainsworth, head of the Record and Pension Office of the Adjutant General's Office, Department of War. Information from muster rolls, regimental returns, descriptive books, and other records was copied verbatim onto cards. A separate card was prepared each time an individual name appeared on the document. Great care was taken through a separate operation of comparison, to ensure that the cards were accurate.

A typical jacket often contains card abstracts of entries found in original records relating to the soldier and original documents relating solely to that soldier. Examples of the latter include enlistment papers, substitute certificates, casualty sheets, death reports, prisoner-of-war memorandums, and correspondence. Unique to the records of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) are deeds of manumission, oaths of allegiance, proof of ownership, certificates of monetary award, and bills of sale. These items appear most frequently in units recruited in the border states of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland. These states remained in the Union but were slave states. Jackets and cards include a section labeled "bookmark," which was reserved for cross-references to other records relating to the individual or his unit. The service records are arranged by arm of service, thereunder numerically by regiment or independent battalion or company, and thereunder alphabetically by name with the records of enlisted men. If an individual served in more than one unit, which was typical for USCT officers, there will be a separate service record for each unit in which he served.

Service records of all USCT units are being filmed as part of an ongoing project. Some of these records are available in the microfilm publications listed below.

- M1801 contains the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers who served with the United States Colored Troops in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored).
- M1817 contains the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers who served with the United States Colored Troops in the 1st through 5th United States Colored Cavalry, 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored), and the 6th United States Colored Cavalry.
- M1819 contains the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers who served with the United States Colored Troops in the 1st United States Colored Infantry, 1st South Carolina Volunteers (Colored), Company A, 1st United States Colored Infantry (1 year).
- M1898 contains the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers who served with the United States Colored Troops in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (Colored).

Microfilm is available for research at the [National Archives Building in Washington, DC](#), at 13 of our regional records services facilities, and through our [Microfilm Rental Program](#) (please note that only selected titles are available for rental). In addition, many large libraries and genealogical societies have purchased all or some of the microfilm sets listed above.

The National Archives [Genealogy Page](#) offers more information on records related to the Civil War.



Harriet Tubman



"The Fifty-fourth did well and nobly. . . . They moved up as gallantly as any troops could, and with their enthusiasm they deserved a better fate."

--Edward L. Pierce, correspondent for the New York Tribune,
to Governor John A. Andrew, July 22, 1863

In the Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, President Lincoln announced that black men would be accepted into the U.S. Army and Navy. Of the estimated 2 million people who fought on the Union side, some 180,000 black soldiers and sailors fought for the Union and for freedom during the Civil War.

The 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment was one of the most celebrated regiments of black soldiers that fought in the Civil War. Known simply as "the 54th," this regiment became famous after the heroic, but ill-fated, assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina. Leading the direct assault under heavy fire, the 54th suffered enormous casualties before being forced to withdraw. The courage and sacrifice of the 54th helped to dispel doubt within the Union Army about the fighting ability of black soldiers and earned this regiment undying battlefield glory. The 1989 film *Glory* tells the story of the 54th.

*List of the Names of the Enlisted men of the
54th Regiment Mass. Inf.
Missing after the assault on Ft Wagner July 18th 1863*

<i>No</i>	<i>Names</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Names</i>	<i>Rank</i>
1	<i>Richard Boston</i>	<i>Sergeant</i>	57	<i>Charles Bode</i>	<i>Private</i>
2	<i>Willie Barber</i>	<i>Private</i>	58	<i>William H. Bode</i>	<i>Private</i>
3	<i>Willie Abbott</i>	<i>Private</i>	59	<i>James P. Bode</i>	<i>Private</i>
4	<i>James M. Allen</i>	<i>Private</i>	60	<i>Charles B. Bode</i>	<i>Private</i>
5	<i>Henry F. Broughardt</i>	<i>Private</i>	61	<i>John Brown</i>	<i>Private</i>
6	<i>George W. Spivean</i>	<i>Private</i>	62	<i>William F. Brown</i>	<i>Private</i>
7	<i>John W. Ellis</i>	<i>Private</i>	63	<i>William Anderson</i>	<i>Private</i>
8	<i>John F. Ford</i>	<i>Private</i>	64	<i>William A. Jeffries</i>	<i>Sergeant</i>
9	<i>Edwards Hines</i>	<i>Private</i>	65	<i>William Williams</i>	<i>Private</i>
10	<i>Samuel H. Hines</i>	<i>Private</i>	66	<i>James Caldwell</i>	<i>Private</i>
11	<i>Franklin H. Hines</i>	<i>Private</i>	67	<i>James A. Williams</i>	<i>Private</i>
12	<i>Franklin H. Hines</i>	<i>Private</i>	68	<i>W. H. Dickerson</i>	<i>Private</i>

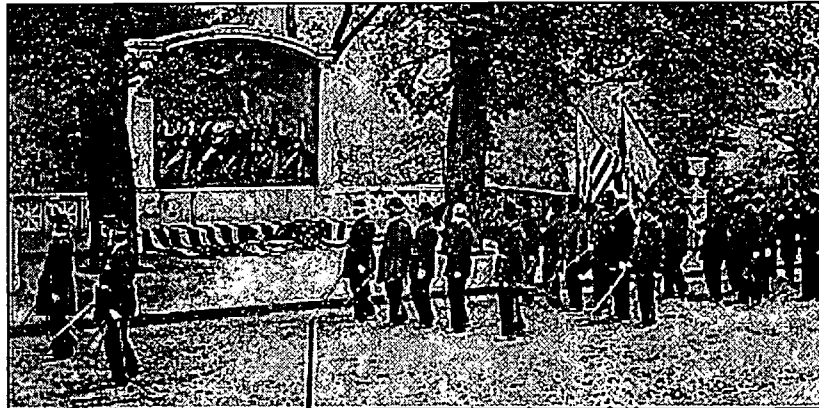
Casualty list of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment from the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, July 16-18, 1863

Shown here is one of the 54th's casualty lists with the names of 116 enlisted men who died at Fort Wagner. Of the 600 men that charged Fort Wagner, 272 were killed, wounded, or captured.

National Archives, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917



Sgt. Henry Stewart, Company E, 54th Massachusetts Infantry
Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston
(Not to be used without permission.)



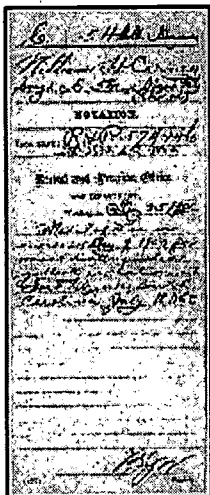
Veterans of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry at the dedication of the memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the men of the 54th, May 31, 1897
Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston
(Not to be used without permission.)

The memorial is located on the Boston Common. Col. Robert Gould Shaw, son of a white abolitionist, led the 54th and died during the assault on Fort Wagner. He was buried unceremoniously by Confederate troops in a common grave with the men he commanded.

Records of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment are among the military records held by the National Archives.

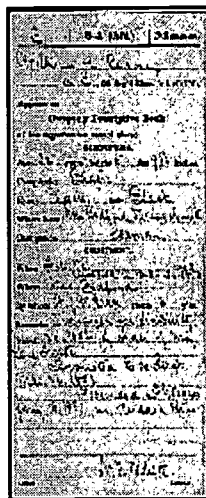


Medal of Honor Recipient



Notation Card for
Sergeant William
Carney

Sergeant William Carney of New Bedford, MA, became the first African American awarded the Medal of Honor for "most distinguished gallantry in action" during the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, on July 18, 1863. After being shot in the thigh, Carney crawled uphill on his knees, bearing the Union flag and urging his troops to follow.



Company Descriptive
Book for Sergeant
William Carney

Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, RG 94,
National Archives and Records Administration.

C. 54 Hill Mass.
William H. Carney
Sergeant C. 54th Mass Regt
(Volunteers)

NOTATION.

R 40. 574 146
with glass to 5. 1885

Record and Pension Office

CHIEF OF BUREAU

DATE: May 25, 1900

Medal of Honor
awarded May 9, 1909, for
most distinguished
gallantry in action at
Fort Wagner, South
Carolina, July 18, 1863

B. J. M.

**Notation Card for
Sergeant William Carney**

51 (1917) | **MEMO.**

William A. Carney
 Co. C, 64 Regt Mass Inf. (Col'd).

Appears on
Company Descriptive Book
 of the organization named above.

DESCRIPTION.

Age: 26 years. Height: 5 feet 9 1/2 inches.
 Complexion: Clear
 Eyes: Blue Hair: Black
 Where born: San Bernardino, California
 Occupation: Electrician

ENLISTMENT.

When: July 1, 1917
 Where: San Bernardino
 By whom: W. A. Carney term 3 yrs.
 Remarks: Discharged for disability
June 30, 1918, by order of the
War Department.
Re-enlisted as private
June 30, 1918.
Discharged at 1900
July 1, 1918 in California.

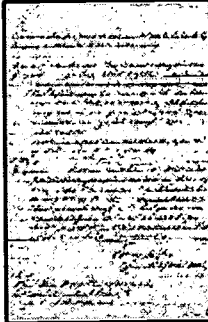
W. A. Carney
 SGT. (Register)

Company Descriptive Book Sergeant William Carney





Equal Pay

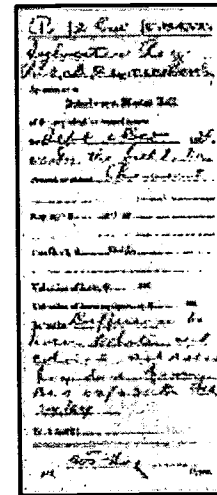


Charges and Specifications Referred Against Private Sylvester Ray, June 5, 1864

In early June 1864, Private Sylvester Ray of the 2d U.S. Colored Cavalry was recommended for trial because he refused to accept pay inferior to that of white soldiers.

First Lieutenant Edwin Hughes of the 2d U.S. Colored Cavalry, recorded Private Ray as stating, "... none of us will sign again for seven dollars a month. ..."

Later that month, Congress granted equal pay to the U.S. Colored troops and made the action retroactive. This increase in pay is indicated on Private Ray's Detachment Muster Roll.



Detachment Muster Roll for Private Sylvester Ray

Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, RG 94, National Archives and Records Administration.

Charges and Specifications preferred against Private Sylvester Ray
Company of the United States Colored Troops

Charge - Drunkenly and insubordinately disobeying the
Specification - That Private Sylvester Ray of the United States Colored
Troops, at or near the camp, on the 5th day of June 1864, did
buy of the said company, by his superior officer, the said
Major of the United States Colored Troops, a quantity of
strong and weak liquor, for some dollars a week, and
sell it to the men, some of you he sold enough to buy it
or to be to that effect.

That the said Major of the United States Colored Troops, did
afflict the said Private Ray with the said charge on the 5th
day of June 1864.

Charge - Drunkenly and insubordinately disobeying the
Specification - That the said Private Sylvester Ray of the United
States Colored Troops, having been ordered to get out of the ranks by
his superior officer, the said Major of the United States Colored
Troops, for the purpose of being placed in confinement, did say
"I won't get out, unless they force me, I'll shoot you, damn you,
or any one that puts a hand on me" to that effect.
That the said Major of the United States Colored Troops, did
afflict the said Private Ray with the said charge on the 5th
day of June 1864.

Edwin Hughes
Major of the United States Colored Troops

Witness
Lieut. Edwin Hughes of the United States Colored Troops
and Sergeant Augustus Morris of the United States Colored Troops
Sergeant Robert Maudsloh

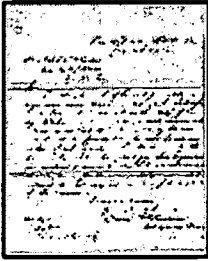
Charges and Specifications Referred Against Private Sylvester Ray, June 5, 1864

U.S. Cav. U.S.C.T.
 Sylvester Ray
 Pvt. Co. B. 2 Regt U.S. Cavalry
 Appears on a
Detachment Muster Roll
 of the organization named above
 On Sept. 10, 1864.
 Station In the field, Va.
 Present or absent Present
 Stopped, \$ 100 for
 Dec Gov't, \$ 100 for
 Valuation of horse, \$ 100
 Valuation of horse equipments, \$ 100
 Remarks: Difference between white and colored soldiers pay done from Dec. 22/63 to Feb. 29/64
 Band mark:
 (014) aw-807

**Detachment Muster
 Roll for Private
 Sylvester Ray**



Treatment of POWs

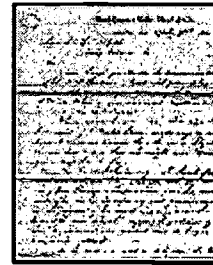


Letter from Colonel
William P. Hardeman
to Col. McCaleb
July 30, 1864

On July 22, 1864, Private Wilson Wood of the 6th U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery was captured by Confederate forces and held in a prison camp.

The letter from Col. William P. Hardeman alerting Union forces to Wood's capture reinforced Confederate policies toward African American prisoners.

In responding to this letter, Brig. Gen. J.M. Brayman explained, "When the United States made negroes soldiers it assured towards them the same obligations as were due to any others who might wear its uniform and bear its flag."



Letter from Brig.
General Brayman
to Colonel McCaleb
July 31, 1864

View [page 2](#) of the
letter

Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, RG 94,
National Archives and Records Administration.

Head Quarters Trinity Sea
July 30th 1864

Lieut Col W. H. McCaleb

Command U. S. Forces

Virginia Sea

Sir

Just the steership of the 22nd July 1864 in
regard named Wilson was captured by the Confederate
forces. He is wounded in the calf of the
leg (P. H. Wilson) and is receiving such medical at-
tention as we have, which he is well if his own
life in the Confederate lines he will be delivered
to him, if not he will be held to slavery by the
Government. I have to inform you that negroes are
not considered prisoners of war, but all who surren-
der to us are treated as property and either
delivered to their original owners or sent at labor
by the Government.

I am very respectfully

Your obedient servant

(Signed) W. P. Hardemann

Col Commanding Post

W. H. McCaleb

U. S. Forces

Virginia Sea

**Letter from Colonel William P. Hardemann
to Colonel McCaleb, July 30, 1864**

Head-Quarters United States Forces,

Natchez, Miss., July 31st 1864.

Lieut. Col. E. A. McCaleb

Comdg. Vidalia, La.

Sir:

I have through you this day the communication of Col. Wm. P. Gardner, Comdg. rebel forces at Vidalia, La. in reply to your enquiring concerning the treatment of Private Wilson of your command, captured by the enemy on the 22nd instant.

Please advise him in reply that when the Government of the United States made negroes soldiers it assumed towards them the same obligations as were due to any others who might wear its uniform and bear its flag.

The honest, patriotic negro, who through an oppressed race, and lowly condition, with few memories of past blessings to inspire him, gives his service and offers his life in defence of good government, is, in the judgment of God and humanity, more than the peer of the man who, while enjoying the protection of that Government and crowned with its benefactions, would destroy it.

As the matter is understood by me, Sir,

**Letter from Brig. General Brayman to
Colonel McCaleb, July 31, 1864**

Government will, for every black soldier reduced
to slavery, put a white soldier in like condition
and will, for every violation of the usages of war
respecting these men, exact ample retaliation.

Respectfully

(Yours' Vc.)

(Signed) Wm. Brayman

Brig. Genl. Prov. Ar.

A true copy
certified

Wm. W. W.

**Letter from Brig. General Brayman to
Colonel McCaleb, July 31, 1864, Page 2**



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Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



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