

# Teaching Healthy Cultural Heritage by Correcting False American Slave Liberation Narratives

---

## Abstract

The shame of slavery was imposed with false narratives created by supporters of slavery. It is argued here that the lives of youth can be improved by understanding the truth about their African American heritage and learning to reject false narratives.

It is believed that slaves referred to themselves as *niggers* out of a lack of self-respect. It is revealed here that the word *nigger* comes from *niger* the Latin word for black. The slaves referred to themselves as *niggers* in the words proper use and form without malice or condemnation.

The contemporary perspective of slave liberation is “President Lincoln freed the slaves” giving no credit to the slaves “Still away to Jesus invisible institution,” and the valor of the United States Colored Troops. By law, black prayer meeting participants were flogged. The persecution of these prayer meetings inspired the abolitionist as well as inspiring “the battle hymn of the republic.”

The false narrative; “slaves won’t strike a blow for their freedom.” was crushed by the Louisiana Native Guard at the Battle of Port Hudson. Led by black officers, they charged the fort five times losing two thirds of their men, the largest regimental battle losses. Their fighting style was proven to be effective at destroying Richmond’s defenses which bolstered President Lincoln’s failing re-election campaign. They also played a decisive role defeating Hood’s Army at the Battle of Nashville. There were more than 10,000 USCT’s at Appomattox Court House, significantly more than the false narrative count of 2000 black men.

## Introduction

I was a research engineer and Civil War re-enactor for over twenty years. My passion for research expanded beyond my engineering career to African American history and I founded the Gospel Army Black History Group. Much of my training is in engineering which is based on facts and mathematics developed from proofs. History on the other hand is story telling that is based on the perspective of the story teller. Emphasis is put on facts that support the author’s argument and uncomplimentary results are often ignored. I discovered that much of African American history was told from the perspective of people that supported or was indifferent to slavery. Narratives that supported slavery were commonly repeated and fabricated until accepted as fact by the general public. On the other hand African American actions taken to acquire liberation were often down played and omitted. African American identity was created from this southern traditional perspective which was used to support racial discrimination. False narratives were commonly used to establish an African American identity that could be manipulated and controlled to inhibit African American successful competitiveness. Many Americans believe these false narratives however because they are taught them from social

relationships and suffer from a lack of formal correct race education. It is important that correct slave liberation history be taught now for healthy development of future generations.

I collected slave liberation material for over twenty years and documented my work in a book called *“Soldiers of the Cross; The African American Journey from Slavery to the Promised Land.”*<sup>1</sup> Most of the material in this paper is documented in my book.

### **The Definition of Race**

African American identity was persecuted with false narratives to support the very profitable American slavery system. It was more palatable to deny basic human rights to people that were considered inferior. Racism was based on the belief that all races are not equal. By the period of the Civil Rights Movement race was divided into these groups<sup>2</sup>:

- Caucasoid (White) race
- Negroid (Black) race
- Capoid (Bushmen/Hottentots) race
- Mongoloid (Oriental/ Amerindian) race
- Australoid (Australian Aborigine and Papuan) race

It was believed by most Americans that the first humans (Adam and Eve) were of the Caucasoid race. The twenty first century definition of race however is significantly different. According to the [Journey of Man](#) DNA study<sup>3</sup>, the [Bushmen](#) or San (which means “settlers” in Nama) of South Africa are thought to be the first descendants of the human race, and all other races are their descendants. In other words, the biblical character Eve resembled a Bushman.

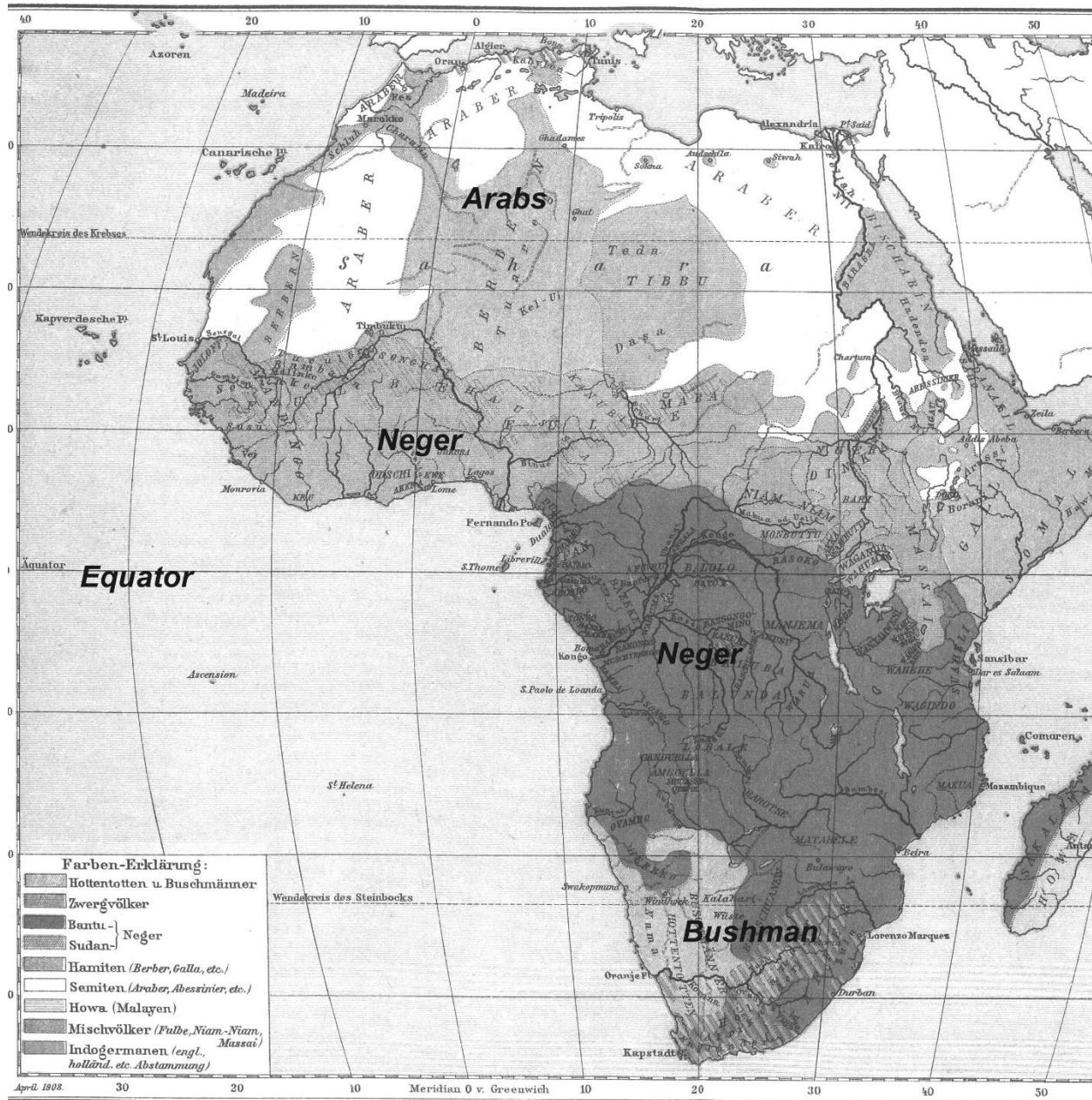
---

<sup>1</sup> John A. White Jr, *Soldiers of the Cross; The African American Journey from Slavery to the Promised Land*, <http://www.soldiersofthecross.us/>

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia Race (sociology), [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race\\_\(sociology\)](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_(sociology))

<sup>3</sup> Spenser Wells, *Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey* (Princeton University Press),2002, 56–8.

## VÖLKERKARTE VON AFRIKA.



### 1908 German map of Africa

#### African Slave Identity

When Europeans first came in contact with the dark-skinned people of Africa, they used the Latin term *niger*,<sup>4</sup> which means “shining black,” to describe them. I acquired an old German map of the people of Africa that divided the continent into three sections. The top section was called “Arab,” the bottom

<sup>4</sup>Wiktionary, *niger*, <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/niger>.

section was called “Bushman,” and the large middle section was called “Neger.” The word was capitalized like a proper noun because it represents a group of people. I was puzzled by the word “Neger,” so I asked a European colleague if he knew the word’s meaning. He said promptly, “Black.” *neger* means “black” in German. The Spanish version of the word is *Negro*, and the French version is *Negre*. The original word for black slave’s in English is proper noun *Niger* but it was changed to common noun *niger* and *nigger*.

The British appear to be responsible for creating the N-word but not responsible for using it as a racial slur. Oddly, the *English Dialect Dictionary*<sup>5</sup> does not define a *nigger* as a black person at all but as “a hard worker; adept.” The British referred to African slaves or “Nigers” as hard workers absent of racial inferiority. They appear to have created the common noun word “*nigger*” to describe a hard worker which is not a proper noun like the word *Niger*. However, racism was used to justify American slavery and slaves were property. The common noun word *nigger* was “high jacked” by slave traders to dehumanize and disrespect slaves.

The word “*coolie*” is similar to the word “*nigger*” in that it also became an offensive term used to refer to a race of people. “*Coolie*” is a racial slur toward people of Asian descent. The word originally referred to Asian laborers. Apparently, nonwhite, poor laborers were frowned upon in the American system; thus their name, “*coolie*,” became derogatory like “*nigger*.” The difference between the origin of the word *coolie* and *nigger* is that *coolie* was always a common noun independent of personal identity. On the other hand the word *nigger* came from a proper noun and a name of a race of people. This distinction led to a dual meaning of the word *nigger* between black and white Americans.

### **The Slave Narratives; the African American Slave perspective**

An important source of primary historical slave liberation data is from former slaves, collected in the Slave Narratives. Black universities such as Fisk University of Tennessee and Southern University of Louisiana were the first to see a need to document American slave history in 1929. At this time, former slaves were in their seventies, and it was important to get their perspectives on slavery before they passed away.

During the Depression, over fifteen million people were unemployed. President Franklin Roosevelt responded with a project called the New Deal for economic recovery and social reform. The Work Progress Administration or WPA was established to aid unemployment during the Great Depression. Between 1936 and 1938, the WPA Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) sent out-of-work writers in seventeen states to interview ordinary people in order to write down their life stories. Over two thousand interviews were made and compiled into seventeen volumes of *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*. My favorite source of the slave narratives is *Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember*, edited by J. Mellon. Mr. Reed, a former slave, explains in the book’s introduction why the interviews are so important:

---

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Wright, *The English Dialect Dictionary Being The Complete Vocabulary Of All Dialect Works Still In Use, Or Known To Have Been In Use During The Last Two Hundred Years* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905).



*If you want Negro History, you will have to get it from somebody who wore the shoe, and by and by, from one to the other, you will get a book.*

Review of the slave narratives reveals a constant and exclusive use of the word “nigger” by former slaves to describe themselves. This is a turnoff for most people. It is hard to respect people who refer to themselves as niggers or expect them to have anything to contribute to well-educated people. We judge people, however, through the eyes of the American establishment that is heavily influenced by slave traders.

By the eighteenth century, thirty thousand slaves a year passed through the Elmina (West Africa) slave port alone. These slaves spoke many different languages or tongues. In the book *Historical and Cultural Atlas of African Americans*, Molefi K. Asante and Mark T. Mattson<sup>6</sup> describe the African origin of American slaves. A few of the many African American seed tribes are: Nok, Ghana, Sundiata, Timbuktu, Sankore, Nsibidi, Benin, Uthman dan Fodio, Gao, Jenne, Ouagadougou, Segou, Dogon, Touba, Keita, Mali, Shango, Oshun, Ogun, Kumasi and Agades. There are thousands of other names of tribes in the western region of Africa.

When slaves learned one common language which was English, they were given one common identity *Niger* which was a proper noun. The slaves continued to use the word *Niger* in its proper form as a tribal name or identity, they were not free Americans. In all of the following examples from the slave narratives the word *nigger* is used respectively as a proper noun representing a tribal name. Note the narrative transcriber represented the establishment however and treated the word as a common noun.

*I wuz skeered of Marse Jordan, an' all of de grown niggahs wuz too 'cept Leonard an' Burrus Allen. Dem niggahs wuzn' skeered of nothin'. If de debil hese 'f had come an' shook er stick at dem dey'd hit him back. Leonard wuz er big black buck niggah; he wuz de bigges niggah I ever seed, an' Burrus wuz near 'bout as big, an' dey 'spized Marse Jordan wus 'n pizen.*

Fanny Cannady

### **Use of the N-word by inhumane slaver traders**

The contrast between the slave use of the word *Niger* and the slave trader use of the word *nigger* is a reflection of the humanity of the user of the word. Beatings were an inhumane method of controlling slave behavior. Slave beatings were a reminder that slaves were property and they had neither rights nor respect. This significantly degraded slave identity. It was the inhumanity of slave traders that turned the proper noun *Niger* into the common noun *nigger*. The following narratives show how the slave and slave trader used the same word “nigger” differently. The slave uses it as a proper noun to describe a group of people and to give respect. The slave trader on the other hand used the word to show disrespect and to demonstrate power over the slave. The slave trader use of the word replaced the slaves proper noun name “January” with the common noun word or label “nigger.”

---

<sup>6</sup> Molefi K. Asante and Mark T. Mattson, *Historical and Cultural Atlas of African Americans* (Macmillan Publishing Company), New York, NY, 1992, 6-8.

*"Nawsuh, he warn't good to none of us niggers. All de niggers roun' dar hated to be bought by him, 'kaze he wuz so mean. When he wuz too tired to whup us, he had de overseer do it, and de overseer wuz meaner dan de massa. But, Mister, de peoples wuz de same as dey is now. Dere wuz good uns and bad uns. I jus' happened to belong to a bad un. One day, I remembers my brother, January, wut cotched ober seein' a gal on de next plantation. He had a pass, but de time on it done gib out. Well, suh, when de massa found out dat he wuz a hour late, he got as mad as a hive of bees. So when brother January he come home, de massa took down his long mule skinner and tied him wid a rope to a pine tree. He strip his shirt off and said, "Now, nigger, I'm goin' to teach you some sense."*

*Wid dat, he started layin' on de lashes. January was a big, fine-lookin' nigger, de finest I ever seed. He wuz jus' four years older dan me, an' when de massa begin a-beatin' him, January neber said a word. De massa got madder and madder, kaze he could't make January holler.*

*"What's de matter wid you, nigger!" he say. "Don't it hurt?" January he neber said nothin', and de massa keep a-beatin' till little streams of blood started flowin' down January's chest, but he neber holler. His lips wuz a-quiverin', and his body wuz a-shakin', but his mouf it neber open; and all de while, I sat on my mammy's and pappy's steps a-cryin'. De niggers wuz all gathered about, and iome uv 'em couldn't stand it; dey hadda go inside deir cabins. Atter uhile, January, he couldn't stand it no longer hissself, and he say in a hoarse, loud whisper, "Massa! Massa! Have mercy on' dis poor nigger. "<sup>7</sup>*

--William Colbert

### Northern use of the N-word

White Southerners were well acquainted with slaves but white Northerners were not. They relied on slave traders for slave identity and saw the word "nigger" as being degrading. An untarnished name for free black Africans was borrowed from the Spanish—the word "Negro." Slaves were property; they had no last names, and their first names were commonly replaced by the N-word by their white owners. As slaves were liberated by the Union army, they were no longer property and took the last name of the previous owner. Since the N-word was reserved for American black slaves, the Spanish word for black, "Negro," was given to free or respected blacks. Eliza Evan described in her narrative her attempted transformation from disrespected property or nigger to respectable Negro.

*"One time, some Yankee soldiers stopped and started talking to me. One asked me what my name was. I say, "Liza," and he say, "Liza who?" I thought a minute and I shook my head, "Jest Liza. I ain't got no other name. "*

*He say, "Who live up yonder in dat big house!" I say, "Mr. John Mixon. " He say, "You are Liza Mixon. " Den he say, "Do anybody ever call you 'nigger'?" And I say, "Yes, Sir. " He say, "Next time anybody. call you 'nigger, ' you tell 'em dat you is a Negro and your name is Miss Liza Mixon. " The more I thought of that, the more I liked it, and I made up my mind to do jest what he told me to.*

---

<sup>7</sup> William Colbert, narrative in Mellon, Bull Whip Days, p420

*My job was minding the calves, while the cows was being milked. One evening, I was minding the calves and Old Master come along. He say, "What you doin', nigger?" say real pert like, "I ain't no nigger, I's a Negro, and I'm Miss Liza Mixon. " Old Master sho' was Surprised, and he picks up a switch and starts at me.*

*Law', but I was skeered! I hadn't never had no whipping, so I run fast as I can to Grandma Gracie. I hid behind her, and she say, "what's the matter wid you, child?" And I say, Master John gwine whip me." And she say, "What you done?" And I say, "Nothing." She say she know better, and 'bout that time Master John got there. He say, "Gracie, dat little nigger sassed me. "She say Lawsie, child, what does ail you?" I told them what the Yankee soldier told me to say, and Grandma Gracie took my dress and lifted it over my head and pins my hands inside, and Lawsie, how she whipped me and I dassen't holler loud either. I jest said dat to de wrong person, didn't I?"<sup>8</sup>*

The power of the N-word had little impact on free black soldiers because they were no longer property. A white captain in the United States Colored troops (USCT) tried to sneak out of camp without authorization. He was stopped and questioned by a black USCT on guard. The captain tried to dominate the guard by saying that he would "shoot you, you damned nigger." The black corporal replied "that he was not a "nigger" but "a Federal soldier and wear the Federal uniform. I have taken the same oath that you have,""<sup>9</sup>. The captain was court-martialed and dismissed from the service

### **Stealing away to Jesus, the Invisible Institution**

The Slave Narratives suggest that slave prayer meetings were a common practice throughout the South. Apparently, slave owners saw these prayer meetings as a threat. It was unlawful for blacks to assemble in prayer groups in the South without a white person being present. This was considered a national-security issue, and the punishment for illegal prayer meetings was flogging. I found no exception to this rule in the slave narratives; slave prayer meetings were not allowed on any plantations.

---

<sup>8</sup> Eliza Evens, narrative in Mellon, *Bullwhip Days*, 341.

<sup>9</sup> Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 90.

The following bill, we understand, is now before the Legislature of the state of Virginia.

*An act to amend an act, to reduce into one, the several acts concerning Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes.*

Whereas it is represented to the General Assembly, that it is a common practice in many places within this Commonwealth, for Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes, to assemble in considerable numbers at Meeting Houses, and places of Religious Worship, in the night, which may have a tendency to promote conspiracy and insurrection.

Be it therefore enacted, That all meetings or assemblies of Slaves, Free Negroes or Mulattoes, at any meeting House or Houses, or any other place or places in the night under any pretence whatever, shall be deemed and considered, as an unlawful assembly. And that it shall be the duty of any Magistrate of the County or Corporation, where such assembly shall be, either from his own knowledge or from the information of others, of such unlaw-

***New York Herald, Saturday, January 28, 1804***

The 1804 excerpt from the *New York Herald* below describes African American prayer meetings in the South as being considered a national-security risk.

*"The following bill, we understand is before the legislature of Virginia.*



*An act to amend an act, to reduce into one, the several acts concerning Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes.*

*Where as it is represented to the General Assembly, that it is a common practice in many places within the Commonwealth, for Slaves, Free Negroes or Mulattoes, to assemble in considerable numbers at Meeting Houses, and places of Religious Worship, in the night, which may have a tendency to promote conspiracy and insurrection.*

*Be it therefore enacted, That all meetings or assemblies of Slaves, Free Negroes or Mulattoes, at any Meeting Houses, or any other place or places in the night under any pretence whatever, shall be deemed and considered, as an unlawful assembly. And that it shall be the duty of any Magistrate of the County or Corporation, where such assembly shall be, either from his own knowledge or from the information of others, of such unlawful assembly or meeting, to issue his warrant, directed to any sworn officer or officers, authorizing him or them to enter the house or houses where such unlawful meeting are, for the purpose of apprehending or dispersing the Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes, and to inflict corporal punishment on the offender or offenders, at his discretion, not exceeding twenty lashes.*

*And be it further enacted, That the said officer or officers, shall have power to summon any person to aid and assist in the execution of any warrant or warrants directed to him or them, for the purposes aforesaid, who on refusal, shall be subject to a fine, at the discretion of the magistrate, not exceeding ten dollars.*

*All acts, or parts of acts, coming within the preview of this act, and is hereby repealed.*

*This act shall be in force, from and after the passing thereof.*

*[This gentle reader, is emphatically the State of Liberty and equality-----the liberty of whipping the blacks for attending religious evening lectures.]*

*NEW YORK HERALD*

*SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 1804*<sup>10</sup>

Slaves had a practice of “stealing away” to the woods to have their religious services. At these services, they usually prayed for freedom, and this is why these meetings were outlawed. These secret prayer meetings were an important part of slave identity. Albert J. Raboteau is a Henry W. Putnam Professor of Religion at Princeton University. In his book *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, he refers to this slave prayer meeting practice as the Invisible Institution. This invisible institution appears to be a slave *movement* or *prayer movement* and is frequently described by the voice of the slaves. The religious life of slaves separated them from all Americans and made their identity unique. In the following narrative a former slave defines what he thinks it means to be a nigger:

*“Some, like niggers, just got to pray, half their life is in prayin’. Some nigger take turn with ‘nuther nigger to watch to see if Marse Tom any wheres ‘bout, and that they circle themselves ‘bout*

---

<sup>10</sup> *New York Herald*, January 28, 1804.

*on the floor in the cabins and pray. They get to moanin' low and gentle, 'Someday, someday, someday this yoke going to be lifted off'n our shoulders, someday, someday, someday.'"*<sup>11</sup>

William Moore

Charlie Davenport, an ex-slave who contributed a narrative to the book *Bullwhip Days*, says that niggers are the "Children of Israel."

*"Us niggers didn't have no secret mettin's. All us had was church meetin's in Arbors woods. De preachers 'ud exhort us dat us was de chillun o' Israel in de wilderness an' de Lawd done sent us to take dis lan' o' milk an' honey."*<sup>12</sup>

Charlie Davenport

It was this biblical identity that promised them freedom with obedience to God.

*"Once my maw and paw taken me and Katherine after night to slip to nother place to a prayin' and singin'. A nigger man with white beard told us a day am comin' when niggers only be slaves of Gawd. ."*<sup>13</sup>

Mary Reynolds

American heritage places a large value on liberty however it also has significant respect for religious freedom and faith. In the following narrative the slave trader showed his respect for a slave's courage and faith by granting her request to keep her family intact.

*"We ain't been in New Orleans very long till Mr. Abram took sick and die, and we is taken to the trader yard to be sold. I reckon I musta been 'bout six or mebbe seven year old, at the time.*

*Major Long was the one who owned the trader yard where we was put, and I guess We was kept there 'bout a week, 'fore my sister Mary was sold away from us.*

*One morning, our family is all kinda huddled up together in a cornet of the yard away from the rest, and 'long comes Major Long carrying his bullwhip in his hand, with another man. He makes Mary stand up and says to the man with him, "Here's jes' the girl you want for a nurse girl.*

*Mama begs Major Long not to separate us folks, and hugged Mary and Jane and me to her. The major and the man with him talks a while, and then the major come over to where we are and pulled Mary away from Mama and he and the man took her off. "twan't till after Freedom that we ever saw her again.*

*Man, man, folks what didn't go through slavery ain't got no idea what it was. I reckon there musta been a hundred colored folks in that trader yard, and the dirt and smell was terrible, terrible. I was jes' a little chap, like I've told you, but I can remember that place like it happened yesterday--husbands sold away from wives, and children taken away from mothers. A trader, them days, didn't think no more of selling a baby or little child away from its mother than takinp a little calf away from a cow.*

*I rec'lec', the night after Mary is sold away from us, the colored folks in the trader yard hold prayer meeting. Mama was very religious--very religious--and it ever a soul went to Heaven, hers did.*

---

<sup>11</sup> William Moore, narrative in Mellon, *Bullwhip Days*, 330.

<sup>12</sup> Charlie Davenport, narrative in Mellon, 377.

<sup>13</sup> Mellon, *Bullwhip Days*, p19.

*Seems like Major Long was gone that evening, and Mama and some more of the folks in the yard got together for a praying time. Didn't do no singing, 'cause that would have 'tracted attention, and the major didn't 'low no meetings. But someone saw the folks prayin and told him the next morning, and he come out in the yard with a cat-o'-nine-tails and rounds everybody up. Then, he said, "You niggers what was praying last night, step out here. "*

*None come out, though, 'cept Mama, 'cause they was 'fraid they was going to get whipped Major said to Mama, "Well, you are the only truthful one in the yard, and I won't whip you, 'cause you have been truthful. I'll see if I can keep you and your man and your other children together and not see you separate." Mama jes' fell on her knees and thanked the good Lord right in front of the major, and he never touched her with his whip.*

*Twan't but a little while till he comes back and says for us to get our bundles and come with him. We didn't know where we was going, but any place was better'n that trader yard. Jes' to get away from that place was a blessing from the good Lord.*

*The Major kept his word to Mama and sell us to Mr. Dan Sullivan, and he takes us up, to Alexandria in a wagon."<sup>14</sup>*

Stephen Williams

### **Influence of the Steal Away Movement on the Abolitionist Movements**

Slaves were banned from reading, but the cat was out the bag. Praying for freedom at night became an unlawful practice, the “invisible institution.” One spiritual that was sung was called “Say, brothers, will you meet me at Canaan’s happy shore?” The land of Canaan was the Promised Land. This song made it north to Boston, where it was published. The tune had been one of John Brown’s favorite. Union soldiers converted the melody and rhythm to a marching song called “John Brown’s Body.”

There was a “secret six” of abolitionists who supported John Brown’s raid; they were [Thomas Wentworth Higginson](#), [Samuel Gridley Howe](#), [Theodore Parker](#), [Franklin Benjamin Sanborn](#), [Gerrit Smith](#), and [George Luther Stearns](#). Both Smith and Sterns were wealthy, while Higginson and Parker were Unitarian ministers. Colonel T. W. Higginson, later led the First South Carolina Volunteers, the first ex-slave regiment organized during the Civil War.

Samuel Howe was a secret supporter of John Brown and a doctor. Howe was married to Julia Ward Howe. The couple visited Abraham Lincoln at the White House in November of 1861. Julia and friends watched Union troops marching to the tune of a popular Union marching song, “John Brown’s Body.” Julia had wanted to rewrite the song to captured John Brown’s new movement, but the words had not come to her. That night the words came to her while sleeping; she awoke and wrote the words down. Julia Howe rewrote “John Brown’s Body” to become “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” which served as the American national anthem until 1931. She said that the words came to her in a dream.<sup>15</sup> If Julia Howe saw “the glory of the coming of the Lord,” it would have been God’s answer to the countless prayers of slaves.

---

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Williams, narrative in Mellon, *Bullwhip Days*, 290.

<sup>15</sup> Ward, *The Civil War*, 104.

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword:  
His truth is marching on*

*Chorus:  
Glory Hally, Hallelujah!  
Glory Hally, Hallelujah!  
Glory Hally, Hallelujah!  
His truth is marching on*

In his final speech in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. repeated a line from this song when he said, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

### **William Wells Brown's Perspective on war time propaganda**

The African American perspective of liberation was well documented by the end of the Civil War. In 1866 Brown wrote *The Negro in the American Rebellion* one year after the end of the Civil War and shortly after writing the first African American history book "[\*The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements\*](#) (1863)". Brown represents the African American perspective but he is unknown to many and his books were over looked.

William Wells Brown was the first writer to reveal the intimacy between white slave masters and their black slaves. Brown's father was white, and his mother was a black slave. Brown wrote the first African American novel, which was called *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter*;<sup>16</sup> however, he was in England at that time. It was rumored that Thomas Jefferson fathered several children with his slave [Sally Hemings](#). Wikipedia says, "A [1998 DNA study](#) confirmed a match between the Jefferson male line and Eston Hemings's direct male descendant.<sup>17</sup> Based on this and the body of historic evidence, most Jeffersonian scholars have come to accept that Jefferson did father Hemings's children in a long relationship."

My favorite book on the Civil War is called *The Negro in the American Rebellion* by William Wells Brown. This book fascinated me because it was written by a "man of the times" and a former slave. While living in St. Louis as a slave, Brown worked for Lovejoy, another abolitionist. He escaped from his owner in St. Louis and became a conductor on the Underground Railroad as well as a great antislavery orator.

Brown wrote the first African American history books and documented the part blacks played in the Civil War. Brown wrote [\*The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements\*](#) in 1863 and *The Negro in the American Rebellion* in 1867. Brown's view of the Civil War was unique. He admitted that he was neither historian nor writer; however, modern editors disagree. His work is highly respected. He included articles and letters in his book that he collected during the Civil War. Unfortunately, there was a fire at his publisher's warehouse, and many of Brown's books were destroyed. I am certain that few if

---

<sup>16</sup> William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*, 1853, ed. Robert Levine (Boston: Bedford, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Wikipedia, *Clotel*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clotel>.



any copies of his book existed in the South or at least in southern black classrooms, since very few African Americans have ever heard of William Wells Brown.

Supporters of slavery used newspapers and magazines to promote the false narrative that blacks were happy as slaves and uninterested in freedom. This value of not wanting freedom was considered by the establishment to certainly be un-American and the primary support of racism. The media portrayed black men as cowards with no principles who were unwilling to fight for their freedom. A proslavery newspaper published this article following the Fort Donelson battle, which occurred February 16, 1862. William Wells Brown collected many articles during the war and published them in the first African American Civil War history book, *The Negro in the American Rebellion*. Brown wrote:

*" Proslavery newspaper correspondents from the North, in the Western and Southern departments, still continued to report to their journals that the slaves would not fight if an opportunity was offered to them. Many of these were ridiculously amusing. The following is a sample*

*"I noticed upon the hurricane-deck, to-day, an elderly negro, with a very philosophical and retrospective cast of countenance, squatted upon his bundle, toasting his shins against the chimney, and apparently plunged into a state of profound meditation. Finding by inquiry that he belonged to the North Illinois, one of the most gallantly behaved and heavily-losing regiments at the Fort-Donelson battle, and part of which was aboard, I began to interrogate him upon the subject. His philosophy was so much in the Falstaffian vein that I will give his views in his own words, as near as my memory serves me: -*

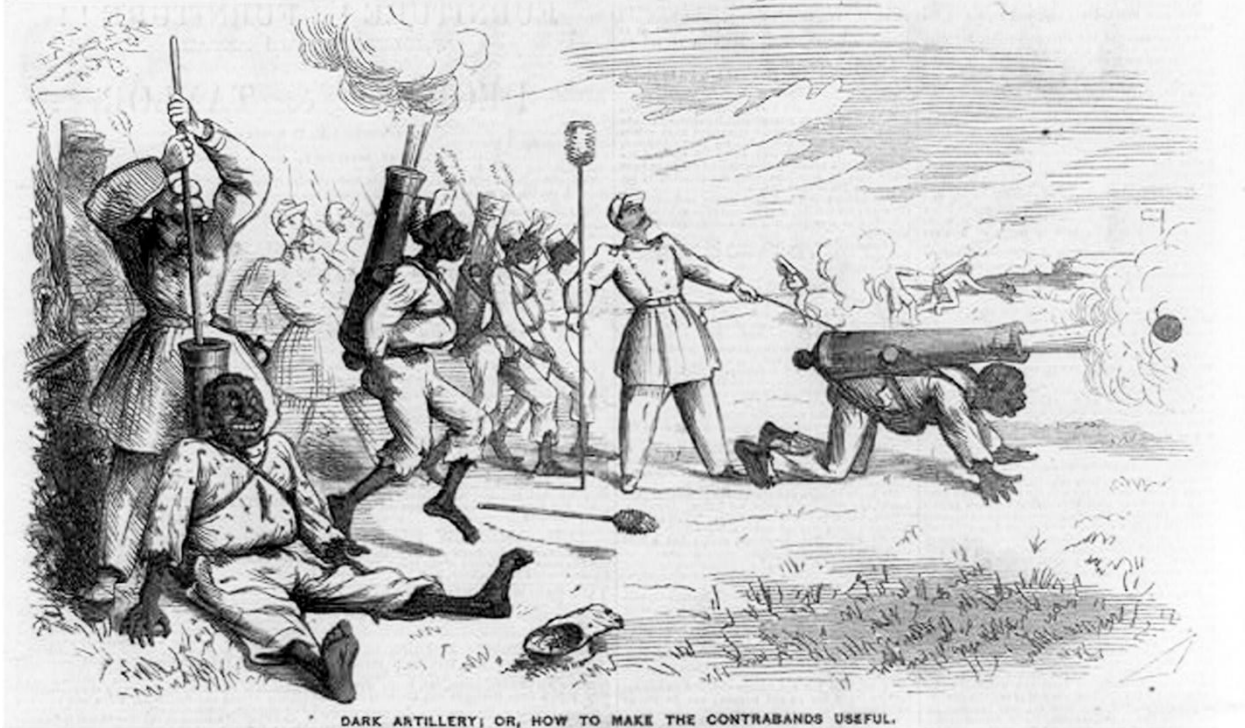
*" ' Were you in the fight ? ' ' ' Had a little taste of it, sa.' ' ' Stood your ground, did you ? ' ' ' No, sa ; I runs.' ' ' Run at the first fire, did you ? ' ' ' Yes, sa. ; and would ha' run soona had I know'd it war comin'.' ' ' Why, that wasn't very creditable to your courage.' ' ' Dat isn't in my line, sa ; cookin's my perfeshun.' ' ' Well, but have you no regard for your reputation ? ' ' ' Refutation's nuffin by the side ob life.' ' ' Do you consider your life worth more than other people's ? ' ' ' It's worth more to me, sa.' ' ' Then you must value it very highly.' ' ' Yes, sa, 'I does ; more dan all dis wuld ; more dan a million of dollars, sa : for what would dat be Wuf to a man wid de bref out of him. Self-perserbashum am de fust I'bm wid me.' ' ' But why should you act upon a different rule from other men ? ' ' ' Because different men set different values upon dar lives : mine is not in de market.'*

*" ' But if' you lost it, you would have the satisfaction of knowing that you died for your country.'*  
*" ' What satisfaction would dat be to me when de power ob feelin' was gone ? '*  
*" ' Then patriotism and honor are nothing to you ? '*  
*" Nuffin whatever, sa: I regard dem as among de vanities ; and den de government don't know me ; I hab no rights ; may be sold like old hoss any day, and dat's all.'*  
*" 'If our old soldiers were like you, traitors might have broken up the Government without resistance.'*  
*"Yes, sa; dar would hab been no help for it. I wouldn't put my life in de scale 'ginst any government dat ever existed; for no government could replace de loss to me.'*  
*"Do you think any of your company would have missed you if' you had been killed ? '*  
*" ' May be not, sa; a dead white man ain't much to dese sogors, let lone a dead nigga; but I'd n missed myself, and dat was de pint wid me.'*  
*" It is safe to say that the dusky corpse of that African will never darken the field of carnage."<sup>18</sup>*

The black soldier portrayed in this article had a well-developed philosophy that was self-centered. He valued his life more than he valued such things as honor, duty, or self-respect. He had no purpose but to save himself. He ran from a battle, not because he was scared like most soldiers, but because it was the most logical action to take, considering the circumstances. He had "no dog in this fight." The author claimed that the black soldier was part of a Northern Illinois regiment. Black troops, however, were not mustered into Illinois regiments until 1864, two years after the article was published. These types of characterizations were so commonly used that blacks today easily believe that typical black soldiers were like the one described in the article. Most blacks lived in the South, where black characterizations were common in published literature and black heroism was censored.

---

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, 127.



**“Dark Artillery,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated*, October 5, 1861**

### **Brown describes Big Bob, the activist Preacher and Leader**

It was difficult for Southerners to admit that they needed Negroes to win the Civil War. Putting blacks in gray uniforms was a plan doomed to fail from the beginning. Southerners controlled blacks with chains and bullwhips. Controlling blacks who were holding bayonets and muskets was a more difficult task. As with the present day, black preachers played an important leadership role in the African American and slave community. A century later, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. articulated their belief in “church activism,” when he said that “the pastor has the responsibility of teaching the word of god as well as leading his flock to do ‘God’s Will.’”

The preacher Big Bob was a classic black leader, hero, minister, and martyr. Big Bob’s history is preserved by William Wells Brown.

*“The siege of Washington, N.C., March 30-April 20, 1863, had carried consternation among the planters of the surrounding country, and contrabands were flocking in by hundreds. when, just at day-break one morning, a band of seventeen came to the shore, and hailed the nearest gunboat. The blacks were soon taken on board, when it was ascertained that they had travelled fifty miles the previous night, guided by their leader, a negro whom they called “Big Bob.” This man was without a drop of Anglo Saxon blood in his veins, if color was a true index. It was also soon known that he was a preacher, or had been, among his fellow-slaves. These men all expressed a desire to be put to work, and, if allowed, to fight for “de ole flag.” “Big Bob” sported a suit of rebel gray, which his fellow-slaves could not; and the way in which he obtained it was rather amusing. In the*

*region from which they escaped, the blacks were being enrolled in the rebel army ; and Bob and his companions were taken, and put under guard, preparatory to their being removed to the nearest military post. Bob, however, resolved that he would not fight for the rebel cause, and induced his comrades to join in the plan of seizing the guard, and bringing him away with them ; which they ' did, Bob claiming the rebel soldier's clothes, when that individual was dismissed, after a march of thirty miles from their home. Bob made an amusing appearance, heing above six feet in height, and dressed in a suit, the legs of the pants of which were five or six inches too short, and the arms of the coat proportionally short.*

*A few days after the arrival of the contrabands, their services were needed in an important expedition in the interior.”<sup>19</sup>*

The preacher Big Bob led his band of “home boys” or congregation on a number of raids behind enemy lines, generating the terror that Butler would describe to President Lincoln.

*“The blacks numbered less than forty ; while the whites were more than one hundred. The negroes were called upon to surrender; but Bob answered, " No, I never surrenders." and then he cried out, " Come on, boys! ef we's captud, we's got to hang; and dat's a fack. And nobly did they fight, whipping their assailants, and reaching the gunboats with but the loss of' three men killed and ten wounded. Bob and his companions were greatly praised when once more on the fleet.”*

*“But Bob's days were numbered; for the next day a flat full of soldiers, with four blacks, including Bob, attempted to land at Rodman's Point, but were repulsed by a terrible fire of rebel bullets, all tumbling into the boat, and lying fiat to escape being shot. Meanwhile the boat stuck fast on the sand-bar, while the balls were still whizzing over and around the flat. Seeing that something must be done at once, or all would be lost, Big Bob exclaimed, "Somebody's got to die to get us out of this, and it may as well be me ! " He then deliberately got out, and pushed the boat of, and fell into it, pierced by five bullets.”<sup>20</sup>*

### **Brown recalls General Hunter’s Letter**

General Hunter with the help of Harriet Tubman established the first black regiment which latter called themselves The Gospel Army. In a letter to then-Governor Andrews of Massachusetts, General Hunter encouraged the establishment of black regiments and described the Gospel Army. William wells Brown published Hunters letter.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE SOUTH

*Hilton Head, Port Royal, SC, May 4, 1863*

*To His Excellency the Governor of Massachusetts, Boston, Mass.*

---

<sup>19</sup> Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, 215.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



*"I am happy to be able to announce to you my complete and eminent satisfaction with the results of the organization of negro regiments in this department. In the field so far as tried, they have proved brave, active, enduring, and energetic, frequently outrunning, by their zeal, and familiarity with the Southern country, the restrictions deemed prudent by certain of their officers. They have never disgraced their uniform by pillage or cruelty, but have so conducted themselves, upon the whole, that even our enemies, though more anxious to find fault with these than with any other portion of our troops, have not yet been able to allege against them a single violation of any of the rules of civilized warfare."*

*"These regiments are hardy, generous, temperate, patient, strictly obedient, possessing great natural aptitude for arms and deeply imbued with that religious sentiment-call it fanaticism, such as like that which made the soldiers of Cromwell invincible. They believe that now is the time appointed by God for their deliverance; and, under the heroic incitement of this faith, I believe them capable of showing a courage, and persistency of purpose, which must, in the end, extort both victory and admiration."*

*D. HUNTER*

*Major General Commanding<sup>21</sup>*

*W. W. Brown*

### **General Butler implements John Brown's plan of arming the Negroes**

A year before Butler assumed control of New Orleans, on May 2, 1861, the Confederacy had organized a regiment of free black soldiers in New Orleans called "Native Guard, Colored." At that time, New Orleans had a population of 150,000, including 18,000 slaves and 10,000 free blacks.<sup>22</sup> Free blacks had previously been enrolled by Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812 and represented 10 percent of his army at the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>23</sup> Although the Louisiana Native Guard was initially composed of black Confederates, it was the first black Civil War regiment to be formed and had the distinction of being the only black regiment to be commanded by black officers. Some of the soldiers were slave owners, and some were mulattos, but they were primarily free blacks.

---

<sup>21</sup> Brown, *Negro in American Rebellion*, 131.

<sup>22</sup> James Parton, *General Butler in New Orleans* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1864), 130.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.



REBEL NEGRO PICKETS AS SEEN THROUGH A FIELDGLASS.

### REBEL NEGRO PICKETS.

So much has been said about the wickedness of using the negroes on our side in the present war, that we have thought it worth while to reproduce on this page a sketch sent us from Fredericksburg by our artist, Mr. Theodore R. Davis, which is a faithful representation of what was seen by one of our officers through his field-glass, while on outpost duty at that place. As the picture shows, it represents two full-blooded negroes, fully armed, and serving as pickets in the rebel army. It has long been known to military men that the insurgents affect no scruples about the employment of their slaves in any capacity in which they may be found useful. Yet there are people here at the North who affect to be horrified at the enrollment of negroes into regiments. Let us hope that the President will not be deterred by any squeamish scruples of the kind from garrisoning the Southern forts with fighting men of any color that can be obtained

### **1<sup>st</sup> Louisiana Native Guard 1861**

Following the defeat of the Confederacy at New Orleans in May of 1861, the Louisiana Native Guard remained in the city. By May of 1862, General Hunter had formed the First South Carolina Colored Volunteers, and Governor James H. Lane had started the First Kansas Colored Volunteers, but these regiments were not authorized by President Lincoln. Butler, however, had a great deal of power in New Orleans, but he was short of men. Butler wondered if the Native Guard would switch sides and fight for the freedom of all blacks. Butler had the following conversation with a group of them:

*"But," I said, "I want you to answer me one question. My officers, most of them, believe that negroes won't fight."*

*"Oh, but we will, "came from the whole of them.*

*"You seem to be an intelligent man, "said I, to their spokesman;*

*" answer me this question: I have found out that you know just as well what this war is about as I do, and if the United States succeed in it, it will put an end to slavery." They all looked assent.*

*"Then tell me why some negroes have not in this war struck a good blow somewhere for their freedom? "General, will you permit a question?"*

*"Yes."*

*"If we colored men had risen to make war on our masters, would not it have been our duty to ourselves, they being our enemies, to kill the enemy wherever we could find them? and all the white men would have been our enemies to be killed?"*

*"I don't know but what you are right," said I. "I think that would be a logical necessity of insurrection."*

*"If the colored men had begun such a war as that, General, which general of the United States army should we have called on to help us fight our battles?"*

*That was unanswerable.*

*"Well," I said, "why do you think that your men will fight?"*

*"General we come from a fighting race. Our fathers were brought here slaves because they were captured in war, and in hand to hand fights, too. We are willing to fight. Pardon me, General, but the only cowardly blood we have got in our veins is the white blood."<sup>24</sup>*

Benjamin F. Butler

The First Regiment of Louisiana Native Guard was mustered into the US Army on August 22, 1862. Exactly one month later on September 22, 1862, President Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. By December of 1862, there were three Native Guard regiments activated: the First, Second, and Third Louisiana Native Guard.

When Butler first came to New Orleans, he occasionally used the word “nigger” to describe blacks. His biographer, James Parton, said, “Not so in the later months. Not so when he had seen the torn and bleeding and blackened backs of fair and delicate women.” While in New Orleans, Butler became a strong supporter for the use of black soldiers and felt they could be the key to a Union victory. Butler was impressed by the ease it took to drill and train them, he wrote:

*“Better soldiers never shouldered a musket. They were intelligent, obedient, highly appreciative of their position, and fully maintained its dignity. They easily learned the school of soldier. I observed a, very remarkable trait about them. They learned to handle arms and to march more readily than the most intelligent white men. My drillmaster could teach a regiment of negroes that much of the art of war sooner than he could have taught the same number of students from Harvard or Yale...*

*Again, their ear for time as well as tune was exceedingly apt; and it was wonderful with what accuracy and steadiness a company of negroes would march after a few days' instruction...*

*Again, white men, in case of sudden danger, seek safety by going apart each for himself. The negroes always cling together for mutual protection.”<sup>25</sup>*

Benjamin F. Butler

### **President Lincoln and General Butler resurrects John Brown's Plan**

President Lincoln supported African colonization as an answer to the Negro problem—that is, sending all the blacks back to Africa. Butler did not think that colonization was practical. There were simply far too many blacks and not enough ships to transport them. Instead, Butler supported John Brown's plan of arming the Negroes and creating a black army. They would first rely on slave athleticism in hand to hand combat. They would be armed with spears and revolvers. This black army would free other slaves and grow as they moved through the South.

On September 22, 1862, exactly one month after the First Regiment of Louisiana Native Guard was mustered into the US Army, President Lincoln unveiled the Emancipation Proclamation. Historians argue that the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation purposely followed a Union victory which occurred five days earlier at the Battle of Antietam. When the Emancipation Proclamation took effect on

---

<sup>24</sup> Butler, *Butler's Book*, 492.

<sup>25</sup> Butler, *Butler's Book*, 491.

January 1, 1863 it was accompanied the Union Army's authorization to recruit black troops and muster them into the Union Army. The idea of arming the Negroes appears to have result from President Lincoln's consultation with General Butler. General Butler did not belong to Lincoln's political party but was an aide to the president. General Butler met with President Lincoln to discuss "the Negro problem" and implementing John Browns plan of arming the Negro. I am not curtain of the date of the meeting, but the meetings content suggest that it had to before the Emancipation Proclamation took effect in January 1863. The plan called for first freeing slaves then arming them. Enlistment of the Louisiana Native Guard would have been a first step to implementing John Brown's plan. Butler describes his meeting with President Lincoln as follows:

*"We then talked of a favorite project he had of getting rid of the negroes by colonization, and he asked me what I thought of it. I told him that it was simply impossible; that the negroes would not go anyway, for they loved their homes as much as the rest of us, and all efforts at colonization would not make a substantial impression upon the number of negroes in the country."*

*"Reverting to the subject of arming the negroes, I said to him that I thought it might be possible to start with a sufficient army of white troops, and, avoiding a march which might deplete their ranks by death and sickness, to take them in ships and land them somewhere on the Southern coast. These troops could then come up through the Confederacy, gathering up negroes, who could be armed at first with arms that they could handle, so as to defend themselves and aid the rest of the army in case of rebel charges upon it. In this way we could establish ourselves down there with an army that would be a terror to the whole South."*

*"He asked me what I would arm them with. I told him John Brown had intended, if he got loose in the mountains of Virginia, to arm his negroes with spears and revolvers; and there was a great deal in that. "*

*"That is a new idea, General," said he.*

*"No, Mr. President," I answered, "it is a very old one. Fathers of these negroes, and some of the negroes themselves, fought their battles in Africa with no other weapon, save a club. Although we have substituted the bayonet for the spear, yet as long as the soldier can shoot he is not inclined to use the bayonet."<sup>26</sup>*

General Benjamin F. Butler

### **Battle of Port Hudson**

On May 27, 1863, the first large battle that included a black regiment occurred at Port Hudson, Louisiana. Butler had mustered the regiment into Union service, making it the first black regiment to serve the Union and the only black regiment to have black officers. The men in Butler's First Regiment of Louisiana Native Guard lived up to their promise to Butler that they would fight with courage and honor. They attacked a heavily defended Confederate fort over five times, until their force of nine hundred men was cut down to fewer than three hundred. A review of Fox's Regimental Losses<sup>27</sup>, reveal that these are the greatest casualties absorbed by a Union regiment in a single battle during the Civil War. William

---

<sup>26</sup> Butler, *Butler's Book*, 578.

<sup>27</sup> Fox's Regimental Losses, "Chapter II", <http://www.civilwarhome.com/foxschapter2.html>



Wells Brown published several newspaper articles that described the battle. The battle drew national attention. The following articles appeared in the *New York Herald* and *New York Tribune*.<sup>28</sup>

“

*“The New-York Herald, June 6—*

*“The First Regiment “The First Regiment Louisiana Native Guard, Col. Nelson, were in this charge. They went on the advance, and, when they came out, six hundred out of nine hundred men could not be accounted for. It is said on every side that they fought with the desperation of tigers. One negro was observed with a rebel soldiers in his face with his teeth, other weapons having failed him. There are other incidents connected with the conduct of this regiment that have raised them very much in my opinion as soldiers. After firing one volley, they did not deign to load again, but went in with bayonets; and, wherever they hail a chance, it was all up with the rebels.”*

*“The New-York Tribune, June 8, 1863-“Nobly done, First Regiment of Louisiana Native Guard! Though you failed to carry the rebel works against overwhelming numbers, you did not charge and fight and fall in vain. That heap of six hundred corpses, lying there dark and grim and silent before and within the rebel works, is a better proclamation of freedom than even President Lincoln's. A race ready to die thus was never yet retained in bondage, and never can be. Even the Wood copperheads, who will not fight themselves, and try to keep others out of the Union ranks, will not dare to mob negro regiments if this is their style of fighting. “<sup>29</sup>*

---

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 175.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, *William Wells, The Negro in the American Rebellion*, 175.



***Battle of Port Hudson (Library of Congress)***

### **Sergeant Spencer Speech**

During the siege of Port Hudson, a new schoolhouse was erected for the black soldiers who had been enlisted in that vicinity. When the school opened, the following speech was made by a colored soldier called Sergeant Spencer. Spencer's perspective represents the dreams and feelings of colored troops that was published by William wells Brown. Spencer gave the following speech at the school's dedication:

*" I has been a-thinkin' I was old man; for, on de plantation, I was put down wid de old hands, and I quinsicntly feeled myself dat I was a old man. But since I has come here to de Yankees, and been made a soldier for de Unite States, an' got dese beautiful clothes on. I feels like one young man ; and I doesn't call myself a old man nebbber no more. An' I feels dis ebenin' dat, if de rebs came down here to dis old Fort Hudson, dat I could jus fight um as brave as any man what is in the Sebenth Regiment. Sometimes I has mighty feelins in dis ole heart of mine, when I considers how dese ere ossifers come all de way from de North to fight in de cause what we is fighten fur. How many ossifers has died, and how many white soldiers has died, in dis great and glorious war what we is in ! And now I feels dat, fore I would turn coward away from dese ossifers, I feels dat I could drink my own blood, and be pierced through wid five thousand bullets. I feels sometimes as doe I ought to tank Massa Linkern for dis blessin' what we has ; but again I comes to de solemn conclusion dat I ought to tank de Lord, Massa Linkern, and all dese ossifers. 'Fore I would be a slave 'gain, I would fight till de last drop of blood was gone. I has 'cluded to fight for my liberty, and for dis eddication what we is now to receive in dis beautiful new house what we has. Also I hasn't got any eddication nor no book-learnin', I has rose up dis blessed ebenin' to do my best afore dis congregation. Dat's all what I has to say now ;*

*but, at some future occasion, I may say more than I have to say now, and edify you all when I have more preparation. That's all what I have to say. Amen."*<sup>30</sup>

## **Butler Is Lincoln's Pick for Vice President**

Simon Cameron was an aide and friend to President Lincoln. He met with Butler to inform him of Lincoln's desire to have Butler as his running mate in the 1864 presidential election. Apparently President Lincoln was trying to reach across the aisle for a moderate Democratic vice president. Butler, however, was pleased with his assignment of capturing Richmond with the Army of the James, so he chose to stay on the battlefield. Butler described his conversation with Cameron:

*"The President as you know," intends to be a candidate for re-election, and as his friends indicate that Mr. Hamptin should no longer be a candidate for Vice-President, and he is from New England, the President thinks his place should be filled by someone from that section. Besides reasons of personal friendship which would make it pleasant to have you with him, he believes that as you were the first prominent Democrat who volunteered for the war, your candidature would add strength to the ticket, especially with the War Democrats, and he hopes that you in that you will allow your friends to co-operate with his to place you in that position."*

*"Please say to Mr. Lincoln," I replied, "that while I appreciate with the fullest sensibilities his act of friendship and the high compliment he pays me, yet I must decline. Tell him that I said laughingly that with the prospects of a campaign before me I would not quit the field to be Vice-President even with himself as Vice President, unless he would give me bond in sureties in the full sum of his four years' salary that within three months after his inauguration he will die unresigned."*<sup>31</sup>

Benjamin F. Butler

## **Battle of Petersburg**

On May 4, 1864, Ulysses S. Grant attacked Robert E. Lee's Army of North Virginia. Grant moved south toward Richmond, engaging in a number of major battles. General Butler with the Army of the James attacked from the south. By 1864 the Confederacy was low on men, and they had adopted a defensive strategy of holding territory with defensive works and hoping for a resolution to the war that maintained slavery. Confederate defenses were primarily composed of forts, breastworks, earthworks, rifle entrenchments, and abatis. In order to dislodge the Confederacy, frontal attacks were required, which were very costly for Union lives. Recall that the Emancipation Proclamation only set slaves free in territory taken from the Confederacy. Black troops attacked Petersburg with success but were ordered to stop before taking the city. A ten-month siege of Petersburg followed.

Black troops performed well at charging Petersburg's Confederate defenses. They mounted their bayonets and rush the Confederate works with screams. Black soldiers wrote letters to black and abolitionary newspapers describing their Civil War battle experiences. Congressional Medal of Honor

---

<sup>30</sup> Brown, *William Wells, The Negro in the American Rebellion*, 281.

<sup>31</sup> Butler, *Butler's Book*, 634.

recipient Milton Holland wrote a letter that described his charge of a Confederate works at Petersburg. Holland wrote:

*“ One thing that I must mention which attracted the attention of the whole division. It was that brave and daring but strange personage that rides the white charger. We could see him plainly riding up and down the rebel lines, could hear him shouting from the top of his voice to stand, that they had only niggers to contend with. This peculiar personage seems possessed with supernatural talent. He would sometimes ride his horse at lightning speed, up and down his lines amid the most terrific fire of shot and shell. But when the command was given to us, "Charge bayonets! Forward double quick!" the black column rushed forward raising the battle yell, and in a few moments more we mounted the rebel parapets. And to our great surprise, we found that the boasted Southern chivalry had fled. They could not see the nigger part as the man on the white horse presented it. We captured here one gun and caisson.”<sup>32</sup>*

*Milton M. Holland,  
Orderly Sergeant  
Co. C, 5th USCI  
Petersburg Virginia, July 24, 1864*

## **The Battle of the Crater**

At the siege of Petersburg on July 30, 1864, General Ambrose E. Burnside developed an elaborate plan to tunnel under the Confederate defenses. The tunnel was to be filled with explosives that would damage the Confederate defenses. Black troops would then rush in to seize the town. Black troops had gained a reputation for fighting with significant determination and tenacity when charging Confederate works, and they trained for the attack. General Grant, however, was not comfortable with Burnside's reason for using black troops and substituted them with a more experienced but untrained white division. The switch resulted in a disaster. The black troops had been trained to go around the crater created by the explosion. The white troops, however, went into the crater instead of going around it and suffered heavy casualties. General Grant then sent the black troops into the crater to save the white troops, but the element of surprise had been lost. Black troops pushed the rebel line back but suffered heavy losses when the rebels were reinforced.

Congress called General Grant to come to Washington and explain.

*“Earlier in his testimony, Grant had said: ‘General Burnside wanted to put his colored division in front, and I believe, if he had done so, it would have been a success.’<sup>33</sup>*

General Grant took the blame for the failure of the attack due to his decision to switch black troops for white troops. The Joint Committee agreed with General Grant and suggested that black troops should be used at any hazard if dictated by the situation.

---

<sup>32</sup> Edwin S. Redkey, ed, *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861–1865*, [Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture](#) 63 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p106.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Pleasants, and [George H. Straley](#), *Inferno at Petersburg*, Chilton Book Company, 1961, 163.

*“Your Committee desire to say that, in the statement of facts and conclusions which they present in their report, they wish to be distinctly understood as in no degree censuring the conduct of the troops engaged in this assault. While they confidently believe that the selection of the division of colored troops by General Burnside to lead the assault was, under the circumstances, the best that could have been made, they do not intend thereby to have it inferred that the white troops of the Ninth Corps are behind any troops in the service in those qualities which have placed our volunteer troops before the world as equal, if not superior to any known to modern warfare.”<sup>34</sup>*

## **Lincoln’s Reelection**

On September 19, 1864, General Butler developed a plan to capture Richmond using black troops. General Butler believed, as did John Brown and Frederick Douglass, that black men must earn their own freedom or forever be second-class citizens whom white men had to rescue. Butler stated that wanted to strike a good blow against slavery and prove once and for all that all men are created equal.

Another important benefit of a big Negro victory was not mentioned by Butler however. Butler rejected President Lincoln’s request to run as Vice President in the 1864 election in order to stay on the battlefield. Butler could bolster Lincoln’s chances of being re-elected with a Negro battle victory more than being his running mate. In September 1864 Lincoln’s reelection in November 1864 was in jeopardy. Lincoln was behind his antiwar opponent, George McClellan, who did not support the Emancipation Proclamation. By 1864 the Civil War was a war of slave liberation composed mostly of trench warfare. Cities such as Richmond, Petersburg, and Atlanta were under siege and protected by dwindling entrenched Confederate forces. Entrenched forces required frontal attacks to dislodge them, which resulted in heavy casualties of the attacking force—and the attacking force was usually white Union troops. McClellan had sieged on the apprehension of white northerners to launch suicidal frontal attacks to free black slaves. Lincoln’s defeat in November would have meant a compromise over the slavery issue. President Lincoln wrote a letter to his cabinet and asked them to sign and support preserving the Union.

*“On August 23, 1864 Lincoln wrote “It seems probable that this administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he cannot possibly save it afterwards.”<sup>35</sup>*

In November 1864, Lincoln was reelected. Historians credit the capture of Atlanta and victories in Shenandoah Valley for the win. Atlanta fell September 2, 1864, a little over a week after Lincoln’s expression of doubt of winning reelection. However, the Battle of New Market Heights may have been a bigger boost to the Union cause because it signaled the probable fall of the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. Also, the battle demonstrated an answer to entrenched warfare. It demonstrated that black troops could be used effectively to dislodge

---

<sup>34</sup> Henry Pleasants, *Inferno at Petersburg*, 163–164.

<sup>35</sup> The Civil War Trust, “Lincoln’s Blind Mimeo”, <http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/primarysources/blind-memo.html>.



entrenched Confederate troops, reducing white Union troop casualties. The strategy utilized black regiments on the flank of battle lines. A double quick charge of the black force caused the Confederates to over commit and remaining forces collapse in front of the remaining battle line. This gave the Union an effective new weapon for which the Confederacy had no answer but to establish their own black army. The thought of relying on black men to save the confederacy was humiliating to proslavery racist. This new Union weapon was probably a bigger lift to the Union cause than the fall of Atlanta. Butler later wrote: "*After that in the Army of the James a negro regiment was looked upon as the safest flanking regiment that could be put in line.*"<sup>36</sup>

General Grant was given the credit for destroying Richmond's outer defenses. The English media, however, gave a complete description of the battle. Congress responded by approving fourteen Congressional Medals of Honor to black troops at the Battle of New Market Heights. These medals were the first Congressional Medals of Honor given to black troops and represent the highest honor given to African Americans for a single battle in American history.

On December 15, 1864, black troops played a decisive role in running General John Bell Hood out of Tennessee. By the end of the Civil War, Union officers were using black troops effectively. The tactic was to put them on the flank of the Union line and let them attack at the Confederate flank "double-quick." The Confederate reaction was to over commit to stopping the black flank advancement at the expense of its opposite flank and center defenses. White troops would then attack and at times rout the Confederate defense. This scenario was played out at the battle of Nashville. By the summer of 1864, there were close to 24,000 black men stationed in Tennessee. Under Lt. Gen. George H. Thomas Black USCT regiments played a decisive roll defeating General Hood at the Battle of Nashville. On the first day of the battle two black regiments were placed on the left flank of the Union line. The two black regiments threaten the confederate right flank causing them to draw reinforcements from the Confederate left flank. The large main force of white Union soldiers overwhelmed the Confederate left flank.

On the second day, black troops again attacked the Confederates right flank at Overton Hill. Confederates stopped the charge of the black troops by over committing to their right flank weakening their center and left flank. White USCT officers ordered them to "Close up those rank...as great gaps were made in them by howitzer and grape shot guns loaded to the muzzle." Again, the large main force of white Union soldiers routed the Confederate left flank. At the Battle of Nashville "Black units sustained 630 casualties out of 3,500 men in the victory."<sup>37</sup>

Following the Battle of New Market Heights, General Butler said "*in the Army of the James a negro regiment was looked upon as the safest flanking regiment that could be put in line,*" Butler's words were supported at the Battle of Nashville.

---

<sup>36</sup> Butler, *Butler's Book*, 741.

<sup>37</sup> Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 167.



***Battle of Nashville, by Louis Kurz and Alexander Allison, 1893***

The following slave narrative was given by a former black Civil War soldier who fought at the battle of Nashville. Note that his name is “Anonymous.” This is one of two anonymous slave narrative that I found in *Bullwhip Days*. The southern establishment would have found his narrative to be very disturbing, since Confederate Civil War soldiers were still idolized when the book was originally published in the 1930s. At the time of his narrative, blacks were subjected to racism in the South, so he may have had his name removed for fear of reprisal.

*“When I went to the War, I was turning seventeen. I was in the Battle of Nashville, when we whipped old General Hood. I went to see my mistress on my furlough, and she was glad to see me. She said, ‘You remember when you were sick and had to bring you to the house and nurse you?’ And I told her, ‘Yes m, I remember. ’ And she said, ‘And now, you are fighting me?’ I said, ‘No’m, I ain’t fighting you. I’m fighting to get free.’”<sup>38</sup>*

Anonymous

### **Changing respect of the N-word**

Between December 10 and 29, 1864, black troops from Kentucky fought at Saltville, Virginia. The following is exceptional historical material because it describes the action of a black cavalry unit at the battle of Saltville.

---

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, *Bullwhip Days*, 339.

*Letter from Col. James S. Brisbiny to Brig. General Lorenzo Thomas*

*Lexington Ky Oct 20/64*

*General I have the honor to forward herewith a report of the operations of a detachment of the 5th U.S. Colored Cavalry during the late operations in Western Virginia against the Salt Works. After the main body of the forces had moved, Gen'l Burbridge Comdg. District was informed I had some mounted recruits belonging to the 5th U.S. Colored Cavalry, then organizing at Camp Nelson and he at once directed me to send them forward. They were mounted on horses that had been only partly recruited\* and that had been drawn with the intention of using them only for the purpose of drilling. Six hundred of the best horses were picked out, mounted and Col Jas. F. Wade 6th. U.S.C. Cav'y was ordered to take command of the Detachment. The Detachment came up with the main body at Prestonburg Ky and was assigned to the Brigade Commanded by Colonel R. W. Ratliff 12th O[hio].V. Cav.*

*On the march the Colored Soldiers as well as their white Officers were made the subject of much ridicule and many insulting remarks by the white Troops and in some instances petty outrages such as the pulling off the Caps of Colored Soldiers, stealing their horses etc. was practiced by the white Soldiers. These insults as well as the jeers and taunts that they would not fight were borne by the Colored Soldiers patiently or punished with dignity by their Officers but in no instance did I hear Colored soldiers make any reply to insulting language used toward [them] by the white Troops.*

*On the 2nd of October the forces reached the vicinity of the Salt Works and finding the enemy in force preparations were made for the battle. Col Ratliffs Brigade was assigned to the left of the line and the Bridge dismounted was disposed as follows. 5th U.S.C. Cav. on the left. 12th O[hio]. V.C. in the center and 11th Mich. Cav. on the right. The point to be attacked was the side of a high mountain, the Rebels being posted about halfway up behind rifle pits made of logs and stones to the heights of three feet. All being in readiness the Brigade moved to the attack. The Rebels opened upon them a terrific fire but the line pressed steadily forward up the steep side of the mountain until they found themselves within fifty yards of the Enemy. Here Col. Wade ordered his force to charge and the Negroes rushed upon the works with a yell and after a desperate struggle carried the entire line killing and wounding a large number of the enemy and capturing some prisoners There were four hundred black soldiers engaged in the battle. one hundred having been left behind sick and with broken down horses on the march, and one hundred having been left in the Valley to hold horses. Out of the four hundred engaged, one hundred and fourteen men and four officers fell killed or wounded. Of this fight I can only say that men could not have behaved more bravely. I have seen white troops fight in twenty-seven battles and I never saw any fight better. At dusk the Colored Troops were withdrawn from the enemies works, which they had held for over two hours, with scarcely a round of ammunition in their Cartridge boxes.*

*On the return of the forces those who had scoffed at the Colored Troops on the march out were silent.*

*Nearly all the wounded were brought off though we had not an Ambulance in the command. The Negro 'soldiers preferred present suffering to being murdered at the hands of a cruel enemy. I*

*saw one man riding with his arm off another shot, through the lungs and another shot through both hips.*

*Such of the Colored Soldiers as fell into the hands of the Enemy during the battle were brutally murdered. The Negroes did not retaliate but treated the Rebel wounded with great kindness, carrying them water in their canteens and doing all they could to alleviate the sufferings of those whom the fortunes of war had placed in their hands. Col. Wade handled his command with skill bravery and good judgment, evincing his capacity to command a much larger force. I am General Very Respectfully Your Obedient. Servant*

*James S. Brisbiny*

*\*i.e., disabled or diseased horses that had been only partly*

By the end of the war, black soldiers had earned the respect of their enemies, the Confederates. At one point in the battle of Milliken's Bend two companies of Iowa were stampeded from the battlefield. Confederate General McColloch said "The white or true Yankee portion ran like whipped curs almost as soon as the charge was ordered." while the blacks resisted with "considerable obstinacy," yet they could not hold the levee."<sup>39</sup> Respect for black soldiers changed the meaning of the word "nigger," and was used by Confederate soldiers as a proper noun. In a letter to his mother, a Union officer wrote:

*" I have talked with numbers of Paroled Prisoners in Vicksburg, and they all admit it was the hardest stroke that there cause has received—the arming of the negrow. Not a few of them told me that they would rather fight two Regiments of white Soldiers than one of Niggers. Rebel Citizens fear them more than they would fear Indians."*<sup>40</sup>

## **USCT's at Appomattox Court House for the "Surrender of Lee and his army"**

On May 19, 2017 without much national attention a statue of Robert E. Lee was removed from the center of Lee Circle near downtown New Orleans. It was the order of a predominant black city council. Many of New Orleans blacks saw the statue "as an offensive celebration of the Confederacy and the system of slavery it sought to preserve."<sup>41</sup> My concern is that there may be no statue of anyone from the Louisiana Native Guard that would represent an important part of black New Orleans identity and culture.

I discovered that the black New Orleanian's were not acquainted with the Louisiana Native Guard when I visited New Orleans the summer before Hurricane Katrina. I toured the area with a very

---

<sup>39</sup> Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 131-135

<sup>40</sup> Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 155.

<sup>41</sup> NPR Michigan Radio, *With Lee Statue's Removal, Another Battle Of New Orleans Comes To A Close*, <http://www.npr.org/2017/05/20/529232823/with-lee-statues-removal-another-battle-of-new-orleans-comes-to-a-close>

knowledgeable black tour guide. He was aware of all New Orleans history except black Civil War history. He said that he had never heard of the Louisiana Native Guard or the Battle of Port Hudson. This history is common knowledge because it was published in the North, but it remains unknown to many blacks in New Orleans.

If black New Orleanian's knew the real history of Robert E Lee's capture maybe they would not feel as intimidated by his statue. I had not questioned the existing history of Appomattox Court House until the discovery of a family member that was at the court house when Lee surrendered and not part of the Park Services record. This led me to research the event and now I question the existing history.

I was attending my brother n-law, Vernon Douglas's funeral when I became aware that Vernon and my wife Nancy's great grandfather Wallace Douglas was a private in the 114<sup>th</sup> USCT, Company K, XXV Corps. Vernon's cousin Pat Spalding informed me that his regiment served at Appomattox Court House. The National Park Service acknowledges that the 114<sup>th</sup> was at Appomattox Court House<sup>42</sup> but they are not included in the Park Service's history of Lee's surrender.

The National Park Service published the official history of colored troops in the Appomattox Campaign in a webpage named "Black Soldiers on the Appomattox Campaign."<sup>43</sup> The article states, "There were seven black units (approximately 2,000 men, or 3% of the Federal force) which made the journey all the way to Appomattox Court House ... the 29th and 31st U.S.C.T., along with the 116th U.S.C.T., assigned to them from another brigade. Colonel Ulysses Doubleday's brigade, 8th, 41st, 45th, and 127th U.S.C.T., were also present."

Bennie J. McRae, Jr. compiled USCT records and published them on the web in three sections, which are Border States,<sup>44</sup> Northern States and Southern States. I found the 114<sup>th</sup> in the Border States section and their official regiment record states "Pursuit of Lee April 3-9. Appomattox Court House April 9. Surrender of Lee and his army." The Park Service states that the 116<sup>th</sup> was the only black regiment from Border States at Appomattox Court House. I searched through the USCT regiment records of the other Border States USCT regiments and found five additional regiments that state that they were at "Surrender of Lee and his army," which are the 109<sup>th</sup>, 114<sup>th</sup>, 117<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. The Park Service states that the Northern State USCT regiments 8<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>th</sup>, 41<sup>th</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup>, and 127<sup>th</sup> were at Appomattox Court House. A search of the Northern States USCT regiment records support the presents of five of these regiments at Lee's surrender however the 43<sup>rd</sup> was present at Appomattox Court House as well. The record of the 36<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> states that they were in the Appomattox Campaign but they did not mention being present at Appomattox Court House. Review of the Southern State USCT records revealed that the 23<sup>rd</sup> was present at Lee's surrender as well.

---

<sup>42</sup> National Park Service, *114th Regiment, United States Colored Infantry* <http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units-detail.htm?battleUnitCode=UUS0114RI00C>

<sup>43</sup> National Park Service, *Black Soldiers on the Appomattox Campaign*, <http://www.nps.gov/apco/black-soldiers.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Bennie J. McRae, Jr., *Organization of the United States Colored Troops in the Border States*, [http://www.lwfaam.net/cw/bord\\_states](http://www.lwfaam.net/cw/bord_states)



The Park Service states that there were seven USCT regiments at Appomattox Court House, however review of USCT records indicate that there were fourteen USCT regiments at Lee's surrender, if we include the 29<sup>th</sup>.

The Park Service may have also under counted the USCT's at Appomattox. The Park Service states that there were about 2000 USCT's at Appomattox Court House which breaks down to less than 300 men per regiment. Newly formed regiments are required to have 970 men.<sup>45</sup> The 114<sup>th</sup> would be newly formed since it was organized only ten months before Lee's surrender. I would estimate that the number of USCT soldiers at Lee's surrender could exceed 10,000 men or 15% of the Federal force. The Park Service needs to correct the history "Black Soldiers on the Appomattox Campaign."

### **Charleston Liberated**

The Confederate flag was taken down from the state capitol building in Charleston South Carolina on July 10, 2015. While teaching this history in a Michigan prison over 20 years ago, I was asked by an inmate what my position was on the confederate flag flying over South Carolina's capitol building. I replied that I was more concerned that black Charlestonians did not support their liberation hero's. My position has not changed however I would like to add that the ancestors of black Charlestonians did support their liberation hero's.

South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union and the Civil War started in South Carolina at Fort Sumter. The first black regiment was formed in South Carolina as well making the state an important part of Civil War history. On February 18, 1865, black troops fighting in the advance of the Union army were the first to enter Charleston. The Harper's weekly illustration reads, "*Marching on!*"—

---

<sup>45</sup> National Park Service, *From Regiment to President: The Structure and Command of Civil War Armies*, <http://www.nps.gov/resources/story.htm?id=299>



"MARCHING ON"—THE FIFTY-FIFTH MASSACHUSETTS COLORED REGIMENT SINGING JOHN BROWN'S MARCH IN THE STREETS OF CHARLESTON, FEBRUARY 21, 1865.—[See Page 17.]

***The Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Colored Regiment singing John Brown's March in the streets of Charleston, February 21, 1865."***

A parade was organized by emancipated blacks of Charleston to celebrate their liberation on March 21, 1865. A report of the parade appeared in the New York Daily Tribune on April 4, 1865 called, "A Jubilee of Freedom": *Freed Slaves March in Charleston, South Carolina.*<sup>46</sup>

*There was the greatest procession of loyalists in Charleston last Tuesday that the city has witnessed for many a long year. The present generation has never seen its like. For these loyalists were true to the Nation without any qualifications of State rights, reserved sovereignties, or other allegiances; they gloried in the flag, they adored the Nation, they believed with the fullest faith in the ideas which our banner symbols and the country avows its own. It was a procession of colored men, women and children, a celebration of their deliverance from bondage and ostracism; a jubilee of freedom, a hosannah to their deliverers.*

*The celebration was projected and conducted by colored men. It met on the Citadel green at noon. Upward of ten thousand persons were present, colored men, women and children, and every window and balustrade overlooking the square was crowded with spectators. This immense gathering had been convened in 24 hours, for permission to form the procession was given only on Sunday night, and none of the preliminary arrangements were completed till Monday at noon.*

<sup>46</sup> History Matters "A Jubilee of Freedom": *Freed Slaves March in Charleston, South Carolina, March, 1865*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6381/>

*Gen. Hatch, Admiral Dahlgren and Col. Woodruff gave their aid to the movement; and thereby the 21st Regiment of U.S.C.T., a hundred colored marines and a number of national flags gave dignity and added attractions to the procession.*

*The procession began to move at one o'clock under the charge of a committee and marshalls on horseback, who were decorated with red, white and blue sashes and rosettes.*

*First came the marshals and their aid[e]s, followed by a band of music; then the 21st Regiment in full form; then the clergymen of the different churches, carrying open Bibles; then an open car, drawn by four white horses, and tastefully adorned with National flags. In this car there were 15 colored ladies dressed in white, to represent the 15 recent Slave States. Each of them had a beautiful bouquet to present to Gen. Saxton after the speech which he was expected to deliver. A long procession of women followed the car. Then followed the children of the Public Schools, or part of them; and there were 1,800 in line, at least. They sang during the entire length of the march:*

*John Brown's body lies a moulding in the grave,  
John Brown's body lies a moulding in the grave,  
John Brown's body lies a moulding in the grave,  
His soul is marching on!  
Glory! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
We go marching on!*

*This verse, however, was not nearly so popular as one which it was intended should be omitted, but rapidly supplanted all the others, until at last all along the [ ? ] or more of children, marching two abreast, no other sound could be heard than*

*We'll hang Jeff. Davis on a sour apple tree!  
We'll hang Jeff. Davis on a sour apple tree!  
We'll hang Jeff. Davis on a sour apple tree!  
As we go marching on!*

A similar parade occurred again in Charleston a month later. A Confederate prison for Union soldiers was located in Charleston at the site of the elite *Washington Race Course and Jockey Club*. The site contained a mass grave of Union soldiers. Because of the “no-quarter” Confederate policy for captured black soldiers, prisoner exchange was halted and many Union soldiers died in unsupplied confederate prisons. Many of the Union soldier remains were exhumed and given a proper cemetery burial at the site. A parade of 10,000 people was organized to dedicate the Union cemetery, which was the first *Memorial Day Celebration*.<sup>47</sup> The procession started at 9 am on May 1, 1865. At the head of the procession was three thousand black schoolchildren carrying roses and singing “John Browns Body.” They were followed by several hundred black women carrying flowers and wreaths. The men marched next followed by Union soldiers. At the cemetery the children sang ““We'll Rally around the Flag,” the

---

<sup>47</sup> David W. Blight, *The First Decoration Day*, <https://zinnedproject.org/materials/the-first-decoration-day/>

*“Star-Spangled Banner,” and several spirituals”. Black ministers read from scripture: “for it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you... in the year of this jubilee he shall return every man unto his own possession.”*

## **Conclusions**

Five hundred years from now a little known story will be told of enslaved American people that were so persecuted their name became an insult. These victims that were rescued from slavery by President Lincoln and his Union Army. Since these people will be remembered only as victims they will not be counted as American heroes. This narrative however is false and will only be corrected by diligent historians. The true story is these persecuted people relied on their religious faith to raise them from the tribulation of slavery and its tremendous persecution. They were flogged for praying for freedom but continued to pray and inspire abolitionist. When given the opportunity to fight they fought with a level of determination that is only shared by invincible armies. This is actually the true narrative of African American slave liberation. But will the truth triumph over centuries of brain washing? This is the true test of American character courage and determination.