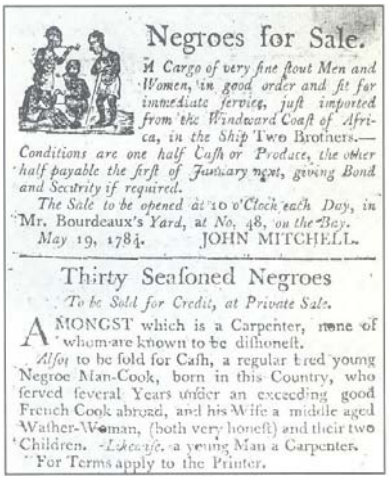
Vicksburg National Military Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

# Glimpses of the African-American Experience

# It's Bad to Belong to Folks That Own You Body and Soul

## Blacks in Antebellum America



Negroes for Sale.

*A Cargo of very fine stout Men and Women, in good order and fit for immediate service, just imported from the Windward Coast of Africa, in the Ship* Two Brothers.—*Conditions are one half Cash or Produce, the other half payable the first of January next, giving Bond and Security if required.*

*The Sale to be opened at 10 o'Clock each Day, in* Mr. Bourdeaux's *Yard, at No. 48, on the Bay.*

*May 19, 1784.* JOHN MITCHELL.

Thirty Seasoned Negroes

*To be Sold for Credit, at Private Sale.*

AMONGST which is a Carpenter, none of whom are known to be dishonest.

*Also* to be sold for Cash, a regular bred young Negroe Man-Cook, born in this Country, who served several Years under an exceeding good French Cook abroad, and his Wife a middle aged Washer-Woman, (both very honest) and their two Children. *Likewise*, a young Man a Carpenter.

For Terms apply to the Printer.

The situation of blacks in America is a unique one. No other group to come here from a foreign continent was so completely torn away from its roots, and no other group had to endure slavery.

The harshness of slavery went far beyond cruel punishments and living and working conditions. Every part of a slave's life was controlled. Children could be taken from their parents and sold or handled in any way the master – not the parents – saw fit. Slaves had no rights in matters that are taken for granted today – education, religion, free speech. Enslavement stripped black people of their fundamental human dignity and stifled their complete development, depriving them of the possibility of achieving their ultimate dreams and aspirations.

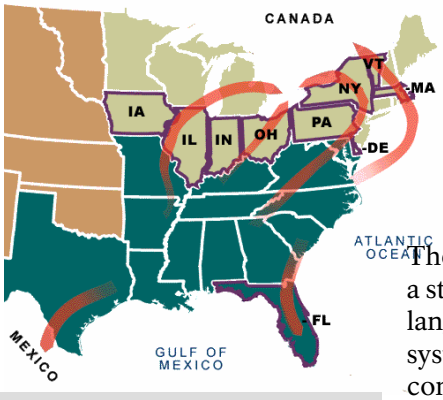
Approximately a quarter million free blacks lived in the slave states, while a little over 200,000 resided in the free states. As free blacks, they may not have been owned, but their civil liberties scarcely resembled those of white people. They were free, but not equal. They tended to hold inferior jobs, receive inadequate education, and could vote in only a handful of states. Free blacks that resided in the slave states had even fewer civil liberties. Southern whites viewed them with suspicion, looking at them as instigators and leaders of slave protests and rebellions. Once sectional tensions mounted, whites in the slave states kept a careful eye on free blacks.

During the decades preceding the Civil War, no issue more divided and plagued the people of the United States than slavery. Even among those who had doubts about its morality, slavery was debated as part of a complex set of interlocking philosophical, social, economic, and political concerns too difficult to resolve and too intertwined with the fate of the nation to consider abolishing.

Yet, in the midst of such moral confusion and political failure, black Americans, slave and free, aided by white allies, operated an illegal network determined to strike at slavery by helping those trapped in bondage. The Underground Railroad served the nation as the exacting conscience of the most important reform movement in U.S. history – purging the land of slavery.

The Underground Railroad is one of American history's mysterious creations. It eventually adopted such terms as *"conductors." "stations," "routes," "cargoes," "packages,"* and *"passengers."* Sharing nothing more than the language and imagery with the steam technology of the day, the Underground Railroad is one of history's finest symbols of the struggle against oppression.

The movement of freedom-seeking slaves resists precise characterization even though it functioned from the founding of the Republic through the terrible bloodletting of the Civil War. It involved lone individuals and entire communities, devised bold methods of escape, and was the scene of great human triumphs and awful disappointments. But at its center it embodied the nation's leading principle: the quest for freedom.



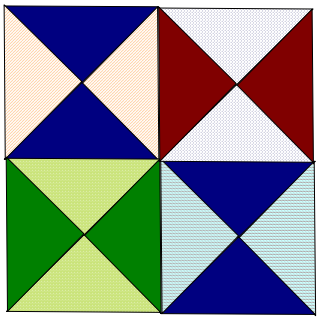

**Harriet Tubman** stands out as the icon of the Underground Railroad. She was born into slavery about 1820 in Maryland. Originally named Araminta Ross, she was called Harriet by her owner. In danger of being sold away from her husband, John Tubman, and her extended family, Harriet escaped alone in 1848 to Philadelphia. She returned to Maryland's Eastern Shore area about 20 times and led more than 300 runaways to freedom. During the Civil War, she returned to the United States from Saint Catharines, Canada, where she had settled, and served in the Union Army as a nurse, spy, and scout. Harriet Tubman died in 1913 at age 93.

**Sojourner Truth** was an evangelistic orator who preached emancipation and women's suffrage. She was born a slave named Isabella Baumfree about 1797 in Hurley, NY. She first gained fame suing for the return of a son who had been illegally sold. Though she could neither read nor write, she was a compelling speaker at abolitionist meetings in the late 1840's, as she evoked the Bible and religious principles. She changed her name in 1843 *"…because I was to declare truth unto people."* In 1850, she began speaking on women's suffrage, and her most famous speech, *"Ain't I A Woman?,"* was presented in 1851 at a women's rights convention in Ohio.

During the Civil War she raised food and clothing contributions for black regiments, and met Abraham Lincoln at the White House in 1864. After the war, she again spoke widely, advocating for some time a "Negro State" in the West. She spoke mainly to white audiences, mostly on religion, "Negro" and women's rights, and temperance. Active until 1874, she returned to Michigan where she died in 1883 and was buried in Battle Creek.

The story of the Underground Railroad is a story of secrets, involving routes and language, codes and music – cunning systems of visual and oral communication, known only to those involved, and reflecting the indomitable spirit of a people's resistance and desire to be free. Codes took the form of spirituals, dance, and symbols committed to memory. Although few of these codes are documented, one, said to be designed by slaves, was the "Quilt Code" – use of quilts as visual maps to freedom.

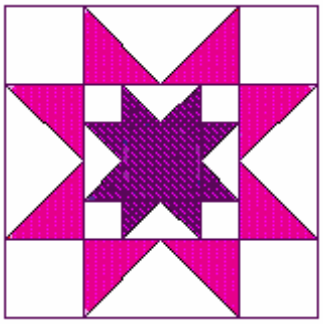
The Quilt Code lends itself to conjecture, and exactly how the code was used is not known. Theory has it that the patterns in the code were used to aid slaves in memorizing directives before leaving the plantation. The names of quilt patterns functioned as metaphors in the code – the patterns representing certain meanings. Patterns used in the code included: *Log Cabin, Bow Ties, Double Wedding Rings, Flying Geese, Drunkard's Path,* and *Tumbling Boxes*.



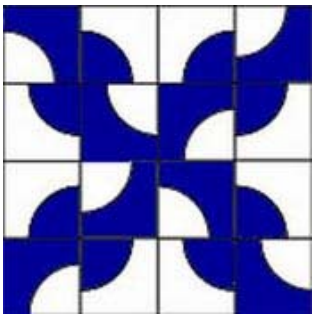
*This pattern is known as Bow Tie, Hourglass, and Pinwheel, all created from one unit. The Hourglass is vertical, the Bow Tie horizontal, and the Pinwheel is the pattern hidden in the center of the design.*

Another code is said to involve the role of the blacksmith on the plantation. The skill of African-American blacksmiths was very respected by both the black and white communities, and in the antebellum South, intricate wrought-iron work was linked to the owner's wealth and prestige. Was the plantation blacksmith a mere skilled laborer, or, as is suspected, was he the dispatcher of information using the anvil and hammer to ring out messages? Did the anvil, hammer, and bellows replace the talking drums when they were outlawed? When "loaned out" to other plantations, the blacksmith most likely used the opportunity to collect geographical information and his cleverness and importance were hidden under the guise of strenuous hard labor.

*Morning Star/Evening Star – Since slaves were told to follow the North Star, many nineteenth-century quilts contained star images.*



*It was believed that when the Tumbling Blocks pattern appeared, it was the signal that the time had come for the slaves to gather their belongings and escape.*

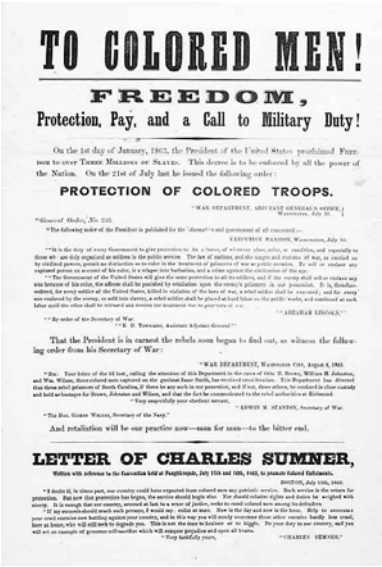


*The Drunkard's Path pattern was believed to encourage the slaves to follow a zigzag path. This may have been a connection to the African superstition that evil only travels in a straight line. Also interesting was the fact that safe houses were staggered for protective reasons as well.*

# Taking Life and Honor in Their Hands

## Black Troops in the Civil War

**Frederick Douglass** was born into slavery in 1818 in Maryland, and given the name Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey. Fleeing slavery in 1838, he settled in New Bedford, MA. Using his eloquent oratorical and journalistic skills, he became the most famous 19th century black abolitionist, lecturing for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, and producing a newspaper, *The North Star*, later titled *Frederick Douglass' Newspaper*. He argued for immediate abolition of slavery, and helped many fugitives escape to freedom. During the Civil War, he campaigned for the rights of blacks to enlist in the Union Army, and was consulted about racial issues by President Lincoln. In 1872, Douglass moved to Washington, D.C., serving as publisher of the *New National Era*, intended to carry forward the work of elevating the position of African-Americans in the post-Emancipation period. The enterprise was discontinued when promised financial backing failed to materialize. Douglass also served briefly as President of the Freedmen's National Bank, and subsequently in various national service positions, including U.S. marshal for the District of Columbia, and diplomatic positions in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.



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.

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

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

LETTER OF CHARLES SUMNER,

As the Union army penetrated deeper into southern territory in the Civil War, huge numbers of black refugees fled to Union lines. Some sought protection from the ravages of war; most, however, hoped that this was the "War for Freedom." They arrived in wagons, on horseback, and on foot, and many came merely with the tattered clothing on their backs.

For slaves, flight to the North was a risky proposition. Beatings, whippings, mutilation, and sometimes murder, awaited the unlucky runaways who were caught. By the war's end, however, estimates of between 500,000 and 700,000 slaves escaped to the Yankees.

Precedent supported black admission into the armed forces. In the American Revolution, black soldiers fought valiantly in the Continental Army. During the War of 1812, men of African descent fought most conspicuously alongside Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans. More importantly, black men had already secured entry into the United States Navy, but, as this was predominantly a ground war, it was in the army that black men had to make their mark. No one was more aware of that fact than Frederick Douglass, who harangued the Lincoln administration for its unwillingness to admit African Americans into the Federal army.

When the war had reached such magnitude that a true reunion of the states without the destruction of slavery was impossible, the President acted.

From the American Revolution to the present, African-Americans have volunteered to fight for their country. The Civil War was no exception. Autumn of 1862 set into motion a philosophical change in the recruitment of Union soldiers to fight the Civil War, but the opportunity for blacks to fight and die for their freedom did not come easy. Using former slaves as soldiers evolved over painful stepping stones of hostility, discrimination and ill will. Some Northerners, despite their abolitionist views, did not like blacks, nor wanted to associate with them on any terms of equality.

Four months before the Emancipation Proclamation, Negroes enlisted for the first time in the Louisiana Native Guards and the Corps D'Afrique. Five colored regiments were in service:

- 1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry Regiment (African Descent),
- 1st Regiment Louisiana Native Guards,
- 2nd Regiment Louisiana Native Guards,
- 3rd Regiment Louisiana Native Guards, and,
- 1st Regiment Kansas Colored Infantry.

The latter has the distinction of being the first colored troops to have engaged the enemy in October 1862, with a raiding party in Missouri. These five regiments were re-designated into US Colored Troops, respectively becoming the 33rd, 73rd, 74th, 75th, and 79th (new) Regiments, US Colored Troops.

With the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, President Lincoln stipulated that blacks could be received in the Union army, *"…to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places…,"* and shortly thereafter, the 1st Regiment Louisiana Native Guards became the first all-black unit to be formally mustered into the United States Army in New Orleans. General Order No. 143, dated May 22, 1863, authorized the creation of the Bureau for Colored Troops, thus lending the full force and effect of the Federal government to the organization and recruitment of colored regiments. On June 30, 1863, the First Regiment, United States Colored Troops (USCT), was mustered in at Washington, DC. At that point, recruitment was going on aggressively all over the country, and it so continued until ordered stopped on April 27, 1865, when no more black troops were required.

## Black Troops in the Union Army

James Monroe Trotter was born the son of a slave in Grand Gulf, MS, on November 8, 1842. He enlisted as a private on June 11, 1863, in Company K, 55th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry (Colored). Promoted to sergeant major of the regiment, he became one of the three black soldiers later commissioned as officers in the 55th Massachusetts when he was made a second lieutenant on June 7, 1865. He became the first black music historian by writing the epochal 508-page, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*. In 1888, President Grover Cleveland appointed Monroe as recorder of deeds in Washington, D.C., replacing Frederick Douglass, and which was at the time, the highest position that a black man had held in the United States.

2nd U.S. Colored Light Artillery

1st Tennessee Colored Battery

More than 386,000 blacks served in the Union army in various capacities. Some 186,000 served as soldiers and another 200,000 served as laborers, cooks and teamsters. Black soldiers received lower pay than their white counterparts, and often went without adequate equipment. Even so, the North's decision to incorporate blacks into their military forces was a vital key to victory.

No branch of the Union army was more efficient and respected than the light artillery, and during the Civil War the Northern artillery became extremely proficient at moving and firing its cannon on the battlefield. Beginning in 1863, black soldiers were recruited into this combat arm of Federal service, with several states organizing black light artillery batteries. Eventually designated United States Colored Troops, these units became Batteries A through I of the Second Regiment of Light Artillery, USCT. Among their battle honors were Brice's Cross Roads, Mississippi; Big Creek, Arkansas; Fort Pillow, Tennessee; and City Point, Virginia.

Black Union regiments participated in many of the major battles of the Civil War, including the following major actions:

- Island Mound, MO, Oct 29, 1862,
- Port Hudson, LA, Apr 27, 1863,
- Milliken's Bend, LA, Jun 7, 1863,
- Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Jul 1-2, 1863,
- Honey Springs, Indian Territory, Jul 17, 1863,
- Olustee, FL, Feb 2, 1864,
- Poison Springs, AR, Apr 4, 1864,
- Fort Pillow, TN, Apr 12, 1864,
- Poison, Springs, AR, Apr 18, 1864,
- Jenkins' Ferry, AR, Apr 30, 1864,
- Brices Crossroads, MS, Jun 10, 1864,
- Battery Wagner, SC, Jul 18, 1864,
- The Crater, Petersburg, VA, Jul 30, 1864,
- New Market Heights, VA, Sep 29, 1864,
- Fort Gilmer, VA, Sep 29, 1864,
- Saltville, VA, Oct 2, 1864,
- Honey Hill, SC, Nov 30, 1864,
- Overton Hill, TN, Dec 18, 1864,
- Natural Bridge, FL, Mar 8, 1865,
- Fort Blakely, AL, Apr 9, 1864,
- Palmito Ranch, TX, May 12-13, 1865.

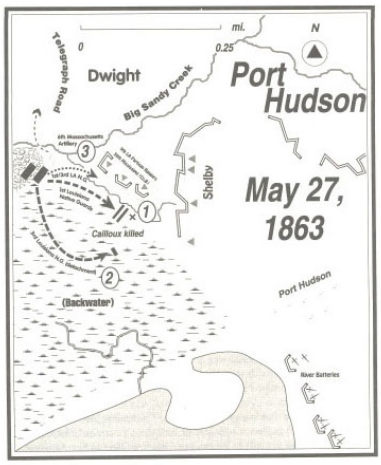
Several Union regiments were formed in Mississippi following the Vicksburg campaign and served with distinction during the war. These regiments included:

- 1st Regiment Cavalry (African Descent),
- 1st Regiment Mounted Rifles,
- 1st Regiment Heavy Artillery (African Descent),
- 2nd Regiment Heavy Artillery (African Descent),
- 1st Regiment Infantry (African Descent),
- 2nd Regiment Infantry (African Descent),
- 3rd Regiment Infantry (African Descent),
- 4th Regiment Infantry (African Descent),
- 5th Regiment Infantry (African Descent),
- 6th Regiment Infantry (African Descent).

Eventually 166 regiments were organized, trained, and sent to the various theaters of operations. Initial questions concerning the black soldiers' resolve to fight were answered on May 27, 1863, during the first Federal assault on the Confederate defenses at Port Hudson, LA, when according to their fellow white soldiers, the black troops *"…charged and re-charged and didn't know what retreat meant."* Two weeks later, black troops stationed at Milliken's Bend, LA, in concert with the gunboats *USS Choctaw* and *Lexington*, successfully drove off a determined Rebel attack.

Louisiana Native Guards

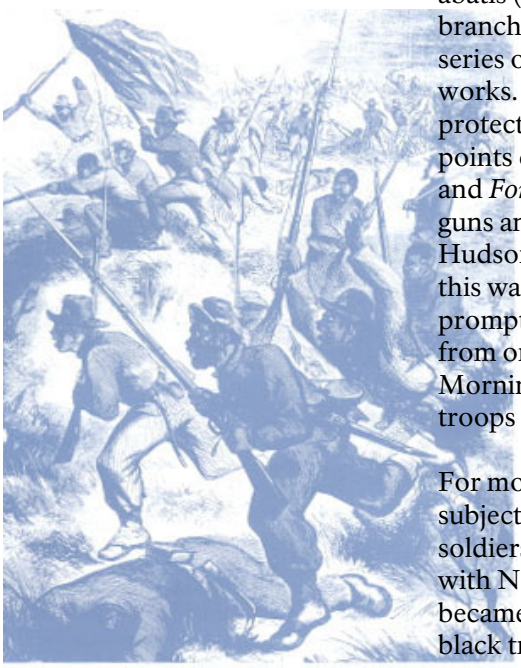
## Price of Freedom – The Battle of Port Hudson




*1st and 3rd Louisiana Native Guards' Assault at Port Hudson, LA, May 27, 1863.*

*"Now," the flag-sergeant cried,*
*"Through death and hell betide,*
*Let the whole nation see,*
*If we are fit to be,*
*Free in this land; or bound*
*Down, like the whining hound –*
*Bound with red stripes of pain*
*In our old chains again!"*
*Oh! What a shout there went*
*From the black regiment!*

*- George H. Boker*



Spring 1863 found the Louisiana Native Guard units camping in mud, first at Algier, then Baton Rouge, LA. The 1st Louisiana was comprised of well-educated, professional freemen. The 2nd and 3rd Louisiana were runaway slaves. Officers for the units were black and white. The only assignment the soldiers had been given since the day of muster was one of drudgery and hard physical labor, building forts and repairing bridges. As the war continued to go badly for the Union, Lincoln realized that for the Emancipation Proclamation to become reality, the Negroes would have to be given the chance to fight.

First use of Negro troops in combat, following the Emancipation Proclamation, took place along the Mississippi River. Two fortified cities enabled the Confederacy to maintain control of 200 miles of river - Vicksburg, to the north, and Port Hudson, to the south. With high bluffs and commanding views of the immense waterway, these strategic cities had to be taken for the Union to gain control of the river, splitting the Confederacy in two. The black troops' first chance to fight would come at Port Hudson, LA.

The city's 3-mile-long fortified line was built by slave labor. A sweeping arc with the Mississippi River's 80-ft bluffs guarding the backside, the assault would not be easy. Along the semi-circle was abatis (felled trees with sharpened branches), and the area was supported by a series of rifle pits and outlying battery works. Fortifications were 20-ft thick and protected by a 15-ft ditch, with strategic points carrying names such as *The Citadel* and *Fort Desperate*. Armed with 20 siege guns and over 100 artillery pieces, Port Hudson was a formidable wall. Added to this was an excellent rear facility for the prompt shifting of troops and artillery from one point to another along the line. Morning of May 27, 1863, found Union troops facing this wall.

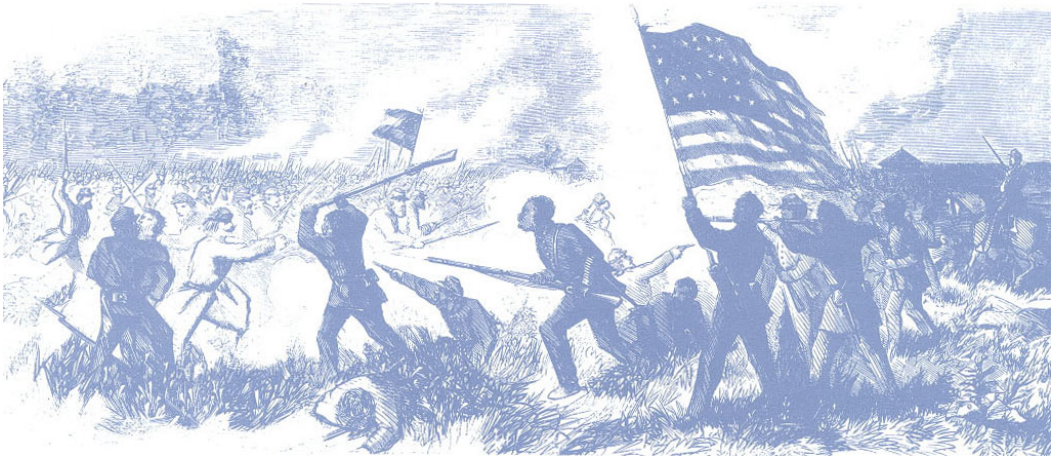
For months the black soldiers had been subject to ridicule and harassment. White soldiers resented the prospect of serving with Negroes. *"Niggers won't fight!"* became the stereotypical phrase. For the black troops, Port Hudson took on a new meaning. It was no longer simply a conflict between Southerners and Northerners - blacks and white Southerners. This battle would answer the questions: *Could Negroes fight? Would Negroes fight?* Their future as soldiers was at stake.

As Union batteries shelled the line, 1,100 Negro soldiers formed four columns to advance 1.5 miles to the front. To their right was an impassable swamp connected to the Mississippi. To the left was abatis, thick underbrush, ravines and gullies. In front, a pontoon bridge. The position was made impregnable by an engineered use of the river to create an area called the backwater, filled with water 20-ft deep. But the most ominous feature was the high bluff with its artillery pieces. To turn back now would mean dishonor, possibly a coward's death. But the Negro soldier had come to prove his worth. Gripping the unfurled banner, Color Sergeant Anselmas Planciancois of the 1st Louisiana had orders to *"…protect, defend, die for, but do not surrender these flags."* Sgt. Planciancois responded, *"Colonel, I will bring these colors to you with honor or report to God the reason why."*

At 10 AM the bugle sounded *"Charge!"* Confederate rifle pits and batteries opened fire with everything they had. Over and over the volleys came, direct fire on the front and crossfire from two batteries to the left and right. The black troops wavered, halted, then rushed for cover only to reform and again advance. The scene was repeated over and over, until the line was stopped by the backwater. Sgt. Planciancois was decapitated and fell, still clutching the banner. Six men died for the honor of carrying the flag, and finally, after four assaults, the retreat order came - the siege of Port Hudson began.

As a military operation, the assault was a failure, but the behavior of the Negro regiments was a bright spot, their conduct closely observed. Had they retreated under fire, their future would have been jeopardized. Three hundred men of the Native Guards were killed, wounded or missing. The history of that day proved to the US Government that it had found in this group of men effective supporters and defenders of a country in which they were not even citizens.

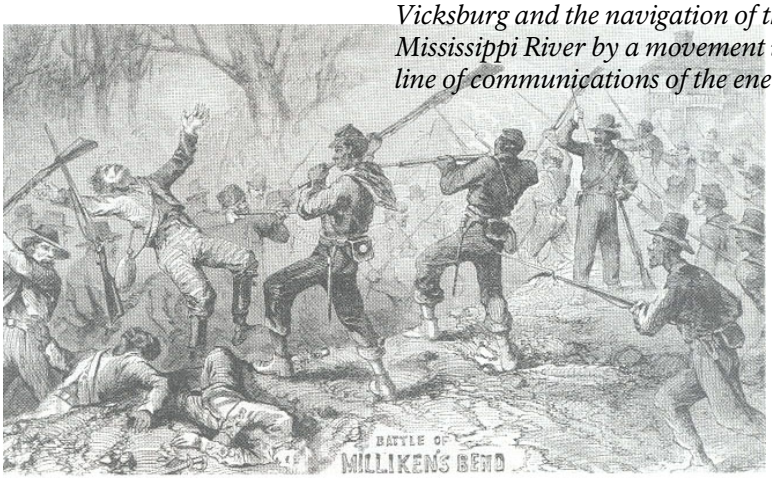
## Before "Glory" – The Battle of Milliken's Bend



Sunday, June 7, 1863, saw what Major General U.S. Grant called, *"The first important engagement of the war in which colored troops were under fire."* The troops Grant spoke of were former slaves recruited into the Union Army by Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant General of the US Army. The engagement was the Battle of Milliken's Bend, LA.

Milliken's Bend was the base of Grant's advance supply and communication line running south 63 miles from the Mississippi river above Vicksburg, to Hard Times Landing below the fortress city. As the line was vulnerable, Grant ordered a road cut from Young's Point to Bower's Landing on May 3. This shortened his line to 12 miles and afforded greater protection to the transportation of vital supplies his army needed to conduct the inland campaign against Vicksburg.

Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton, Confederate commander at Vicksburg, recognized the need to destroy Grant's line of supply. On May 9, he wired Lieutenant General Kirby Smith: *"You can contribute materially to the defense of Vicksburg and the navigation of the Mississippi River by a movement upon the line of communications of the enemy on the western side of the river."* He emphasized, *"To break this would render a most important service."*




After the road was opened from Young's Point to Bower's Landing, and as the siege of Vicksburg progressed, Milliken's Bend decreased in strategic importance. Confederate authorities in the east felt it imperative that some effort be made on the west side of the Mississippi in support of the Vicksburg defense. Part of that effort was determined to be an attack on Milliken's Bend.

The entire Union force at Milliken's Bend consisted of three newly organized, incomplete regiments of black troops, and part of one white regiment, a total of 1,061 troops. The black regiments were the 9th Louisiana Regiment (African Descent), organized May 1, 1863, at Vicksburg, the 11th Louisiana Regiment (African Descent), organized May 23, 1863, at Milliken's Bend, and the 1st Mississippi Regiment (African Descent), organized May 16, 1863, at Milliken's Bend. One of these regiments did not receive their muskets until June 6, one day before the battle. Besides lacking any training or familiarity with their weapons - most did not know how to load or reload them – it was discovered that many weapons were of inferior quality and often malfunctioned when used. Officers and enlisted men were unknown quantities to each other.

Following a brief skirmish on June 6, the main assault of Milliken's Bend occurred on June 7th. An excerpt from the official report of Brigadier General Elias S. Dennis, commander of the Union troops, describes the action:

*"It is impossible for men to show greater gallantry than the Negro troops in this Fight."*

*- General Elias S. Dennis*

*"The capacity of the Negro to defend his liberty, and his susceptibility to appreciate the power of motives in the place of the last, had been put to the test under our observation as to be beyond further doubt."*

*- Captain Abraham E. Strickle*

*"The bravery of the blacks at Milliken's Bend completely revolutionized the sentiment of the army with regard to the employment of Negro Troops."*

*- Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana*

*"At 3 o'clock the following morning, (June 7) the enemy made their appearance in strong force on the main Richmond Road, driving the pickets before them. The enemy advanced upon the left of our line, throwing out no skirmishers, marching in close column by division, with a strong cavalry force on his right flank. Our forces consisted of the Twenty-Third Iowa Volunteer Infantry and the African Brigade (in all, 1,061 men), opened upon the enemy when within musket-shot range, which made them waver and recoil, a number running in confusion to the rear; the balance pushing on with intrepidity soon reached the levee, when they were ordered to charge with cries of "No Quarter!"*

*"The African regiments being inexperienced in the use of arms, some of them having been drilled but a few days, and the guns being very inferior, the enemy succeeded in getting upon our works before more than one or two volleys were fired at them.*

*"Here ensued a most terrible hand-to-hand conflict several minutes duration, our men using the bayonet freely and clubbing their guns with fierce obstinacy, contesting every inch of ground, until the enemy succeeded in flanking them, and poured a murderous enfilading fire along our lines; not until they were overpowered and forced by superior number did our men fall behind the river bank, at the same time pouring volley after volley into the ranks of the advancing enemy.*

*"The Gunboat (Choctaw) now got into position and fired a broadside into the enemy, who immediately disappeared behind the levee, but all the time keeping up a fire upon our men.*

*"The enemy at this time appeared to be extending his line to the extreme right, but was held in check by two companies of the Eleventh Louisiana Infantry, African Descent, which had been posted behind cotton bales and part of the old levee; in this position the fight continued until noon, when the enemy suddenly withdrew."*

Confederate Brigadier General Henry E. McCulloch paints a somewhat different picture in his official report:

*"The line was formed under a heavy fire from the enemy, and the troops charged the breastworks, carrying it instantly, killing and wounding many of the enemy by their deadly fire, as well as the bayonet. This charge was resisted by the Negro portion of the enemy's force with considerable obstinacy, while the white or true Yankee portion ran like whipped curs almost as soon as the charge was ordered. There were several instances in this charge where the enemy crossed bayonets with us or were shot down at the muzzle of the musket. No charge was ever more gallantly made than this, and the enemy were not only driven from the levee, but were followed into their camp, where many were killed."*

McCulloch's Brigade, made up of the 16th, 17th, and 19th Texas Infantry, and the 16th Texas Cavalry – approximately 1,500 troops – had 44 men killed, 131 wounded, and 10 missing, compared to General Dennis' forces, which suffered the loss of 101 men killed, 285 wounded, and 266 captured - 566 of these casualties from the black regiments.

Although strategic importance of Millikens' Bend had diminished by the time of the battle, it was significant in another regard. It was a proving ground for the African-American participants, demonstrating their willingness and ability to fight, and earning them praise from all quarters.

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Black troops were repeatedly cited for heroic conduct in battle and steadfastness under trying field conditions. By war's end, black soldiers had participated in 449 separate engagements. While the lure of fighting to end slavery was great, black soldiers faced many hardships their white counterparts did not have to endure, including poor medical attention, harsh treatment, and if captured, a return to slavery, or worse – death. Most battle accounts include only brief references to the role played by black troops.

After the war, some officers tried to help black veterans, while others showed no concern. Black veterans were, however, allowed to join the Union veterans' Grand Army of the Republic organization as equal members with their white comrades-in-arms. Many blacks remained in the occupation forces, while others became the famous *"Buffalo Soldiers"* of the regular US Army in the West.

The last black Union veteran, Joseph Cloves, a drummer in Co. G, 63rd United States Colored Troops, passed away into history on July 15, 1951. Today we remember the service of all black Americans who fought to make our nation a land of freedom for all races.

African-American Civil War Memorial, Washington, DC

## A Forgotten Milestone - Blacks in the US Navy

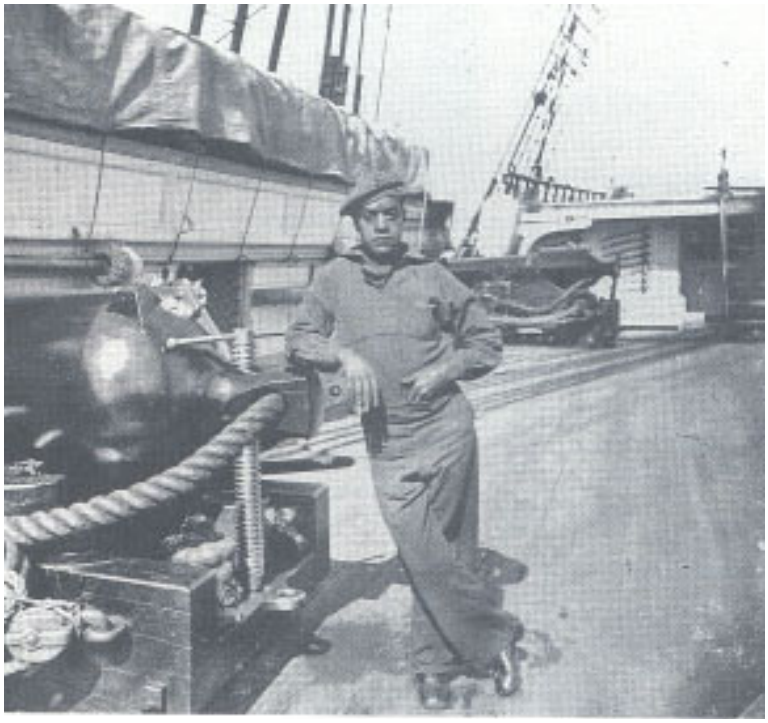
US Navy sleeve patch, identifying petty officers, including stewards and cooks, masters-at-arms, and boatswain's, gunner's and carpenter's mates.

While the Negro soldier was proving himself to be of character, the Negro sailor went forth to do service for his country. Much has been written about the black soldier's display of courage during the Civil War, yet the black sailor had been quietly fighting for his country since the Revolutionary War. Throughout its history, the Navy never barred free Negroes from enlisting, and in September 1861, it adopted the policy of recruiting former slaves – two years before the Army even allowed Negro enlistment. Suffering during the entire course of the war from a shortage of men, the Navy encouraged the Negroes to join the service. *"Fill up the crews with contrabands obtained from Major-General Dix, as there is not an available sailor in the North."* This advice was sent by Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, on August 5, 1862, to Commodore Charles Wilkes, Commander of the James River Flotilla. The Mississippi Squadron, under Admiral David D. Porter, was also suffering a shortage. Admiral Porter wrote to Rear Admiral A.H. Foote on January 3, 1862, *"Don't be astonished at the list of … I send you. I could get no men. They do first-rate."* Five months later, Rear Admiral S.F. DuPont informed Secretary Welles that the contrabands on board the vessels in the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron were *"very useful, particularly as there is difficulty in obtaining men in the North ports."*

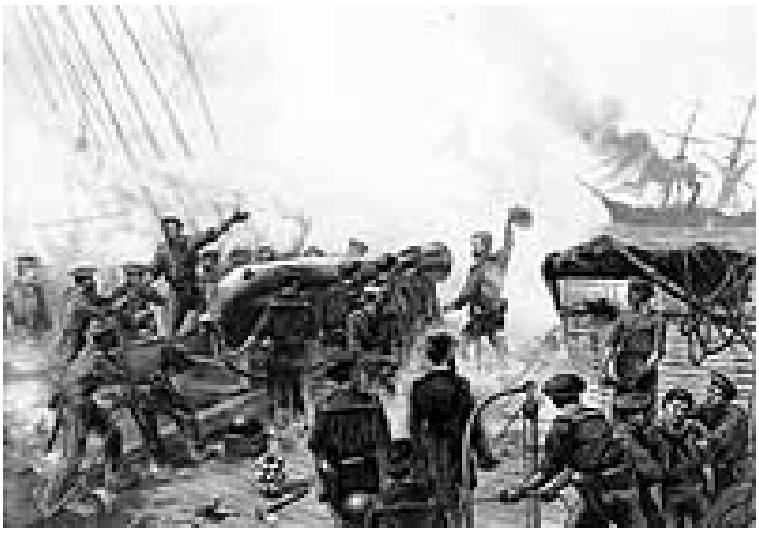
Eager to recruit Negro sailors and to have them re-enlist, the Navy tended to treat them fairly well. Negroes responded in large numbers to the Navy's beckoning. Although precise figures on black naval personnel is lacking, Secretary of the Navy, John D. Long, quotes in a letter on April 2, 1902, the Superintendent of the Naval Records Office as reporting that of the 118,044 enlistments in the Navy during the Civil War, one-fourth (or approximately 29,511) were blacks. Segregation and discrimination were at a minimum, and blacks were messed and quartered with other crewmembers. During prisoner exchanges the Negro sailor was spared the uncertainty experienced by his Negro brother in the Army. Secretary Welles wrote in his diary on October 5, 1864, *"No question of color has ever come up in regard to naval exchange."*

The Negroes served aboard Union ships in various positions and ranks, including officers. Four black sailors serving aboard the *USS Cairo* held the rank of seaman. The number may not seem significant; however, as the Navy viewed the *USS Cairo,* and her sister ships, as "experimental," the bulk of her crew was volunteer. Of the 175 men aboard, only 28 had sailing or naval experience, the four black sailors included, having served as sailors or boatsmen in the private sector.

Men of the USS Mendota



USS Monitor Crewmen



USS Kearsarge Sinking the CSS Alabama

Navy Medal of Honor

**Pease, Joachim -**

*Rank and Organization:*
Seaman, US Navy
*Born:*
Long Island, NY
*Accredited To:*
New York
*G.O. No.:*
45, 31 December 1864

**Citation –**

Served as seaman on board the USS Kearsarge when she destroyed the Alabama off Cherbourg, France, 19 June 1864. Acting as loader on the No. 2 gun during this bitter engagement, Pease exhibited marked coolness and good conduct and was highly recommended by the divisional officer for gallantry under fire.

Negro sailors participated in some of the great naval battles of the Civil War. The encounter between the *USS Monitor* and *USS Virginia* in March 1862, saw one-third of the *Monitor*'s crew being black. Another battle took place thousands of miles from home off the coast of France. On June 19, 1864, the Confederate raider, *CSS Alabama*, steamed out of Cherbourg harbor to meet its doom in an engagement with the *USS Kearsarge*. On the *Kearsarge* were 15 black enlisted men of various ratings. From his actions during this historic duel, Seaman Joachim Pease, loader of No. 1 gun, received the Navy Medal of Honor. Acting master David H. Sumner wrote of Seaman Pease, *"…possessing qualities higher than courage or fortitude which fully sustained his reputation as one of the best men in the ship."* In total 8 black sailors received the Navy Medal of Honor.

The Navy had its roster of Negro sailors who did their duties effectively during battle with little recognition. At least 49 Union vessels had black crewmen who were killed, captured, or wounded in action. Approximately one-fourth of the total casualties (800 of 3,220) suffered by the US Navy during the war were black sailors. To these battle casualties must be listed an estimated 2,000 Negro seamen who died of disease. Because of the long history of blacks in the Navy, little is written about them during the Civil War; not because of their lack of participation, but because the US Navy has always been desegregated. If their quality of work and respect from their fellow sailors could be judged by Civil War photographs (such as displayed in Vicksburg National Military Park's *USS Cairo* museum), it would be safe to say the burden of battle was shared equally.

USS Miami Crewmen

USS Sacramento Crewmen

## To Their Honor – USCT Burials In Vicksburg National Cemetery

In March 1999, a proposal was put forward by Vicksburg Mayor, Robert M. Walker, for placement of a monument in the Vicksburg National Military Park, recognizing the contributions of African-American soldiers during the Civil War. In August of that year, the concept was approved and plans moved forward to obtain funding and submit the proposal for site, design, text, and other required specifications. The original proposed site for the memorial was to be along the tour road in the Vicksburg National Cemetery; however, after discussions with the agencies involved concerning the cultural aspects and funding for the project, the site was moved to a location along Grant Avenue in the Military Park, near the Kansas State Memorial.

Approval to erect the memorial was received in 2002, and Dr. J. Kim Sessums, of Brookhaven, Mississippi, selected to design the monument. The nine-foot tall structure depicts three figures, two of whom are Union soldiers with the 1st and 3rd Mississippi Infantry Regiments of African descent, and the third being a civilian laborer. Of the more than 1,300 monuments in the park, this memorial is the first to honor black troops, and indeed, the first monument honoring African-Americans ever placed in any National Park.

Groundbreaking for the monument was held on September 20, 2003, with dedication of the memorial on February 14, 2004.

"Commemorating the Service of the 1st and 3d Mississippi Infantry, African Descent and All Mississippians of African Descent Who Participated in the Vicksburg Campaign."

Established in 1866 for the burial of *"the soldiers who shall die in the service of this country,"* the Vicksburg National Cemetery lies on ground once manned by Major General William T. Sherman's XV Army Corps. The ground became the final resting place of 17,000 Union soldiers, a number unmatched by any other national cemetery. Bodies removed for re-interment came from the Union lines of Vicksburg, Jackson, Meridian, Grand Gulf, Chickasaw Bayou, and other locations in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Of this vast number, over 6100 were United States Colored Troops (USCT) – more than a third of the total burials. And of this number, only 124 black soldiers and sailors were identified; the rest interred with only a number marking their gravesites.

Though no attempt was made to separate "known" from "unknown," it is evident that, from the cemetery's inception there was segregation according to race. Whereas the re-interments of the first white soldiers were placed throughout sections A through H, and O, all of the initial re-burials of the Negro soldiers were in section M.

Segregation carried over into the memorial services held during the cemetery's early existence. In June 1893, Superintendent Thomas France reported that, for the sake of harmony, he had decided to divide the Decoration Day exercises into two ceremonies - one for Negroes and one for whites. The Negroes held their ceremony from noon until 3 p.m., and the white held theirs from 3 p.m. until 5 p.m.

As time passed, Congress enacted legislation extending burial privileges to a larger portion of the veteran population. This, in turn, created the need to expand existing cemetery space. Upon assuming charge of the cemetery in 1933, Superintendent John Steffy recommended a new burial section be opened, as only 18 available sites remained for Negro veterans. Originally, Steffy had planned to use the old roadway in the rear of the Indian Mound to provide for Negro burials, but due to recent slides and cave-ins, the area was no longer accessible. He reported of a plot southeast of the cemetery in the Vicksburg National Military Park that could be used for this purpose, and requested authority to have the area cleared by members of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Quartermaster General J.L. DeWitt wrote to the Assistant Secretary of War, requesting that his office be authorized to transfer that part of the Military Park to the National Cemetery. However, on advice of the Judge Advocate General to the Assistant Secretary, it was concluded that no authority existed for the proposed transfer, the Judge Advocate General stating,

*"Where land is purchased by the United States for a specific purpose [Vicksburg National Military Park], with funds appropriated by Congress for that purpose, the land may not be devoted to any other purpose than that for which acquired except with specific authority from Congress."*

The pressing need for development of a new addition to the cemetery increased, as available burial space rapidly became limited. Under new regulations made in the early 1940s, the only allowable discrimination between burial of officers and enlisted men was in national cemeteries where separate sections existed for officers and enlisted men, and in national cemeteries where separate sections existed for Negroes and whites. These regulations placed a heavy drain on the already rapidly diminishing burial sites available in the Vicksburg National Cemetery, but no attempt was made to extend the cemetery beyond its original boundaries. By January 1960, it was reported that only 100 unreserved and available gravesites remained within the cemetery. Formulating plans for closing the cemetery to future burials, Superintendent Raymond Rundell of the Vicksburg National Military Park, approached various citizens in the community to test their reactions to the decision. It was concluded that adverse reaction would be minimal, due mainly to the fact that the protests of veterans' organizations were allayed when informed that the previous practice of segregating the burials of Negroes and whites could not continue if the cemetery remained open. The final closing of the cemetery was the result of an administrative decision in the Park and justified by the claim that any further burials would appreciably minimize the historical significance of the Civil War interments.

## Fighting Shoulder to Shoulder – Blacks and the Confederate Army

***"Tender of the Services of a Company of Negroes"***

*We are informed that Mr. G.C. Hale, of Autauga County, yesterday tendered to Governor [A.B.] Moore the services of a company of negroes, to assist in driving back the horde of abolition sycophants who are now talking so flippantly of reducing to a conquered province the Confederate States of the South. He agrees to command them himself, and guarantees that they will do effective service. What will our Black Republican enemies think of such a movement as this? We have frequently heard the slaves who accompanied their masters to the "scene of action," assert that when fighting was to be done, they wanted to shoulder their muskets and do their share of it, and we do not have a shadow of a doubt but what they would be found perfectly reliable. An idea seems to have prevailed at the North, that in the event of a war between the two sections, the slaves would become rebellious. Let them no longer lay this flattering unction to their souls. It will avail them nothing.*

- From the *Montgomery Advertiser*, reprinted in the *Southern* (Athens, Ga.) *Banner*, May 1, 1861.

It has been estimated that over 65,000 Southern blacks, both slave and free, were in the Confederate ranks throughout the Civil War. Of these, over 13,000 *"saw the elephant,"* meeting the enemy first-hand in combat. The Confederate Congress did not officially approve enlistment of blacks in the army, except as musicians, until late in the war, but their presence was apparent long before.

Black Southerners were caught up in the emotion of the coming war just as were white citizens. While many anxiously waited for the *"year of jubilo,"* others had a different response, indicating their support for the South, and offering their services, and to take up arms against the Yankees.

From the start, many Confederate officers defied mandates of Southern politicians, recruiting and enlisting blacks with the simple criteria, *"Will you fight?"* Biracial units were frequently organized by local commanders in response to immediate threats in the form of Union raids. The largest demonstration of Southern black support came in New Orleans with the organization of a regiment of black Confederate troops with black officers - the Louisiana Native Guards. The regiment was a direct result of the rallying of free people of color in New Orleans, who declared themselves resolved and *"ready to take up arms at a moment's notice and fight shoulder to shoulder with other citizens."* The regiment's mission was the defense of New Orleans, and by early 1862, approximately 3,000 men had joined this regiment and various other units in and around the city. While their service was mostly relegated to guard duty in New Orleans, including serving as Provost Guards, there is some indication that at least part of the regiment saw action at Fort Jackson during the campaign. As Federal troops approached and captured New Orleans in 1862, the Native Guards refused to abandon the city, and surrendered, although no parole or surrender documentation is on record.

Four months after the occupation of New Orleans, General Benjamin Butler saw the possibility of utilizing the free men of color who had some military education and discipline and an August 2, 1862, issued an order calling on all members of the Native Guards to enlist in the service of the United States. Although none of the men prominent in the organization of the regiment did so, some of the rank and file did. Under Lt. Col. Chauncey Bassett, the regiment fought with courage and distinction at Port Hudson.

Generally, the Confederate Army was willing to use blacks only as teamsters, cooks, and body servants, and did so to a considerable extent from the outbreak of the war. Later, as white soldiers grew scarce, it became the custom to make requisitions upon communities for slaves to work upon fortifications, government farms, salt works, powder factories, nitre bureaus, and more. Indeed, free blacks and slaves provided much of the infrastructure of the Southern war effort. Fortifications and other defensive works built in nearly every city and town of the South were constructed by black laborers. A persistent theme in Confederate politics was, *"How should black labor be used? What compensation should be given owners of slaves used on national projects?"* Blacks staffed Southern hospitals and ran the weapons manufacturing plants in Virginia and Georgia. Estimates indicate that at least 20% of the workers in the Confederate Ordnance Department were black. But the records also document numerous instances where black southerners found their way into combat, the largest number most probably the ubiquitous "body servants," who took up arms along with their masters as the troops moved into battle.

In January 1864, General Patrick Cleburne and several other Confederate officers in the Army of Tennessee proposed using slaves as soldiers, recommending the offer of freedom if they fought and survived. Although Confederate President Jefferson Davis refused to consider this proposal, and forbade further discussion of the idea, the concept did not die. By the fall of 1864, the South was losing more and more ground, and some believed that only by arming the slaves could defeat be averted. Faced with the serious loss of white manpower in the army, the Confederate Congress passed General Order 14, which President Davis signed into law in March 1865. The Southern

*"I think we must decide whether slavery shall be extinguished by our enemies and the slaves be used against us, or use them ourselves at the risk of the effects which may be produced upon our social institutions. My own opinion is that we should employ them without delay. I believe that with proper regulations they may be made efficient soldiers…Our chief aim should be to secure their fidelity…Such an interest we can give our Negroes by giving immediate freedom to all who enlist, and freedom at the end of the war to the families of those who discharge their duties faithfully (whether they survive or not), together with the privilege of residing at the South. To this might be added a bounty for faithful service.*

*- General Robert E. Lee in a letter to Senator Andrew Hunter January 1865*

*"We are a band of brothers And native to the soil Fighting for our liberties With treasure blood and toil*

*- Civil War battle hymn*

army called for 40,000 slaves to become an armed force in the Confederacy. A notice in the April 1, 1865, *Petersburg Daily Express*, called for black recruits with the statement,

*"To the slaves is offered freedom and undisturbed residences at their old homes in the Confederacy after the war. Not freedom of sufferance, but honorable and self-won by the gallantry and devotion which grateful countrymen will never cease to remember and reward."*

This recruitment effort resulted in a "Negro Brigade," the only two companies of colored troops officially enlisted in Confederate service. As the Confederate Army abandoned Richmond on April 3, 1865, these black Confederate soldiers apparently accompanied General Lee's wagon train, guarding it on its journey. When Lee surrendered his army at Appomattox, a total of 36 blacks were listed on the Confederate paroles.

Had the Confederacy been successful, the organization of the Confederate States Colored Troops, modeled after the segregated northern colored troops, would have created the largest army (at that time) in the world – even larger than that of the North.

Comprehension of the minds and hearts of black Southerners during the Civil War is complex. The majority of blacks were loyal to themselves and their families, trying to do what was best for them, without regard to abstract political causes. For the majority, the war brought not elation and joy, but anxiety, wariness, and difficult choices. There is much to suggest that throughout the war black Southerners, *"maintained a strong sense of local identity and a bittersweet affinity for the land of their birth."*

The primary fact was that the South was home. Some of the 4,000,000 who lived there, had roots going back over 200 years. Despite the oppression of slavery and racism, and sometimes because of it, they had developed intricate networks of relationships to families and friends (both black and white) in local towns and on plantations. They felt a strong sense of attachment to their home states, towns and rural areas, and many who followed the Union armies away from their homes, returned after a short time. Homesickness and a growing awareness that the army could not care for them drove them back to where they started. It has been stated by leading black historian, Benjamin Quarles, that, *"like thousands of white Southerners who personally hated slavery and felt that it was doomed with the coming of the war, but who nevertheless defended the Confederacy, these free Negroes had a sense of community responsibility which impelled them to throw their lot with their neighbors."*

Another black Confederate underscored the wish to improve life in the South by defending it when he stated they hoped to raise esteem for blacks amongst both blacks and whites by fighting for the South: *"no matter where I fight,"* he said, *"I only wish to spend what I have, and fight as long as I can, if only my boy may stand alone in the street equal to a white boy when the war is over."*

The majority of black Confederates were not officially part of the army, and therefore rarely listed on muster rolls, and never listed on hospital rolls. Very little of the work they performed, much less how they lived, was ever recorded and little documentation survives. Yet thousands lie buried, often nameless, under Southern soil, with little or no recognition of their role.

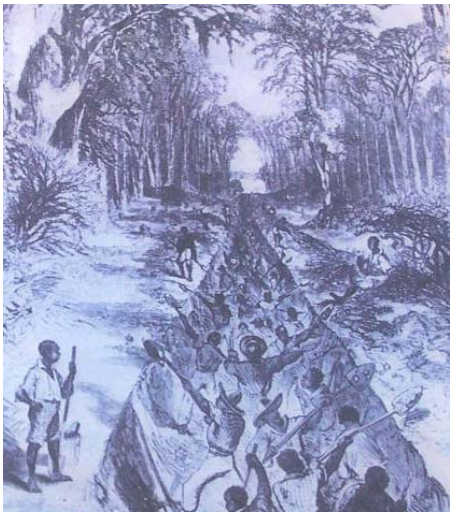
# "Freedom City"

## Blacks in Occupied Vicksburg

Rather than attack Vicksburg directly, the Federals at first tried to engineer their way around the Confederate stronghold. In June 1862, Union troops started digging a canal across the foot of De Soto Point. The theory: the river would adopt the new channel, and Union shipping would be able to bypass Vicksburg. The "Gibraltar of the South" would become just another inland town.

Work on the 1.5 mile canal began on June 27. To speed the digging, the Federals pressed more than 1,200 blacks from area plantations into service alongside the soldiers. For a month the laborers and soldiers toiled, reduced by sickness and hampered by falling water levels. On July 24, with more than half the work force incapacitated, Williams abandoned the project.

Most of the canal lay just beyond the effective range of the Confederate batteries at Vicksburg. The Southerners, however, constructed new batteries to fire on the mouth of the canal below Vicksburg. Even if the canal had been finished, Confederate artillery fire would have made its use extremely hazardous.



Vicksburg, Mississippi was a city born of the river, an ideal place for steamboats to stop for fuel and supplies. Located halfway between New Orleans and Memphis, it was a natural outlet for traffic from the rich delta area, sharing in the state's agricultural boom of the 1830s – a boom that was heavily dependent on cotton, slavery, and the plantation system. Extant to this was the establishment of a network of railroad lines, making Vicksburg an important center for shipping goods throughout the country. These improved transportation facilities, combined with exploitation of slave labor, resulted in unparalleled prosperity for agricultural entrepreneurs in the late 1850s, where fortunes were made harvesting the white gold, and delivering it to the world markets via the Vicksburg hub. In 1859 the city shipped close to 250,000 bales of cotton, grown in the Yazoo Valley and Louisiana Delta. These railroads played a large role during the Civil War, becoming one of the strongest links holding the Confederacy together across the Mississippi River.

At the same time, a dramatic increase in Mississippi's slave population reflected the interdependence of cotton and slavery. By 1860, the average price of an adult field hand had risen to $1,800, and the total value of Mississippi's slave property was estimated at $350,000,000. Vicksburg's prospects for the future were optimistic, clouded only with vague worries about abolitionists' threats to their labor system. Ultimately the economy of the city and the state rested upon slavery.

Prewar Vicksburg's prosperity could be seen in its buildings, signifying a transition from frontier town to ordered city. The new courthouse, built by slave labor in 1859 , and costing $100,000, occupied one of the higher hilltops. When the war decade opened, Vicksburg boasted a population of 4,590 – 3,158 whites, 1,402 slaves, and 31 free blacks – a gain of 1,000 people since the 1850 census.

Because of Vicksburg's diverse economic activity, the city was not dependent on any one particular interest group, resulting in citizens not being so vulnerable to those who preached secession as the panacea for the security of their economic and social system. Thus, the city found itself in an unusual position prior to the election of 1860, for the majority of its citizens were Unionists, in spite of their dependence on the slave culture, and did not sanction secession. No one could have predicted that within three years the Unionist outpost would dramatically change to a Confederate bastion of strength and hope in the West.

By 1862, the Union controlled the Mississippi River from Cairo, Illinois to the Gulf, with the important exception of the crucial stretch of river commanded by the Vicksburg guns to the north, and the batteries of Port Hudson, Louisiana, to the south. On land, Federal troops worked to divert the mighty river away from Vicksburg and its formidable bluffs, digging a canal across the foot of De Soto Point across from the city. This grandiose plan, under Brigadier General Thomas Williams, involved digging a trench, with the theory that the river would take the course of the canal and leave Vicksburg, *"…an inland town with a mere creek in front of it,"* and causing the city to *"…fall with the spade."*

To do the work, Williams confiscated slaves from the plantation owners and utilized runaways to augment his army workforce. As digging commenced, insurmountable problems occurred, not the least of which was fever and illness that took a deadly toll on soldiers and slaves alike. In spite of the canal's failure, however, the campaign marked a significant change in Federal policy regarding the utilization of black labor – it was both the first wide-scale use of slave labor by the Union army in the southwest, and the final time the Union army engaged in the practice of systematically returning slaves to their owners.

Unable to overcome the difficulties associated with the canal, Williams abandoned the project, withdrawing his troops with Admiral Farragut's Gulf Blockading Squadron in July 1862.

As Union forces continued to advance on Vicksburg throughout the fall and winter of 1862-63, problems continually plagued plantation owners with impressments of slaves as well as confiscation of livestock and personal property by soldiers of both armies. Runaway slaves were a constant problem, the Negroes seeming restless and sullen. Many a planter kept trained hounds for chasing and recovering runaways. This, along with the distressing hardship of mandatory burning of cotton to keep it from the hands of the enemy, financially ruined many plantation owners, and numerous planters left for the secluded hills of Louisiana or Texas, evacuating their slaves and as many of their belongings as possible.

During the next few months, Major General Ulysses S. Grant's forces made four unsuccessful attempts to reach Vicksburg, one being the resumption of digging the canal across De Soto Point. Although Grant had little hope for the project's success, it was of great interest to President Lincoln, giving the campaign a particular impetus. Grant expended over two months of backbreaking labor on the canal, once again using blacks along with his army workforce, only to have the levee at the north end of the canal break, flooding the entire site. This, along with the Confederate artillery across the river, put an end to the effort completely.

Undeterred, Grant pushed on with his campaign, and by May 18, 1863, was outside of Vicksburg, surrounding the city with a force that vastly outnumbered the city's defenders. After 47 long days of siege, the city capitulated, surrendering on July 4, 1863, and beginning a period of occupation lasting into the next decade.

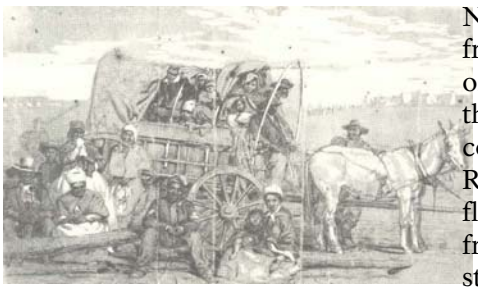
Following the surrender, many Vicksburg families soon found that war conquered loyalty. The loss of "loyal" servants was a bitter reminder of defeat and surrender. Most slaves left within days of the surrender, and those who remained with their masters often became disorderly and sometimes dangerous. Crowds of Negroes clogged the roads, *"…going into Vicksburg to get their freedom."*

The dilemma of the liberated slaves created numerous problems for the Confederates during the first week of occupation, since most Negroes looked upon the Yankees as their "liberators" and felt that they had special privileges. Some became so belligerent that, *"…no white Confederate citizen or soldier dared to speak to them, for fear of being called a rebel, or some other abusive epithet."* Various occupation policies made relations between the races even more difficult, such as Grant's Special Orders, No. 180, giving Negroes "policing" responsibilities:

*"All able bodied Negro men in the city will be immediately collected and organized into working parties under suitable officers…They will at once be set at policing the city and the grounds within the entrenchments."*

Military changes within the city were distressing to Vicksburg's citizens. They lived under martial law, and difficulties increased when the guards were Negroes, resulting in many confrontations and demeaning experiences, as the citizens watched their Southern traditions fall by the wayside.

Although several of the black regiments saw action in skirmishes around Vicksburg during occupation, such as Coleman's Plantation near Port Gibson, Mississippi, on July 4, 1864, most troops in the city served at post and garrison duty, a somewhat tedious task at times. In spite of efforts to enforce rigid military rules and discipline, incidents of vandalism by soldiers, both black and white, occurred daily in Vicksburg. Lawlessness in trade seemed minor when compared to the increasing frequency of violence perpetrated throughout the Vicksburg area by Negro soldiers. Outrages from ransacking homes and terrorizing citizens to the atrocity of murder horrified the populace. Just prior to the end of the war, the murder of Mrs. Minerva Cook received prompt and vigorous action from General Napoleon Dana, military provost in command of the city, as he offered a reward for apprehension of the guilty parties. When a dozen Negro soldiers were arrested, they were tried by court martial, convicted, and ordered executed. Of the twelve, nine were hanged, and three received stays of execution for turning "state's evidence."



On foot, on horseback, in wagons, any way they could, blacks in increasing numbers fled to Union lines as Federal armies invaded different parts of the South.

Black families often lived in the same cabins they occupied as slaves. "Everything happened in that one room – birth, sickness, death."

The racial situation in Vicksburg at the end of that fateful summer was acute. The Union army attracted thousands of Negroes to the hill city, searching for freedom, position, or simply for refuge. At one time an estimated thirty to forty thousand Negroes huddled in mass confusion on the banks of the Mississippi River at Vicksburg and Natchez. Countless flocked toward Vicksburg "going to freedom." In the words of a soldier, stopped to watch a typical procession:

*"Such a sight as met my gaze. All along the road were negroes with their families, household goods, everything they could gather in the short time, piled up in their immense cotton wagons as high as they could get them. There must have been thousands, no end to the children; 'Going to freedom'…they sang and danced, kissed each other and all the extravagant demonstrations of joy you can imagine were carried on."*

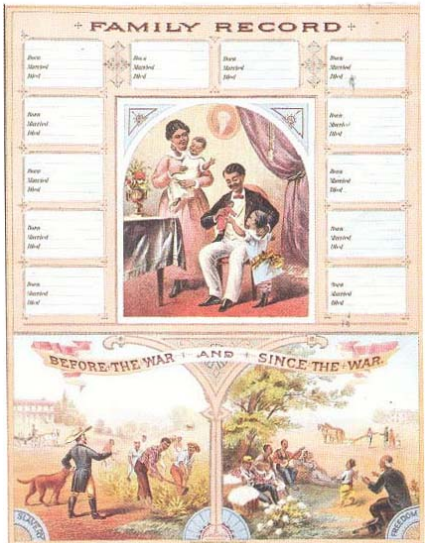
Ironically, the freedom-bound Negroes were ill-equipped to assume new roles as Freedmen; instead, they ended up in Vicksburg often no better off than they were as slaves. The Negro problem grew in spite of efforts by the government to solve it. Vicksburg became the first place to experiment with numerous new policies, laying the foundation for many government policies toward the Negro after the war. As early as November 1862, Grant had appointed John Eaton, Jr, chaplain of the 27th Ohio Volunteers, to take charge of the countless fugitive slaves who flocked to the Union army camps, and set up a contraband camp where Negroes could *"…be cared for and set to work…"* One such camp quickly grew into many, and Eaton faced tremendous organizational difficulties. As Grant said upon meeting him, *"Oh, you are the man who has all those darkies on his shoulders."*

To ease prejudice and friction within the army, Eaton recommended establishment of separate regiments of Freedmen who would be led by white officers. Many a private jumped to officer status by volunteering to lead soldiers of "African descent." Eaton also collected Negroes into "Home Farms", or contraband camps as workers. But these new policies and plans only created additional woes. Camps set up for the freed slaves soon became outposts of abject misery, becoming a bitter blow to those learning the lessons of freedom.

John Eaton was also given responsibility of organizing the Negroes in Vicksburg. For this immense task, he appealed to friends in the North for aid. Remaining optimistic that he could accomplish this undertaking, he found clothes for the blacks, organized them into squads, and established a school in which 250 adults and children learned to read and write. But, for all Eaton's good intentions to settle problems and prejudices, his school caused some citizens to, *"…hate [Yankees] worse every day."*

In October 1863, the policy toward abandoned plantations, taken over by the government after occupying Vicksburg, reached Eaton's desk. One of its purposes was to give employment to the freed Negroes at the expense of private individuals leasing the plantations rather than the government. Eaton planned to contract the able-bodied Negroes in the camps to the lessees of the abandoned or confiscated plantations as salaried workers. Theoretically the policy offered help for Negroes; in reality, the caliber of people leasing the plantations doomed it from the start. Speculators flocked into Vicksburg, as unfortunately the policy attracted men who cared little for the Freedmen – they cared only for the profit.

In February 1864, the worst suffering among Negroes in the Vicksburg area seemed eased, but General Sherman's return from Meridian, Mississippi changed that, with the influx of thousands of blacks who followed his army back into the city. Once again the populace adjusted to the hordes of former slaves that sought "Freedom City." Federal authorities utilized the same program for these new arrivals previously, but work among the Freedmen was hampered by conflicts between the Treasury and War Departments over control of abandoned plantations and the Freedmen. In the end, the Treasury Department retained control of leasing the plantations, but the Negroes working there remained under the supervision of Eaton and the military authorities. Ultimately, the plan did not work, for the "loyal" citizens leasing the plantations were speculators - their only object profit.




This family record, reflecting the visions of Northern idealists, was meant to help blacks keep track of births, deaths, and marriages after emancipation. Most slaves had only given names; out of expediency, many freedmen assumed their master's surname. "It was the easiest way to be identified," one ex-slave said.

A black soldier and his sweetheart are wed by a Freedmen's Bureau chaplain in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Many black soldiers asked that the unions they had made while slaves be legalized by the Federal government so that in case of their deaths, their wives and children would qualify for survivor benefits.

Brierfield Plantation – "The House Jeff Built"

Departments over control of abandoned plantations and the Freedmen. In the end, the Treasury Department retained control of leasing the plantations, but the Negroes working there remained under the supervision of Eaton and the military authorities. Ultimately, the plan did not work, for the "loyal" citizens leasing the plantations were speculators -their only object profit.

Living conditions for Freedmen within the occupied city, as well as the plantations, was miserable. Most lived in dirty, run-down hovels or shacks, filled to overflowing with humanity, and with little or no provisions to sustain them. In the city many black refugees were compelled to pay exorbitant rents, or have no home at all.

Union occupation did have far-reaching effects on the situation of blacks in Vicksburg, however. Prior to the city's surrender, funeral listings simply indicated burials of blacks as "Col Person" or "Child (Col)," with the deceased remaining nameless. Three weeks after surrender, the records changed significantly, and from that time forward the Negro dead were named.

In September 1864, General Dana cracked down on the trade system in the city. Acting under the premise that all lessees of abandoned plantations were "sharks and knaves," Dana worked to enforce rigid rules for the lessees, canceling all previous Treasury contracts, requiring permits to ship cotton, denying issuance of permits without a certificate from the Provost Marshal of Freedmen guaranteeing that all wages due Freedmen had been paid, and levying a military tax of $5.00/bale on all cotton brought into Vicksburg by the lessees. Showing little sympathy to a November letter from a Yankee cotton planter vocalizing the problems of the Northern lessees, Dana responded by issuing an order notifying all white persons on the Davis Bend peninsula to leave the leased plantations, including Hurricane, the home of Jefferson Davis' brother, Joe. Already the setting for an experiment where Freedmen leased and worked the plantations, Davis Bend became the chief camp of Freedmen. Over 70 Negro lessees *"worked the land on their own account,"* obtaining more successful results than the Northern speculators, due in part to the training given by Joe and Jefferson Davis to their slaves before the war. The Negroes at Davis Bend became a unique experiment in freedom and subsequently colonized the all-Negro settlement of Mound Bayou.

The Davis Bend lessees were exceptions to the roles played by most Freedmen. Theoretically, Freedmen on the abandoned plantations in the Vicksburg area received wages of $7.00/month for men and $5.00/month for women, less the cost of clothing. In reality, planters added other deductions for non-working days and for the support of dependents, cutting wages even more. At the end of 1864, many lessees reported that they did not know what to do about discharging their hands, as the Freedmen were greatly in debt to them, yet none had not been paid a dime of money. Countless Negroes found themselves in circumstances much worse than those experienced as slaves.

Freedmen in Vicksburg and its nearby camps fared somewhat better than those on outlying plantations because of government supervision. Eaton and his assistants made a concerted and enforceable effort to establish schools and provide religious and moral instruction. Their efforts were not in vain, as hundreds of Freedmen received some education during Vicksburg's occupation, and over 1500 marriages of Freedmen took place in the city between April and November of 1864. The former slaves cherished the marriage certificates that served as tangible signs of freedom, and which promised so much.

It can be said that one of the most profound changes in occupied Vicksburg was that of the status of the freed Negroes. In Vicksburg, government officials experimented with policies toward Freedmen that laid the foundations for many national postwar policies, including the Freedmen's Bureau, educational systems, and military use of the Negroes. Between 1863 and 1865 in the Mississippi Valley, the Freedmen learned the first hard lessons of freedom.

## Slaves No More - The Davis Bend Experiment 1863-1865

The population of Vicksburg, Mississippi, including the city's surrounding plantations, was forced to adjust to changes brought by the Union army after the surrender of the city in July 1863. But no group had their lives more affected by the war than those who had been slaves when it began. The first rush of freedom was incomparable – slaves freed by the Federal soldiers were generally ecstatic over the sudden change in their lives - but it was not long before the freedmen realized that each person, black as well as white, was responsible for his own life. As recalled by one elderly ex-slave many years later, *"De Yankees come 'roun' … and tol' us we's free an' we shouted an' sang, and had a big celebration fer a few days. Den we got to wonderin' 'bout what good it did us."*

The sheer numbers of refugees who inundated Vicksburg were overwhelming to even the staunchest individual. John Eaton, appointed by General Grant as General Superintendent of Contrabands for the Department, was shaken by the appalling scenes of sickly, starved, and disheartened freedmen, often dying on the streets. Eaton and his Freedmen's Department made every attempt to care for the teeming multitudes thrust upon them by the war, but soon over 30,000 persons were clamoring for attention and desperately needed help.

Fortunately for the refugees, and of immeasurable help to the government, aid soon began coming from a number of missionary and philanthropic organizations in the Northern states, in the form of both workers and materiel.

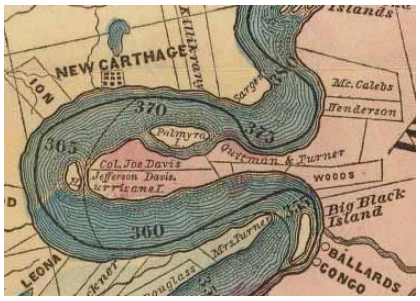
But, this new freedom for the blacks was not without restrictions, as the Federal government stepped in to impose a new order on the situation. One manner of aid was to employ the displaced blacks to harvest the cotton crop abandoned in the fields by those planters who fled at the approach of Union troops. General Ulysses S. Grant gave authority to gather the crop to a group of white businessmen, who then employed the freedmen to pick the cotton at a rate of a penny a pound.

Half the cotton under this contract belonged to the Government, but the contractors received some 67¢ a pound for their share. In many cases, the newly freed slaves had little or no choice but to work for those with whom cotton arrangements were made, as the provost marshal at "every military post" was charged with seeing that "every Negro within the jurisdiction of the military authority is employed by some white person, or is sent to the camps provided for freed people."

The government soon expanded this system of employment using an act passed in June 1862, to lease "abandoned lands," opening an area that stretched along the Mississippi River from twenty miles south of Vicksburg to thirty-five miles north of the city. Although one aim of the program was *"to give employment to the freed negroes whereby they may earn wages and become self-supporting,"* the government unfortunately showed little concern over the character of those awarded the leases. With predictable results, as soon as the leasing began, *"a distinct class whose interests were primarily commercial and involved patriotism or humanity only as secondary and incidental considerations,"* swarmed into the valley.

The first experimentation with free black labor and the leasing of plantations in the Mississippi valley was quite confused, with various commanders promoting their own interpretations of the governmental will. Several Federal officers lamented that, *"…as far as the Federal Government and Army prevail, the race will die out like that of the Indians."* Not until the next year was the confusion of authority between the War and Treasury Departments eliminated, with the Treasury in control of leasing the plantations, while the army was responsible for the freedmen.

The lot of the plantation laborer in the Vicksburg area was not an easy one. Most planters, especially those not experienced cotton growers, over-extended themselves in an attempt to garner quick riches. As noted by Whitelaw Reid on a tour of the area in 1865, *"Negroes were…ill-paid. [Their] rations were likely to be of the cheapest and scantiest. If the Negro, dissatisfied with this specimen of the workings of free labor, broke his contract and ran away, it was a proof that they would never make cotton without a system of peonage."*



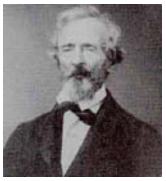

Davis Bend

Brierfield

Grounds of Hurricane

Jefferson Davis

Abraham Lincoln



Joseph Davis

The example to disprove this, however, was close at hand, as the all-black colony at Davis Bend was well into its second full year of operation. General Grant learned of Davis Bend during his 1863 campaign against Vicksburg, and was struck by the opportunity it presented. Lying eighteen miles below the city, and containing, among others, the plantations of Jefferson Davis and his brother Joseph, the 10,000-acre peninsula was seized by Grant to make a "Negro paradise" – a refuge for slaves who had escaped the Confederacy. It was ambitious and idealistic, and in a double irony, owed a large part of its success to the efforts of the Davis brothers over the previous 40 years.

It took Jefferson Davis three years of steady land clearing before the first sizable crop of cotton could be raised on his property at Davis Bend. Designing their own home, he and his second wife, Varina, built a large, comfortable, practical place, with an utter lack of outward pretension, calling the plantation Brierfield, after the profusion of trailing thorn bushes covering much of the land.

Joseph Davis, on the other hand, built Hurricane, an impressive three-story mansion surrounded by oak trees and ornamental shrubs, with wide lawns reaching out toward the river. Along with the usual out-buildings of a plantation, Hurricane possessed a truly unique structure – the Hall of Justice, where slave offenders were brought to trial before a jury of their peers. Indeed, this, along with encouragement toward enterprise among their servants, allowed the ambitious slaves of the Davis brothers' plantations to develop their own businesses. One man, Benjamin Montgomery, owned by Joseph Davis, kept a variety store at the bend, buying and selling on his own account. Jefferson Davis used Jim Pemberton, a trusted slave, as his plantation manager for almost 20 years, and lamented that he never found another as good to replace him when Pemberton died.

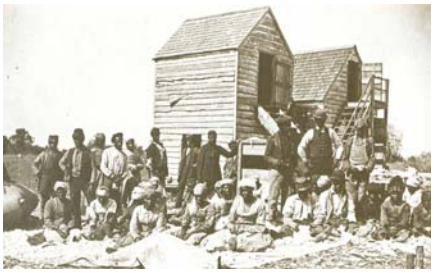
In 1860, vast improvements in the crop yield appeared to indicate that fortunes would be made in the rich alluvial soils of the peninsula. But then Abraham Lincoln was elected, the South began seceding, and by February 10, 1861, Jefferson Davis learned he was to be the leader of the Confederacy. He left for Montgomery, Alabama the next day to be inaugurated as president. Within two weeks, Brierfield was in the hands of the slaves who lived there. By 1862, raiding parties from Admiral David Farragut's fleet reached Davis Bend and burned the Hurricane mansion.

Shortly afterward, Joseph Davis, now 78 years old, moved his family and many of his slaves to a plantation farther inland, leaving Benjamin Montgomery in full command of the Davis brothers' farming operations on the bend. The next months were quiet, but the tranquility was suddenly broken by Admiral Farragut's return as his fleet approached in early May 1863. Brierfield mansion was again spared the torch, and when Vicksburg finally fell into Union hands, the inhabitants of Davis Bend, having gone undisturbed through the siege, remained quiet for some months thereafter.

When it finally came time to make Grant's "Negro paradise" a reality, Col. Samuel Thomas was placed in command of the operation. In his first report on the bend, Thomas stated that the condition of the slaves there, *"was about as usual where Negroes are alone. They were in comfortable quarters, but lacked clothing and food…"* Actually, the Davis Negroes seem to have been in a fairly enviable condition when Thomas arrived. Their slave quarters were intact, and Ben Montgomery had secured some $4,000 from Joseph Davis to enable them to raise crops for the year.

Even their court system had survived the departure of the Davis brothers. Indeed, their legal system was still vital a year after Union troops took over, and a Northern officer, seeing its operation and supposing it to be of recent vintage, marveled at *"how one year of freedom would elevate the blacks."*

To secure the bend, Union authorities soon added to the natural defensive advantages of the area by stationing eight companies of black troops there, who cut a canal across the peninsula - making it an island at high water - and positioning a gunboat in the Mississippi River at that point. Thus guarded, the Davis Bend population was never in danger of Confederate guerrillas who often lurked nearby.



All the property of the bend, excepting the Turner and Quitman plantations, was reserved for military purposes, establishing a "Home Farm" to furnish land for freedmen, to be used for their own cultivation. A set of rules and regulations was drawn up by military authorities, explaining, among other things, that freedmen who desired to lease lands would have to form themselves into 'companies' of *"from 3 to 25 hands that are able to do their share of the labor."* The freedmen were not allowed to change companies except by consent of two-thirds of the members and approval of the post superintendent.

Everyone who remained with the company through the season was expected to pay a portion of the expenses and share in the profits. Every effort was made to rid the peninsula of certain undesirable characters, and heads of companies were enlisted as part of a crime prevention campaign. A number of refugees had taken up residence at Davis Bend prior to the arrival of Union forces, and by 1864 their numbers were increasing every day. Soon over 1,000 persons were occupying space at the Home Farm, which itself was only a small part of the bend.

Companies received their seeds, mules, and implements from the government, and began their plowing and planting. Problems arose almost immediately, however, as the mules were of poor quality, and the shortage of hoes was a definite hindrance once the cotton crop was up. Even so, prospects for a good crop looked promising at the beginning of 1864 - but then the worm struck. The dreaded army worm, forerunner of the boll weevil in the list of Southern agricultural woes, crossed the Mississippi River in the form of a small, plain-looking moth, laying eggs in the blooms of the cotton plant. Within a few short days, the eggs hatched, and the worms began eating their way through the fields.

Army Worm

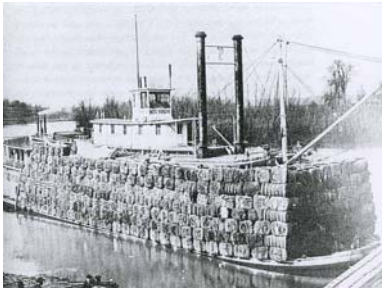
Even the most advanced planters were helpless, and before the worm had run its course, the 1,500-bale hopes of the Home Farm had been reduced to the reality of 130 bales. Still, the experiment could be counted a success, owing to the high price of cotton, which in 1864, was over $1.00 per pound.

Almost every company on the Home Farm recouped expenses, with some clearing as much as $1,000 profit. This first planting season with freed workers had shown much of the ability of the ex-slave to care for himself, but was only a prelude of what was to come.

Federal authorities, pleased with the preliminary results, issued orders to expand the scope of the program for 1865. The whole peninsula was reserved for military purposes, exclusively devoted to the colonization, residence, and support of freedmen. Furthermore, no whites were allowed to land at Davis Bend after January 1, 1865, without permission of the proper authorities. Benjamin Montgomery, returning to Davis Bend from self-imposed exile after the first arrival of Federal troops in 1863, once again assumed a leadership role.

Having demonstrated his abilities as a manager and leader, Montgomery's return, together with what seemed to have been a genuine desire on the part of Federal authorities to allow more refugee self-government, led to one of the most innovative aspects of the Union experiment. With the survival of the Davis brother's pre-war system of courts, the early months of 1865 saw the establishment of a more formalized administration of justice. John Eaton was much impressed by the shrewdness of the judges, all former slaves, and found their performance very remarkable. He thought the court system an unqualified success, reporting that *"exposed property was as safe on Davis Bend as it would be anywhere."*

Davis Bend Court System



The steamboat Katie Robbins passing Davis Bend

However, living conditions remained poor and material possessions few, despite the benevolent work of missionaries and others. It was exceedingly difficult, moreover, to affect any great improvements in refugee conditions, as the number of freedmen remained at around 4,000 throughout the spring and summer. The end of the war seemed largely irrelevant to this pattern of existence on the peninsula, and of more impact was the death of Abraham Lincoln. Still, the more immediate challenge of that spring and summer of 1865 was the planting, cultivating, and harvesting of a crop, hopefully making up for the disappointment of the previous year.

Successful cultivation of the peninsula was hampered by numerous problems, one being the recurrence of flooding. For much of April and May approximately one-third of the bend lay unproductive under the gradually vanishing floodwaters of the Mississippi River. Another problem was the shortage of mules, plows, and other agricultural supplies, partly due to the removal of these essentials by Federal authorities earlier in the year. Although some mules did remain in the colonists' hands, there were not enough draft animals to serve the farmers' needs, forcing some to turn to white financiers for loans of equipment and supplies.

In spite of all these difficulties, the cotton crop was in excellent shape by mid-July. Cotton began coming into the gin in large quantities by early October, but the freedmen who had worked so hard on their crop were often disappointed when their accounts were figured. Most planters had been forced to mortgage their crop to the commissary stores on Davis Bend in order to secure necessary agricultural supplies, not to mention foodstuffs for their families.

Still, when Colonel Thomas made his report to Congress in December 1865, there was every reason to believe the Davis Bend colony a success. In spite of individual complaints and the almost certain embezzling of various officials, the balance sheet for the bend as a whole was quite favorable. The net profit for the year was $159,200, which meant that the majority of the 1,300 adults each received an average of slightly more than $120 for their year's work, a figure much better than that attained by freedmen working for white lessees in the area.

Even with this success, official operations at Davis Bend began to diminish. On October 24 a simple official statement was issued claiming that *"the Post at Davis Bend is hereby discontinued,"* which brought to an end over two years of military involvement. The larger government experiment at Davis Bend ended after 1865, as all the owners on the peninsula, excepting the Davis brothers, were pardoned and had their land returned to them.

The experiment so grandly conceived by U.S. Grant was not a failure. These first two years proved, said John Eaton, *"the capacity of the Negro to take care of himself and exercise under honest and competent direction the functions of self-government."* The next few years saw the virtual elimination of any governmental direction, yet the colony proved able to handle its own affairs for several years thereafter, until the bend was finally abandoned to the river.

## One More River to Cross - Beulah Cemetery

Vicksburg's only African-American cemetery, Beulah Cemetery, is located on Old Jackson Road, adjoining the eastern boundary of the Vicksburg National Military Park. Established in 1884 by Tabernacle No. 19, Independent Order of Brothers and Sisters of Love and Charity, a fraternal order that had wide support among blacks, the 53-acre, lightly rolling tract was purchased for $1000 from Harvey and Lucy Shannon and named for the proverbial Beulah Land of Biblical origin.

The cemetery has been in continuous used since its founding, and is significant as one of the most intact historical properties associated with the growth and development of the African-American community of Vicksburg. From its establishment until the mid-1940s, Beulah was the most important cemetery for burials in the city's black community.

More than 5,500 graves are scattered across the grassy, tree-studded cemetery, the majority dating from 1884 to the 1940s. The area was apparently not laid out in an "orderly" fashion, and does not appear to have been formally landscaped. Many of the graves are clustered by families, with plots in some instances delineated by masonry copings and fences. The graves are oriented in an east-west direction with markers facing east and varying widely – from simple, crude, hand-made memorials, to elaborately carved obelisks. A low chain-link fence enclosing the property, and a metal arch at the main entrance (since removed) were added in the 1950s.

The cemetery contains gravesites for ancestors of almost every African-American native of Vicksburg, and is the final resting place for members of some of the most prominent black families in the city's history. Nowadays, due to the increased popularity, accessibility and availability of Cedar Hill (City) Cemetery, burials in Beulah Cemetery have decreased significantly since 1945, but the site is still an active place of interment.

The African-American community has constituted a significant proportion of Vicksburg's population from the city's founding in 1812, constituting nearly one-half of the citizenry. Despite this long history, there are few early historic black resources that survive, or that retain sufficient integrity to be considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Many of these resources have been lost through demolition or have been severely neglected. The rarity of properties associated with the African-American community, therefore, increases the relative significance of Beulah Cemetery, which remains an intact and highly visible landmark for the black community, providing information, through its tombstones, about the history of African-Americans in Vicksburg. Customs, such as the arrangement, clustering and other means of identifying families and persons of importance, are preserved, and the cemetery documents the existence of generations of people who otherwise would have no surviving physical memorial.

# Blacks During Reconstruction

Reconstruction – the dramatic and controversial era following the Civil War – was a time of extraordinary social and political change for blacks. As part of the ongoing evolution of Southern society, the black experience played a central role in the development of Reconstruction. Far from being passive victims, or a "problem" facing white society, blacks were active agents during this period, pushing for individual and community autonomy to help establish the era's political and economic agenda.

Free, but far from equal. Many freed slaves plowed their land without a mule or horse. Ten years after emancipation, barely 5% of the former slaves owned their own land, and those who did lacked the capital and credit to develop it.

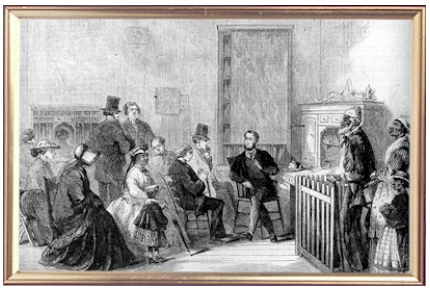
Transformation of slaves into free laborers and equal citizens was the most dramatic example of the social and political changes unleashed by the Civil War and emancipation. Presenting a formidable barrier to change, racism was pervasive in mid-nineteenth century America. Yet, a significant number of Southern whites were willing to link their political fortunes with those of blacks, and Northern Republicans, for a time, came to associate the fate of the former slaves with their party's reason for existence and the meaning of Union victory in the Civil War. Interrelated issues of land and labor and the persistent conflict between race and class were inextricably linked. A Washington newspaper noted in 1868, *"It is impossible to separate the question of color from the question of labor, for the reason that the majority of the laborers …throughout the Southern States are colored people, and nearly all the colored people are at present laborers."* Various groups of blacks and whites sought to use state and local government to promote their own interests and define their place in the region's new social order.

Reconstruction did not begin in 1865, but with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. It ushered in the beginning of an extended historical process, that of the adjustment of American society to the end of slavery. Of the Proclamation's provisions, few were more essential to the promise of emancipation than the massive enrollment of blacks into military service. The "logical result" of their military service, as observed by one Senator in 1864, was that, *"the black man is henceforth to assume a new status among us."* For the first time in American history, large number of blacks were treated as equals before the law – if only military law. It was in the army that numerous former slaves learned to read and write, and from which many black political leaders of Reconstruction would emerge. The war and destruction of slavery permanently altered the landscape of Southern life, permanently redrawing the economic and political map of the white South.

Military devastation and Confederate economic policies had plunged much of the country into poverty. And as economic disaster stalked the South, the North saw a time of unprecedented prosperity. Accelerating the emergence of an American industrial bourgeoisie, the war tied the fortunes of this class to the Republican Party and the national state. After the Emancipation Proclamation, the Republicans exalted in this continuing growth, and broad nationalism was embraced within Congress, most of all by the Radical Republicans. They took the stand that the nation was the "custodian of freedom," and felt the war vindicated their conviction that freedom stood in greater danger of being diminished from local than national authority.

Thus, the Civil War consolidated the national state while identifying that state, via emancipation , with the interests of all humanity, and specifically, with a coalition of diverse groups and classes. But with these developments cam e the galvanization of bitter wartime opposition. The process of national state formation clashed with cherished traditions of local autonomy and cultural diversity. And even small improvements in the status of Northern blacks stirred ugly counterattacks from advocates of white supremacy. The Democratic Party, the preeminent conservative institution of the era, fanned the flames of political opposition to the changes brought by war. The party's greatest constituency came from areas like the "butternut" farming regions of the Ohio Valley, closely tied to

For many blacks, life changed little during Reconstruction. They lived on the same plantation and toiled under the same overseer – only now for a meager wage or a modest share of the crop.



A Freedmen's Bureau official settles a dispute between a black family (in witness box) and their employer.

the South and bypassed by wartime economic expansion, and other voters hostile toward cultural homogeneity. White supremacy provided the ideological glue of the Democratic appeal, identifying the Republican Party as a threat to individual liberty and the tradition of limited government. *"Slavery is dead,"* announced the *Cincinnati Enquirer* at war's end, *"the negro is not - there is the misfortune."*

Northern ideas on Reconstruction ranged across a spectrum of alternatives. At one end was the democratic alternative of self-reconstruction, allowing the existing Southern state governments to proclaim their loyalty to the Union, supervise the election of new congressmen and senators, then carry on as if the war had never occurred. At the opposite end of the spectrum was the radical vision of Reconstruction as revolution, overthrowing the power of the Southern ruling class by disfranchisement and confiscation. The Radicals wanted to enfranchise the Freedmen and grant them confiscated land, shaping the South in the Republication image of the free-labor North. Between these two extremes lay options ranging from partial to full enfranchisement of the Freedmen, temporary to long-term disfranchisement of varying categories of ex-Confederates, and an assortment of proposals for economic assistance to freed slaves. Could a society in which racial hatred ran so deep secure justice for the emancipated slaves? How could Southern society be remade in the Northern image when the North itself was so bitterly divided by the changes brought on by the Civil War? Thus, two societies, each divided internally, entered the Reconstruction years to confront the myriad consequences of the Civil War.

Of the many questions raised by emancipation, none was more crucial for the future of both blacks and whites in Southern society than the organization of the region's economy. While all Republicans agreed that "free labor" must replace slavery, few were certain how the transition should be accomplished. By 1865, hundreds of thousands of slaves scattered throughout the South had become, under federal auspices, free workers. Freedmen sought to control the conditions under which they labored, leading them to prefer tenancy to wage labor, and leasing land for a fixed rent instead of sharecropping. Above all, they aspired to the quest for land. Owning land, they believed, would "complete their independence."

Blacks' striving for economic independence not only threatened the foundations of the Southern political economy, it put the Freedmen at odds with both former owners seeking to restore plantation labor discipline and Northerners committed to reinvigorating staple crop production. But as part of the broad quest for individual and collective autonomy, it remained central to the black community's effort to define the meaning of freedom.

In the war's immediate aftermath, Federal policy regarding black labor was established by the army. Having swept through the South as destroyers, Yankees remained there as restorers. Into the vacuum of devastation and chaos moved the occupation forces, the Freedmen's Bureau, and Northern relief agencies. As piecemeal and often inconsistent programs for dealing with the Freedmen got underway, sentiment grew in the North for the creation of a general "Emancipation Bureau" in the Federal government – an idea that conflicted with the even stronger belief that the national government should have limited powers. From this conflict emerged the Freedmen's Bureau Act of March 1865, establishing a Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, under the jurisdiction of the war department. The agency was entrusted, for one year after the end of the war, with the "control of all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen."

Not surprisingly, Southern whites denounced the Bureau as "a curse," a "ridiculous folly," and a "vicious institution." Planters insisted that they could "make the nigger work" if the interfering agents would only leave them alone. *"The Bureau doesn't seem to understand the possibility of a white man's being right in a contest or difference with a Negro,"* complained one Southerner. These complaints reflected a dislike of the Bureau more for what it symbolized – conquest and emancipation- than for

what it did. In reality, the Bureau often functioned as an ally of planters by getting idle Freedmen back to work and by enforcing contracts whose terms often favored employers. In 1865, many Freedmen refused to sign contracts for the next year because they expected soon to get their "forty acres and a mule." It fell to the Freedmen's Bureau to correct the fallacy of land redistribution to the Freedman and compelled them to sign contracts. Summing up the contract system in 1867, a Bureau official stated, *"It has succeeded in making the Freedman work and in rendering labor secure and stable – but it has failed to secure to the Freedman his just dues or compensation."*

The Bureau also overruled or suspended the more oppressive features of the "black codes" adopted by Southern states in 1865-1866. These codes excluded blacks from juries and prohibited racial intermarriage. Some required segregation in public facilities, and several prescribed more severe punishment of blacks than whites for certain crimes. Although decried by abolitionists, the North was, as a whole, in no position to condemn these codes, for many Northern states also adhered to the same restrictions or discriminatory actions. The black codes strengthened the resolve of Republican congressmen to keep the South on probation until they could work out means to protect the freedpeople and to guarantee the fruits of victory.

In the winter of 1865-1866, two bills were drafted to protect the freedpeople, the first extending the life of the Freedmen's Bureau, expanding its legal powers and authorizing it to build and support schools, and the second defining the Freedmen's civil rights, giving Federal courts appellate jurisdiction in cases concerning these rights. Having conferred with President Andrew Johnson several times, bill author Lyman Trumbull, Senator from Illinois, believed he had the President's approval. But on February 19, 1866, Johnson dismayed his Republican supporters by vetoing the bill, with his convictions of white supremacy and states' rights prevailing over any concern about harmony with the congressional majority.

Despite Johnson's veto, Congressional moderates still centered their hopes on a modified Freedmen's Bureau bill and on Trumbull's civil rights bill, representing the first attempt to give meaning to the Thirteenth Amendment that had abolished slavery. Congress passed the civil rights bill with nearly unanimous Republican support on March 13, 1866. The bill defined blacks as U.S. citizens and guaranteed their rights to own or rent property, make and enforce contracts, and have access to the courts as parties and witnesses. Although the civil rights bill mandated the transfer of legal proceedings from state to Federal courts if the former discriminated by race, it would not nullify the traditional Federal system, nor would the bill enfranchise blacks, authorize them to sit on juries, or require desegregated schools and public accommodations. Republicans expected Johnson to sign this moderate bill despite his states' rights convictions. But a second veto succeeded in driving off the majority of his Republican party, leading them to concentrate on passing the two bills over the his vetoes – which they accomplished on April 9 and July 16, 1866. In addition, the Republicans drafted a constitutional amendment as the basis for readmission of the Southern senators and representatives to Congress. The Joint Committee on Reconstruction labored to fashion an amendment acceptable to a broad spectrum of Northern opinion, providing a constitutional guarantee of the rights and security of Freedmen, insurance against a revival of neo-Confederate political power, and enshrining in the Constitution the sanctity of the national debt and repudiation of the Confederate debt. Radicals on the joint committee also pushed for an amendment to enfranchise blacks or disenfranchise ex-Confederates, or both. Moderates, believing these proposals went too far, softened them to temporary disfranchisement of Confederates and an indirect inducement for the states themselves to enfranchise blacks. On June 13, 1866, after lengthy debate, the revised Fourteenth Amendment passed both houses with the necessary two-thirds majority.

This complex amendment has been the basis of more litigation than any other part of the Constitution. But since the 1930s, Section 1, defining all native-born or naturalized persons, including blacks, as citizens, has been used mainly to protect and expand the civil rights of black citizens. The framers probably did not so intend it, but in recent decades the courts have interpreted this clause to strike down segregation.

While great political and constitutional issues were being decided in Washington, the reconstruction of Southern states moved forward. When the registration of voters ended in September 1867, approximately 735,000 blacks and 635,000 whites were enrolled in the ten unreconstructed states, and blacks constituted a majority of voters in five states: South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Alabama.

Throughout Reconstruction, blacks comprised a large majority of Southern Republicanism. But even in states with black majorities, Southern Republicanism needed white support. And they found it among "carpetbaggers" from the North and "scalawag" native white southerners, who, in turn, were subjected to a torrent of abuse by their Democratic opponents.

Inexpensive suitcases made from carpeting, inspired the epithet "carpetbaggers" for Northerners who thronged to the South after the War ended. One well-intentioned Ohioan who traveled to North Carolina later remarked ruefully: "We tried to superimpose the idea of civilization, the idea of the North, upon the South at a moment's warning. It was a fool's errand."

Political, regional, and class prejudices have combined to produce the image of the carpetbagger as a member of the "the lowest class" of the Northern population. Able to pack "all his earthly belongings" in his carpetbag, he supposedly journeyed south after the passage of the Reconstruction Act "to fatten on our misfortunes." In fact, carpetbaggers tended to be well educated and middle class in origin. Many had been lawyers, businessmen, newspaper editors, and other pillars of Northern communities. The majority was veterans of the Union Army, and their ranks included teachers, Freedmen's Bureau agents, and men who had invested tens of thousands o dollars in cotton plantations. Nearly all had come south before 1867, when blacks lacked the franchise and the prospect of office appeared remote.

A variety of motives and experiences propelled these Northerners into Southern Republican politics in 1857. Some were typical 19th-century men for whom politics offered the opportunity for a quick profit. Others entered politics because they had earned the Freedmen's good will as Bureau agents. Still others, bankrupted in unsuccessful cotton planting, saw in politics a means of earning a living. And some were idealists, who became convinced that they had a mission to assist the former slaves.

Generally representing black constituencies, carpetbaggers garnered a major share of Reconstruction offices, especially in states with relatively few native-born white Republicans. But these Northerners could hardly provide a voting base for Southern Republicanism, not even comprising 2% of the population. Far more numerous were Southern-born white Republicans, or "scalawags."

Castigated as "white negroes" who had betrayed their region in the quest for office, scalawags had even more diverse backgrounds and motivations than Northern-born Republicans. They included men of prominence and rank outsiders, wartime Unionists and advocates of secession, entrepreneurs advocating a modernized New South and yeomen seeking to preserve semi-subsistence agriculture. Their common characteristic was the conviction that they stood a greater chance of advancing their interests in a Republican South than by joining with Reconstruction's opponents. Certainly, scalawags almost unanimously rejected the idea that black political rights implied "social equality" between the races; however, for most, the alliance with blacks remained a union of convenience.

On average, carpetbaggers and scalawags of the Southern Republican Party were neither more nor less honest and able than their counterparts in the opposing party or other regions. If anything, they possessed more courage and, particularly in the case of the carpetbaggers, more idealism than the average politician, serving in the front lines of progressive and unpopular change.

Hiram R. Revels (1822-1901) was born a free man in the slave state of North Carolina. Apprenticed as a barber at age 16, Hiram stayed until 1844, when he became a student at the Quaker school in Liberty, IN. To further his education, he attended school in Ohio and Knox College in Galesburg, IL. Ordained as a minister of the African Methodist Church in 1845, he ministered to congregations in several states. With the outbreak of the Civil War, Revels turned his resources toward support for the Union cause, aiding in the organization of African-American regiments. He served in Vicksburg, MS as chaplain of a Negro regiment, and at one point was Provost Marshal in the city. After the war, Hiram settled in Natchez, MS where he was elected alderman. He went on to be the first African-American member of the US Senate, serving until March 1871. Returning to Mississippi, he was named president of Alcorn College, the State's first college for African-American students, retiring in 1882. Earning the respect of both whites and blacks, Hiram Revels dedicated his life to improving the spiritual and educational needs of the African-American community.

Convinced that to remain in ignorance was to remain in bondage, tens of thousands of freed slaves attended schools organized by the Freedmen's Bureau.

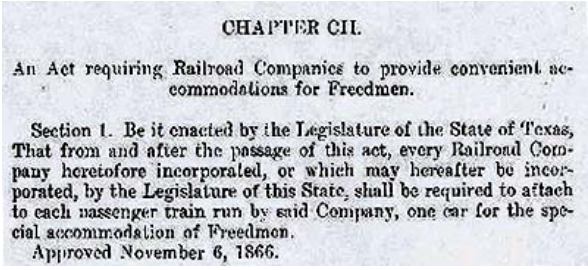
Thus, Southern Republicanism attracted a broad coalition of supporters with overlapping but distinct political agendas. The sense of living in a new era of progress animated the party at its first statewide conventions in the spring and summer of 1867. But also revealed were the inner tensions that plagued the Southern Republican party throughout its brief and stormy existence. Virtually every party convention found itself divided between "confiscation radicals" (generally blacks) and moderates committed to white control of the party and a policy of economic development that offered more to outside investors and native promoters than to impoverished Freedmen and yeomen.

In virtually every county with a sizable black population, Freedmen held local offices during Reconstruction. By 1871, they controlled boards of supervisors throughout the Mississippi plantation belt, holding positions as sheriff, magistrate, school commissioner, and officer of the state militia. Not surprisingly, however, many black officials lacked the advantages of an education, relying on other blacks or white Republicans to conduct official business. Although some achieved bourgeois status and others aspired to it, few blacks successfully translated political power into a share of the economic growth of their states. In fact, black politicians' wealth, while impressive when compared to that of most Freedmen, paled before that of Conservatives and white carpetbaggers. Even prominent leaders like Hiram Revels and Robert B. Elliott sometimes met day-to-day expenses with small loans from white politicians. Indeed, for many, political involvement led not to social mobility, but to devastating loss.

In countless ways, newly freed slaves sought to overturn the real and symbolic authority whites had exercised over every aspect of their lives. Freedmen held mass meetings and religious services, unrestrained by white surveillance. When restrictions on traveling without a pass were lifted, it seemed that half the South's black population took to the roads. There was a large influx of Freedmen to the cities, during and immediately after the war, believing the areas to be "free-er" than anywhere else. Here schools, churches, fraternal societies, the army, and Freedman's Bureau offered protection from the violence pervasive in much of the South.

Education was the Freedman's Bureau's most successful achievement of Reconstruction. As veterans of the Freedmen's Bureau and Freedmen's aid movement, the new superintendents of education viewed schooling as the foundation of a new, egalitarian social order, and a public school system did take shape in the Reconstruction South. A Northern correspondent in 1873 found adults as well as children crowding Vicksburg schools and reported, "*…female Negro-servants make it a condition before accepting a situation, that they should have permission to attend the night-schools.*" At first, most teachers were Northern white women, but as time went on, the schools themselves produced the next generation of black teachers. In many ways, however, educational progress must have appeared painfully slow; schooling continued to be far more available in towns and cities than in rural areas, and in 1880 70% of blacks remained illiterate. Nonetheless, Republicans had established, for the first time in Southern history, the principle of state responsibility for public education.

Reconstruction's effort to guarantee blacks equal treatment in transportation and places of public accommodation launched it into a realm all but unknown in American jurisprudence. But, as in education, establishing a legal doctrine of equal citizenship proved easier than putting the principle into effect. Racial discrimination took a variety of forms. Many institutions, public and private, excluded blacks altogether; others provided separate and ostensibly equal facilities; still others offered blacks markedly inferior services. Railroads and steamboats often refused to allow blacks access to first-class accommodations, regardless of their ability to pay, relegating them to "smoking cars" or lower decks along with poor whites. When challenges to this policy came before the newly created Interstate Commerce Commission in 1889, it ruled that railroads must provide equal accommodations for both races.



CHAPTER CII.

An Act requiring Railroad Companies to provide convenient accommodations for Freedmen.

Section 1. Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Texas, That from and after the passage of this act, every Railroad Company heretofore incorporated, or which may hereafter be incorporated, by the Legislature of this State, shall be required to attach to each passenger train run by said Company, one car for the special accommodation of Freedmen.

Approved November 6, 1866.

A broadside commemorating the new Louisiana constitution, rewritten under the 1867 Reconstruction Acts, and saluting the most prominent of the 48 black convention delegates.

Pinckney Benton Stewart (Pinchback) (1837-1921) was one of 10 children born to a white Mississippi planter and former slave freed before the boy's birth. Fearing re-enslavement after the planter's death, the family fled to Ohio, where Pinchback found work as a cabin boy, then steward on craft plying the Mississippi, Missouri and Red Rivers. After war broke out in 1861, he ran the Confederate blockade on the Mississippi to reach Federally-held New Orleans. There he raised a company of black volunteers for the Union, called the Corps d'Afrique, but resigned his captain's commission after encountering racism. In 1868, Pinchback was elected to the Louisiana State Senate and named its president *pro tempore*. He became Lt. Governor upon the death of the incumbent, and Acting Governor during impeachment proceedings against Henry Clay Warmoth. Elected to the U.S. Congress in 1872, then Senate in 1873, he was refused both seats, ostensibly for election fraud, but most likely for his color. His last office was as surveyor of customs in New Orleans in 1882. Disillusioned with the outcome of Reconstruction, Pinchback moved to Washington, D.C., remaining active in politics for the remainder of his life.

The ruling did not require the *same* accommodations, however, opening the floodgates for "Jim Crow" legislation, a dimension of second-class citizenship sanctioned by the Supreme Court and fastened on blacks during this period. Segregation by law soon prevailed in almost every aspect of Southern public life – streetcars, water fountains, restaurants, and recreational facilities, to name a few.

The issue of economic development preoccupied Republican leaders in the first years of Reconstruction, and the "gospel of prosperity" captivated the moderate leaders, who hoped it would recast politics along nonracial lines and win legitimacy for the Reconstruction state. But the program of state-sponsored capitalist development, launched with grandiose hopes, proved in many ways the party's undoing.

Rising taxes, steadily increasing debts, and the declining value of state bonds vividly illustrated the new governments' financial problems. As the collapse of their credit reduced Southern governments' ability to finance the ambitious programs they had undertaken, widespread corruption undermined their political legitimacy. Corruption thrived in the Reconstruction South. Officials regularly handled unprecedented sums of money, corporations vied for the benefits of state aid, and communities concerned about their future prosperity competed for rail routes, offering numerous opportunities for bribery and plunder. The spirit of economic promotion fostered a get-rich-quick mentality, and many officials, both white and black, saw nothing wrong with taking a piece of the expanding economic pie for themselves. Most important, corruption threatened to undermine the integrity of Reconstruction, and for the Southern Republicans it was an unmitigated disaster, contributing to the demise of the entire "gospel of prosperity."

The depression of the 1870s dealt the South a severe blow, with effects rippling through the entire economy, plunging farmers into poverty and drying up the region's sources of credit. By a cruel irony, the depression hit just as blacks were increasing their political influence in states where Reconstruction still survived. Under other circumstances, blacks might have used their enhanced political power to press for bold new political and economic programs, but their role increased precisely as the Northern outcry against corruption and "extravagance" reached its peak. Blacks found themselves helping to preside over a period of moderation and consolidation, rather than striking out in radical new directions.

At the same time, the Democratic party made the candid judgment that white supremacy offered the best prospects for mobilizing the Democratic electorate and winning over remaining scalawags. Particularly in the Deep South, where Democratic victory required the neutralization of part of the black electorate, this implied a revival of political violence. The issues of white supremacy, low taxes, and control of the black labor force dominated the Democratic campaigns of the mid-1870s, and the 1874 Southern elections proved disastrous for Republicans.

Although violence had been endemic to large parts of the South since 1865, the advent of Radical Reconstruction stimulated its expansion. By 1870, the Ku Klux Klan and kindred organizations were deeply entrenched in nearly every Southern state. In effect, the Klan was a military force serving the interests of the Democratic Party - the planter class - and all those who desired the restoration of white supremacy. Its purposes were political in the broadest sense, for it sought to affect power relations, both public and private, throughout Southern society. It aimed to destroy the Republican Party's infrastructure, labor force, and restore racial subordination in every aspect of Southern life. Violence was typically directed at Reconstruction's local leaders, and many blacks suffered merely for exercising their rights as citizens. Nor did white Republicans escape the violence, with Klansmen murdering three scalawag members of the Georgia legislature, and driving ten others from their homes.

In other ways, as well, violence had a profound effect on Reconstruction politics, as the Klan devastated many local Republican organizations. Indeed, the

black community was more vulnerable to the destruction of its political infrastructure by violence than the white. Local leaders played such a variety of roles in schools, churches, and fraternal organizations, that the killing or exiling of one man affected many institutions at once, and had a demoralizing impact on their communities. Southern Republicans once again turned to Washington for salvation.

On May 31, 1870, Congress passed an enforcement act that made interference with voting rights a Federal offense punishable in Federal courts. The key section of this law defined as a felony any attempt by one or more persons to deprive another person of his civil or political rights, and became the basis for subsequent prosecutions and convictions of Klansmen. Still, during the first year of existence, the law was little enforced. As Klan violence increased, Congress, in special session, passed a law, popularly known as the Ku Klux Act, strengthening the felony and conspiracy provisions of the 1870 law, authorizing the use of the military for enforcement, and empowering the President to suspend the writ of habeas corpus in areas that he declared to be in a state of insurrection. Under these laws, the Grant administration cracked down on the Klan, effectively restoring temporary peace and order to large parts of the former Confederacy.

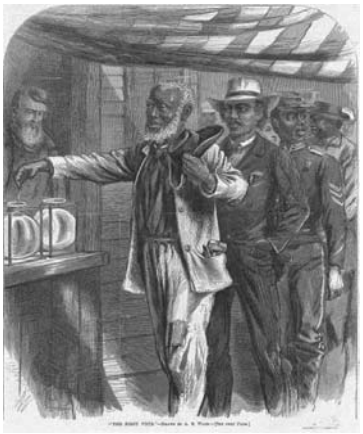
The Fifteenth Amendment, passed in 1869, prohibited Federal and state governments from depriving any citizen of the vote on racial grounds; however, while sanctioning black suffrage, the Amendment said nothing about the right to hold office and did not forbid literacy, property, and educational tests that, while nonracial, might effectively exclude the majority of blacks from the polls. In the mid-1880s presidential nominee James G. Blaine, narrowly defeated by Grover Cleveland, charged that the suppression of Southern Republican votes had cost him the election. In 1888, when Republicans won both houses, as well as the presidency, but only 27, 26, and 17% of the vote in Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina, respectively, they responded to the situation with new enforcement legislation. Congressman Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts took charge of the numerous bills introduced in the House and fashioned them into a single comprehensive measure. The bill authorized Federal district judges to appoint election supervisors in any congressional district upon petition by 100 voters. The supervisors would have the power to inspect registration books, observe voting, and advise voters of election procedures. Federal circuit courts were to appoint canvassing boards to certify the results of an election and to initiate proceedings against anyone charged with intimidation or fraud. It was a strong bill, but applied only to Congressional elections, and would do nothing to protect black voters in state and local contests, where matters vital to their interests were decided – schools, labor legislation, and criminal punishments.

Although passed by the House in July 1890, the Senate pushed the Lodge bill aside, in deference to the McKinley tariff act. The decision to postpone the elections law until the next session resulted in a loss of momentum, proving fatal to the bill. In the next session, the bill was abandoned in return for Southern support of the Western Republican senators' silver bill. The death of the Lodge bill marked the end of the era. The sectional and racial issues that had dominated every presidential election for the past half-century faded into insignificance for the next half-century. The generation that had fought the Civil War was passing away, and a new generation with few memories of the war and little interest in its issues was emerging to leadership. The Lodge bill was the last black rights measure to come so close to passage until the Civil Rights Act of 1957. In 1894, the Democratic Congress repealed much of the 1870-1871 enforcement legislation, and the era of Reconstruction died an unheralded death.

In the course of Reconstruction, the Freedmen demonstrated political shrewdness and independence in using the ballot to affect the conditions of their freedom. However, it remains a tragedy that the lofty goals of civil and political equality were not permanently achieved. The end of Reconstruction came not because propertyless blacks succumbed to economic coercion, but because a tenacious black community, abandoned by the nation, fell victim to violence and fraud.

# "...forty acres and a mule..."

## Impact of the Freedmen's Bureau



*"No man loves work naturally. Interest or necessity induces him to labor…Why does the white man labor? That he may acquire property and the means of purchasing the comforts and luxuries of life. The colored man will labor for the same reason."* – John E. Bryant, Freedmen's Bureau agent

Although its tenure was brief (1865-1870), the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands – better known as the Freedmen's Bureau – became a focal point during Reconstruction following the Civil War. To this agency, more than any other institution, fell the task of assisting in the creation of a free labor society. It became an experiment in social policy that, according to one modern historian, *"did not belong to the America of its day."* The responsibilities of the Bureau were daunting – to introduce a workable system of free labor, establish freedmen's schools, provide aid to the destitute, aged, ill, and insane, adjudicate disputes among blacks and between races, and attempt to secure equal justice from state and local governments for blacks and white Unionists during Reconstruction. At its peak, no more than 900 Bureau agents served the entire South, with only a dozen in Mississippi in 1866. Indeed, Bureau agents were often the only Federal presence in the area. *"It is not…in your power to fulfill one tenth of the expectations of those who framed the Bureau,"* General William T. Sherman advised the Bureau's commissioner, General Oliver Otis Howard. *"I fear you have Hercules' task."*

Established by Congress in March 1865, just prior to the close of the war, the Freedmen's Bureau bill was to provide for a coordinated national program of relief, supervision, and management of, *"…all abandoned lands and control of subjects relating to refugees and freedmen from Southern states…under such rules and regulations as may be prescribed by the head of the bureau and approved by the President."* To the extent that this meant putting freedmen back to work on plantations, the Bureau's policies coincided with the interests of the planters. To the extent which it prohibited coercive labor discipline, took up the burden of black education, sought to protect blacks from violence, and promoted removal of legal barriers to blacks' advancement, the Bureau reinforced the freedmen's aspirations.

In the end, however, its policies exposed the ambiguities and inadequacies of the free labor ideology itself. Still, former slaves seized the opportunity offered by the agency's imperfect efforts to bolster their own quest for self-improvement and autonomy.

But the foundations for the Bureau were laid prior to its enactment in 1865. In his memoirs, Ulysses S. Grant described his efforts to take care of black refugees in west Tennessee and northern Mississippi. In 1862 he placed Chaplain John Eaton of the 27th Ohio Infantry in charge of organizing camps and putting blacks to work to bring in the fall cotton and corn crops from the deserted plantations around Vicksburg. Those planters who remained could hire these black workers with Eaton supervising the relationship. Grant recorded the result as thus: *"At once the freedmen became self-sustaining. The money was not paid to them directly, but was expended judiciously and for their benefit. They gave me no trouble afterward."* Proud of these accomplishments, Grant mused, *"It was at this point, probably, where the first idea of a 'Freedman's Bureau' took its origin."* In fact, other efforts occurring around the same time along the Atlantic Coast were also working to bring about freedom for emancipated slaves. Grant inadvertently revealed some of his own assumptions regarding the form this freedom would take. The Federal government would supervise the transition from slavery to freedom by managing labor relationships, maximizing order and productivity while providing for freedpeople's welfare. Grant also realized his program would curtail the impact the refugee population might have on his military operations, including disorder, disease, and the draining of supplies from the soldiers.

John Eaton's work in Vicksburg was an enormous task, as implied by a single sentence taken from his diary of August 28, 1863: *"How appalling my labor here!"* Initially surprised by General Grant's order putting him in charge of the thousands of black refugees, and reluctant to take on what he believed was, *"…an impossible undertaking doomed to bring only suffering and failure…,"* Eaton, nevertheless, along

John Eaton, Jr. (1829-1906) was born December 5, in Sutton, New Hampshire, the oldest of nine children. Recreation found little place in the young Eaton's life, nor did education fare much better. First attending school when he was three years old, by age five, John was deemed old enough to work on the farm, and his schooling became sporadic. With the encouragement of his mother, however, John developed a hunger for books, struggling against heavy odds to educate himself. By sixteen his father agreed to send him to Thetford Academy in Vermont, and later securing admittance to four years at Dartmouth College. After graduation in 1854, he spent two years as principal of Ward School in Cleveland, Ohio, then three years as superintendent of schools in Toledo, Ohio. During this period, he studied privately to prepare himself for the ministry, being ordained by the presbytery in September, 1861. He entered the army as chaplain of the 27th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, his position when appointed to oversee the care and settlement of the recently emancipated slaves around Vicksburg, Mississippi. It was during this turbulent period that followed the surrender of the city, that John Eaton met and married 20-year-old Alice Shirley, whose family home had lain within the Union siege lines along the Jackson Road. In October 1863, he was appointed colonel of the 63d U.S. Colored Infantry Regiment, and received his brevet of brigadier-general in March 1865.

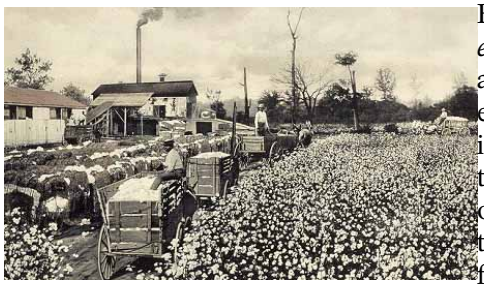
Working with the newly-formed Freedmen's Bureau at the close of the war, he served as Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, with general oversight of freedmen's affairs in Maryland. In December 1865, John Eaton resigned this position and settled in Tennessee, holding various education positions until he was appointed U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1870 by then President Ulysses S. Grant, serving in that capacity until August, 1886. Always a strong proponent of public education, John Eaton continued to work in the field until obliged to permanently resign on account of serious ill-health. He died in Washington, D.C., on February 9, 1906, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

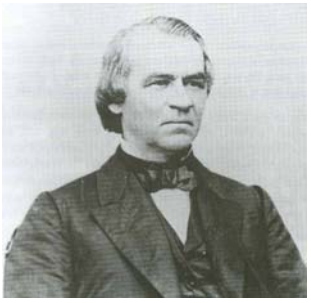
with Captain Samuel Thomas, attacked the difficulty of caring for nearly 30,000 contrabands who had flooded the city, caring for the destitute and organizing efficient squads of those blacks who were capable of working. Nearly a year after initiating his work with the freedpeople in Vicksburg, he wrote, *"…The results are, on the whole, very favorable…our aim was, by the simplest principles and expedients to bring labor and its rewards into their natural relations to the people…They are not so far an exception to the rest of humanity as to be free from vice and crime…but in all our cities they are an interesting industrial class, - manageable, and susceptible of improvement…Any one of a candid and unprejudiced mind cannot look over the same people now and fail to pronounce emancipation a success…"* Because of his experience in caring for the emancipated slaves who had flocked to Union lines during the war, John Eaton, on recommendation of General Grant, was called upon by Bureau Commissioner Howard to serve in the newly established agency at war's end. After his work with the Bureau, Eaton went on to promote the public education system, first as Superintendent of Public Instruction in Tennessee, and later as U.S. Commissioner of Education.

Despite efforts to place the proposed Freedmen's Bureau under the tutelage of the Treasury Department, the agency, when established, came under the direction of the War Department, a decision that was strongly supported by John Eaton. The life of the Bureau was limited to the present war of rebellion and one year thereafter, beginning the most ambitious experiment to date in extending Federal authority into the states. The Freedmen's Bureau Act also implied a promise of government aid to blacks and Unionists in beginning new lives as independent farmers in a reconstructed South. Army personnel became the primary administrators of Reconstruction policy, both during and after the war, and seemed to many freedmen to have only one object in view – to compel them to return to work on the plantations. In the spring and early summer of 1865, military commanders issued stringent orders to stem the influx of freedmen into Southern cities. Army regulations forbade blacks to travel without passes from their employers, be on the streets at night, and prohibited any insubordination on their part. In many cities, postwar black political organizations came into being due to protests against these military policies, and in July 1865, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, instructed army commanders in the South to discontinue pass requirements and cease interfering with the blacks' freedom of movement.

Different expectations regarding the Bureau persisted throughout Reconstruction, and lack of a clear mandate as to its proper authority and extent of its responsibilities in the face of ever-changing social, economic, and political conditions and interests, stymied the agency almost immediately. The principal source of funding was cut off practically as soon as the Bureau became operational, and it had to rely on private charity and Congressional appropriations to survive. That it did not function as a free-standing institution, and its existence was to be short-lived, was by design – the proposal to make the Bureau a permanent agency with Cabinet rank was rejected by the Republican-held Congress. Almost all Republican members believed the Bureau had been intended to meet an extraordinary crisis with extraordinary means, but only until freedom was established and Southern Reconstruction well and safely underway.

Throughout its existence, the Freedmen's Bureau regarded relief to the poor as a temptation to idleness, and determined that these individuals must, *"…feel the spur of necessity, if it be needed to make them self-reliant, industrious, and provident."* This position not only reflected attitudes toward blacks, but the more general Northern belief of the dangers of encouraging dependency among the lower classes. Yet the Bureau's assumption that blacks *wished* to be dependent on government flew in the face of evidence that the black community, whenever possible, shouldered the responsibility of caring for orphans, the aged, and the destitute. In fact, in many places, more whites received Bureau aid than blacks. The agency's relief policy was only one contradiction in the Bureau's purposes. Nowhere was it more evident than in the Bureau's efforts to supervise the transition from slave to free labor, and the assumption that the interests of all Americans would best be served by the blacks' return to plantation labor remained intact as the Freedmen's Bureau assumed command of this transition.





Andrew Johnson

The idea of free labor, wrote a Tennessee Bureau agent, was *"…the noblest principle on earth."* Blacks and whites merely had to abandon attitudes toward labor and toward each other that were inherited from the institution of slavery, and the market would do the rest by quickly assuming the role as arbiter of the South's economic destinies, sharpening those qualities that distinguished free labor from slave – efficiency, productivity, and economic rationality – and ensuring equitable wages and working conditions. Based on the theory that all classes in a free-labor society shared the same interests, this social vision was, to a large extent, blind to the realities the Freedmen's Bureau faced. What both former masters and former slaves inherited from slavery, was work habits and attitudes at serious odds with free labor theories, and both parties recognized this fact far more clearly than the Bureau. Bureau officials themselves, differed regarding the ultimate social implications of the free labor idea. Some believed freedmen should remain a permanent plantation labor force, while others insisted blacks should be afforded the same opportunities to make their way up the social ladder to independent proprietorship. And still others hoped the Federal government would assist at least some black families to acquire their own farms.

No issue proved more vexing for the Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction than that of land and labor. The freedpeople's expectations for land – *"forty acres and a mule"* - was seemingly incorporated into the March 1865, bill creating the agency, and became the mantra thereafter for blacks eager to gain independence and self-reliance. Freedpeople expected land that they could work on their own account to be one sure avenue to liberty, but many white Southerners refused to part with their property. The Bureau was charged to satisfy the freedmen's legitimate interest in acquiring land, while also getting them to work land still owned by others.

Various land and labor policies established by the Federal army during the war, strongly influenced thinking about the determination of land and labor management during Reconstruction. Adding to the freedpeople's expectations of receiving land were the many rumors circulating during, and immediately after, the war that the Federal government would confiscate former Confederate land and give it to the emancipated slaves. The freedpeople, along with many Bureau agents and Union soldiers, thought such redistribution to be the ex-slaves' just due for years of unremitting toil and suffering. In 1865, the Freedmen's Bureau controlled over 850,000 acres of abandoned land, hardly enough to accommodate all former slaves, but sufficient to make a start toward creating a black yeomanry. The agents, under General Howard's direction, included men sincerely committed to settling freedmen on farms of their own and protecting rights of those who already occupied land. One of these men, General Rufus Saxton, a pre-war abolitionist who directed the Bureau in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, had already overseen the settlement of thousands of blacks on lands reserved for them under General William T. Sherman's famous Special Field Order No. 15. In desperation to relieve his army of the large entourage of fleeing slaves attracted during his march to the sea, Sherman had issued these orders to set aside the sea islands and low-country area 30 miles inland from Charleston, South Carolina, to Jacksonville, Florida, for resettling blacks, and ridding himself of their presence. General Saxton announced his intention in June 1865, to use the property under Bureau control in his jurisdiction to further provide freedmen with 40-acre homesteads. General Howard initially shared these same ambitions and issued Circular 13, instructing Bureau agents to set aside 40-acre tracts for the freedmen as rapidly as possible.

However, few Republicans, and no Democrats, in Congress countenanced any policy that would violate the sanctity of property. And President Andrew Johnson ended any such prospect in 1865 by adopting a generous amnesty and pardon policy toward former Confederates, ordering all abandoned and confiscated lands still in the hands of Union forces at the end of the war to be returned to their "rightful" owners. Directing General Howard to rescind Circular 13, the president drafted a new policy from the White House, issuing it in September as Howard's Circular 15. It ordered the restoration of all land to the pardoned landowners, save that which had already been sold under a court decree. Once all planted crops were harvested, virtually all the "abandoned" lands in Bureau hands would revert to the former owners. The Bureau grudgingly complied with this order, and it fell to General Howard to travel to the various areas and inform the freedmen that the land was to be restored to the pardoned owners and that the freedpeople must either agree to work for the planters or be evicted.

The freedmen pleaded with General Howard for the right to rent or purchase the land, and displayed an intense aversion to signing labor contracts, equating such agreements with a "practical return to slavery" – an indication that the interests of former master and former slave were fundamentally irreconcilable. Restoration of land to pardoned Confederates required the displacement of tens of thousands of freedmen across the South. On more than one occasion, freedmen armed themselves, barricaded plantations, and drove off owners attempting to dislodge them. But in the end, the result was most blacks being dispossessed of the lands they had occupied during the war. Although General Howard pledged to renew the fight for black ownership of land when Congress reconvened in December 1865, the obstacles thrown in the Bureau's path by President Johnson precluded any success. The president removed General Saxton as director of the Bureau in South Carolina, based on complaints from white planters that the general had a "hostile attitude" toward restoring their properties. With this, the idea of the Freedmen's Bureau actively promoting black land ownership virtually came to an abrupt end.

"The Freedmen's Bureau" –
The Bureau as promoter of racial peace in the postwar South.
(*Harper's Weekly*, July 25, 1868)

Enforcement of this land restoration policy compromised the Freedmen's Bureau in the eyes of many blacks, particularly for not fulfilling the promise of land ownership. It also left the agency lacking the needed resources to run its programs that came from selling the abandoned land. The Bureau found itself with no alternative but to encourage virtually all freedmen to sign annual contracts to work on the plantations. Its hopes for long-term black advancement and Southern economic prosperity now focused exclusively on the labor contract itself. The Bureau did try to facilitate movement of freedpeople to homestead land after passage of the Southern Homestead Act of 1866, but with very limited success. Often tied to these year-long labor contracts, most freedpeople, after 1865, had to turn to negotiating the best terms possible for working land that others would own. They could hope to earn enough to buy their own property one day, but were increasingly trapped by low returns and oppressive conditions.

The Bureau's role in supervising labor relations reached its peak in 1866 and 1867. Thereafter, Federal authorities intervened less and less frequently to oversee contracts or settle plantation disputes. To the extent that the contract system had been intended to promote stability in labor relations in the chaotic aftermath of war, allowing commercial agriculture to resume, the Bureau's role could be deemed a success. But in other ways, the system failed – the entire contract system in some ways violated the principles of free labor. How voluntary were these contracts when the blacks were denied access to land, coerced by troops and Bureau agents if they refused to sign, and fined or imprisoned if they struck for higher wages? Why require blacks to sign year-long labor contracts when other agricultural laborers "throughout the civilized world" could leave their employment at any time? These policies, in fact, made a mockery of the Bureau's professed goal of equal treatment for the freedpeople.

The Freedmen's Bureau eventually moved out of the land business to assume its principal roles of labor mediator and school builder. Not surprisingly, the Bureau agents spent most of their time settling disputes, although their ability to adjudicate such conflicts was restricted, caused in part, by their limited presence across the South. In fact, many disagreements did not even reach Bureau agents. Until the summer of 1866, the agency lacked the legal authority to handle the complaints, relying on local civil courts to do so once Southern states allowed blacks to testify in civil cases.

The revised Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1866 granted the institution the authority to establish special courts and boards of arbitration with civil and criminal jurisdiction over minor cases involving freedpeople. Still, agents had to rely on persuasion, cajoling, and even threats of further legal action to win compliance from planters who refused to concede that the Bureau, or anyone, had a right to interfere in their relations with black workers. But the agents' ability to bring suit against a planter in civil court or send a case involving civil rights to Federal court, gave the Bureau leverage in negotiating settlements, and the informal process of advocacy and intervention, more than legal proceedings, became the main line of Bureau adjudication across the South.

Among the more than 4,000 schools founded to educate blacks after the War was Nashville's Fisk University. When debt threatened to close the school in 1871, Fisk's treasurer and music teacher, George L. White, had a bold idea. Why not send the student chorus on a tour of the North to raise money?

That October, White and nine singers, seven of whom had been born into slavery, set out, as one of them said, *"…to sing the money out of the hearts and pockets of the people."* The tour got off to a shaky start, offering such sentimental selections as "Home Sweet Home," and barely meeting expenses. But when the students ventured to sing some of their cherished "slave songs" – spirituals – to a church conference in Ohio, the audience was thrilled. From there, the Jubilee Singers progressed in triumph to New York, where influential churchman Henry Ward Beecher, assuring his flock that the group was no "Negro minstrel show," arranged concerts in the most prestigious churches. Another minister remarked that he had never seen his congregation *"…so moved and melted by the magnetism of music."* One listener said the singers, *"…touched the font of tears, so that gray-haired men wept like children."*

On subsequent tours over the next seven years, the Jubilee Singers took their "plantation hymns" all through the North and to Europe; they raised $150,000, and thus ensured the survival of their university.

Among the Freedmen's Bureau several responsibilities, the most enduring was its role in building schools for freedpeople. Although Bureau practices varied from locale to locale, officials agreed that education was the "talisman of power" and the foundation of a free society of self-reliant people. Much of the impetus for education came from the blacks themselves, as they built makeshift schools in the contraband camps, and struggled to set up their own schools in churches and abandoned buildings after emancipation. Freedmen constantly pressed the Bureau for financial and material aid for education, and the Bureau eagerly joined and invested heavily in the process. It founded such colleges as Hampton Institute, Howard University, and Fisk University, to train teachers, and spent $5 million on freedmen's schools, more than half of the total recorded expenditures from all sources for such education during this critical period. Bureau agents spent much of their time sponsoring and managing schools from 1866 onward.

The Freedmen's Bureau did not have a set educational plan, but rather offered a framework that would be carried on by others. It provided materials to build schools, brought in Northern teachers (and sometimes paid them), and coordinated efforts with freedmen's aid and missionary societies to manage the schools. Working closely with Northern aid societies and local black churches allowed the Bureau to enlarge its geographical reach, and by the late 1860s, schools were located in most counties of the former Confederate states. Additionally, the Bureau maximized its resources by leaving many staffing problems to the aid societies and increasingly, by 1870, to the blacks themselves.

The Bureau brought thousands of Northern teachers, many of them women, to these schools, creating a second "Northern invasion," making possible the freedmen's education and boosting the Bureau's efforts to lead the freedpeople toward middle-class values. It spurred blacks to take over their own schools and whites in "reconstructed" governments to assume responsibility for establishing a permanent public education system, if for nothing else but to get the "Yankee schoolmarms" out and Southern culture back into the schools.

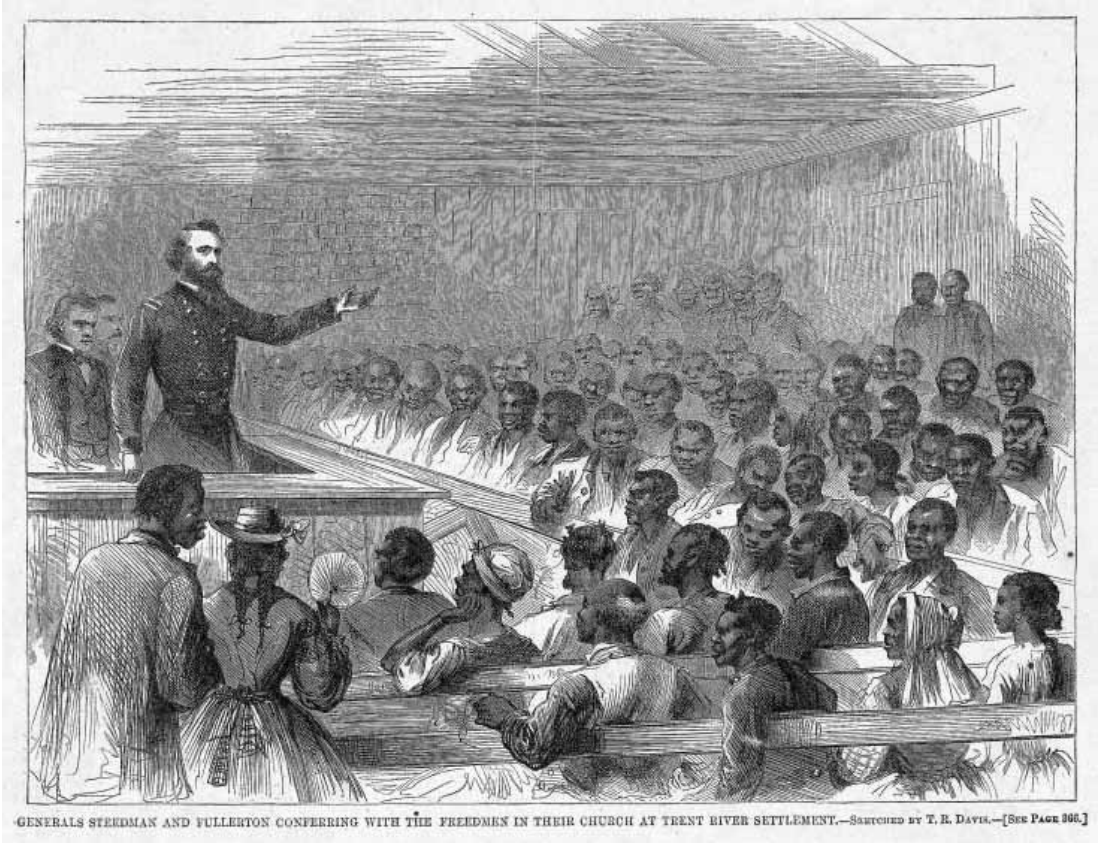
By 1870, when the Freedmen's Bureau's educational and other responsibilities ended, there were over 4,300 freedmen's schools with almost a quarter million students across the South. Statistics tend to disguise the unevenness and poverty of the freedmen's education, but to discount the Bureau's educational achievements would cloud the dynamics of the Bureau's role in Reconstruction. Although the Bureau could not take credit for all the schools, without its resources and resolve, freedmen's education would have been even more sporadic and poorer than it was. The Bureau's goal in education was to set a course for others to follow, rather than carry the load by itself, and its efforts should be judged on that basis.

Another area where the Freedmen's Bureau made an impact concerned the "black codes" adopted by Southern state legislatures in 1865-66. Much of the legislation to regulate the new status of emancipated slaves was unexceptional – authorization of freedmen to own property, make contracts, sue and plead in courts, and contract legal marriages. Under pressure from the Federal government and the Freedmen's Bureau, the states also permitted black testimony in court cases where blacks were parties. But the "black codes" excluded the freedmen from juries, prohibited interracial marriage, required segregation in public facilities, and prescribed harsher punishments for blacks who committed certain crimes. The army and the Bureau sought to overrule or suspend the more oppressive features of these codes, particularly those parts that discriminated between races. Mississippi's and South Carolina's black codes, passed first and deemed most severe, defined vagrancy in such a broad sense that magistrates could arrest almost any black man they defined as unemployed, fine him, and hire him out to a planter to pay off the fine. Both states also required freedmen to obtain special licenses for any occupation other than agriculture. These provisions provoked Republican accusations of the South's intent to create a new slavery system, but ironically, many of the codes had aspects the North could not condemn, as numerous Northern states also had similar laws. But despite shortcomings in their own racial attitudes, Northerners were incensed by the South's apparent attempt to overturn one of the main results of the war. Consequently, the most important impact of the "black codes" was not in their operation, but in their impression made in the North. These codes strengthened the resolve of the Republican Congress of 1865 to keep the South on "probation" until they could work out means to protect the freedpeople and guarantee the fruits of the Northern victory.

Throughout Reconstruction, the Bureau suffered from uneven support in Washington, and strong and sustained opposition in the South. Looked on with doubt about its legality and distrust for its mission, President Andrew Johnson was a key figure in disrupting the Bureau's operations. White Southerners and their Northern Democratic Party allies saw the Bureau as a symbol of tyranny of Reconstruction and corruption of government. Despite the numerous obstacles faced by the Freedmen's Bureau, however, it accomplished much during the initial stages of Reconstruction. Its relief efforts alone saved many Southerners from starvation and began the resettlement and rebuilding process for countless refugees. Its educational work laid the foundation for public education across the South, bolstering the freedpeople's own effort in this area. And even though most Southern freedmen remained a landless and despised class, and most Southern whites were considered "unreconstructed rebels" in their racial attitudes and refusal to accept freedpeople as citizens, this owed less to the Bureau's failings than to the larger social, economic, and political context in which the agency operated and Reconstruction practice and policy evolved.

Despite the agency's shortcomings, most blacks remained extremely loyal to the Freedmen's Bureau. To the very end of Reconstruction, the freedmen insisted that, *"…those who freed them shall protect that freedom."* When President Johnson sent an inspection team to tour the South in hopes of receiving enough complaints from freedpeople to discredit the Bureau, in city after city the black citizenry rallied to the agency's support. In the end, perhaps the Bureau's greatest failing was that of never quite comprehending the depths of racial antagonism and class conflict in the postwar South, arising from the conflicting interests of former masters and former slaves as each sought to define the meaning of emancipation.

*"…we were friends on the march…brothers on the battlefield, but in the peaceful pursuits of life it seems that we are strangers."* – Merrimon Howard, former Mississippi slave

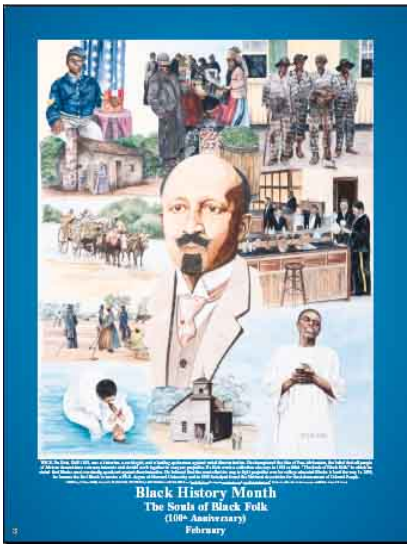

GENERALS STEEDMAN AND FULLERTON CONFERRING WITH THE FREEDMEN IN THEIR CHURCH AT TRENT RIVER SETTLEMENT.—SKETCHED BY T. R. DAVIS.—[SEE PAGE 366.]

In 1866 President Andrew Johnson sent Generals John Steedman and Joseph Fullerton on a tour of the South to gather information in an effort to discredit the Freedmen's Bureau. Southern blacks, however, expressed strong support for the continued presence of the Freemen's Bureau, believing that it offered them necessary aid and, especially, protection. In one case, when General Steedman offered a crowd of 800 blacks a hypothetical choice between the Freedmen's Bureau and the Federal army, the audience overwhelmingly chose the Bureau.

# The Souls of Black Folk

## Milestones in African-American History

Carter G. Woodson




Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950) was born to parents who had been slaves, neither of who could read or write. Having to work to earn money for the family, Woodson did not start school until later than most children. However, using the motto, "it is never too late to learn," he went on to become a high school teacher. Disappointed to discover that none of the schools taught the history of black Americans, Woodson started the Association of the Study of Negro Life and History to research the important achievements and accomplishments of black people. On February 19, 1926, Woodson established "Negro History Week," now called Black History Month in the United States. Black History Month is a time to learn about African-American history, a time to acknowledge that we live in a multicultural America, and a time to set right the multitude of historical wrongs.

Carter Woodson chose the second week of February for Negro History Week because it marked the birthdays of two men who greatly impacted the black American population - Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. The Association today has the same three goals it had when it was founded:

- To promote appreciation of the life and history of the Black American.
- To encourage an understanding of the present status.
- To enrich the promise of the future.

It can be easy to forget that at the center of the many debates, protests, legal battles, and compromises, are people looking to enjoy ordinary lives and opportunities considered the birthright of every American - people like ourselves. Another thing easily forgotten is that blacks have not always relied on the courts or on people in power to help them. Many times, and in many ways, blacks established organizations to help themselves. Black churches, schools, banks - even black national conventions - have existed since early Colonial times.

The civil rights of blacks are now guaranteed by law. But because opportunities for blacks have become available in American society only in more recent times, they are often the first to suffer during hard times when opportunities and money are short. In addition, nearly a third of all African-Americans live in poverty.

And so the struggle goes on - a struggle that we should recognize is not only for improvements for blacks or other individual minority groups, but for the improvement of all of America.

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Capt. Charles Young (1864-1922) was born to former slaves in Kentucky. Moving with his family across the river to Ripley, OH, Young attended the white high school and graduated at the age of 16, the first black to graduate with honors. He then taught school in the black high school in Ripley, during which time he had an opportunity to enter a competitive examination for appointment as a cadet at West Point. With the second highest score, Young reported to the military academy in 1883, and was the third black man to graduate with his commission. Assigned to the 10th and 7th Cavalry, he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. In 1903, he was appointed acting superintendent of Sequoia and General Grant National Parks, becoming the first black superintendent of a national park. His greatest impact involved road construction helping to improve the underdeveloped park. Through his work ethic and perseverance, Young's troops accomplished more in one summer than had been done in three years. Conquering a world of obstacles in his path, he became the first black to attain the rank of lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army. Young died in 1922, while detailed in Nigeria, and given a hero's burial in Arlington National Cemetery.

**"Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity."**

*"I have a Dream" -- Martin Luther King, Jr., August 28, 1963*

Thurgood Marshall

*May 17, 1954* - The Supreme Court rules on the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kans., unanimously agreeing that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional. The ruling paves the way for large-scale desegregation, and is a victory for NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall, who will later return to the Supreme Court as the nation's first black justice.

*December 1, 1955* - NAACP member Rosa Parks refuses to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, defying a southern custom of the time. In response to her arrest, the Montgomery, AL black community launches a bus boycott, which will last for more than a year, until the buses are desegregated December 21, 1956. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. is instrumental in leading the boycott.

Rosa Parks

**"I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream."**

*June 12, 1963* - Mississippi's NAACP field secretary, 37-year-old Medgar Evers, is murdered outside his home. After two trials in 1964, resulting in hung juries, Byron De La Beckwith is convicted for murdering Evers thirty years later.

Medgar Evers

*September 1957* - Formerly all-white Central High School in Little Rock, AR, learns that integration is easier said than done. Nine black students are blocked from entering the school by crowds organized by Governor Orval Faubus. President Eisenhower sends federal troops and the National Guard to intervene on behalf of the students.

*May 4, 1961* - The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) begins sending student volunteers on bus trips to test the implementation of new laws prohibiting segregation in interstate travel facilities. One of the first two groups of "freedom riders," as they are called, encounters its first problem two weeks later, when a mob in Alabama sets the riders' bus on fire. The program continues, and by the end of the summer 1,000 volunteers, black and white, have participated.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

**"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: '*We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.*'"**

*August 28, 1963* - About 250,000 people join the March on Washington. Congregating at the Lincoln Memorial participants listen as Reverend King delivers his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

*August 10, 1965* - Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965, making it easier for Southern blacks to register to vote. Literacy tests and other such requirements that tended to restrict black voting become illegal.

*July 2, 1964* - President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, making segregation in public facilities and discrimination in employment illegal.

Malcolm X

*February 21, 1965* - Malcolm X, black nationalist and founder of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, is shot to death in Harlem. It is believed the assailants are members of the Black Muslim faith, which Malcolm had recently abandoned.

**"I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."**

*April 4, 1968* - Reverend King, at age 39, is shot as he stands on the balcony outside his hotel room in Memphis, TN. Although escaped convict, James Earl Ray, later pleads guilty to the crime, questions about the actual circumstances of King's assassination remain to this day.

*April 11, 1968* - President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968, prohibiting discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing.

*March 22, 1988* - Overriding President Reagan's veto, Congress passes the Civil Rights Restoration Act, which expands the reach of non-discrimination laws within private institutions receiving federal funds.

*November 22, 1991* - After two years of debates, vetoes, and threatened vetoes, President Bush reverses himself and signs the Civil Rights Act of 1991, strengthening existing civil rights laws and providing for damages in cases of intentional employment discrimination.

National Civil Rights Museum

**"From every mountainside,
let freedom ring."**

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