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Introduction

The story of black women who fled to the North in hopes of escaping slavery is an uncharted aspect of American Civil War history. Even as black women sought refuge within Union lines it remained unclear whether they would find a haven for fugitives and a new life, or whether their experience would prove to be more of a continuum of the conditions of slavery. The history of black women during this critical period of transition from slavery to freedom is inseparably linked to the employment of black men as laborers and to the enlistment of black men as soldiers for the Union Army, as well as the subsequent emancipation of both male and female slaves. For the first hundred years after the ending of the Civil War traditional historiography ignored the role of the African-American in the Civil War era. Although the more recent recognition of black soldiers as an integral part of the Union Army is in itself a major historiographical advance, the experience of black women within Union lines also needs to be addressed if we are to build a comprehensive interpretation of the African-American experience during the Civil War era.

During the second half of the twentieth century historians made few attempts to describe a most singular development in African-American history: the transformation of chattel slaves into official soldiers of the Union Army. Traditional historical interpretations have dismissed black

regiments as an insignificant aspect of the Union victory, even though President Lincoln himself credited the black regiments for altering the course of the war in favor of the Union. Mainstream survey texts like *A History of the American People* (1970) and even more specialized texts like *The West Point Military Series: The American Civil War* (1987) have perpetuated the omission of African-American participation.[1] At the time, however, the admission of black soldiers into the Union Army constituted one of the most controversial issues of the entire Civil War. Owing in great measure to the participation of black troops, the war for the Union became a war for black freedom and an opportunity for black Americans to prove themselves worthy of citizenship. This development was most eloquently predicted by Frederick Douglass in his appeal to President Lincoln to accept black volunteers into the Union forces:

> Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States.[2]

Lincoln's reluctance to comply with Douglass' wishes and the general Northern opposition to black enlistment eventually gave way to pressing military demands for more recruitments. By the end of the Civil War approximately two hundred thousand black soldiers and sailors wore the Northern blue uniform, twenty one received the Congressional Medal of Honor, and more than one-third of the participants became

casualties.[3] Their outstanding military performance on the battlefield built a foundation for extending the rights of citizenship to all African-Americans.

The enlistment of black men not only transformed the lives of those serving in the military, but also changed the lives of their family members as well. Black families either began fleeing to the North to seek refuge in Union Camps, or attempted to escape to Union-occupied areas of the South. In these refugee villages, black women and children and elderly black men supported themselves by performing such camp work as cooking, laundry service and tending horses for the Union cavalry. The growing numbers of refugee villages around Union encampments were an annoyance to Union officers who believed the presence of black families distracted black soldiers from their duties and was otherwise a nuisance. The increasing numbers of refugees forced officials to adopt a formal policy regarding their status. Under the Confiscation Act of 1862, all black refugees within Union territory were declared forever free.

In the African-American struggle to progress from slavery to freedom, unresolved questions became issues of contention between leaders of the black and white communities. In the gulf between the theory and the practice of emancipation, there emerged a central problem: the interpretation of freedom for all blacks. Did emancipation imply that blacks would enjoy the same rights of

citizenship equal to whites? As James A. Garfield asked:

> What is Freedom? Is it the bare privilege of not being chained? . . .If this is all, then freedom is a bitter mockery, a cruel delusion.[4]

The meaning of freedom was not a static concept and was open to different and sometimes contradictory interpretations; its meaning changed for both blacks and whites during the Civil War era.[5] When fugitives in the North were declared "forever free" by the Confiscation Act, what would the conditions of this new social status of freedom be? At the time, many black Americans believed the advancement of black enlistment and emancipation were signs of a new era of equality. Some even took on new names like "Hope," "Faith," "Chance" and "Deliverance," reflecting the optimism inspired by emancipation.[6] Would their future in fact be one of social equality, or would it be instead one marked by oppressive social conditions and the doctrine of white supremacy?

Whether the Civil War experience for black women in the North was characterized more by freedom or by persistent racial discrimination, is an area in need of historical investigation. Even as black families left behind the shackles of slavery, their experience in the refugee camps was often shaped by an established ideological framework of Northern racist attitudes. The Civil War experience for all black Americans reflected the pervasive racial prejudice of American society.

The Historiography of African-Americans in the Union Army During the Civil War

The historiography of the African-American in the Union Army has evolved from a neglected subject to a recognized part of mainstream Civil War history. During the years immediately following the Civil War, there were only three attempts to record the history of African-Americans in the Union Army. The first record, *The Negro in the American Rebellion* (1867), by William Wells Brown, draws its material from letters, speeches, editorials, newspaper articles, and accounts that were provided by officers and soldiers from several black regiments. Brown wrote his account before the United States War Department published its *War of Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* between 1880-1901, so Brown could not benefit from this standard source of information. The second record, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of Rebellion* (1888), by George Washington Williams, a veteran of the U.S. Colored Troops, utilizes a wide range of materials. These include official sources and correspondence from Union officers who commanded black troops. Although there is more detailed information in Williams' work, it lacks objectivity and too often attempts to glorify every black soldier.[7] But Williams also provides some poignant insights, such as his recognition that white Northern Americans sought to downplay the black soldiers' contribution to the national victory.[8]

The third record, *Black Phalanx* (1888), was written by Joseph

T. Wilson, also a veteran of the Union Army. Although Wilson provides more information on military dispatches, his work is similar to the earlier ones in its organization and lack of analysis. Perhaps the most important contribution made by both Wilson and Williams is to describe from first-hand experience the white prejudice towards black soldiers in the Union Army. With the exception of these three books, studies of the Civil War have dismissed with only passing reference

when they have not entirely overlooked, the African-American role in the Union Army.[9] As late as the 1950's the dimensions of the African-American experience in the Union Army had not been thoroughly addressed.

A low point in the historiography of the African-American in the Civil War was reached in W.E. Woodward's biography *Meet General Grant (1928)*. Woodward stated:

> The American Negroes are the only people in the history of the world. . .that ever became free without any effort of their own. . .They had not started the war nor ended it. They twanged banjos around the railroad stations, sang melodious spirituals, and believed that some Yankee would soon come along and give each of them forty acres of land and a mule.[10]

The persistence of these racist perceptions among both laymen and historians limited the progress towards addressing the active role of African-Americans in the Civil War.[11] Racist perceptions in the early twentieth century derived, in part, from the earlier racist generalizations commonplace during the Civil War era. The tenacity of Northern racism is one of

the greatest ironies of the entire Civil War. As the Northern battle to preserve the Union became intertwined with the cause of abolishing slavery, Northern society remained deeply racist. Northern attitudes were generally influenced by the doctrine of white supremacy: emancipation was not generally predicated on a belief in black equality. Only during the last decades of the twentieth century would historiographical investigation begin to explore the problem of racism and discrimination towards African-Americans in the Union Army.

While earlier treatments of Civil War history overlooked the role of black regiments, the works of Dudley Taylor Cornish and James M. McPherson have added new perspectives to the historiography of black regiments. Cornish's *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army 1861-1865* (1987) made the first comprehensive analysis of the development of the policy to recruit and to enlist African-Americans. Cornish's extensive study includes the military aspects of the black regiments in both the Union Army and the Union Navy. It explores the segregation of black regiments commanded by white officers, as well as the recruitment, training and military effectiveness of these regiments. Making extensive use of the volumes of *War of Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Cornish's study is an invaluable contribution to understanding the employment of African-Americans in the Union Army. In another work "The

Union Army as a School for Negroes," Cornish also explores how military service served as a transitional phase that helped prepare blacks for American citizenship.[12]

James M. McPherson has also made unprecedented contributions to the historiography of African-Americans in the Civil War. In *The Negro's Civil War; How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (1965) and *Marching Toward Freedom: Blacks in the Civil War 1861-1865* (1991), McPherson emphasizes the rapid social change experienced by African-Americans during the Civil War years and how the resolution of the slavery issue altered the course of history and "redefined the United States."[13] Another dimension which McPherson addresses is the issue of race relations. The same racist attitudes that underlaid the institution of slavery also established a framework for their experience in the Union Army. Even more that the controversy over slavery, the future status of the black race in American society was a central issue of the Civil War.[14]

There are some aspects of the black experience in the Civil War that both Cornish and McPherson have advanced through continuing study. They have brought to the forefront the problem of hostility and discrimination towards African-Americans in the Union Army. Black regiments were assigned a disproportionate share of the heavy labor, fatigue duty, inferior weapons and equipment. They have also documented the long struggle of black soldiers to gain equal pay. In

the years since their earlier publications, both Cornish and McPherson have updated their works and both have emphasized the importance of the black American Civil War experience in understanding our own contemporary society. Cornish has reaffirmed his hopes that "historical examination of the past can illuminate the problems of the present and help progress towards a final solution."[15] McPherson has stressed the urgency of race relations issues, which he finds to be as important today as they were during both the 1860's and the 1960's, and like Cornish he suggests the black experience in the Civil War can illuminate race relations.[16] But as invaluable as these studies have been for advancing the historiography of African-American men during the Civil War, they have ignored the experience of African-American during this transitional period and their experience within the context of Northern society.

The most comprehensive interpretive studies to date on the African-American in the Civil War are the works by the Freedmen and Southern Society Project. In a departure from earlier perceptions of African-Americans as hapless and passive participants in emancipation, the Freedmen and Southern Society Project has advanced a more positive interpretation of African-Americans as active agents in transforming themselves from chattel slaves to American citizens and in determining their own destiny. These works are compilations of previously unavailable primary

manuscripts and official documents from the National Archives of the United States. The volumes include letters from slaves, from black soldiers, and their families; personal testimonies; and official transcripts. *The Destruction of Slavery (1985)* documents the collapse of the institution of slavery in the South and shifts the story of emancipation away from national political leaders to the slaves themselves, individuals who took an active role in promoting their own freedom. *The Black Military Experience (1982)* studies the simultaneous advancement of black enlistment and slave emancipation, focusing on how black enlistment in the Union Army transformed the war to preserve the Union into a war for black freedom. As this work discusses, the black initiation into the Union Army provided many blacks with their first opportunity to acquire education, new skills and wider knowledge of the world. The Freedmen and Southern Society acknowledges the difficulties of this transitional period and suggests that the Civil War experience helped prepare blacks for their larger struggle after the war in their pursuit of social equality. The collection of documents published in *Free At Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War* (1993) reveals how emancipation set American society on a progressive course of freedom. These studies are landmarks in the historiography of the African-American experience; they have transformed that experience from a once neglected subject into a central

theme of American Civil War history, and they have simultaneously advanced the concept of a new social history that includes all race and genders.

The Freedmen and Southern Society has opened up new areas for research in the historiography of African-Americans in the Civil War. Within these volumes are the first available records establishing the Civil War as a transitional period for the entire African-American community. New breadth to understanding the black experience can be gained through the perspective of black soldiers and their families. For example, *The Black Military Experience* suggests that the determination of black soldiers to receive equal pay with white soldiers arose from their sense of family responsibility and their concern for the welfare of their dependents.

Another promising area in the historiography of this field are the recently published primary sources written by black Americans who participated in the Civil War. Susie King Taylor's *A Black Women's Civil War Memoirs (1988)* describes her experience of camp life when she served as a nurse, teacher and laundress for the 33rd United States Colored Troops. Works like James Henry Gooding's *On the Alter of Freedom: A Black Soldier's Letters From the Front (1991)* and Thomas Chester Morris' *Black Civil War Correspondent: His Dispatches From the Virginia Front (1989)* are invaluable sources for understanding the African-American

condition in the Union Army through the viewpoint of those experienced it. We can also glean from these works how black men viewed the role of black women during the Civil War period.

There is no other period American history characterized by such unprecedented social transformation than the Civil War. On March 7, 1864 a *New York Times* editorial described the rapid transition in the status of African-Americans, who only months before had suffered from acts of racial violence and now were enlisted as part of the Union forces.[17] Only a few years earlier, the Dred Scott case of 1857 had denied citizenship to black Americans. "The Ovation to the Black Regiment" described the parade celebrating the departure of the first black regiment from the state of New York. This event brought about a realization of the "... revolution which the public mind everywhere is experiencing."[18] This social transformation and acceptance of African-American men as soldiers worthy and capable of bearing arms and fighting to preserve the Union was a major turning point in African-American history. In view of the unprecedented idea of African-American men serving as Union soldiers, we can understand the *New York Times* reporter remarking: "Such developments are infallible tokens of a new epoch."[19]

There is no doubt that the historiography of the African-American has made tremendous progress since the end

of the Civil War. Only in recent years have the many dimensions involved in the black enlistment in the Union Army begun to be addressed. However, a comprehensive study of black women and black families and how their lives were changed by the black enlistment and by their own emancipation remains an unwritten chapter of American Civil War history. Only by including the experience of African-American women in the North during the Civil War can we develop a comprehensive analysis of the black transition from slavery to freedom, and the unfinished heritage of the African-American experience in the Civil War.

Endnotes

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13 James M. McPherson, "A War that Never Goes Away," *American Heritage* March 1990: 44.

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16 James M. McPherson, *Marching Toward Freedom: Blacks in the Civil War 1861-1865* (New York: Pantheon, 1991), x.

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18 "The Ovation to the Black Regiment."

19 "The Ovation to the Black Regiment."

White Racism in Northern Society

Although during the course of the Civil War the Union adopted the cause of abolition, racist ideology remained very much a part of Northern thought. As C. Vann Woodward has suggested in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1966) racism was not uniquely characteristic of Southern society but was actually very prevalent in Northern society as well. Discriminatory legislation limiting suffrage and social opportunities relegated the free black population to the margins of Northern society. Only in the North were there segregated residential ghetto areas known as "Little Africa," "Nigger Hill" and "New Guinea." Blacks became trapped in the lower echelons of a socially stratified Northern order and the oppressive conditions of the "Darktown" slums. The exploitative nature of the institution of slavery stigmatized the African race. The racial subordination that American slavery institutionalized reinforced a pervasive negative association with the black race and led to the development of racism and discrimination as a by-product of slavery.[1] Slavery itself created racism which became entrenched in American society. As a consequence, blacks were downtrodden in both Northern and Southern society. Despite the strong antislavery sentiment that emerged in the North during the decades preceding the Civil War and despite the enlistment of black regiments into the Union Army and the subsequent emancipation, white racism remained part of Northern thought.

While the Compromise of 1850 was designed to stem the growing controversy over the slavery issue, the Fugitive Slave Act provision only led to further controversy. The Compromise of 1850 allowed California to enter the Union as a free state and yet at the same time also strengthened the rights of Southern slave owners to capture their runaway slaves. The Fugitive Slave Act provided federal assistance in issuing warrants for arrest and apprehending and returning fugitive slaves to their masters. The increasing presence of slave catchers in Northern communities hunting and capturing slaves generated growing indignation over the inhumanity of the law. Harriet Beecher Stowe's influential antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* first published as a serial between 1851-1852, dramatized the plight of runaway slaves, bringing the cruelty and tragedy onto a personal level. The widely read novel also contributed to the growing opposition among Northerners to the institution of slavery in America. The Fugitive Slave Law was symbolic of the "chattel" status of enslaved blacks as property and without legal rights in American society. By the 1850's the antislavery movement in the North had taken on a moral character with abolitionists calling for immediate dissolution of the institution. However, the antislavery propaganda of the North did not translate into a belief in equality for blacks. Even as the antislavery movement grew, the most controversial issue was the question of free blacks in Northern society.

Many Northerners began to believe that deportation of blacks to colonies outside the United States provided a solution for ridding the nation of the evil institution of slavery. A number of potential locations were considered for black settlements including Africa, Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean. Colonization could provide a home for freed blacks and at the same time provide an opportunity for the United States to expand its sphere of political and cultural influence. The Unites States hoped to secure control over resources and transportation routes to check the growing European domination of these regions.

Supporters of a plan for emancipation with compensation to slave owners founded the American Colonization Society in 1817. Members hoped not only to promote the elimination of slavery in the South in order to benefit social and economic development in the North, but also to remove free blacks from the North. Colonizationists were influential in maintaining the discrimination that plagued blacks and relegated them to the margins of Northern society. They often stereotypically categorized the 250,000 black population of the North as "ignorant," "degraded" and "mentally diseased."[2] With the unofficial support of the United States government, the Society began its program of colonization in 1822, and established a small settlement of 1,400 blacks on the West African coast. The colony established the city Monrovia, named after President James Monroe in whose term the first

settlement began, and was recognized by the United States as the independent republic of Liberia in 1862. This first settlement was successful and African colonization continued to be viewed as a viable solution to the problem of slavery.

President Lincoln was a long-time advocate and active supporter of the African colonization movement because he believed it to be a realistic solution to the race relations problem in American society. He believed that even if slavery were abolished prejudices against persons of African descent would remain. His efforts to persuade black leaders to recruit volunteers for colonization were resisted. Lincoln met with black leaders in August, 1862 to discuss the problem of racial prejudices and his belief that separation was the best solution. He told them:

> Your race are suffering. . .the greatest wrong inflicted on any people. But even when you cease to be slaves, you are yet far removed from being placed on an equality with the white race. You are cut off from many of the advantages which the other race enjoy. . .I cannot alter it if I would.[3]

He believed blacks would always suffer from racial inequality in America and they could find better opportunities in other countries. However, the Civil War population of black Americans was mostly second, third or fourth generations of blacks removed from Africa. Descendents of slaves transported from Africa did not feel compelled to move to a country where they had never lived. They had already begun to develop a strong cultural identity within the African-American community. America was their place of birth and in

America they wished to remain. Thus they questioned:

> Why should we leave this land, so dearly bought by the blood, groans and tears of our fathers? Truly this is our home. Here let us live and here let us die.[4]

Frederick Douglass accused Lincoln of "canting hypocrisy" and "contempt for Negroes."[5] Though there was some dissent within the black community from those who suggested that colonization was perhaps the best solution, the majority believed that they were entitled to the same rights of citizenship as the white race. Black leaders maintained that any black person who supported colonization was a traitor to his race.[6] Furthermore, they believed that the American Colonization Society was not founded so much on the true spirit of benevolence but more on the selfish interests of white Northern policy makers. Abolitionists and radical Republicans asserted that colonization was cruel and inhumane. Evangelical ministers supported the abolitionists, proclaiming that depriving blacks their God-given moral rights would result in divine retaliation against the American nation. However, conservative Republicans continued to stress the "immutability of racial differences."[7]

One example of the Lincoln administration's desire to remedy the problem of slavery by removing the black race from American soil was the government-subsidized plan for a black colony on the Isthmus of Chiriqui, the modern day region of Panama. Believing it might be easier to establish a colony in Central America than in the more distant Africa,

the Lincoln administration promoted a plan to settle black emigrants in the Chiriqui region. Here they could produce rice, sugar, coffee, cotton or tobacco and begin developing economic self-sufficiency. Indeed, the Chiriqui plan seemed an idyllic solution which could accomplish the dual purpose of finding a refuge for freed blacks and seizing control of the vital Isthmus region, which was a potential communication and transportation route between the East and West coasts of the United States. The potential acquisition of coal reserves in this region and influence over the Mexican Gulf and Caribbean Sea were other appealing factors. Even though Lincoln was eager to implement the Chiriqui plan, the Central American governments had not yet given their full consent to the establishment of black colonies in the region. Although prospective black colonists were not entirely willing to emigrate to this region, Lincoln believed that once settlement had begun and the population of the colony grew, other blacks would not be so reluctant to follow.

Enthusiasm for African colonization persisted among most Northerners, and in 1862 Congress appropriated $600,000 to fund a colonization program. While at first the Mexican and Central American governments were willing to accept black emigrants with the hopes that it would benefit the settlement and agricultural cultivation of vacant lands, this situation soon changed. At first a number of the Central American governments grew suspicious about American intentions when

they were excluded from critical aspects of the initial planning stages of the black settlements. Their reservations arose from what they believed was the tendency of "Yankee territorial expansionism."[8] One by one, the governments of Mexico, Columbia, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and El Salvador grew apprehensive enough about American intentions to cause them to reject the colonization schemes. Finally, Central and South American countries objected not so much to individual migration of black persons but more to mass migration of black persons under the protection of the United States government, which might undermine the political autonomy of their countries.

Even though the Chiriqui program was abandoned because of increasing protests from Central American governments, Lincoln still believed black colonization was the solution to the race relations problem. His administration promoted an alternative colony in Haiti, and in 1863 a group of 453 black colonists settled on an island near Haiti. The colony was plagued by smallpox and starvation and finally in 1864, the Lincoln administration sent naval ships to return the 368 survivors to the United States. The failure of this settlement effectively suspended all further plans for black colonization in Central and South America. In the last analysis, the Federal government simply did not have sufficient funds to compensate slave owners for emancipation and to subsidize a large scale colonization program.

Colonization schemes clearly demonstrate Northern policy makers' belief in the desirability of gradual removal of persons of African descent from American society. Colonization efforts also represent the tendency among white Northerners to be predisposed to black antipathy. More than anything else they feared a black exodus to the North once slaves in the South were emancipated. Northern Democrats attacked the "black Republican Party of fanaticism" and claimed that the freeing of several million "semi-savages" to "overrun the North and enter into competition with the white laboring masses" was potentially detrimental to Northern society.[9] Democratic newspapers questioned, "Shall the Working Classes be Equalized with the Negroes?"[10] The interracial tensions in the North resulted in acts of violence. When black workers replaced striking Irish dockworkers, black neighborhoods suffered white attacks in retaliation. Another angry mob set on fire a tobacco factory where black women and children were working. Northern Democratic leaders even threatened to withdraw their support for the Union if it would only mean an influx of millions of blacks into Northern Society.

Midwestern states also expressed the same fear of a black exodus from the South, and declared: "There is a very great aversion. . .against having free Negroes come among us. Our people want nothing to do with the Negro."[11] Midwesterners likewise objected to the flooding of their

labor market with a new pool of free black workers. They were also staunch supporters of the colonization program and believed separation of the black and white races was imperative. When the Union agenda began to include emancipation, Midwesterners became haunted with visions of freed blacks streaming into their states and "mixing" with whites.

The fear of a black exodus that pervaded Northern and Midwestern public opinion directly corresponded to the fear of black assimilation, or the fear that the black race would absorb into the white population. Aversion to assimilation in turn reflected a belief in the innate inferiority of persons of African descent. Racial prejudice against the black race had its origins in the beginning of American slavery during the seventeenth century, and it advanced through succeeding generations. During the 1780's Thomas Jefferson was one of the first Americans to suggest a physical and intellectual inferiority of the black race:

> I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to whites both in body and mind.[12]

During the decades of the 1830's and 1840's the belief that differences in black physical appearance and pigmentation were products of environmental conditions was a widely accepted ethnological doctrine. In 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States and recorded his observations on relations between the black and white

races. Even at a time when sentiment in favor of colonization was at a high point, he noted the social and economic unfeasibility of a full scale colonization program. He presented in *Democracy in America* his view that colonizationist rhetoric "transcended crude Negrophobia" and was more symptomatic of widespread and "deeply-rooted" prejudices which pervaded all aspects of American life.[13] Tocqueville acknowledged the evilness of the institution of slavery, but he also recognized that racial prejudice would actually increase with emancipation. Many "free" blacks in the North suffered from greater social degradation than did enslaved blacks in the South. By the mid-nineteenth century racist thought claimed that "scientific evidence" substantiated the belief in the biological and developmental inferiority of the black race. As George M. Fredrickson has described in *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (1987) such ideological conceptions reflected the extent to which Northern whites viewed blacks as permanently alien and an unassimilable element of the population."[14]

There were several other problems perceived by Northerners regarding a free black population. First, many believed that after blacks were liberated from the oppression of slavery they would harbor hostility and express resentment toward whites, a circumstance which could erupt into violent interracial conflict. Second, many believed that emancipated

slaves might drift into a "permanently discontented and pariah class" and become caught in the lower stratification of Northern society.[15] Transient blacks would only contribute to crime, idleness, drunkenness and disorderliness among the urban poor.[16] Third, there was great concern that once the black and white races were equalized, amalgamation, or the blending of the two races into one community would occur. Amalgamation would then be followed by miscegenation, or the intermarrying between the black and white races. Extreme racist propaganda contended that miscegenation would result in a debasement of the white race and bring catastrophic divine intervention.[17] Intermarriage between the two races was the greatest threat to the racist ideal of an Anglo-Saxon American nation. Advocates of racial homogeneity clung to the notion of an American national character defined by an Anglo-Saxon image. An African population was not needed. For these reasons, African colonization had seemed like an ideal solution for both the problem of slavery, and a way of preserving the racial homogeneity of American society.

Although resentment of blacks characterized the long-standing mainstream attitude among white Northerners, the mounting costs of the Civil War and the increasing demands of white military recruitment caused public opinion to change. Following the Enrollment Act of 1863 rioting in New York broke out in protest of conscription and the commutation

fee. Democrats argued that Lincoln was drafting immigrants and the white laboring class in order to flood Northern cities with black workers. Conflict over race and class led to some of the most violent demonstrations in American history, with protestors even burning down a black orphanage. More and more the Lincoln administration realized that the Confederacy was deriving great military advantage from the employment of vast numbers of slave laborers. An attack on the cornerstone of Southern society, the institution of slavery, became increasingly urgent. The growing resistance to the draft and the belief that if blacks were going to benefit from abolition and Union victory, then they too should share in the dying and fighting, caused public opinion to shift in favor of black enlistment.

During the wartime social upheaval, many slaves fled from plantations in the South and sought refuge behind Union lines. Once Union officers refused to return runaway slaves to their masters the fugitives were classified as "contraband of war." The increasing numbers of contrabands within Union lines forced the government to adopt an official policy regarding their status. The First Confiscation Act of August 1861 allowed the seizure of all Confederate property used to support the rebellion, including slaves. The Second Confiscation Act of July 1862 declared all fugitive and captive slaves under the control of Union forces "forever free." The Militia Act of July 1862 further authorized the

employment of persons of African descent for military service and designated a wage of $10.00 a month. Under the Militia Act both black persons enlisted in the army and their families were entitled to freedom (except in Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland and Delaware, where slave owners were technically loyal to the Union and therefore exempt). Finally, in March of 1865 Congress declared the freedom in all states for families of black men serving in the United States Army and Navy.

The emancipation and corresponding employment of blacks in the Union forces was from the beginning a pragmatic measure in military strategy. An indication of this fact is contained in a letter from General Ulysses S. Grant to his family, where he summarizes his view of black employment and its relation to his military goal:

> . . .to put down the rebellion. I have no hobby of my own with regard to the Negro, either to effect his freedom or to continue his bondage. . . I am using them as teamsters, hospital attendants, company cooks and so fourth, thus saving the soldiers to carry the musket. I don't know what is to become of these poor people in the end, but it weakens the enemy to take them from them.[18]

Grant recognized that newly-emancipated blacks could not be fully integrated into white regiments due to the hostility towards, and the resentment of the use of black soldiers in the Union forces. Grant therefore supported the creation of separate black units commanded by white officers. Even though white officers volunteered to lead black regiments, it was mostly because of the opportunity for rapid advancement

in the military ranks, rather than out of any willingness to accept the equality of black soldiers. For white officers who commanded black troops, there was always a lingering stigmatization from being associated with the black regiments.

Most Northern whites, then, embraced emancipation as a means to Union victory, not as something that was necessary or even desirable as an end in itself.[19] As Lincoln said:

> If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.[20]

As late as August 1862, Lincoln was still reluctant to end slavery, as he explained in a letter to Horace Greeley:

> My paramount objective *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or destroy slavery. . . What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union.[21]

These quotes are a reminder of the Lincoln administration's primary objective of restoring the Union and the secondary objective of ending slavery. The long delay until December 31, 1865 for the final ratification of the Emancipation Proclamation is another reminder of the strong reluctance of the Republican Congress to accept black emancipation.

As the American nation became engulfed in the social upheaval of the Civil War years there was a simultaneous advancement of contrasting belief systems which characterized Northern attitudes. First, the growing awareness of the

essential evilness of slavery and the belief that the institution was detrimental to the stability of American society. Second, the increasing prevalence of racist ideology and the negative stigmatization of inferiority associated with persons of African origin that were direct outgrowths of the slavery condition. The juxtaposition of these conflicting belief systems created a framework for the black Civil War experience. As a result, slavery was only one dimension of the status of blacks in American society and emancipation advancement did not coincide with a belief in black equality.

Endnotes

1 Lawrence B. Goodheart, ed., *Slavery in American Society* (MA: D.C. Heath, 1993), 13-17.

2 James A. Henretta, et al, *America's History* (New York: Worth Publishers, 1993), 363.

3 Gary Planck, "Abraham Lincoln and Black Colonization: Theory and Practice," *Lincoln Herald* 72 (1970): 69.

4 Louis Mehlinger, "The Attitude of the Free Negro Toward Colonization," *Journal of Negro History* 1 (1916): 286.

5 James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), 508.

6 McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 509.

7 McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 506-508.

8 Thomas Schoonover, "Misconstrued Mission: Expansionism and Black Colonization in Mexico and Central America During the Civil War," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (1980): 612.

9 McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 507.

10 McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 507-509.

11 McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 507-509.

12 George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP, 1987), 1.

13 Fredrickson, 21-23.

14 Fredrickson, 1-6.

15 Fredrickson, 8-23.

16 Fredrickson, 7-23.

17 Fredrickson, 188-190.

18 As quoted in James M. McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), 502.

19 McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 502.

20 As quoted in James M. McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War 1861-1865* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), 510.

21 As quoted in James M. McPherson's *Marching Toward Freedom: Blacks in the Civil War 1861-1865* (New York: Pantheon, 1991), 15.

Black Enlistment and Retaliation Against Black Families

As black men left for the North to work as laborers and later to serve as soldiers in the Union Army, the fate of their wives, children and other dependents was correspondingly affected. Relatives left behind in the bondage of slavery lived with the threat of retaliation from disgruntled masters. In Southern and Northern states (Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland and Delaware) where blacks were still legally held in slavery, family members were often punished when black men left to join Union forces. The plight of black women was especially physically harsh. Martha Glover, a slave women in Missouri, wrote to her husband describing the hardships of her situation:

> I have had nothing but trouble since you left. You recollect what I told you how they would do after you was gone. they abuse me because you went & say they will not take care of our children & do nothing but quarrel with me all the time and beat me scandalously the day before--Oh I never thought you would give me so much trouble as I have got to bear now.[1]

Their master was later apprehended enroute to Kentucky where he planned to sell Martha and her three children.[2] Slave women and children were often considered unprofitable because they were not physically suited for heavy labor. Some black families were thus sold or evicted because slave owners did not want to assume the responsibility of unproductive financial responsibilities. In a letter from a Union officer at a Missouri recruitment center, a slave women explained:

> that her master told her never to return to him; that his men were all gone, and that he could not, and would not support the women.[3]

In an effort to intimidate and discourage potential black enlistees for the U.S. Colored Troops of Maryland, black families were terrorized by local white gangs. Colonel William Birney described some incidents in a report to the War Department's Bureau of Colored Troops:

> the most inhuman outrages against the families of free men of color who have enlisted: the cornfields of the people have been thrown open, their cows have been driven away and some families have been mercilessly turned out of their homes.[4]

Maryland slave owners who feared that black enlistment would soon be followed by recruitment of their own slaves began sending their slaves to public jails or private slave pens to safeguard their investment, and also to distance the slaves from potential emancipation in the District of Columbia.[5] Special Order No. 202 authorized Colonel Birney to release from imprisonment the slaves belonging to Confederate general J.E.B. Stuart and other Rebel sympathizers.[6] In Birney's official report he described the discovery of an enclosed yard, brick-paved and with brick wall, containing a total of fifty-six slave men and women and three infants.[7] "Sixteen of the men were shackled together, by couples, at the ankles with heavy irons and one had his legs chained together."[8]

When intimidation failed to deter black enlistment,slave owners resorted to even harsher forms of punishment for black families. While serving in the Union Army many black

soldiers learned of owners punishing their wives and children by forcing them to perform labor usually done by men. In a report sent to General William A. Pile, supervisor of black recruitment in Missouri, Private William Brooks complained that his wife was "required to do the same work that he formerly had to do, such as chopping wood, splitting rails &."[9] Some residents of Missouri were so moved by the acts of intimidation and cruelty against families of enlistees, they sent a petition to Major General W.S. Rosencrans to call attention to the abuses. These citizens were in favor of the General Order No. 135 to recruit and enlist black volunteers in Missouri, but they feared blacks would not volunteer, "if their families are to be abused, beaten, seized and driven to their former homes in the night and deprived of reasonable food & clothing because of their enlistment."[10] The petition was signed by one hundred and thirty-two citizens of Missouri. Claims like these were further substantiated by a Federal recruiting officer who confirmed that abuse against families of enlistees had "almost suspended enlistment."11

Kentucky resisted black enlistment more than any other slave state in the Union. Slaves were punished unmercifully when black men left to join the Union Army. In an affidavit filed march 25, 1865, a black soldier's widow, Patty Leach, recounted the harsh treatment she received from her owner after her husband left:

> From that time he treated me more cruelly than ever whipping me frequently without any cause and insulting me on every occasion. . . .The

> last whipping he gave he took me into the Kitchen tied my hands tore all my clothes off until I was entirely naked, bent me down, placed my head between his knees, then whipped me most unmercifully until my back was lacerated all over, the blood oozing out in several places so that I could not wear my underclothes without their becoming saturated with blood....On this and other occasions my master whipped me for no other cause than my husband having enlisted....[12]

Patty Leach subsequently escaped and took refuge at Camp Nelson, Kentucky where she gave the above testimony. Another black woman, Frances Johnson, who also managed to escape to Camp Nelson, swore in her May 1864 testimony that "the day after my husband enlisted my master knew and said that he (my husband) and all the "niggers" did mighty wrong in joining the Army."[13] She testified also that she left her master after harsh treatment and being beaten and whipped. Other slave women gave testimonies describing being beaten with large whips, leather buggy reins and branches from trees.[14] All the aforementioned incidents occurred in retaliation for black enlistment in the Union Army.

In response to the many dangers facing black family members which were compounded by the emotional hardships of separation from loved ones, black women and children began fleeing to the North and living in contraband villages around Union encampments where black men worked as laborers and served in the Union Army.

Endnotes

1 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., "Family and Freedom: Black Families in the American Civil War," *History Today* 37 (1987): 12.

2 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., "Family and Freedom," 12.

3 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992), 366-367.

4 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 339-340.

5 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 335-338.

6 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 336.

7 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 336.

8 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 361-362.

9 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 362-365.

10 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 366.

11 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *The Black Military Experience*. Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867 2. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1982), 268-269.

12 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *The Black Military*, 268-269.

13 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *The Black Military*, 694-695.

14 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *The Destruction of Slavery*. Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867 1. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1985), 481-482, 615-616, 623-624, 654-655.

The Flight for Freedom and Life Behind Union Lines

Although there were those who responded to the plight of the black refugees with genuine humanitarian benevolence, racism was nevertheless a dominant current in Northern perceptions of persons of African descent. One example of this is found in a letter written by a "young Boston blue blood" in 1863:

> As I was going along this afternoon a little black baby that could just walk got under my feet and it look so much like a big worm that I wanted to step on it and crush it, the nasty, greasy little vermin was the best that could be said of it.[1]

In Union camp life prejudice often manifested in random acts of careless cruelties. A Union soldier wrote from Kentucky of a mulatto girl who delivered laundry to their tents being vulgarly taunted by his comrades.[2] Soldiers' crude forms of amusements were often at the expense of black women. Another Union soldier from Connecticut wrote that some of his comrades took two "Niger wenches...turned them upon their heads, & put tobacco, chips, sticks, lighted cigars & sand into their behinds."[3] A Union Chaplain from Illinois wrote of an incident where a soldier grabbed a black women around the waist and "forcibly marched off with her under his arm, while she struggled to get loose, and a hundred voices cheered."[4]

Another Union soldier wrote from South Carolina that he witnessed a group of soldiers from the New York 47th Regiment

chasing some black women until finally they caught a black girl about 7-9 years old and raped her.[5] Union court-martial documents cite cases of rape, assault and mistreatment of black women, and yet many other incidents undoubtedly went unrecorded. Three Union officers wrote to the War Department of Missouri telling of the abuses they witnessed at Helena, Arkansas:

> The contrabands within our lines are experiencing hardships of oppression & neglect. . . .The wives of some have been molested by soldiers to gratify their licentious lust, and their husbands murdered in endeavoring to defend them, and yet the guilty parties, though known, were not arrested.[6]

Theft and pillaging of the black quarters were also rampant throughout the refugee camps. Union soldiers also found amusement in tricks and fraud which took advantage of black naivete and ignorance, like telling them that "Massa Lincoln" needed to borrow money and giving them worthless soap-wrappers as guarantees of repayment.[7] While these acts may have been the products of boredom or restlessness among the soldiers, they were nevertheless characterized by racist overtones.

Even those fugitives that were able to find employment within Union camps did not always experience decent treatment. The chief grievance among laborers was the problem of unpaid wages for service rendered. Army Chaplain Samuel Sawyer reported to the War Department of Missouri that blacks who managed to work and collect wages were:

> waylaid by soldiers, robbed, and in several

> instances fired upon, as well as robbed, and in no case that we can now recall have the plunderers been brought to justice....Many contrabands have been employed, & received in numerous instances, from officers and privates, only counterfeit money or nothing at all for their services. . . .The negro hospital here has become notorious for filth, neglect, mortality & brutal whipping, so that the contrabands have lost all hope of kind treatment there, & would almost as soon go to their graves as to their hospital.[8]

Even though military laborers were entitled to specified rations of food and clothing as part of their wages to provide for family members, provisions and food allotments were often restricted or neglected entirely. In response to Chaplain Sawyer's petition, he was appointed superintendent of contrabands at Helena. However, exploitative working conditions were not limited to only Camp Helena.[9]

Former slaves were dependent on the Union Army for protection, and because there were few alternatives for earning a living, refugees were caught in a situation which made them especially vulnerable to abuse.[10] Antislavery clergymen Lewis C. Lockwood described in a letter to Henry Wilson, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, his observations of abuse of black laborers at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. Lockwood questioned: "...by what constitutional right does government treat these persons as slaves? And by what right does the government become a great practical slaveholder?"[11] Lockwood stated that "most slaves are compelled to work for government for a miserable pittance.

Up to two months ago they had worked for nothing but quarters and rations."[12] He also told of the food rations for families being reduced, which caused some black laborers to withdraw from government service. These men were subsequently gathered together in the guard house and punished with whipping, thus forcing them back into Union employment.[13] Lockwood added further that:

> Contrabandism at Fortress Monroe is but another name for one of the worst forms of practical oppression--government slavery.[14]

He concluded by stating that all these acts of cruelty were:

> committed in the name of Union, freedom and justice under the stars and stripes.[15]

In February 1862 an investigative committee appointed by General John E. Wool confirmed allegations of abuse and fraud of black military laborers.[16]

Black female laborers, like their male counterparts, were confronted with the persistent problem of unpaid wages. Four black women hired for duties in Union military hospitals in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee were only paid the equivalent of one weeks wages for over a year of employment. A formal complaint was filed with an agent at the Freedmen's Bureau, who daily received applications of similar claims of fraud practiced on black persons by the Union Army. The complaint was forwarded to the Surgeon General's Office in Washington, D.C., where no records of the women's employment could be found.

Records of official Union correspondence reveal negative

presuppositions toward the black refugees. A series of questionnaires and interrogatories were circulated to superintendents of contraband camps in the Tennessee region under the control of Ulysses S. Grant. The interrogatories were circulated by general superintendent Chaplain John Eaton Jr., and attempted to evaluate the dispositions and personalities of the black refugees. The interrogatories reveal much of the prejudicial notions Northerners felt which arose from the beliefs that persons of African descent were lazy, dishonest and shiftless. In response to interrogatory 15: "What of their notions of property?" answers like "Wholly childlike," "Entirely Undeveloped," and "Many are dishonest--the result of a system which compels them to steal from their masters."[18] Interrogatory 16 asks: "What of their notion of honesty?" to which the following answers of "Have little idea of honesty" and "Large portion act upon the principle of getting what they can by any means" and "They do not consider it dishonest to take from their masters."[19]

Racist attitudes are especially evident in Northern perceptions of black marriages. Northerners tended to believe any real responsibility or commitment between men and women was exclusively for white relationships. Union officers often referred to black soldiers wives as "whores" of "bitches" and called their sweethearts "common place women of the town."[20] Interrogatory 19 asks: "What of their marital notions & practices?" to which answers like "All

wrong," "Their idea of marriage relations and obligations is very low," and "Most of them have no idea of the sacredness of the Marriage tie."[21] Some answers commented further "Have had no opportunity for correct notions and practices" and "Loose & by example."[22] Believing that there was no real marital bond between black men and women, some officers went so far as to restrict contact between black soldiers and their families, while moving their own white wives and mistresses closer to Union encampments.[23] Examples like these like these indicate a tendency among Northerners to be every bit as racist as the Southern slave masters that they so condemned.

From the outset, black refugees were greeted with Northern skepticism regarding their moral character. Northerners were undoubtedly influenced by familiar perceptions of the black race as lazy, slovenly, immoral and unintelligent. One officer reported from the Union-occupied South Carolina Sea Islands that the slaves were "naturally slothful and indolent."[24] Many of these perceptions, however, were direct outgrowths from the conditions known in slavery. For example, the frequency of petty theft in plantation slavery led to the association of slaves as "dishonest" and "deceitful." But theft was really more in response to an attempt to survive and stave off hunger. Slaves were often labeled "lazy" because of their apparent indifference to labor. But the underlying problem was the

lack of any real motivating incentive toward labor: slave industry never would bring any pay or reward and there was a natural indifference to forced labor.[25] Promiscuity and lack of paternal responsibility were also believed to be proof of black immorality. However, under the laws of slavery, fathers had no legal of personal claim or obligations to their children, who technically belonged to the slave owner.[26] Slave marriages had no legal validity either, and promiscuity was encouraged not so much by blacks themselves, but more by the white masters. It is ironic that at the same time Union officials questioned the moral integrity of blacks due to theft and so fourth, their own soldiers regularly committed assault and robbery throughout the refugee camps. In the last analysis, it was really the very conditions of slavery which actually created and perpetuated racist perceptions.

Another illustration of the blatant racial discrimination black families were confronted with can be found at Camp Nelson, Kentucky in 1864. Camp Nelson was one of the largest Federal recruitment centers for blacks and an unprecedented number of wives and children of black soldiers arrived seeking refuge. Brigadier General Speed S. Fry rejected any responsibility for sheltering the refugees and ordered many of them to return to the owners, and threatened "the lash" to any who returned.[27] When three black women returned the next day the were "bound and whipped as an

example for all."[28] Despite the harsh and unwelcome conditions, families continued to arrive until the refugee population grew to approximately one thousand. Disease and overcrowding plagued the residents, who lived in small tents and crude huts made from scraps. The United States Sanitary Commission was appalled at the living conditions of the families, describing them as the worst "misfortune and misery occasioned by the war."[29] After several months of attempting to restrict entry of refugees into Camp Nelson, Union official expelled all the black families and destroyed their make-shift dwellings in order to discourage them from returning. Northern missionaries and abolitionists were outraged when accounts of the expulsion of black families into the bitter November cold reached the Northern press. Opposition to the eviction forced the Federal Army to allow the families back into Camp Nelson.[30] Thus the families of black soldiers became caught in a vicious cycle of discrimination. After being threatened with retribution and punishment for black men giving support to the Union, families then faced further prejudices in the North where they fled for refuge.

If life was so intolerable in the refugee camps why did blacks choose to stay? If former slaves were generally unwelcome in Northern states, they certainly were not welcome in Union-occupied areas of the South either. The potential presence of "large numbers of masterless black people

offended not only former slave holders, but also some Union military authorities."[31] The hostility and controversy surrounding ex-slave settlers in the North made their presence generally unwelcome. Because of the general reign of terror and intimidation to discourage black men from enlisting, local farmers found it difficult to hire men and women as laborers or rent land to them. Because of few viable alternatives to etch out a livelihood many blacks had no other choice but to stay in the refugee camps for as long as they could, whatever the conditions.

Endnotes

1 As quoted in Bell Irvin Wiley's, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge, LA UP, 1978), 109.

2 Wiley, *Billy Yank*, 114.

3 As quoted in Bell Irvin Wiley's, *Billy Yank*, 112.

4 As quoted in Bell Irvin Wiley's, *Billy Yank*, 114.

5 As quoted in Bell Irvin Wiley's, *Billy Yank*, 114.

6 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 180-182.

7 Wiley, *Billy Yank*, 114-115.

8 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 180-182.

9 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 182.

10 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 169-170.

11 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 170-173.

12 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 170-173.

13 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 170-173.

14 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 170.

15 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 172.

16 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 172.

17 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 229-231.

18 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 186-200.

19 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 186-200.

20 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *The Black Military*, 659-661.

21 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 198.

22 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 198.

23 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *The Black Military*, 659.

24 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 173.

Conclusion

Behind the facade of Northern antislavery propaganda the fact remains that "most of the victors were in their own way as thoroughly imbued with the convictions and sentiments of white supremacy as were the vanquished."[1] Causal references to "niggers" and "darkies" reveal racist generalizations that were often a part of Northern thought.[2] Northerners not only had a predisposition toward racism, but also demonstrated what historian Lawrence Powell has described as "Yankee Paternalism" and the tendency to believe that former slaves needed "humane and intelligent supervision such as only Yankees could give them."[3] If blacks were going to rise out of the social oppression of slavery, then Northerners would have to guide them. These beliefs were products of a Northern bourgeois society and were reflective of the notion that bourgeois ethics of "sobriety," "regularity," "frugality" and "steady industry" needed to be inculcated in former slaves.[4] Northerners recognized the differences in work patterns that blacks were accustomed to under the plantation lifestyle: for former slaves time was something that passed and was tied to fluctuations of the seasons and weather, not a tangible commodity of industry.[5] In the years following the legal institution of slavery, "Yankee Paternalism would degenerate into a racism every bit as spiteful and vindictive as that of the old master, and maybe

more so."[6]

There were several other factors which compounded the hostility felt toward black refugees in general. As the Civil War became linked with black emancipation, Unionists began to fear the North being overrun with "equality-minded blacks."[7] Also, the growing association of the black race with the Civil War itself generated antiblack sentiment. For the soldiers military life became more and more a routine of tiresome hardships and monotonous duty. As blacks became more identified as the very cause of the longest, bitterest and bloodiest conflict America had ever known, they became scapegoats for the hatred Union soldiers felt toward the war itself.[8] Resentment toward and denunciations of blacks were generally "more frequent and more violent after long, hard and unsuccessful campaigns."[9]

It is perhaps one of the saddest ironies of all that fugitives fled the bondage of slavery in the South only to find an even harsher form of oppressed labor in Union Army camps. The ending of slavery in the South was the beginning of a new life in the North where black men and women often suffered even more brutality, deprivations, destitution, disease, death and forced labor than they had ever known in slavery, and at the hands of the very people they believed were their liberators. The flight for freedom to the North did not liberate black women from slavery, but only offered a new form of social oppression. Though there were

humanitarian groups like Union Chaplains and Northern Aid Societies which gave assistance to former slaves in their transition to independence, the incidents of cruelty against black women in the refugee camps were the rule rather than the exception.

Thus the Civil War experience for black fugitive women was more "the gritty reality of life in the contraband camps," than the dawning of a new era of freedom.[10] Black women suffered physical abuses at the hands of whites that reflected racist perceptions and above all the view that black women were creatures lacking in human dignity. Letters and affidavits written by black soldiers, their families and Union officers and soldiers reveal a Northern society unwilling and unprepared to accept African-American on terms of social equality. Those who witnessed the appalling conditions in the refugee camps have left behind well-documented records and testimonies through which future generations can investigate and arrive at a more all-embracing interpretation of American Civil War history.

So much had changed in the legal status of black Americans, and yet so much remained the same. At the same time blacks achieved unprecedented social advancement through manumission, they were nevertheless constrained by unchanging perceptions of their racial inferiority. Legal emancipations alone did not remove the deep-seated prejudices against the black race existing in the hearts and minds of the Northern

white population. For all members of the black community in Northern society, their experience during the Civil War years would be fraught with deep contradictions. Black social mobility and social opportunity remained, in essence, as nonexistent under conditions of legal autonomy as they had during period of slavery itself. The limitations imposed by a racist ideology only grew stronger following legal abolition of the institution of slavery.

These failures of emancipation and the denials of full black equality remain undercurrents of the race relations tensions that exist between the black and white communities in American society to this day. The deep chasm between the black and white communities and the unresolved nature of the race relations issues have their origins during the American antebellum and Civil War eras. Race relations tensions today are grounded in the foundations of the social framework built during these eras, foundations that perpetuated the stigmatization of the black race following its emancipation. The same white racial perceptions that determined the social conditions for blacks during this period are impediments to interracial harmony today. By exploring the origins of black and white race relations conflicts, we can begin to address the nature of contemporary race relations and the unfinished character of the African-American destiny which began during the Civil War era.

Endnotes

1 Lawrence Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980), 30.

2 Powell, 30, 142-143.

3 Powell, 31, 53, 73-74.

4 Powell, 73-79, 113, 117.

5 Powell, 79.

6 Powell, 30-31.

7 Wiley, 112.

8 Wiley, 112.

9 Wiley, 112.

10 Ira Berlin, et al, ed., *Free At Last*, 167-189.

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