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## So Fine a Set of Men: The Influence of Race Relations Between Civil War Soldiers and the Shift in Perspective

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Arts and Sciences

*SO FINE A SET OF MEN:*

THE INFLUENCE OF RACE RELATIONS BETWEEN  
CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS AND THE SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

By

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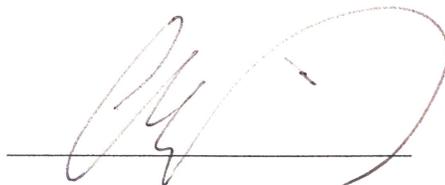
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The United States, since its inception, has considered itself a “melting pot” of cultures and races, housing people from across the globe, and accommodating a variety of different races. While the United States prides itself on diversity, civil rights and racial inequality has been a notable recurring dilemma in United States history; whether it was the introduction of slavery into the colonies due to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, or the civil rights protests that took place during the Vietnam War. It took centuries for African Americans to gain the same rights as Caucasians, and for many African Americans, serving in the United States’ military was their only option to gain freedom and rights. Armed conflicts such as the Civil War featured a number of slaves and freedmen who participated in the Union army attempting to secure their freedom from slavery, while attempting to escape the bonds that held them in the South.

The Civil War presents an environment where blacks were fighting to prove themselves, and change the minds of their white comrades, as well as, provide a catalyst to alter the racist perceptions of white soldiers and officers. The positive interactions between the two groups, and the black soldier’s fight for equality serve as a proper beginning to the debates about race relations, equality, and their presence in future wars, like World War II and the Vietnam War, among others. Military service for many at the outbreak of the Civil War, seemed to be the pinnacle achievement one could acquire, and blacks felt that through military service, one could argue for, and have a strong case advocating for equality and citizenship. There is a belief that through the military, one could garner equality, and that is evident in the Civil War, and establishes a baseline for future wars. Fighting alongside soldiers of different color also propelled sentiments against the institution of slavery amongst people of both white and black descent in the Union army. In some cases, whites across the Union army felt that black people were inferior to them, but while fighting alongside one another, these attitudes began to shift

causing their perspectives to change. These experiences, and shift in beliefs, are significant in explaining the eventual anti-slave sentiments that would develop in the future. The research aims to analyze how the experiences of white and black soldiers during wartime caused a shift in sentiment for white soldiers towards blacks. Overall, it seems that the interactions between both parties introduced a shift in opinions but did this cause both parties to eventually form positive relationships with one another?

There seems to be a gap in the literature relating to the topic of colored troops during the Civil War. The focus tends to be on one party or the other, with an emphasis on either the experiences of a single soldier, or race, while neglecting to include the other side in a significant manner. Some sources, such as “The Sable Arm” by Dudley Taylor Cornish, or “The Negro’s Civil War” by James M. McPherson serve as extremely beneficial sources, they maintain a focus on black soldiers. Other sources, such as “When this Cruel War is Over” by David W. Blight, focuses on the experience of one Union soldier. This paper will attempt to add to the discussion by providing a view into how African-Americans and Caucasians interacted, and how their interactions during one of the bloodiest conflicts in American History caused sentiments to shift, and how the bonds these groups fostered affected their participation in a positive way during post-war anti-slavery movements. The paper will be divided into multiple sections: a section on Lincoln and his shift in dialogue pertaining to slavery, a section on white soldiers and their shift in sentiment towards black soldiers, a section on black soldiers and their valiant actions that brought about the aforementioned shift and served as evidence for their equality, as well as a discussion of how the three sections impact each other, and essentially how each section is significant for the others.

## Abraham Lincoln:

Abraham Lincoln's stance on slavery and the South presents itself in a unique way and could possibly be used as a model for public sentiment at the time as well. Lincoln's perspective, while beginning with anti-slavery sentiment, takes a stark shift in focus when states begin seceding, and shifts back to slavery after the emancipation proclamation is put into action. Lincoln maintained an anti-slavery stance through most of his life, but the increase in "Pro-Union" dialogue is significant. While Lincoln's personal thoughts on the subject are not entirely available, due to his failure to keep a diary and only writing a few personal letters<sup>1</sup> analyzing his public speeches provides insight into the transformation of his views on the subject, and how the public may have viewed slavery, the Civil War, and the secession as a whole in the North. Lincoln wasn't a leading voice at the time against slavery, but he essentially serves as mirror for public opinion, specifically the white union soldiers of the Civil War due to the over 80% of soldiers who vote for Lincoln<sup>2</sup> in his second run for office as opposed to former General McClellan. His dialogue shifts as the year's progress, and while he begins his life as a Whig, there is a progression into more radical views, abolition focused views.

The Peoria Speech (October 16th, 1854) came in response to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and serves as one of Lincoln's first public rejections of the act itself, and the expansion of slavery into territories. While other works preceded the Peoria Speech, this speech seems to be one of the earliest examples of Lincoln's opposition to slavery:

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<sup>1</sup> Foner, Eric. *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1220), XVI

<sup>2</sup> Manning, Chandra. *What This Cruel War Was over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*. (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2008), 194

...I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our Republican example of its just influence in the world---enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites---causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity.<sup>3</sup>

The Peoria Speech makes it clear to listeners at the time that Lincoln had a noticeable aversion to slavery as an institution and its spread throughout the United States (viewing it as fundamentally anti-American), but also shows his inability at the time to bring forward a suitable solution to the problem of abolishing the institution and freedom for blacks. In Eric Foner's *The Fiery Trial*, he presents what Lincoln speculates that: "Lincoln condemned slavery as a violation of the nation's founding principles as enunciated in the Declaration of Independence: human equality and mankind's natural right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness."<sup>4</sup> Lincoln inadvertently demonstrates that at the time, it was difficult to provide an ample solution to the freedom of blacks:

If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia, --- to their own native land....<sup>5</sup>

Lincoln's inability to provide a viable solution to slavery in the United States and his resolution of sending them back to Africa rather than offering them citizenship is evident throughout this speech and can also be used as a model for the common thinking at the time period. While this is an inference based on Lincoln's dialogue, his stance on slavery and its hold on society is neither

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<sup>3</sup> Peoria Speech, October 16, 1854." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. ([nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/peoriaspeech.htm](https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/peoriaspeech.htm))

<sup>4</sup> Foner, Eric. *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, 64-65

<sup>5</sup> Peoria Speech, October 16, 1854." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior.

extremely for or against slavery; it seems to be towards the center politically. He essentially openly spoke about slavery's extinction, but had no true solution to it.<sup>6</sup> For clarification purposes, colonization as a method of dealing with blacks at the time was middle of the road position for some to have; less radical than abolishing the slavery system, but less oppressive than maintaining slavery. Lincoln's closest attempt to a feasible solution is when he discusses avoiding full equality, opting for gradual emancipation: "We cannot, then, make them equals. It does seem to me that systems of gradual emancipation might be adopted; but for their tardiness in this, I will not undertake to judge our brethren of the south."<sup>7</sup> While this out of context could be seen as extreme, it provides a view into the anti-slave views of Lincoln, his reflection of society's views at the time which were ambivalent towards the subject of slaves, as well as, the connection both to his beliefs presented in the Peoria Speech and the politics of the time period. This stance shows Lincoln, and most moderate people's views on slavery and enslavement as a whole, being against the system of slavery, but not necessarily in favor of giving the enslaved rights. He does not agree with the enslavement of blacks, but doesn't fully believe they deserve to be equals. Overall, the Peoria speech serves as a suitable starting point when discussing Lincoln's dynamic views, and provides a proper beginning for discussing his future oratory and thought.

Lincoln's "House Divided" speech, given in the Illinois state house on June 16th, 1858 should be used as the next significant instance of anti-slavery rhetoric in his works. The difference between his early work and his later works is the noteworthy change in rhetoric on Lincoln's part, as the reader begins to see a significant change in how Lincoln approaches the previous problems he saw in freeing slaves, as well as incorporating more pro-union rhetoric.

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<sup>6</sup> Foner, Eric. *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, 65

<sup>7</sup> Peoria Speech, October 16, 1854." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior.

...‘A house divided against itself cannot stand.’ I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved...but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery, will arrest the further spread of it; .... or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new -- North as well as South.<sup>8</sup>

Lincoln takes the time in this section of the speech to discuss the issues surrounding a divided nation, and with the enactment of the Kansas-Nebraska Act it would certainly lead to the downfall of the country due to its dissention. With the ability for slavery to spread into the new territories, in Lincoln’s eyes, would lead to the Union’s downfall due to it not only being fundamentally different than what founding fathers believed but also the fear that slavery could spread into the north, and begin to affect the well-being of Northern Whites. The House Divided speech not only discusses the institution of slavery and its fundamentally anti-American nature, but also discuss the oppressed in the south in response to the Dred Scott Decision:

First, that no negro slave, imported as such from Africa, and no descendant of such slave can ever be a citizen of any State, in the sense of that term as used in the Constitution of the United States. This point is made in order to deprive the negro, in every possible event, of the benefit of this provision of the United States Constitution...<sup>9</sup>.

Lincoln shifts his stance in the “House Divided” speech speaking on citizenship for slaves compared to the “Peoria” speech where they were to be sent back to Africa. This is a significant change in theory in a short amount of time which could reflect society’s outlook also changing at

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<sup>8</sup> “House Divided Speech.” "House Divided" Speech by Abraham Lincoln. (abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/house.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

a rapid pace. Not only does the House Divided speech serve as Lincoln's response to the Kansas-Nebraska act and slavery's expansion, but also serves as a response to blacks being denied any sort of rights or freedom by the Dred Scott decision.

The Lincoln Douglas Debates, following the House Divided Speech, provide insight into Lincoln's stance on the politics of the time, as well as, a future reference for voters when Lincoln eventually runs for President. Lincoln lost to Douglas, unfortunately, but the debates provide not only Lincoln's views at the time, specifically slavery and its spread:

This declared indifference, but, as I must think, covert real zeal for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world-enables the enemies of free institutions<sup>10</sup>.

In this section, Lincoln speaks about the spread of slavery into the Kansas and Nebraska territories due to the repeal of the Missouri compromise and the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska act. While Lincoln states he would vote for the admission of a pro-slave state into the Union<sup>11</sup>, it seems that Lincoln spends a considerable amount of time discussing Slavery, and its end. In the fourth debate, in Charleston, Illinois, Lincoln states:

I say, then, there is no way of putting an end to the slavery agitation amongst us but to put it back upon the basis where our fathers placed it, no way but to keep it out of our new Territories to restrict it forever to the old States where it now exists then the public

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<sup>10</sup> "First Debate: Ottawa, Illinois." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. (<https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/debate1.htm>)

<sup>11</sup> "Second Debate: Freeport, Illinois." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. (<https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/debate2.htm>)

mind will rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction. That is one way of putting an end to the slavery agitation.<sup>12</sup>

Lincoln has spoken out about against the spread of slavery, and it is apparent in this fourth debate that Douglas' "popular sovereignty" argument would lead to further spread of slavery, and the further destruction of the great country the founders created. The spread of slavery, in Lincoln's eyes, leads to the downfall of the Union, and threatens not only the Union's existence, but the people's liberty:

Has anything ever threatened the existence of this Union save and except this very institution of Slavery? What is it that we hold most dear among us? Our own liberty and prosperity. What has ever threatened our liberty and prosperity save and except this institution of slavery? If this is true, how do you propose to improve the condition of things by enlarging Slavery – by spreading it out and making it bigger?<sup>13</sup>

The spread of slavery, in Lincoln's point of view, is essentially anti-American, and ultimately a threat to the republic. As mentioned previously, slavery goes against what the founders believed in Lincoln's point of view, and presents another example of Lincoln's shift from the middle, to leaning more towards support of slavery's end and eventually abolition. Lincoln essentially used the debates to not only present his stance on slavery, condemning its spread as a threat to personal liberty and the republic, but frame the actions done by Douglas and ultimately KN supporters in a negative manner.

The next significant speech from Lincoln, when discussing shifting of public opinion, would be his "Cooper Union" speech. While Lincoln discusses topics such as John Brown's raid

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<sup>12</sup> "Fourth Debate: Charleston, Illinois." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. (<https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/debate4.htm>)

<sup>13</sup> Lincoln, Abraham, and Michael P. Johnson. *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery and the Civil War: Selected Writings and Speeches*. (Boston [Mass.]: Bedford, 2011), 47

on Harpers Ferry, the first bold claim in Part One is that the control of slavery's spread is not unconstitutional:

...of our thirty-nine fathers who framed the original Constitution, twenty-one - a clear majority of the whole - certainly understood that no proper division of local from federal authority, nor any part of the Constitution, forbade the Federal Government to control slavery in the federal territories...<sup>14</sup>

Lincoln's support for this claim is that twenty-one of the thirty-nine voted (across the span of multiple years and different avenues of voting) for the regulation of slavery's spread into the newly acquired land. Lincoln makes the argument that if twenty-one of the thirty-nine Founding Fathers supported the control of slavery, how could it be unconstitutional? Lincoln also takes the time to establish a clear argument in support of the National Government's legal ability to control the spread of slavery. The entire first part of Lincoln's Cooper Union speech is dominated by this topic, speaking to the severity of slavery's expansion in Lincoln's opinion, and how this was a popular subject for people at the time, especially the audience in attendance. One New York Times writer wrote about Lincoln's ability to make a grand first impression, and the reactions of the crowd following the conclusion to his speech: "When Mr. LINCOLN had concluded his address, during the delivery of which he was frequently applauded, three rousing cheers were given for the orator and the sentiments to which he had given utterance."<sup>15</sup> The positive reaction by the crowd speaks to Lincoln being a representative of a popular view of the time, as well as, the public's support of the issue. The most significant part about the second and third parts of the Cooper Union speech was where Lincoln stated:

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<sup>14</sup> "Cooper Union Address ." Abraham Lincoln's Cooper Union Address. ([www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/cooper.htm](http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/cooper.htm))

<sup>15</sup> "REPUBLICANS AT COOPER INSTITUTE.; Address by Hon. Abraham Lincoln." *The New York Times*, February 28, 1860. (New York Times Archive)

These natural, and apparently adequate means all failing, what will convince them? This, and this only: cease to call slavery wrong, and join them in calling it right. And this must be done thoroughly - done in acts as well as in words.<sup>16</sup>

Lincoln states that in order to convince the South to avoid leaving the Union is to join them in “calling it right” and supporting slavery, which Lincoln disagrees with ultimately. Congress throughout pre-civil war America was riddled with attempts by the south to quell discussions of slavery in general on the floor, and it seems that Lincoln is taking the time here (talking to his fellow Republicans) to take these attempts seriously and continue to pursue their end goal of abolishing slavery and removing the danger of retaliation from Southern politicians. For Lincoln, embracing slavery as an institution, or stepping aside to allow Southerners to essentially do what they want is wrong; allowing Southerners to force Northerners into accepting their unjust laws is, in Lincoln’s eyes, the equivalent of calling the institution correct. Lincoln, towards the conclusion of his Cooper Union speech calls on his fellow Republicans to continue doing their duties, despite fear:

Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the Government nor of dungeons to ourselves. Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.<sup>17</sup>

There is essentially a fear of Civil War, and while the war becomes inevitable later, it could be assumed Lincoln is willing to lose the Union and the country as a whole if it meant destroying the institution that he views as entirely un-American. He calls for his fellow Republicans to

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<sup>16</sup> “Cooper Union Address .” Abraham Lincoln's Cooper Union Address. ([www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/cooper.htm](http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/cooper.htm))

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

continue doing their duties, speaking to his desire to continue to do what is right, even if it causes their downfall.

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1860, Abraham Lincoln is elected to his first term of Presidency. His election to office over Stephen A. Douglas proves his popularity at the time in comparison to Douglas and others running for president. Lincoln's First Inaugural Address comes at a time where we see the secession of seven states, and this speech is dominated by dialogue on the union. While there is a lack of significant dialogue of freeing the slaves or abolition, this is quite possibly due to the immediate threat of war by the seceding states. In regards to secession, Lincoln states:

Plainly the central idea of secession is the essence of anarchy. A majority held in restraint by constitutional checks and limitations, and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it does of necessity fly to anarchy or to despotism.<sup>18</sup>

Lincoln goes to the extent to call the secession "anarchy," speaking to the severity of secession and eventual war for Lincoln and the people in the North. Overall, Lincoln's First Inaugural address seems to be a stark shift in Lincoln's rhetoric, as caused by the commencement of secession by the Southern states. Lincoln's First Inaugural seems to be a discussion between Lincoln and the Southern states and makes efforts throughout the piece to sway other states away from secession: "Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other nor build an impassable wall between them..."<sup>19</sup>. While this speech spends very little if not no time discussing abolition, it is key in presenting the primary cause of

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<sup>18</sup> "Lincoln's First Inaugural Address ." Avalon Project - Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. (avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\_century/lincoln1.asp)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

the Civil War: Secession. While Lincoln viewed the Civil war as a means to quell the insurrection<sup>20</sup>, and essentially places the blame on the South because of their desire to leave the Union, the Civil War takes a drastic shift from a war about preserving the Union, to one about preserving the Union as well as freeing the slaves after the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation. The First Inaugural serves as an example of public sentiment going into the Civil War, while the Emancipation Proclamation (discussed later) serves as this shift from a war of union, to a war of union and freeing the slaves.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Inaugural serves as the baseline for the shift during the Civil War. It is dominated by pro-union dialogue, with a lack of slave focused sections but this is for the specific purpose of avoiding war with the South. While the war becomes unavoidable, and its primary focus is to preserve the Union, the Emancipation Proclamation shifts the war's purpose. Lincoln, with the Emancipation Proclamation, shifted the war from one about preserving the Union, to one of abolition. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did not free any slaves at first, but what it did provide was a shift in the war discussed earlier:

...all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons<sup>21</sup>.

Lincoln's election to office overall serves as not only a mirror into the public sphere, but how Lincoln's actions and words affected his fellow citizens.

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<sup>20</sup> Lincoln, Abraham, and Michael P. Johnson. *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery and the Civil War: Selected Writings and Speeches*, 70

<sup>21</sup> "Transcript of Emancipation Proclamation (1863)." Our Documents - Transcript of Emancipation Proclamation (1863)

The Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in the South essentially, and caused slaves across the south to begin seeking out the Union Army as an extension of the North or freedom. The Emancipation Proclamation also gives the Union Army not only the authority to free the slaves, but enter the viable or healthy ones into the armed forces:

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.<sup>22</sup>.

The Emancipation Proclamation's importance to this research, is seen in two areas: the shift the war takes from one of preserving the Union to preserving the Union and freeing the slaves, as well as the increase in interactions between white soldiers and Black slaves and freedmen.

Throughout the previous speeches discussed up until the First Inaugural Address, we see a prevalent focus on slavery, and the emancipation of slaves. With the First Inaugural Address, we see a slight shift in Lincoln's attitudes, but the Emancipation Proclamation brings slavery and its abolition back into light. The Emancipation Proclamation also provides the predominantly white union army with fresh interactions with slaves and freedmen, speaking to the significance of Lincoln's decree on the information presented later. Lincoln's Emancipation proclamation, which quite possibly could have proved to be unsuccessful, brought about a shift in the war effort, and caused a great number of white soldiers to respect black troops, and support the abolitionist shift in the war. If the Emancipation Proclamation was unsuccessful, there may have been an entirely different outcome to the war. While this is speculation, without black soldiers entering the armed forces through the Emancipation Proclamation, the war effort may have been in vain due to the shortage in white troops as the war continued. The Emancipation Proclamation

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

was essentially a gamble on Lincoln's part, but due to public support, it proved to be successful. The Emancipation Proclamation is the catalyst that provides the war with not only a shift in purpose, but a shift in sentiment from whites on the status of Blacks.

Lincoln's Second Inaugural address, while shorter than the first, provides a reinforcement of the claims made above that a shift of the war's purpose took place. In Lincoln's First Inaugural, we are presented with a speech dominated by pro-union dialogue, but thanks to the shift in the war caused by the EP, the Second Inaugural reaffirms the shift:

These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war<sup>23</sup>.

The 2nd Inaugural is dominated by religious dialogue and parallels, but the clear distinction Lincoln makes that the war was about slavery speaks to the importance of ending slavery in the North, as well as, the pro-abolitionist sentiment amongst the people. The Second Inaugural came at a time where Lincoln could afford to be radical, due to the war's shift after the Emancipation Proclamation. Shifting the war into one over emancipation and the freedom of blacks gave Lincoln the ability to make radical statements, such as the claim that god will continue the war for hundreds of years if need be<sup>24</sup>, due to the support he garnered through the Emancipation Proclamation. The emancipation of blacks introduces the intermingling of races in the Union Army, and eventual success from black regiments, which proved to be beneficial to the war effort. In Lincoln's second run for presidency, which takes place post emancipation proclamation, he receives over seventy percent of the vote amongst Union soldiers, beating

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<sup>23</sup> "Lincoln's Second Inaugural." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. ([www.nps.gov/linc/learn/historyculture/lincoln-second-inaugural.htm](http://www.nps.gov/linc/learn/historyculture/lincoln-second-inaugural.htm))

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

George McClellan, a Union general, speaking to the effectiveness of the Emancipation Proclamation on white soldiers, as well as Lincoln's popularity amongst the public. The interactions between black and white soldiers due to the Emancipation Proclamation, and the eventual success of black soldiers (discussed later) give Lincoln the public support to not only re-elect him, but to make radical claims, ultimately reflecting public sentiment at the time.

The election of 1864 between Abraham Lincoln and George McClellan is extremely important when discussing Lincoln's popularity with the soldiers to be discussed later, as well as, the white soldier's shift after the Emancipation Proclamation is put into place. As discussed prior, George McClellan was a popular general at this time, and while his military success was not as grand as say General Grant or General Sherman, he still remained popular enough to garner the democratic nomination. While this election saw Lincoln's victory, what is most important is the turnout for Lincoln from soldiers in the field: "White Union soldiers loved and stood by Lincoln because by the autumn of 1864 they believed that he articulated a vision of the war's causes and purpose that matched their own."<sup>25</sup> As mentioned previously, Lincoln garnered nearly 80% of the vote from soldiers<sup>26</sup>, serving as a prime example of the soldier support for not only Lincoln, but the Emancipation Proclamation as well. While some sided with McClellan, and did not support the emancipation of slaves, this was not popular, many believing that if the Democrats won, the war would be over nothing: "...Democratic victory would betray the war effort because McClellan would endorse peace negotiations that fell short of the goals for which their comrades had fallen"<sup>27</sup>. Overall, the 1864 election serves essentially as a "census" of sorts,

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<sup>25</sup> Manning, Chandra. *What This Cruel War Was over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*. (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2008), 194

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 194

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 191

displaying how an enormous amount of Union soldiers not only supported Lincoln, but supported the Emancipation Proclamation and destruction of slavery. With nearly 80% of soldiers siding with Lincoln, as Manning describes, it is apparent that a vast majority felt Lincoln and his policies best suited the war effort, and what they had come to believe in.

Lincoln's speeches are essential in presenting the sentiments of the white soldiers during this time. In essence, soldiers are similar to civilians in the sense that they look towards the president in times of need, and this is especially the case due to the mass turnout of Soldiers to vote for him during Lincoln's second campaign for presidency. Lincoln's shift in sentiment is significant because it mirrors that of the people. Lincoln's election to office speaks to this. If the civilians of the antebellum United States agreed with Senator Douglas, they would have wholeheartedly voted for him, but this was not the case. Lincoln's discourse with the public serves ultimately as a representation of the rapidly shifting views of the North at this time, beginning with moderate abolition, to union preservation, and ultimately into abolition with the Emancipation Proclamation.

### White Union Soldiers

The Union army before the Emancipation Proclamation was predominantly white, and while interactions with blacks were on a limited scale, the emergence of racism from officers and soldiers began to unfold. Many soldiers, like the Colonel the Governor of Iowa speaks of in his letter to General-in-Chief of the Army, felt that blacks would serve well as servants, or workers in Union camps: "I hope under the confiscation and emancipation bill just passed by Congress to supply my regiment with a sufficient number of 'contrabands' to do all the 'extra duty' labor of

my camp”<sup>28</sup>. This colonel who the governor speaks of, is one of the best in the state, and he feels that blacks serve no purpose in fighting in the army. The sole benefit to maintain blacks in the corps would be to enable labor such as “a regiment as teamsters & for making roads, chopping wood, policing camp”<sup>29</sup>. In this colonel’s eyes, blacks serve no purpose fighting in the army and his thinking is not exclusive. In some companies, they used fugitive slaves as laborers, such as the Illinois Lieutenant that writes “I have 11 negroes in my company now. They do every particle of the dirty work.”<sup>30</sup>. While some desired to have blacks do menial labor in the Union armies, others outright put fugitive slaves or “contraband” to work, such as cooking, or working as “teamsters”. Another example of white officers or soldiers believing blacks could unburden white soldiers for other tasks comes in a letter from the General-in-Chief of the Army to the Commander of the Department of Tennessee: “...if they can be used to hold points on the Mississippi during the sickly season, it will afford much relief to our armies. They certainly can be used with advantage as laborers, teamsters, cooks...”<sup>31</sup>. Putting blacks to work, in the eyes of some white soldiers, gave white soldiers the ability to accomplish other duties, or be better prepared for war: “Every rest has nigger teamsters and cooks which puts that many more men back in the ranks...”<sup>32</sup>. These early beliefs from soldiers will eventually change with the emancipation proclamation and interactions on the front lines, but before any of this takes place,

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<sup>28</sup> Kirkwood, Samuel J. “Governor of Iowa to the General-in-Chief of the Army.” Letter. Des Moines, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience, (<http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/bmepg.htm>)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> McPherson, James M. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 138

<sup>31</sup> Halleck, H. W. “General-in-Chief of the Army to the Commander of the Department of the Tennessee.” Letter. Washington D.C, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience, (<http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Halleck.html>)

<sup>32</sup> McPherson, James M. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. 138

a large majority felt that blacks should be left to doing the same tasks they were deemed useful for while enslaved.

Fugitive slaves, throughout the war, would view the Union army as an extension of the North, and essentially freedom. While this does not become the legitimate case until the Emancipation Proclamation is put in place, contraband camps began to pop up in Union camps very early in the war. This influx of contraband into Union camps gives soldiers more interaction with not only blacks (which were put to work in some cases seen above) but also southern slave owners who flocked to the camps in search of their “property”. This is where we begin to see a noticeable shift in attitudes of some union soldiers. While they may feel that blacks are only suitable for menial labor, and not fighting in the ranks, they are opposed to the thought of returning them to their masters: This can be related to the “middle ground” stance that Lincoln had earlier; some soldiers like the ones mentioned earlier were willing to rescue captured slaves, but would put them to work in their own camps. The extent this soldier goes to describe how he would rather die than return a slave to its owner speaks to the positive sentiment some soldiers had for the blacks escaping and running away from their brutal masters. McPherson writes: “Attempts by their masters to reclaim these runaways turned many soldiers into practical abolitionists. They hid fugitives in camp and laughed at the rage of owners who went home empty handed.”<sup>33</sup>.

While white Union soldiers, before the Emancipation Proclamation was implemented, viewed slaves as means of manual labor, there was a significant presence of soldiers refusing to return slaves to Southerners, mentioned above, even at the risk of their jobs. One such soldier,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 137

Charles Brewster, risked his position to save his new servant David, an escaped slave, and kept him from returning to the rebels:

I dont know but I shall be discharged, as the whole Regiment is almost in a state of mutiny on the Nigger Question ... I should hate to have to leave now just as the Regiment is going into active service, but I never will be instrumental in returning a slave to his master in any way shape or manner, I'll die first.<sup>34</sup>

Protecting his new servant even at the risk of his own demise, seemed to be of utmost priority to Brewster, later writing that while some were supportive of his stance and willing to protect the boy, others were not. Brewster spent the first winter at war in Camp Brightwood, on the edge of Washington, D.C., trying to deal with the boredom and sickness that came from being in an army camp, and determined to protect fugitive slaves from their former masters<sup>35</sup>. Brewster wrote a number of letters to his mother, and in one letter he discusses protecting his servant, and escaped slave from his former master: "I have got a 'Contraband' he came from Montgomery 13 miles north of here...he was the only slave his master had and his master never will have him again if I can help it."<sup>36</sup>. Brewster and the mutiny that takes place in regards to "David" is a prime example of the opposing perspectives.

The Union army seemed to be torn between those who sought to follow orders, and those who felt necessary to keep slaves from being returned to the South. Brewster was willing to risk his career in being dishonorably discharged in order to protect one escaped slave, speaking to the importance of protecting fugitive slaves in Brewster's eyes. Once the Emancipation

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<sup>34</sup> Blight, David W. *When This Cruel War Is over The Civil War Letters of Charles Harvey Brewster*. Univ of Massachusetts Pr, 2009, 68

<sup>35</sup> (David Blight). 53

<sup>36</sup> Blight, David W. *When This Cruel War Is over The Civil War Letters of Charles Harvey Brewster*, 54

Proclamation was implemented, we begin to see a shift in the thoughts of white Union soldiers. The viewpoints transitioned from solely being at war to terminate the Confederacy, to adding the Emancipation Proclamation, which expanded the meaning of the war to the abolition of slavery as a new motive. This shift in mentality is also reflected in Lincoln's First Inaugural address which is dominated by pro-Union dialogue, but once he enacts the Emancipation Proclamation, he shifts into an anti-slavery mindset which reflects not only society's change in mindset but the soldiers' as well. While the Emancipation Proclamation does bring the white Union army into more contact with blacks, some soldiers were outraged at first: "But a good many Union soldiers strongly opposed the idea of freeing the slaves... This sentiment brewed up from a mixture of racism, conservatism, and partisan politics."<sup>37</sup> Many Union soldiers entered the war effort to stop the rebels, not fight for blacks, which seemed to be the case for some.

The Emancipation Proclamation and entering blacks into the Union army was met with some opposition, yes. This was expected. As the two races interacted and fought alongside each other more often, however, there is a noticeable shift in sentiment. McPherson puts this shift quite clearly: "At first many white soldiers opposed this policy — generally the same soldiers who opposed emancipation... But this soon became a minority position as it dawned on white soldiers that blacks in uniform might stop bullets otherwise meant for them."<sup>38</sup>

The acceptance of blacks is slow, but in mid 1863 we begin to see instances of whites accepting, and even praising them. Some white soldiers take longer to accept them, but this is an oddity. One such example is a letter to the Commander of a Black Brigade from the Commander

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<sup>37</sup> McPherson, James M. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. 139

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 145

of a North Carolina Black regiment, requesting that the blacks being assigned menial acts of labor be placed in proper roles:

I am informed that to day a detachment of 60 men properly officered, having been ordered to report to a Major Butts of some New York Regiment were set to work levelling ground for the Regimental Camp, digging wells &c pitching tents and the like...Since the commencement of the war I have never before known such duty imposed upon any Regiment.<sup>39</sup>

As the black soldiers fought in more and more battles, however, they began to gain respect. White soldiers began to realize that blacks could and would fight courageously, giving the Union side the edge in combat, speaking towards the previous Commander's assertion that the labor roles were inappropriate and demeaning. Their valiant actions caused whites to view them in a different regard, leading to more blacks being placed in proper positions, rather than positions of menial labor. This shift in sentiment is seen when said Commander ultimately advocates for their removal from these positions:

I respectfully protest against this particular imposition because of its injurious influence upon the men in another respect... They have been slaves and are just learning to be men It IS a draw-back that they are regarded as, and called "d—d Niggers" by so-called "gentleman" in uniform of U.S. Officers, but when they are set to menial work doing for white regiments what those Regiments are entitled to do for themselves, it simply throws them back where they were before and reduces them to the position of slaves again.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Beecher, James C. "Commander of a North Carolina Black Regiment to the Commander of a Black Brigade." Letter. Folly Island, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Beecher.html>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

This letter as a whole is an example of not only the racism blacks faced in the Union army at the beginning of their integration into the service in 1863, even with the establishment of the Emancipation Proclamation, but also signifies the progression of some commanders and soldiers towards respecting their fellow black soldiers, and attempting to shift the views of other racist regiments.

Progressive officers served as avenues for black soldiers to prove themselves earlier, giving them combat assignments or respecting them as equals instead of just simply contraband like other officers at the time. Major General David Hunter is an example of a “progressive” officer. Although he is controversial due to his 1862 proclamation that freed slaves in Georgia, South Carolina and Florida he respected the black soldiers, and treated them as if they were any other white soldiers. Officers like Hunter, ones who viewed blacks as equals to a degree, existed, but were in a minority before the emancipation proclamation is put into place. In his letter to Jefferson Davis, Hunter asks the President of the Confederacy (CSA) to treat their black prisoners with dignity essentially, while threatening the lives of captured rebels if the CSA continued to mistreat black POWs:

Several negroes in the employ of the Government, in the Western Department, have been cruelly murdered by your authorities, and others sold into slavery. Every outrage of this kind against the laws of war and humanity, which may take place in this Department, shall be followed by the immediate execution of the Rebel of highest rank in my possession...<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hunter, David. “Commander of the Department of the South to the Confederate President.” Letter. Hilton Head, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Hunter2.html>

This letter not only threatens the leader of the CSA, but also places the lives of the captured black soldiers at the same level, if not in higher regard in comparison to the captured rebels. Threatening to execute the highest-ranking rebels in retaliation for the deaths of black soldiers reveals the respect some white Union Commanders, like Major General Hunter, had for black soldiers as early as 1862. He serves as an example of a leader who did not enter the war an abolitionist as far as anyone was concerned, but was an advocate for arming blacks in an effort to suppress the Rebellion.

As the war progressed, we began to see more white soldiers realizing the black soldier's abilities in battle. The military prowess that whites were witnessing from blacks essentially changed their thinking, shifting it from extremely racist in the early years of the war, to acceptance: "At Port Hudson, Milliken's Bend, and Fort Wagner black soldiers in 1863 proved their willingness and ability to fight. That began a process of converting many skeptics into true believers."<sup>42</sup> At first, many believed their skills to be limited to doing tasks such as cooking or driving horses, but through tests of battle, black soldiers proved themselves not only worthy of fighting alongside whites, but worthy of praise from skeptics. In "Where Death and Glory Meet", Russel Duncan recounts the feelings of a Mustering officer upon first enlisting blacks into the regiment Robert Shaw was constructing, but speaks to the abilities of the soldiers: "When the army's Mustering officer had sworn the men into service, he admitted his beliefs that 'it was a great joke to make soldiers of niggers'" but he told Shaw that he 'had never mustered in so fine a set of men'<sup>43</sup>. This serves as another example of the racist generalizations some officers made about blacks entering the service, but through their military ability in training and interactions

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<sup>42</sup> McPherson, James M. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, 146

<sup>43</sup> Duncan, Russell. *Where Death and Glory Meet Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Infantry*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 84

proved the officer wrong. Proving officers and soldiers wrong is a theme seen throughout the post-emancipation Civil War, soldiers and officers being surprised by their black comrades, and ultimately shifting from racism to respect.

Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, leader of the 54th Massachusetts, is another example of one of the “progressive” officers mentioned earlier when discussing Major General Hunter, and while Shaw’s support of arming black troops is due to his quest for military glory, according to Duncan: “Shaw thought blacks would ‘make a fine army after a little drill, and could certainly be kept under better discipline than our independant Yankees’”<sup>44</sup>. This reinforces the claims made by the Mustering officer supporting the idea that black soldiers were fit for war and were fine soldiers. It is necessary to consider these progressive officers when discussing the general consensus of the soldiers and officers in the Union army, because they provide insight from soldiers who were not necessarily abolitionists, but sought to add blacks to the ranks in order to subdue and suppress the rebels.

Skepticism was rampant amongst the ranks, however, and some soldiers were not overall supporters from the beginning like Shaw and Hunter mentioned previously. Battle alongside one another, as mentioned previously, would alter this skepticism. An example of a skeptic turned supporter is seen in an Officer of a Louisiana Black Brigade writing to the Commander of the Black Brigade, stating:

We went into action about 6. A.M. and was under fire most of the time until sunset. The very first thing after forming line of battle we were ordered to charge– My Co. was

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<sup>44</sup> Duncan, Russell. *Where Death and Glory Meet Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Infantry*, 48

apparently brave. Yet they are mostly contrabands, and I must say I entertained some fears as to their pluck. But I have now none—<sup>45</sup>

This theme is widespread across the Union army, and even when doubted the black soldiers persevered. The Officer goes on to write:

Valiantly did the heroic descendants of Africa move forward cool as if Marshaled for dress parade, under a most murderous fire from the enemies guns...Battery of seven guns—whose destructive fire would have confuse and almost disorganized the bravest troops. But these men did not swerve, or show cowardice. I have been in several engagements, and I never before beheld such coolness and darring—<sup>46</sup>

Mentioned earlier was the fact that at key battles, black soldiers were able to garner much attention and respect through valiant actions and their actions in combat. This seasoned Officer had never seen such bravery before not even of white soldiers. This again reiterates the shift in sentiment due to the white and black soldiers fighting alongside one another. As mentioned earlier by McPherson, Milliken's Bend was a catalyst for this shift because of the bravery shown by black soldiers. According to the Commander of the District of Northeast Louisiana, to the Headquarters of the Department of the Tennessee who spoke about these black soldiers at Milliken's Bend:

Not 'till they were overpowered, and forced by superior numbers, did our men fall back behind the bank of the river, at the same time pouring volley after volley into the ranks of the advancing enemy... The officers and men deserve the highest praise for their gallant

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<sup>45</sup> Strunke, Elias D. "Officer in a Louisiana Black Regiment to the Commander of a Louisiana Black Brigade." Letter. Baton Rouge, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Strunke.html>

<sup>46</sup> Strunke, Elias D. "Officer in a Louisiana Black Regiment to the Commander of a Louisiana Black Brigade." Letter. Baton Rouge, Freedmen and Southern Society Project.

conduct, and especially Colonel Glasgow of the 23d Iowa, and his brave men, and also Colonel Leib, of the 9" La., A.D...<sup>47</sup>

This is an account from mid 1863, and the fact that only a few months after the Emancipation Proclamation this officer is calling for “the highest praise” and also calling them “our men” in regards to the black soldiers and officers speaks to the shift in thinking resulting from close proximity and combat. While these officer’s accounts are from earlier in the war, an assumption could be made that as the war progressed there would be less racism and mistreatment from white soldiers, there are actually some that take longer to shift. For example, in a letter to the Adjutant General of the Army from the Superintendent of the Organization of Kentucky Black Troops, which is written in 1864:

On the march the Colored Soldiers as well as their white Officers were made the subject of much ridicule and many insulting remarks by the White Troops and in some instances petty outrages such as the pulling off the Caps of Colored Soldiers, stealing their horses etc was practiced by the White Soldiers.<sup>48</sup>

The Adjutant General speaks of mockery and insults coming from white troops towards blacks of the 5th US Cavalry, but writes that due to their valiant fighting, fighting better than any white troops he has seen in twenty seven battles<sup>49</sup>, the skeptical soldiers who mocked and harassed them during their march to battle, were silent on the return home from battle: “On the return of the forces those who had scoffed at the Colored Troops on the march out were silent...”<sup>50</sup>. Even

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<sup>47</sup> Dennis, Elias S. “Commander of the District of the Northeast Louisiana to the Headquarters of the Department of the Tennessee.” Letter. Young’s Point, La, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Experience, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/edennis.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Brisbin, James S. “Superintendent of the Organization of Kentucky Black Troops to the Adjutant General of the Army.” Letter. Lexington, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience. <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Brisbin.html>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

a year after the Emancipation Proclamation was put into place, some soldiers were still mocking and treating black soldiers with disrespect, but through the course of battle, and fighting valiantly alongside one another, their preconceived notions were altered. Colonel Thomas, an officer of black troops, recalled the valiant actions taken by his troops at the battle of Nashville (1864), stating that their performance was highlighted by an exceptional record of coolness, bravery, and manliness<sup>51</sup>. As the war begins to wind down, and we near its conclusion, this positive rhetoric maintains. Another example of praise coming from high ranking officers comes from an Adjutant General of the Army writing to the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Military Affairs on the success spawning from a number of black soldiers:

On several occasions when on the Mississippi river I contemplated writing to you respecting the colored troops, and to suggest that as they have been fully tested as soldiers their pay should be raised to that of white troops... You are aware that I have been engaged in the organization of freedmen for over a year, and have necessarily been thrown in constant contact with them.<sup>52</sup>

Not only does regard black and white soldiers as equals, he also advocates for equal pay, which at this time was not established. This is a significant instance of a high ranking white officer, recommending to Senate Committee that black soldiers are not only extremely brave, but deserve equal pay. Equal pay signified for many black soldiers the final step towards equality in the military. With equal pay, comes actual equality, which is ultimately what the black soldiers want, and this will be discussed later in detail. This Adjutant General goes on to write:

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<sup>51</sup> Cashin, Joan E. *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 136

<sup>52</sup> Thomas, L. "Adjutant General of the Army to the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Military Affairs." Letter. Washington, D.C. Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Thomas.html>

They have proved a most important addition to our forces, enabling the generals in active operations to take a large force of white troops into the field; and now brigades of blacks are placed with the whites... Their fighting qualities have also been fully tested a number of times, and I am yet to hear of the first case where they did not fully stand up to their work.<sup>53</sup>

The praise from these white officers and soldiers discussed prior reveals not only the shift in attitudes towards blacks entering the Union army, but also a shift in their preconceived and racist mentality concerning blacks and their ability to fight. Aside from outlier commanding officers like John C. Fremont and David Hunter, among others, there is an overwhelming transformation that takes place in the Union army after Lincoln established the Emancipation Proclamation. If one were to view the progression as a series of events, a majority of soldiers began with beliefs that blacks could only be utilized for menial labor, and expedited whites reentering the battlefield. It then progressed to white soldiers protecting “Contraband” from returning to slaveholders in the South, a limited but positive progression, even if it was inspired by a hate of the Rebels. After the Emancipation Proclamation, there was resistance paralleled with support from soldiers, and a large wave of skepticism surrounded soldiers in the Union army after blacks are able to enter the armed forces. This skepticism, however, was quelled when black soldiers proved themselves through combat. The metaphorical and literal journey these soldiers took in changing their racist beliefs towards blacks was a dramatic shift overall, emerging from the ignorance of viewing them as property and less than human, to brothers in arms, with the utmost respect and praise for their prowess and actions in combat. While it takes some soldiers mere months to change their perceptions, and others years, there was a noticeable

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid

shift in thinking for these white soldiers discussed. The shift in sentiment was overall dramatic, and ultimately propelled Lincoln into office for his second term, ultimately bringing new amendments to the constitution and preparing the nation for equality.

### Black Soldiers:

White soldiers and their gradual acceptance of black soldiers is highlighted by skepticism, surprise, and an eventual shift in thought through combat; this is not entirely the case for Black soldiers however. Primary documents disclosing black soldier's sentiments towards white soldiers during this time period are scarce, but what is apparent through the little that is available is that black soldiers fought valiantly to prove themselves worthy to their fellow white comrades, worthy of fighting for the Union, in addition to, proving themselves worthy of equality. Overall, there is a pervasive theme throughout the Civil War for most Blacks, this being their love for the Union and in turn their respect for white soldiers, as well as, black soldiers' desire for equality. Freedom was a welcomed addition to their lives, thanks to the Emancipation Proclamation, but without equality, freedom was meaningless. This desire for equality was the driving force behind their valiant actions, these actions causing a shift in white soldier's views towards blacks.

Equal pay was a form of the very equality black soldiers were fighting for, and many felt the gap in pay was disrespectful to the service they were providing the army. According to Chandra Manning, "No issue better illustrated the gap between black hopes and wartime backsliding than the equal pay issue. White privates received thirteen dollars per month plus

clothing and rations.”<sup>54</sup>. The pay gap experienced by blacks was significant, as mentioned above, white soldiers thirteen dollars, while the black soldiers received ten dollars and a three-dollar subtraction in fees, leaving their total earnings at seven dollars a month. Although some units were exceptions to the pay gap, it affected a vast majority of blacks and served as an example of disrespect from white leadership essentially. In a letter from a black Massachusetts Corporal to the President, he writes in an effort to prove black soldiers worthy of equal pay:

Now the main question is. Are we Soldiers, or are we LABOURERS. We are fully armed, and equipped, have done all the various Duties, pertaining to a Soldiers life, have conducted ourselves, to the complete satisfaction of General Officers, who, were if any, prejudiced against us, but who now accord us all the encouragement, and honour due us: have shared the perils, and Labour, of Reducing the first stronghold, that flaunted a Traitor Flag<sup>55</sup>

This Massachusetts Corporal, and other black soldiers understood the difference in pay as another form of the discrimination running rampant through the army at this time. The Corporal goes on to write: “And now, he [the black soldier] is in the War: and how has he conducted himself?...Obedient and patient, and Solid as a wall are they. all we lack, is a paler hue, and a better acquaintance with the Alphabet. Now Your Excellency, We have done a Soldiers Duty. Why cant we have a Soldiers pay?”<sup>56</sup>. The black Corporal justified his demands for equal pay, saying that he, and fellow black soldiers, have fought just as hard as any other soldier. They have been successful in not only battle but in drilling in camps, so in this soldier's eyes (and many

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<sup>54</sup> Manning, Chandra. *What This Cruel War Was over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*. (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2008), 171

<sup>55</sup> Gooding, James Henry. “Massachusetts Black Corporal to the President.” Letter. Morris Island, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/gooding.htm>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

others) equal pay was a necessity for the valiant duties they performed and as a right due to them for fighting alongside white soldiers receiving higher pay for those same duties. While the equal pay issue was one of significance, causing dissent amongst some black soldiers, their fight for equality found success. As Chandra Manning describes: “In June 1864, Congress had legislated equal pay for black and white soldiers, and in late 1864 and 1865, black soldiers finally began to receive their equal wages.”<sup>57</sup> Finally receiving equal pay serves as the first major steps taken towards equality. Black soldiers receiving the same pay as white soldiers served as a positive progression towards full equality and citizenship.

The equal pay question was an attempt at the government to continue to oppress black soldiers, and place them in a lesser category compared to their fellow white soldiers, and essentially an attempt at preventing full equality militarily. This quest for equality would evidently bring with it a shift in sentiment towards black servicemen by white soldiers. For blacks at this time, serving in the armed forces seemed to be the ultimate way to prove one's loyalty to the country, and through serving in the army, one could garner rights, and equality. Chandra Manning writes: “By serving as soldiers, black men could help dispel racial inequality. If some white Union soldiers hesitated to link black enlistment and black equality, black troops celebrated that very connection.”<sup>58</sup> As early as 1861, blacks are attempting to aid the Union as much as they can. Blacks are either fleeing the south, seeking out Union lines and becoming contraband, or attempting to enlist with recruiters in free states. One Ohioan who wrote to the Secretary of War, speaks about a “partly drilled” regiment he put together:

Very many of the colored citizens of Ohio and other states have had a great desire to assist the government in putting down this injurious rebellion... We behold your sick list

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<sup>57</sup> Manning, Chandra. *What This Cruel War Was over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*, 202

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 136

each day and Sympathize with the Soldiers and the government. We are confident of our ability to stand the hard Ships of the field and the climate...To prove our attachment and our will to defend the government we only ask a trial<sup>59</sup>

This Ohioan, and many other blacks across the Union not only find sympathy for the White soldiers already facing hardships at the beginning of the war, but also have a resounding desire to assist in suppressing the rebellion and serving alongside their white counterparts. This desire, however, fails to sway recruiters in the North, due to outstanding laws barring blacks from entering the Army. Another instance of black's sympathy towards not only the cause, but the casualties faced by whites is seen in the Hannibal Guard's communication to General James Negley:

Sir:- As we sympathize with our white fellow-citizens at the present crisis, and to show that we can and do feel interested in the present state of affairs; and as we consider ourselves American citizens and interested in the Commonwealth of all our white fellow-citizens...we yet wish the government of the United States to be sustained against the tyranny of slavery, and are willing to assist in any honorable way or manner...<sup>60</sup>

Although the government refuses to officially accept them into the military at this time, blacks are still willing to fight and assist their fellow white citizens as mentioned above, speaking to not only their combined desire to fight in the army, but also to garner freedom and equality. An interesting aspect of the letter discussed above is the claim to citizenship by saying they "sympathize with our fellow-citizens"<sup>61</sup> At this time, due to the Dred Scott Decision, blacks

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<sup>59</sup> Jones, WM A. "Black Ohioan to the Secretary of War." Letter. Oberlin, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/William%20A%20Jones.html>

<sup>60</sup> McPherson, James M. *The Negroes Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted during the War for the Union*. (Vintage Books, 1993), 19

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 19

were not considered by the government to be citizens, but in the minds of blacks, they are. Contraband was mentioned previously, when discussing the race relations between whites and blacks, and while they feld to the Union lines, and grateful to the Yankees because now their freedom was ensured<sup>62</sup>, they would face much discrimination. Blacks had a resounding desire to join the army and fight for their freedom, yes, but the Army placed them in meaningless positions until the summer of 1863. In these positions, Ash writes: "...they frequently encountered endured insult and humiliation and at times robbery and physical assault. Most bore it quietly, but all resented it"<sup>63</sup>. This is ultimately the reaction most of the Army had at this time, having a negative view overall of blacks entering the camps. While blacks were unable to garner roles of prominence, where they could put their valiance on display, there were some, like Fredrick Douglas who advocated for these blacks. Fredrick Douglas, who endorsed the arming of blacks, and forming of black regiments, wrote in his publication Douglas' Monthly: "LET THE SLAVES AND FREE COLORED PEOPLE BE CALLED INTO SERVICE, AND FORMED INTO A LIBERATING ARMY, to march into the South and raise the banner of emancipation among the slaves"<sup>64</sup>. While Douglas called for the arming of blacks at a time where it was not entirely allowed, he was also advocating that through fighting in the armed forces, free people of color and slaves could emancipate their race, and garner freedom and equality. This of course was not an idea reciprocated at the time by whites and the Lincoln administration, due to the war having "no direct relation to slavery"<sup>65</sup>, it presents the clear desire of blacks to arm themselves and fight against the South.

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<sup>62</sup> Ash, Stephen V. *Firebrand of Liberty: The Story of Two Black Regiments That Changed the Course of the Civil War*. (New York: Norton, 2008), 22

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 22

<sup>64</sup> Cornish, Dudley T. *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 4

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 4

Some blacks were given the opportunity to enter the armed forces before 1863, however, but they saw little success in their quest to prove themselves worthy. In 1862, for example, Benjamin Butler enlists the help of the Louisiana Native Guard after the occupation of New Orleans, but sought to use them as sources of labor: “Butler may have allowed black men to join the army, but he did not intend to let them fight...Butler told De Forest that he planned to use the Native Guards for garrison duty around New Orleans and other ‘unhealthy positions’ and for ‘fatigue duty, such as making roads...’”<sup>66</sup>. These men were accepted into the army earlier than 1863, and while some would have viewed this as the proper beginning towards their quest to prove themselves, blacks were limited to positions that were less than beneficial to their cause. Being able to properly join the army, and while they were initially relegated to laboring instead of fighting duties, mentioned earlier with Butler and the Native Guards, they begin garnering an increasing amount of combat roles by the summer of that year<sup>67</sup>. Many white officers at the time were opposed to the idea of leading black regiments. Before discussing the courageous acts that black soldiers used as evidence for their equality and independence, it seems necessary to discuss the actions of the Louisiana Native Guards towards the end of 1862. In an effort to quell the racial tension perpetrated by whites in New Orleans, General Butler sent the Native Guards to accompany Brigadier General Godfrey Weitzal on an assignment. With this new assignment, the black troops were excited over the prospect of confronting the enemy<sup>68</sup>; most likely due to their chance at proving themselves to their skeptical white comrades. Captain James H. Ingraham, of the Louisiana Native Guard writes: “We are still anxious, as we have ever been, to show the

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<sup>66</sup> Hollandsworth, James G. *Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War*. (Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 19

<sup>67</sup> Manning, Chandra. *What This Cruel War Was over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*, 137

<sup>68</sup> Hollandsworth, James G. *Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War*, 33

world that the latent courage of the African is aroused...and that, while fighting under the American flag, we can and will be a wall of fire and death to the enemies of this country, our birthplace.”<sup>69</sup>. Captain Ingraham, on behalf of his soldiers, describes not only their desire to prove the fighting capabilities to the doubters, but also puts an emphasis on their love of country, their “birthplace”. This love of their birthplace, and the Union, represents the desire for freedom (which is granted by the Emancipation Proclamation) but also the possible claim to birthright citizenship. This regiment, and the two discussed in the subsequent section, serve as prime examples of the efforts black soldiers took to serve courageously, alter the mentality of their fellow soldiers, as well as, assert their claim for equality.

Alongside the Louisiana Native Guards, we see the 1st South Carolina as another example of military prowess from black soldiers, and respect being earned from fellow white soldiers. After an amphibious raid on the St. Mary’s river, the 1st South Carolina Volunteers found success, which proved to be beneficial to the whole regiment: “Listening to these increasingly exaggerated tales, Colonel Higginson (commander of the First South Carolina) realized that the raid had already begun to assume mythic status in the men’s minds. He saw too that it had strengthened the regiment by solidifying the men’s confidence in themselves and in their officers and likewise the officer’s confidence in them”<sup>70</sup>. Not only did their expedition into the Florida/Georgia territory strengthen the bonds between both black soldiers and white officers, it also gave the soldiers a glimpse of the fighting that would propel them towards equality. Their ability to serve well alongside whites and impress them is what eventually shifted the beliefs of many whites discussed in previous sections. Ash also states:

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 33

<sup>70</sup> Ash, Stephen V. *Firebrand of Liberty: The Story of Two Black Regiments That Changed the Course of the Civil War*, 65

But some white soldiers heard stories of the raid closer to the truth. A few began to manifest a grudging respect for the men of the 1st South Carolina; ‘they fight like daemons,’ wrote one.<sup>71</sup>

There were some officers who heard warped and distorted tales of the 1st South Carolina, further reinforcing unsubstantiated theories that arming black troops was reprehensible. At this time, the First South Carolina was formed by Major General Hunter in an effort to arm blacks, even though many, including Lincoln, disapproved. The few that heard the true story of the First South Carolina’s actions, like Ash recounts, began to respect the 1st South Carolina. This respect garnered through combat, as discussed in the previous sections discussing white soldier’s reactions, served as a possible solution to the inequality blacks were facing. Through extraordinary fighting, and courageous acts, black regiments before 1863 are able to build a reputation for other regiments to follow, and not only prosper, but provide ample evidence in the defense of blacks gaining equality. Ultimately, the pre-emancipation regiments such as the First South Carolina and the Louisiana Native Guards served not only as examples of what black soldiers could do in battle, but also prepared the future regiments for the status quo of black courage and capability.

After Lincoln executes the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, black soldiers were permitted to properly join the army, while previously it was on circumstantial and unauthorized ground. Due to the efforts of the early black regiments, like the Louisiana Native Guards and 1st South Carolina Volunteers, other black regiments were given the opportunity to fight for the Union, securing the freedom guaranteed by the Emancipation Proclamation, but assisting in their efforts towards garnering equality. The desire for equality seems to begin with commanding

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 65

officers who would treat them as soldiers, not laborers, and this is seen in a black former officer's letter to the Commander of the Gulf: "But sir give us A commander who will appreciate us as men and soldiers, And we will be willing to surmount all outer difficulties...If the world doubts our fighting give us A chance and we will show then what we can do—"72. In order to properly prove themselves, black soldiers needed leaders that would let them flourish, instead of placing them in jobs as laborers. A prime example of said commanders include men such as Major General Hunter, Colonel Higgenson of the 1st South Carolina, and Colonel Robert Shaw. These commanders presented themselves as not only an example of whites who viewed black soldiers as equals, but also gave them the ability to thrive, and prove themselves; displaying their abilities on a grand scale which was a primary goal for black soldiers. In Matthew Calvin's "Aiming for Pensacola", similar examples of commanders who gave blacks opportunities are discussed:

Though some white officers treated black troops harshly, others displayed a remarkable degree of fraternity and fellowship... General Asboth, whose reputation as a 'friend of the colored man and soldier'... General Joseph Bailey, a Wisconsin lumberjack and engineer, 'who showed no distinction of color among his soldiers'...73

While similar to officers such as Major General Hunter and Colonel Robert Gould Shaw were discussed earlier, the impact they had on black soldiers was immeasurable. One of the most prominent black regiments to come out of 1863 was the Fifty Fourth Massachusetts, led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw. This regiment is significant not only because of their success in

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<sup>72</sup> Gla, Adolph J. Et All. "Black Former Officers in a Louisiana Black Regiment to the Commander of the Department of the Gulf." Letter. New Orleans, Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The Black Military Experience, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Gla.html>

<sup>73</sup> Clavin, Matthew J. *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 172

capturing Fort Wagner (which propelled them into the national spotlight), but serves as a post Emancipation Proclamation regiment that served valiantly, and supported their white colonel. Taking Fort Wagner was a monumental feat for the regiment, Russel Duncan states: “The men of the Fifty-Fourth were proud of what they had done and determined to do more... several remarked that they would continue until ‘the last brother breaks his chains’”<sup>74</sup>. Taking Fort Wagner gave the Fifty-Fourth the ability to prove themselves, and while it came at the loss of many soldiers, including Colonel Shaw, it made the soldiers eager for more fighting.

The death of Colonel Shaw, while unfortunate, provides another instance of positive remarks for a white officer from black soldiers: “I still feel more Eager for the struggle than I ever yet have, for I now wish to have Revenge for our galant Curnel”<sup>75</sup>. The desire for revenge represents the bonds created between Shaw, a white commander, and his regiment of black soldiers. Alongside this soldier’s desire for revenge, another one of Shaw’s men affirms in regards to Shaw that “He was one of the very best men in the world”<sup>76</sup> and a nurse wrote in her journal the feelings of Shaw’s wounded, writing that “all greatly excited about him, hoping, fearing, disregarding their wounds in their anxiety for him...They love him.”<sup>77</sup>. Not only did his soldiers desire revenge for their fallen commander, their love for him was so great, even those outside the regiment acknowledged it. The storming of Fort Wagner saw the deaths of many soldiers, including Shaw, but it sparked a positive propaganda wave to spread across the North. Newspapers such as the New York Tribune wrote that “the battle would be to black Americans what Bunker Hill was to white Americans”<sup>78</sup>. This report by the *New York Tribune* presents not

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<sup>74</sup> Duncan, Russell. *Where Death and Glory Meet Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Infantry*, 114

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 114

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 115

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 115

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 123

only the effect the battle had on the outlook from whites on black soldiers, but also makes it a point to call them “black Americans”. The fact that they are called “black Americans” following their valiant actions at Fort Wagner reveals the position many held, including blacks, that courageous service would be the key to respect and equality.

Although thoughts and feelings like this are not in abundance, unlike white soldiers, regiments such as the Louisiana Native Guards, the First South Carolina, and the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts serve as iconic examples of black soldiers acting courageously in battle, to the surprise of whites, and through this garnered respect would serve as primary evidence in their quest for equality, or simply citizenship. These regiments ultimately served as the pinnacle of glory and fame that other regiments could and would achieve. Duncan’s account of the aftermath at Fort Wagner exemplifies this:

... the charge upon Wagner changed things. Blacks had proven themselves as fighting men and vindicated their sponsors, the abolitionists. By year’s end sixty black regiments were being organized, and they would not be used simply to dig fortifications, handle baggage, and cook food for white soldiers. They would be allowed to fight<sup>79</sup>

The actions of these three regiments provided the masses with examples of black vigilance and prowess in battle, evidence to be utilized in their quest for citizenship post-Civil War, and served as a model for other black regiments to follow. Black soldiers and white soldiers would thoroughly impress each other, the whites more so than the blacks, and throughout the war blacks would fight valiantly, even up until the final battles of the war in 1865. An example of not only the shift in sentiments of whites, and respect through fighting is seen in the 1865 march

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 116

from Pensacola to Alabama. In “Aiming for Pensacola”, Clavin describes the firsthand account of said march from a Chaplain, who describes the camaraderie he witnessed as late as 1865:

I have never witnessed such a friendly feeling between white and colored troops...During the whole march I have not heard a word of reproach cast upon a colored soldier. But on the other hand, I have seen the two divisions exchange gifts, and talk with each other with apparent equality.<sup>80</sup>

Equality is what the soldiers fought for, and towards the end of the Civil War in this comment from a chaplain who is making it a point to say “with apparent equality” reinforces the idea that through valiant service throughout the war, blacks could shift the preconceived sentiments of white soldiers, and garner the ever so desired equality they needed to truly be free. The freedom granted by the Emancipation Proclamation was a grand achievement for blacks, but without equality and citizenship, it meant nothing.

Through the presentation of Lincoln’s speeches, primary documents from a variety of sources, as well as secondary sources from a variety of authors, the shift in sentiment is made clear. Lincoln is presented alongside this research as a mirror of public sentiment at the time, most importantly, the soldiers themselves. With the lack of able bodies, the Emancipation Proclamation arrives as a solution to the lack of man-power, allowing for blacks to formally enter the Army. The anti-slavery, but not necessarily pro-equality views seen in earlier speeches provide an exact connection to the beliefs of a majority of white soldiers after the Emancipation Proclamation is enacted. Lincoln frees the slaves, yes, but he does not necessarily make them equal, similar to the treatment blacks receive after entering the armed forces: members of the armed forces, but subjected to menial labor. Through the efforts made by blacks to prove

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<sup>80</sup> Clavin, Matthew J. *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers*, 174

themselves, however, they shift the perspective of the white soldiers and Lincoln, this is seen with the equal pay they finally receive, and the increase in combat assignments black soldiers receive as the war progresses and they are able to prove themselves. Essentially, through their valiant actions and quest for equality shifted the perspectives of whites, and Lincoln's actions represent this shift in the white soldier's minds. While it would have been entirely beneficial to acquire more primary documents from black soldiers, which is the primary complication with this research, the valiant actions presented by secondary sources, and the responses from white soldiers in primary documents proved supplementary to this lack in black primary sources. This research could prove useful to others in the field due to the combination of three aspects of the civil war (Lincoln, Blacks and Whites) in a singular review, as opposed to others who tend to focus on one group.

The Civil war proved to be one of the bloodiest wars in American history, and while it boasts a high number of casualties, it provided an opportunity for bonds to be forged. While black soldiers were not initially accepted into the Union army, and White soldiers for the majority felt that they were not necessary for the war effort, by 1863 blacks were a saving grace for the war effort. With the belief in mind that they could garner citizenship through military service, black soldiers were eager for the opportunity to serve alongside their white comrades. Unfortunately, towards the beginning of black service post-Emancipation Proclamation, they saw very little action, being relegated to menial labor positions. Through the efforts of particular black regiments, like the 1<sup>st</sup> South Carolina, and the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, for example, black soldiers were able to prove themselves militarily and began shifting the perspectives of the white soldiers and officers they served under. This shift, presented by a variety of primary and secondary sources, proved to be beneficial in black soldiers in their efforts to claim equality. The

courageous fighting of blacks led to the shift in skepticism of their white counterparts, and not only garnered respect from prominent figures, but served as the primary evidence for citizenship.

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