

# African-American Reaction to Recruitment in the North during the U.S. Civil War: the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry.

Robert E. Gettings

## Abstract

In the 1860s, the Civil War broke out between the northern and southern states of the United States of America. The popular view is that African-Americans in the United States thought of the war as a crusade against slavery and wholeheartedly supported President Abraham Lincoln and the Northern government. Slavery did end as a result of this war, but although hundreds of thousands of African-Americans joined the armies of the United States, there was opposition to many specific policies of the northern government. This paper explores the attitudes of African-Americans to one of those policies, military recruitment of blacks in 1863. Although there was much support for recruitment, there was also a great deal of opposition based, to a significant degree, on black demands for equal rights with whites.

## 要 約

南北戦争は1860年代にアメリカ合衆国北部と南部の州の間に勃発した。アフリカ系アメリカ人の間では一般的にこの戦争は奴隷解放の為の聖戦と考えられ、リンカーン大統領や北軍政府は好意的に受けとめられている。結果として奴隷制度は無くなり、何万人ものアフリカ系アメリカ人が軍隊に入隊した。しかしながら北軍の掲げた政策の内の数多くに反対意見も出た。その中の一つである1863年度黒人徴兵制度に対するアフリカ系アメリカ人の反応についてこのレポートで探っている。徴兵に際しては、多くの支持もあった反面、黒人が白人と平等の権利を主張することに根強い反対もあった。

In January of 1863 President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freed all slaves in the states which had rebelled against the US government. Lincoln also gave permission to the state of Massachusetts to recruit an infantry regiment of black troops, the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, in the same month.

This was an important change in government policy. Before this, African-Americans were not allowed to join the US Army. The 54th Regiment would be the first chance for blacks to prove that they were equal to whites in a very important way: on the

battlefield.

Recruiting started in February 1863. But the African-American population of Massachusetts was small. Estimates by the head of the United States Census Bureau placed the number of black men between the ages of 18 and 45 at fewer than 2,000 in 1863. To fill the regiment, the government had to recruit men anywhere it could. White officers began recruiting in Boston, New Bedford and Springfield, Massachusetts. They also opened up a recruiting office outside of the state, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the city with the largest African-American population in the north.<sup>1</sup>

The Governor of Massachusetts, John Andrew, had high expectations that the regiment would be filled quickly. However, most white Americans were against recruiting African-American troops. They opposed any equality between whites and blacks. For the most part, their reactions were racist, based on beliefs that blacks were either naturally inferior or that it was acceptable to treat blacks as inferior to whites.

This racism can be seen clearly in the newspapers of the time. A quote from the *New York Times* illustrates a fear that many whites had—that the average white soldier would lose the will to fight because he:

...would feel himself degraded as a volunteer if negro equality is to be the order in the field of battle... one negro regiment... will withdraw an amount of life and energy in our army equal to disbanding ten of the best regiments we now can raise.<sup>2</sup>

The pro-Democratic, pro-slavery, *Boston Pilot* attacked the idea of recruitment for the 54th:

One Southern regiment of white men would put twenty regiments of them to flight in half an hour. Twenty thousand negroes on the march would be smelled ten miles distant. No scouts need ever be sent out to discover such warriors. There is not an American living that should not blush at the plan... and every American living, if he has any independent patriotism in his heart, will cry it down.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most violent reactions against the use of black troops came from the government of the south. The idea of giving guns to African-Americans was horrifying to most southerners. Black slaves, or ex-slaves with guns, threatened their very way of life. The southern government announced that it would either execute captured black soldiers or sell them as slaves. The *Liberator*, a popular anti-slavery newspaper with a large African-American readership, reported atrocities committed against blacks in the south. African-Americans were very aware of the dangers they would face if they joined the northern armies.<sup>4</sup>

Anti-enlistment attitudes were also held at the highest levels of the US government. President Lincoln had insulted black leaders with a plan to send freed slaves back to Africa or to Central America. In August 1862, Lincoln told a white group that, "To arm the negroes would turn 50,000 bayonets from the loyal Border States

against us that were for us." Lincoln also reflected the opinion of most whites that black troops could not fight but would quickly surrender when he said, "...if we were to arm [the Negroes], I fear that in a few weeks the arms would be in the hands of the rebels." <sup>5</sup>

Although the Lincoln government was anti-slavery, and eventually did change its views, it is important to remember that it was an all-white government and was basically racist in its approach to African-Americans. Most white Americans thought of the United States as a white nation. No other race: African-Americans, Asian-Americans or Native Americans could be allowed to have social or political equality with them. In 1863, the Union which the north was fighting to restore still had no place for non-white citizens.

Even in Massachusetts, the home of the proposed regiment of black soldiers, the 54th, whites held strong sentiments against black enlistment. Peter Welsh, writing to his wife about Governor Andrew's recruitment plans for the 54th regiment, spoke of the feeling in the all Irish 28th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry:

The feeling against niggers is intensely strong in this army.... They are looked upon as the principal cause of this war.... <sup>6</sup>

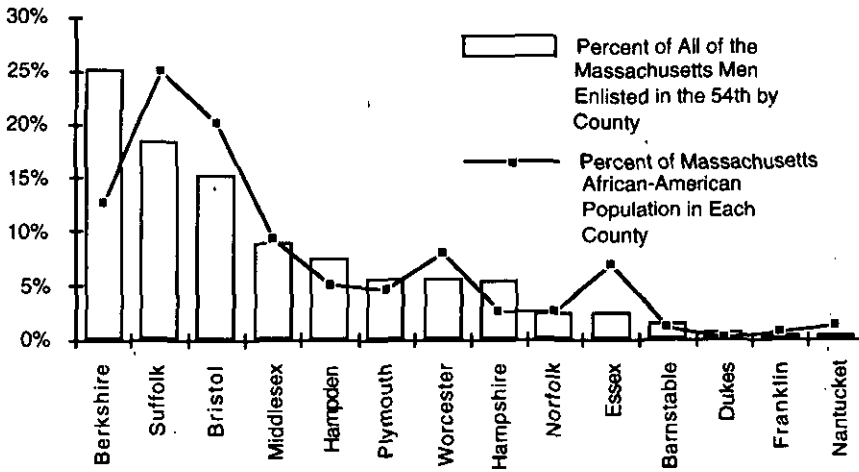
It is not surprising then, to discover that even though the government of Massachusetts and a small minority of whites supported the idea of black troops, most were opposed to letting blacks have any equality in the military. But what was the reaction of African-Americans, themselves, to joining the Union Army and, in particular, to recruitment for the 54th? One of the easiest ways to measure the reaction is to simply ask, "Did African-Americans enlist in the regiment?"

They not only enlisted, but by May 1863 the government of Massachusetts felt that there were enough men wanting to fight to start a new regiment of black soldiers, the 55th. From this point of view, recruitment was very successful. The 54th was recruited throughout the north. Most of the 1,229 men who enlisted by the end of the war came from Pennsylvania (24%), Massachusetts (23%), New York (15%) and Ohio (12%). Massachusetts was the center of recruitment, which accounts for the large number of men who enlisted there. Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio had very large African-American populations, therefore, the higher enlistment in those areas. <sup>7</sup>

The 54th was a Massachusetts regiment, so of course enlistment in Massachusetts was high. Enlistment was also large in the Massachusetts counties that had the biggest black populations: Suffolk, Bristol and Berkshire Counties. But here, if we use the 1860 census figures to make a rough comparison between enlistment and the size of the pre-war African-American community, some questions arise.

As can be seen in the chart below, rural Berkshire County had the largest enlistment yet it had only about half the pre-war black population of Suffolk County, which

included the city of Boston. A Boston newspaper of the time reported that this success in recruitment was completely unexpected.<sup>8</sup>



**Comparison of the Percentage of Massachusetts Men Enlisting in the 54th and Percentage of Massachusetts' 1860 African-American Population in Each County**

Comparing pre-war population and enlistment figures raises some questions but the numbers of enlistees were very small—less than 100 men in each area. The enlistment figures tell us who enlisted in a town, not if the men actually lived there. Beyond this, we do not know why they enlisted or what their feelings were about recruiting. Yet there is a surprising difference in enlistment between urban Suffolk and Bristol counties and rural Berkshire County. This suggests that African-Americans living in different regions may have had different responses to recruitment.

How can we discover attitudes toward recruiting, especially the differences between regions? One way of examining the reactions of African-Americans to recruitment in 1863 is to look at the record of African-American response to military service before the war. Another would be to examine the process of recruitment, itself, from reports in newspapers, public debates, and memoirs of the people who were involved.

African-Americans did have a long and proud military history in the United States even though they were officially denied permission to fight in the US Army before 1863. Black troops had often served the nation in times of military necessity: They fought during the Revolution, as members of Washington's army, and during the War of 1812 at the defense of New Orleans. African-Americans had also made up a sizable percentage of the crews of the United States Navy during and after the War of 1812. Throughout the pre-Civil War period, they continued to enlist in the US

Navy.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1850s, the federal government took away the rights of free African-Americans in the Dred Scott decision, which declared that they were not citizens; the Fugitive Slave Law, which could return escaped slaves living free in northern cities back to slavery; and many other laws. In the face of these federal attacks on their community, black leaders in the north were becoming more and more militant. They began to support the idea of armed slave rebellion and believe that war with the slave states was the only way to free slaves in the South. This was a dramatic move away from the pacifism preached by white abolitionists.

Massachusetts' black communities were very much aware of their members' military service in the past. In the 1840s and early 1850s, northern African-Americans used this patriotic history to justify their demands for civil rights. William C. Nell of Boston published two works: *Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812* and *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* which illustrate this. Their message was simple: African-Americans claimed equal rights because they had fought for them.<sup>10</sup>

Demands that African-Americans should be allowed to enlist in the peace-time, local militia were one continuing focus of the black equal rights movement of the 1850s. The movement to establish all black drill and militia companies reflected this new militancy:

Blacks felt themselves embattled: the positive, visible, even inspirational presence of disciplined, organized, and armed community members served not only to discourage slave catchers but also to bolster the courage of the community.<sup>11</sup>

Led by Robert Morris, Charles Remond, and other African-American leaders, Massachusetts blacks petitioned the government again and again for the right to establish a militia company. Their petitions were denied. Finally, in 1854 a private black militia unit, the Massasoit Guards, was formed. Its members came from all classes of Boston's African-American community.<sup>12</sup>

When war broke out African-Americans throughout the north volunteered to serve the Union. From the first they were refused admission to the US Army. Nevertheless, some men did enlist in other services at the outset of the conflict.

The black men who were acquainted with the main-spring of the rebellion rushed forward at the commencement.... Some, impatient for the conflict, rushed into the navy; while a considerable number, determined to see the thing done even if they could take no part in it, have gone out as servants to officers.<sup>13</sup>

Those who did not enlist as servants or sailors continued to oppose unequal treatment by whites. A meeting was held at Boston's Twelfth Baptist Church in the spring of 1861 which called for the repeal of discriminatory military laws. On 29 April 1861,

Robert Morris, one of the leaders of previous petition drives, made a speech in favor of military preparedness. Lewis Hayden, George T. Downing, M.R. DeMortie, and others, who would later be involved in recruiting for the 54th, also spoke. As a result of this meeting, a private military drill society was organized.<sup>14</sup>

Petitions were sent to the government. The government turned them down. The same process was taking place in other states, but northern blacks, although willing to volunteer for service in the US Army, continued, at the same time, to protest discrimination. Henry Cooper, the captain of a Philadelphia military company, refused to serve until he was given equal rights with whites:

We... have more knowledge of our duty, and also more dignity, than to offer our services to a Government, when knowing at the same time, that the laws call for none but white men to do military duty.... I, as the Captain, in behalf of the Company, am resolved never to offer or give service, except it be on equality with all other men.<sup>15</sup>

As was mentioned above, there was some support among whites for equal rights for blacks in the north. Governor Andrew, many high-ranking Republican politicians and white anti-slavery leaders saw no reason why blacks should not have the right to fight for their country. Many of these whites had fought for equal rights for blacks before the war.

But there were other reasons for whites to support black enlistment. State governments had a desperate need for soldiers. Each state had to supply a quota of men to fight in the northern armies. The war had been going on for some time and was robbing Massachusetts of the men needed to run the state's factories. At the same time that Governor Andrew was pressuring the Lincoln administration to allow northern black enlistment, he was also looking for other ways to fill the state's quota.

Andrew established a committee of businessmen to run the state's recruiting drive more efficiently, in a way that would not hurt business. They recruited one thousand Europeans to migrate to Massachusetts and enlist. They began to support enlistment of black troops in the spring of 1862 and soon decided that either southern or northern blacks would provide a more acceptable supply of men than Europeans.<sup>16</sup>

The attitude of the US government also began to change in 1862. Its situation was becoming desperate. As the war wore on, the number of white volunteers was dropping. The war was unpopular among white workingmen; they were not enlisting. At the same time, due to Union losses and desertions, the need for men increased. In 1862, some Union generals began to independently recruit freed slaves in the south. Nevertheless, the administration still refused to allow the northern states to enlist black troops<sup>17</sup>

Finally, following a series of victories which increased support for the administration, Lincoln felt secure enough to reverse his decision and on 26 January 1863, gave

Massachusetts permission to raise troops which would "include persons of African descent, organized into special corps." The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was to be made up of black enlisted men. African-Americans, however, could not become officers in the regiment. An officer could give an order to any soldier beneath his rank. The idea of black officers giving orders to white soldiers was unacceptable. The officers of the all black 54th had to be all white.<sup>18</sup>

After receiving permission to recruit, Governor Andrew privately presented his plan for the 54th to some of Boston's black leaders. At first, only Lewis Hayden, a political appointee, supported him; the others insisted on equal treatment with whites, including the opportunity to become officers. Robert Morris, who had been in the forefront of the petition movement to allow blacks to join the state militia, especially opposed the ban on black officers. Although all African-American leaders opposed the ban some felt that they should protest by refusing to enlist. They attacked the governor's plan at a public meeting at the Twelfth Baptist Church when he spoke to promote recruitment for the 54th.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, recruiting began in Boston, New Bedford, Springfield, and Philadelphia in early February 1863. A white officer recruited a company that he would later command. While these officers received private support from some blacks in their areas, no African-American agents were appointed as recruiters by the state.<sup>20</sup>

On 9 February Lt. John W. Appleton received orders to hire an office in Boston's West End, "where colored folks abounded, and begin to drum up recruits." The *Boston Daily Traveller* noted that Appleton had started recruiting but that blacks in the vicinity were not very well pleased with the proposition of a black regiment with white officers.<sup>21</sup>

Recruitment went slowly in Boston. Appleton enrolled his first man, William Henry Jones, aged 44, on 10 February. By 14 February only six men had enlisted in the city. Appleton attributed the problem, in part, to opposition to the ban on black officers. He specifically mentioned Aaron Bradley, "a light colored freckled faced man [who] was busy in making a trouble for us out of this matter."<sup>22</sup>

There was trouble in other cities as well. During a recruiting meeting in New Bedford Dr. Bayne protested "that Colored men had not had full justice done them and complained that black men were not made recruiting officers."<sup>23</sup>

In a letter published by Frederick Douglass, John W. Menard condemned enlistment, protested that the United States was a government by and for white people only and claimed that enlistment would only serve to strengthen that type of government:

It is clear, then, that if we take up arms to perpetuate a white nationality or a natural antagonistic element, we would be knocking against our own heads and sealing the doom of posterity. Negro regiments fare very well in the old Bay State, but I fear down here in

Dixie they would be as soon be favored with an attack from the "Red, White, and Blue" as from the ragged representatives of Jeff Davis. Because... the only objection white people have to us is when we appear like ladies and gentlemen.<sup>24</sup>

Menard stated an objection that was held by many educated African-American men: doctors, lawyers, ministers, authors and businessmen. They considered themselves to be equal or superior to ordinary whites. They were gentlemen. Their status had been recognized in the black community. Some of them were officers of the private militia and drill companies that had formed in black communities. They felt that they had as much a right to be officers as whites of similar occupation and status.

Robert Purvis, a wealthy leader of Philadelphia's African-American community expressed his frustration:

... notwithstanding the advances made by the government forming regiments of colored men—it is a sad misapprehension of character aspirations and selfrespect of colored men to suppose that they would submit to the degrading limit which the government imposes in regard to the officering of said regiments. From that position and error... failure to obtain the right kind of man... will result.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the restriction on officers, blacks chose not to enlist for other reasons as well. They had many of the same reasons that whites had for not enlisting. An Ohio man said, "I have no inclination to go to war. I had as soon pay three hundred dollars if I had it." Another man asked, "Do you suppose I am going to leave my home and comforts to be killed for nothing? I am not going to do any such thing."<sup>26</sup>

A Cincinnati man complained:

I do not think, however, that more than 10 or 12 if so many, will go. The fact is, our men... are like the whites. At the beginning of the War when it was thought that there would be little, if any fighting every man you met with wanted to go to War; but now when they know that hard fighting is to be done, hardships to be suffered and privations endured, it is rather difficult, in fact impossible to get their courage screwed to the fighting pitch.<sup>27</sup>

Faced with this resistance, Massachusetts' government reorganized its recruitment plan. Joined by black and white anti-slavery leaders who supported enlistment, Andrew took his message directly to the African-American community in a series of public meetings in Boston and New Bedford. He promised that black enlisted men would receive equal treatment with whites in all other ways except that they could not become officers.<sup>28</sup>

On 16 February an advertisement was placed in the *Boston Journal*:

Wanted. Good men for the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers of African descent... \$100 bounty at expiration of term of service. Pay \$13 per month, and state aid for families.<sup>29</sup>



The notice offered the same money and benefits to blacks as white soldiers received.

On the same day a meeting held at Joy Street Baptist Church, Boston's oldest black church, illustrates the new strategy of the recruiters. The meeting was run by blacks. It was presided over by three black men who, themselves, were to enlist. Wendell Phillips, a white anti-slavery leader and reformer, gave the main address. He admitted that the ban on black officers was wrong but he also suggested that officers' commissions could be gotten in the future, if blacks showed their merit: "Put yourselves under the Stars and Stripes, and fight yourself to the marquee of a general, and you shall come out with a sword." His suggestion met with cheers.

He went on to urge his audience to accept the ban for now and to enlist: "...you cannot have a whole loaf, will you not take a slice? That is the great question for you to decide." Other speakers followed the same theme:

You desire to be line-officers yourselves.... If you want commissions go earn, and get them. [Cheers.] Never let it be said that, when the country called, this reason kept back a single man from the army, but go cheerfully....<sup>30</sup>

Also, some black leaders changed their positions. Robert Morris, who had previously opposed Andrew, spoke at the meeting. The *Liberator* reported that his remarks, as well as those of the others, "were patriotic and generously applauded." As a result, two days later, on 18 February, the *Journal* expected "the military company of colored men to be full this week" and reported that Andrew was expected to appear at another meeting to aid enlistment.<sup>31</sup> By the end of February William C. Nell reported that enthusiastic meetings were being held throughout New England:

At the several meetings addressed by William Wells Brown, Charles Lenox Remond, and Dr. J.B. Smith, the objections to enlistments have been satisfactorily explained....<sup>32</sup>

Other meetings also emphasized African-American participation and promises that blacks could become officers in the future. On 5 March the annual Crispus Attucks Day celebration was held in Boston's Tremont Temple. Attucks was one of the "victims" of the Boston Massacre, and was memorialized by blacks as an African-American hero. By commemorating Attucks's role in the Revolution, blacks and white abolitionists used the imagery of Boston's revolutionary past to call for the end of slavery and for equality for African-Americans in the present.<sup>33</sup>

The occasion was also used as a recruiting rally for the 54th. A contingent of men from the 54th, in uniform, was on the platform. William C. Nell, who wrote for the *Liberator* and had led Boston's black community in the fight for integrated public schools in the 1850s, was one of the main speakers. Nell expressed his conviction "that by accepting the opportunity of becoming soldiers... the result cannot be otherwise than a full acknowledgment of every right." Sergeant William H. Carney and

other black soldiers from the 54th also spoke. A white officer:

... said their thorough military education was of the greatest possible importance, since all of them would soon be wanted as officers of new regiments.<sup>34</sup>

Yet many more men were needed to fill the regiment than could be found in Massachusetts or even in New England. Andrew called on the white abolitionist, George Luther Stearns, to act as the state's chief agent in organizing recruitment among blacks. With money raised by a special committee, Stearns hired a number of African-American recruiters. These men were well known throughout the north. Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Martin R. Delany, Charles L. Remond, John Mercer Langston, John S. Rock, and Henry Highland Garnett, all pre-war anti-slavery and civil rights leaders, were among them.<sup>35</sup>

By February 23, Stearns had begun to recruit in Buffalo, New York. He took a personal, community oriented approach to organizing. While having his hair cut, he discussed recruitment plans with a black barber. The barber later gathered a few friends to work with Stearns in organizing a recruitment meeting.

At the meeting Stearns emphasized the importance of enlistment in order to aid in the fight against slavery and to improve the "future of the negro race." He assured the meeting that blacks would be able to become officers in the near future. However, it was not until after Stearns promised that he, personally, would look after one man's family and care for their needs, that ten or twelve men enrolled.<sup>36</sup>

In other cities as well, Stearns's agents relied on local people to encourage their fellow community members to enlist. A Cincinnati, Ohio man commented that:

... an agent from "Mass." was here a few days since for the purpose of getting recruits for the 54th Massachusetts. A few of us met with him and selected a committee to see what could be done.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, the organization met with a great deal of opposition. *The Liberator*, and several other newspapers, described a New York recruitment meeting on 27 April at Shiloh Church, led by Douglass, Garnet and others. Only one recruit came forward. A black New Yorker, Robert Johnson, gave a spirited defense of this refusal to join:

... by a few well spoken words, [he] convinced the meeting that it was not cowardice which made the young men hesitate to enlist, but a proper respect for their own manhood. If the government wanted their services, let it guarantee to them all the rights of citizens and soldiers, and, instead of one man, he would insure them 5,000 men in twenty days. Mr. J's remarks were received with tremendous and long-continued applause.<sup>38</sup>

Douglass and the other recruiters retreated to organize another meeting for the 30th. At this meeting, pro-enlistment resolutions were passed but few men joined.<sup>39</sup>

In response to opposition, disinterest and war weariness the recruiters blanketed

the northern black communities with broadsides, newspaper editorials and eloquent appeals for enlistment. Frederick Douglass took up the cause with passion. Speaking editorially in *Douglass' Monthly*, sending appeals to newspapers or lecturing throughout the north, Douglass words reached African-American men from Massachusetts to California. In an appeal published by the *San Francisco Bulletin*, he linked enlistment in the 54th with the spirit of African-Americans who had led or joined rebellions against slavery:

Remember Denmark Vesey of Charleston; remember Nathaniel Turner of South Hampton; remember Shields, Grace and Copeland who followed John Brown and fell as glorious martyrs for the cause of the slave.<sup>40</sup>

Other black editors also supported recruitment. In response to an anti-enlistment letter to the *Christian Recorder*, Henry M. Turner replied:

Ah! That may do for that portion of our people who have no interest in the South; those who have no sympathy, no friends, no relations, no care.... But those who... abhor the monster slavery, and have felt its inhuman crushings, will look from a different standpoint.<sup>41</sup>

But perhaps more than any other, the most effective message to the black communities of the north was to encourage them to take up arms against slavery. "Can you ask more," questioned the *Anglo African*, "than a chance to drive bayonet or bullet into the slaveholders' hearts?"

Are you most anxious to be captains and colonels, or to extirpate these vipers from the face of the earth? The government has... announced the freedom of all our brethren within the grasp of rebellion, is there any higher, any nobler duty than to... pluck out from the grasp of the slaveholders the victims of their lust and tyranny?<sup>42</sup>

Despite the refusals and racism of white Americans, black Americans still claimed the United States as their country. A letter in the *Pacific Appeal* stated:

All we want... is to be ready at the call of our country, and when we show the world that we are as willing to lay our lives down... as they are, then, and not until then, will we be respected as men.<sup>43</sup>

Despite discouragement in the black community and harassment from whites, the recruitment drive was successful. By 1 April, 21 officers and 400 men were in camp training for the 54th. By 12 May, Massachusetts was able to recruit not only enough men to fill the 54th, but to begin a new regiment, the 55th. On 28 May, the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry marched through the streets of Boston in full dress uniform to ceremonies that would mark its departure for the war in the south.<sup>44</sup>

This paper began with the intent of exploring the attitudes of northern blacks towards a specific policy of the Lincoln government, recruitment of soldiers for the

first African-American regiment in the north. We have seen that the response among African-Americans as individuals was varied. The response also varied by region. There was a great deal of support for the regiment in rural Berkshire County, and a great deal of protest in other areas such as Boston, Philadelphia and New York.

Although blacks had many of the same reasons as whites for not wanting to fight, most African-American opposition to recruitment for the 54th was a protest against a specific instance of racial inequality: the ban on black officers. This demand for racial equality was not a new one. It had its roots in the equal rights movements of the 1850s. African-Americans were very willing to fight but they demanded the right to enlist in the US Army on equal terms with whites.

Early attempts to recruit made by white officers were not successful. The state had to create a new recruiting organization, staffed by African-American agents, to attract black recruits in sufficient numbers. It took the combined efforts of radical whites and African-American leaders to overcome resistance to recruitment.

Finally, that resistance was overcome, to a great extent, by false promises which pro-enlistment leaders could not guarantee. They claimed that the Lincoln government's policy would change, that soon blacks would receive equal treatment with whites and be granted commissions as officers.

This did not happen. In fact the government's treatment of its black troops was even worse than the supporters of the 54th had imagined. Blacks were denied the equal pay and benefits that they had been promised before enlistment. The government refused to confirm blacks as officers.

Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of African-Americans stepped forward to enlist in the US Army. Throughout the north and south they answered the call to "drive bayonet or bullet into the slaveholders' hearts." They did this, however, without giving up their fight for equal rights with whites. As fighters, both on the battlefield and against the racism of the white government, they brought the cause of freedom and equal rights one long march closer for themselves and generations of Americans to come.

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## Notes

- 1 Berlin, Ira, ed., Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland, assoc. eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 12, 87-8.
- 2 The writer in the *New York Times*, quoted in the *New York Tribune*, 16 August 1862, was quoted in James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Thought and Acted during the War for the Union* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 163-4.
- 3 *Boston Pilot*, [n.d.], quoted in Lewis Hayden, *Grand Lodge Jurisdictional Claims; or, War of the Races: An Address....* (Boston: E.S. Coombs, 1868), 51.
- 4 McPherson, 173-4. See the *Liberator*, 20 and 27 February 1863, for examples of stories of Confederate actions against blacks.
- 5 Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Roy P. Basler, ed., 9 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955) V: 357, 423, in McPherson, 164.
- 6 Peter Welsh to Margaret Welsh, Fragment, [ca. February 1863], *Irish Green and Union Blue: The Civil War Letters of Peter Welsh, Color Sergeant, 28th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers*, Lawrence Frederick Kohl and Margaret Cosse' Richard, eds. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 62-3.
- 7 Luis Fenellosa Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment: The History of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863-1865*, 2nd edition (Boston: Boston Book Co., 1894; rept., New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), 31-34, 328-392; James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1979), 125-25. The figures are based on the roster of the regiment in *Brave Black Regiment*, which lists place of enlistment. For estimates of the black population in 1863, see Berlin, *The Black Military Experience*, 12, 87-8. These estimates are an approximation, based on the 1860 census. Population movements during war and especially movements of recently freed slaves may have affected the actual population for 1863.
- 8 *Boston Daily Evening Traveller*, 21 February 1863, excerpted in Emilio, *MSS Records: 54th Massachusetts Infantry*, 4 vols., Luis Fenellosa Emilio, collector, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, 1:20. Figures for the chart are based on the regimental roster in *Brave Black Regiment* and United States Census Bureau, *Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census. . .* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864).
- 9 Mary Frances Berry, *Military Necessity and Civil Rights Policy: Black Citizen-*

- ship and the Constitution, 1861-1868* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977), 4, 10, 22; Herbert Aptheker, "The Negro in the Union Navy," *Journal of Negro History* 14 (April 1947): 169-200.
- 10 William C. Nell, *Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812* (Boston: Prentiss and Sawyer, 1851) and *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: R.F. Wallcut, 1855).
  - 11 Horton and Horton, 121.
  - 12 Nell, *Colored Patriots*, 101-2, 110-11; *Liberator*, 14 September 1855; Benjamin Quarles, *Allies for Freedom: Blacks and John Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 69; Horton and Horton, 120-5.
  - 13 "Speech of John S. Rock, Esq., at the New England Anti-Slavery Convention in the Tremont Temple, May 29 [1863]." *Liberator*, 5 June 1863.
  - 14 Berry, 35-6; *Liberator*, 26 April 1861; 17 May 1861.
  - 15 McPherson, 29, quoted from *Pine and Palm*, 25 May 1861.
  - 16 See Richard H. Abbott, "Massachusetts and the Recruitment of Southern Negroes," *Civil War History* 32 (September 1968): 198-9.
  - 17 Berry, 41; 47.
  - 18 Berry, 41-46; Abbott, 197-9; McPherson, 164; Edwin M. Stanton to John A. Andrew, 26 January 1863, in Emilio, *Brave Black Regiment*, 2.
  - 19 Horton and Horton, 125. The Twelfth Baptist Church was one of Boston's leading black Baptist congregations. Its pastor, Leonard Grimes, was an anti-slavery activist and an advocate for black rights.
  - 20 Emilio, *Brave Black Regiment*, 8-11.
  - 21 Boston *Daily Traveller*, 9 February 1863, in Emilio, *MSS Records*, I: 12
  - 22 This figure is based on information from the "Roster of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Infantry," compiled by George F. McKay, in Emilio, *Brave Black Regiment*. The "place and date of enlistment" is given for enlisted men. See also, "Excerpts from a 'Paper on Recruiting for the 54th Mass Inf'y' written by Major JWM Appleton of Salt Sulphur Springs, W. Va. in July 1891 and sent to the Officer's Association," in Emilio, *MSS Records* I:12.
  - 23 Emilio, "Feb 13/63 Mass Meeting in New Bedford," abstract of an article from the *Boston Journal*, *MSS Records* I:12.
  - 24 John W. Menard to Frederick Douglass, 10 March 1863 in *Douglass' Monthly*, April, 1863, in *Black Abolitionist Papers, 1830-1865*, 17 reels, (The Microfilming Corporation of America, 1981), 14:0786.
  - 25 Robert Purvis to [?], 18 February 1863, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 14:744.
  - 26 J. B. Moore to his brother, 3 March 1863, and William Parnham to Jacob C. White, Jr., February or March, 1863, Moore Papers, Howard University Library,

- and the *Christian Recorder*, 7 February 1863, in McPherson, 173, 175. For \$300 a man could buy his way out of the draft.
- 27 William Parnham to Jacob C. White, Jr., February or March, 1863, in McPherson, 174.
- 28 See, for example, John A. Andrew to George T. Downing, 23 March 1863, in Emilio, *Brave Black Regiment*, 17-8; Frank Preston Stearns, *The Life and Public Services of George Luther Stearns* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1907; rept. New York: Kraus Reprint Company, 1969), 286-7.
- 29 Emilio, *Brave Black Regiment*, 8-9; *Boston Journal*, 16 February 1863, clipping in *MSS Records*, IV.
- 30 *Liberator*, 20 February 1863.
- 31 *Liberator*, 20 February 1863; *Boston Journal*, 18 February 1863, excerpted in *MSS Records*, I:20.
- 32 *Liberator*, 6 March 1863.
- 33 Horton and Horton, 24.
- 34 *Liberator*, 20 March 1863.
- 35 Letter from John Murray Forbes to Luis F. Emilio, *MSS Records*, IV; Emilio, *Brave Black Regiment*, 10-11.
- 36 Stearns, 287-8.
- 37 William Parnham to Jacob C. White, Jr., February or March, 1863, *Moore Papers*, Howard University Library, quoted in McPherson, 174.
- 38 *Liberator*, 22 May 1863.
- 39 McPherson, 177-8; Berry, 50. Berry suggests that the Stearns organization was promising second lieutenancies to blacks.
- 40 Frederick Douglass, *San Francisco Bulletin*, 6 April 1863, excerpted in Emilio, *MSS Records* I:32.
- 41 *Christian Recorder*, 7 February 1863, quoted in McPherson, 175. Turner was the pastor of Israel Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, of Washington, D.C.
- 42 *Anglo African*, quoted in *Douglass Monthly* 5 (March 1863):802, in McPherson, 175-6.
- 43 S.T.W. to [the editor], *Pacific Appeal*, 28 February 1863, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 14:0750.
- 44 Emilio, 31-4; Horton and Horton, 124-5.