

African americans fighting in the civil war research papers examples

[War](#), [Civil War](#)



The Civil War is largely remembered as a fight between white northerners and white southerners and central to this fighting were issues of states' rights, secession, and slavery. Only by looking at the war more closely is it possible to examine the varied roles African Americans played in the conflict. Perhaps the most notable of these roles was soldier.

The start of the Civil War saw many free African Americans in the north hoping to enlist in the military. Although some African Americans had served in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, a 1792 federal law barred them from bearing arms in the U. S. Army (National Archives " Background"). At the onset of the Civil War, only the navy enrolled black seamen, although the Navy had a quota in place and African Americans typically only held menial positions as coal heavers or shipboard firemen. Frustrated by their inability to serve in the Army, at the outset of the war would-be volunteers in Massachusetts even met to pass a resolution asking the government to modify the law so they could enlist and pledging to raise an army of fifty thousand men, many of whom would be familiar with the geography of the south and the enemy (Astor, 2001, p. 20-21).

President Lincoln was at first hesitant to authorize black troops, concerned that border states would secede as a result, but after the war dragged on for a few years and the numbers of white volunteers began to dwindle, the administration reconsidered its position. The use of black labor in the union's fight against the Confederacy became legal with the Second Confiscation and Militia Act of 1862 (Coddington, 2012, p. xii). Shortly after, slavery was abolished with the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's final version of the Emancipation Proclamation included a paragraph stating that suitable

African Americans could enlist and serve in the military. John David Smith (2002, p. 2) asserts that “ Lincoln’s decision to free and then employ blacks in the U. S. Army would rank among his boldest, most controversial, and most important measures.

Black recruitment eventually burgeoned and despite the proclamation allowing them to serve and a general earnestness, black soldiers still faced significant problems in addition to the difficulties of war that their fellow white soldiers did not have. According to the National Archives, black unites faced prejudice and were not used for combat as extensively as might have been possible. Confederate forces also threatened to execute or enslave any captured blacks and white commanders of black forces would also be seriously punished or executed (“ African-American Soldiers in the Civil War”), so there was hesitancy because of this and because of some degree of prejudice, to utilize black soldiers on the front lines. Initially, black soldiers received less pay than their white counterparts and in some cases had an additional clothing allowance drawn from their pay that white soldiers did not. This was eventually corrected by Congress in 1864.

Eventually even the desperate Confederate Army began enlisting black soldiers in 1865. According to the Civil War Trust’s website, enlisting required the consent of both the slave and his master and after the war the slave would have the rights of a freeman. There was not a very large number of black enlistees in the Confederate army after it was made legal.

According to the Civil War Trust (2013), about 180, 000 African Americans served in 163 different units of the Union Army and thousands more served in the Navy. The National Archives hold that nearly 40, 000 black soldiers

died during the Civil War and about 75 percent of those deaths were the result of infection or disease.

References

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