

African Americans and Their Battle

From 1861 to 1865 the bloodiest battles took place. This was the war that our country turned against itself. Brother fighting against brother due to the difference in opinions. The north had a different perspective about slavery, they wanted to get away from it but the south wanted to keep it. They depended on the slaves to do all the hard manual work that they refused to do. Slaves endured years and years of selling and buying slaves, using them to do work, and punishing them when they did their work inaccurately. Slaves had to do many jobs all which were based on their skill levels. The more skilled slaves would do jobs such as carpeting, cabinetmaking, bricklaying and more. Some slaves would work in factories, while other slaves were construction workers that worked in the canals or railroads. The remaining slaves worked as dockworkers, lumberjacks, mines, office workers, or riverboat pilots. Slaves lived a hard life before and during the war. They went and got through a lot that no one can ever describe, the pain and the things they had to give up to stay alive. The main question that is asked is what did the blacks have to go through before and during the war?

Before the Civil War, African Americans were not able to attend schools. They didn't have any schooling for that matter. Everything they learned was from things around them, for example African Americans speech and grammar was not easily understood, they would pronounce the as "da" or that as "dat". Here is an example of their speech by an aged slave on the islands talking about freedom, *"I'd been yere seventy-three years, workin' for my master widout even a dime in wages. I'd worked rain-wet sun dry. I'd worked wid my mouf full of dust, but would not stop to get a drink of water. I'd been whipped, an' starved, an' I was always prayin' Oh! Lord, come an' deliber us! All dat time de birds had been flyin', and de rabens had been cryin', and de fish had been sunnin' in de waters. One day I look up, an' I see a big cloud; it didn't come up like as de*

clouds come out far yonder, but it 'peared to be right ober head. Der was tunders out of day, an' der was lightnin's. Den I looked down on de water, an' I see, 'peared to me a big house in de water, an' out of de big house came great big eggs, and de good eggs went on trou' de air, an' fell into de fort; an' de bad eggs burst before day got dar.... Den I heard 'twas the Yankee ship firin' out de big eggs, and dey had come to set us free. Den I praise de Lord. He come an' put he little finger in de work, an' dey Sesh Buckra all go; and de birds stop flyin', and de rabens stop cryin', an' when I go to catch a fish to eat wid my rice, de's no fish dar. De Lord Almighty'd come and frightened 'em all out of de waters. Oh! Praise de Lord! I'd prayed seventy-three years, an' now he's come an' we's all free” (The Negro's Civil War, Anonymous, p. 58, 59).

In South Carolina it was illegal to teach slaves to read or write (Education, arts, and culture, pbs.org). Even then there was still some endurance regarding slave education in different groups of the south. Remarkably, in 1743, long before the war there was a school for slaves. For twenty years the school provided guidance in Christian religion and education under the surveillance of a slave schoolmaster (Education, arts, and culture, pbs.org). While on plantations slaves education attempts came from parents, spouses, family members, and other slaves. Some slaves were even educated by their masters. Even through all this, the slaves did not get a lot of education, but of course this was before the war. One of the main presumptions of why the south did not want to educate the slaves was that the south was afraid of the blacks becoming more intelligent, and this would throw out their theory of the slaves not being smart individuals. One man named J. Anderson Raymond wrote in 1864, *there is no natural difference existing between the two races.... Take a colored and a white child; rear them together; treat them precisely alike; show them the same advantages, and disadvantages; and at the end of ten years, show me which is the smarter child. Or, take them both and turn them to the cares of the world, where they can*

have free access to all kinds of vice, then, at the end of ten years, tell me which can be the hardest, or endure the greater hardships.... If the white and the black man's conditions had been the same, no difference could have been found between the two races, as far as intellect is concerned (J. Anderson Raymond, 1864 , p. 112).

African Americans had to depend on their masters to present them with homes or building materials to build one themselves. Housing was very cramped, at times there was ten slaves in one home. Their beds and furniture were usually made out of straw or rags, but that was for the slaves that worked in the fields. Slaves that had worked in the plantation house had somewhat improved homes; they were given better food and clothing. Sometimes the masters supplied them with pots and pans but most of the time slaves had to make it themselves. Slaves used a pumpkin and hollowed it out, some called it calabash and they used it to cook their food. These supplies were very limited, but many did the best of their abilities to do what they could with the supplies. They did not try to ask for more or whimper about what they received because of the fear of getting whipped and sometimes worse. For clothing, slaves would get one pair of shoes, two linen shirts, three pairs of underwear, one jacket, one pair of socks, and overcoat, and one wool hat per year. Many were very lucky to get so much from the whites.

Slaves had to live through many punishments if they did not do what they were asked. For example, some owners would just whip their slaves but others whipped them and put them in a smokehouse, this was known as smoking their slaves. Another form of punishment was to push the slave down a steep hill and slaves were also constantly branded. Some slaves were even put under water forcibly for punishment. There were so many other punishments such as being kicked, tied up, and sometimes also tarred and feathered. Slaves experienced much more harsh punishments in which they tried to run away such as being chased by dogs, hit with a paddles, whipped and

sometimes they also got a part of their body cut off. Whipping made the slaves stay in check, the larger the offense the more lashings they would get. On a few of the plantations slaves got 39 lashings but some slaves were not that lucky, such as a man named Francis Fredric. Francis had gotten 107 lashes for running away; he only had freedom for nine weeks until he was caught. Even then that was not as much as another man named Moses Roper, he had gotten 200 lashes, he would have had more but his owners wife insisted he stop (Punishments of slavery, library.thinkquest.org).

Many slaves had family such as wives, husbands, sons and daughters. Most of which were separated because they were bought by different owners. Slaves were determined to have a broad amount of children, but they also had to get married. Thirty-two of all marriages were all part of slavery. Their theory was if they got married the male slaves would not run away from the plantation. Male slaves were unhappy with being married to a woman that worked at the same plantation because they didn't want to see her suffer in front of his eyes. The master would beat the wife as the husband watched. Slave woman would have to have many kids; the slave owners promised freedom to the woman who had fifteen kids. Even if a woman was pregnant she still had to work the same hours. When the child was born she only got a month of rest to recover, then she was sent off to work again (A slave's life, library.thinkquest.org). Women were supposed to start having kids at thirteen, and at the age of twenty they were supposed to already have four to five children in total (A slave's life, library.thinkquest.org).

Not only were African Americans discriminated during slavery but into the war itself. They were unable to fight in the war or to simply pick a side. Little did they know this was only the beginning. When the final Emancipation Proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863, the slaves were finally freed. Even then, this did not end slavery completely. When President Lincoln issued

the full-scale recruitment of black soldiers in 1862, not many joined but the ones that did were very eager.

One main reason why the African Americans did not join was because they did not get the same rights as the whites in the union. Fredrick Douglass tried to guilt the blacks into enlisting in the war by saying he was ashamed of them that they weren't joining the war. However, a man named A Mr. Robert Johnson took a different perspective. He defended them and he had said **"that it was not the cowardice which made the young men hesitate to enlist, but a proper respect for their 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"** (The Negro's Civil War).

Henry M. Turner tried also to shame the blacks into volunteering, and then one black man said, **"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"** Henry M Turner had replied back: **"Ah! That may be for that portion of our people who have no interest south; those who have no sympathy, no friends, no relations, no care, nor no desire for a triumph of freedom and our heaven-chartered rights. But those who have been taught by a God-blessed experience to abhor the monster slavery, and have felt its inhuman crushing's, will look from a different standpoint.... The cry has long been, Give us the opportunity; show us a chance to climb to distinction, and we will show the world by our bravery what the negro can do, and then as soon as we are invited to stand on such a basis as will develop these interior qualities, for us to deride the idea and scornfully turn away, would be to argue a self-consciousness of incapacity"**(Henry M. Turner, 177).

On April 30 1863, Fredrick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, and others restated their encouraging words. After George T. Downing introduced new resolutions to give African Americans rights such as the following: **“Resolved, That we are impressed with the fact, that the resolutions most in place *now* are those which will give force and efficacy to a determination, on our part, to stand by the government in every way we may; with sympathy and succor, with loaded muskets and drawn swords, seeing that the very existence of our government is imperiled; a government which is daily endearing itself to us more and more, by an increasing willingness to respect and depend us as its equal subjects. Resolved, that in determining to stand by the government in this war, we are not only deciding to stand by the good government, but against slavery, the parent and fosterer of the unjust prejudice we have been the subjects of here in the north; we believe that as we shall manifest competency and valor in the field, will rewards, acknowledgment and promotion be awarded us; and that the bugbear “Colonization, “ which has so troubled the American people, will not, out of respect for the feelings of loyal Americans, be ever again agitated.”** (The Negro’s Civil War). Many men enlisted the same day that this meeting was held; they had enlisted because they thought they finally had the same rights as the whites in the military. The government said that they gave the same right to the colored troops; however, half of it was a lie. By the end of April, thirty to forty recruits were coming in each day. In total, at the end of the war, there were 179,000 African Americans that joined the war.

Those that joined the union with hope with what might become in the future, were soon faced with the reality that they really didn’t have the same rights. They were now struggling with unequal pay. Colored troops were paid \$10 per month but \$3 were deducted for clothing, which left them with \$7. White troop members were paid \$13 per month with nothing deducted (The

Fight for Equal Rights: Black Soldiers in the Civil War, archives.gov). Colored troops started to fight for equal pay. The blacks eventually stopped accepting pay, in an effort to get the same pay as the white troops. A soldier from the Fifty-fourth once wrote: **“A strange misapprehension exists as to the matter of pay, and it pains us deeply.... Three times have we been mustered in for pay. Twice have we swallowed the insult offered us by the United States paymaster, contenting ourselves with a simple refusal to acknowledge ourselves different from other Massachusetts soldiers. Once, in the face of insult and intimidation such as no body of men and soldiers were ever subjected to before, we quietly refused and continued to do our duty. For four months we have been steadily working night and day under fire. And such work! Up to our knees in mud half the time, causing the tearing and wearing out of more than the volunteer’s yearly allowance of clothing, denied time to repair and wash... denied time to drill and perfect ourselves in soldierly qualities, denied the privilege of burying our dead decently. All this we’ve borne patiently, waiting for justice. Imagine our surprise and disappointment on the receipt by the last mail of the governor’s address to the general court, to find him making a proposition to them to pay this regiment the difference between what the United States Government offers us and what they are legally bound to pay us, which in effect, advertises us to the world as holding out for *money* and not from *principle*, that we sink our manhood in consideration of a few more dollars. How has this come about? What false friend has been misrepresenting us to the governor, to make him think that our necessities outweigh our self-respect?”** (The Negro’s Civil War). The struggle for equal pay went on for awhile until June 1864; this was when the colored troops were granted the same pay as white troops.

Since the union was receiving many recruits and the confederacy was down soldiers, they

decided to start enlisting African Americans. They didn't wait for recruits to come; they took an extra step and promised the blacks freedom. They said if they joined the confederacy and stayed truthful they would be free after the war. Other than the volunteers the confederacy still had slaves, so they used them under their own will because the confederate soldiers refused to do hard manual work. The slaves had to do work such as digging trenches, roads, and prison camps. On January 2, 1864 a group of rebel officers in the Army of Tennessee, headed by General Patrick R. Cleburne, entered a report to the commanding general stating: **“we propose.... that we immediately commence training a large reserve of the most courageous of our slaves, and further that we guarantee freedom within a reasonable time to every slave in the south who shall remain true to the confederacy in this war. As between the loss of independence and the loss of slavery, we assume that every patriot will freely give up the latter.”** (The Negro's Civil War). The confederacy was going to prolong the promise of freedom to every slave so that within time the slaves would give up fighting.

The war had been a long one, and the lives that were taken were surely remembered. The union had won, and the slaves were set free. No more working under the will of others and no more beatings that could take their life. They could live the way they always dreamed about. After all they went through they were left with the satisfaction of being known as a man, not a slave or an outlaw. They proved themselves in the war and many finally respected them.

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