

...Contributions and History of African Americans in Times of War...

African Americans and the Civil War

African-Americans contributed much during the Civil War. At first, African-Americans were ineligible to enlist in the military. Most were slaves; the others were either runaways or freed slaves. Late in 1862, America saw the first time that African-American men could enlist into the military. This was a result of the Militia Act of 1862, an act that boosted the number of armed men in the army. It allowed African-Americans to participate as war laborers and soldiers for the first time since the previous Militia Act of 1792. During the following year, the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed all slaves from the South, was issued and passed, letting African-Americans in the South be able to be free to join the military.

Once African-Americans were able to enlist in the military, many signed up. Abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass, even encouraged the free black men to join, as a way to eventually realize full citizenship. Even though African-Americans were now able to serve in the military, they were still not treated as equal citizens. They were paid only \$10 a month with a \$3 reduction for clothing, which amounts to just \$7 each month. Meanwhile, white men were paid a monthly salary of \$13 without any clothing deduction; their total stayed at \$13. That was a \$6 difference! African-Americans earned \$72 less over the course of a year, which back then was a huge sum. Not only that, but they were still segregated within the military. By the end of the Civil War, some 179,000 African-Americans served in the army, and another approximately 20,000 served in the navy. Many died for the country we call home today. Almost all freed black men were on the Union side, but some slaves were forced by their masters to serve on the Confederate side. Some had to take care of their master's needs while they were in the camps; others fought for the Confederacy because it offered freedom to those who fought. When the Confederates looked to enlist African-American soldiers, almost no one enlisted.

The offer did not succeed because the African-American slaves did not trust that they would truly be free at the end of the war if they joined.

During times of war, African-Americans have always been there in the background, serving in the military as cooks, spies, nurses, etc. Even when they didn't receive equal pay for equal work, were not treated equally, nor recognized for their work, they still served their country, a country that had enslaved them for many years. African-Americans were helpful in the war effort, for they were willing to serve and fight for freedom. The time had come for equality and justice. Even today, decades after the Union Army's win, African Americans are still serving their country. It is with pride and honor that they represent America, now really the *land of the free*.

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