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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Paul E. Coker entitled ""Is This the Fruit of Freedom?" Black Civil War Veterans in Tennessee." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.

Stephen V. Ash, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Daniel Feller, G. Kurt Piehler, Asafa Jalata

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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“Is This the Fruit of Freedom?”
Black Civil War Veterans in Tennessee

A Dissertation Presented for
the Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Paul E. Coker

August 2011

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the meaning of the Civil War in the South by examining the experience of Tennessee's black Union army veterans from the 1860s through the early twentieth century. Today historians almost reflexively agree that the black military experience took on an "ever larger meaning" in American society, but few scholars have given sustained attention to black soldiers' lives in the postwar South. My dissertation finds that the black military experience profoundly disrupted Southern hierarchies and presented black men with unprecedented opportunities to elevate their political, economic, and social status; however, these aspirations rarely went uncontested. Nearly 40 percent of Tennessee's black male population of military age enlisted in the Union army during the Civil War, and as these men pursued individual agendas and attempted to build families and communities they played a critical part in the postwar remaking of the urban and rural South. The redefinition of Southern society produced inter- and intra-racial tension and occasionally brutal violence, but it also involved striking accommodations and reconciliations. This study also explores conflicting commemoration of the war by contrasting black prominence in the state's racially integrated Grand Army of the Republic veterans' organization with efforts to recognize Confederate "colored soldiers." The dissertation's most important sources are federal military pension records at the National Archives in Washington, which allow the study to focus on otherwise largely undocumented and unexplored lives. These invaluable records provide information about antebellum, wartime, and postwar family life, health conditions, employment, economic mobility, geographical mobility, race relations, and relationships with white ex-soldiers.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: The Wartime Experience, 1861-1865 9

Chapter 2: The Postwar Transition, 1865-1867 34

Chapter 3: Communities, Families, and Comrades 70

Chapter 4: Work, Health, and Wealth 116

Chapter 5: Politics 156

Conclusion 200

Bibliography 211

Vita 221

Introduction

In January 1865, a group of white Unionists assembled in Tennessee's capital city to reestablish the state government. A few weeks earlier at the decisive battle of Nashville, regiments of U.S. Colored Troops had suffered high casualties in fierce fighting just a short walk from the capitol steps. During a frontal assault against a strong Confederate position, the 13th U.S. Colored Infantry lost five color bearers, as each time the flag fell a new man pushed it forward. In all, the regiment lost nearly 40 percent of its strength—the highest proportion of casualties of any regiment on either side throughout the entire battle. Ambrose Bierce, who witnessed the assault from the safety of Union lines, called the charge "as pretty an example of courage and discipline as one could wish to see," and even the Confederate commander of the brigade defending the hill cited the gallantry of the black troops in his official report.[1]

No African Americans were included in the January convention, but a group of Nashville blacks prepared a petition to submit to the assembly. In it, they called for recognition of black soldiers' faithful service in the Union army as the basis for extended rights, include the suffrage. Pointing out that black soldiers were not even allowed to testify in court, while white "rebels" enjoyed such legal rights, the petitioners asked, "Is this the fruit of freedom, and the reward of our services in the field? Was it for this that colored soldiers fell by hundreds before Nashville, fighting under the flag of the Union?" The mixture of both hopefulness and uncertainty in this plea could be found in almost every aspect of life for black Tennesseans after the war. In many

[1] James Lee McDonough, *Nashville: The Western Confederacy's Final Gamble* (Knoxville, 2004), 159-68, 225-35.

respects black soldiers appeared ideally positioned to grasp the "fruit of freedom," but whether it would prove sweet or bitter remained to be seen.[2]

This dissertation explores the meaning of the Civil War in the South by examining the experience of Tennessee's black Union army veterans from the 1860s through the early twentieth century. One can hardly overestimate the impact of the Civil War on American society and particularly on black Americans. Emancipation has long been recognized as a watershed in American history, and historians increasingly have drawn attention to the role of black soldiers in this transformation of American life. Pulitzer Prize winner Steven Hahn contends that "by nineteenth-century standards, participation in the military and militia most clearly defied the representation of what it meant to be a slave or abject dependent, marginalized in or excluded from the arenas of civil and political life." Ira Berlin and the other authors of *Slaves No More* conclude that "for those men who fought, the Civil War was a momentous event that molded their lives and those of their descendants in countless ways. It elevated some to new heights of glory and power. . . . It shattered others. . . . Because so many black soldiers simultaneously achieved freedom and reached maturity, the military experience took on an ever larger meaning for the men, their families, their communities, and ultimately, the entire society."[3]

But if the black military experience "took on an ever larger meaning" in society, the historiography of the experience of black veterans in the aftermath of the war remains woefully underdeveloped. In the last fifty years, the compelling story of black Civil War soldiers has attracted increased attention from professional historians and even from Hollywood. The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s had something of a historiographical parallel in several

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[2] Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II: The Black Military Experience* (New York, 1982), 811-16.
[3] Stephen Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, 2003), 175; Ira Berlin, Barbara Fields, Steven Miller, Joseph Reidy, and Leslie Rowland, *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (New York, 1992), 222.

influential works on black soldiers, including Dudley Taylor Cornish's *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* and James M. McPherson's *The Negro's Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for the Union*. Cornish and McPherson set the tone for future studies of black troops by emphasizing the substantial African American contributions to the Union war effort and, even more significantly, by drawing attention to black soldiers' active role in seizing wartime opportunities. In the 1980s, Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland supplemented the growing body of secondary sources with a collection of primary documents and essays in *The Black Military Experience* that will prove invaluable to researchers and students for many years to come. Major themes of this scholarship even found expression in popular culture with the 1989 release of *Glory*, a film based on the experience of the white officers and black enlisted men of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. The movie traces the soldiers' struggles from their initial battles against discriminatory Northern quartermasters in camp to their final sacrifice in a suicidal charge against Confederate Fort Wagner in South Carolina. The image of free blacks and former slaves taking up arms to secure their freedom is indeed powerful, but few have rigorously examined the fate of these soldiers in postwar America.[4]

Until very recently, black Civil War veterans lacked their own historians and received only cursory discussion at best—usually as a footnote to discussions of their wartime experience. But the 2004 publication of Donald R. Shaffer's *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* may spark further interest in the subject. In this first book-length study of black

[4] Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York, 1956); James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (New York, 1965); Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II: The Black Military Experience* (New York, 1982). *Glory* received widespread critical and popular acclaim and won three Academy Awards, including Denzel Washington's Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of "Pvt. Trip," an ex-slave from Tennessee.

Civil War veterans, Shaffer portrays their struggle as a quest for manhood in a society increasingly dominated by white racism. Manhood meant many things to blacks, including "money, power, pride, dignity, respect, self-control, citizenship, autonomy, bravery, physical prowess, fraternal solidarity, and patriarchal authority"; and both veterans and nonveterans fought to establish their place in the emerging postbellum society. In his careful analysis of this quest for manhood, Shaffer finds that the postwar period was "at best a mixed success" for black veterans. They generally found more material prosperity than nonveteran blacks, benefited from military pensions, were widely admired in the black community, and gained some acceptance by white Northerners for their role in the Union victory; but, on the other hand, postwar triumphs "were tempered by the incompleteness and impermanence of some of their gains." Most notably, black veterans were the target of widespread violence by resentful white Southerners, and over time the reconciliation of white Union and Confederate veterans tended to push the memory of black veterans' service to the periphery of the nation's consciousness.[5]

While Shaffer's pioneering study provides a much needed national framework for the discussion of black veterans, deeper local and regional explorations will yield further insights—particularly those situated in the volatile postwar South. Richard Reid has demonstrated the value of this approach in his examination of veterans from the four black regiments recruited in North Carolina. Reid begins by noting a tendency among historians to portray military service as a positive force in black veterans' lives and a potential gateway to postwar success; Eric Foner, for example, states that "for men of talent and ambition, the army flung open a door to advancement and respectability." While Reid acknowledges that a few veterans translated their

[5] Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (Lawrence, 2004), 5, 195. For similar conclusions regarding white sectional reconciliation at the expense of black interpretations of the Civil War, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, 2001); and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Race, Memory, and Masculinity: Black Veterans Recall the Civil War," in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton, 2002), 138-56.

military careers into impressive political or financial success, he suggests that these cases were exceptional and that most veterans' gains tended to be "limited or intangible." Reid persuasively links black military service with unprecedented assertions of freedom and manhood, for example, tracing specific connections between wartime experiences and postwar geographic mobility. Certainly, ex-soldiers "could draw comfort from knowing that they had played a major role in freeing the slaves and launching the freedom generation," but Reid concludes that most North Carolina veterans ultimately "returned to friends and kin, perhaps moving to coastal towns as their health declined and living out quiet lives of destitution."[6]

The experiences of Tennessee's black veterans support Shaffer's and Reid's general points about ambiguous victories with incomplete and impermanent gains, but the ways in which the meaning of black military service evolved in Tennessee were complicated and deserve careful study. The state was not subject to Congressional Reconstruction, but the nature of postwar opportunities shifted rapidly as Tennessee became the first Southern state to enfranchise blacks and also the first to be "redeemed" by ex-Confederates. Focusing on a single state lends coherence to the discussion of political matters, but Tennessee has the added benefit of providing a cross-sectional view of several "Souths." The rugged highlands of East Tennessee, the Middle Tennessee heartland, and the plantation districts of West Tennessee developed distinct societies before the war and presented distinct opportunities and challenges for black veterans after the war. Like the rest of the South, Tennessee was predominantly rural and agricultural. The state's black veterans also had been predominantly rural and agricultural before the war, but Tennessee was also home to some of the South's important cities, which only grew in significance to black

[6] Richard Reid, "USCT Veterans in Post-Civil War North Carolina," in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill, 2002), 391-421; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, 1988), 9. Reid revisits the topic in the final chapter of his book *Freedom for Themselves: North Carolina's Black Soldiers in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill, 2008), 297-322.

Southerners during and after the war. Studying black veterans in the state thus sheds light on the postwar evolution of both cities and countryside.

The study of black veterans, particularly Southern black veterans, presents researchers with distinct challenges. The army offered many black Southerners their first taste of education, but black veterans produced relatively few written accounts after the war—perhaps the scarcity of scholarship on black veterans in part reflects a perceived scarcity of sources. My study draws on military records, Freedmen's Bureau documents, manuscript census returns, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century histories, newspapers, and memoirs; but by far the most important sources for this project are the federal military pension records housed at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Using pension records allows the study to focus on the otherwise largely undocumented and unexplored lives of black soldiers and veterans. Pension files typically provide insight into each applicant's life at the time of enlistment, details of his military service, and a wealth of information about his postwar status including family life, health, employment, economic mobility, geographical mobility, and relationships with white and black ex-soldiers and with others in his community. Letters, depositions, and other documents contained in these files recover voices otherwise unheard and forgotten.[7]

The dissertation opens with a chapter sketching the black experience in Tennessee and the black military experience in the South from 1861 to 1865. Initially, the war presented a very uncertain situation for black Tennesseans, but as they responded to shifting circumstances their actions significantly shaped the course of the war. The black military experience was not monolithic, and I argue that the variety of duties proved significant. Labor details played an indispensible (if unglamorous) part in bringing Union victory, participation in combat gave

[7] For a recent demonstration of the pension files' usefulness, see Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer, *Voices of Emancipation: Understanding Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction through the U.S. Pension Bureau Files* (New York, 2008).

greater weight to black demands for citizenship, and even mundane garrison duty seemed to revolutionize Southern social relations. Chapter 2 examines the experience of Tennessee's ex-soldiers in the immediate postwar period, from the Confederate military surrenders of spring 1865 to the state legislature's extension of voting rights to black men in early 1867. From politics and economics to the formation of families and communities, much appeared to be in flux during these two years. Although a time of great confusion and uncertainty, it also appeared to hold considerable possibilities and promise for black veterans.

The remainder of the dissertation covers the period from early 1867 to the early twentieth century and is divided into topical chapters. Chapter 3 examines the development of communities, families, and comradeship. The military experience of the Civil War opened up a variety of new opportunities in the lives of black veterans, including an unprecedented degree of geographical mobility. But as veterans decided between returning to the countryside, building new lives in urban areas, or emigrating to the North or West, each option offered potential benefits and hazards. Black veterans who remained in Tennessee supported each other and presented an alternative interpretation to most Southern whites' view of the Civil War. Comradeship with white Union veterans in the state through the Grand Army of the Republic also was significant, particularly considering the dominance of segregation and white supremacist belief in American society, but interracial comradeship in Tennessee had distinct limits. Chapter 4 analyzes black veterans' patterns of work and wealth. Bounties, back pay, and federal pensions represented significant wealth in the early years following emancipation. But, on the other hand, military service frequently produced disability, and gaining pensions could be problematic. Finally, Chapter 5 explores the black veteran in Tennessee politics. The black soldier had been a powerful symbol in campaigns for civil rights and helped open the door for

black suffrage by 1867. However, the peculiar circumstances of the state's Reconstruction along with opposition from white Conservatives and Republicans and divisions among blacks limited opportunities for black veterans in Tennessee. As the veterans maneuvered to make what they could from an unenviable position, the results were sometimes spectacular violence and other times startling reconciliations. The Conclusion briefly addresses the way Tennesseans from the early twentieth century to the present have interpreted the Civil War. As Tennessee's surviving black Civil War veterans entered their twilight years, the state legislature awarded pensions to slaves who accompanied masters in the Confederate army, indicating the pliability of the meaning of the black military experience. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, nearly one hundred fifty years after the war, commemoration of black Union soldiers gained momentum in Tennessee—but so did the quest for "forgotten" black Confederates. Given the shifting meanings of a war for its contemporaries and following generations, careful examination of the lives of Tennessee's black Civil War veterans remains a challenging but important undertaking.

Chapter 1: The Wartime Experience, 1861-1865

In January 1864, the 1st Tennessee Volunteer Infantry, African Descent, arrived at its new post in Memphis. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cowden, the regiment's white commander, recalled that "as it marched with steady step to the music of its own martial band through the main street of that once proud but now humbled city, the inhabitants thereof saw as they peered from their windows or stores, what they had never before seen and had never expected to see, their own former slaves powerfully and lawfully armed for their overthrow, and led and commanded by those whom they considered their invaders." Cowden perceptively concluded, "The sight must have burned into their very souls." The metamorphosis, "not only in appearance and dress, but in character and relations also," seemed profound to this Northern officer: "Yesterday a filthy, repulsive 'nigger,' to-day a neatly-attired man; yesterday a slave, to-day a freeman; yesterday a civilian, to-day a soldier. He is nothing of what he ever before was; he never was aught of what he is now. In relation to his maker, God, unchanged; in relation to his brother, man, wholly changed. He represents in himself at once the cause and the result of the war, and now becomes a part of its *force*."[1]

The meaning of the black military experience for Civil War veterans cannot be comprehended without first understanding how thousands of black Southerners became part of the war's force. It is difficult to imagine a more dramatic transformation than the Civil War passage from slave to soldier, but little about the transition came easily. As black Southerners navigated shifting and uncertain circumstances, their actions significantly shaped the course of

[1] Robert Cowden, *A Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth Regiment of United States Colored Infantry* (Dayton, 1883; reprint, New York, 1971), 45, 53.

the war in Tennessee. The Union army gained control of Tennessee's largest slaveholding districts relatively early in the war, and the state eventually became the scene of extensive black recruitment. Beginning in 1863, black soldiers enforced federal occupation and simultaneously advanced their own interpretations of freedom, sometimes at odds with U.S. policy. Ultimately over twenty thousand blacks—a number representing nearly 40 percent of Tennessee's black male population of military age—enlisted in Union infantry, artillery, and cavalry regiments. The black military experience was not monolithic, but the various duties proved significant. Labor details and combat duty played an important part in bringing Union victory, while garrison duty seemed to revolutionize Southern social relations. Freedom of movement, pursuit of economic advancement, education and self-improvement, control within families and emerging communities, claims to broader rights as citizens—these and other prominent postbellum themes were rooted deeply in wartime experiences. In some respects military service seemed to elevate soldiers to the upper limits of what African Americans might hope to attain in Southern society; however, their aspirations rarely went uncontested.

That black Southerners yearned for freedom there can be little doubt—for evidence, one need look no further than the tens of thousands across the South who, in the face of considerable hardship and hazard, flocked to Union lines where the opportunity presented itself. Yet the nature of these opportunities, and, even more significantly, the perception of opportunities, varied considerably with individual circumstances. As one historian observes of the course of emancipation in Tennessee, "with few exceptions, freedom derived not from an institutional or legal mechanism but from a personal stroke." As black Southerners considered their futures, a variety of factors including relationships, the shifting tides of military campaigns, and material conditions influenced the "personal stroke" of individual decisions. When George Knox and his

fellow slaves in Statesville, Tennessee, overheard the white uproar surrounding the election of the "nigger lover" Abraham Lincoln and the "black Republicans" in 1860, they "felt that freedom was coming." But the coming of war also brought insecurity. While Knox longed for freedom, he was one of his master's favorite slaves. Knox recalled that when his master enlisted in the Confederate army and left home in 1861, they "both shed tears." As he explained his ambivalence, "I felt that my only friend was gone; I began to think he would be killed and that I would be sold and carried away to the South." Knox's intimacy with his master was not typical, but many other slaves experienced like Knox the excitement and anxiety of the war.[2]

Some slaves soon found themselves near the front of the fighting. Hundreds of Tennessee masters who enlisted took male slaves with them to the Confederate army as personal servants and cooks. Some of these men remained devoted to their masters for the duration of the war, but many others took advantage of their proximity to enemy lines to run away and join the Yankees. Major Nathaniel Cheairs of the 3rd Tennessee Infantry brought his slave Jerry to the army to cook and care for his horses. Decades after the war, Major Cheairs's son still remembered Jerry as a "faithful good negro" during his time with the Confederates, but the slave took advantage of his trusted position to liberate not only himself but also his master's favorite mount King, "the best horse in Tennessee." Both the runaway slave and the equine accomplice quickly found new employment with the Union army.[3]

Jerry Cheers's experience—and the testimonial of his onetime master's family—vividly illustrate Leon Litwack's observation that slaves were well versed in "lessons in survival and

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[2] Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (Baton Rouge, 1988), 121; George L. Knox, *Slave and Freeman, The Autobiography of George L. Knox* (Lexington, 1979), 46, 48. On rumor and expectation, also see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, 1979), 20-23; and Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 64-68.

[3] Tennessee Colored Soldiers' Pension Applications, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville; pension file of Jerry Cheers, 111th USCI, RG 15, NA. For more examples similar to Cheers, see pension files of Jesse Cotton (alias Bridgeforth), 3rd USCHA; Andrew J. Fouche, 44th USCI; and Edmond Ramsey, 61st USCI, RG 15, NA.

accommodation," including "the uses of humility, the virtues of ignorance, the arts of evasion, the subtleties of verbal intonation, the techniques by which feelings and emotions were masked, and the occasions that demanded the flattering of white egos and the placating of white fears." The war served to heighten the dangers and raise the stakes of this charade, making such calculations more critical than ever. George Knox's hope for freedom grew with the progress of the Union army; however, he explained, "I had to show my sympathy for the south in order that they would not mistrust me." In January 1863, Knox smugly delivered news of the Battle of Stones River to his neighborhood, carefully adding to whites "how bad it was that the Yankees had whipped us again." Around whites he "put on as long a face as possible," but he "was secretly rejoicing at the success of the Union army." Knox also spent time serving his master in the Confederate army, but after numerous slaves had run away "the rebels . . . were very rough, swearing and cursing at every Negro they thought would be glad to leave them to go to the Yankees." When the regiment captured some Union soldiers and several black men, the Confederates became abusive until the black men insisted that the Yankees had forced them away from the rebels against their will. Later, Knox privately asked them about their experience with the federals, and they confided that "they had a very good time and that the Yankees were in favor of giving us our freedom." When Knox asked if they would ever return to Union lines, they affirmed that "the first chance they got, they expected to." Over the next few days Knox continued these clandestine conversations, but when "the rebels asked them if they liked to be with them; they replied yes, and insisted they did not want to get away; however the first opportunity that presented itself they made their escape." This made the Confederates furious and even more abusive to those slaves who remained. Knox greatly feared the consequences of running away to Union lines, but being captured by the Yankees became his "greatest desire." In

the end Knox was not captured, but he eventually mustered the courage to run away on his own initiative. Other black men, however, did gain freedom through Knox's dream scenario. For example, after the Union army captured Thomas Baker and his young Confederate master, the master was paroled and Baker joined the 3rd U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery.[4]

The exact course of emancipation varied by individuals' circumstances, but nothing prompted extensive migrations more than the movements of the Union army in Tennessee. A chaplain with Ulysses S. Grant's army watched in amazement as blacks from the plantations "flocked in vast numbers—an army in themselves—to the camps of the Yankees." To this observer, the advance of the black freedom seekers seemed "like the oncoming of cities." The arrival of federal forces tended to embolden slaves to abandon their masters, but Union withdrawals from an area also frequently triggered a mass exodus, as many slaves feared Confederate impressment or being sent farther south beyond the reach of federal incursion.[5]

A reciprocal relationship thus developed between slave actions and federal policy; as one historian concludes: "the more the slaves liberated themselves from bondage, the more the federal army was inclined to treat them as free men and women; the more the federal army considered them free, the more the slaves deemed themselves so." When Union troops invaded Tennessee and occupied the capital city of Nashville in February 1862, official military orders called for the exclusion of runaways from federal lines. Initially few Northern officers were willing to disobey this order, but breaches soon appeared in the policy. After the fall of Fort Donelson, Major General Ulysses S. Grant used the First Confiscation Act (which allowed the army to confiscate slaves that the Confederacy had used as military laborers) to impress black

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[4] Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, xi; Knox, *Slave and Freeman*, 49-52; pension file of Thomas Baker (alias Bracken), 3rd USCHA, RG 15, NA. For more on "black masks" in the context of the war, see Litwack's chapter on "The Faithful Slave," 3-63.

[5] Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 72; John Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865* (University, 1985), 22.

males into construction gangs. By June, military needs—not to mention the eagerness of many "contrabands" to escape their masters—undermined the exclusion policy. Federal troops seized Memphis in June 1862, and as General William T. Sherman assumed command in that city in July, Congress passed the Second Confiscation Act, which freed secessionists' slaves who came within federal lines. The presence of Unionist slaveholders complicated federal policy in Tennessee, and President Abraham Lincoln exempted the state from the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, but the coming of the Union army undermined the ability of local whites to maintain slavery.[6]

The army provided order in garrisoned towns, but often in a way that conflicted with previously established authority. In October 1862, Sherman assumed control of law enforcement in Memphis and ordered police to treat all blacks of the city as freedmen. Although the slave code remained on the books, it went unenforced by the military government. In November, Sherman declared that the Second Confiscation Act trumped Memphis's local laws regulating slavery, ordered that the "runaway slaves must be treated as free," and encouraged people "to give them employment as such." When a local judge pointed out that Sherman's orders contradicted the slave code, Sherman bluntly responded, "No Law of Tennessee [is] in conflict with the Law of the United States for the latter is the Law and if any Lawyer or Judge thinks different, the quicker he gets out of the United States the Safer his Neck will be." The experience of Judge Manson M. Brien, a Unionist and leader of wartime reconstruction in Nashville, clearly illustrates the shifting situation. In February 1863, Judge Brien called for strict enforcement of slave codes and laws pertaining to free blacks in the Davidson County court; but Brien himself clashed with federal authorities over his treatment of his own slave in July 1863, and by the end of the year he was instructing grand juries that it was no longer "*practicable* or

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[6] Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed*, 112; Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee*, 34-35.

expedient" to enforce the slave code. Brien repeated this counsel in the Rutherford County circuit court in May 1864 and concluded that the state's slave laws were "virtually repealed." Those who failed to recognize these changes were in for a rude awakening. Local authorities in Columbia sentenced contraband William Jordan to twenty-five lashes in 1864 for violating a town ordinance against educating slaves, but because the post commander had approved Jordan's school, the magistrate and two other town officials found themselves arrested and convicted in military court for assault and battery.[7]

The proximity of Union authorities eroded slave discipline in the countryside as well. Federal troops arrived near John Houston Bills's Hardeman County plantation in mid-1862. As of early 1863 Bills reported no trouble from his slaves, but he felt his power steadily slip away in the coming months. Most of his slaves remained on the plantation, but soon they were "working only as they see fit," which left the "affairs of the plantation in a wretched condition." By the end of 1863, only twenty-one of his eighty slaves had left the plantation, but Bills complained that "the institution of slavery is worthless to us as it now exists."[8]

Bills and his fellow slaveholders struggled with how best to address changing circumstances. When the Union and Confederate armies clashed at Stones River in late 1862 and early 1863, George Knox perceived changes in slaveholder behavior even with the ebb and flow of this single battle. While the Confederates appeared to have the upper hand, "you could hear them yell and order the slaves around." But the next day the Union seemed to be winning, and masters were suddenly "as kind as could be to their slaves." If the carrot failed some masters, the stick was a proven tool. Violence had always characterized the system of slavery in

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[7] Bobby Lee Lovett, "The Negro in Tennessee, 1861-1866: A Socio-Military History of the Civil War Era" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 1978), 29-31; Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee*, 42-44; Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed*, 113.
[8] Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 84-85.

the South; and, whatever paternalistic sentiments many slaveholders expressed, their world was ultimately held together by physical coercion and the threat of violence. Louis Hughes and other slaves in rural northern Mississippi heard stories of black soldiers in Memphis, and several black men unsuccessfully attempted to escape to Union lines. But Hughes remembered that after those men were captured and executed, "All of our servants were called up, told every detail of the runaway and capture of the poor creatures and their shocking murder, and then compelled to go and see them where they hung. . . . The bodies hung at the roadside, where the execution took place, until the blue flies literally swarmed around them, and the stench was fearful."[9]

Violence could be effective temporarily in isolated areas—Hughes and his family, for example, continued to be held as slaves into mid-1865, several months after the war's end, when they finally escaped to Memphis. But now more than ever slaveholders' attempts to assert power could backfire dramatically. The region around Clarksville was in Union hands beginning in early 1862, but George Childress and his fellow slaves did not leave their masters until February 1864, when "the whites got so bad on us" that "we all ran off to Clarksville, where we could be protected." Late one evening twenty slaves, "little and big, old and young" resolved to set out for the Union army lines with their masters' six-mule team, buggy, and extra mules. Not surprisingly, their masters were "very much enraged," and a party of twelve white men set out in pursuit; but the fugitives narrowly escaped their owners and reached the safety of Union pickets. Childress and the other male slaves quickly expressed their desire to join the army, for as Cicero Cummings observed, "a Blue Uniform protected us slaves." Like the other potential recruits, Childress was stripped and examined by a surgeon, who "squeezed me round the waist and belly and knocked me on my seat and felt of my hamstrings, looked into my mouth and eyes and made

[9] Knox, *Slave and Freeman*, 50; Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom* (Milwaukee, 1897), 154-55.

me jump and said ‘I was a good one.’” About half of the men in Childress’s party did not pass the physical, but by nine o’clock the morning after their escape, the rest were soldiers in the United States army.[10]

Childress’s experience demonstrates the magnetic effect of federal presence, but to others the Union army seemed an uncertain ally. After George Knox made his long anticipated escape with his brother to Union lines at Murfreesboro in mid-1863, he was not sure what to make of his new surroundings. White masters had spread rumors that the Union army wanted to re-enslave black contrabands and sell them to Cuba, and much to Knox’s consternation he overheard a blue-clad soldier musing, "‘There is a big fellow up there . . . that we could get $2,000 for in Cuba.’" Shortly thereafter, Knox witnessed another soldier brandishing “a great long wagon whip . . . as though he would strike at some one.” Afraid that his master’s warnings were about to come true, he later found out that the “whip was all for mischief.” Knox said to his brother, “This is hell isn’t it,” to which Knox’s brother replied, “it is.” Other escaped slaves struggled to adapt to life in the camp, and some even felt twinges of homesickness, but Knox encouraged them to “cheer up and be men and not get discouraged.” As difficult as conditions were, he reminded them, “don’t you know if you go home you will get your backs cut all to pieces?” Knox and his brother decided to stay, taking work as a teamster and a cook.[11]

As thousands of blacks flocked to refugee camps and towns, the question of their employment became increasingly important. Many Union commanders saw labor as the natural use for blacks, and hundreds, perhaps eventually thousands, of slaves were conscripted to construct fortifications at Memphis, Nashville, Clarksville, and elsewhere. But by 1863, Northern public opinion had shifted enough to make another potential form of employment for

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[10] Stephen V. Ash, *A Year in the South: Four Lives in 1865* (New York, 2002), 119-35; pension file of George Childress, 16th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[11] Knox, *Slave and Freeman*, 57-58.

black males more widely accepted: military service. At the outset of the fighting in 1861, most Northerners assumed that the war would end quickly and produce no social change; but as the conflict dragged on, expectations about the nature of the war changed—as can be seen in Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. As battlefield losses mounted to staggering proportions, the Union struggled to address the need for military manpower, eventually resorting to the conscription measures of Congress's March 1863 Enrollment Act. One federal officer remembered that some Northerners "looked at each other seriously, and asked if a black man would not stop a bullet as well as a white man," or, as a popular ditty more crudely put it: "The right to be killed, I'll divide with the nayger, and give him the largest half." The Lincoln administration "grudgingly, but irrevocably" turned to black enlistment.[12]

White officers initially had divided opinions about the wisdom of the undertaking. Many formed a discouraging first impression of their recruits. When Thomas J. Morgan arrived at Gallatin in October 1863 to organize the 14th U.S. Colored Infantry, the camp of black men was "a motley crowd" of young, old, and middle aged. To Robert Cowden, the average recruit seemed "a hard-looking specimen," with a "rolling, dragging, moping gait and a cringing manner," and a "downcast thievish glance that dared not look you in the eye." Cowden blamed the slave system for producing this affect, but his qualifying remark that the slave was "in no wise responsible" for his demeanor nevertheless reflected many Northerners' doubts regarding former slaves' capacity for military service. As General Sherman wrote in the spring of 1863, "I

[12] Lovett, "The Negro in Tennessee," 29-31; Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed*, 80; Thomas J. Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service with Colored Troops in the Army of the Cumberland, 1863-65* (Providence, 1885), 9; Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 9.

would prefer to have this a white man's war, & provide for the negroes after the Storm. . . . With my opinion of negroes and my experience, yea prejudice, I cannot trust them yet."[13]

In contrast, Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas insisted that black soldiers had a number of useful qualities. He argued that the "habit of obedience," particularly to white men, was a positive trait and asserted that they were a "musical people, and thus readily learn to march and accurately perform their maneuvers." But perhaps most importantly, Thomas recognized that black recruits "take pride in being elevated as soldiers." Thomas Morgan found that some of his soldiers were men of considerable intelligence and spiritual strength, and he was impressed by the "noble ideas" of some. One man told Morgan he wanted to "fight for freedom." When Morgan countered that he might be killed, the soldier replied "but my people will be free." Perhaps most importantly, Morgan recognized that the recruits had "men's hearts": "Among them were the same varieties of physique, temperament, mental and moral endowments and experiences as would be found among the same number of white men." Morgan was convinced that his soldiers would prove their manhood in combat if given the opportunity.[14]

By mid-1863, black troops had demonstrated their willingness and ability to fight. Black soldiers' performance during a March 1863 expedition into northeastern Florida was closely followed by the Northern press and built momentum behind President Lincoln's decision for full-scale black recruitment. In May and June 1863, reports spread of black soldiers' valor in Louisiana during an assault on Port Hudson and in brutal hand-to-hand fighting at Milliken's Bend; and the 54th Massachusetts's sacrifice at Fort Wagner just outside Charleston in July 1863 was one of the most publicized and discussed operations of the war. But the Emancipation

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[13] Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service*, 14; Cowden, *Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth*, 44; Anne J. Bailey, "The USCT in the Confederate Heartland" in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill, 2002), 229.
[14] Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 530; Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service*, 8, 14-15.

Proclamation indicated that black soldiers would be used for garrison duty, and many white authorities continued to view blacks as best suited for labor details. Tennessee's military governor, Andrew Johnson, who wielded considerable influence over black recruitment in the state, summarized his vision of a "double purpose" for black males in a September 1863 letter to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton: "first . . . Employ them on the Gov't works where needed and then Convert them into soldiers." Both the 12th and 13th USCI were formed in late 1863 specifically with fatigue duty in mind, to complete the construction of the Northwestern Railroad connecting Nashville to the Tennessee River at Johnsonville. This construction project involved the greatest mobilization of black labor in the state, as eventually over 7,200 soldiers and civilian conscripts were put to work on the railroad in preparation for Sherman's 1864 campaigns.[15]

Considerable tension developed among Union authorities over the issue of labor and recruitment into the army as soldiers. Governor Johnson warned against army recruiters and jealously guarded his power over laborers, arguing that "all the Negroes will quit work when they can go into Camp and do nothing." During the Atlanta campaign in 1864, Sherman threatened to arrest recruiters who interfered with black laborers employed by the quartermaster. "I believe that negroes better serve the Army as teamsters, pioneers, and servants," he insisted. While he claimed no objection to any "surplus" black men enlisting, Sherman claimed such a surplus did not exist: "I must have labor and a large quantity of it. I confess I would prefer 300 negroes armed with spades and axes than 1,000 as soldiers." When Adjutant General Thomas continued to press Sherman on the issue of recruiting black soldiers, Sherman testily replied,

[15] Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 172; Lovett, "Negro in Tennessee," 34-35, 288-90. On the significance of the Florida expedition, see Stephen V. Ash, *Firebrand of Liberty: The Story of Two Black Regiments that Changed the Course of the Civil War* (New York, 2008). Dudley Taylor Cornish addresses the fighting in Louisiana and South Carolina in *Sable Arm*, 142-45, 152-56.

"For God's sake, let the negro question develop itself slowly & naturally & not be premature cultivation."[16]

Ironically, in some respects employment as civilian laborers may have held more appeal for black men than enlistment in the army. A frustrated army recruiter in Nashville noted that as of April 1864, laborers were promised wages more than twice as high as soldiers' pay—in fact, some Union officials welcomed the idea of mustering laborers into army battalions as a cheaper and more efficiently controlled source of labor. Quartermasters offered laborers monthly wages of $25 plus rations, while black soldiers received only $10 and rations, from which $3 was deducted for clothing. Meanwhile, white soldiers were paid $13 including clothing. Making matters worse, black soldiers' extensive fatigue duty wore out clothing much faster, which also cut deeper into their pay.[17]

The harsh regimen of extended fatigue duty combined with poor living conditions to produce considerable misery among black troops. Because they were used primarily as garrison forces, they suffered a much lower rate of combat fatalities than white soldiers over the course of the war: about 4.5 percent of white soldiers died in battle, compared to only 1.8 percent of black soldiers. However, disease was the biggest killer among both black and white soldiers, and blacks had a significantly higher overall mortality rate than whites: 16.7 percent of all black enlistees died of disease compared to 9 percent of whites. An army surgeon reported from Memphis in May 1864 that his regiment's sick list was swollen with soldiers still ailing from the "excessive labor and exposure" of the previous winter. He sadly concluded, "Some of them will

[16] Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 172-82; Bailey, "USCT in the Confederate Heartland," 229-30; Michael T. Meier, "Lorenzo Thomas and the Recruitment of Blacks in the Mississippi Valley, 1863-1865" in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill, 2002), 262.

[17] Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 181. Black action and white response on the equal pay issue varied. At one extreme, Sergeant William Walker of the 3rd South Carolina Volunteers was executed for mutiny after he persuaded his men to protest by stacking their arms. Soldiers of the 54th and 55th Massachusetts simply refused to accept their pay until Congress equalized pay in June 1864. See Keith P. Wilson, *Campfires of Freedom: The Camp Life of Black Soldiers during the Civil War* (Kent, 2002), 44-58.

not be of Service again during their present term of enlistment." Summer conditions were sometimes no better. The 59th USCI spent the summer of 1863 in La Grange with "very discouraging" health, "more than forty dying in July, and nearly as many in August." The regiment's commander blamed the intense summer heat and black Southerners' unfamiliarity with wheat bread (he observed that health was restored after the Southern staple cornmeal was obtained), but he also speculated that his men's "superstitions may also have increased mortalities, for so frightened were they that going to the regimental hospital was considered the equivalent to death."[18]

Black soldiers' fear of army hospitals may, however, have been more the product of rational observation than superstition, for going to the regimental hospital *was* the equivalent to death for many black soldiers. A recent study of black soldiers' health finds that black regiments received "decidedly second-class medical care," in a time when, by modern standards, even first-class care was crude. An inspector with the United States Sanitary Commission in Memphis traced "the great majority" of black deaths "either to incompetency or carelessness of Medical and Military officers, or to errors in hygiene which might have been obviated." Nashville, a major center of black recruitment, also had some of the worst medical accommodations for blacks. Adjutant General Thomas toured a black hospital in January 1865, about a month after the battle of Nashville, and found wounded men still unwashed and wearing the same bloody clothing—or no shirts at all. Thomas roared at the officer in charge, "Had these been white soldiers, think you this would have been their condition? No!"[19]

[18]Margaret Humphreys, *Intensely Human: The Health of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War* (Baltimore, 2008), 10-11; Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 639; Cowden, *Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth*, 47-48. A major theme of Humphreys's study is white doctors' fascination with—and often misunderstanding of—black soldiers' bodies. For example, an exploration of morbidity and mortality rates by race reveals that black soldiers died of malaria at three times the rate of white soldiers, despite supposed black immunities.
[19] Humphreys, *Intensely Human*, 57, 68; Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York, 1990), 194.

Reports of poor treatment made some black Southerners hesitant to join the army. Some frustrated army recruiters resorted to impressment, but this only generated further ambivalence among black men. A white citizen of Rutherford County noted that as federals pressed local slaves into the 17th USCI in 1864, some had to be "forced away from home"—although "others as slaves [were only] too glad to get away."[20]

Despite discriminatory treatment and harsh conditions, black military service presented unprecedented opportunities and seemed likely to revolutionize Southern society. Those officers concerned with the moral and intellectual condition of their men could not help being impressed with many black soldiers' zeal for education. Alongside camp barracks and kitchens, soldiers frequently constructed schoolhouses where regimental chaplains taught reading and writing to enlisted men and women and children. Northerners found it "astonishing to note the eagerness . . . and also the rapid progress they made in learning. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds as one or another came out first or second best in the contests that secured prizes for best spelling, etc." Officers frequently commented on black soldiers' initiative in pursuing education: "Such intense interest was created that men going on duty were generally seen carrying their spelling-books or Testaments under their belts to their posts of duty and spending their time when off post in learning their lessons." Another officer agreed that "the men who went on picket or guard duty took their books as quite as indispensible as their coffee pots."[21]

Education opened opportunities for at least some black soldiers. A white surgeon with the 14th USCI described George Griffith as "a bright young fellow" although illiterate at enlistment. But Griffith was "very anxious to secure an education," and "with the advantages given him in the regiment . . . he learned to read and write in a very short time so that he became

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[20] John Hope Franklin, ed., *The Diary of James T. Ayers, Civil War Recruiter* (Baton Rouge: 1999); pension file of Egbert Bennett, 17th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[21] Cowden, *Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth*, 59-62; Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service*, 24.

competent to serve as a non-commissioned officer." The 59th USCI initially was staffed with white first sergeants, but as vacancies appeared white commanders selected "the most intelligent and capable colored men" for promotion. Significantly, this "made it unpleasant for the remaining white men in that grade and they . . . were all, at their own request, discharged"—thus creating more openings for black promotion. The "color-line" remained stark, but at least it was "drawn a grade higher" in this regiment.[22]

For all the misery, filth, and tedium of camp life, black enlistees shared in the élan of Civil War soldiering. The commander of the 14th USCI recalled that his men "took great pride in appearing on parade with arms burnished, belts polished, boots blacked, clothes brushed, in full regulation uniform, including white gloves." Their drills in Chattanooga attracted hundreds of spectators: "some came to make sport, some because it was the fashion, and others from a genuine desire to see for themselves what sort of looking soldiers negroes would make." What they found was a well-equipped and well-drilled unit, complete with a drum corps and a band with expensive silver instruments. Crowds also turned out in Memphis to watch the dress parades of the 59th USCI, and the men established a fund for a regimental band "uniformed in a new, beautiful, and costly suit."[23]

The significance of black troops in the South went far beyond pomp and parade, however; they also wielded power in tangible ways. Black troops on picket duty in Gallatin were ordered to apprehend anyone attempting to leave or enter the town without permits, and "thus many proud southern slaveholders found themselves marched through the streets guarded

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[22] Pension file of George Griffith, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA; Cowden, *Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth*, 58. The War Department hesitantly commissioned some black chaplains and surgeons, but generally pursued the less controversial policy of confining black soldiers to enlisted ranks. Many whites assumed that blacks simply were mentally and morally unsuited for higher rank, but the policy also reflected the pervasive view that the long experience of slavery made blacks most receptive to white command. See Glatthaar, *Forged In Battle*, 35-36, 72, 179-81.

[23] Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service*, 20; Cowden, *Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth*, 135.

by those who three months before had been slaves." Some of these confrontations were intensely personal. While still a slave, Louis Hughes overheard his master's family discussing their encounter with a black neighbor who ran away from his master to join the Union army in Memphis. The soldier was stationed at the city's outskirts to stop people passing to or from the city, "no difference who they were," and learn their names and business. Hughes's master's son and daughter went to Memphis and were halted by this former slave of their uncle. When they related the story to their father, he said: "And you halted did you? 'Why yes,' replied [the son], 'we had to do it.' 'Well,' the old man sputtered, 'I would have died-died before I would have done it. To think that a servant should have halted you!'"[24]

White responses to the black occupation forces ranged from anger and disbelief to fear. When the 59th USCI set up camp south of Memphis, white residents were "filled with alarm," anticipating the realization of the nightmare of insurrection and race war that had long haunted white Southerners. But in Memphis and elsewhere, black troops showed remarkable restraint. Thomas Morgan praised the discipline of his men, although he noted that they "often laughed over these changed relations as they sat around their camp fires, or chatted together off duty." Nevertheless, for many whites, the presence of black troops represented a society turned bottom-side up. A white woman who returned to Memphis in 1865 reported that "during my walks from one shop to another I sometimes had to get off the sidewalk into the street in order to make way for these Negro soldiers—they walked four and five abreast and made not the slightest effort to let a white woman pass. Sometimes one of them would say: 'We's all equal now. Git out o' our way, white woman." She concluded that "any stranger seeing those Negroes would have supposed that blacks, not whites were masters in the South." Black presence was not limited to a few encounters in the streets: "Negro squatters were everywhere"—including her old front yard.

[24] Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service*, 17; Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 171.

White residents who fled when Memphis fell in June 1862 returned in 1865 to find that the city's black population had grown from less than 4,000 to over 16,500. A great demographic shift occurred in towns across Tennessee during the war, and many black troops had close personal ties with the refugee camps and shantytowns that sprang up around Union garrisons. Some of the soldiers themselves were recruited from the camps, and numerous soldiers had families among the refugees.[25]

Black soldiers' determination to preserve and protect their families sometimes put them at odds with federal officials. White Southerners watched with growing dismay as blacks abandoned the countryside for towns, but the massive influx of rural blacks also concerned Union authorities. In March 1863, General S. A. Hurlbut reported that thousands of blacks in Memphis "crowded into all vacant sheds and houses, living by begging or vice, the victims and the fruitful source of contagion and pestilence." According to Hurlbut, "Pilfering and small crimes are of daily occurrence among them and I see nothing before them but disease and death." But beyond humanitarian concerns, many commanders also believed that the black settlements disrupted discipline among the black troops. John Foley, a lieutenant colonel in a black regiment, complained to T. A. Walker, the district's superintendent of freedmen, that "there are several hundred negro women living in temporary huts, between the camp of this regiment and the city, who have no visible means of support, and who are, for the most part, idle, lazy vagrants, committing depredations, and exercising a very pernicious influence over the colored soldiers of this Post. They are generally in a destitute condition, and their wants are partially supplied by soldiers of colored regiments who claim them as wives." According to Foley, his

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[25] Cowden, *Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth*, 53; Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed,* 122; Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service*, 17; Elizabeth A. Meriwether, *Recollections of 92 Years, 1824-1916* (Nashville, 1958), 164, 167; Kathleen C. Berkeley, *"Like a Plague of Locusts": From an Antebellum Town to a New South City, Memphis, Tennessee, 1850-1880* (New York, 1991), 121.

men constantly slipped away to be with the women, and "as long as these women are allowed to remain were they are, it will be impossible to enforce that discipline which is requisite for efficiency." Foley was not alone in doubting black capacity for morality. Colonel F. W. Lister of the 40th USCI argued that "the marital relationship is but little understood by the colored race, and, if possible, still less respected." He concluded that his efforts to maintain discipline were all that prevented the camp "from becoming a brothel on a gigantic scale." From the black soldiers' perspective, however, Lister and likeminded officers little understood or respected the men's commitment to their families. George Buck Hanon, a black soldier in Lister's regiment, wrote a letter of protest to General George Thomas pointing out that white officers had wives in camp, and "a collard man think jest as much of his wife as a white man dus of his." Hanon claimed that some of the black soldiers' wives travelled over one hundred miles to be with their men, but the men were not permitted to see them. "We volenterd and come in to the servest to portec this govverment and also to be protected our selves at the same time," Hanon concluded, "but the way colonel luster is treating us it dont seem like to me that he thinks we are human."[26]

Black soldiers and Union authorities repeatedly clashed over the fate of the soldiers' families. Many officers believed blacks crowding around army garrisons and contraband camps should return to the countryside. Hurlbut maintained that "if the fugitives now lurking about Memphis could return to their homes in the city and vicinity and their former owners would receive them and treat them kindly until the final determination of their status, much of the misery and vice which infest the city and vicinage would be removed." In April 1864, Lieutenant Colonel John Phillips offered to arrange employment for women on plantations near Helena, Arkansas, stating that under existing orders "the families of Colored Soldiers must be

[26] Ira Berlin, el al., eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, ser. I, Volume I, *The Destruction of Slavery* (Cambridge, 1985), 304; Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 713-15, 719.

made self-supporting." Assuring them of his "kindly" intentions, he insisted that "it is for their interest to go voluntarily" and hastily added that "they can have daily communication by boat with their husbands at Memphis." Black troops stymied federal plans, however. After Walker attempted to remove blacks to nearby President's Island, he disappointedly reported to Foley, "The people are unwilling to be moved, and will give no assistance to themselves, but lock their doors, and run to their husbands in the various military organizations for protection. The husbands swear their families shall not be moved to the Island and in some instances have come out under arms to prevent it."[27]

Former slaves had reason for their reluctance to return to rural areas. Shortages of food and supplies in the countryside had prompted flight to Union lines in the first place for some refugees, and, whatever assurances federal officials might offer, complaints of abuse on plantations continued to flow into garrisoned towns. Stories of whippings, beatings, murder threats, and the refusal to pay wages sounded too much like slavery for many blacks. If enough proof could be obtained, blacks could pursue charges against offending planters; however, few cases ever got that far. Admissible evidence often was difficult to obtain because a witness was needed and a black person's testimony did not hold up in court. Given the army's and (later) the Freedmen's Bureau's apparent powerlessness over whites, many blacks were more willing to risk the hardships of urban areas than to return to labor under white planters. Thus, even as black soldiers enforced federal occupation, they also advanced an agenda of their own which sometimes contradicted the plans of federal officials.[28]

If black soldiers were at times less accommodating than their white officers wished, on balance they rendered valuable service. Consignment to extensive fatigue duty was unjust and

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[27] Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 720; Berlin, et al., *Destruction of Slavery*, 304.
[28] Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed*, 91; Berkeley, *"Plague of Locusts,"* 123, 151.

demoralizing but nevertheless a boon to the war effort, and, as William Freehling notes, it was "the Federals' disproportionately black army of occupation" which enabled "the disproportionately white army of conquest" to march to the sea and to corner Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. This alone was an irreplaceable contribution and revolutionary in its own right—although as one USCT commander put it, "nobody doubted [the black man] would work, while many did doubt that he had the courage to stand up and fight like a man." But despite the reluctance of many Union authorities to assign combat roles to black units, their use as garrison forces defending supply lines ultimately exposed them to far more action than these white officials had intended.[29]

The Union's deployment of black soldiers posed distinct challenges for Confederate policy makers. Determined to uphold slavery, the Confederate War Department initially indicated that black soldiers would not be considered prisoners of war, but rather recaptured property to be turned over to state authorities and most likely returned to slavery, while white officers would be executed as insurrectionists. The Confederate Congress left it to individual states' discretion whether black soldiers would be returned to slavery or executed, but advocated that the states try white officers for fomenting slave rebellion. In the summer of 1863, Lincoln's General Order 100 announced a policy of retaliation: "For every soldier of the United States killed in violation of the laws of war a rebel soldier shall be executed, and for every one enslaved by the enemy or sold into slavery a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works." Neither Confederate nor Union officials consistently upheld these resolutions, however. Lincoln privately admitted, "The difficulty is not in stating the principle, but in practically applying it." Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon likewise acknowledged that the

[29] William W. Freehling, *The South vs. The South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York, 2001), 85, 173; Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service*, 24.

extreme course of executing slave soldiers was not viable due to "the embarrassments attending this question and the serious consequences which might ensue from the rigid enforcement of the act."[30]

Ambiguity in policy and many Confederates' bitter resentment of "disloyal" former slaves represented a potentially murderous combination. Perhaps the most infamous episode in the Civil War occurred at Fort Pillow on the Mississippi River on April 12, 1864. During a raid into western Tennessee, General Nathan B. Forrest's cavalry overwhelmed the fort's garrison of around 600 men, about half black and half white. In the rout that followed, one Confederate officer reported that some of the black soldiers "would run up to our men, fall upon their knees and with uplifted hands scream for mercy but they were ordered to their feet and shot down." Exactly what happened at Fort Pillow and whether Forrest and other Confederate officers were culpable immediately became the source of considerable controversy, but the statistics clearly indicate a massacre with a distinct racial dimension. More than twice as many federal troops were killed in the battle than were wounded—an odd occurrence for Civil War battles. In total, only about half of the Union defenders survived the assault, and the numbers reveal a stark racial contrast: one third of the white garrison was killed, while two thirds of the black soldiers were killed.[31]

Threats of retaliation following Fort Pillow probably helped limit the recurrence of massacres, but treatment of captured black soldiers remained uneven throughout the war. A soldier of the 44th USCI who was captured at Dalton, Georgia, in October 1864 testified that some prisoners were shot trying to escape, while the surviving captives were taken to Alabama, where they were formed in a line and many were claimed by their old owners. The Confederates

[30] Cornish, *Sable Arm*, 157-80; John Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory* (Baton Rouge, 2005), 62, 107.
[31] Cimprich, *Fort Pillow*, 70-85, 129.

put the unclaimed men to work on fortifications in Mobile with several hundred other captured black soldiers.[32]

In his report a few days after Fort Pillow, Forrest boasted that the slaughter should "demonstrate . . . that negro soldiers cannot cope with Southerners"; however, rumors of Confederate treatment of black troops only hardened the resolve of many black soldiers. Tens of thousands more blacks joined the Union army by the end of the war, and the idea of surrender, a dubious prospect to begin with, became unthinkable for many. "Remember Fort Pillow!" soon became the battle cry of black troops not only in Tennessee but across the South.[33]

The combat experience of many black troops remained limited to minor engagements or skirmishes with guerrillas, but black regiments also saw action at Nashville in December 1864, in one of the most important battles of the war. Following Sherman's capture of Atlanta in September 1864, General John B. Hood hoped to draw Sherman out of Georgia by invading Tennessee. When Sherman failed to take the bait (and instead launched a campaign of destruction to the Atlantic coast), the task of stopping Hood fell to Major General George H. Thomas. As Hood's army approached Nashville, Thomas gathered black and white garrison forces from across the region to counter the threat. By the time Hood reached the capital, his army was outnumbered by more than two to one, but he stubbornly ordered his men to dig in on the southern outskirts of the city and dared Thomas to sally forth from the extensive Union fortifications.[34]

Insisting that "the ultimate status of the Negro was to be determined by his conduct on the battlefield," Colonel Thomas Morgan had long petitioned for his men to be used in combat, and at Nashville his persistence was finally rewarded. On the opening morning of the battle, two

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[32] Ibid., 107; pension file of Shelby Sally, 44th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[33] Cimprich, *Fort Pillow*, 94, 106.
[34] James Lee McDonough, *Nashville: The Western Confederacy's Final Gamble* (Knoxville, 2004), 7-13, 135-36.

brigades of black troops and one white brigade were ordered to attack the extreme eastern flank of the Confederate army as a strong diversion from the main Union assault, which would come later in the west. The black troops encountered stronger fortifications than their officers had anticipated, and Morgan's brigade quickly lost over three hundred men. As a diversion, the maneuver was a failure, but black soldiers earned high praise for their courage in the futile charge. The next day, black soldiers again joined the fighting on the Confederate right flank. The frontal assault against the strong Confederate position on Peach Orchard Hill proved to be another costly blunder that resulted in terrible slaughter for no gain of ground, but even white enlisted men were impressed as the black soldiers lifted "a yell that sounded above the rattle of musketry" and drove headlong at the Confederate defensive works. Noting the heavy black losses, division commander James B. Steedman concluded, "I was unable to discover that color made any difference in the fighting of my troops. All, white and black, nobly did their duty as soldiers . . . such as I have never seen excelled in any campaign of the war in which I have been a part."[35]

While the black units' assignments were highly questionable, the battle ended as an overwhelming Union victory. Hood's Army of Tennessee, which had been one of the Confederacy's two major armies, "essentially ceased to exist" afterward, and black soldiers had demonstrated their fighting mettle in the decisive battle. Before the battle, General Thomas speculated that blacks might fight from behind defensive works, but remained somewhat skeptical of their usefulness in the open field. But as he surveyed the black and white bodies strewn across the Confederate works, even the doubting Thomas admitted: "the question is settled; negroes will fight." Colonel Henry Stone, whose 100th USCI saw action on Peach Orchard Hill, envisioned no less than the dawning of a new age: "the blood of white and black

[35] Ibid., 159-68, 225-35.

men has flowed freely together for the great Cause which is to give freedom, unity, manhood and peace to all men, of whatever birth or complexion."[36]

On April 5, 1865, at Nashville's capitol building (a short walk from Peach Orchard Hill), Unionists unfurled an enormous banner depicting black soldiers and schoolchildren and bearing antislavery quotations from the Founding Fathers. It was inauguration day for Tennessee's new civil government, and one of the legislature's first items of business that morning was the unanimous ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, abolishing slavery. The war was rapidly drawing to a close—a few days previous, the Confederate military and government had abandoned Richmond, and, a few days later, Lee would surrender the Army of Northern Virginia, signaling the end of the Confederacy. Black soldiers in Tennessee had indeed become a part of the war's force in powerful and unforeseen ways, but what role they would play in shaping the postwar society remained to be seen.[37]

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[36] Ibid., 274; Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 563.
[37] Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee*, 118.

Chapter 2: The Postwar Transition, 1865-1867

The wartime experience of black soldiers provided reason for both skepticism and optimism regarding how the "fruits of freedom" might ripen in the years immediately following the war. Between early 1865 and early 1867, black soldiers experienced both triumph and frustration as they explored the meaning of freedom with their fellow veterans and families and sought prosperity and political power in old neighborhoods and emerging communities. Their post-service transition was sometimes exhilarating and sometimes painful.

As of early 1865, however, the military careers of most were not yet over. Following the surrender of the Confederate armies in spring 1865, most Northerners were satisfied that the war was over, and many were eager to return to civilian life. "So long as the Union was imperiled and there were blows to be struck for freedom, I could endure the hardships and enjoy the service of the army," explained Colonel Thomas J. Morgan of the 14th USCI. "But when peace came, I felt my place was in the ranks of those who seek in some humble way to assist in promoting education and moral and social reforms." A few months after the war, Morgan resigned his commission, returned to Indiana, and resumed his college education, "which the foolish firing on Fort Sumter had so rudely interrupted." While many officers of the 59th USCI remained with the regiment in Memphis, the commander admitted that most of them "lost, in large measure, their interest in military matters, seeing the object for which they enlisted was now secured, and the calls to home, wife, children, or neglected business began to be more imperative." Perhaps not surprisingly, "it was quite impossible to keep alive the military spirit and maintain the high standard of excellence hitherto attained." At the same time, federal officials looked to cut back the expensive wartime army of one million men; however, at least some military presence

appeared essential to restore order in the war-torn South. The military's solution was to demobilize most white regiments relatively rapidly, while retaining the services of many black regiments recruited later in the war. In the war's final years, the Union's disproportionately black army of occupation had allowed the disproportionately white army of conquest to plunge deep into the Confederacy; in the months following the war, the disproportionately black garrisons allowed most of the white army to go home. Black military service in Tennessee extended for as much as one year after Lee's surrender. Most of the USCT regiments serving there mustered out between mid-December 1865 and the end of April 1866.[1]

In some respects, black regiments' postwar military service resembled their wartime responsibilities. Although the nature of the work shifted, black regiments still provided a ready pool of workers for disagreeable labor details. The 111th USCI supplied much of the muscle for the development of Stones River National Cemetery, just outside of Murfreesboro. In fall 1865, the regiment disinterred from battlefield graves about 600 Union dead—or "nearly a regiment of dead soldiers," as chaplain William Earnshaw put it—then loaded the bodies onto rail cars and reburied them in the national cemetery. It was a macabre and exhausting assignment, but Earnshaw, who oversaw the cemetery's establishment in 1865 and 1866, praised the black soldiers' effort: "Long as I live I shall remember how tenderly they performed this work amid untold difficulties; how cheerfully they set out on long and toilsome journeys through rain and storm in search of fallen comrades, and the proud satisfaction expressed by them when the precious remains were laid in the new made grave."[2]

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[1] Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service*, 51; Cowden, *Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth*, 137; Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 209-10. For an overview of USCT regiments' stations in Tennessee and dates of muster in and out, see Lovett, "Negro in Tennessee," 283-84.

[2] Miranda L. Fraley, "The Legacies of Freedom and Victory Besieged: Stones River National Cemetery, 1865-1920," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 64 (2005): 137-38.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of postwar service was simply black soldiers' continued presence in Southern communities. In the aftermath of the war some leading Tennessee Republicans, including Governor William Brownlow, proposed colonization plans to resettle blacks out of the state (and perhaps out of the United States), but one black newspaper editor spoke for many blacks when he declared that "old Tennessee is as good a country as we want." In cities and towns, where wartime contraband camps quickly evolved into postwar neighborhoods, black garrisons played a leading part in staking black claims to the local landscape. Edgefield, one such Nashville suburb where refugees created a new black community, hosted a picnic in October 1865 described as "a truly grand affair." Several black non-commissioned officers spoke alongside black ministers and General Clinton B. Fisk of the Freedmen's Bureau; and the 17th USCI regimental band led a parade through the main streets of Nashville, "making a very fine appearance" and highlighting an occasion "long to be remembered." Following the army band's appearance at the soiree of Nashville's black Barber Association a week later, the editor of the *Colored Tennessean* remarked, "It is rather pleasant walking about the streets now, listening to regimental bands playing 'Tramp, Tramp, Tramp' and the 'Star Spangled Banner.'"[3]

Black Southerners celebrated the USCT's continued presence, but many white Southerners grew exasperated as what they had hoped was a wartime aberration remained the

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[3] *Colored Tennessean*, 7, 14 October 1865. "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! (The Prisoner's Hope)," was a popular marching song for both the Union and Confederate armies. The lyrics of prolific white Northern songwriter George Frederick Root tell the story of a captured soldier languishing in an enemy prison, but blacks in Nashville and elsewhere in the South could draw their own meanings from the optimistic chorus:

> Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!
> The boys are marching;
> Cheer up comrades, they will come.
> And beneath the starry flag
> We shall breathe the air again
> Of the free land in our own beloved home.

See Irwin Silber, ed., *Songs of the Civil War* (New York, 1995), 35-37, 121-22.

daily reality months after the war. "While I sat at breakfast, no less than four companies of colored soldiers passed the window," a Northern preacher in Nashville wrote in September 1865. "Nothing can be more grating to the secesh and their sympathizers than to have these men placed as they are at every street corner," he added with cheerful satisfaction. "A Negro in 'bayonet and blue' symbolizes their humiliation and conquest, and proclaims emphatically the onward march of northern ideas and influence." The assertiveness of black soldiers occasionally provoked violent reactions. In August 1865, two black soldiers were riding a train near Memphis when a white man demanded their seats. When they refused to move, the white man pulled a gun, and in the ensuing struggle the black soldiers fatally shot him. Citizens at Collierville forced the two blacks off the train and lynched one of them.[4]

Ex-Confederates were not the only white residents who chafed at the continued presence of black troops, however; leading East Tennessee Unionists—including the nation's president—did so too. President Andrew Johnson and General George Thomas exchanged correspondence in late August and early September 1865 in which Johnson complained about black troops and warned of an impending black "insurrection." In a telegram to Thomas on September 4, he claimed to have information "of the most reliable character" that black soldiers stationed in the president's hometown of Greeneville were "under little or no restraint and are committing depredations throughout the country, domineering over and in fact running the white people out of the neighborhood." According to Johnson, "The negro soldiery take possession of and occupy property in the town at discretion, and have even gone so far as to have taken my own house and converted it into a rendezvous for male and female negroes who have been congregated there, in fact making it a common negro brothel." "It was bad enough to be taken by traitors and

[4] Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville, 1999), 62; Bobby L. Lovett, "Memphis Riots: White Reaction to Blacks in Memphis, May 1865-July 1866," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 38 (1979): 14.

converted into a rebel hospital," fumed the president, "but a negro whore house is infinitely worse." He concluded, "The people of East Tennessee above all others are the last who should be afflicted with the outrages of the negro soldiery. It would be far better to remove every negro soldier from East Tennessee and leave the people to protect themselves as best they may." In reply, Thomas informed the president that he had no white troops with which to replace the black ones, but he also tried to ease Johnson's mind. Thomas perceived not "the least foundation for fearing an insurrection" of black troops; in fact, "as a general rule, the Negro Soldiers are under good discipline." What altercations had occurred were typically caused by whites attempting to bully the soldiers, "for it is exceedingly repugnant to the Southerners to have negro Soldiers in their midst and Some are So foolish as to vent their anger upon the Negro because he is a soldier." Moreover, the rumors that Johnson's old home was a "negro whore house" were completely unfounded, although some white refugees had sought shelter there. Thomas cautioned Johnson to be wary of "evil-minded persons" who "misrepresent and exaggerate every event, however trifling."[5]

Even as black soldiers enforced federal occupation, their wartime habit of frustrating federal officials' plans for black refugees persisted after the war. General John E. Smith arrived as Memphis's new post commander in May 1865 and thereafter worked with the Freedmen's Bureau to send freedpeople back to the countryside, but black troops continued to resist these efforts. In August 1865, the head of the Freedmen's Bureau in Memphis complained to Smith that black soldiers were undermining the Bureau's authority by telling family and friends in the city to defy relocation plans. As Memphis's civil government reemerged after the war, ill-

[5] David Warren Bowen, *Andrew Johnson and the Negro* (Knoxville, 1989), 153-55. Leon Litwack observes that, whatever black soldiers' actual behavior, their very presence of black soldiers "violated tradition and provoked a vehement response in a people who had always viewed armed blacks as insurrectionists." See Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 267-74.

defined jurisdiction further complicated the situation. Military patrols and city constables shared responsibility for off-duty soldiers, and many soldiers worked in Memphis when not on active duty. To some extent, "vagrancy" and "disorderly conduct" were in the eye of the beholder.[6]

By late 1865, violence between Memphis's white police force and black soldiers had become frequent. In September Sergeant Joe Brown of the 3rd USCHA was sitting at his door when a policeman passed on the street. The policeman said to Brown, "I wish I could get a chance to kill all the damned nigger soldiers." Brown's reply, "You can't kill me," infuriated the policeman, and according to Brown he "ran up and struck me with his club, on the head. At that time another policeman came up and he struck me several times, and they thru me down and stamped me on the back while lying on the ground. My shirt was torn off and I was badly bruised." The policemen wanted to arrest Brown, but were foiled by the arrival of an army patrol.[7]

Redirecting black labor was but one source of conflict between black soldiers, federal officials, and local whites. Black leisure also became a point of contention. The conservative press and many local whites seem to have regarded almost any gathering of blacks as "disorderly." In early 1866, for example, Brigadier General Benjamin P. Runkle, Freedmen's Bureau superintendent for Shelby County, issued regulations for freedmen's dance halls, and the subsequent enforcement of these orders by city police infuriated many Memphis blacks. In February, two policemen broke in on a ball (which the mayor had approved) and attempted to arrest a number of soldiers' wives on charges of prostitution. After the women's husbands and brothers interfered and prevented the arrest, the two policemen retreated to find reinforcements. They soon returned with a force of seven men armed with muskets and carbines and, "cocking

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[6] Bobby L. Lovett, "Memphis Riots," 14-16; Kevin R. Hardwick, "'Your Old Father Abe Lincoln is Dead and Damned': Black Soldiers and the Memphis Race Riot of 1866," *Journal of Social History* 27 (1993): 118.
[7] Berlin, et al., *Black Military Experience*, 743.

their weapons, demanded a surrender." Witnesses stated that the police "behaved in a rough and boisterous manner crying, 'Shoot the damned niggers.'" This was but one of many acts of police aggression.[8]

The simmering racial tension in postwar Memphis finally boiled over, producing a race riot that ravaged the city's black community on May 1-3, 1866—ironically (but not coincidentally) beginning the very day after the last black regiment in Memphis was discharged. Dr. D. P. Beecher, who served as a surgeon for the black soldiers at Fort Pickering, was one of many who testified about the riot's origins. He did not have a particularly high regard for Memphis's black soldiers, regarding them as prone to theft, drunkenness, and laziness. But he insisted that police brutality provoked the trouble. "Three or four weeks previous to the riot," he stated, "the policemen of the city had been making very unnecessary arrests . . . in a good many instances using unnecessary violence." The congressional investigation of the riot reported that "about a week before the riot . . . there had been an arrest made of a colored man, in the neighborhood of the fort, without cause. The colored man was knocked down, most cruelly beaten, and carried off on a dray." At this, "The colored soldiers made threats that if ever the police came up again and arrested a man in that way they would resent it."[9]

The mustering out of the 3rd USCHA on April 30, 1866, did nothing to ease racial tension. Instead, it released a group of unpaid black men, still in uniform—and some with firearms—into the city. On Tuesday, May 1, a crowd of about one hundred of the newly discharged black soldiers congregated on South Street. Tony Cherry, one of the ex-soldiers,

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[8] Affidavits of Charles Swear, Robert R. Church, and John Green, quoted in Hardwick, "'Your Old Father Abe Lincoln,'" 117-18. On the Memphis press's exaggerated allegations of black soldiers' criminality, see Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill, 2009), 44-49.

[9] Testimony of Dr. D. P. Beecher before Congressional delegation in "Memphis Riots and Massacres," 39th Congress, First Session, *House of Representatives Report 1011* (Washington, 1866), 7, 145 (henceforth cited as *Report*).

stated that "the colored men had been drinking right smartly, and some of them hallooing 'Hurrah for Abe Lincoln,' and so on. A policeman came along and told them to hush, and not be hallooing in that way, and another policeman said, 'Your old father Abe Lincoln is dead and damned.'" The congressional investigation determined that the drunken crowd's behavior was sufficiently "riotous and disorderly" to justify police intervention, and two colored men were arrested in an "orderly manner." But at this time, "a colored man who a week before had been arrested by the police . . . discovered among the policemen making the arrests the very man who had arrested him." At this, "The colored soldiers began to gather around the policemen, threatening them in an excited manner, and calling out 'Club them,' 'Shoot them.'" As the policemen began to move off, some of the black soldiers fired their revolvers into the air. The police, "possibly thinking the soldiers were firing at them," turned around and began firing into the crowd of black soldiers. In the ensuing shootout, one of the policemen was killed and the police soon retreated.[10]

Later that afternoon, both the police and the black soldiers returned with reinforcements and fought a running battle in the streets. When the congressional investigators asked who, the black soldiers or white policemen, "shot the oftener" during the first evening, Tony Cherry replied that the police "shot oftenest," but only because "they had the most arms." The black soldiers "were doing the best they could, but they had hardly anything to fight with; a good many

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[10] Testimony of Tony Cherry before Congressional delegation, ibid., 7, 182. Two white men were killed during the riot, one a fireman and the other a policeman—but the evidence indicates that both were victims of "friendly fire" rather than black soldiers' bullets. The white policeman was most likely killed by his own pistol; the trajectory of the entrance wound and a powder-burn on his leg suggest that he accidentally fired his pistol and shot himself as he fell through a bridge. A witness stated that one of the white rioters, not black soldiers, shot Henry Dunn, the fireman. As a group of firemen and police rushed toward the black soldiers during the initial confrontation on May 1, another white man, John Pendergrast, emerged from a store brandishing two pistols. Pendergrast joined the pursuit of the black soldiers, and shot a man in the back of the head from a distance of five paces, killing him instantly. As soon as the man fell, Pendergrast realized his mistake and said, "We have killed one of our own men; I thought it was a damned yellow nigger." Pendergrast was "so mad that he [had] shot a white man," that he rejoined the pursuit and shot two black soldiers, and played a prominent role in the shooting and burning of a black woman later that evening. Testimony of Dr. R. W. Creighton and James Carroll Mitchell before Congressional delegation, *Report*, 8, 15-16, 124, 308-309.

of them who had pistols had no ammunition." The white and black combatants separated at nightfall, with the police retreating for more reinforcements and the black soldiers returning to Fort Pickering. Some of the black soldiers went to the fort's ordnance depot for ammunition. When guards turned them away, a few of the soldiers favored charging the depot, but most disagreed with this bold plan, and the group restrained themselves. Meanwhile, the police returned to South Memphis at about 10 p.m. with a two-hundred man posse. Finding that the black soldiers had retreated to the fort, the posse commenced what the investigators termed "an indiscriminate robbing, burning, and murdering" that persisted for the next two days.[11]

The attacks were not completely "indiscriminate," however, as the rioters particularly focused their violence against black soldiers. Witness Thomas Leonard testified that on the evening of May 1, white rioters mostly ignored a large crowd of unarmed blacks and "seemed to be looking after and pursuing the colored soldiers." The next morning, a rumor circulated through the white mob that "their orders were to shoot every man wearing blue clothes." Dr. S. J. Quimby testified that an unarmed black corporal who was walking to work was a target simply because he was wearing blue pants. The Shelby County coroner examined the bodies of thirteen black victims and reported that "all . . . were dressed in soldiers' clothes." The coroner's report does not prove that all thirteen had been soldiers; however, it does suggest the mob's primary targets.[12]

The mob's objectives are further documented by abundant testimony indicating that rioters interrogated blacks to determine if they were soldiers. Often these inquiries were of the "shoot first, ask questions later" variety. On May 1, a policemen shot Taylor Hunt in the head and then asked him if he was a soldier. Hunt reported that when he said no, the policeman said it

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[11] Ibid., 31, 184-86.
[12] Testimony of Dr. S. J. Quimby and Francis Ericson before Congressional delegation, ibid., 106, 109; testimony of Thomas Leonard before military commission, ibid., 314.

was a good thing he was not and went on his way. Rioters stopped Louis Bennett on May 2 and asked him if he had been a soldier. When Bennett replied that he had served on a gunboat, they called him a "damned smoked Yankee," and beat and robbed him. Obadiah Stockly reported that on May 3 three armed white men entered his home and confiscated his watch, his wallet, and a gun. They also asked if he had been a soldier, but warned him that "he had better not own [that he was a soldier] if he had."[13]

As Stockly's testimony suggests, one of the mob's primary concerns was disarming blacks. One witness reported that Fayette Dickerson, a black veteran, was standing by his house "when two men came up and struck him over the head with a stick; they then shot him in the head, a glancing shot; they then shot him in the abdomen, and then asked him if he had any arms about himself or in the house." The first night of the riot, when the white posse of two hundred armed men returned to South Memphis and found that the black soldiers had retreated to Fort Pickering, "they scattered around in small squads and went among the shanties, 'hunting for arms.'" Robbery, arson, rape, and murder accompanied the arms confiscation, but the terror was not completely "indiscriminate." The rioters clearly aimed to eradicate the presence of armed blacks in Memphis.[14]

The congressional investigation concluded, "That there was bad conduct on the part of some of the soldiers there can be no doubt, and the riotous and lawless conduct of a portion of them on the 1st of May is without excuse." However, the investigators agreed with federal commanders that blacks were not responsible for perpetuating the riot over the next few days. On the conduct of black soldiers, General Stoneman stated: "I must say, in justice to the colored troops, that their conduct compared very favorably with that of the same number of white troops

[13] Testimony of Taylor Hunt before Congressional delegation, ibid., 101; testimony of Louis Bennett before military commission, ibid., 330; testimony of Obadiah Stockly before Freedmen's Bureau commission, ibid., 336.
[14] Testimony of S. J. Quimby before Congressional delegation, ibid., 106-107.

under similar circumstances." Captain Thomas J. Dornin noted the remarkable restraint of black soldiers at Fort Pickering. With the exception of a few who attempted "to seize some arms to defend their families from the butcheries of the mob, there was the most complete subordination among them, although they had been in point of fact mustered out of service."[15]

Testimony demonstrates, however, that not all of the black troops were content to stay in the fort. D. Upman, a local white "Union man," reported that on the morning of May 2 he saw a "large crowd of several hundred colored people collecting near the fort, in front of the fortifications . . . some with United States muskets, others with pistols; some uniformed, others partly so; some twenty or twenty-five of them . . . engaged in firing at the people on South Street." Tony Cherry remained with other discharged black soldiers in the fort but watched from the ramparts as the scene unfolded on South Street. He stated that some of the discharged black soldiers outside the fort "kept up a pretty brisk fire for some time." According to Cherry, "the policemen and citizens were on horses down on South Street firing at every colored boy who had blue clothes on." As this white "cavalry" moved down the street, Cherry and his fellow soldiers in the fort assumed that the black flag carried by the whites meant "Kill them all. . . . Show no quarter." Under the direction of a white captain at the fort, Cherry and other discharged black soldiers loaded the fort's artillery and prepared to defend themselves if the white mob charged. Before the expected charge came, however, a group of blacks, four of whom had muskets, climbed a small hill near the fort and fired at the makeshift cavalry, knocking the flag bearer off his horse and scattering the mob.[16]

It is not surprising that some blacks felt their best protection was to take up arms themselves rather than wait for sympathetic federal authorities to intervene or for cooler heads

[15] Ibid., 31-32.
[16] Testimony of Tony Cherry and D. Upman before Congressional delegation, ibid., 40, 184-85, 194.

among the white mob to prevail. Unfortunately for the black community, the mustering out of black soldiers and the attack of local whites coincided with a change in federal military command at the Memphis post. A new general, George Stoneman, relieved General Smith not long before the riot and gave the impression that he would maintain a *laissez faire* policy toward local authorities and the black population. Stoneman testified before the congressional delegation that Memphis's civil authorities "had requested the withdrawal of troops from the city, stating that they were competent to take care of themselves. I preferred, therefore, to test the question whether they were competent to keep order, and waited for an application in writing from the city authorities before using any troops stationed here to interfere." On May 3, white teachers and preachers from black schools and churches came to Stoneman and reported that their buildings had been destroyed and that they had been personally threatened. Stoneman replied that "they must be their own judges as to what course they should pursue, but they should have all the assistance I could render them." When they asked for guards, however, Stoneman replied that there were not enough troops and that such dispersal "would destroy the efficiency of the whole, but that if they would go to the troops they should have protection, and that if they wanted to leave the city I would furnish them transportation to wherever they wanted to go." General Runkle of the Freedmen's Bureau also warned Northern teachers that he lacked the means to protect them and advised them to flee to Cairo, Illinois. With the "assistance" from Stoneman, "Many, and in fact nearly all of them, availed themselves of the opportunity and left the city." Of twenty-two Northern teachers who taught an estimated 1,200 black pupils before the riot, only four remained afterwards.[17]

[17] Testimony of General George Stoneman and Orin E. Walters before Congressional delegation, ibid., 52, 56-57, 259-61.

The immediate effects of the three days of rioting were two whites and forty-six blacks killed, seventy-five wounded, five black women raped, hundreds (mostly black) robbed, and four churches, twelve schools, and ninety-one houses burned. Property valued at $130,981 was destroyed. Of the forty-six blacks killed, at least fourteen were ex-soldiers, at least six of them members of the 3rd USCHA. The first few days of the transition from black soldier to black veteran in Memphis were inauspicious to say the least.[18]

In the weeks following the riot, Memphis's conservative white press expressed satisfaction. "The negro population of Memphis—the draymen, hackmen, porters, servants of all kinds, are as respectful and kindly in their deportment as they ever were," wrote the editor of the *Avalanche*. "With these, save in rare instances, our people would never have trouble. It is only with the negro soldiers that trouble has ever existed. . . . With their departure will come order, confidence, and the good will of old days." He concluded, "Thank heaven, the white race are once more rulers in Memphis." A few weeks later, he reflected, "Memphis has not been so quiet for six months. Why? *The negro troops are gone*. Memphis has had less idleness and vicious behavior among her black populations since the riots than during the six months preceding. Why? *The negro troops are gone*. Since their departure, the white citizens of all classes . . . have felt that a heavy weight of anxiety as to the future has been lifted from them, and that peace, quiet and prosperity are again within their reach."[19]

The 3rd USCHA was indeed the last active black regiment remaining in West Tennessee, and so in a technical sense the black soldiers were gone once they mustered out on April 30. But in fact, many of the black men who had worn blue uniforms were *not* gone in the days after the riot. Like other black ex-soldiers in Tennessee, the newly discharged men confronted a range of

[18] Ibid., 35-36; Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880* (Washington, 1941), 87.
[19] Memphis *Daily Avalanche*, 5, 18 May 1866, quoted in Jack D. Holmes, "The Effects of the Memphis Race Riot of 1866," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 12 (1958): 70-71, 74.

possibilities as they considered their futures. Remaining in the city, returning to the countryside, or perhaps seeking opportunities elsewhere—each option had its own potential benefits and hazards.

Some men chose not to leave the army at all. William Sumner, for example, began his military career as a musician in the 17th USCI, but used his Civil War experience to gain promotion to sergeant in the regular army in postwar Texas. Cicero Cummings also enlisted in the regular army and served on the frontier in the postwar years. But the number of troops who reenlisted in the postwar army remained relatively small—probably no more than 1 or 2 percent of black Civil War veterans. Like their white counterparts, black Civil War soldiers generally chose to return to civilian life when their enlistment expired.[20]

For some black veterans, the North seemed to beckon. A few even used wartime connections with white officers to make their way north, but these odysseys sometimes proved disappointing. George Knox heard good things about the North while serving as a teamster with the Union army in Tennessee. A runaway slave, he did not expect a warm welcome from his former master, so he convinced a white officer to let him come north with him. Knox traveled through Kentucky with white troops and reached the Ohio River, but as they reached the ferry to cross into Indiana, "some of the men on the boat swore that they would kill the first 'nigger' they saw on Indiana soil" and a lieutenant colonel forced all black men off the boat. Although briefly stranded in Louisville, Knox and some black friends eventually made it to Indiana and reconnected with his white army patron. But once in Indiana, "the colored boys said they were in a strange land and they were going back South as they wanted to go home." Insisting that he "did not propose to go out of heaven into hell," Knox was determined to stay in the North, and

[20] Pension files of William Sumner, 17th USCI, and Cicero Starks (alias Cummings), 16th USCI, RG 15, NA; Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 39.

went to Kokomo, Indiana, to learn to be a barber. But he was the only black man in the town, and his time there seemed about as lonely a period "as I ever spent in my life. I said that if ever God would forgive me, I would never spend another day in Kokomo as long as I lived."[21]

In some ways Alfred Green's experience was exceptional, but it reveals something of the limits for black Southerners in the postwar North. Green was one of the many runaway slaves who sought sanctuary in Memphis during the war. Before enlisting in the 3rd USCHA, he served a Wisconsin cavalry officer in Memphis by grooming his horses; after the war, this relationship allowed him to follow the officer to Wisconsin. White residents of Eau Clare came to know Green as one of "about two" black men living in the town, and, although his feet were crippled from the rheumatism he contracted in the service, his connections ensured that he frequently found light work cutting lawns, fixing gardens, and tending rose bushes. But need also compelled him to work part time in the "nasty" night business of cleaning the city streets and vaults. He drank whiskey to help him through the unpleasant work, but his white neighbors noted approvingly that he did not drink to excess. One citizen characterized him as "one of those darkies who would work. . . . He was pretty white for a darkie, i.e. honest and industrious." Green was also an object of pity to white acquaintances. A doctor who treated him in Wisconsin "considered it more charity, he being a colored man, and poor," and "never made any charges." But he was also an object of amusement for some. Another doctor who treated Green admitted, "I have always noticed that he went lame but did not think much of it as that is kind of a negro trick, to walk in that way." A white Union veteran in the town described him as "a regular plantation nigger with big feet and a shuffling gate—he dragged his feet." After being informed that Green's injury could be service related, this veteran replied that "the peculiarity of his walk may have been due to that but I supposed it was due to the way he had been compelled to work

[21] Knox, *Slave and Freeman*, 74-77.

in the South as a slave." Green's neighbors viewed his positive traits as exceptional, not necessarily shared by other blacks, while his weaknesses confirmed the stereotypes held by people who had little if any other contact with African Americans; few seemed to take the more positive view of his disability as a legacy of service rendered to the nation.[22]

Most Southern black veterans remained in the South after discharge, although many moved from one state to another within the region, in many cases returning to their homes after serving elsewhere. For example, the 1st USCHA was primarily recruited and stationed in East Tennessee, but George Forney's sergeant remembered him as one of a group of "North Carolina boys" who remained close during their time in the regiment. Forney and his mates returned to North Carolina together after the regiment mustered out. Some of these odysseys were quite dramatic. Franklin Gibbs and David Muller of the 40th USCI grew up and played together as slaves in western North Carolina, before running away to Tennessee, joining the 40th, and becoming messmates in the Union army. After discharge, they returned together to North Carolina, but Gibbs's legs were so weakened from an illness that Muller had to carry his friend on his back for much of their journey across the mountains. The two remained in North Carolina only a few months before together recrossing the mountains and settling in Carter County in East Tennessee. Brothers Jesse and Paul Bridgeforth enlisted in the Union army in Memphis, but after the war returned to their prewar neighborhood in northern Mississippi. Alexander Blackburn, John Brown, and William Gilbert knew each other as slaves in northern Alabama before the war, and all enlisted in the 110th USCI in Giles County, Tennessee. After discharge, the three returned to their Alabama homes, and Blackburn reunited with his wife from slavery.[23]

[22] Pension file of Alfred Green, 3rd USCHA, RG 15, NA.
[23] Pension files of George Forney, 1st USCHA, Franklin Gibbs, 40th USCI, Jesse Bridgeforth (alias Cotton), 3rd USCHA, and Alexander Blackburn (alias Gilbert), 110th USCI, RG 15, NA.

Returning to familiar neighborhoods to reunite with family was common among black veterans from Tennessee as well. After discharge Simon Smith returned to Cocke County and lived with his aunt. William Jennings returned to Wilson County after his service with the 14th USCI and reunited with his parents and a brother who had been separated by the war. Jennings settled within about five miles of where he lived as a slave. For some men, reunions did not require much travel. David Chears was a slave in Giles County at the outset of the war, and his regiment remained stationed near Pulaski for much of his military service. After the war, he returned to live with his parents and work on the same plantation where he had lived as a slave.[24]

But even when veterans returned to old haunts and familiar faces, they came back on markedly different terms. Few aspects of freedom were more important to veterans than their new status as heads of family. Benjamin J. Cobb and his sons Mack and David left behind their lives as the slaves of a Confederate officer from McMinn County to enlist in the Union army. Before the war Benjamin's marriage to Margaret, a fellow slave, had no legal basis, but she followed his regiment to Knoxville during the war, and the two returned to McMinn County after he left the army, now officially man and wife. Similarly, Jefferson Parks and Charlotte had lived together in Hardeman County for more than a decade before the start of the war and had several children together. Soon after his discharge from the service, Parks returned and legally married his longtime companion. Some veterans quickly emerged as community leaders after the war. David Hannum had a wife and two children before he enlisted in the 1st USCHA; after his regiment mustered out in spring 1866, the ex-sergeant returned to Maryville and became an elder in the town's Presbyterian church. Oscar Wilson, likewise born and raised in Maryville, had also served as a sergeant in Hannum's company; he too returned to Maryville and the Presbyterian

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[24] Pension files of Simon Smith (alias Samuel Gillet), 40th USCI, William Jennings (alias Harris), 14th USCI, and David Chears, 110th USCI, RG 15, NA.

church after leaving the military. Wilson applied his education to his community's advancement by teaching school in Maryville.[25]

But if some men were able to assert and advance themselves as never before, many limped back to their old neighborhoods as broken men. The scope of the suffering and devastation brought by the war was numbing to some. Years after the war, when asked about one ex-soldier's injuries, a neighbor simply replied that at the time "there were so many crippled and lame that I did not pay any more attention to one soldier than to any other." Regarding Fuel Williamson's return to friends and relatives in Marshall County in 1866, his sister-in-law stated simply, "I think he seemed glad to get home alive." Williamson's niece remembered that the man was a "strong and healthy" blacksmith when he went away to the army, "but he came out all broke up with rheumatism and army diarrhea," and could hardly put on his own coat because of the intense pain. With the support of his family and black neighbors, Williamson eventually returned to farming and blacksmithing, but he was unable to do much of anything for nearly a year after discharge. Claiborne Baldwin contracted a respiratory illness (probably tuberculosis) during his time in the 17th USCI that left him with a severe cough and spitting blood. When he returned to Rhea County after his discharge in 1866, his old neighbors found "a feeble man with a harsh cough," who was "thin," "short-winded," and "too weak to shake a hand." Baldwin was taken in by a sympathetic black neighbor, but he received little attention from doctors, as he "seemed too poor for them to come see him much and his case was called a chronic one that medicine would not help." The ex-soldier often attempted to do some light work for neighbors, but this "almost without exception resulted in Baldwin breaking down," and he never again completed a full day's work. William Manson made his way back to family and friends in

[25] Pension files of Benjamin J. Cobb, 1st USCHA, Jefferson Parks, 61st USCI, David Hannum, 1st USCHA, and Oscar Wilson, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

Murfreesboro after discharge, but he had sustained a wartime gunshot wound to his back and shoulder and subsequently developed a respiratory complication that left him coughing up thick yellow matter. This produced "very foul breath" and made it "very offensive" to go near him.[26]

Far from the soldierly ideal of manly independence, some disabled veterans slipped into dependence on their old masters. Shortly after Thomas Majors's discharge from the 1st USCHA, he and several comrades from his regiment returned to the Knox County farm of his former masters' widow. She admitted that she never knew the specific details of the ex-soldier's medical condition, only that "he was like a good many others that were in the War, he looked like he was fatigued and worried." Majors was unable to work the first three weeks after his discharge because he was "just fatigued and fagged down," but he recovered his strength and spent the next several years laboring in the fields of the "old home place." Robert Stone suffered from rheumatism after exposure to cold weather on marches with the 1st USCHA. He returned to his old master's farm in Knox County after the war and farmed there for the next six to eight years, but was never able to work more than half a crop because of his poor health.[27]

Former slaves taking up arms for the Yankee invaders had undermined slaveholders' cherished paternalist ideology; but, ironically, the debilitated condition of some returning black soldiers provided an opportunity for a few former owners to demonstrate their continued fealty to that ideal. In 1866, Jasper Gordon returned from the army to farm in his old neighborhood in Giles County. But heavy labor and exposure to the elements during his military service had weakened him, and he soon became ill. The son of Gordon's former master took pity on the ex-soldier and brought him onto his place, where Gordon remained for most of the next ten years. Egbert Bennett's homecoming was even more revealing of the attitudes and lingering hopes of

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[26] Pension files of Thomas Davidson, 14th USCI, Fuel Williamson, 15th USCI, Claiborne Baldwin, 17th USCI, and William Manson, 17th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[27] Pension file of Thomas Majors, 1st USCHA, and Robert Stone, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

one family of former slaveholders. When Bennett returned to Rutherford County, still "dressed up in a blue uniform," he "was delirious, talked out of his mind," and seemed to be suffering from jaundice and pneumonia. Several decades later, Bennett's owner's son vividly recalled "Egbert being brought in, his insensible condition and my old father's anxiety about him and [his] long illness." The family was shocked by the sight, but "my sympathy was aroused and I did all I could for him since he was forced away from us at the point of the bayonet a good, obedient, able bodied servant, one of our best." According to his old master's family, Bennett had been "pampered" and "well fed and clothed" as a slave. In stark contrast to his experience in the Union army, "he had not been exposed to hard weather night or day as he was growing up on the place." The old master's family nursed Bennett back to health, although "it took a year and better for him to walk as I fed and clothed him, bought medicines and all necessaries," and "have never let him suffer." Decades after his military service, Bennett remained "a wandering, inoffensive creature, full of pain." The notion that slave "disloyalty" had been due to the meddling of Yankee invaders or a few "bad niggers" had grown increasingly untenable in the face of individual betrayals and mass migrations during the war, but evidence that freedom had been forced on slaves provided comfort to some whites. The insistence that blacks were incapable of independence had been a major tenet of Southerners' justification of slavery, and some former masters could find a grim satisfaction in postwar evidence that they had been right.[28]

For many other former masters, however, the relationship with their workers had clearly changed. After Lewis Saffell was discharged from the army in early 1866, he returned to his old master's farm in Sevier County and went back to work operating a sawmill on the property. But

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[28] Pension files of Jasper Gordon, 110th USCI, and Egbert Bennett, 17th USCI, RG 15, NA. On planter attitudes regarding black weakness after the war, see Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long,* 360-63.

the ex-soldier appeared weak and sickly on his return, and after eight months the former master told Saffell that he “couldn’t do his work and he did not want me.” Saffell continued to live within about a mile of his old master and never moved more than two or three miles from his birthplace, but he had to find employment elsewhere.[29]

Former masters’ attitudes had changed, but former slaves’ attitudes had changed as well. James Grady ran away from his master in Kentucky in 1862 and eventually joined the 16th USCI, but after discharge in the spring of 1866, he decided to return to his old owner, who hired him as a farm laborer. Although Grady’s health was fine, the relationship was clearly not the same. To the former owner’s wife, Grady seemed “mighty lazy after he came back,” and her husband soon decided that his former slave was “not worth a damn” anymore. (In contrast, another white man who hired Grady off and on for some twenty years praised the ex-soldier’s work and deemed him “as reliable a negro as I ever knew in my life.”) Evidently, the distaste was mutual: around Christmas of 1866, Grady left his former master and bought his own place near Clarksville. Although he later returned to the old Kentucky neighborhood to farm with his brother, Grady never saw his old master’s family again.[30]

During the war, the presence of Union garrisons had drawn thousands of blacks from the countryside to Tennessee’s cities and towns. Despite crowding, poor sanitation, and the threat of racist violence so vividly demonstrated in the Memphis riot, many black Southerners continued to view urban areas as the most attractive destinations. For some veterans, returning to old neighborhoods simply was not a viable option. George Pollard ran away from his master in Montgomery County and joined the Union army at Clarksville. Shortly after reaching the town, Pollard gathered a squad of soldiers to accompany him to the farm of his old master, where he

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[29] Pension file of Lewis N. Saffell, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.
[30] Pension file of James Grady (alias Redmond), 16th USCI, RG 15, NA.

demanded payment for a crop of tobacco that he had raised and threatened to haul his master before the federal authorities if he refused to pay. The ex-soldier remained in Montgomery County after discharge; however, he never returned to his old home. As another former slave testified, Pollard, "did not go back to his old master's place, because his master would have killed him for bringing the soldiers out to his place." Instead, he remained in Clarksville, where other black veterans provided a network of support. Sylus Elliot and George Childress had deserted their "bitter secessionist" masters for the safety of Union lines. Decades after the war, Childress still characterized his master as "dangerous mean man, a Confederate Soldier, averse to us having any potential rights," who "for our running away . . . owes us no good will until this day." Rather than risk returning home, Elliot and Childress decided to remain in Nashville after the war in the company of other veterans, and both became active in black churches and benevolent societies.[31]

The war shattered some relationships, but new connections also emerged from the chaos. As a slave in northern Mississippi, Jacob Burnett had a wife who belonged to a different owner. He escaped slavery and joined the Union army near Memphis, but his wife was "run off down south" to avoid emancipation, and he never saw her again. But in February 1865, his regiment was ordered to Louisiana, and there he met a woman named Cerina who had run away from a large sugar plantation south of New Orleans. She accompanied Burnett throughout 1865 as his regiment traveled to Pensacola and Mobile, and after he was mustered out at Baton Rouge in December 1865, the two went north to Memphis to begin a new life together. London Mathies, raised in Alabama, came to Memphis during the war and enlisted in the army. He remained near the city after the war, farming with his father-in-law in Shelby County. Peter Covington of

[31] Pension files of George E. Pollard, 12th USCI, and George Childress, 16th USCI, RG 15, NA.

Carroll County and Amos Patterson of Maury County met after enlisting in the same artillery battery in Memphis and after the war lived as neighbors in the city.[32]

Many veterans took advantage of their new freedom of movement by trying town life but then returning to the countryside, or vice versa. After the 1st USCHA mustered out, Jordan Hodge spent a year in Clinton before returning to his prewar home in Jefferson County, where he lived near other black veterans from his regiment whom he had known since boyhood. Hamilton Davis, also of the 1st USCHA, lived in Knoxville for a short time after discharge, but then returned to live near family and in the same neighborhood as his old master in McMinn County. Sampson Smithers decided to remain in Nashville when the 12th USCI mustered out, but after a few years he returned to his old Alabama neighborhood to try farming. When his poor health made him give up farming, he returned to the company of his army comrades in Nashville.[33]

Maintaining ties with fellow veterans and exploring new employment options frequently went hand in hand. Barney Cox had been a plantation slave in northern Mississippi, and he returned to farming after discharge in early 1866—but not at his old home. Instead, he joined a group of at least seven other recently discharged soldiers who were recruited as farm laborers by a wealthy planter in Fayette County, one of the employers who "inundated" army camps at discharge, eager to tap the fresh source of laborers. After the 12th USCI mustered out, ex-sergeant Jesse Overton came to the iron works of Cumberland Furnace in Dickson County "with a band of colored soldiers—they were right out of the army and some of them had their

[32] Pension file of Jacob Burnett, 61st USCI, RG 15, NA; accounts of London Mathies, no. 130, Peter Covington, no. 150, and Amos Patterson, no. 151, Memphis Branch, Freedmen's Bank Registers, RG 101, NA.
[33] Pension files of Jordon Hodge, 1st USCHA, Hamilton Davis, 1st USCHA, and Sampson Smithers, 12th USCI, RG 15, NA.

muskets." Overton's skills as a carpenter secured him a job repairing wagons and carts, and he never returned to his old neighborhood or saw his master again.[34]

Even veterans not as skilled as Overton in many cases emerged from the war with a degree of mobility due to wealth. While irregular payment and delays in processing bounties and backpay had frustrated black soldiers who desperately needed the money, the flawed system resulted in what one historian terms an "involuntary savings plan" that allowed a modest accumulation of wealth. Considering how little most black Southerners started with at emancipation, even small amounts were relatively significant—particularly for those who returned from the war in poor health. When an investigator from the pension board asked Lewis Saffell if he did not work after leaving the army because he was physically unable or because he had some money, the veteran explained that he did have some money to help him through the difficult period, but could not work because of his poor physical condition.[35]

Such money could be useful, however, only if black veterans managed to get it. As eagerly as many soldiers had embraced education, few were any match for the complexities of the system. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cowden noted that claim agents were "almost as numerous in Memphis at this time as locusts in Egypt during the reign of a certain Pharaoh." After the 59th USCI mustered out in January 1866, his men were "harassed in camp and at every corner by these persons, who used every argument, promise, and entreaty, in order to get possession of their discharges and the privilege of collecting their bounties." In arrangement with the other officers, Cowden offered to collect all of the discharge papers from his men and personally handle their claims. Cowden later reported that all 530 men who gave their papers and power of attorney to him received payment within a few years. Certainly, ex-soldiers were

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[34] Pension files of Barney Cox, 61st USCI, and Jesse Overton, 12th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[35] Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 41; pension file of Lewis N. Saffell, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

glad to finally get the money promised them—although Cowden's take, at $10 per claim collected, profited him as well.[36]

While prosperity remained elusive for many during the postwar transition, in some respects black soldiers seemed poised to make considerable gains in the political realm. Black soldiers were symbolically and literally at the forefront of black political activity during the postwar transition. They assumed particularly prominent positions in public celebrations affirming black freedom. In 1865, soldiers and USCT bands led a procession of hundreds of people through the principal streets of Nashville to celebrate Independence Day. A Memphis parade including men from several USCT regiments on August 1 was part of a celebration of West Indian Emancipation that drew thousands of men, women, and children. In September, a regimental band headed a Gallatin parade of black fraternal groups and school children that marked the anniversary of Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. On the first day of 1866, despite wet, wintry weather that had transformed Nashville streets into a muddy slough, black soldiers and a regimental band led a parade of several hundred blacks to celebrate the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. January 1 was especially meaningful for black Southerners, for emancipation revolutionized the meaning of a day previously known as "heartbreak day" because of its association with contract-signing and debt settlement. As prominent black minister and USCT chaplain Henry McNeal Turner explained, "This day which hitherto separated so many families, and tear-wet so many faces; heaved so many hearts, and filled the air with so many groans and sighs; this of all others the most bitter day of the year to our poor miserable race, shall henceforth and forever be filled with acclamations of the wildest joy. . . . Before this day, all other days will dwindle into insignificance for us." As the Nashville parade wound through the city, black soldiers marched ahead of a wagon crowded with black

[36] Cowden, *Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth*, 138.

children and an auctioneer "beseeching the bystanders to bid high for a choice lot of young negroes"—a vivid reminder to black Southerners of how far they had come in so short a time under the protection of their soldiers.[37]

Black Tennesseans recognized and praised the role of their soldiers in transforming Southern society, but it remained to be seen how white Tennesseans would respond to black appeals for rights beyond basic freedom. As the all-white Union Convention of Tennessee prepared to meet in January 1865 to reestablish the state government, a "Petition of the Colored Citizens of Nashville" rooted its claims explicitly in the service of black soldiers: "Near 200,000 of our brethren are to-day performing military duty in the ranks of the Union army. Thousands of them have already died in battle, or perished by a cruel martyrdom for the sake of the Union, and we are ready and willing to sacrifice more. But what higher order of citizen is there than the soldier? or who has a greater trust confided to his hands?" Considering Tennessee's large pro-Confederate population, black votes were essential to preserving the Union cause in the state: "If we are called on to do military duty against the rebel armies in the field, why should we be denied the privilege of voting against rebel citizens at the ballot-box? . . . The Government has asked the colored man to fight for its preservation and gladly he has done it. It can afford to trust him with a vote as safely as it trusted him with a bayonet." In addition to voting rights the petitioners begged the Union Convention to reconsider the ban on black testimony in Tennessee courts. "A colored man may have served for years faithfully in the army, and yet his testimony in court would be rejected," they complained, "while that of a white man who had served in the rebel army would be received." If this injustice was not corrected, "then will our last state be worse than our first, and we can look for no relief on this side of the grave. Has not the colored

[37] Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 6 July 1865, 2 January 1866; *Colored Tennessean*, 7 October 1865; Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst, 2003), 118-21.

man fought, bled and died for the Union, under a thousand great disadvantages and discouragements? Has his fidelity ever had a shadow of suspicion cast upon it, in any matter of responsibility confided to his hands?" After pledging "ourselves, and our families, with all that we have on earth" to the cause of Union, the petitioners expressed hope that loyal Tennessee would allow blacks "to perform the full measure of our duty both as citizens and soldiers."[38]

At least one white legislator agreed with the petition. Soon after the new state government went into operation in April 1865, state senator B. R. Peart of Montgomery County introduced a measure to make blacks competent witnesses in court, commenting that "if the negro is good enough to fight he is good enough to exercise the prerogatives of a free man." Much to black Tennesseans' disappointment, however, many of Peart's colleagues remained unconvinced. The proposal faced particularly heavy opposition from East Tennessee and never came to a vote. Radicals calculated that keeping ex-Confederates disfranchised would be enough to maintain control of state politics without granting black voting rights.[39]

In August 1865, black leaders assembled in Nashville for the first State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Tennessee to assess the condition of their race and plan for the future. Soldiers played a prominent role at the gathering. Among the 104 delegates listed in the Nashville *Daily Press and Times* were twenty-six soldiers representing six USCT regiments stationed in Middle and East Tennessee. Duty likely prevented other black soldiers from participating in the convention; but even so, it quickly became apparent that soldiers' symbolic significance in the proceedings was disproportionate to their numbers. The first morning of the convention, Sergeant Henry J. Maxwell of the 2nd USCLA delivered "an eloquent speech" that "struck the keynote of the occasion." He announced that he stood before his fellow delegates "as

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[38] Berlin, el al., *Black Military Experience*, 811-16.
[39] William Gillespie McBride, "Blacks and the Race Issue in Tennessee Politics, 1865-1876" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, Nashville, 1989), 41-42.

an American, claiming the inalienable rights of a man. Life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness were his prerogatives. Life and liberty meant to share in the Government by which they were protected and the right to live anywhere on the continent. Should not these rights be the rallying theme of the Convention?" He underscored the soldiers' role:

> By this music we march to victory. We shall be heard before Congress and before the Legislature. We have come here for principles, and there will be no dissension. We want the rights guaranteed by the Infinite Architect. For these rights we labor; for them we will die. We have gained one—the uniform is its badge. We want two more boxes, besides the cartridge box—the ballot box and the jury box. We shall gain them. The government of this nation will not prove false to its plighted faith. It proclaimed freedom and we shall have that in fact. It will not forswear itself. Let us all work faithfully unto the end.[40]

Reverend James Lynch's address later that morning emphasized similar themes. "We have met here to impress upon the white men of Tennessee, of the United States, and of the world, that we are part and parcel of the American Republic," he began. "In the past struggle, when the nation stood trembling upon the verge of the precipice, the black man came to the rescue, his manhood was recognized in that hour of national trial." In an appeal for the right of testimony in Tennessee courts later in the week, he noted that "Thirty-three thousand one hundred and thirty-three colored men have fallen in the struggle for the Union. From the ground their blood crieth." The lack of protection appalled him: "Does it not make ungrateful return to the 158,270 colored men who have, according to the last official report of Secretary Stanton been mustered in as soldiers of the United States army, to say nothing of the sailors in the navy, and

[40] *Colored Tennessean*, 12 August 1865; Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 8 August 1865; Judy Bussell LeForge, "State Colored Conventions of Tennessee, 1865-1866," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 65 (2006): 230-53. While service in the Union army was a primary focus, the convention also boasted military credentials stretching much deeper into Tennessee's past. The opening prayer for the first day's afternoon session was delivered by Elder Edwin (or Edmond) Jones, a delegate from Sumner County who had joined a Tennessee company and "served under General Jackson as a private soldier in the War of 1812," and thereafter "voted for Gen. Jackson for President." Free blacks in Tennessee were eligible voters until 1835, when the new state constitution explicitly limited the franchise to white men.

the thousands of Government employees? . . . I ask, can loyal people deny the brothers, fathers, mothers, sisters, wives and daughters and sons of these men and the men themselves the privilege of testifying to outrages committed upon them by traitors and outlaws?"[41]

General Clinton B. Fisk of the Freedmen's Bureau delivered a supportive message to the convention, but he urged patience—particularly regarding political rights. Fisk admitted that he had been mainly interested in blacks' material needs and "had not thought so much" about voting rights, but believed that "suffrage will come around all right." As "one of the first men to give the colored man a bible" and "the first to give him a bayonet," Fisk promised, "I shall not be behind in giving him the *ballot*. With this swarm of *B's* I think the negro will take care of himself."[42]

The convention's final resolutions, however, revealed that patience was wearing thin. In "an appeal to the loyal white citizens of Tennessee," the delegates reiterated that "the Federal Government has called for our assistance in putting down the late iniquitous rebellion and acknowledged not only our humanity and right to freedom, but our just claim to all other [rights as] citizens under the Government." The convention threatened to protest the U.S. Congress's seating of the Congressional delegation from Tennessee if the state legislature did not grant voting rights to black males by December 1, 1865.[43]

Some white politicians were willing to consider expanding black rights, at least in some limited form. In October 1865, John Trimble proposed a bill for the gradual enfranchisement for all black soldiers and other black men freed before February 22, 1865, provided they could pass a literacy test. However, even with this restrictive language, the Trimble bill bogged down in committee for several months and failed to gain any momentum. But even as attempts to secure

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[41] *Colored Tennessean*, 12 August 1865.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

black political rights languished, Governor Brownlow felt pressure from his political base in East Tennessee to end the presence of black troops and restore full state authority. Under these circumstances, he supported the extension of black legal rights as a way of removing the state from Freedmen's Bureau authority. Such concessions remained difficult for many in the General Assembly to swallow; in November 1865, legislators rejected a bill allowing black testimony, but then reconsidered and in January 1866 passed the measure—although an amendment specifically prohibited blacks from voting, holding office, or sitting on juries.[44]

As white Tennessee Radicals plotted their course between national and state considerations and largely ignored the demands of the black convention, a division emerged in the black leadership between those who supported an aggressive strategy and those advocating moderation. Soldiers—including Sergeant Maxwell, who had spoken forcefully at the August convention—addressed large black audiences in the fall of 1865, but they frequently shared the stage with more conservative black leaders.[45]

By the time of the second State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Tennessee in August 1866, the division was sharpening between those who supported the Equal Rights League's calls for full political and legal rights and others who stressed education and economic improvement—which, they feared, might be compromised by agitating political questions. A bloody race riot in New Orleans on July 30, 1866, raised the stakes as the delegates prepared to meet in Nashville. The New Orleans riot stemmed from a meeting of delegates from the Louisiana constitutional convention supporting black voting rights. Some 300 blacks, about half of them Union veterans, escorted the delegates to their assembly hall to prevent any disruption of the proceedings, but fighting erupted between the black supporters and a white crowd during the

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[44] Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 3 October 1865; McBride, "Blacks and the Race Issue," 60-63, 108-109.
[45] *Colored Tennessean*, 7 October 1865; McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 108-109.

convention's first afternoon. Supporters of the convention had a few pistols, but mostly were armed with canes, sticks, and clubs. The New Orleans police joined the white mob to overwhelm the black defenders and storm the hall, massacring those inside. Many black veterans were among the 38 dead and 146 wounded. In the long run at the national level, the New Orleans riot discredited President Johnson's lenient reconstruction agenda and proved a rallying point for Radicals in their bid for congressional control. But in the immediate aftermath of the riot, some black Southerners—with the Memphis riot of May also in mind—concluded that caution was more essential than ever. On August 1, black revelers conducted marches in Memphis and Nashville celebrating West Indian emancipation without provoking violence, but some blacks worried that any spark might set off another explosion of violence in the South.[46]

Daniel Watkins, the convention's central committee president, was among those who felt that discretion was the better part of valor. In a carefully worded letter, he requested Nashville Mayor W. Matt Brown's "approbation" and "protection" for the convention, and announced the plan to deliberate on "Agriculture, Manufactures, Mining and Education"—remaining conspicuously silent on the matter of politics. The mayor pledged his support, and alluded to the New Orleans riot's origins in "trivial causes or indiscretions," while "very earnestly" urging "a strict adherence to the discussion of the objects named." Mayor Brown was happy to wish the convention success, as long as politics remained off the agenda.[47]

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[46] Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 71-72; James G. Hollandsworth, Jr., *An Absolute Massacre: The New Orleans Race Riot of July 30, 1866* (Baton Rouge, 2001), 146-49. In an August 1 report, John Lawrence, the Freedmen's Bureau superintendent for Davidson County, noted that a local newspaper editorial "appears to justify the New Orleans Massacre and to threaten a similar scene here. I hope that the authorities will be prepared for any emergency." Although Lawrence claimed to have no such apprehensions about Nashville until that morning, he sensed that "the Mob Spirit" was "certainly manifesting itself in an alarming manner" in parts of the South. See "Report of outrages perpetrated on blacks by whites in Nashville Sub District since June 1, 1866," Nashville, 28 August 1866, Reports and Affidavits Relating to Outrages and Riots, Selected Records of the Tennessee Field Office of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives Microfilm Publications, T142.
[47] Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 6 August 1866; McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 133;

Black soldiers were far less prominent within the 1866 convention than in the previous one, but some black veterans found other ways to announce their presence and express their thoughts on the proceedings. When the convention opened, it soon became apparent that the correspondence between Watkins and Mayor Brown had "caused a good deal of embarrassment and restiveness," for some delegates resented the exclusion of politics as "a hint for them to be dumb on the main question presented in the published call of the Convention." That morning, Watkins and several other black ministers delivered remarks focusing on education while "giving the political rights of the freedmen a wide berth." The white Republican press praised the remarks as "interesting, judicious, and well delivered," but apparently some blacks, including a Nashville veterans' organization known as the Colored Soldiers' League, were less impressed. As Reverend G. W. Lavere attempted to deliver his speech on education, members of the League, whom the *Daily Press and Times* derisively described as a "disorderly company of persons outside who had resurrected an old drum and fife, and a few old rusty swords and dirty uniforms," began "parading around the church." When the assembly reconvened that afternoon, Lavere "advised that the Convention disapprove of the parading of processions of colored people through the streets with bands of music during its session," and urged "the colored citizens to abstain from all unnecessary demonstrations." The motion was approved unanimously; however, the "drum and fife squad" passed the church again during the afternoon session, "making a most disagreeable din and disturbing the proceedings in no small degree," until a messenger informed the party of "the decided wish of the Convention that they would either stop their noise or withdraw."[48]

Despite the convention's efforts to distance itself from the Colored Soldiers' League, League president Joseph E. Williams was himself a convention delegate. During the

[48] Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 7 August 1866

convention's second afternoon, the ban on political discussion gave way to heated debate, and Williams emerged as a supporter of cooperation with the Equal Rights League. When one delegate expressed skepticism about the legality of political leagues and urged his colleagues to have faith in the more cautious approach of General Fisk and the central committee, Williams grew impatient and asserted that "the colored race had rights—civil rights. They had the right to form leagues, if they chose, and it was lawful and legal to do so. When we come together in convention we have rights, which must be kept sacred." The convention's constituents "had rights which ought to be asserted. They wanted to have equal rights before the law." Opponents of the Equal Rights League ruled Williams out of order and pronounced his remarks "irrelevant to the subject under debate," but the political discussion only intensified, and by the end of week, the convention resolved to take the more aggressive stand and join forces with the Equal Rights League.[49]

The strategy proved to be well-timed. Despite the Radical leadership's long reluctance to enfranchise blacks, growing fear that the state would fall into "disloyal hands" led by late 1866 to a change of heart. In answer to Governor William Brownlow's appeal for the enfranchisement of "loyal" blacks, Representative W.Y. Elliot introduced in January 1867 House Bill 739, which provided for suffrage for literate blacks, those who owned real property, and those who had served in the United States army. Thomas Mason of Roane County introduced a second bill granting the vote to "honorably discharged black servicemen" and those who could read the United States Constitution. The Voting Act's final form removed these stipulations, for by this time the Radicals felt they needed all the help they could get to hold off the Conservatives. Tennessee thus became, in February 1867, the first state in the South (and only the second state outside of New England) to give all black males the vote. Suffrage was an enormous

[49] Ibid., 7, 11 August 1866

achievement for black Tennesseans—although, significantly, Section 16 of the bill specified that "nothing in the act should be construed to allow Negro men to hold office or sit on juries."[50]

The voting law had sparked considerable debate among white Tennesseans. Conservatives and Radicals alike wondered whether these political rights would result in blacks flocking to Tennessee--but neither side seemed entirely sure whether such an outcome would be good or bad. Radicals who had once hoped that blacks might leave the state altogether now, in the shifting political landscape, needed to secure black votes. Some Conservatives actually supported the extension of voting rights in the hope that it would attract blacks to the state, which might translate to more black laborers and lower wages. But the fact that ex-Confederates remained disfranchised irked Conservatives. The Memphis *Daily Avalanche* expressed the more common view regarding black voters (and ex-soldiers in particular): "We would sooner trust the uneducated [white] laborer on our streets with the ballot-box than the educated negro soldier or any other negro." Shortly after black suffrage became law, another Memphis newspaper opined, "It would be better for the whole black breed to be swept away by pestilence. This may sound harsh but it is true. If one had the power and could not otherwise prevent the curse and inconceivable calamity in many of the southern States, it would be a solemn duty for him to annihilate the race. The right to vote might just as safely be given to so many Southern American monkeys as to the plantation Negroes." Given such attitudes and evidence of continuing violence in the state, it is not surprising that on the same day Brownlow signed the voting act he also proclaimed his intention to mobilize the state militia. For months, Conservatives had feared the creation of a black militia—now, about a year after the last black

[50] McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 162-63; Thomas B. Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee* (Nashville, 1950), 123-24, 129-31. Tennesseans used the labels "Radical" and "Republican" interchangeably in the postwar years. The anti-Radical opposition, including ex-Confederates and some cautious Unionists, called themselves "Conservatives" until 1869, when they openly adopted the Democratic name.

federal garrisons mustered out, many wondered whether Tennessee would soon experience another massive mobilization of black soldiers.[51]

Many black Tennesseans rejoiced in their long awaited victory. Deeming political rights "essential to the education, wealth and general elevation of our race and to the prosperity of Tennessee," attendees of a February meeting in McMinn County expressed their appreciation of Brownlow and the Radicals, but emphasized that the legislature's action was "perpetuating the boon of freedom secured to us by our noble, gallant and patriotic soldiery, who fought and vanquished on the battle field the foes of our Union and of freedom, and who are ready and willing to mete out justice to treason and traitors at the ballot-box." A convention of East Tennessee blacks also recognized the debt owed to black soldiers:

> This acknowledgement of our manhood and citizenship is a lasting tribute to the loyalty and patriotism of our race, and a manly recognition of the heroism and daring displayed by our colored soldiers, on *numerous bloody battle fields*, in *devotion to the National flag* during the war for the suppression of the great rebellion; yet [it is] no more than the outgrowth of the justice and honor of those who, when the war cloud hung dark and low all over the State, and the *strong hearts of brave men trembled* for the safety of the Government, requested us to share with them the fearful responsibilities of citizenship."

The Knoxville convention concluded that although the General Assembly had not "secured all we may have desired," specifically the right to serve on juries or hold office, "yet we will labor and wait in hope that they may still stand firmly upon the rock of eternal justice, battling for the right, till we can rejoice in the exercise of every right belonging to an American citizen."[52]

For black soldiers, the months between the Confederate surrender in spring 1865 and the extension of voting rights in February 1867 had been marked by both labor and waiting in abundance. Though the war claimed many lives and shattered others beyond recovery, the

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[51] McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 155, 172; Memphis *Daily Avalanche*, 1 November 1866, quoted in McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 155; Memphis *Appeal* 26 February 1867; Ben H. Severance, *Tennessee's Radical Army: The State Guard and Its Role in Reconstruction, 1867-1869* (Knoxville, 2005), 17, 24.
[52] Knoxville *Whig*, 20, 27 February 1867.

survivors asserted themselves in ways nearly unimaginable just a few years before. And yet the question posed in early 1865 seemed just as pressing and perplexing in early 1867: what would be the "fruit of freedom" for black veterans in Tennessee?

Chapter 3: Communities, Families, and Comrades

In the decades after the war, black veterans reshaped relationships and asserted authority in communities and families in ways that would have been unimaginable before emancipation. They also gained an unprecedented degree of geographical mobility after the war, as they decided between returning to the countryside, building new lives in urban areas, or emigrating to the North or West. In forging their new lives, relationships with comrades remained important, and in some cases black veterans even enjoyed interracial fellowship with white veterans in Tennessee. Comradeship with white veterans, particularly through the Grand Army of the Republic, was remarkable considering the growing commitment to segregation and white supremacy in American society during the era. But each aspect of black veterans' relationships presented obstacles as well as opportunities. Breaking free from former masters was one challenge facing black veterans, but establishing their own authority in families and communities was another, and interracial comradeship had distinct limits.

As veterans established families and communities after discharge, many remained in areas they had known before the war. David Chears was born near Pulaski, and after his service with the 110th USCI he returned to his parents in the area and soon married. He moved several times in the decades after the war, but always remained within a few miles of Pulaski. Milton Gordon, another veteran of the 110th USCI, was born near Brickchurch in Giles County in 1846 and returned to that county to farm after his military service. He married in 1869, and he and his wife had thirteen children before he died near Brickchurch in 1915. Maryville's Presbyterian Church appointed veteran David Hannum an elder when he returned home from the army in the spring of 1866; fifty years later, he still held the position. As he explained in 1916, "I have never

found any one yet to take my place." Hannum also helped purchase land for a black cemetery in Maryville. Thomas Lillard and Oscar Wilson entered the army as privates but had gained promotion to sergeant by the end of their military service. They continued to exercise leadership when they came back to Maryville after discharge by organizing the A.M.E. Zion Church and Sunday school. The men also actively supported education in their community. In 1871, Lillard took a leading role in the call for the establishment of the Freedmen's Institute in Maryville for the training of black teachers, and Oscar Wilson was perhaps the first black school teacher in Blount County.[1]

Remaining in prewar neighborhoods appealed also, in some cases, to those black veterans who enjoyed the support of white neighbors. Benjamin J. Cobb returned his family to McMinn County after discharge. In 1886, fifteen of the county's citizens, including a physician, a justice of the peace, and a U.S. marshal, submitted a letter to the pension board on Cobb's behalf. The letter noted that all of the signers were personally acquainted with Cobb, "some of us for more than thirty years." They vouched for Cobb's health before his enlistment, his upright character since discharge, and his difficult present circumstances and concluded, "We consider his a deserving claim and we as his neighbors and friends who have known him longest would be glad to see him get a pension."[2]

Even the families of former masters sometimes offered aid. In 1886, a Lynnville man testified to pension examiners on behalf of Jasper Gordon, "an old family servant" and veteran of the 110th USCI. A. R. Gordon, the son of Jasper's old owner, explained that the former slave came home from the army in early 1866 to make a crop in the neighborhood but was in poor

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[1] Pension files of David Chears, 110th USCI, Milton Gordon, 110th USCI, and David Hannum, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA; Inez E. Burns, *History of Blount County: From War Trail to Landing Strip, 1795-1955* (Nashville, 1957), 116, 160-62.

[2] Pension file of Benjamin Cobb, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

health and had to quit work for most of the year. He moved into A. R. Gordon's house, stayed there for most of the next ten years, and afterward continued to live with and work for other family members of his former owner. In other cases, the support was less extensive, but still helpful. Jeeter Knox settled in the same area as his old master's family just across the state line from Chattanooga in Chickamauga, Georgia, after his service in the 44th USCI. In 1908, R. L. Knox, a grandson of Jeeter's former owner, characterized the veteran as "one of the old family darkeys" and confirmed the date of birth from an old family bible. About a week later, another family member wrote to the pension bureau on the veteran's behalf, again characterizing him as "one of the old family darkeys" and stating that the white family would "appreciate any aid you can give him." These contacts enabled Jeeter Knox to get an increase in the pension he was drawing based on a provision for veterans' age.[3]

Many other black veterans exercised their newfound mobility to move within the South, out of the region, or both over the course of their lifetimes. Harrison Hall lived in Nashville until 1882 when he moved to California for his health. Three years later, he moved again, this time to Chicago. Oliver Fountain also lived in Nashville for more than a decade after his military service before moving to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1878. In 1887, he was accused of smuggling whiskey and fled the region, but he was able to start a new life in Ontario, Canada, where he found employment as a porter and married a white woman. Fountain never relinquished his U.S. citizenship; he drew a pension and became active in a GAR post in London, Ontario.[4]

Many former slaves eagerly took advantage of their freedom of movement to explore their options, but a veteran's lengthening list of employers in the postwar years could also indicate uncertainty and financial instability. James Redmond, whose legs were crippled by a

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[3] Pension files of Jasper Gordon, 110th USCI, and Jeeter Knox, 44th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[4] Pension files of Harrison Hall, 12th USCI, and Oliver Fountain, 12th USCI, RG 15, NA.

train accident during the war, worked for his former master in southern Kentucky for only a few months after discharge, then moved to Clarksville. Over the next thirty years he "worked backwards and forwards" in Kentucky, in the old neighborhood, or wherever he "could do best," but "never staid at anyplace more than three months." Barney Cox was a slave in northern Mississippi before joining the 61st USCI. He remained in West Tennessee after discharge, but moved nine times over the next three decades in his search for farm work or day labor and never accumulated much wealth.[5]

In other cases, the travels of individual veterans merged into broader migrations. Fuel Williamson explained that he left Marshall County, Tennessee, in March 1878 "during the Exodus to Kansas." Other comrades from Williamson's regiment who had been his neighbors in Tennessee soon joined him in Kansas, including his army bunkmate and his nephew. Brothers Casper and Calvin Burford left Gallatin, Tennessee, for Kansas in 1886 and then moved on to Oklahoma in 1889 when the U.S. government opened that territory for settlement. The pension files of Richard Hill, Haywood Thurman, and Jerry Rollins reveal a network of veterans from the 3rd USCC who settled in Memphis after discharge, then moved to Conway, Arkansas, around 1880.[6]

Many other black veterans remained in Tennessee's cities and towns, where black communities had emerged during the war centered on the authority and protection of black soldiers in Union garrisons. For some, including George Childress, Sylus Elliot, and George E. Pollard of Montgomery County, whose self-emancipation and subsequent army enlistment had provoked the wrath of their masters, urban areas felt safer after the war. Childress and Elliot

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[5] Pension files of James Grady (alias Redmond), 16th USCI, and Barney Cox, 61st USCI, RG 15, NA.
[6] Pension files of Fuel Williamson, 15th USCI, Casper Burford, 14th USCI, Richard Hill (alias Nutterville), 3rd USCC, Haywood Thurman, 3rd USCC, and Jerry Rollins, 3rd USCC, RG 15, NA. The "Exoduster" migration to Kansas in the late 1870s included hundreds of black Tennesseans. As of 1870, just 696 Tennessee-born blacks lived in Kansas; by 1880, the number had grown to 5,418. See Taylor, *Negro in Tennessee*, 124.

settled in Nashville, Pollard in Clarksville. Brothers Charles and Dan Moore grew up as slaves in Maury County before joining the Union army together. After their military service, the two settled as neighbors in Nashville. George Murphy and Joseph Sinks were slaves on a farm about thirty miles south of Knoxville before the war. After serving in the same company of the 1st USCHA, the two settled in Knoxville and lived as neighbors for decades after the war. Cities provided some men with leadership opportunities. Childress, for example, joined benevolent societies, while Elliot became a trustee and treasurer of Bethel A.M.E. church in Nashville. Africa Bailey was a slave on a Mississippi cotton plantation before enlisting in the Union army. He gained promotion to sergeant and after discharge became a Baptist preacher in South Memphis. Initially operating from a mere brush arbor with sawdust floor, by 1867 he had established the 242 members of his Salem Baptist congregation in a frame building. Some veterans, including Nathan Steele of Chattanooga and Henry C. Jolly of Nashville, became active in Masonic lodges. In 1867, Memphis veterans Henry Shepard and Solomon P. Green helped found the Sons of Zion fraternal order. Shepard presided over the organization, while Green initially served as secretary and later as both secretary and treasurer.[7]

While some veterans thus became fixtures in their communities, mobility also remained common. After serving in the 3rd USCHA, Elezar Valentine farmed in Cairo, Illinois; Mississippi County, Missouri; eastern Arkansas; and Henry County, Tennessee, but spent only about a year at a time in each place between 1866 and the mid-1880s. John Lumberly, a veteran of the 61st USCI, lived about half a dozen places around Memphis in the decade after the war before finally settling as a farmer in Conway, Arkansas. Lewis Finley lived in Kingston for six

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[7] Pension files of George Childress, 16th USCI, George E. Pollard, 12th USCI, Charles Moore, 101st USCI, Joseph Sinks, 1st USCHA, Nathan Steele, 1st USCHA, and Henry Jolly, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA; David M. Tucker, *Black Pastors and Leaders: Memphis, 1819-1972* (Memphis, 1975), 7-8; accounts of Henry Shepard, no. 25, Solomon P. Green, no. 92, Sons of Zion, no. 92 and no. 245, Memphis Branch, Freedmen's Bank Registers, RG 101, NA.

years after discharge, then moved to Chattanooga. But when recounting his whereabouts from 1872 to 1898, he listed nine addresses around Chattanooga (ranging from six months to two years at each place) before concluding "and numerous places in Chattanooga." George Nettles was slave on a Wilson County farm before the war, and he returned to Wilson County after discharge but lived in Lebanon. He stayed there only two years before moving to Murfreesboro. In 1874 he returned to Wilson County, but then five years later he moved to Edwardsville, Illinois, just outside St. Louis.[8]

In other cases, journeys away from old neighborhoods proved only temporary. After serving in the 1st USCHA, Harrison Henry returned to Blount County and worked for his former owner for two years but then decided to test his freedom and travel north. "I don't know where he stayed during the time he was away, and don't think he knew," Henry's old master told pension officials; "He claimed to have been all over the world pretty near." In fact, Henry had spent two months in Illinois before returning to Blount County, and seven years after his brief Northern venture, the veteran again returned to work on the farm of his old master, where he remained into the early 1890s. Although his travels were brief, his excitement—as well as his old master's scorn and skepticism—regarding his mobility is clear from the former owner's comments.[9]

Putting physical distance between themselves and former masters was but one way black veterans asserted their freedom. Changing names was another. Many veterans took their fathers' names, thus boldly signaling a redefinition of family relationships. James Redmond was known by his owner's last name, Grady, before the war. However, his father's name was Redmond and, as he explained to pension officials, "when I went to enlist I wanted to join under

[8] Pension files of Elezar Valentine, 3rd USCHA, John Lumberley, 61st USCI, Lewis Finley, 1st USCHA, and George Nettles, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[9] Pension file of Harrison Henry, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

the name Jas. Redmond." In some cases, however, this assertion of masculine authority was thwarted. The army enrolling officers "asked me if that was my owner's name, and when I told them it was after my father's name, they had me go under my owner's name." After discharge he "took the name of Redmond and I am known in Clarksville by the name of James Redmond and have been since the war," but as far as the pension records were concerned, the ex-soldier remained James Grady. Another veteran explained to pension officials that his "right name" was Richard Hill, but when he enlisted, the mustering officer asked the name of his master and entered his name as "Richard Nutterville." But after discharge he always went by Hill, "for I swear I will never go by the name of Nutterville." He resented the lingering reminders of his enslavement. A questionnaire designed to verify a veteran's identity inquired whether he had any distinctive permanent marks or scars, to which Hill responded that there were "plenty on my back received when I was a slave." Nevertheless, for the purposes of the pension bureau he was "Richard Nutterville (now known as Hill)." Some ex-soldiers abandoned names they found demeaning for other reasons. Edward W. Baine was known as "Ned" when he enrolled in the military but insisted on being called Edward after his discharge, for he found "Ned" insulting "on the account off a Song that is Sung in every Family of the Southern Land." A popular minstrel tune by Stephen Foster, "Old Uncle Ned" presented a sentimentalized view of plantation life with a white "Massa" and "Missus" who wept at the death of their favored slave. Edward Baine was determined to lay "Old Ned" to rest. Noting the lines "Poor Old Ned he is dead and gone where the good Negor gose[;] he had no Teeth to Eat that ash he lade that ash down," Baine declared, "Ever since then I have abhored that Ned Part and are not well known by that Name by the General People and will not accept the Name." Virgil Goodrich's widow explained to pension officials that her husband was called either "Goodwin" or "Goodrich," but she was also

sometimes known by her mother's name, Mitchell. Still others knew her as Hall, because that had been her father's name, but sometimes she was still called McClure, her former master's name. By the time the pension office processed her claim for reimbursement of Virgil Goodrich's final illness and burial expenses, she had remarried and taken her new husband's last name. A pension investigator in East Tennessee complained that "nearly all the old colored people here have two or more names," a fact that vastly complicated the pension bureau's efforts to confirm applicants' identities (as the next chapter will show). The pervasiveness of aliases and multiple names among veterans is thus evidence of black Southerners' insistence on forging new identities, but it also reflects continuing obstacles to veterans' attempts to claim patriarchal authority.[10]

Marriage was another central aspect of family life for black veterans, but this too had a rather uncertain status in the decades after the war. Many whites perceived an eagerness among black soldiers to establish marriages. Lt. Col. Robert Cowden of the 59th USCI observed that during his time in Memphis the men of his regiment "seemed to be seized with an infatuation to get married, a privilege hitherto denied them, and now but sparingly granted." Some white officers remained skeptical of their men's readiness for marriage, but "when argument, advice, and persuasion had all been exhausted in vain, as was sometimes the case, the commanding officer of the regiment issued his license, or permit, on the presentation of which to the chaplain that officer proceeded to pronounce the ceremony that was to unite the dusky pair forever."[11]

But Cowden's depiction of officers as sage dispensers of fatherly advice oversimplified the complex situation as black soldiers negotiated relationships with companions, loved ones,

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[10] Pension files of James Grady (alias Redmond), 16th USCI, Richard Nutterville (alias Hill), 3rd USCC, Edward W. Baine, 17th USCI, Virgil Goodrich, 3rd USCHA, and Franklin Gibbs, 40th USCI, RG 15, NA; Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton, 2005), 69-70.
[11] Cowden, *Brief Sketch,* 137.

and white authorities. In 1899, when pension officials asked Peyton Alston, a former private in the 3rd USCHA, whether his comrade Henry Hart had been married, Alston recalled that the officers at Fort Pickering in Memphis, overwhelmed by the refugees thronging to the black regiment's encampment, ordered the men "to marry any woman with whom they were living or get rid of them." Any soldier who had lived five years with a woman prior to this order would not have to go through a wedding ritual to establish a binding marriage relationship, but those "who had picked up a woman and but a short while been living with her must marry her and at once or she would be removed from the said Fort and the privileges of same." Under these circumstances, as Alston saw it, Henry Hart never married, but simply lived with a woman as a "concubine." However, Hart and this "concubine" continued to live together after the war and only "parted" in 1885, never officially marrying or divorcing. Another black resident of the city testified in 1899 that "the colored people of Memphis do not consider a marriage without a license has been issued and same has been solemnized by proper person" and "numbers of colored people in Memphis are living with women without being married and have children, and yet the fact that they lived together does not bind either party as they often swap about from one to another." Evidence from pension records at the turn of the century suggests that the move toward marriage standards on the white model was uneven and sometimes slow to develop.[12]

White observers frequently interpreted black marriage practices as evidence of immorality and ignorance. Pension examiner Charles Whitehead, for example, concluded after a frustrating visit to the McMinn County courthouse in 1903 that "the status of the black people in that region is little above that of animals, and a search for record of negro marriages and divorce excites mirthful surprise in county court house." A few years later, Whitehead claimed that during the course of his work among blacks in northern Mississippi he had "never found one

[12] Pension file of Henry Hart, 3rd USCHA, RG 15, NA.

record of a negro or ex-slave divorce. With them a quarrel usually supplemented with a club constituted a divorce up to a very recent date, and even now a divorce is very rare and is regarded as a waste of good money on a luxury never intended for 'cullard folks.'"[13]

There were elements of truth in Whitehead's racist, condescending commentary. For example, financial considerations seem to have influenced marriage and divorce practices among black Tennesseans. A black acquaintance discussing the relationship between Benjamin and Margaret Cobb explained that "there was no such things as paying lawyers for divorce" in the years after the war. To many, the informal marriage practices of slavery seemed more reasonable; as Cobb's nephew explained in 1903, "We colored folks separated when we felt like it and Uncle Ben and Aunt Margaret did not agree so they just separated and no divorce was ever talked of or thought of." The Victorian conventions of monogamy notwithstanding, many veterans apparently viewed flexibility in their relations with women as a benefit in asserting their manhood. David Chears married eventually, but for several decades after the war, as a nephew recalled, he "would knock about with different women, like all men." This relative insisted that, although Chears had a son with one woman, he did not marry her and remained a bachelor until he married a different woman in 1885.[14]

In the wake of the war and emancipation confusion abounded regarding black marriage claims, but the difficulties of trained pension officials in sorting out the legality of marriages puts charges of mere "ignorance" in a different light. Crossing state lines, a common occurrence among blacks in the Border South, particularly complicated matters. Philip Gilbert and his wife initially married as slaves in southwest Kentucky with the consent of their master. After serving in the 15th USCI, Gilbert returned to his wife, and a few years later the two moved a few miles

[13] Pension files of Benjamin J. Cobb, 1st USCHA, and Jesse Cotton, 3rd USCHA, RG 15, NA.
[14] Pension files of Benjamin J. Cobb, 1st USCHA, and David Chears, 110th USCI, RG 15, NA.

across the border into Montgomery County, Tennessee, where they lived together until the veteran's death in 1900. Two years later the case drew the attention of the chief of the pension bureau's law division, who ruled that the marriage was *not* legal in Kentucky, because a Kentucky law of 1866 stipulated that slave marriages had to be formalized after emancipation to carry legal weight. However, the bureau ruled that the slave marriage *was* legally binding as soon as the couple crossed into Tennessee, citing the ruling of a Tennessee judge that former slaves' "subsequent mutual acknowledgement of each other as husband and wife should be held to complete the act of matrimony so as to make them lawfully and fully married from the time at which their subsequent living together commenced." The law division ruled that the two were "lawfully man and wife" from the time they moved into Tennessee—although they had not been married in the eyes of the law while the couple lived together in Kentucky for a year after the soldier's discharge.[15]

A woman's claim to be George Holman's widow raised two basic questions for pension officials: first, whether the two had ever married, and second, whether they had ever divorced. Answering these simple questions turned out to be quite complicated. Holman had lived with a slave woman before the war, and returned to the woman briefly after his military service. In 1909, the son of their former owner in Springfield, Tennessee, recalled that "some of them would have a little party or wedding as they called, but there was never such thing as a license granted in those days to colored people." The former owner's daughter's assertion that slaves "just did as they pleased" clearly overstated matters—although perhaps it spoke to the continuing difficulties facing those white Southerners who were interested in monitoring and regulating black relationships. However, her comment that "the negroes did not have to get the consent of their owner to live together" was supported by her brother's blunt observation that, even when

[15] Pension file of Philip Gilbert, 15th USCI, RG 15, NA.

slaves did not obtain their masters' explicit permission for marriage, "their owners were generally glad to have them take up together and have children, because that meant more slaves." In this case, the examiner found that the two slaves had "undeniably lived together, according to the custom among slaves." But the couple separated sometime between 1865 and 1872; the woman subsequently married three times, and Holman married another woman in 1872. The special examiner in the case concluded, "I presume [Holman] considered that parting as a divorce, which was a general presumption among many ignorant people in those days, and which prevails to a large extent among that class of people even to the present time [1909]." Lacking legal documentation of either a marriage or a divorce from the slave marriage, the pension bureau granted Holman's second wife a widow's pension.[16]

The continuation of informal marriage customs suggests a more complex situation than simple "ignorance" of the law; rather, white and black observers frequently seemed to have very different perceptions of what black relationships signified. A white Williamson County woman who had hired Frank North and Julia Ann while they were slaves before and during the war noted that Julia Ann did Frank's washing and patched his clothes, and considered the two to be married. But one of North's black army comrades, while acknowledging that North had a child with Julie Ann while the two were slaves, denied that this signified a marriage. In fact, during his time in the army Frank and Julia Ann both apparently started new lives: he did not send her any money, presents, or letters, and she had a child with another man.[17]

The pension bureau tried to get testimony of slave marriages from the former slave owner or one of his or her children, or from people present at the wedding. However, sometimes whites who were relatively close to the situation disagreed among themselves about what they were

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[16] Pension file of George Holman, 15th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[17] Pension file of Frank North, 12th USCI, RG 15, NA.

seeing. Family members of Robert Maxwell's former master in Maury County disagreed over whether Maxwell had been married before the war. Although he and his alleged wife had several children together after the war, Maxwell never formalized the relationship, and in 1869, he legally married another woman with whom he had also had children. The chief of the law division of the pension bureau concluded that Maxwell's relationships before 1869 were very likely "polygamous in character" and that neither could be regarded as a "slave marriage." Thus the ceremonial marriage in 1869 was deemed valid and this woman received a widow's pension.[18]

On the other hand, veterans also had both opportunity and incentive to reject the informal customs of slavery and adopt mainstream standards of marriage. Joseph and Mary Williams considered themselves married in Nashville in 1864, but they went through a wedding ritual in 1866 out of fear that authorities "were arresting people that did not have a ceremony between them." They were married by the same black preacher, Ransom Harris, both times. In many cases, the experience of black veterans seems to have fulfilled white expectations about marriage. Blount County made no legal record of David and Mariah Hannum's 1861 slave marriage, but as of 1916, the veteran plausibly claimed that "me and my wife have been married longer than any couple in Maryville." In 1920, Winfield Scott Hannum testified to his parents' shared devotion: "the older they got the better they loved each other and I have often heard them talk of their wedding supper." As of 1915, the couple had six living children. Some veterans embraced formal marriage as a way to enhance their status as the male head of household and their "respectability" in the eyes of neighbors, or to assuage their own consciences. After living in informal relationships during the war and for several decades afterward, Henry Hart finally separated from his "concubine" in 1885 both because he was jealous of her relationships with

[18] Pension file of Robert Mackville (alias Maxwell), 111th USCI, RG 15, NA.

other men and because he had grown "tired of the disgraceful life he was leading with unmarried women who cared only for the money that he gave them."[19]

Ex-soldiers' status as manly providers, including access to military pensions, certainly conferred advantages in establishing familial authority. Pensions gave even disabled veterans at least some economic support in their relationships. John Addams, for example, suffered a gunshot wound to the leg during the war and fought rheumatism and an eye disease later in life; but despite these health struggles, he married in 1881 and had eight children. His wife died in 1899, but he remarried just one year later. Similarly, even though Scipio Turner had been blinded by smallpox while in the army, he maintained enough independence to leave his wife and marry another woman a few years later.[20]

Those veterans who were able to form families gained an extra source of support, particularly as their health deteriorated in later years. By 1898, George Childress could only do light work and was unable to operate the wagon he owned, but his wife and niece ran the wagon for him. William Jennings and a brother who served in the Union army returned to within about five miles of their prewar home in Wilson County. The two lived with their mother and father for five years after discharge and within a few miles of each other after that. By 1895, Jennings' health struggles made farming difficult and, as his brother explained, "the white folks he works for did not want to keep him this year because he was not able to make a hand." However, "they kept him on account of his two boys who are large enough to work." Jennings himself stated in 1895 that his strength broke down easily, but "the boss generally just gives me an easy job of looking around after the other hands." Lewis Dillon survived the battle of Nashville and settled in Greene County, but grew weak in his old age. In 1924, his wife of thirty years testified that

[19] Pension files of Joseph E. Williams, 13th USCI, David Hannum, 1st USCHA, and Henry Hart, 3rd USCHA, RG 15, NA.
[20] Pension files of John Addams, 1st USCHA, and Scipio Turner, 15th USCI, RG 15, NA.

"he requires the regular attendance of someone all the time," and "I have to dress and undress [him] and assist him and wait on him to the calls of nature." She also helped feed him, noting that "he cannot see sufficient to wait on him self with out turning over his victuals." She concluded, "All told, he is as helpless as a child."[21]

Black veterans also received support from fellow veterans. Henry King, a veteran in Pulaski, met Littleton Alsup a year after discharge, and the two became friends and often reminisced about their military service. "I have been at his house and eaten many a meal there and he has been at mine," King said, "and we have talked over army life many a time." Many black veterans in Tennessee found friendship and support from their black comrades in the decades after the war. George E. Pollard and Benjamin Herring enlisted in different USCT regiments but had been owned by the same Montgomery County man before the war and settled in the same Clarksville neighborhood after discharge. In 1898, Herring remarked that after the war the two "often talked together about our troubles and trials while we were soldiers." Such longstanding relationships were common among black veterans in Tennessee. John Alfred Wilson, Edward Wilson, and Oscar Wilson were owned by the same man in Blount County before the war, and all three served in the 1st USCHA and settled in Maryville after discharge. Testimony taken in 1893 for John Alfred Wilson's pension claim indicates that the three men remained in close contact. Similarly, Alexander Gordon, Henry Sanders, and Almo Carter of Columbia had known each other their entire lives. The three served in the same company and were still neighbors as of 1905. But Carter also developed longstanding relationships with other veterans such as Calvin Irvine, with whom he became acquainted in the army. David Chears of Pulaski remained close friends with a number of black veterans after the war including his

[21] Pension files of George Childress, 16th USCI, William Jennings, 14th USCI, and Lewis Dillon, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA.

nephew and several men who had known each other from their boyhood as slaves, and he also fellowshipped with other veterans whom he met only after the war.[22]

While pension files reveal extensive connections among many black veterans, they indicate limited contact with their white officers. Unfortunately for black veterans, the experience of Memphis resident Davis Henderson, a veteran of the 3rd USCHA living in Memphis, was typical of post-service relationships. A frustrated Henderson explained to pension officials that he "used every effort to get the evidence of Commissioned Officers, without success." While he could easily provide the testimony of "5 or 6 of his comrades of his Co. living in this neighborhood," he found it "impossible to get the evidence of commissioned officers, owing to his inability to find them." Similarly, George Childress was active in his Nashville church and benevolent societies and was "well known among my colored soldier friends," but his efforts to locate white officers for his pension application were unsuccessful. In 1886, Thomas Majors of Knox County told pension officials that he was unable to furnish testimony from commissioned officers because "none of them are here." "They were Northern men and left here at the close of the war," Majors explained. He had "written making inquiry for them but have heard nothing from them. Others have written with the same result." Four years later, his efforts had still come to naught. He remembered his officers by name and remarked wistfully that "I would like to see them; they were might[y] good to me," but since the regiment mustered out "we never have seen or heard tell of one another." Even when white officers could be located, they sometimes were unable to recall black veterans. A special examiner from the pension bureau located Knoxville resident Alexander Grigsby's company's captain and two lieutenants in Ohio, but they provided no assistance. The captain recalled Grigsby's name but

[22] Pension files of Littleton Alsup, 111th USCI, George E. Pollard, 15th USCI, John Alfred Wilson (alias John Wilson), 1st USCHA, Almo Carter, 15th USCI, and David Chears, 110th USCI, RG 15, NA.

nothing of his ailments in the service. One lieutenant could "not remember him at all," while the other stated bluntly, "I do not know anything about this claimant nor anything about any of the members of Co. B. . . . That is all I can say."[23]

It is unsurprising that officers would sometimes fail to remember enlisted men after decades of separation, but some seemed uninterested in remembering. In 1888 special examiner Charles Whitehead travelled to Aspen, Colorado, to secure testimony for a black veteran's pension claim from Ed T. Brown, formerly a captain in the 1st USCHA. The examiner reported that Brown "manifested some little annoyance and irritation at being called upon for a little time in the case of a colored soldier" and "seemed to be ashamed of his former military associations." The former officer "appeared to think a request for testimony on such a matter after so many years was absurd and preposterous and for a time pooh-poohed the proposition for a deposition. He based his refusal upon lack of memory and the fact that he was only a short time in 'Company Office' and could not individualize 'a private in a darkey company.'" When Brown tried to use his busy schedule as the manager of a large mining syndicate to excuse himself from further questioning, Whitehead "cautiously but firmly insisted on cross examining him under oath" and pointedly reminded Brown that "duty must be performed, no matter how poor and insignificant the claimant might be." Eventually, "Captain Brown submitted to an examination with rather ill grace" but intentionally made his deposition "as indefinite as possible, to express his contempt for colored soldiers generally."[24]

The memories that emerged from white officers' reflections on their time with the USCT present a range of opinions on black soldiers. In a paper read in 1885 before the Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society, Thomas J. Morgan, the colonel of the 14th USCI,

[23] Pension files of Davis Henderson, 3rd USCHA, George Childress, 16th USCI, Thomas Majors, 1st USCHA, Anderson Grigsby, 1st USCHA, and Wesley Madden, 3rd USCHA, RG 15, NA.
[24] Pension file of George Forney, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

insisted that "history has not yet done justice to the share borne by colored soldiers in the war for the Union." He optimistically concluded that the "conduct of the American slave, during and since the war" had "wrought an extraordinary change in public sentiment regarding the capabilities of the race" and emphasized that "the manly qualities the negro soldiers evinced in camp, on the march and in battle, won for them golden opinions and made their freedom a necessity, and their citizenship a certainty." Morgan lauded the black men under his command and hoped his audience would "pardon" "those of us who assisted in organizing, disciplining and leading negro troops in battle" for "feeling a good deal of pride in our share of the thrilling events of the great war." Some former officers, however, praised other officers almost to the exclusion of black soldiers. The publisher of Colonel Robert Cowden's history of the 59th USCI, for example, explained that the book's purpose was "to preserve for a time the names and the recollection of the gallant services of the officers of the 59th United States Infantry of African descent, and as far as possible of the men enrolled in the regiment." In fact, the book mentions only one black soldier by name, while 150 pages (just over half of the book) are devoted to biographical sketches of forty white officers and a circular letter passed among the officers.[25]

The autobiography of Captain W. S. Cain of the 12th USCI, published in 1908, was more genealogical and personal in nature and contained little about black soldiers, but Cain also emphasized the white officers. After detailing the vast challenges and responsibilities facing officers, he expressed his disgust that the pension system failed to distinguish "between meritorious volunteer officers and the least capable private," a practice he considered an "injustice" and "unwise." Politics were also excessively egalitarian in Cain's view. He insisted that "the time has come — is here now — to begin a systematic curtailment of the suffrage, upon the lines of intelligence, property, and nativity, and a much longer period for naturalization of

[25] Morgan, *Reminiscences of Service*, 6-7, 51-52; Cowden, *Brief Sketch of the Fifty-Ninth*, xiv.

people who are not familiar with our language and form of government." As a representative in the Kansas legislature in 1866, he had the opportunity to put his philosophy into practice by voting against measures to extend the vote to women and blacks. This "gave offense to many influential constituents," he admitted, but "in the exercise of my judgment then I thought right, and feel the same way to this day." He explained that he voted "against negro suffrage because they were not then — just free from slavery— capable of making a good use of the privilege; and I am firmly of the opinion today that we should cease to dilute our electorate, and favor a more restricted suffrage."[26]

Black veterans' aspirations did not necessarily fare better among the few white USCT officers who remained in the South. In the early 1880s, John E. MacGowan, the colonel of the 1st USCHA, used his platform as editor of the Chattanooga *Times* to oppose the appointment of black policemen in that city. "We think we know the peculiarities of the negro character tolerably well," he asserted; "The negro is utterly and irretrievably spoiled by a badge of authority"—a striking conclusion considering MacGowan's wartime experience. Edwin M. Main, who served as major of the 3rd U.S. Colored Cavalry and settled in Nashville after the war, revealed a degree of racial ambivalence in his history of the regiment. While he proudly noted that "the black troops, inspired by the dash and daring of their officers, seemed to rise equal to any emergency," he also observed that his regiment was "far above the average of those in colored regiments" because "none but the finest specimens of physical manhood were

[26] W. S. Cain, *Autobiography of Captain W. S. Cain; Biographical Sketches of Relatives; Reminiscences of 1861-1865; Also Some Opinions and Reflections Concerning Public Duty* (Topeka, 1908), 42, 77, 79. One of the few places Cain's account mentions enlisted men by name is on a sample "Statement of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores," which Cain includes to emphasize the magnitude of his own responsibility by detailing each soldier's missing equipment and specifying whether the gear was "Lost by carelessness," "Abandoned without authority," or "Stolen or lost by desertion." See ibid., 110-11.

accepted." Indeed, "the majority of men were mulattoes and in many of them the Caucasian blood predominated."[27]

Like other white officers' histories, Main's rarely mentions black men by name; however, the book's last two chapters, "Old Alf, the Wizard of the Black Regiment" and "Little Bob, the Waif," are striking exceptions. At the start of the chapter on Old Alf, Main admits that "there were many men in this regiment who performed deeds of heroism entitling them to special mention in these pages, but unfortunately their names cannot now be recalled," but the "most notable" man of the regiment, Alfred Wood, whom everyone knew as Old Alf, deserved special mention. Old Alf escaped from a Mississippi plantation in 1863 and soon became a valuable scout for the regiment. Main asserted that while "the fullblooded negroes could be easily kept in subjection," Old Alf also had white and Indian ancestry, and due to his "Indian characteristics largely predominating," he "could not be suppressed." Main clearly relished recounting Old Alf's exploits, including the time he scouted miles behind enemy lines "disguised as a plantation darkey." Old Alf was sometimes impulsive; in one tale, the scout "over-indulged in 'fire water,'" shot one of his comrades, and then fled camp—running straight into the hands of a Rebel picket. Just when it appeared the Confederates would execute Old Alf as a "nigger soldier," he convinced them that he was in fact a "good nigger" who had been pressed into the Union army and that he had just shot one of the Yankees to make his escape. His act was so convincing that the Confederate colonel put Old Alf to work tending his horses. This was just the opportunity Old Alf needed to steal the officer's fine thoroughbred and escape back to Union lines in time to warn his officers of the Confederate presence. The result was another glorious

[27] Chattanooga *Times*, 28, 29 October 1880, 7 October 1881, quoted in Cartwright, *Triumph of Jim Crow*, 148-49; Edwin M. Main, *The Story of the Marches, Battles, and Incidents of the Third United States Colored Cavalry, a Fighting Regiment in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-5* (Louisville, 1908), 12.

victory for the regiment, and Old Alf "acquitted himself so well" that he was merely reprimanded in the matter of his drunken shooting.[28]

Old Alf also plays a prominent role in Main's final chapter, on Robert Butler, "Little Bob, the Waif." Little Bob was too young to enlist, but he waited on the officers of the regiment and became a special project of Old Alf. Main, trying his hand at dialect writing, quoted Old Alf as saying, "Ize gwine ter edicate that nigger ter be 'spectible. Dese little niggers got ter be licked 'bout so ofen er dey get wufless and no 'count." Main approvingly noted that "under Old Alf's tutelage, Little Bob became proficient as a table waiter," and when the regiment mustered out Little Bob and Old Alf went to live on the Mississippi plantation of the regiment's one-time commander, Brigadier General E. D. Osband. After less than a year, Osband fell ill and died, but "these faithful servants remained true to the last, ministering to the General in his last illness," and they then went to live with Main, who at the time operated a cotton plantation in Arkansas. When Main went to Little Rock to establish a business, Little Bob went with him and found work at a hotel. Main proudly reported that Little Bob was still "a worthy citizen of that city, where he is universally respected by white and colored people."[29]

While much of Main's account is condescending, black veterans likely would have agreed with at least some of his assertions. In his 1893 address to the inaugural meeting of the "Third Colored Cavalry Organization" in Chicago, a reunion of the regiment's officers, he unequivocally named slavery as the primary cause of the war. "The Ship of State was sailing under false colors," he wrote; "she flew the pennant of freedom on her masthead, while millions groaned in chains." He assured his comrades that "when time shall have obliterated sectional prejudices, future historians, rewriting the story of the great struggle for national existence, will

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[28] Ibid., 305-17.
[29] Ibid., 321.

carefully adjust the scales of justice. In one side will be justice, forebearance, and a due regard for the rights of mankind. In the other side will be injustice, arrogance, and oppression, intolerance and cruelty, chains and slavery, and misery unspeakable mingled with the groans of captives in chains, the agonized cry of Union soldiers sick and dying in foul prison-pens, at whose sufferings pitying angels weep and devils dance with glee. Which side, think you, will receive the approving sentence, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant?'" But, as with the accounts of other officers, Main's emphasis on the officers tended to minimize the capacities of black soldiers. "That the colored troops acquitted themselves with credit, has been fully demonstrated," he insisted, but "it is needless to say that without efficient white officers the experiment with negro troops would have been a total failure."[30]

It is interesting to note that, whatever MacGowan's and Main's racial attitudes, both men were members of one of the era's most influential interracial organizations: the Grand Army of the Republic. The GAR experienced enormous growth nationally in the 1880s, from 30,000 members in late 1870s to over 400,000 in 1890, and black and white veterans in Tennessee contributed to the expansion. The organization wielded considerable political influence—particularly concerning pension legislation—and encouraged "proper" displays of patriotism everywhere from cemeteries to elementary schools. It also provided fraternal fellowship for veterans at local post meetings, state encampments, and national gatherings. Black veterans' presence in a predominantly white organization was a remarkable development considering the general deterioration of American race relations in the late nineteenth century. Alongside the codification of segregation, disfranchisement of blacks, and increased mob violence and lynching, historians have found that white supremacy shaped the nation's memory of the Civil War as well. David Blight contends that "a segregated society demanded a segregated historical

[30] Ibid., 3-4, 11.

memory" and compellingly argues that white supremacy formed the foundation of reconciliation between white Southern and Northern veterans. Amid this rising tide of white supremacy, black veterans' involvement in Tennessee's interracial GAR organization represents a striking, largely forgotten alternative in race relations and the evolving memory of the Civil War in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, as MacGowan's and Main's rhetoric suggests, black veterans sometimes encountered skepticism among their white comrades.[31]

In May 1883, the national GAR created the Department of Tennessee with four charter posts, including a black post in Nashville. By the time of the department's first annual encampment, at Chattanooga in February 1885, additional black posts in Pulaski, Chattanooga, and Athens were among the department's twenty-eight posts. Attracting more members to the GAR was a primary concern of the first encampment, and black veterans appeared likely candidates to at least some white leaders. The national organization's senior vice commander in chief, John P. Rea, who was visiting the department encampment, encouraged "all colored ex-Union soldiers to enter the ranks," insisting that he "felt sure that no Grand Army man would refuse the hand of companionship." In fact, four black veterans representing three of the posts were in attendance, and the proceedings appeared to support Rea's optimism. Amid general remarks on increasing the state organization's membership, a white veteran "spoke encouragingly to colored Posts," stating that he was "proud of colored Grand Army men" and that "if those present were a fair index to the whole, they reflected credit to their Order." He vaguely admitted that "he might not be fully in accord with them on other issues," but "he was

[31] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 361. For an overview of race relations in the period, see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York, 1992), 132-49; 152-59, 283-309, 432-37.

glad to extend to them the hand of fellowship." According to the encampment journal, two black post commanders "made excellent and appropriate replies."[32]

In these early years, black veterans gained a degree of acceptance in the state organization. At the 1885 national encampment, Tennessee's delegation lobbied to host the next national encampment in Nashville and white delegate John Lawrence boasted that the state had contributed to the Union cause, "under great difficulties and sufferings, thirty-two white regiments and thirty colored regiments" for a total of "sixty-two regiments of brave men." Among the virtues of this New South city, he proudly noted, the "Athens of the South" had both "a great university for the white people, the Vanderbilt, and a great university for the colored people, the Fiske." Black veterans even secured departmental office. In 1884, Peter Martin of Nashville sat on the five-member council of administration. Although there were only four black veterans among the thirty-five delegates at the 1885 department meeting, the encampment elected one of them, Pulaski's George W. Whitfield, to the council.[33]

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[32] GAR, Tennessee, *First Encampment* (1885), 8-9, 12, 26. Although the 1880s marked the beginning of Tennesseans' sustained involvement with the national GAR, the organization briefly existed in the state during the 1860s. The GAR first appeared in Tennessee in December 1866, and in December 1868 the state reported seventeen posts (most of them formed that year). It is unclear whether black Tennesseans joined the GAR at this time, but the state organization was defunct by 1870. According to the GAR's national officers, "the rebel influence in this state . . . forced the several Posts to disband, and their members either to leave the State or disavow their connection with the Order," and in some instances "public prejudice" led veterans to hide their affiliation "as if it were a capital crime." In 1872, a Northern visitor to Tennessee agreed that "intense hatred against members of the G.A.R." was a primary cause of the organization's failure in the state, but suggested that the disorder was "intensified, no doubt, by internal dissensions in the Posts when in existence, and their attempted use for selfish purposes." In the early 1870s, Nashville attorney D. W. Glassie attempted to revive the order in Tennessee, but his efforts came to naught. One wonders how black Tennesseans might have responded to Glassie's leadership; as documented in an 1869 congressional investigation, Glassie charged illegal fees and usurious interest rates to black veterans who were desperate to collect their bounties and back pay. See GAR, National, *Third Encampment* (1869), 15; *Fifth Encampment* (1871), 24; *Sixth Encampment* (1872), 7, 29; *Seventh Encampment* (1873), 13-14; *Ninth Encampment* (1875), 32. For Glassie's bounty schemes, see Chapter 4 below.

[33] GAR, National, *Nineteenth Encampment* (1885), 133-37; GAR, Tennessee, *First Encampment* (1885), 4, 22. Lawrence was well acquainted with the black Tennesseans' contributions to the war effort, for he had served as a chaplain with the 15th USCI. But the racial delineation of Tennessee's Union regiments also may have been prompted by comments two years earlier during another unsuccessful campaign to bring the national encampment to Nashville. In 1883, a skeptical Illinois veteran had speculated that Nashville "will not receive us lovingly" and, in response to the claim that Tennessee was home to some 30,000 Union veterans, the Northerner asserted that "they

Black veterans typically kept a low profile at department meetings, however, and it is unclear whether they attended the banquet that the white Chattanooga post hosted to close the first annual encampment. After the "ladies, gentlemen, and children" finished their "rations," the evening concluded with a series of toasts. The final toast, "The Blue and the Grey," was co-delivered by a Union veteran and a Confederate veteran, whose "eloquent words, breathing a spirit of reconciliation, showed how firmly the two sections were again wedded together, and how completely the bitterness and acrimonies of the war had been obliterated." As the Union veteran neared the end of his speech, he dramatically grasped the hand of his Confederate counterpart, and "the two stood on the stage in fraternal clasp, while the audience rose *en masse* and the hall fairly shook with the most vociferous applause." As the spectators filed out of the hall, "several were heard to say that they had never known before what was meant by the Grand Army of the Republic, but they knew now; and the earnest 'God bless them,' was uttered by many."[34]

Such developments may have given black veterans reason for pause. As historian Edward Ayers notes, during this period the Civil War "came to seem not unlike a ball game, its importance based on the sportsmanship and effort its participants displayed rather than on the questions of fundamental human importance for which they fought," such as secession and slavery. At a joint public reception of the Zollicoffer Camp of Confederate Veterans and the white Ed Maynard GAR post in Knoxville, for example, a Union veteran assured his former adversaries that "it makes no difference to us on which side a soldier fought during the late unpleasantness, so he loves the old flag now and believes in America and American principles." Another GAR representative agreed that "the boys that wore the blue and the boys that wore the

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were from nowhere near Nashville. They were from East Tennessee, and the troops who marched under our banner wore black faces." See GAR, National, *Seventeenth Encampment* (1883) 157, 174-75.

[34] GAR, Tennessee, *First Encampment* (1885), 29-30.

grey now belong to the same country, are soldiers of the same army, fight under the same flag, drink coffee from the same pot, eat meat from the same plate, and chew tobacco from the same plug." Such intimacy would not seem to bode well for black veterans in the era of increasing segregation.[35]

Indeed, during a debate over black involvement at the 1887 GAR national encampment, the Tennessee department's posture towards its black members appeared ambivalent at best. Race became a topic of discussion at the national meeting after the fledgling Department of the Gulf, a five-post organization headquartered in Louisiana, refused to approve applications for new black posts. This intransigence led a Wisconsin representative to propose a resolution that charter applicants who were rejected "because of their color" could appeal to the national organization's commander-in-chief for authorization and subsequently report directly to the national headquarters to circumvent hostile state leaders. Tennessee's department commander, William J. Ramage of Knoxville, opened discussion of the resolution by noting that his department already included five black posts. But, he reported, one was out of touch with headquarters and two others were suspended. He asserted that a fourth was "kept alive" primarily through the efforts of a white comrade and complained, "It is utterly impossible in our Department to find comrades of color who have the ability or the knowledge requisite to keep up their reports." While Ramage claimed to have "no objection to organizing ex-colored soldiers in posts," he gloomily concluded that it had been "thoroughly tried and tested and it is the unanimous opinion of all the representatives of the Department of Tennessee and Georgia that it is inexpedient."[36]

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[35] Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 338; GAR, Tennessee, *Third Encampment* (1887), 22-28.
[36] GAR, National, *Twenty-first Encampment* (1887), 250-51.

The ensuing debate revealed a range of opinions, not just nationally, but even among the Southern departments. Comrade Allen of the Department of Virginia (and the national organization's junior vice commander-in-chief) insisted that black veterans must not be denied admission. While admitting that he could "readily understand" why some white comrades in the Department of the Gulf "might dread the effect upon their social relations with the people amongst whom they live," he vowed that if forced to choose between one who "was battling for the destruction of our Union, or the black men who stood side by side with me, my hand will be outstretched to the man of dusky skin." Speculating that the Department of the Gulf might create some twenty black GAR posts, Allen registered his support for expansion rather than preserving the existing five exclusively white posts as a "tail to waggle the dog." In response to the criticism, Comrade Graham, the commander of the Department of the Gulf, urged his comrades to leave such decisions in the hands of leaders who understood local circumstances. He also argued that the GAR was a "social organization" in which members had the right to determine their membership, and in this case the department commander, council of administration, and department encampment all opposed chartering black posts. But Graham also questioned the legitimacy of black veterans' aspiration to share white veterans' glory. "I say boldly on this floor that the men who formed the majority of the negro regiments were not soldiers in the same sense that the volunteers were," he claimed. "When I enlisted in April 1861, with thousands of others, the black man was never taken into consideration at all. I went to defend the flag. My comrades went to do the same thing." He begged the organization not to "supplant the white department of the Gulf with a black department" and expressed faith that his comrades would not "wipe out" the white posts "in order to put in their places black men who were not volunteers in any sense of the word." Graham's appeal left the encampment unconvinced, however, and drew

the heated reply from a California delegate that any department commander who refused to offer a charter to black veterans on the basis of race should be "removed from his position." Noting that officers of the Department of the Gulf had recently participated in the unveiling of a statue of Albert Sidney Johnson, he remarked that he "would rather shake hands with the blackest nigger in land if he were a true, honest man, than with a traitor." Without further discussion, the encampment adopted the Wisconsin resolution.[37]

Ramage's comments were hardly a ringing endorsement of black veterans, but historians have largely misinterpreted race relations in Tennessee's GAR based on the 1887 debate. In fact, whatever skepticism and reservations Ramage may have harbored, the black presence in the state GAR increased significantly in the following years. In 1889, new all-black posts sprang up in Clarksville, Knoxville, and Memphis. In 1891, the department reinstated a suspended post in Pulaski under its old charter, and most of the black posts in the department appeared to be thriving. The new Memphis post, with fifty members, was the largest black post in the state, but posts in Nashville, Chattanooga, Clarksville, and Knoxville each claimed between thirty-seven and forty-two members. Clarksville's black post reported $135 of charitable expenditures in 1891, the greatest such outpouring in the department.[38]

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[37] Ibid., 251-55. Despite the adoption of the resolution, no black posts were formed through the national headquarters. However, in 1890 the race issue in Louisiana and Mississippi again drew national attention when an embattled department commander granted charters to black posts in an attempt to bolster his strength in the department. Opponents of the new posts, mindful of the earlier rebuke from the national organization, were careful to justify the black posts' exclusion from that year's department meeting by bureaucratic technicalities instead of race—an argument initially accepted by the GAR's national leadership. But when the crisis persisted into 1891 and white members of the Department of Louisiana and Mississippi suggested establishing two racially segregated departments to accommodate the Gulf region, white veterans from the North and Upper South joined their black comrades in rejecting the proposal and demanded the immediate incorporation of the black posts. In the wake of this decision, over the next year the department's white membership dropped from 345 to 114, but the department gained over 550 black members. Eventually the white membership recovered somewhat; in 1897, the department listed 249 white members. See Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 146-150.

[38] GAR, Tennessee, *Sixth Encampment* (1890), 12, 22-23; *Eighth Encampment* (1891). Mary Dearing acknowledges white Tennesseans' encouragement of black veterans at the 1885 state meeting, but cites the 1887 national debate as evidence that "this cordiality, never very strong, soon disappeared." Stuart McConnell, in his study's only reference to GAR affairs in Tennessee, incorrectly states that the 1887 national debate was sparked by Tennessee's refusal to

Black veterans also retained a role in department leadership in 1887 and beyond. The state encampment elected M. J. Nesbit of Chattanooga to the council of administration in 1887 and again in 1888. In 1889 only two black men attended the state encampment, but one of them, A. W. King of Clarksville, was elected to the council. King died before completing his year-long term, but the department elected Oscar Johnson of Knoxville's newly-formed black post to fill the vacancy. To be sure, white veterans continued to dominate the highest departmental offices and most of the minor positions. In 1890, for example, only one of twenty aides de camp and one of twelve assistant inspectors were black. However, black veterans retained one of the five seats on the council of administration. At the 1890 meeting, Oscar Johnson of Knoxville was the only African American among seven nominees for the council, but two white veterans withdrew their names from consideration, and the encampment elected Johnson without opposition.[39]

Black veterans' presence on the council continued without comment in the encampment journals until the 1891 encampment; but when the subject drew discussion during that year's election of officers, white veterans' comments unanimously supported the custom. After five candidates were nominated for the council, someone raised a motion to close the nominations, but C. W. Norwood, a white veteran from Chattanooga's white Post 45, "objected and called attention to the absence of colored representative." Woodson Weaver of Chattanooga's black

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grant a charter to a black post and simply concludes that "the posts were not formed." While I agree with Donald Shaffer that Ramage's 1887 remarks were characteristic of the "patronizingly racist manner" in which white GAR members often treated black veterans, my analysis suggests that race relations and black participation in Tennessee's GAR was more complicated. My research tends to correspond with the conclusions of Barbara Gannon who, although not offering sustained treatment of GAR affairs in Tennessee, contends that previous scholarly analysis of race relations and black involvement in the GAR in Georgia, South Carolina, and Arkansas is either incomplete or taken out of context. White GAR departments in Texas and Alabama managed to exclude black veterans through technicalities, but Gannon argues that these cases were "the exception and not the rule" in Southern states. See Mary R. Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.* (Baton Rouge, 1952), 413; Stuart Charles McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 215-16; Shaffer *After the Glory*, 151; Barbara A. Gannon, "The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic" (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2005), 39-42; and Barbara A. Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2011), 28-34.

[39] GAR, Tennessee, *Third Encampment*, (1887), 19; *Fourth Encampment* (1888), 41; *Fifth Encampment* (1889), 4-17, 40; *Sixth Encampment* (1890), 26, 30.

GAR post agreed: "We have no representative on the entire list, and I think we are entitled to a representative on the Council of Administration." Andrew Jackson Gahagan of Chattanooga's Post 2, who had been elected the new department commander earlier in the afternoon, added, "I desire to go on record in favor of the colored representative. A colored man's body was as good a material as a white man's to be shot at, and it is just that at least he be given one member of the Council of Administration." Without further ado, Hardin Greer of Chattanooga received a nomination for the council. Although the encampment seemed to agree on the justice of selecting a black representative, it was initially unclear how the five positions might be distributed among the six candidates "without the trouble of a formal ballot." Ultimately Kemp Murphy, a white nominee from Mountain City, resolved the difficulty by withdrawing from consideration. At the time there were only six all-black posts out of eighty posts in the department of Tennessee. The extent of black veterans' involvement in the department thus depended heavily on the good will of their white comrades, but black veterans seem to have enjoyed a considerable degree of support.[40]

Black veterans' involvement in Tennessee's GAR continued to expand in the early 1890s. In April 1891, Commander Gahagan's official staff appointments included five black aides de camp. He also appointed Preston Taylor of Nashville as one of the state's five assistant inspectors with jurisdiction over the all-black posts of Pulaski and Clarksville. Taylor was the first black veteran to serve in this capacity and was elected to the council of administration at the 1892 encampment in Nashville. As that year's meeting drew to a close, a white veteran thanked local white posts for their hospitality—then sheepishly admitted that "inadvertently in drawing

[40] GAR, Tennessee, *Eighth Encampment* (1891), 101. As Barbara Gannon observes in her study of interracial comradeship in the GAR, "no other major social organization in this era allowed black Americans to join their ranks and if they allowed them to join it is unlikely that they would have made sure that African Americans were represented in elected public office." See Gannon, "Won Cause," 51.

up the resolution of thanks to the Nashville Posts, I omitted the name of Lincoln Post No. 4 [the city's black post]." Observing that "we have a goodly delegation of our colored comrades, and the comrades of Post 4 have generously entertained them," he requested "unanimous consent that Post 4 be inserted in the resolutions."[41]

As Taylor's appointment to inspect an all-black circuit and the belated resolution of thanks suggest, much of black veterans' activity in the GAR took place on a segregated basis, and white veterans seem to have viewed their black comrades as junior partners in the organization. Further evidence can be found in the decoration of Union graves on Memorial Day, which was among the chief activities of GAR posts. National cemeteries at Chattanooga, Fort Donelson, Knoxville, Memphis, Nashville, Pittsburg Landing, and Stones River were the final resting place for more than 57,000 Union dead, and nearby black and white posts sometimes conducted services together. However, the department commander's 1892 Memorial Day order specifying that the principal white posts of Memphis, Nashville, and Knoxville should be "assisted by" local black posts at the national cemeteries suggests white veterans' view of the proper relationship. In 1897, the commander directed Chattanooga's two white posts to decorate graves in that city's national cemetery and gave the local black post responsibility for graves in the "colored sections."[42]

Only a small proportion of black GAR members attended state encampments with white veterans; indeed, white and black veterans alike experienced the GAR predominantly through their local posts. At various times the Tennessee GAR included black posts in Nashville, Pulaski, Chattanooga, Athens, Greeneville, Rogersville, Clarksville, Knoxville, Memphis, Columbia, and Jackson, and the vast majority of black veterans who joined the GAR in

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[41] GAR, Tennessee, *Ninth Encampment* (1892), 9-12, 21-24, 128, 147.
[42] Ibid., 14-15; GAR, Tennessee, *Fourteenth Encampment* (1897), 9; GAR, Tennessee, *Seventeenth Encampment* (1900), 17.

Tennessee were members of these all-black posts. The department did not explicitly order or urge segregation of black veterans, but in practice each location with at least twelve black GAR members formed separate black and white posts. Two of the first four posts organized in the Department of Tennessee, for example, were the all-white George H. Thomas Post No. 1 and the all-black Lincoln Post No. 4, both in Nashville. While John Lawrence, a former chaplain with the 15th USCI, was a prominent leader in Post 1, numerous black veterans of the 15th were active in Post 4. The all-black Post 26 in Athens was established in December 1884, just one week after the all-white Post 25 formed in the same town. Chattanooga eventually boasted two white posts, but the city's black veterans met in a separate post.[43]

This pattern is unsurprising considering that fraternal orders, militia units, and virtually all other social organizations of the time were segregated, but available records do not indicate whether the formation of black posts resulted from exclusion by white veterans or efforts to claim autonomy by black veterans. All-black posts certainly gave black veterans more leadership opportunities than they would have had in white-majority posts. The all-black post also gave veterans a unique platform to advance their own interpretations of Civil War's meaning, as evidenced by the names they chose for their posts. Nashville's Post No. 4 adopted the name Lincoln to celebrate the memory of the Great Emancipator, a hero revered by white and black veterans alike. In 1889, Memphis's Post 86 suggested an even more extreme vision of the war's meaning by naming their post for John Brown. When the post reorganized in 1895, leaders rechristened it Douglass, another powerful symbol of black freedom. Like their white counterparts, black veterans' posts sometimes honored lesser known heroes. Pulaski's Col. Lathrop Post No. 10 was named after William H. Lathrop, the white commander of 111th USCI,

[43] GAR, Tennessee, "Descriptive Records," McClung Collection, Knoxville. As discussed below, Athens's Post 25 later absorbed many of the black veterans when Post 26 returned its charter.

who was killed in a September 1864 clash with Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry in Alabama. According to the post's descriptive records, many members of Post 10 had been captured during the battle. In other cases, black posts appropriated ostensibly white symbols to stake their own claim to local sacred spaces. In the same vein as Chattanooga's white Lookout and Mission Ridge posts, the city's black post took the name Chickamauga in honor of a nearby battlefield, even though no black troops had fought there.[44]

Because the GAR remained officially colorblind, black veterans' involvement can go unnoticed in encampment journals unless a veteran's race was itself an issue of discussion. However, the descriptive records for Tennessee's GAR list most members' regiment and rank, revealing that, while segregation was the norm, some black USCT veterans joined interracial posts in Tennessee. Twelve predominantly white posts, all in East Tennessee, had at least one black member. Posts in Rogersville (Knox County), Dandridge, Ellejoy (Blount County), Lost Creek (Union County), and Riverdale (Knox County) had black charter members, while posts in Athens, Johnson City, Jacksboro, Jonesborough, New Market, Rutledge, and Maryville also eventually admitted black members. Post 25 in Athens claimed the largest contingent of black veterans of any integrated post. After the town's all-black post disbanded, the originally all-white post absorbed some of the black veterans and eventually listed eleven black members, 6 percent of the post's 184 members. Similarly, the nine black veterans of New Market's Post 46 represented 7 percent of the post's 122 members. Five of the integrated posts appear to have claimed only one or two black veterans—although proportionally Dandridge's W. T. Sherman Post 96 had the highest concentration of blacks, with two among the sixteen members.[45]

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid. Tennessee's descriptive records list membership through mid-1897, but even beyond this date, the state encampment's annual "Roll of Honor," a list of obituaries that includes each veteran's rank and regiment, reveals further evidence of integrated posts.

In some respects, those who joined black or integrated posts appear to have been rather ordinary black ex-soldiers. The department's descriptive records do not provide complete information on all members, but the available data for black posts in Memphis, Nashville, Pulaski, Knoxville, and Greeneville suggest that about three-quarters of each black post's members had served as privates during the war. At Clarksville, Columbia, and Chattanooga, former privates appear to have comprised more than 80 percent of post membership. The first forty members of Memphis's Douglass Post were all Southern-born, and just over half identified their occupation as laborer or farmer. Similarly, of seventy-three members of Nashville's black post who listed their birthplace, most were born in Tennessee and only one was born outside the South. At that post, a majority of those listing their occupation are identified simply as laborers (thirty-eight of sixty-seven). To be sure, the GAR also attracted black ministers, lawyers, teachers, and entrepreneurs—some, such as Preston Taylor of Nashville, being among the South's black elite. But the social status of a large majority of black members in Tennessee was modest. Of the first twenty-four men to join Pulaski's black post, for example, nineteen listed their occupation as farming and eighteen had mustered out of the service as privates. Chattanooga's ten charter members included seven laborers and eight former privates. Black veterans in integrated posts followed a similar pattern—most were privates during the war and farmers or laborers afterward.[46]

Black Tennesseans' participation in an organization that was integrated (even if only to a modest degree) was remarkable, but given their limited proportion of the department's membership, black veterans' role at the state level remained somewhat tenuous. In 1885, the department counted 1,145 white and eighty-eight black members, and the proportion did not shift dramatically over the following decades. Black participation at the annual department

[46] Ibid.

encampments varied from year to year. Although ten blacks representing four posts attended the 1892 state encampment in Nashville (out of seventy-eight total in attendance), only three black veterans (from the Knoxville and Chattanooga posts) attended the 1893 encampment at Harriman; and, for the first time in the department's history, the new council of administration in 1893 lacked a black representative. The following year only one black delegate attended the annual encampment in Greeneville, and he was not elected to the council. A black veteran did not sit on the council again until 1898. Geography seems to have been an obstacle to greater black involvement. East Tennessee was the locus of wartime Unionism and the center of white GAR activity, and it typically hosted the department's annual encampments. But the most extensive recruitment of black soldiers had occurred in West and Middle Tennessee. Representatives from Memphis's black post rarely made the cross-state trip to department encampments.[47]

To some degree, black participation in Tennessee's GAR was hampered by the same issues that discouraged greater white involvement, including isolation from existing posts and financial considerations such as paying organizational dues. But black veterans also faced lingering skepticism from their white comrades. As Ramage's comments at the 1887 national encampment indicate, many white veterans doubted their ability to manage paperwork. Whites also worried about adherence to the organization's ritual and believed black veterans were particularly susceptible to fraud. In 1897, for example, the department commander issued an order warning the department of "the impositions of one Walker, a negro, who is said to be circulating among the negro Posts and Corps and pretending to have the authority to re-organize the Corps and give charters and badges peculiar to that branch of the order." Reiterating that

[47] GAR, Tennessee, *Ninth Encampment* (1892); GAR, Tennessee, *Tenth Encampment* (1893); GAR, Tennessee, *Eleventh Encampment* (1894).

Walker had "no authority whatever in what he claims to do," the commander demanded that he "be denounced and prosecuted as a common swindler" and that Knoxville's black GAR post "kick the swindler out."[48]

Memorial Day observances were another issue that threatened to divide white and black veterans. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Stones River National Cemetery became a site of contention, as hundreds of Nashville blacks annually flocked to Murfreesboro on excursion trains and vastly outnumbered whites. The black revelers' celebration deeply offended some whites, whose Victorian sensibility dictated that Memorial Day should be an occasion of solemn remembrance. In 1897, the Murfreesboro *Independent Banner* complained that fifteen hundred blacks had congregated just outside the cemetery to patronize half a dozen vendors hawking barbeque, cakes, and lemonade. Noting scenes of gaming and drunkenness, the *Banner* urged the state government to make it a felony "for any one to run a gambling device of any kind, or to offer anything for sale to eat or drink within one mile of a cemetery on decoration day" and suggested that if Congress would allow the burial of Confederates in the cemetery and a shared decoration day, "we guarantee that there will be a proper observance of the day, and the services attended by those who have a proper regard for the occasion." While admitting that some blacks were among the five hundred attendees of a dignified GAR service within the cemetery, the *Banner* emphasized that they comprised no more than one-third of the whole. In the wake of the 1897 controversy, cemetery superintendent Edwin P. Barrett defended his ability to maintain order in the cemetery grounds and pointed out that the rowdy behavior occurred outside the cemetery walls, beyond his jurisdiction. But Barrett also perceived a problem of racial control, asserting that "a few and a very few negroes (old slaves)" appeared to "respect the

[48] GAR, Tennessee, *Fourteenth Encampment* (1897), 34.

day and occasion," while younger blacks indulged in "a day of feasting, gambling, drunkenness &c."[49]

This racial tension threatened to spill over into the GAR, but black veterans continued to prove themselves capable of participating in departmental activities—and continued to receive support from many of their white comrades. The 1892 state encampment ended on something of a sour note when T. G. Balpishweiler of Nashville addressed "the colored brethren particularly" on Memorial Day decorum. He complained that "our colored people make of this day a picnic; a colored jollification; a place of barter and trade." At Murfreesboro, he "found everything conducted, not in the strict practice of the proprieties of the day, but [like] a religious picnic." However, other white veterans quickly rushed to their black comrades' defense. L. E. Dyer of Memphis interjected that "it is out of order for the brother to lecture these men for something done at Murfreesboro." The newly elected department commander H. C. Whittaker of New Market noted his agreement with Dyer, and the discussion closed without further comment. From the 1890s to the 1910s, some white observers continued to complain about the boisterous black Memorial Day celebrations in Murfreesboro, but black veterans remained a part of GAR observances in the national cemetery. In 1900, for example, the department commander extended "especial thanks" to Nashville's black post and one of the city's white posts for conducting "a most excellent ceremony" at Stones River.[50]

Black veterans continued to overcome white concerns about post management as well. A year after the commander's warning about swindlers, the officers of Knoxville's black post

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[49] Fraley, "Stones River National Cemetery," 151-55. The character of Memorial Day observances caused tension not only between whites and blacks but also among Nashville blacks. In 1874, for example, following a brawl at the Nashville National Cemetery, the city's black elite "expressed great indignation" over the "disreputable conduct." Nashville *Republican Banner*, 31 May 1874, quoted in Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York, 1978), 246-47.

[50] Fraley, "Stones River National Cemetery," 155-56; GAR, Tennessee, *Seventeenth Encampment* (1900), 4.

reported that they had suspended the offending members and successfully pressed for the arrest and arraignment of imposters who persisted in sporting GAR regalia. In 1896, when department commander Halbert B. Case of Chattanooga considered chartering a new black post in Columbia, he deemed it best to go "in person to inspect the field." As he explained in his address to the 1897 encampment, he initially had "grave doubts as to the propriety of organizing this Post, owing to the difficulty of getting persons able to keep the records." However, "after careful consideration, it was deemed best to muster the Post, there being one comrade, in the person of J. S. Gilmore, well qualified to keep the records and who agreed to see that they are continued in proper order." The post started with twenty-three charter members and expanded to thirty-two by the end of the year, and Case credited Gilmore's "efficient work" for the post's "prosperous condition." In sharp contrast to the rosy report on Columbia's new black post, the commander disappointedly noted that delinquency in paying dues to the state organization led to the suspension of three posts and that another eight posts surrendered their charters. Although the commander did not mention race in his comments on the disbanded posts, the assistant adjutant-general's report indicated that no black posts were among the eleven in arrears.[51]

In the late nineteenth century, white Union veterans in Tennessee sometimes appeared ambivalent toward blacks, but they also evinced hesitation regarding fellowship with ex-Confederates. If, as David Blight has argued, Civil War reconciliation and white supremacy were related, lingering tension between white Tennesseans may at least partially explain how black veterans were able to maintain a place in the state GAR. In 1891, for example, department commander Charles Muller of Chattanooga told the state encampment, "We are told that being the victors we can afford to be magnanimous, but we cannot afford to haul down 'Old Glory.'"

[51] GAR, Tennessee, *Sixteenth Encampment* (1899), 8; GAR, Tennessee, *Fourteenth Encampment* (1897), 9-10, 21-23.

Muller insisted that the GAR must teach a new generation "that it is very much more honorable to have fought *for* one's country than against it" and urged, "do not let the fires die down." Later department commanders, such as W. E. F. Milburn of Greeneville, were willing to stoke the flames. In 1895, Milburn complained that "in some localities the old Federal soldier is a stench in the nostrils of his unrepentant neighbors" and described the GAR as "the focus of thirty-five years growth of malice and ever-increasing hatred." He somewhat softened his remarks by noting that this spirit was "not often found" in Confederate ex-soldiers, because "brave men always respect brave men." But even while advising GAR men that "it is best that we all be friends," the commander continued, "we cannot for the sake of mere friendship . . . afford to sacrifice the truth, or pervert the facts of history." Milburn's account of the "facts of history" surely resonated with black veterans: "Our, then, enemies fought to preserve a wrong—for secession, to maintain a rebellion, to perpetuate human slavery, to destroy the Union. There is no comparison between right and wrong. No lapse of time, however long, can convert a wrong principle into a right one."[52]

Lingering resentment resurfaced during the 1897 department encampment in Nashville. The encampment coincided with the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, and Northern visitors from the GAR's auxiliary Women's Relief Corps admitted "surprise" and "disappointment" when numerous Nashvillians, including several policemen, could not—or perhaps would not—direct them to the GAR encampment. John F. Spence of Harriman attempted to lighten the mood by joking about his own wanderings in the Southern backwoods and insisted that members of the new generation, including his own sons, simply "do know what [the war] means" and regard the conflict as "a matter of history." Spence begged the visitors, "Don't tell your sisters of the North

[52] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, passim; GAR, Tennessee, *Eighth Encampment* (1891), 55; GAR, Tennessee, *Twelfth Encampment* (1895), 43-44.

that the South is disloyal." However, department commander Halbert Case of Chattanooga replied with a much harsher assessment. "I want to assure you of one thing, that we have got the bitter and the sweet in Tennessee," he told the women. "If loyalty were heaven and rebellion were hell, one could say they have more heaven in East Tennessee than in any other spot on the earth, and more hell in Central Tennessee than in any other place. That is pretty nearly so, sisters." He warned, "You will not get much encouragement in Middle Tennessee and West Tennessee along the lines of the Grand Army of the Republic." The department's junior vice commander, W. F. McCarron of Athens, took a more moderate stance, telling the women that "there is more loyalty in the South than you have been giving us credit for." However, during the next day's closing ceremony, with the Northern visitors still in attendance, he admitted that there was "still some old prejudice existing in the hearts of some people" and remarked that the present conditions in Tennessee reminded him of a Baptist preacher who suggested that a certain elderly man would have to remain immersed in the river overnight "if you want to get all the sin out of that old creature." McCarron concluded his story, "Some of the Tennessee politicians ought to remain in the river over night"—and on this note the encampment journal's account of the 1897 exercises abruptly ends.[53]

Some historians have argued that the Spanish-American War accelerated the trend toward sectional reconciliation on the basis of white supremacy, and, to some extent, the war did bring Union and Confederate veterans together in Tennessee at the turn of the century. In July 1898, department commander W. H. Nelson of Johnson City expressed his "hearty approval" of GAR members around the state who offered flowers "to be strewn on the graves of those who were our foes" for Confederate Decoration Day. Nelson explained that "when men who wore the blue and the men who wore the gray, along with the sons of each, are arrayed side by side under the

[53] GAR, Tennessee, *Fourteenth Encampment* (1897), 45-60.

Nation's flag, defending its honor against a foreign foe, it is time to forget the animosities and prejudices of the civil war and yield at least a tribute of flowers to the memory of men we knew were brave Americans."[54]

However, in October 1901, the dedication of a monument "to the memory of the Union soldiers of Tennessee" at the Knoxville National Cemetery revealed continuing sectional tension and the insistent remembering of fundamental issues of the Civil War, including slavery. The address of Newton Hacker of Jonesborough ended on a reconciliatory tone, but not before dissecting the differences between the two causes at considerable length. Requesting his audience's "patient attention," Hacker took them back three hundred years to a time when "two antagonist[ic] ideas found a foothold on the American continent." Describing a ship landing at Plymouth Rock and another at the mouth of the James River, Hacker told his audience that "the first cargo was fleeing from oppression and seeking a larger freedom" while "the other was introducing and propagating a system of human slavery. The one was right in the eyes of God, and the other was eternally wrong." From the colonial origins of the conflict, Hacker turned to a colorful cast of nineteenth-century figures including Harriet Beecher Stowe ("one of the brainiest women America has ever produced"), James Buchanan ("that great weakling"), and John Brown ("the wild fanatic"), and left little doubt about what caused the war: the South "thought she foresaw in [Lincoln's] election the doom of African slavery." In terms of the implications for black veterans, however, the message soon became somewhat mixed. While Hacker explained at considerable length how slavery caused the war, the remainder of his speech focused primarily

[54] GAR, Tennessee, *Sixteenth Encampment* (1899), 9. Edward Ayers, for example, argues that the Spanish-American War "accelerated the decline" in American race relations, including "the loss of civility, the increase in bloodshed, the white arrogance." According to Ayers, "the major effect of the war seems to have been to enlist the North as an even more active partner in the subjugation of black Americans." David Blight agrees that "Southern support for the war and expansion became an overwhelming force by which reunion trumped appeals for racial justice" and "had profound consequences for race relations and for the nation's historical memory." See Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 333; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 351-52.

on the hardships that East Tennessee Unionists endured and said nothing about emancipation, reconstruction, or other consequences of the war. Indeed, he concluded, "God knows I entertain no unkind feelings for any man because he differed with me in the great civil war." Hacker was proud that "the boys who wore the blue and the boys who wore the grey have fought side by side and under the Stars and Stripes against a foreign foe," and he encouraged the "honorable soldiers who fought on the other side" to "come let us be brothers again—let the dead past bury its own dead—only be loyal and true henceforth to the whole country." Whether black veterans too might be embraced as brothers in the dawning century was not entirely clear from this message.[55]

In fact, black veterans' roles in the Tennessee GAR shifted in the decade after the Spanish-American War, but not towards exclusion. In some respects, black participation at the 1901 state encampment at Greeneville was quite limited, as only one representative from the state's black posts attended. However, in a striking development, New Market's predominantly white post sent black veteran John Talley to the meeting as one of its three representatives. Later in the year, Talley represented not only his post but the entire state as the department's flag bearer for the grand parade at the national GAR encampment in Cleveland, Ohio. Department commander M. M. Harris of Knoxville explained during the 1902 department encampment that before leaving for Cleveland, he "determined to devise some plan by which our delegation would receive more attention than has been ordinarily bestowed upon it in the grand parade." The commander emblazoned a flag with the words "Loyal East Tennessee—'61-'65" and delegated "the honor of carrying this banner . . . to Comrade John Talley, a colored comrade," who remarked when he received the flag, "I will stick to it as long as a piece of it remains." Harris's

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[55] GAR, Tennessee, *Nineteenth Encampment* (1902), 14, 59-68. Inscribed on the monument is a list of ten infantry, fourteen cavalry, and eight mounted infantry regiments and six artillery batteries raised in Tennessee. Black units raised in Tennessee were not included, however, even though some mustered in under state designations. The 59th USCI, for example, originated as the 1st Tennessee Volunteer Infantry, African Descent. See GAR, Tennessee, *Eighteenth Encampment* (1901), 13-14.

strategy produced the desired effect, for Talley and the other twenty marchers in Tennessee's delegation "proved an attraction, eliciting cheers and such exclamations as: 'Hurrah for Tennessee—yes, East Tennessee," and garnered "more than the ordinary attention . . . in [the] grand review."[56]

Talley's appointment as flag bearer may have originated as a publicity stunt, but it established a new pattern of black involvement in Tennessee's GAR. In 1902, the encampment journal began listing "Color Bearer" or "Chief Color Bearer" alongside other department offices in the annual journal of proceedings. The position remained the domain of black veterans, with Thomas White of Nashville's black post and William Upshaw of Knoxville's black post appointed in 1902 and 1903 respectively, Talley resuming the role from 1904 to 1908, and James Turner of Chattanooga's black post serving in 1909 and 1910. Black involvement in the state organization flourished during the decade. Seven representatives from black posts attended the 1902 state encampment in Chattanooga, and this time Talley was the lone representative from New Market's predominantly white post. The 1903 encampment, again in Chattanooga, was attended by eight black veterans—including a rare appearance by a representative from Memphis's black post—and the commander appointed ten black veterans as aides de camp or assistant inspectors. Department records bear no evidence of white misgivings about the black color bearer appointments; in fact, during the same period white Tennesseans' involvement at the national encampment expanded as well. The 1902 national encampment in Washington, D. C., included seventy-two marchers from Tennessee and "many more" who did not march, the state's largest showing at a national encampment in ten years. The following year in San Francisco, Tennessee officials took pride in fielding the largest delegation of any Southern department.

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[56] GAR, Tennessee, *Eighteenth Encampment* (1901), 17-28; GAR, Tennessee, *Nineteenth Encampment* (1902), 16-33.

After the 1904 encampment in Boston, the department commander proclaimed that the state was again "fairly represented" as "thirty of our comrades marched behind the beautiful new National Flag carried by the Department Color Bearer, Comrade John Tally."[57]

While black veterans assumed the flag-bearer duties in the early twentieth century, they remained absent from the council of administration. During the department's first decade, black veterans had been a fixture on the council but after 1893 they rarely occupied a seat. Department records offer no explicit rationale for the shift from council member to flag bearer, but white Tennesseans' pervasive skepticism regarding their black comrades' literacy and competence suggests that many viewed blacks as better suited for carrying a flag than exercising other forms of leadership. It is tempting to dismiss the flag-bearer assignment as mere tokenism, but this may misconstrue the context of black veterans' new role. Carrying a unit banner or national flag into battle had long been a mark of distinction for a soldier, but historian Stuart McConnell observes that in the last decade of the nineteenth century the American flag "acquired semisacred trappings" in the GAR and flag etiquette grew much more formal. As new legislation mandated the display of the flag at schools, Flag Day gained popularity, and "patriotic exercises" such as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance became common, the flag became the "chief icon" in the emerging "civil religion" of the United States. There can be little doubt that racially-fueled skepticism hindered black involvement in Tennessee's GAR, but according black veterans such a prominent symbolic place in the department was a remarkable development in an era largely characterized by exclusion.[58]

Black veterans' experience in Tennessee's GAR was ultimately a mixed legacy. William A. Rhegness's appearance in Samuel Hawkins's pension application is but one example in which

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[57] GAR, Tennessee, *Eighteenth Encampment* to *Twenty-seventh Encampment* (1902-1910).
[58] McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 228-30.

the implications for race relations can be interpreted as both positive and negative. In 1916, Rhegness, the state GAR's assistant adjutant general and quartermaster general, wrote to the pension commissioner on behalf of Hawkins, noting that he was "a colored man and, of course, an ignorant man." Rhegness later explained that he knew Hawkins through his involvement with Jackson's black GAR post; as the department's adjutant general, he believed it was "necessary for me to take interest in the post of colored folks . . . as they were not capable of managing it themselves." Historian Donald Shaffer's suggestion that Rhegness's "patronizingly racist" outlook was common among white veterans appears well founded. But on the other hand, Rhegness's conviction that "as an old Federal Soldier and a grand army man . . . I have to look after the old soldiers" not only supported black Tennesseans' access to a powerful national organization and interracial fellowship but also produced tangible benefits for Hawkins and his family. Rhegness testified in Hawkins's pension claim and later Hawkins's widow's claim, and in his capacity as a notary public he collected and notarized other supporting documents for the applications.[59]

Black involvement in Tennessee's GAR remained on an unequal footing, but the organization offered ordinary black Southerners an opportunity for interracial fellowship unparalleled in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. James Edds was only a private in the army and a laborer and teamster after the war, but he served as a commander of Memphis's Douglass Post. John Talley, who achieved prominence as his post's representative and the department color bearer, was, like most of his black GAR comrades, a private during the war and a farmer afterwards. Talley embraced his role with unmistakable pride. Yet black veterans also expressed frustration at times. In 1908, Littleton Alsup of Pulaski wrote to the

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[59] Shaffer, *After the Glory,* 149-51; pension file of Samuel Hawkins, 111th USCI, RG 15, NA.

pension commissioner, “I can’t see why I don’t get my back money.” Although “it has been allowed and they keep telling me I will get it and not to worry,” Alsup and his family faced increasingly desperate circumstances: “8 months ago I fell and was hurt badly, am failing fast in health and am not able to work. My wife has made herself sick waiting on me and selling out of her garden to buy me something I could eat. We are both old, and I wish you would see why I have not got my money.” Alsup bitterly noted, “I belong to the Grand Army and they have not given me a cent since I have been sick and I was one of the first members that joined. Please send me my money as soon as you can.” The military experience and postwar comradeship had given black veterans reason for hopefulness, but some continued to wonder whether such relationships would produce more tangible gains.[60]

[60] Pension files of James Edds (alias Yates), 3rd USCHA, and Littleton Alsup, 111th USCI, RG 15, NA; GAR, Tennessee, “Descriptive Records,” McClung Collection, Knoxville.

Chapter 4: Work, Health, and Wealth

In August 1865, the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Tennessee promulgated an address "To the Colored Americans of the State of Tennessee" urging an embrace of principles of "Industry, education, economy, and christianity." Concluding with "a word to our brave and ever to be remembered soldiers," the Convention reminded them, "The day is not far distant when you will be called on to give up the pursuits of war and return, we hope, to your peaceful homes. You will find them no longer the homes of oppression as they were in former days. Through your valor and bravery the tyrant's rod has been forever broken. . . . Your heroic bravery and undaunted courage have forever silenced the enemies of free government with regard to the colored man's qualities to defend the right." As black soldiers prepared "to lay aside the bayonet," the Convention exhorted the men "in the face of your brilliant successes on the battlefield, to remember you are pillars by which your long suffering race expect to climb to greatness and renown, and on which they expect and hope to lean for support."[1]

In the decades after the Civil War, black ex-soldiers were in many ways pillars for their communities. The distribution of bounties and back pay in the years after discharge represented a significant accumulation of wealth in the early years following emancipation and helped black soldiers support themselves, form families, and build communities. However, veterans increasingly found themselves in need of support as well. While the Union army provided black Southerners with unprecedented opportunities to assert themselves in Southern society, most had entered the military service as unskilled slaves and most continued after discharge to earn their

[1] Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 12 August 1865.

living through physically demanding work. Those who incurred disabilities while in the military service or afterward thus faced a precarious future.

Federal pensions proved an enormous source of relief as the health of many Union veterans deteriorated. The pension system was an unprecedented outpouring of government resources to support veterans and their families, and black veterans in Tennessee had considerable access to this federal largess. That the system was equal in principle was a remarkable development—however, in practice, blacks frequently had difficulty claiming an equal share with white Union veterans. The pension process also reveals black and white Southerners' continuing efforts to define the meaning of black military service. The presence of black soldiers had revolutionized Southern society, but the postwar struggles of disabled black veterans suggested to some white Southerners a very different interpretation of the war's meaning for African Americans. And even if some black ex-soldiers won a degree of trust from white neighbors, whether such gains could be enjoyed by black non-veterans remained in doubt.

If black veterans were to be pillars of postwar communities, the government's promise of accumulated back pay and bounties seemed to offer some hope of providing the men with a financial foundation. In February 1868 alone, the Freedmen's Bureau's Memphis sub-district office distributed nearly $35,000 of such payments to 187 black soldiers, an average payment of $186.47 per claim. In an effort to ensure fair treatment for black claimants, the Freedmen's Bureau processed all black soldiers' applications, and soldiers continued to submit claims to the Bureau until Congress dissolved it in 1872. According to the last available records, for the period from January through mid-March of 1872—some six years after most black regiments

had mustered out in Tennessee—the Nashville office received 163 vouchers from veterans, their widows, or dependent family members claiming bounties or backpay.[2]

The claims process provided a slow but steady infusion of wealth into black communities that had emerged from slavery with very little, but it also provoked skepticism and frustration on the part of those who desperately needed the money. Matters came to a head in 1869, when rumors of fraud sparked a congressional investigation of the Freedmen's Bureau's distribution of bounties to black soldiers in Tennessee. When the investigating commission asked white Nashville claims agent D. W. Glassie what accounted for the Bureau's damaged reputation among black soldiers, Glassie replied, "The government has been so slow in settling these claims that it is hardly to be wondered at that these men, ignorant as they are, should think that somebody, bureau agents, claim agents, government, General Howard and all, had entered into a conspiracy to cheat them out of their bounty." After hearing testimony in Memphis, Pulaski, and Nashville, the commission absolved Bureau agents of any wrongdoing, but uncovered ample evidence of misdeeds by other parties in all three locations. Claims agent M. Coombs of Memphis, for example, practiced "forgery, perjury, and every other crime by which he could accomplish his dishonest ends." The law firm of Moyers and Dedrick in Memphis fraudulently claimed up to 50 percent of soldiers' bounty payments, and investigators found that "an odium . . . attaches itself to the whole of the firm's operations." J. M. M. Cloon, an agent and hawker of "magic oil," swindled dozens of ex-soldiers and widows in Middle Tennessee out of amounts ranging from $10 to $100.[3]

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[2] Reports Relating to Bounty Claims and Disbursements, Memphis, 4 March 1868, Freedmen's Bureau Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, National Archives Microfilm Publications, M999; Volume 4 (Jan.-Mar. 1872), Records of the Tennessee Freedmen's Bureau: Registers of Back Pay and Bounty, National Archives Microfilm Publications, M1911.

[3] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Military Affairs, *Bounties to Colored Soldiers: Letter from the Secretary of War in Answer to a Resolution of the House, of the 7th Ultimo, Relative to the Collection and Payment of Bounties to Colored Soldiers*, 41st Congress, 2nd Session (1870), 12-18, 31, 34, 59, 77.

In addition to such blatant fraud, the investigation revealed that some claim agents illegally loaned money to black veterans at usurious interest rates and extorted payment after the men received their bounties. D. W. Glassie of Nashville, the most infamous practitioner of such methods, "boldly [pled] guilty" to offering such loans, but denied that the transactions involved fraud. Noting the Bureau's sluggishness in processing claims, Glassie pointed out that his methods provided income when black soldiers "desired to rent a farm, and required teams, seed, etc.; when they wished to buy a house, a wagon and team, a cow, or anything of that sort that would assist them in making a living." The loans also aided those facing difficult circumstances, including veterans who travelled to Nashville "from a long distance to look after their claims and had no money to take them home again" and others who needed "to buy necessaries for sick families; to pay doctors' bills; pay funeral expenses; pay fines in court that they might be free to support their families, and money to employ lawyers to keep them from going to the penitentiary." The commission's final report admitted that in many cases "but for these loans by Mr. Glassie, the ex-colored soldiers would have had a serious time," but concluded that "taking advantage of the necessities of claimants" was "greatly to [Glassie's] own gain and to their loss." Glassie's operation suggests the desperation of many black veterans in Tennessee to get their promised payments, but also the usefulness of that money, assuming they could obtain it.[4]

The directors of the Memphis branch of the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company, which began accepting accounts in December 1865, correctly assumed that soldiers would form a significant portion of their clientele, and the first few years following the discharge of black regiments in the state witnessed a gradual increase in the number of black veterans establishing new accounts. During the bank's first four years of operation, it requested for identification purposes information regarding "regiment and company," along with name of former master,

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[4] Ibid., 5-6, 56.

height and complexion, names of family members, residence, and occupation. Between December 1865 and June 1867, only five of the ninety-eight accounts established in Memphis listed a Union regiment. But the number of new veterans' accounts and the percentage of such accounts both grew markedly over the next six months, comprising about 25 percent (forty-six of 182). The number of new veteran's accounts more than doubled between January and June 1868, with just under half of all new accounts (102 of 219) opened by black veterans.[5]

Of those veterans who opened new accounts in the first half of 1868 and recorded their employment, a majority (fifty-seven of ninety-eight) listed their occupation as farmer or laborer, but a variety of other lines of work were represented as well. A mail carrier, several barbers and grocers, and skilled workers including carpenters, blacksmiths, and a shoemaker opened accounts. Seven men had found employment as porters, while another six worked as teamsters, drayman, or hack drivers. Four young veterans indicated that they were attending school.[6]

As black veterans considered their career options after discharge, some were drawn to the ministry. Jesse Cotton, for example, was a slave in northern Mississippi before enlisting in the Union army at Memphis, but after the war he traveled through Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee as an itinerant preacher. Cotton's military credentials seem to have enhanced his authority. One congregant recalled that "when we colored folks used to have a Sunday School celebration, Parson Cotton used to put on his army uniform and belt and sword and badges to lead the parade." The uniform's brass buttons, "his old canteen and other army relics," and, of course, the sword, made a lasting impression. Even veterans who sustained severe wounds in the service sometimes found that church work offered opportunities for leadership. Elias McNairy, a sergeant in the 12th USCI, was three-quarters disabled for manual labor after enduring a gunshot

[5] Memphis Branch, Freedmen's Bank Registers, RG 101, NA, passim.
[6] Ibid.

wound and bouts of measles and smallpox while in the army, but he could still preach. After his discharge, he led several Cumberland Presbyterian congregations in Middle Tennessee. Carroll Childers lost a leg in the war and was illiterate but became a preacher in Davidson County. Ministers were not only among the most influential members of black communities, but occasionally among the wealthiest as well. Preston Taylor was a slave in Kentucky before the war but after discharge he rose to prominence as a minister of the Christian Church in Kentucky and moved to Nashville in 1886. He quickly established himself as one of the city's most prominent citizens. In addition to leading the Gay Street Church, one of Nashville's largest and wealthiest black congregations, he also founded a successful undertaking business, established an African-American cemetery, and invested in a variety of other ventures in Nashville. Taylor was among the first residents of Nashville to own an automobile, and he died a very wealthy man.[7]

Some Tennessee veterans enjoyed a degree of success as skilled workers. In many cases, these men had evinced talent and learned trades as slaves, but the circumstances of the war presented unprecedented opportunities for advancement and autonomy. James Mosley worked as a shoemaker and baker while a slave, but he proved himself a "good mechanic" who "could do any kind of work." As a member of the 3rd USCHA, Mosley was promoted to quartermaster sergeant when the previous quartermaster was suspected of speculating with rations and other supplies. After discharge, he found employment as a carpenter and worked for a furniture store in Memphis. Nathan Steele, a slave in Kentucky before the war, gained promotion to commissary sergeant in the 1st USCHA. He was a stone mason in Chattanooga after the war, and traveled to Atlanta and New Orleans to work on government contracts. After serving in the

[7] Pension files of Jesse Cotton (alias Bridgeforth), 3rd USCHA, Elias McNairy, 12th USCI, Sampson Smithers, 12th USCI, and Preston Taylor, 116th USCI, RG 15, NA; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 218, 397; Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 109.

110th USCI, Gabriel McKissack returned to Pulaski to work as a carpenter and master builder; by 1870 he had accumulated $500 in real estate and $100 in personal property. He had learned the trade from his father while a slave, and he passed his skills on to his sons, Moses and Calvin McKissack, who eventually established an architectural firm in Nashville and enjoyed even greater success. McKissack and McKissack Architects was commissioned to design schools, churches, and college dormitories, secured large contracts from the federal government, and became one of the most successful African-American architectural firms of the early twentieth century.[8]

But while some tasted success, even educated, relatively prominent black veterans were often compelled to accept menial work. After the 13th USCI mustered out, Pennsylvania-born veteran Joseph E. Williams established a law office in Nashville, processed bounty claims for other black veterans, served as the president of Nashville's Colored Soldiers League, and was a delegate to the 1866 Tennessee State Colored Convention. Williams's wife described his "general occupation" as "a politician and an orator" but noted that he also "worked around as a laborer." Williams did enjoy some upward mobility, however; in 1871 he left Nashville to become an employee of the New Orleans customhouse and a foreman of the city's street gang.[9]

While Williams and others enjoyed a degree of success, downward mobility was common. Allen Garner of the 1st USCHA settled after discharge in Maryville, where he was a merchant for several years and then was elected justice of the peace for the ninth civil district of Blount County. He held this post for nearly a decade, but then split time between work as a lawyer and as a laborer. Garner could not do much heavy labor because of a hernia suffered in

[8] Pension files of James Mosley, 3rd USCHA, Nathan Steele, 1st USCHA, and David Chears, 110th USCI, RG 15, NA; 1870 U.S. Census, Giles Co., Tenn., 139; Bobby L. Lovett and Linda T. Wynn, eds., *Profiles of African Americans in Tennessee* (Nashville, 1996), 87-89.
[9] Pension file of Joseph E. Williams, 13th USCI, RG 15, NA.

the service, but as of 1889, he had found more manageable duties as the janitor of Maryville's courthouse while continuing to practice law. In 1880, Albert Bailey of the 1st USCHA came to Dandridge from Washington County to teach school, but school was only in session four months of the year and he was "most of the time a laborer." Similarly, Oscar Wilson was one of the first black teachers in Blount County and helped organize Maryville's AME church, but he took a variety of jobs to support himself and his family. From discharge to 1869 he worked as a laborer. Wilson had been a porter before the war, and in 1869 he again found work as a porter for local merchants. But by 1877, little more than a decade after his discharge from the military, this leader of the black community was reduced to work as a day laborer, "hired to do chores about the houses of the citizens of Maryville."[10]

One historian of veterans argues that military service did little to enhance the average Civil War soldier's "vocational stature," for knowing the manual of arms was hardly more relevant to earning a living than "knowing how to foot the saraband or some other intricate forgotten dance." In some cases, however, black soldiers' military experience did lead directly to postwar employment. After the 17th USCI was mustered out in April 1866, Joseph Bigham did not return to his prewar home in Murfreesboro but instead remained in Nashville and "at once went to work for the officers gathering up dead U.S. soldiers and burying them in cemeteries hearabouts [sic]." He explained that "others of different Col. regiments, not wanting to go to their homes, did the same." While working at the cemetery, Bigham met Lewis Harriway, an Alabama native and veteran of the 111th USCI. Bigham reckoned "it was the soldiers' privilege to solicit such work." Apparently cemetery administrators agreed, and Bigham and Harriway worked in the Nashville National Cemetery through the end of 1867.

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[10] Pension files of Allen Garner, Albert Bailey, and Oscar Wilson, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA; Burns, *Blount County*, 211.

Harriway's stint at the cemetery was temporary, but he remained in Nashville and in the following decades made a living for himself, his wife, and his children by driving a wagon, hauling wood, and running a small coal yard. For other veterans, work at the national cemeteries was a long-term source of employment. William Holland labored at Stones River National Cemetery as a member of the 111th USCI and continued to work there from his discharge until 1885, when a workplace accident disabled him for manual labor.[11]

William Sumner of the 17th USCI also took advantage of the "soldiers' privilege" to work at the Nashville National Cemetery, but his service injuries left him unsuited for heavy labor and eventually rendered him vulnerable to political persecution. Sumner suffered a severe scrotal hernia while in the army and could not walk or lift anything heavy without "the bowel coming down." For a time, he found light work as a porter at Nashville's markethouse and as a janitor at the city council chamber and aldermen's room, but by 1870, as he explained in a desperate letter to the commissioner of pensions, he was "known all over this place and its vicinity as a Dead Out Republican," and "my Politics as a Straight and firm Republican Prevents me from getting work to do that I can stand or make anything." Noting that he was "a poor boy with no profession to make a living except hard work and I am not able to do that," he appealed for a pension for this "worn out and disabled soldier of the United States Army."[12]

Sumner's experience suggests why some black veterans were more cautious around ex-Confederates. Thomas J. Hamilton was wounded in the leg by a shell fragment during the war, but he told his employer, who had recently returned from service in the Confederate army, that he was merely suffering lingering effects from a bout of yellow fever. As the special examiner in the case explained, "With the sentiment then prevailing here against nigger soldiers he would

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[11] Dixon Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (Boston, 1944), 196; pension files of Lewis Harriway and William Holland, 111th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[12] Pension file of William Sumner, 17th USCI, RG 15, NA.

not naturally tell [this employer] that he had been in the Federal Army and got wounded there." Hamilton was open about his military service and his wound with others who hired him in the late 1860s; only the ex-Confederate employer was unaware of the true nature of Hamilton's disability. Hamilton's effort to avoid provocation is understandable. While the black community rallied to black soldiers as manly protectors, after the war black workers, including veterans, remained vulnerable to economic pressure or even violence at the hands of their employers.[13]

The ability of some black veterans to work was impaired by substance abuse or mental problems. Describing Anderson Grigsby as "a faithful soldier," a longtime Knoxville neighbor wrote to the pension bureau in 1894 that this "honest man . . . deserves help and if it is in your power for godssake do something for him." Grigsby claimed to be disabled for manual labor by rheumatism and chronic diarrhea contracted in the service but some in his community were skeptical. A medical review by the pension bureau's Board of Surgeons found no evidence of "vicious habits," but a white Knoxvillian named W. C. Warmack claimed "about all [Grigsby] has done since I've known him was to lay around some saloon drunk." Although Warmack did not know Grigsby before the 1880s, he speculated that the veteran's disabilities stemmed more from drunkenness rather than anything service related. A black acquaintance testified that he had seen Grigsby drunk "several times" but he also thought Grigsby "didn't have as much sense as other men" and was "not very strong minded." Frank Butler, a neighbor and fellow veteran, declared that Grigsby's disabilities had indeed originated in the service and noted that Grigsby

[13] Pension file of Thomas J. Hamilton, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

frequently put his hands on his hips and grunted in pain. But even the sympathetic Bulter grimly joked with Grigsby that, considering his condition, "if I was his woman I'd leave him."[14]

A Confederate veteran and justice of the peace who lived near Egbert Bennett in Rutherford County claimed that he was "a well disposed negro" before the war but when he returned from service in the 17th USCI he was physically disabled and "his mind [was] affected." As of 1880, the black veteran was "sick and lame . . . as well as half-witted." Joseph Caldwell returned to Bradley County a troubled man after his service in the 40th USCI. Another black veteran remembered Caldwell as a "stout, able-bodied" man at enlistment, but said he was never the same after he fell from the door of a car on a train transporting black troops across East Tennessee. This comrade recalled that "for a few days after the accident Caldwell did not seem right and acted wild and at times after that he talked queer and frequently complained of his head being wrong." In 1882, medical examiners in Charleston, Tennessee, reported that the veteran bore a large scar over his right eye and that some "disease of head" was "discernable by a heavy look of pain in the eyes and the painful expression about the mouth and the frequent placing of his hands to his head as if to crush out the pain." Caldwell also had difficulty communicating and eating because he lost three teeth while in an army hospital and the rest of his teeth within a year of discharge as a side effect of the "mercurial treatment" army doctors administered for his fever. Several decades later, another black veteran remembered that Caldwell's fellow soldiers' had laughed at his speech impairment and joked that he was lucky to be "done gnawing hard-tack," but after the war, neighbors noted that Caldwell continued to struggle with eating.[15]

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[14] Pension file of Anderson Grigsby, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA. On addiction and mental illness among Union veterans, see James Marten, "Exempt from the Ordinary Rules of Life: Researching Postwar Adjustment Problems of Union Veterans," *Civil War History* 47 (2001): 57-70; and Eric T. Dean, Jr., *Shook over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1997).

[15] Pension files of Egbert Bennett, 17th USCI, and Joseph Caldwell, 40th USCI, RG 15, NA.

Despite Caldwell's obvious injury, the very severity of his debility impeded his efforts to obtain a pension. The special examiner assigned to assess the merits of Caldwell's claim complained that "the old man has little or no sense. I spent near half a day in trying to get an intelligent statement from him, but made a failure." A white physician who had treated Caldwell shortly after discharge sympathized with the examiner. "I am not surprised that he cannot tell his story any better," the doctor commented; in his estimation, the veteran "knew how to work and nothing else." Health struggles also dogged George E. Pollard's efforts to procure a pension. Pollard suffered a gunshot wound to the foot during the battle of Nashville that left him permanently lame. He lived in Clarksville after the war, but by 1891 physical and financial problems made it impossible for him to travel for scheduled medical examinations for the pension board. The special examiner sent to investigate the claim found Pollard "unsound in mind" and "on the verge of insanity," and the veteran struggled to make a coherent official statement for his application.[16]

Some veterans moved about so much as to appear shiftless. Immediately after discharge, Joseph Caldwell returned to his pre-war home of Charleston, Tennessee, but between 1870 and 1880 he drifted between nearby Polk County, Charleston, and Ringgold, Georgia, before moving to Chattanooga in 1880. He explained that he "moved about wherever I could find employment." He could not do heavy labor, but frequently "waited around the depot" looking for light chores. Sampson Smithers was healthy before the war, but after discharge he complained of rheumatism and a pain in his head; fellow black veterans noted that he appeared "sort of weak minded." One ex-soldier who knew Smithers after the war explained that "he jobbed around" but was frequently unable to work and often "went half-naked," perhaps "because he was not able to work much." Smithers stayed in Nashville for three years after

[16] Pension files of Joseph Caldwell, 40th USCI, and George E. Pollard, 12th USCI, RG 15, NA.

discharge, before returning to his pre-war home near Hunstville, Alabama. But after three years trying to farm, he moved back to Nashville and took what employment he could find in whitewashing, yard work, and other light jobs.[17]

While some impaired veterans recovered their health after leaving the army and resumed gainful employment, ailments often grew worse over time. Before the war, George Nettles was "more than ordinarily stout and muscular and a good field hand." But a severe case of measles contracted while in the 14th USCI left him almost blind for nearly a year after the war and "wholly disabled from work" for two years. With the support of his father, he made a partial recovery after about three years, but he also suffered from hemorrhoids contracted in the service, which "prevented him from ploughing to advantage." The severity of his ailment was evident "from his walk and carriage and deposits on his clothes"; a neighbor who had "seen many cases of piles" thought "none so bad and seemingly incurable" as this veteran's. Nettles moved from Wilson County to Murfreesboro and back to Wilson County looking for work as a field hand, but could manage only about one-third the work of a healthy laborer. While serving in the 14th USCI, Abraham Elliott contracted chronic diarrhea and a respiratory illness that continued to trouble him as he aged. Those who knew him at the time of enlistment reported that he had been "sound in body and in vigorous health," but one of his postwar neighbors in Chattanooga testified that after he returned from the army he caught illnesses increasingly easily. Elliott often had to quit work and "at times grows so bad as to be confined to his house and bed for several weeks at a time." Phillip Deeds also emerged from the war in a weakened condition after suffering a bayonet wound in his shoulder and lingering respiratory trouble from camp fever and pneumonia. A fellow black veteran and neighbor in Clarksville testified that his "condition grows worse each year of his life." William McGhee was raised as a slave in northern Arkansas

[17] Pension files of Joseph Caldwell, 40th USCI, and Sampson Smithers, 12th USCI, RG 15, NA.

but after his regiment mustered out in Kansas, he spent the next several years "travelling about" and in 1868 came to Tennessee. Although he practiced law and taught school in Greeneville, he described himself as "a poor man." School lasted only three to five months of each year, and the rest of the time he sought work as a manual laborer. But by the 1890s, rheumatism in his legs became increasingly severe. He was unable to "cut wood, dig, lift, plow, or do any kind of work that required muscular exertion" for more than "a few minutes at a time," and even ascending hills or stairs and simply walking through town became arduous challenges. He sometimes was "forced to ask the assistance of persons passing" just to get out of the road and had to steady himself on walls or fences to keep from falling in the street.[18]

Physical debility was perhaps hardest on unskilled laborers, but it affected skilled workers as well. Those who worked in such trades as blacksmithing, which required considerable physical exertion, were particularly vulnerable. Peter Sliger of the 1st USCHA operated a thriving blacksmith shop in Knoxville after the war. When he first left the military, "he could do pretty fair work" but the rheumatism he contracted in the service worsened over the years, forcing him to curtail his labor. By the 1890s, pain and weakness in his arms and legs occasionally left him "not able to clothe himself . . . or stoop down and pick up his cane from the ground or ascend stairsteps," and in 1905 he was too weak to leave his home for an appointment before a pension examining board.[19]

As the soldierly ideal of manly independence gave way to the reality of deteriorating health for black veterans in Tennessee, many took heart from the possibility of a financial windfall in the form of federal pensions. In an 1899 letter to the commissioner of pensions, Harrison Henry admitted that when Union recruiters conscripted him for service in the 1st

[18] Pension files of George Nettles, 14th USCI, Abraham Elliott, 14th USCI, Philip Deeds, 14th USCI, and William McGhee, 83rd USCI, RG 15, NA.
[19] Pension file of Peter Sliger, 1st USCHA, and, RG 15, NA.

USCHA, "being very ignorant and illiterate, I was in great fear for my life." But Henry's "comrades and newfound friends" in the regiment soon "consoled me by repeating to me the great things that the government would do for the colored people, and especially the colored soldiers." After the war, he returned to farming in his old Blount County neighborhood and "again, my friends, claim agents, and others, repeated to me the story of the great things the Government was doing for her old soldiers and that I among the rest was entitled to a pension, and that all that was necessary for me to do was to put my claim in the hands of an agent who knew just what to do to prove it." However, Henry soon discovered that the system could be vastly more complicated. He spent years struggling to overcome the testimony of an unreliable former master and an envious brother and the skepticism of pension officials—but eventually he did secure a pension. Liberalization of pensions in the late nineteenth century opened considerable opportunities for black veterans to obtain government aid, for in principle the pension laws did not discriminate by race. In practice, however, black veterans struggled to gain an equal share of the rewards.[20]

The justice of generous financial support for those who had saved the Union became an article of faith for many soldiers. In 1867, the editors of the *Athens Republican* heartily endorsed the resolution of a Northern Republican meeting that "time and continued peace ought never to diminish our gratitude to the brave and true men by whose courage and toils on land and sea the rebellion was suppressed, and the country saved. It is and will ever be our sacred duty to care for the disabled survivors and the families of the dead." Federal legislation passed early in the war

[20] Pension file of Harrison Henry, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA. Based on a random sample of 545 white veterans and 545 black veterans, Donald Shaffer finds that about 75 percent of black veterans made at least one successful application, compared to more than 92 percent of the white veterans, and that only 61 percent of African American widows made at least one successful application, compared to 74 percent of white widows. White parents who applied for their sons' pension fared better than black parents, with a rate of nearly 70 percent to only 36 percent; however, applications for both white and black veterans' minor children in this sample were successful 50 percent of the time. See Donald R. Shaffer, "'I Do Not Suppose That Uncle Sam Looks at the Skin': African American Veterans and the Civil War Pension System, 1865-1934," *Civil War History* 46 (2000): 132-35.

awarded pensions based on disabilities or injuries that could be traced to military service, although already by 1864, provisions for special benefits made the system "rather baroque" and left "much room for initiative and interpretation" in the distribution of pensions. In 1874, the pension system seemed to peak in terms of new applications, total number of pensioners, and total expenditures, but by the end of the nineteenth century, the system had evolved from what one scholar terms "a generous, partially utilized program of compensation for combat injuries and deaths into an even more generous system of disability and old age benefits." Particularly significant were the 1879 Arrears Act, which allowed veterans to collect all pension payments for which they would have been eligible dating back to the 1860s, and the 1890 Dependent Pension Act, which stipulated that pensionable disabilities no longer had to be directly related to military service. Old age was often disability enough to secure a pension under the 1890 law, and Congress made the age qualification explicit in 1906 legislation and raised benefit levels several times. As of 1893, 41.5 percent of federal revenue was paid out as pension benefits to some 966,012 pensioners, and by 1910, over 90 percent of surviving Union veterans were on the pension rolls. By the start of the twentieth century, the federal pension system made the United States a "precocious social spending state" compared to other western nations. Although the system drew charges of corruption and excess, white Union veterans in Tennessee agreed with their Northern counterparts that pensions were well deserved. M. M. Harris, the commander of the GAR's Department of Tennessee, remarked in 1902 that the government could "not begin to pay the debt she owes the men who saved the nation."[21]

In their shared service with white veterans, black veterans were poised to reap significant benefits. But to secure these benefits, black veterans had to negotiate numerous pitfalls in the

[21] *Athens Republican,* 27 September 1867; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, 1992), 106-11; GAR, Tennessee, *Nineteenth Encampment* (1902), 36.

expanding bureaucracy of the pension system. Most veterans contracted attorneys or claims agents to assist in the processing of their claims, but fraud was rampant and sometimes even literate and conscientious veterans were swindled. Peyton Alston of Memphis noted that he was careful to "always keep my certificate myself" but he fell victim to unscrupulous agents. He made unnecessary payouts to several people who helped him secure his pension, including two white lawyers and a black man who prepared some documents for him. The latter agent was sent to the penitentiary for skimming $30 off of Alston's earnings. Illiterate veterans were even more vulnerable. Barney Cox, a farmhand in West Tennessee, had been "working at it" for two years before he was awarded a pension in 1888. But when his pension was increased in 1894, he believed he was cheated out of about $120 by someone forging his check and voucher.[22]

Although frequently the victims of fraud, sometimes black veterans were themselves perpetrators. In 1891, a special examiner accused C. W. Lewis, a black veteran and "sub-agent" in Chattanooga, of "testing the vigilance" of illiterate pensioners by withholding checks and collecting illegal fees. Such charges could be difficult to prove, but in this case the examiner had Lewis arrested, and the agent agreed to repay the money to avoid further prosecution. Cornelius Sanlon of Memphis, himself a pensioner, offered testimony in a string of fraudulent claims and committed perjury "time and again" in court.[23]

The broad variety of schemes plaguing the pension system produced a profound skepticism among many pension officials. Special examiner W. L. Sullivan uncovered a host of illegal practices in Nashville during his investigation of the pension claim of Cicero Starks's widow, Rebecca Starks, who ran her own pension claim business with another man out of her home. Sullivan concluded that the widow was in an adulterous relationship with her business

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[22] Pension files of Peyton Alston, 3rd USCHA, and Barney Cox, 61st USCI, RG 15, NA.
[23] Pension files of Joseph Caldwell, 40th USCI, and Jackson Demming, 3rd USCHA, RG 15, NA.

partner, rendering her ineligible for a pension—but the investigation also revealed a network of corruption. Sullivan characterized several deponents as professional witnesses, one as "an infamous liar" and another as "a sporting colored woman, and unreliable besides." A black doctor who testified in support of the claim had "a large practice and stands well among his race" but Sullivan concluded that he too was "somewhat of a professional witness in pension claims." Yet another witness was guilty of preparing forged and false testimony in pension claims, and Sullivan concluded that the group was a "gang of stock witnesses of the very worst character." A few months later, he reported that one of the witnesses was now serving a term in the Tennessee penitentiary for perjury and collecting an illegal fee in a pension case; another was under bond for filing a false pension claim, committing perjury, and making false affidavits; and a third was in the penitentiary for committing perjury and procuring a pension through fraud. Such instances of flagrant dishonesty seemed to confirm white suspicions of a more general black criminality. When Sullivan confronted Rebecca Starks about using her pension certificate as security to borrow money, another common crime, she claimed ignorance of any wrongdoing. The exasperated examiner exploded, "How is it that you colored people get together and 'work' so many men in the same way, and yet all of you each time plead that you did not know that it was against the law?"[24]

More subtle forms of dishonesty also damaged the credibility of black veterans' claims. White pension attorney S. Jerome Smith of Murfreesboro gained an "unscrupulous" reputation for collecting illegal fees from his clients, but he also defrauded the government by exaggerating his clients' disabilities. Other times, attorneys cut corners in the preparation of supporting documents. While investigating Reuben Abernathy's claim in 1890, special examiner C. W. Taylor reported from Pulaski, "In the large majority of Invalid-claims which I have examined in

[24] Pension file of Cicero Starks (alias Cummings), 16th USCI, RG 15, NA.

this district . . . affidavits have generally been framed to suit the allegations and not in accordance with the knowledge of the witnesses," who were most often illiterate and thus unaware of the deception. When confronted with such irregularities, witnesses sometimes "repudiate, in part, or in whole, their former alleged statements."[25]

Agents no doubt pursued such dubious strategies with the intention of accelerating the approval of their clients' pensions (and thus the collection of their own fees), but the shortcuts were sometimes a major disservice to veterans. In Abernathy's case, the examiner recommended that the bureau reject the fraudulent evidence, but the veteran changed lawyers, gathered legitimate testimony, and eventually received his pension. Another lawyer's carelessness with the facts provoked an extensive investigation and threatened to derail Franklin Harland's pension claim. Harland sought a pension for a gunshot wound to the leg suffered during the battle of Nashville and partial blindness. When filing the application, J. R. Griffin, Harland's white pension attorney, indicated that the ex-soldier's loss of sight was due to smallpox contracted in the service, but examiner W. C. Garrett noticed that neither Harland nor his witnesses ever alleged that the soldier had smallpox while in the army. The examiner concluded that the discrepancy was a product of the "unscrupulousness" of the attorney, who had already gained a degree of notoriety. "This man, Griffin, is now under indictment in the Federal Court for forging in a pension case," Garrett reported, "and I doubt not, if the *facts* in the case can be presented fully at his trial, that he will be convicted." In fact, further investigation revealed that Harland had sustained his eye injury in combat. Fortunately for this veteran, his testimony and that of

[25] Pension files of Jerry Morrow, 1st USCHA, Thomas J. Hamilton, 1st USCHA, and Reuben Abernathy, 111th USCI, RG 15, NA.

other affiants convinced the examiner that the claim was meritorious "notwithstanding the claim for loss of eyesight is attributed to an entirely different source of origin."[26]

Filing multiple claims seemed to promise greater rewards, but also created more paperwork and more opportunities for error. Chattanooga resident and veteran Edward Keelin filed separate claims in 1888 and 1894, the first for a specific disability, the second under the general pension law of 1890. Keelin could not write; he entrusted his claims to two law offices and a black man who claimed to be a "sort of sub-agent" of his second attorney. The attempt to consolidate these claims aroused the pension bureau's suspicions and resulted in a special examination to determine if the claim was fraudulent. In this case, the special examiner ruled the paperwork valid; but the additional scrutiny delayed the settlement of the claim.[27]

Veterans who relied on others to manage their affairs were vulnerable to an array of difficulties. Albert Goodall of Trousdale County explained that he could not read or write and was "very poor," so he left his pension certificate with a local merchant for "safe keeping and did my trading with him and turned my check over to him every quarter." However, during one settling of accounts, the certificate was nowhere to be found. The merchant looked for it "time after time and it can't possibly be found" and concluded that it had dropped on the floor and been swept away. In other cases, veterans' claims were unnecessarily complicated by the meddling of others. In 1898, after reviewing Tyler Garner's claims for increase of pension for loss of eyesight and lung disease, a pension official concluded that "it appears quite clear that this poor, ignorant colored man . . . would long ago have abandoned his claim if those who are making use

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[26] Pension files of Reuben Abernathy, 111th USCI, and Franklin Harland, 15th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[27] Pension file of Edward Keelin, 1st USCHA.

of him had let him." Instead, the veteran had become "merely a tool of others in a bold attempt to defraud the United States government."[28]

Some veterans attempted to handle their applications personally, with mixed results. In 1897, Hamilton Davis of Meigs County took matters into his own hands after his attorney had failed to act in his claim for more than a year. Although Davis struggled with spelling and grammar, he personally wrote much of his correspondence with the pension bureau. Two years later, he hired a new lawyer, but the issue of which attorney would collect the fee for obtaining the pension precipitated a minor crisis. The pension bureau ruled that the second attorney was Davis's rightful representative and demanded that the first attorney refund a $10 fee. Eventually the lawyer complied with the ruling, but only under protest and after a thirty-day extension. Ten years later, Davis spent several months locking horns with yet another attorney, who refused to send the veteran a new discharge certificate until he paid a fee of $3. Davis initially refused to send the money, but in this case the pension bureau confirmed that the required fee was legitimate.[29]

Charles Bonner, an illiterate veteran living in Tullahoma, likewise ran into difficulty when he took his claim into his own hands. He was already drawing a pension under the general law when his attorney sent him forms suggesting that he might be eligible for a larger pension based on his injuries. Bonner borrowed money for travel to a medical examination and for a trip to Chattanooga to search for comrades who could vouch for him. The effort and expense were all for naught; Bonner apparently was unaware that, because his injuries were not incurred during his military service, he did not qualify for the pension increase.[30]

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[28] Pension files of Albert Goodall, 14th USCI, and Tyler Garner, 1st USCHA, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA.
[29] Pension file of Hamilton Davis, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.
[30] Pension file of Charles Bonner, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA.

Black veterans were not alone in facing fraudulent agents and bureaucratic tangles in the pension system, but lower literacy rates made them more susceptible to such problems than white veterans, and African Americans were at a severe disadvantage in pursuing their claims for other reasons as well. One challenge facing black veterans was the basic matter of confirming their identity. As noted in the previous chapter, former slaves often changed their names to repudiate their bondage, which sometimes made proof of identity an issue in the pension process. In other cases, identity problems were rooted in simple clerical errors or decades-old miscommunications. James Hunt changed his name when he found out his father's name was Yates. But when he enlisted in the 3rd USCHA, the enrolling officer misunderstood him and recorded his last name as Edds. Yates acquiesced to the mistake and went by either name after the war. The special examiner in the case of John Alfred Wilson's claim concluded that "the difficulty over the name arose solely from the claimant's ignorance," but the problem was actually more complicated. Wilson and his comrades testified that they always heard "John Alfred" called at roll, but supposed that officers simply called him that "for short." Among the black community he was always called John Alfred, but everyone knew his last name was Wilson. But when he received his discharge papers, he discovered he had been entered on army rolls as simply John Alfred. Decades later, when he prepared his pension application, he received conflicting counsel from his attorneys. One lawyer advised him to correct his name while the other told him that such an attempt "would make no difference" and that "as I was mustered out as John Alfred, I had better apply under that name." Wilson was literate and preserved records in a family bible, and his decades of continuity living as a neighbor to other black veterans in Maryville who could provide testimony eventually helped secure his pension;

but the identity question generated an extensive investigation and caused a significant delay in the processing of his claim.[31]

Assuming that a veteran's identity could be established to the satisfaction of the pension bureau, the amount of the pension varied based on the onset and extent of debility and the veteran's age. Documenting such matters frequently presented another set of challenges and, at times, simply getting to a medical examination was a hardship. In 1903, Jesse Overton was so "old and feeble" that it was a hardship to travel to his scheduled examination in Nashville, sixty miles from his home in Dickson County. The pension commissioner agreed to postpone the examination but Overton still had to go to Nashville. Sometimes poverty rather than debility was the problem. Thomas Baker had difficulty finding funds for the sixty-mile trip from Haywood County to his appointment before the medical board in Memphis.[32]

The nature of black soldiers' disabilities sometimes made obtaining a pension more difficult. Many veterans who suffered gunshot wounds or amputated limbs struggled to readjust to civilian life, but at least such trauma was memorable and likely to have been documented at its incurrence. Black soldiers suffered lower rates of combat wounds than white soldiers but higher rates of disease, and after the war many black veterans claimed chronic ailments related to their extensive wartime fatigue duty. Fuel Williamson was crippled with severe rheumatism, but he explained in 1895 that he "did not know enough to apply for a pension when I came out of the service" because he "supposed a man had to be wounded in order to become a pensioner." Sickness, hernias, and the like were less heroic than combat wounds but could be equally debilitating. On this point, black veterans found allies among their white comrades. The 1903 Tennessee GAR encampment endorsed a pension rate increase for hernias, citing the

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[31] Pension files of James Edds (alias Yates), 3rd USCHA, and John Alfred Wilson (alias John Wilson), 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.
[32] Pension files of Jesse Overton, 12th USCI, and Thomas Baker (alias Bracken), 3rd USCHA, RG 15, NA.

"pronounced opinion" of "many eminent physicians, boards of medical examiners, and many statesmen," that a hernia "is a disability equal to that caused by the loss of an arm at the shoulder or a leg at the hip." But black veterans sometimes had difficulty proving that hernias, rheumatism, hemorrhoids, chronic diarrhea, and other relatively common afflictions originated during their military service.[33]

In verifying such claims, the testimony of white army surgeons and officers could be pivotal. African Americans who had been noncommissioned officers tended to have more contact with white officers during the war than did other black soldiers and sometimes remained more memorable after discharge. Anderson Wallace served as a duty sergeant in the 1st USCHA, and settled in Knox County after his military service. He had not been in touch with Second Lieutenant John B. DeShorey of Ohio since the regiment mustered out, but in 1896, the white officer remembered that Wallace was a "good soldier" before he was overcome with heat stroke while on dress parade and was sent to the regimental hospital. Although the officer prudently avoided speculation on possible lingering effects of this illness after discharge, his corroboration of Wallace's claim that his disability originated in wartime helped secure Wallace a pension. In 1873, John E. MacGowan, the colonel of the 1st USCHA and editor of the *Chattanooga Times* after the war, provided support in the pension claim of Allen Garner, who had served as a commissary sergeant. MacGowan remembered Garner's hernia, as did the regimental surgeon, E. M. Wight.[34]

But unfortunately for black veterans, Private Thomas J. Hamilton's experience was more typical of the postwar relationship with white officers. John W. Kerr, the captain of Hamilton's company, did not even remember a man by that name being in the company, much less

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[33] Pension file of Fuel Williamson, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA; GAR, Tennessee, *Twentieth Encampment* (1903), 39-40.
[34] Pension files of Anderson Wallace and Allen Garner, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

circumstances of the alleged disability. In the case of Richard Hill, his white orderly sergeant testified from Illinois in 1897 that "a great many of the men had diarrhea," but "it is impossible for me to recall the names of the men in that Co. not having seen them for 32 years." H. H. Hood, a surgeon with the 3rd USCHA, was sympathetic to Wesley Madden's request for testimony, but politely declined to assist in his claim. "I regret sincerely that I cannot help you in obtaining a pension, as I do not doubt you are worthy of it," Hood informed Madden. "When you tell me that I treated your eyes while we were in the service, I believe what you say, but of course I cannot swear to it unless I remember it, and I do not remember it. I think every soldier who was disabled in the service is entitled to a pension, but the Government requires evidence under oath. . . . I hope you will pardon me for not complying with your request."[35]

Even if white officers were easily located and living in the vicinity, they were not always helpful, particularly as the war years grew distant. When questioned in 1898, Colonel MacGowan stated that he did not remember Corporal Mark Ish. In fact, some two decades earlier, MacGowan had signed a statement supporting Ish's claim. When the special examiner brought this to MacGowan's attention, the colonel replied that previously he had enlistment and service records to refresh his memory and insisted that he could no longer "recall the soldier definitely." As an army physician Henry Wyatt had treated black soldiers, and he lived in Chattanooga after the war. But he had "no recollection whatever" of having treated black veteran Lewis Saffell.[36]

On the other hand, the considerable extent of one surgeon's contacts with former soldiers presented its own obstacles to providing testimony. S. J. Quinby, a surgeon in the 59th and 61st USCI, practiced medicine in Memphis for fifteen years after the black regiments' discharge and

[35] Pension files of Thomas J. Hamilton, 1st USCHA, Richard Nutterville (alias Hill), 3rd USCC, and Wesley Madden, 3rdUSCHA, RG 15, NA.
[36] Pension files of Mark Ish (alias Henderson) and Lewis Saffell, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

during that time provided care for many black veterans. But in 1897, he testified that he "treated so many of the colored boys who had been in the service—as high as 40 in a day—just after the war, that I find it hard to remember them now." In the case of Richard Hill (who had enlisted under the name Nutterville), the doctor claimed to "have some sort of a faint recollection of a man named Richard Nutterville or Nutter" and willingly searched his books for a record of treatment. But Quinby's records primarily pertained to house calls, not office treatment for rheumatism and diarrhea, and he sadly admitted that a soldier "might have been into the office 40 times and I would not have any record of it." Although Quinby was eager to help, in the end he could find no record of treatment; he was forced to admit that "I can't recall the man satisfactorily," and could provide no sworn testimony supporting Hill's claim.[37]

Edward Munk, a white captain in the 14th USCI, also seemed willing to support a black veteran, but could provide little practical help. Munk was living in Lawrence, Kansas, when he was called to offer testimony in the case of Anderson Medlow in 1908. Munk said he knew Corporal Anderson Medlow "well," because "he was a young fellow who was prompt in obeying orders and trusty." Munk supported Medlow's claim that a collapsing wall injured him in the service, but the pension bureau ruled this insufficient proof since the captain was not present at the time of the accident. Munk also was unable to definitively identify Medlow after the examiner showed him a photograph to refresh his memory, but sheepishly admitted, "I am no hand to distinguish colored people apart." After further scrutiny, Munk decided that the man pictured probably was the soldier in question, "but there is a great change in a negro as he grows older."[38]

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[37] Pension file of Richard Nutterville (alias Hill), 3rd USCC, RG 15, NA.
[38] Pension file of Anderson Medlow, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA.

Comments such as these boded poorly for the capacity of white officers to support black claims, but, in fairness to Captain Munk, several of Medlow's black comrades who had not seen him in over forty years did not immediately recognize a recent picture of the veteran either. Memory posed a problem for white and black veterans alike. In 1895, black veteran Lafayette Browder testified that he had seen pension applicant Charles Bonner two or three times in the three decades since they left the army, but could not offer much information regarding his medical condition while in the service. "It has been so long that a good many of the boys have grown out of my recollection," he admitted; "I never studies much about other people's business only just as it comes to me." When the pension examiner reminded Browder that he had previously provided testimony in the case, he explained, "I did not remember the man at the time and could not recall him for some time; I got to studying about the man and went to see Abraham Elliott (comrade), and when he called the man to mind, I remembered him." Pressed on the matter of Bonner's disability, Browder replied, "I have studied a good deal about him, but all I can remember is that there was such a man in the company, and that he came to see me and that I went with him to the office . . . and identified him."[39]

Establishing chronology was another frequent source of frustration for pension officials. After attempting to gather information in McMinn County in 1903, special examiner Charles Whitehead grumbled that the impoverished "cotton picking negroes" he encountered were "all . . . of the illiterate, stolid plantation grade," and he "found it extremely difficult to elicit anything as to dates and little as to circumstances." While investigating another case in Shelby County, Whitehead complained that "these southern negroes have no idea as to dates and years" and "estimate time from the 'surrender.'" Misreported information at Peter Hensley's enlistment in the 111th USCI complicated his pension claim thirty years later. Examiner S. F. Hampton

[39] Pension files of Anderson Medlow and Charles Bonner, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA.

declared the veteran "both ignorant and stupid" and reported that did not know whether he was born in February or May, much less the year of his birth. In 1913, the chief of the board of review admitted that "everything indicates that he is much older than the enlistment age indicates" but because the age given at enlistment was "usually relied upon in such cases as this and as the former reviewers relied upon it, we will now adjudicate on the same basis."[40]

Given widespread black illiteracy and white officials' skepticism about black witnesses' honesty and intelligence, black veterans' ability to secure testimony from "respectable" whites, who could testify to their age and physical condition was of considerable importance. Former masters were potentially valuable sources of information about soldiers' pre-enlistment histories, but Henry C. Jolly's attempt to prove his age reveals some of the problems of depending on such references. One issue was that Jolly's independence in establishing a new life in Nashville left him out of touch with those in his prewar home near Huntsville, Alabama. When he returned to Alabama years after the war, he "found a new generation and could not find a soul I knew." The chances of obtaining proof of his age seemed slim; after enduring extensive questioning, he said, "Anyone can look at me and see I am old, and that is as far as I can go." However, a special examiner located a son of Jolly's former owner in Chicago. While the man was too young to remember Jolly, he indicated that his older sister, who had grown up with Jolly, had all the family records in Memphis—but he warned the examiner, "She won't tell you her age." The pension official was pleasantly surprised, however, when, during an interview in Memphis, the woman freely divulged that she was sixty-seven years old. She and Jolly had played together as children, and she thought they were about the same age; she could not, however, confirm the exact year of his birth. When the examiner asked if Jolly's birth date could be recorded in the

[40] Pension files of Benjamin J. Cobb, 1st USCHA, Edmond Ramsey, 61st USCI, and Peter Hensley, 111st USCI, RG 15, NA.

family bible, the woman replied that she doubted it, and, in any event, "I have packed it away and do not care to get it for your inspection." The examiner decided not to press the issue. Although the pension board had devoted the time and expense of examiners working in several states to test this claim's legitimacy, ultimately Jolly was unable to produce the proof he needed for an increased rate.[41]

In some cases, however, white patrons actively assisted the claims of black veterans. Pecuniary considerations sometimes provided motivation. In 1915, merchant A. F. Temple of Shelbyville wrote on behalf of veteran Peter Hensley to inform the bureau that "this old colored gentleman desires his mail changed . . . care of me—me being his grocerier." Temple had reason to make sure mail from the pension bureau arrived at the proper place. Noting that the veteran was "a credit customer of my store" and that he was in "feeble health," Temple inquired whether the pension bureau would send a prorated check "should this fellow die between designated customary dates of [pension] payment." A few weeks later, Temple contacted the pension bureau with a request for reimbursement for Hensley's burial expenses.[42]

More often, however, a mingled sense of pity and justice motivated white patrons to support black veterans' claims. Despite indications of forgery and fraud and a lack of testimony from white officers in Thomas Majors's pension application, connections with the family of his old master in Knoxville helped secure a pension for him and, years later, for his widow, Lucinda. In 1915, shortly after Majors's death, attorney G. W. Pearsall wrote that "the reputation of the [widow] and the soldier is good among the old white people who have known them for a long

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[41] Pension file of Henry C. Jolly, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA. The Pension Bureau advised its special examiners that when dealing with "colored claimants," "Wherever it is possible, the former owners or members of the owners' family, and the fellow-slaves of both the soldier and [widow or dependent relative], should be carefully examined. More accurate and satisfactory information can generally be obtained from such witnesses than from other sources." Given white examiners' general skepticism of the usefulness of former slaves' testimony, this advice tended to place even greater importance on the testimony of former owners. See *General Instructions to Special Examiners of the United States Pension Office* (Washington, 1881), 28.
[42] Pension file of Peter Hensley, 111th USCI, RG 15, NA.

time. They speak of the soldier as an 'honest hard working negro.'" Majors had been unable to do any work for several weeks after discharge and remained partially disabled for labor by rheumatism and heart disease, but in the postwar decades, at least five relatives of his former owner hired him, and at least four of these testified in support of his pension application. After Majors's death, the special examiner reported that "everyone that I met expressed the wish that 'Cinda' would get a pension to help her out in the last few years of her life." In 1892, J. M. Collins, a physician in northern Alabama, offered testimony in support of Benjamin Grigsby. Collins lived within a few miles of Grigsby before the war and knew the man was healthy before going into the army. But he returned from his military service suffering from lumbago, "which renders him unable to gather his cotton crop without doing so upon his knees," and eczema that produced eruptions on his forehead, abdomen, and scrotum. In 1898, Collins again wrote on behalf of Grigsby, noting that "I have testified in one of Ben's pension claims prior to this, and the wonder with me, from my intimate knowledge of Ben and his physical condition, is that his case has not received the same attention as that of others who were his superiors physically." "From a professional standpoint, I do think great injustice has been done this negro," Dr. Collins insisted. "Ben is rather an exceptional negro, no vicious habits, reliable and trustworthy."[43]

Wartime and postwar garrisons of black soldiers had seemed to revolutionize Southern social relations, but in the decades after the war, even as white Southerners were increasingly apprehensive about the generation of blacks coming of age after slavery, disabled black soldiers offered Southern whites opportunities to assert a very different interpretation of the meaning of the black military experience. When Egbert Bennett returned to Rutherford County from his service in the Union army, white neighbors found that he was delirious and seemed to be suffering from frostbite, pneumonia, and jaundice; in short, "his whole system must have been

[43] Pension files of Thomas Majors, 1st USCHA, and Benjamin Grigsby, 12th USCI, RG 15, NA.

affected." The son of Bennett's old master took pity on him. "All is like a dream now," he wrote of the chaotic aftermath of the war, but he vividly recalled "Egbert being brought in, his insensible condition and my old father's anxiety about him and his long illness." He explained that, because the slave had "grown up with me, my sympathy was aroused and I did all I could for him since he was forced away from us at the point of the bayonet a good, obedient, able bodied servant, one of our best." It took over a year for Bennett to walk but, "I fed and clothed him, bought medicines and all necessaries, and have never let him suffer." During the war, the neighborhood had been "scoured for recruits" by Union patrols, and while the family admitted that some slaves were "too glad to get away," they pointed out that others had been "forced away from home." Egbert Bennett's own testimony revealed that he was of the latter sort, and the white Bennetts insisted that, in stark contrast to his hardships faced while in the Union army, he "had been pampered and cared for well fed and clothed, his habits had been most regular as a slave," and "he had not been exposed to hard weather night or day as he was grown up on the place." The white Bennetts left no doubt that Union military service was responsible for the condition of this "wandering, inoffensive creature, full of pain," and eagerly seized the chance to reclaim the paternalism so severely shaken by the war. But ironically, whatever comfort they could offer the black veteran, their support did not secure Bennett a pension. In fact, the bureau ruled that Egbert had deserted the army to return to his former owner, rendering his pension claim invalid.[44]

Many white Southerners viewed the federal pension system as a corrupt, bloated monstrosity, but the testimony of an ex-Confederate who supported Nat Jenkins's pension claim suggests how white notions of proper race relations could be reconciled with support of pensions

[44] Pension file of Egbert Bennett, 17th USCI, RG 15, NA. On white Southerners' anxiety about the post-emancipation "New Negro" and efforts to romanticize slavery, see Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York, 1998), 179-216.

for disabled black soldiers. In 1890, "Capt." Jim Rivers of Giles County wrote to the pension commissioner that he was "an old Rebbel and have never had any thing to do with your department," but he could "tell the truth and want to say what I know of one case which I believe you do not understand." Rivers had known Nat Jenkins for some fifty years, for Jenkins worked on an adjoining farm before the war. Rivers noted that Jenkins was "a strong hearty man" before he joined the army but was "always a half witted man nearly an Idiot and just sense enough to work." Even so, he was "kind and good to everybody," even taking in orphans when he had no food for himself. Jenkins was crippled with rheumatism after the war, and at times would have gone hungry if not for the support of neighbors. While he never worked for or lived with Rivers after the war, Rivers gave him cornmeal "some times when he was completely without." According to the ex-Confederate, "Nat is really an object of charity, made so I believe from service in the Federal Army, and has a right to call on the Government for *aid* and it will be a Charity for you to do all you can towards getting his Pension."[45]

Rivers's choice of words in supporting Jenkins's claim is revealing. Union and Confederate veterans alike often went to considerable lengths to demonstrate that the benefits they sought for themselves were *not* "charity." As one historian of Confederate veterans notes, "charity carried with it a nasty stigma that repelled many proud veterans," because dependence seemed "to raise serious questions about their manliness and morals." For some white Southerners, "to become dependent upon others was to admit failure," and some viewed pensions as an "evil" threatening to lower the pensioner from a "high standard of honorable distinction." But in the eyes of Nat Jenkin's white neighbors, there was no contradiction between

[45] Pension file of Nat Jenkins, 101st USCI, RG 15, NA.

the black veteran's dependence and his status as a deserving negro, and their advocacy helped secure the man a pension.[46]

Salvaging the "faithful slave" ideal required a much greater leap of logic in Jerry Cheers's pension case, but the effort achieved an almost elegant simplicity within its convolution. Raised in Giles County as a slave of a wealthy planter and Confederate officer, Cheers settled near Murfreesboro after discharge. When he initially filed for a pension in 1888, he stated that he did not know whether his old master or any of the master's family were living. But in 1915, his appeal to his old owner's family to verify that he was over seventy years old (and thus qualified for the increase of pension due to age), provoked an enthusiastic response from W. M. Cheairs, a son of his old master. "If there is an old niger in this state who is entitled to a pension, old Jerry is the niger," declared Cheairs. "I believe he was a good soldier because he was a good faithful slave." Cheers had stolen his master's best horse to help him reach Union lines and never returned to his old neighborhood after the war for fear that his former owner might punish him for his audacious escape. But with some fifty years of hindsight, W. M. Cheairs concluded that "he was a faithful good negro in the Rebbel army as cook and from what I have heard was a valuable man in the U.S. Army after he deserted the Rebels and went to the Yankeys." Cheairs admitted that he did not know Cheers's exact age, but insisted that he was certainly over seventy.[47]

In many such cases, black veterans were no doubt glad to gain former masters' support—however, those who benefited from paternalistic sentiment did not necessarily adopt the outlook. The case of Abram Ralls suggests the distance between those former owners who looked wistfully to a paternalistic past and those black veterans who insisted on freedom. Ralls ran

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[46] R. B. Rosenburg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill, 1993), 14, 30-34, 73.
[47] Pension file of Jerry Cheers, 111th USCI, RG 15, NA.

away from his master in Alabama to enlist in the 44th USCI and after discharge lived in Williamson County, Tennessee, for several decades before moving to Kansas City in the mid-1880s. Pension officials suspected an imposter in his pension claim, which led them to contact the veteran's former owner, J. P. Ralls, to verify his identity. Ralls obliged by writing to his former slave and then composed another lengthy letter to the pension office recounting the correspondence. The former master seemed to take pleasure in his reminiscence with his former slave about intimate details of the white family's life before the war, including "the pet name of my Dear Mother (Miss Sally or 'Old Miss'); the names of my children in regular order according to age; the particulars as to the capture of the deer in the lane at the time of the marriage of Wiley to my girl Abbie; the death of my Dear Sister Mary at my house . . . the building of the cottage on the mountain" and more. J. P. Ralls reported with delight that his former slave remembered all the details—but Abram Ralls's reply to his "dear old Master" added a few significant memories of his own. After accurately recounting the details from the white family, Abram Ralls asked his master, "and do you remember giving me some money and tobacco not to run away any more . . . you gave me a pass to widow Avery and have never seen me since."[48]

In many other cases, however, any trace of fondness or paternalism on the part of masters had long since died out. Some former owners were openly hostile and not inclined to support pensions for their former slaves. Two decades after the war, George Childress explained that "for our running away our Masters owes us no good will until this day." In 1876, he wrote to his old master in Robertson County requesting a statement verifying his sound physical condition before enlistment, but as of 1884 he had received no response. He characterized his former master as a "bitter secessionist" and "a dangerous mean man, a Confederate Soldier, averse to us having any potential rights." According to Childress, one "poor colored man" in Robertson

[48] Pension file of Abram Ralls, 44th USCI, RG 15, NA.

County was “a walking monument of his temper towards our race as he put out both eyes of the colored man for no reason or offence.”[49]

In some cases, white Southerners actively worked to undermine veterans’ access to benefits. One of the most flagrant attempts is documented in the file of Edward Copeland, who was active in Tennessee and Virginia politics in the 1890s. In 1894 he was “threatened by some of the leaders of the democratic party” in Virginia, who warned him that if he did not use his influence to support Democratic candidates, “my claim would be defeated.” Copeland refused to cooperate, and “the election was the 6th of November 1894 and my claim was rejected on 17th of the same month.” In fact, in November 1894, the pension office received a letter from someone posing as Copeland that offered a remarkable reinterpretation of the meaning of the black military experience. In the forged document, “Copeland” related a colorful story in which he carried his wounded Confederate master off a South Carolina battlefield before he was forced into the federal army. The idealized slave “considered I got my death warrant” when his eyes were damaged by an exploding shell at the battle of Franklin in November 1864, for “I would rather be a slave the balance of my life if only I could have the sight of my eyes.” Before he joined the Yankees, he had been “well and harty and my master learned me how to read and write,” but as a consequence of his Union army service, “Now I cannot see how to read.” Adamantly proclaiming that he did not want admission to the National Home for Disabled Soldiers, the letter writer resolved, “I never want to put on another piece of Yankee blue. The Yankee cause my eyes to be like they is now.” The message concluded, “I have always voted the Democrat ticked [sic] the first and last one was a Democrat ticked.” When the real Edward Copeland later alerted the bureau to the fraudulent letter, he reiterated, “I have not lived to regret any of the hardships I encountered. I had rather be a dead hero in my grave than live a coward.”

[49] Pension file of George Childress, 16th USCI, RG 15, NA.

Copeland also clarified his political allegiance: “I am a republican from principle and if every black man votes the Democratic Ticket I shall remain a republican.”[50]

If white opposition to black pensioners was rarely so imaginative, it was often more damaging. A white acquaintance’s allegations of alcoholism hurt Anderson Grigsby’s pension case, but special examiner Will J. Auten’s interview with the sons of Grigsby’s former master also made an unfavorable impression. While the sons admitted that “they were all too small at the time to remember anything about the claimant,” they asserted that they “knew less about Anderson and his brother Henry than any of the negroes” because the two were “the worst of the lot” and the former masters’ family “had no use for them.” The special examiner concluded, “I don’t think this case has a particle of merit—the claimant looks about as able to work as anyone, in fact I think a little exercise of that kind would prove beneficial to him. It would seem, from what I could gather, that he never did like to work and wouldn’t when he could help it.” Although Grigsby’s claim was rejected in 1893, he applied again ten years later and finally in 1906 received a pension for rheumatism and diarrhea.[51]

Whether files languished from inattention or swelled with assertions requiring verification, the discretion of individual pension board examiners often took on enormous importance to a claim’s outcome. In 1896, Tennessee’s white GAR department commander voiced veterans’ concerns that pensions were “left to the whim and fancy of this or that administration” and insisted that “once granted after fair examination,” pensions should be “as sacred as any other contract entered into in any other relation.” But even what constituted a fair examination was a question on which special examiners sometimes disagreed. Anderson Wallace of Knox County claimed to suffer from heart disease originating during his service in

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[50] Pension file of Edward Copeland, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA
[51] Pension file of Anderson Grigsby, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

the 1st USCHA. In 1896, when special examiner E. B. Olmstead saw a list of Wallace's black comrades to be interviewed, he concluded that "the witnesses are not of the character competent to testify as to the origin or continuance of so obscure a disability as disease of heart." But examiner Will J. Auten in Chattanooga disagreed with his colleague and continued collecting depositions from Wallace's black comrades. While admitting that most of the testimony came from "ignorant colored men" who "know nothing of diseases," Auten insisted that the men were "considered truthful" and told what they knew about the case without embellishment. Convinced that Wallace's heart trouble dated back to his military service, Auten recommended that the claim be admitted.[52]

The bureau sometimes reopened previously admitted claims for further examination, much to the dismay of veterans. Harrison Henry's former master, with whom he worked after discharge, testified in the late 1880s that the veteran returned to Blount County from his military service suffering from an injury to his back and hips. But during an 1896 interview with examiner L. J. Taylor regarding another veteran's pension case, the former owner mentioned that if Harrison Henry was receiving a pension for an injured hand, this disability had existed prior to his enlistment in the army. Henry had left the farm of his former owner about 1892, and it is unclear why his pension was of interest to the man in 1896, but the damage was done. In a letter to the pension commissioner, the examiner recommended opening the case for investigation and suggested that under further review "the whole case may turn out to be fraudulent." In new testimony, the former master claimed that he could not recall Henry complaining of anything

[52] GAR, Tennessee, *Thirteenth Encampment* (1896), 48; pension file of Anderson Wallace, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA. Black veterans' pension applications tended to draw greater scrutiny from the Pension Bureau than white applications. In a sample of fifty applications of white Southerners who joined the Union army, Donald Shaffer finds that 26 percent included at least one special examiner's report, compared to about 49 percent of black veteran's pension files (based on a random sample of 533 black veteran's pension files). See Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 129, 237.

when he returned from the service; it was only after he had gone to Illinois and then returned to work for the old master in Blount County several years later that he complained of his back and hip. The outraged veteran fired off an angry letter to the pension commissioner claiming that the examiner was “a scoundrelly tool” who “took every unfair method possible to rob me of my pension.” According to Henry, the examiner refused to let him protest while his master was testifying, and allowed the “malicious testimony” of Henry’s brother and others who were biased against the claim because Henry had refused to provide false affidavits in their claims. “I have been unjustly robbed of my pension, now in my old age,” he fumed, “not only by the perjury of a brother, but by as mean a man [the special examiner] as ever cursed the interests of the pensioners of this section.”[53]

Considering the pervasive white racism and increasing exclusion of blacks in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America, it is remarkable that black veterans procured as much from the pension system as they did. But sadly for black communities, many veterans’ success stories revealed a difficult truth: even if white neighbors accepted some black veterans as trustworthy, productive members of society, broader suspicions of black character remained. The pension files abound with backhanded compliments. In 1888, for example, examiner Joseph S. Noble recommended giving Lewis Saffell the benefit of the doubt, as he is a “man of good standing”—at least “for one of his class.” In 1895, a special examiner noted that Anderson Wallace “bears an excellent reputation for a negro.” In 1908, special examiner N. H. Nicholson’s report to the pension commissioner also supported Wallace’s application, remarking favorably that the deponents in the case were all “of the old type of negroes” and “considered truthful.” Charles Bonner impressed his white neighbors in Tullahoma as a “worthy negro” and a “sober man and of good habits.” One longtime neighbor thought Bonner had been “industrious

[53] Pension file of Harrison Henry, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

and done all he could" until the veteran's failing health forced him into complete dependence on his wife's income. Bonner also received supporting testimony for his disability from local white merchant R. H. Richardson, who deemed him "a man of good habits, away above the average of his class." Richardson had sold Bonner goods for over twenty-five years and "always found him prompt to keep his word." But in some ways the white community's insistence that Bonner was an "exceptional negro" only underscored their distrust of others of his race. W. H. McLemore, a white resident of Tullahoma, sent the pension bureau several letters regarding the reliability of local blacks connected to Bonner's case. "The within named persons are colored," he cautioned the bureau, and "having spent my life among these people, I take every statement made by them, where they are at all interested, with considerable allowance." McLemore admitted that two of the deponents were "as reputable as any of their race in this community," but in further correspondence with the pension bureau a few months later, he reiterated that while "these negroes are as reputable as the average of their race[,] . . . as a rule the testimony of negroes is not worth much unless corroborated by other testimony."[54]

Occasionally, examiners' comments were even more revealing of their understanding of the race's character. In his report on Simon Smith's widow's claim, special examiner Herbert W. Meyers explained that the couple had been incarcerated for five years in the state penitentiary for stealing from their white employer, but he matter-of-factly characterized the "ignorant old colored woman" as "fairly honest, as much so as any of her colored sisters in East Tennessee." In relation to Ed Kennedy's application, examiner Ed D. Hamner admitted that he never obtained a sworn statement from the veteran, but "I knew Ed Kennedy in his lifetime and have talked enough with him" to be "fully convinced" of his identity. Unfortunately for Kennedy, this

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[54] Pension files of Lewis Saffell, 1st USCHA, Anderson Wallace, 1st USCHA, and Charles Bonner, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA.

confidence was largely a moot point by the time Hamner composed his report; the veteran had been "shot and mortally wounded in a drunken row." But "not withstanding this fact," the examiner concluded, "his reputation was fairly good for a negro."[55]

In terms of work and wealth, the military experience had imparted an uncertain legacy to black veterans. Some succeeded brilliantly after the war, but the trauma of the war left others objects of pity. And even when black veterans were successful in gaining the trust and support of white neighbors, they did not necessarily view an honest soldier as representative of other blacks. The question of whether black veterans fared better in politics, either substantively or symbolically, is the subject of the next chapter.

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[55] Pension files of Simon Smith (alias Samuel Gillett), 40th USCI, and Ed Kennedy, 44th USCI, RG 15, NA.

Chapter 5: Politics

The black soldier was a powerful symbol in campaigns for civil rights and helped open the door to black suffrage in early 1867, but black Tennesseans remained barred from holding office or serving on juries. During the pivotal state campaigns of 1867, black voters appeared poised to deliver a decisive advantage to whichever party could gain their support, and Tennessee's white Radicals (Republicans) and Conservatives (Democrats)—as well as black veterans themselves—attempted to use the black military experience to advance their political fortunes. Black veterans maneuvered to make the best of their position, resulting in both spectacular violence and startling reconciliation. But as black voters swung decisively to the Republicans, the state's politics assumed a paramilitary character, and anti-Radical violence and Radical divisions brought Radical rule to a sudden demise. The circumstances of Reconstruction limited office-holding opportunities for black Tennesseans, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century black political involvement faced increasing obstacles, but black veterans continued to find ways, both direct and indirect, to assert their political interests. However, as the dwindling number of surviving black Union veterans entered their twilight years, the meaning of the black military experience of the Civil War continued to be reshaped.

In 1867, with the majority of Tennessee's white voting-age men disfranchised and eligible white voters divided fairly evenly between the Radical and Conservative parties, both sides understood that black support could be decisive in the coming election. Both sides also recognized that black veterans and more generally the black military experience could be useful in securing these votes. A few areas contained outright black majorities. In the eighth congressional district, blacks were 45 percent of the population and 70 percent of registered

voters. Haywood and Fayette counties were 55 and 65 percent black and had 68 and 87 percent black electorates, respectively. From the enactment of black enfranchisement, Radicals expressed confidence in marshalling the black vote. In mid-February, the Nashville *Daily Press and Times* compared rumors of "colored rebel voters" to "the milk sickness": "you can hear of their existence in some remote country, but the most diligent search will not enable you to come up with them." Indeed, for the first few months of 1867, many Conservatives remained hopeful that the Tennessee Supreme Court would rule the 1866 franchise law unconstitutional, which would give whites voting rights and indirectly exclude blacks.[1]

On March 21, however, the court upheld the law, and some Conservatives reconsidered their position on black voters. To be sure, many remained adamantly opposed to the political inclusion of blacks. The Bolivar *Bulletin*, for example, declared that "Conservatives do not wish nor will they allow negroes to sit in convention with them," and "neither do the negroes themselves, except a few perhaps, who have been made associates of mean white men, desire such a privilege. The sensible negro knows his place and is content." But others hoped to forge an interracial alliance in which that black voters "would intuitively defer to their old masters." Headlines of the Nashville *Republican Banner*'s coverage of the April 1 Davidson County Conservative convention trumpeted "Political Equality of the Colored Man Recognized" and "The State Convention to be 'Without Distinction of Race or Color.'" During Judge Isaac Whitworth's address to the convention, he admitted to blacks in the gallery that "before the war I owned some forty of you," but now he affirmed that he was "ready to go with you to the [state] Convention and take you by the hand and act in concert with you on these questions which so vitally concern us all." He urged his audience, "you must regard our proposition for united action as entirely disconnected with the question of slavery; which is a defunct issue."

[1] Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 19 February 1867; McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 185.

Conversely, Whitworth questioned the Radicals' claims to have "liberated" the slaves: "Is there any man fool enough to believe it? They came here to fight for the Republic, as they regarded it, not to liberate you. They did that only at the last gasp of the Republic—when you would serve to stop a bullet or some other useful purpose." Whitworth hoped to win their support "not by stealing you, not by bribing you, but by convincing you." He urged white Conservatives to "take [the black voter] by the hand and turn his faculties to the benefit of both races" and grimly warned that "if we do not do this, the extermination of one or the other race must follow." However, he insisted "our purpose is far from one of extermination—it is to elevate, to enlighten, to ennoble."[2]

Thus, in early 1867 black voters faced a choice between Radicals who had granted them the franchise but had yet to extend the right to sit on juries or hold office and Conservatives who had recently opposed *any* political rights for black Tennesseans but controlled much of the land and available employment opportunities. At least one black veteran, Joseph E. Williams, sided with the Conservatives in a rather remarkable conversion. As president of the Colored Soldiers League during the State Colored Convention in August 1866, he had been an outspoken advocate for joining Equal Rights Leagues, and the noisy parades of the Colored Soldiers League outside the meeting disrupted the speeches of several more cautious delegates who eschewed politics. But some eight months later, Williams became the leading black Conservative. After Judge Whitworth's April 1 speech, the *Banner* reported that convention delegates shouted "loud calls for Williams! Williams!" and the "Pennsylvania-born, well-traveled . . . Union Soldier" ascended the rostrum and outlined his position. "The country had been distracted by the curse of slavery," he said, but the institution "was now removed forever" and "the people of the South were not to be blamed for holding colored men as slaves, for the Constitution under which we lived had

[2] McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 192-97; Nashville *Republican Banner*, 2 April 1867.

authorized the system." "This day, the 1st of April, 1867, begins a new era in the Southern States," Williams declared triumphantly; "Never before have such honors been conferred on the colored race—and they have not come from the North." Calling for peace between the races, Williams appealed to blacks and whites to "join hand in hand, as those should do who live in the same country and have the same material interest. . . . All we ask is that you support us in our equality before the law and guarantee the freedom we have secured." In conclusion, Williams declared himself "ready to sacrifice my life for this cause."[3]

Williams's public statements revealed a simmering resentment toward Tennessee's Radicals. In a front-page column in the *Republican Banner*, he offered a cynical view of the black military experience. "The white Radicals wish to make a cat's paw of us by throwing us 'to the front' in a political point of view, as they did in the rebellion, because we are ignorant and do not understand their schemes," he warned his fellow blacks; "I contend that your best interest is to be loyal to yourselves, for your own advancement, by not adopting their wild policy." "True," he admitted, "these Radicals have made us voters to suit their own selfish ends, but have they not prohibited us, at the same time, from exercising the right of sitting in the jury box, and the right of holding office. They say that we shall not vote for those of our own color, and that it is a high crime for us to vote for whom we please. Are we not capable of thinking and acting for ourselves? If not, we are, in my opinion, no better than political slaves—mere tools to be used when needed, and then thrown aside." Williams demanded "the right to follow our own interest and opinions as a race without Radical dictation." Personal snubs by the Radicals seem to have fueled his outrage. The Conservative press claimed Governor Brownlow had denied Williams permission to organize a State Guard company, while a Radical paper predicted that Williams

[3] McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 186; Nashville *Republican Banner*, 2 April 1867. On Williams's activity in 1866, see Chapter 2.

would "fail to control the colored voters as he failed to induce Governor Brownlow to employ him to make speeches over the State for the Radical ticket this canvass; and as he failed in his application for a captaincy to command one of the companies in the loyal State militia."[4]

Throughout the 1867 campaign, Williams and the Conservatives attempted to turn conventional wisdom regarding race, Radicalism, and the legacy of the Civil War on its head. Williams's address to the state Conservative convention in Nashville in mid-April exemplified these themes. "I came to this country [i.e., the South] because I love my race. I took up arms in defense of their freedom and I stand today in defense of their rights, rights on the terms of equality. . . . I have been a soldier and have been mustered out among the people here, who were said to be our enemies." But although "we had to toil and work for them," he saw "no reason why we should not vote for them who have treated us kindly," and he admonished whites, "I hope you will do well by us, that we may be friends forever." Conversely, Williams claimed, "I see Radicals here that have been in the rebel army. I see Radicals here that have been negro traders. I see a man running for Governor who has devoted his life for the destruction of my people." According to Williams, Brownlow had "excited more prejudice against the abolitionists of the North than any other men in this country, and today he wishes to use me and my people as his tools. . . . I want my people to vindicate their honor and not support the man who has devoted his life to their destruction. What does he propose to do with the colored people if they are free? He says colonize them. That is his policy. If we adopt it, we may yet be driven from this country." Along similar lines, the Conservative *Republican Banner* claimed that it had favored gradual emancipation even before 1861, while Brownlow argued for the "divine origin" of slavery. Reminding readers of Brownlow's prewar declarations that "the negro was born to

[4] Nashville *Republican Banner*, 6 April 1867; Nashville *Union and Dispatch*, 29 March 1867; Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 11 April 1867.

work," the *Banner* argued that his support of black suffrage itself was "a species of labor": "The negro is still to be used as a workman. He is to be a political utensil as he was a private chattel, and he is to be forced to work for Brownlow, the hardest master, the most exacting overseer that ever flourished a lash." The editor expressed confidence that black Tennesseans, "ignorant [as] they may be . . . are not destitute of a certain intuition [and] shrewdness" that would allow them to see that their true interests lay with the Conservatives. Throughout the campaign, the Conservative press launched a daily barrage of headlines attacking Brownlow's alleged hypocrisy: "He is for Breaking up the Union to Save Slavery," "Brownlow for Lynch Law — He Advises Tar and Cotton for Vile Abolitionists," "Brownlow a Rebel — He Advises a Coalition with France and the Invasion of New England." Pointing out that emancipation was "but a military strategy," the Nashville *Union and Dispatch* reasoned that former slaves "owe as much gratitude to one of the parties to the war as to the other." It remained to be seen whether black voters would find such logic convincing.[5]

In fact, the Conservatives gained some black allies, including twenty-five delegates representing six counties at the state convention. But the proceedings of a Conservative Nashville "Colored Convention" in early April suggest why the movement failed to draw broader black support. The sympathetic *Republican Banner* approvingly reported that the Union veteran Williams chaired the meeting and also gave a glowing account of the address of a "colored man named Washington," who delivered what the Conservative press considered "a most sensible and appropriate speech." Washington argued, "If Jeff Davis had not gone to Richmond, we would be working in the cotton patch today. The South will go further for our good than any Radical dare do. I say to the Southern men, hold your heads up, your time will

[5] Nashville *Republican Banner*, 14, 17, 18 April, 7 July 1867; Nashville *Union and Dispatch*, 13 March 1867; McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 203.

come yet." Washington's closing couplet, "Let others go as they may, I will forever stick to those who wore the gray," may have heartened ex-Confederates, but the ostensibly Conservative gathering also revealed discord. One speaker turned out to be what the *Banner* characterized as a "wolf in the sheep fold" who unleashed a "wild, disconnected harangue against Conservatives, Rebels, slaveholders, and all of that ilk . . . [who] wished to send the kink heads back into slavery." Rev. Daniel Watkins, a leading figure at the previous year's State Colored Convention who had attempted to use his influence to steer that gathering away from politics, also spoke "at considerable length," but declined a nomination to chair the meeting and "did not appear willing to commit himself to either party at the present."[6]

In the end, few blacks converted to the Conservative cause. At a Radical mass meeting in Nashville on April 13, B. L. Brooks told an audience of 4,000 blacks, "I don't blame the Conservatives for wanting our votes," but he remained unmoved. "They claim to be our best friends," he observed; "Well, I recollect when they sold my wife away from me, and my children too. Oh! they say, you must forget all that. Well, we can forgive it, but we can never forget it as long as we have memories." As for anyone who desired the "Constitution as it was," "he is welcome to our old place in the cotton-patch." "If we go with the Conservatives," he warned, "we will make the government just what it used to be. Does any colored man want that?" Urging his audience to "look through the history of the war," Brooks credited black soldiers with forcing a remarkable shift in power and attitudes: "What troops marched into Petersburg? What troops stormed the toughest forts? [Cries of colored troops and applause.] You, colored troops. The government owes its success, through God, to the colored troops. We have too much of the idea that was stamped on our minds by old master, when we were young—that 'niggers' weren't worth anything. We must shake off that idea, for see how much the 'nigger' is worth now.

[6] Nashville *Republican Banner,* 7 April 1867

When we come to get the musket and the cannon-ball, we were surprised to shake ourselves and humph! we were somebody to be sure. [Laughter and applause.]" Neither black nor white Southerners, Brooks insisted, should ignore the significance of black military service. "Now, you vote for the Conservatives if you dare," he said, but referring to the nearby site of the battle of Nashville he added sardonically, "You know they have all forgotten how we fought them on the hills yonder. You have just to give them power then it will be 'Oh! my nigger, I've got you now.' Put things back as they were, if you dare." At the same meeting, George W. Bartie, another black speaker, similarly paid tribute to black soldiers and predicted that "black men would march up in one solid phalanx" to vote for Radicals. A convention of Roane County blacks also credited the "skill and bravery of our soldiers in the field" for their part in gaining the privilege "to meet together as freemen," and vowed to "rightfully appreciate the acts of the patriots in the Legislature of our State, *who voted that we might vote*." The convention pledged "undivided support" for Brownlow and advised that freedmen "keep at a respectful distance the former disloyal slave owner." These black Republicans insisted that their old masters, "having become accustomed to look upon our race as menials, merchandise and chattels, &c. . . should be required to bring forth fruits" proving their "repentance" before black voters could trust them.[7]

The Radical press also recognized the utility of evoking the black military legacy to bolster political support. On the day Joseph Williams addressed Nashville's Conservative convention, the *Press and Times* reprinted Jefferson Davis's proclamation to execute black soldiers and their officers as insurrectionists and warned readers that the former Confederate president was "today the idol of the rebel leaders who are trying to gain the confidence of colored men to obtain their votes." "Now there are in this city and State many thousands of

[7] Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 15 April 1867; Nashville *Republican Banner*, 14 April 1867; Knoxville *Whig*, 1 May 1867.

negroes who enlisted in the Union army at the call of Abraham Lincoln," the editor concluded; "how many discharged colored soldiers will join the Jeff Davis party? The ghost of the murdered Lincoln, who gave up his life for their sakes, would haunt the renegades forever." The Radical press also raised the specter of the 1866 riots in New Orleans and Memphis: "Who mobbed a Convention of colored Union men and murdered more than one hundred in New Orleans? *The Conservative Mayor . . . and his police.* Who murdered and wounded nearly two hundred colored men and women in Memphis and burned their houses and churches? *A Conservative mob led by a Conservative police.*"[8]

The nomination of Emerson Etheridge as the Conservative candidate for governor provided more fuel for the Radicals. Etheridge was an unconditional Unionist in 1861 but opposed the Emancipation Proclamation and well into the summer of 1865 continued to make speeches denying its legitimacy. Beginning with Etheridge's April nomination and continuing through the summer, the Nashville *Daily Press and Times* ran a regular column under the headline "Etheridge on Shooting Negroes." Typical was this, in the April 18 issue: "Etheridge said at Trenton, July 3d, 1865: 'The negroes are no more free than they were forty years ago, and if any one goes about the country telling them that they are free shoot him; and these negro troops, commanded by low and degraded white men, going through the country, ought to be shot down.' That is the Etheridge doctrine. And if the people are mad enough to put Etheridge and his rebel party in power, every negro will be shot down who shall dare assert his freedom."[9]

The Radical press also called into question the military record of Conservative darling Joseph E. Williams. On April 17, the Knoxville *Whig* printed a letter from an officer of the 13th USCI describing Williams as a "shirking member" of the regiment. According to this source,

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[8] Nashville *Daily Press and Times,* 1, 11 April 1867.
[9] Ibid., 18 April 1867.

Williams initially worked as a clerk but after a few months he proved to be "insolent" and "the most worthless soldier in the regiment" and was demoted to private. The officer accused Williams of "feigned sickness." While this officer credited other black soldiers of the "noble regiment" with "true valor" at the battle of Nashville, he claimed that Williams was too busy "peddling newspapers around the camp" to join his comrades on the front line. Instead, he "sneaked away" during the fighting and was charged with "desertion in face of the enemy": "he never saw a battle, and is *not wounded.*" The *Daily Press and Times* dismissed Williams as the "hero of the ball and chain and the guard house" and confidently asserted that "ninety-nine Union soldiers, out of every hundred, of honorable record, in this State will support Governor Brownlow."[10]

Williams's bid to assume leadership of his race quickly faltered, with potentially dangerous consequences for him. Several days before the April 13 mass meeting of black Republicans, Williams sent a message to Leander Woods, commander of the Colored Soldiers League, asking him to assemble the organization at the Nashville courthouse square. Woods refused and passed the note to the editors of the *Press and Times*, who accused Williams of attempting to "bring on a riot" and break up the planned meeting. "The colored soldiers do not recognize Williams," the editors claimed; "he was expelled in disgrace from their association for rascality long since and holds no office whatever in it." Even a Conservative paper admitted that during Williams's speech before the state convention a "large number" of blacks stormed out of the gallery "making all sorts of threats as they noisily shuffled out," such as "the d—d rebel

[10] Knoxville *Whig,* 17 April 1867, Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 17 April 1867. According to Williams's military records, on December 16, he was initially reported missing in action at the battle of Nashville after he "ran from the field by virtue of cowardice"; however, the next day he was reported in the hospital, "slightly wounded by the bursting of a shell." He deserted the regiment on January 27, 1865, but was arrested two weeks later and returned to duty, serving until the regiment mustered out in January 1866. The Conservative press identified Williams as a sergeant major, but in fact he never rose above the rank of corporal and he mustered out as a private. See pension file of Joseph E. Williams, 13th USCI, RG 15, NA.

nigger, he ought to have his head busted wide open.' 'He's buying niggers for the rebels,' etc." That paper, the *Republican Banner*, accused the Radicals of planting malcontents to make a scene, but went on to report that as Williams left the convention hall, a rumor spread that a crowd of angry blacks intended to tar and feather him. Several policemen and prominent whites escorted him to his residence, where he found a "mob of several hundred" waiting for him, "apparently meditating mischief." "They contented themselves with cursing and threatening," but the *Banner* particularly made note of "an old negress" who declared that "they would hang Williams, and . . . in a mysterious undertone [added] that the police would not always be with him." As the veteran took to the campaign stump, the Radical press reported that the "inevitable Joe Williams" received a hostile reception elsewhere in Middle Tennessee. Following an April 16 appearance in Columbia, he "sneaked off to his quarters, fearing for the safety of his person, as the colored men were very much exasperated against him." Although many Conservatives had protested the continued presence of U.S. soldiers stationed in Columbia, some now appealed to the Freedmen's Bureau agent for a military guard to protect Williams from harm and escort him to the depot. "No violence was used, but the desire to lynch Joe was very evident," the Radical correspondent observed. During his address to the state Conservative convention, Williams had noted threats of "assassination" and remarked, "I have been in this city four years, among the soldiers of both armies and among you said to be the enemies of our race, and I have never received such ill treatment as from this body calling themselves Radicals." He promised to continue speaking, however, and if killed "I will die a martyr for the cause of liberty and humanity."[11]

Meanwhile, Radicals worried about black voters' vulnerability to violence at the hands of ex-Confederates and Conservatives, and Brownlow met this threat by mustering in State Guard

[11] Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 11, 18 April 1867; Nashville *Republican Banner*, 17, 18 April 1867.

units throughout the spring and summer. Fearing the possibility of a race war, Brownlow proceeded cautiously with the recruitment of black militia companies and declined some offers to raise black companies. But ultimately the 1867 State Guard included 1,875 men, of whom between 483 and 544 (25 to 29 percent) were black. Black guardsmen served in seven of the Guard's twenty-one companies, including one mixed-race company from West Tennessee (McNairy County) and two mixed-race companies from East Tennessee (Washington and Greene counties). Three companies raised in Middle Tennessee (Sumner, Williamson, and Davidson counties) were black units commanded by whites, while a fourth black company from the region (Davidson County) was the only company commanded by a black man. Union army veterans figured prominently among the black guardsmen. The Washington County company was about half black, and many of the recruits claimed to have served in USCT regiments. J. H. Sumner, the sole black commander and a prominent Nashville saloon keeper, was not a veteran—a fact not lost on the Conservative press, which advocated an appointment for Joseph E. Williams in place of the "mere civilian" who "never saw a day's service, and who has no knowledge or experience of the military art." But despite the Conservative press's claim that "the colored 'veterans' of Nashville look with aversion" on Sumner's captaincy, his lieutenants, twenty-three-year-old George Sumner and twenty-four-year-old Henry H. Mitchell, were both Union veterans. The other black company from Davidson County was commanded by a white officer and apparently had a white second lieutenant, but the first lieutenant was Alexander Gleaves, a thirty-five-year-old veteran of the battle of Nashville who had served as a sergeant in the 13th USCI. One historian of the Guard suggests that this "may mark one of the first instances in American military history where a white man served under a black."[12]

[12] Severance, *Tennessee's Radical Army*, 46, 51-55, 235-36; Nashville *Union and Dispatch*, 28 March 1867.

The presence of the Guard in Middle and West Tennessee emboldened black political activity and encouraged involvement in Republican Union Leagues, but many white Conservatives and ex-Confederates were incensed by it. Brownlow's "standing army" was bad enough, but rearming blacks seemed infinitely worse. To those inclined to view any black political rights as an abomination, the Radical Leagues' commitment to "drill, drill, drill" the freedmen into unshakeable Republicans only compounded the sin. Collisions between black assertiveness and white anxiety occurred across the state during the 1867 campaign, most notably in Franklin on July 6.

Franklin was home to an active Union League that included numerous black veterans, and that summer the League procured a fife and drum and in the evenings frequently paraded around the outskirts of town. One resident later explained that "the Conservatives viewed the marching of the League with fife and drum as a sort of military organization and had fears lest it might be turned to disturbance or strife." In fact, on at least one occasion, several "colored conservatives" disrupted the procession by barging through the column and firing pistols into the air. Leaguers sought counsel from a local lawyer, but when they found no legal way to prevent the harassment they armed themselves and on one occasion exchanged gunfire with Conservatives. No one was injured in the skirmish, but tension built in June when a white Radical politician came to Franklin and spoke at the courthouse. The League marched to the courthouse with its fife, drum, and banners, but the sheriff blocked the entrance and refused to let them bring the music or banners into the hall. General W. P. Carlin, who later investigated the matter for the Freedmen's Bureau, considered some of the League's banners to be "in bad taste," with slogans such as "Remember Fort Pillow when you go to the Polls" and "The Radicals build

schoolhouses, the Conservatives burn them"—but he also noted that the U.S. flag was among the banners barred from the courthouse. [13]

On this occasion, League members left their banners at the entrance, but hostility between the League and anti-Radicals continued to build. Lizzie Crutcher, a black resident of Franklin, testified that when she attempted to collect her pay on July 4 her white employer William Crutcher "asked me what I was," whether she was "a Radical or Conservative." She "told him I was nothing and I didn't know the meaning of either party." Another white man, Ed Crutcher, then "insisted I should tell him what I was," but she repeated "nothing." He then said, "Lizzie, I will be honest with you, this beating of drums by these God damned niggers and their marching up and down the streets [will] bring on a mob," and "the [white] people [will] not stand it." He went on to denounce the League's support of "old Brownlow," warn that "the nigger was not able to fight the white man," and claim that he "hated to see [blacks] mobbed," but "it would be done."[14]

The Franklin League planned a political rally for the afternoon of July 6 featuring Republican legislative candidates and an evening torchlight parade. The rally was relatively peaceful, but later that afternoon, Joseph E. Williams, who had been speaking nearby for the Conservative campaign, made an unscheduled stop in Franklin and used the opportunity to deliver a speech. Williams's appearance produced an uproar, and Conservatives and Radicals began trading taunts. Leaguers interrupted Williams by chanting for Brownlow and striking up music. A white Conservative told black veteran and prominent League member Benjamin Graves, "Ben you ought to take a little lesson under [Williams], you have been following the

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[13] Affidavit of D. B. Cliffe, Franklin, 11 July 1867, and report of Gen. J. P. Carlin, Nashville, 15 July 1867, Reports and Affidavits Relating to Outrages and Riots, Selected Records of the Tennessee Field Office of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives Microfilm Publications, T142.

[14] Affidavit of Lizzie Crutcher, Franklin, 12 July 1867, ibid.

wrong flag." The Union League members walked away from the speech in disgust, firing a few shots in the air "as a salute," and headed toward a grove outside of town. Meanwhile, ex-Confederate "Col." John L. House and several armed men accosted white Radical J. C. Bliss and blamed the "thieving Yankee scoundrel" for "getting up a mob and riot." Bliss denied provoking anything and retorted hotly that he "helped to drive the rebels from this Country and intend to stay here until I get ready to leave." For this insolence, House struck Bliss in the face. The unarmed but now thoroughly enraged Bliss stormed off in search of a pistol, spreading "great excitement" among League members on the edge of town.[15]

Some sympathetic whites advised the League members to disperse and go home, but they objected to cancelling their scheduled torchlight parade because "the Conservatives would attribute their retirement to cowardice." They eventually compromised by agreeing to abandon the procession but preserve their dignity by marching in a body back into town to the public square before breaking ranks and going home. Meanwhile, the Conservatives in Franklin expected a "collision" and began gathering arms and ammunition under the direction of Col. House. General Carlin's subsequent report noted that "the number of arms seemed to have increased" among the Union League as well, with some ten muskets and an unknown number of pistols. A white Conservative claimed that the League members "were generally armed, some with army guns, others with pistols and many of them seemed to be infuriated" as they returned to town. Carlin surmised that League members "seemed fully to expect a conflict" as they passed House's store on the way to the square, but the column passed House's corner without incident. However, just when crisis appeared to have been averted, a white man advanced from among the Conservative crowd and fired two pistol shots into the marchers. Witnesses disagreed

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[15] Report of Gen. J. P. Carlin, affidavit of Benjamin Graves, Franklin, 10 July 1867, affidavit of John L. House, Franklin, 10 July 1867, and affidavit of William Branam, Franklin, 10 July 1867, ibid.

over precisely what happened next, but apparently Conservatives fired a volley into the League, and the League members turned and unleashed a volley of their own into the Conservatives. A bullet passed through Benjamin Graves's coat sleeve, but he "called on the boys to rally to the flag" and claimed he "heard the Rebels cry out let us take those colors and tear them up." Another Leaguer testified that Col. House had ordered his men "to go strait for the [U.S.] Flag" and declared that he would make the Leaguers regret displaying "a banner with Fort Pillow on it." Conservative L. Gadsey claimed that Graves told the League to "charge" the Conservatives and described "a perfect war of shots from all sides of the League." When the smoke cleared, one white Conservative lay dead and six other Conservatives—some of them black—were wounded. At least twenty-seven black Leaguers were wounded; the doctor who treated their wounds noted that their injuries were all in their backs or the back of limbs, demonstrating they had been attacked from behind. General Carlin observed pointedly that the man bearing the United States flag was wounded in the head.[16]

When Carlin arrived on July 8, he "found the town quiet and the people apparently very sorry that the affray had occurred." But evidence suggests that some on both sides remained defiant and even belligerent. One witness testified that on the morning after the riot she heard Ben Graves brag about his role and vow he "would do it again." According to this source, when one League member expressed uncertainty about whether he would join a fight, "another negro replied that they were not drilling for nothing." On July 7, League member William Davis was walking down the street with his arm in a sling when he encountered a white man named

[16] Report of Gen. J. P. Carlin, affidavit of L. Gadsey, Franklin, 10 July 1867, affidavit of Samuel L. House, Franklin, 9 July 1867, affidavit of Benjamin Graves, Franklin, 10 July 1867, affidavit of Burrell Bostick, Franklin, 8 July 1867, and affidavit of D. B. Cliffe, Franklin, 11 July 1867, ibid. Carlin suspected that the Conservatives had fired the first volley after the initial pistol shots, and he seemed to admire the League's poise: "The firing of the colored League was very deliberate and very accurate as nearly as many conservatives were killed or wounded as there were arms in the hands of the colored men, and it was evident that none of the arms were reloaded and fired a second time."

Mayberry who asked “where was you” during the riot. When Davis replied, “I was in the U.S. crowd,” Mayberry told him his “damn throat ought have been cut from ear to ear.” Davis asked “what for,” to which the Conservative snapped “don’t give me no more of you[r] jaw.” Davis ran into Mayberry again about an hour later, whereupon Mayberry told him “he was going to make a mob and kill every Radical nigger from the cradle up.”[17]

The Radical press responded to the Franklin riot by citing again Etheridge’s statement in 1865 about an open season on black troops and drew a direct line connecting the atrocities at Fort Pillow, Memphis, and Franklin. “The massacre of colored soldiers at Fort Pillow illustrated the real temper of the rebels towards freedmen who assert their rights,” said the *Daily Press and Times*, while “the same malignant spirit which guided the bullets and the bowie-knives of rebels to the hearts of more than sixty murdered colored men in Memphis, raged like a fell demon in the breasts of the Franklin rebels last Saturday when they fired a murderous volley upon a procession of colored Republicans. Fort Pillow, Memphis and Franklin are three monuments which mark the madness of Conservatism, and declare to the country how blind, infuriate and devilish is the resistance which it makes to the cause of equal rights.” The paper further contended that “The Franklin riot was as thoroughly, essentially and completely a Democratic outrage as the Memphis riot or the Democratic anti-draft riot in New York City. It is Conservative property in every respect. Its bloodshed, its brutality, its dastardly cowardice, its mangled corpses, all lie at the door of that charnel-house of sin and damnation, which God in his inscrutable providence has permitted Satan to build up in this country under the name of Democracy.”[18]

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[17] Report of Gen. J. P. Carlin, affidavit of Temperance Allen, Franklin, 10 July 1867, and affidavit of William Davis, Franklin, 8 July 1867, ibid.
[18] Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 9 July 1867.

A few days after the riot, General Carlin reported that "all parties" in Franklin, "especially the white Conservatives, seemed very solicitous" that the U.S. troops who had arrived on July 7 should remain in town. The army stayed, but to Conservatives' dismay J. H. Sumner's black State Guard company arrived in Franklin on July 8 at the behest of state authorities. To some local whites, the black militia appeared as a "conquering army." A Conservative newspaper portrayed this development as "a troop of negroes—commanded by a drunken and infuriated negro chieftain who left Nashville breathing death and destruction to all white men not Radicals" descending on Franklin "with extra arms and munitions to reinforce and equip the Loyal Leaguers already on the ground, to murder and pillage, to burn and massacre." The Radical *Press and Times* responded by denouncing that report as "one of the blackest falsehoods which the devil ever whispered into the ear of one of his faithful children" and insisted that Sumner's company was "as orderly and well-behaved a militia company as ever paraded in Tennessee. Their crime is that they march under the Stars and Stripes and are ready to fight in their defense." In fact, no more outrages occurred in Franklin through the election, and on July 10 the town even hosted a Conservative rally featuring a visit by Emerson Ethridge. But to the chagrin of many whites, both federal troops and black guardsmen remained in Williamson County through the August 1 election, with Sumner and his company even participating in a July 29 Union League parade. That same day, a white officer in Williamson County mustered an additional sixty blacks, most of them likely from the Franklin Union League, into a new State Guard company.[19]

[19] Report of Gen. J. P. Carlin, Nashville, 15 July 1867, Reports and Affidavits Relating to Outrages and Riots, Selected Records of the Tennessee Field Office of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; Nashville *Republican Banner*, quoted in Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 15 July 1867; Severance, *Tennessee's Radical Army*, 52, 99-102, 130-31.

Election day in Franklin and across the state gave black veterans who had sided with the Radicals cause for celebration. Some had suffered violence and intimidation. In June three black veterans were murdered in Gibson County, and blacks were also attacked in Obion and Dyer counties in West Tennessee and Giles, Maury, and Marshall counties in Middle Tennessee. Others braved economic coercion. Some Conservatives employers threatened to run off employees who sided with the Radicals, and at least three hundred blacks in Memphis, Nashville, and Knoxville suffered this fate—although the overwhelming black support of the Radicals made it difficult for employers to follow through on such threats. Some may have been frightened away from the polls, but black voters contributed substantially to the overwhelming Radical victory. Brownlow prevailed over Etheridge by a count of approximately 74,000 to 22,500. The margin of over 50,000 votes indicates that Brownlow likely would have won the gubernatorial race even without black enfranchisement, but this support gave him a far more convincing margin of victory. Meanwhile, black support proved decisive in at least three and perhaps four congressional races, and the Radicals swept all eight of the state's congressional districts. The Radicals dominated the state legislative races as well, claiming all but three seats.[20]

It was a striking victory for the Radical party and its black supporters, but the aftermath of the election saw the emergence of ominous developments in Conservative white attitudes. The *Republican Banner* rather half-heartedly speculated that if Conservatives had courted black voters "with a hearty determination not to be disgusted," they might have "reaped the fruit of this . . . not very fragrant toil." But others were less philosophical about the loss, and the *Banner* noted the emergence of "an intense and very universal feeling of antipathy to the negro . . . in the popular mind since the late election." "The great mass of the people of this State believe that

[20] Severance, *Tennessee's Radical Army*, 140-42; McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 213-14.

they have been not only insulted but deeply wronged through the medium of the negro," and "it is sure that in some way or another the account will be made even before we finish the era in which we live." "We regard the condition of the negroes as infinitely worse today than it was twelve months ago," the *Banner* declared, and "the gulf between the white man and the black man, already wide and deep, will widen and deepen." The editor urged cool reflection but concluded that "the negro will taste the evil fruit" that had been "sewn by the Radicals." The Columbia *Herald* declared that "the Irrepressible conflict has begun, and no human power can stay it in Tennessee. Tennessee must be either all white or all black. There is no such thing as peace while she is half-and-half." That newspaper claimed to have "not one spark of ill-will for the negro. He has ever had, and still has, our sincere pity," but "we state the fact as it appears to us, that either the whites or the blacks must leave Tennessee within the next ten years."[21]

Such threats notwithstanding, black Radicals seemingly had reason for optimism. They had demonstrated their power, and it appeared that Republicans would reward their loyalty by finally repealing restrictions on black office-holding and jury service. In January 1868, the legislature did just that—although strong support of the repeal by West and Middle Tennessee legislators was necessary to overcome lingering reservations of some East Tennessee Radicals. Conservatives denounced the measures and called for the creation of a "white man's party." The Trenton *Gazette* in Gibson County fumed that "this giving to the African social and political equality is a stupendous crime against humanity, and a desecration of the sublime truths and beneficent teachings of the Founder of the Christian religion."[22]

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[21] Nashville *Republican Banner*, 6, 8 August 1867; Columbia *Herald*, quoted in Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, 14 August 1867.
[22] Trenton *Gazette*, quoted in McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 244-45. In an early reading of the legislation to remove restrictions on black officeholders and jurors, more than two-thirds of East Tennessee legislators opposed the repeal, while those from Middle and West Tennessee overwhelmingly supported the repeal. On December 10, 1867, the final form of the measure passed the House 39-23, but East Tennesseans voted against the bill 14-10, with East Tennessee legislators from counties with less than 10 percent black population opposing the bill 14-1. In

The Union Leagues, which black Tennesseans had joined in droves in 1867, were a source of Radical strength and Conservative outrage. Where Union Leagues remained strong, black veterans experienced remarkable success—perhaps nowhere more so than in the East Tennessee town of Maryville. The Maryville chapter of the League was founded in January 1867 as an entirely white organization, but blacks began joining after the extension of the suffrage in February. Only 10 percent of the population of Blount County as a whole and 13 percent of the population of Maryville was black as of 1870, and apparently the vast majority of the Maryville League's 178 members were white, but surviving minutes of the chapter's meetings reveal that black men, including veterans, were prominent in the organization's leadership. William B. Scott Sr. and his son, who were active in the League and published the Maryville *Republican*—the only black-owned newspaper in the state—were not veterans, but veterans Allen Garner, David Hannum, Oscar Wilson, and Thomas Lillard held a variety of offices between 1867 and 1869 including vice president, treasurer, marshal, herald, and secretary. Literacy likely aided the veterans' prominence; between August 1867 and August 1868, Lillard and Garner, and occasionally W. B. Scott Jr., acted as secretary for all but one of the League's weekly meetings.[23]

In 1868, League support helped secure victory in black veterans' bids for several Maryville offices, including Garner's for justice of the peace and Wilson's and Lillard's for city alderman. The League initially promoted David Hannum as a candidate for constable but eventually nominated him as another alderman. Remarkably, Wilson, Lillard, and Hannum won

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January, the Senate approved the repeal by a 16-9 vote, with East Tennesseans approving 5-3. The state's only two Conservative legislators consistently opposed the repeal. See McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 231-43.

[23] Minutes of the Maryville Union League, passim, McClung Collection, Knoxville. Available rosters are incomplete, but Ben Severance's scrutiny of ninety-one names indicates that the Maryville chapter had at least eighteen black members. See Benjamin H. Severance, "Loyalty's Political Vanguard: The Union League of Maryville, Tennessee, 1867-1869," *Journal of East Tennessee History* 71 (1999): 25-33.

election and joined a fourth victorious black candidate to form a black majority on the seven-seat council of the overwhelmingly white town. The League itself provided other opportunities for service and leadership. In November 1867, Oscar Wilson served on a five-member committee of the League appointed to collect food and clothing for Maryville's "suffering poor." The committee solicited donations at one League meeting, with the minutes reporting that "most all persons present subscribed very liberally." In April 1868, the League organized debates in which assigned teams would assume opposing sides of various issues, such as "should E[ast] Tenn be a separate state," "Does peace add more to the strength of a nation than war," and "Which deserve the severest punishment, the rebels of 61 or the conservatives of 67." Garner, an aspiring lawyer, served on the committee organizing the debates and frequently participated as a debater.[24]

Maryville's black veterans' early success in the Union League opened opportunities for continued political involvement. Allen Garner served as justice of the peace for the next decade. During his tenure, he administered the oath of office to the four black aldermen in 1869, issued warrants, adjudicated petty legal cases, and married couples. Garner also served as an alderman in 1870 and later was elected county magistrate and public school board member. During Thomas Lillard's time as alderman, he kept the council's minutes and served as county treasurer. He briefly served on Maryville's school board, and in 1882 he defeated William Scott in an election for justice of the peace. Oscar Wilson was again elected alderman in 1877.[25]

In Middle and West Tennessee, however, whites overwhelmingly resented black assertiveness, and some eventually turned to organized violence. In late 1865, Confederate

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[24] Minutes of the Maryville Union League, 21, 28 November 1867, 6, 13 February, 5 March, 30 April, 7, 28 May, 19 November 1868, 14 January 1869.

[25] Maryville *Soldier's Gazette*, 7 May 1870; Robert Glenn Slater, "A Distinctive Minority: The Black Leaders of Blount County, Tennessee, During Reconstruction," *Journal of East Tennessee History* 81 (2009): 33-34.

veterans in Pulaski founded the Ku Klux Klan as a social club, but by mid-1868 the Klan functioned as a paramilitary auxiliary of anti-Radical politics. Contemporaries had a tendency to lump instances of white terrorism together as "Kukluxism," assuming a more centralized structure than the variety of violent vigilantes and secret societies sometimes possessed. But whether or not it had a well-articulated chain of command, Kukluxism represented a systematic assault against institutions of black authority and independence—and particularly black soldiers. In August 1868, Walter Scott, a black farmer in Giles County, testified that in the preceding five months, the Klan had demanded that "all the colored preachers in that neighborhood . . . quit preaching, and they have done so." Additionally, local whites "have broken up all the colored schools, and have forbidden [blacks] to attend preaching, and white men from preaching to colored people." Klansmen had whipped him for voting Radical, Scott added, and had warned that "hell would be our portion" if any black reported Klan activity to the authorities. He noted also that the Klan was "much worse towards Union soldiers than others." Union veteran Pink Harris, also of Giles County, explained, "It is generally understood and repeated that the Ku Klux Klan are preparing to kill or drive away all the colored men who were soldiers in the Federal Army or were ever connected with it in any way." In April 1868, several hundred Klansmen massed at a church in his settlement, and later that month two Klansmen came to his house, confiscated his pistol, and threatened to hang him if he reported the incident. Two months later, a body of "disguised and armed men" surrounded his sleeping quarters, firing their pistols in the air. Harris fled for his life, but was shot in the side as he ran. Finding "no protection for colored men or Union citizens," he moved to Nashville "to seek protection for his rights and life."[26]

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[26] Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*, 176-98; Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York, 1971), 3-27, 40-46; *Report of Evidence Taken Before the*

Anti-Radical whites seem to have viewed Union military service and Union League activity as kindred offenses. Charles Belefont, who farmed about ten miles south of Columbia in Maury County, noted that the Klan rode several times each week. One night nine men came to his home, took him about a hundred yards off, stripped him of his clothes, and took turns whipping him. They called him a "damned nigger" who "had been a Yankee soldier" and said "they were going to kill all that had been in the Yankee Army, or that belonged to the Union League," and if he reported the attack, "they would kill me the next time." Belefont recognized seven of his attackers, including his "late young master," and noted that all were Confederate army veterans. Wesley Alexander of Columbia identified himself as a Union veteran and Union Leaguer and testified that the Klansmen "say they intend to kill every nigger that belongs to any of those things." He also drew the Klan's wrath because of his involvement with black schools, where he "beat a drum for the colored children." He testified that Klansmen had shot at him "seven or eight times" and eventually chased him away from his home. On July 4, 1868, four or five hundred masked horsemen paraded through Columbia and sought out Alexander's house along their route. When they found the place, they asked "where is that damned drummer boy that has been drumming for them children belonging to the colored schools that have been having a barbeque," and told him that "if I ever come back they would kill me."[27]

Klan violence often fused political objectives and personal disputes. In June 1868, Klansmen confiscated a pistol from Maury County veteran Nim Wilks "and told me if they caught me with any more arms they intended to hang me." Shortly thereafter, Wilks ran afoul of his white employer, who was "a rebel, in sympathy with said Klan." According to Wilks,

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Military Committee in Relation to Outrages Committed by the Ku Klux Klan in Middle and West Tennessee (Nashville, 1868), 35-36; affidavit of Pink Harris, Nashville, 27 July 1868, Reports and Affidavits Relating to Outrages and Riots, Selected Records of the Tennessee Field Office of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands.

[27] *Report of Evidence Taken*, 23-24, 26.

"because I insisted on my rights, he assaulted and struck me with a stone." The following evening, Klansmen came to his home to hang him, but he narrowly escaped through a window and fled to the relative safety of Nashville. As of early August, he still considered it too dangerous to return to Maury County, even though staying away meant losing six months of wages that his employer owed him.[28]

As Wilks's testimony indicates, disarming blacks was another Klan priority. Stephen Medon reported that the Klan in Marshall County was "taking guns from every colored man who has one. This is a part of their plan of operation, so far as I can learn." Klansmen stormed into Medon's home and threatened to kill him because they believed that his son "was raising, or trying to raise a company to fight them." This particular rumor was false, but Medon's son "with many others—nearly all who can leave" fled the neighborhood. "Most radicals, when they go to bed, have apprehensions of personal violence before day," Medon testified. "The state of society is alarming. No one who differs with [the Klan] is safe, and their numbers are increasing." A witness in Obion County reported in August 1868 that the Klan had "visited almost every negro cabin in the County and taken every pistol and gun they could get their hands on; and if they gave any offense, they got knocked and kicked very unmercifully. . . . They threaten the Negroes with certain death, if they ever attempt to vote or carry arms again." This writer noted that these "rebels" were "elated with the prospect of soon getting the government into their hands." "There has not been such a rejoicing here since the fall of Fort Pillow," the report concluded, "as there is over the triumph of the Ku Klux."[29]

In some cases, black veterans resisted Klan attacks. According to G. F. Bowles, a white teacher in rural Giles County, the Klan attacked black prayer meetings and schools, and on June

[28] Ibid., 13-15.
[29] Ibid., 53-54, 66-67.

26 “marched in solid column . . . as for a Battle” on a schoolhouse occupied by women and children. The Klansmen “gave three cheers for Jefferson Davis and three for the KuKlux,” then sent the women and children “screaming and run[ning].” But about this time, to Bowles’s “astonishment,” a group of black men arrived “armed with such old muskets as were not yet stolen from them by the nightly Klan” and quickly put their military training to use. “Being well skilled in tactics,” they “surrounded their enemies and took them into custody.” The squad “would have marched them to Pulaski,” but, on the advice of some influential black men, they released the captives after securing promises “to disturb them no more.” The victory proved fleeting, however. Later that same evening, the white men again fired on a group of blacks. In the aftermath, prominent whites in the community decided “it would not do for the colored people to protect themselves in the way they did,” so they met to pass resolutions restricting access to weapons. The following night, blacks again gathered at the schoolhouse for their regular “Debating Club,” but several whites who claimed to be “friends of the colored people” advised them to cancel the meeting because “there were in town a great many armed men who intended mischief.” On the night of July 4, a group of whites “turned out with shot guns, revolvers, clubs, &c.,” marched on the house of a black man, and shot him in the head. They threatened Bowles, who they claimed was “admonishing the col’d people to insurrection against the whites,” forcing him and several black men to flee to Nashville, even though some left family behind and were “without food or means of support” in the city.[30]

Black Tennesseans were particularly vulnerable to the 1868 campaign of violence because Republican legislators had by that time disbanded the expensive and controversial State Guard and only belatedly secured assistance from federal troops. Ulysses S. Grant easily won

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[30] Affidavit of G. F. Bowles, Nashville, 18 July 1868, Reports and Affidavits Relating to Outrages and Riots, Selected Records of the Tennessee Field Office of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands.

the state in November's presidential election, but Klan terrorism kept thousands of blacks away from the polls, and most of the Union Leagues outside of East Tennessee were shattered. Only in February 1869, as violence against white and black Radicals continued, did Brownlow declare martial law in nine counties and remobilize the State Guard—but this time it was entirely white. Although black units had performed competently in 1867, Brownlow apparently concluded that putting them into the field again would be too great a provocation to the white anti-Radicals.[31]

Ironically, the violence led some Republicans, including Brownlow, to consider moderating the state's franchise restrictions as a way of easing tensions. On February 20, 1869, when Brownlow resigned to take a U.S. Senate seat, his successor, DeWitt C. Senter, inherited an increasingly precarious position. The Radical party was under pressure from a variety of sources. Some black Tennesseans were growing impatient with the lack of offices under the Republicans, while some white Republicans believed racial equality had gone too far already. Anti-Radical violence combined with growing uncertainty about the propriety of continued extensive disfranchisement. Personal rivalries and ambitions further undermined Radical solidarity. In May, the state supreme court ruled that Brownlow's disqualification of registered voters in numerous counties had been illegal, a decision that appeared likely to add some thirty thousand Conservative voters to the coming election. With the Republicans badly divided between gubernatorial candidates Senter and General William B. Stokes, the governor proclaimed his support for universal suffrage (a position which Brownlow now endorsed as well) and appointed dozens of new registrars who enrolled thousands of previously disfranchised anti-Radical voters. Although a few black leaders, notably publisher and editor William B. Scott, endorsed Senter's reforms as the best way to ensure interracial harmony, most black voters supported Stokes in a losing effort. Conservatives and ex-Confederates, now openly calling

[31] Severance, *Tennessee's Radical Army*, 143, 175-95.

themselves Democrats, were content to let Senter and Stokes feud and declined to field a candidate of their own for governor, but they established overwhelming control of both houses of the state legislature by electing eighty-six Democrats to a mere thirteen pro-Senter Republicans and eight pro-Stokes Republicans. On January 10, 1870, a Democratic-dominated state constitutional convention convened in Nashville. Radical rule in Tennessee was suddenly and decisively over.[32]

Many black Tennesseans viewed these developments with alarm. The Columbia *Herald* reported that a meeting of "Stokes Negroes" discussed leaving the state, fearing "that white people, being now in ascendancy, would put them back into slavery." Some Conservative newspapers, including the Memphis *Appeal* and Nashville *Union and American* called for a rejection of the 15th Amendment and repeal of the state laws permitting black office-holding, jury service, and voting. Fearing federal intervention, the convention decided against direct restriction of black suffrage but authorized a poll tax to reduce the number of poor voters. Meanwhile, the legislature had repealed Radical measures including the militia laws, an anti-segregation common carrier law, and the state education system that mandated equal schooling for blacks. Stokes protested the 1869 election, and in March 1870 a delegation of black Radicals traveled to Washington to testify on outrages before a congressional committee with the hope of getting the state put under congressional authority as the other former Confederate states had been. The committee investigated but ultimately took no action. That fall, in the first gubernatorial election under the new constitution, Tennessee voters elected John C. Brown, a

[32] Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*, 199-219.

Democrat, former Ku Klux Klan leader, and Confederate general. Tennessee's "redemption" from Radical rule was complete.[33]

For many black veterans, this was a frustrating and dangerous time. Alexander Newton, a Southern-born veteran who enlisted in a Northern black unit and returned to the South after the war as a minister in the AME Church, led Pulaski's Campbell Chapel for five years. When he arrived in Tennessee in June 1870, he found the Klan "engaged in every kind of intimidation and cruelty in order to keep the Negroes from voting the Republican ticket." Their determination to "kill, torture, or do anything that came into mind in order that their purpose might be realized" led Newton to conclude that "the unrest and mental suffering of these times were as severe a strain almost as the period of the war itself." Trouble began within moments of his arrival at Pulaski's train station when his baggage was handled roughly by a confrontational white. The steward of Newton's church later explained to him that he "had acted wisely in being calm and making no fuss over the matter" because the local whites "were Klu Kluxing [sic] the Colored people without mercy and going out of their way to find provocations." This local black further advised Newton that he "would have to be very careful as a minister in and out of the pulpit" and that "the Klu Klux Klan [sic] was especially after the preachers to force them to use their influence to make the Negroes vote the Democratic ticket in elections." Shortly thereafter, the Klan visited the house of Pleasant Rector, a member of Newton's congregation, and "shot him down" in his doorway "as if he had been a dog." Rector's terrified wife and children came to the minister seeking counsel, but he could think of nothing that "would help such dreadful matters," so they simply prayed and he "consoled them as best I could." Newton also saw a black man beaten to death by an angry mob for watering his horse in the same trough with a white man's

[33] Robert B. Jones, "The Press in the Election: Ending Tennessee's Reconstruction," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 65 (2006): 335; McBride, "Race Issue in Tennessee," 318-28; Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*, 234-37.

horse. The minister "preached at the funeral of the poor fellow, but was not allowed to refer to the circumstances, or I suppose there would have been another funeral in a day or so."[34]

Despite intimidation and violence, some veterans continued to publicly assert their rights and participate in political meetings. For example, Alex Gleaves served on a committee of resolutions for a massive emancipation day rally in Nashville in 1870 that boldly vowed defiance of the "Rebel party" controlling Tennessee and called on Congress to place the state "under military rule." At a statewide black convention in 1874, Allen Garner of Blount County was appointed to a committee on permanent organization. The Conservative *Union and American* disapprovingly summarized the tone of the 1874 convention with the headline: "The Colored Men Still Clamoring for Equality." Delegates spent much of the meeting expressing support for the Civil Rights bill being considered in Congress and disapproval of Senator Brownlow's opposition to the measure. But the meeting also addressed equal access to schools, accommodations on trains and in restaurants and theaters, and what the *Union and American* characterized as "high-toned notions about marrying white women." Indeed, delegates devoted considerable attention to the plight of David Galloway, a black Union veteran who was convicted under a provision in the 1870 state constitution outlawing interracial marriage. The convention approved a resolution declaring that Galloway's marriage to a white woman "was in conformity with his privilege as an American citizen in the land of his birth." Galloway's heart was "loyal to the flag of his country" and he was "an ex-Federal soldier who fought to sustain during the war the Union and Government of the United States," but "since he returned to civil life, [he] has been outraged by the judicial farce of a trial in two courts of Tennessee and deprived of his liberty and divested of his manhood and of the enjoyment of his personal rights."

[34] Alexander H. Newton, *Out of the Briars: An Autobiography and Sketch of the Twenty-ninth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers* (Philadelphia, 1910), 99-103.

The convention resolved to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court and "vindicate the rights of the colored citizens of Tennessee to the civil rights of marriage with whomsoever they may contract and choose, and strip [Galloway] of the outrage and odium placed on him and us by the unjust and barbarous constitution and laws of Tennessee."[35]

Courage did not necessarily secure political offices for the state's black veterans, however. The limited office-holding of blacks in postwar Tennessee is particularly striking when compared to black office-holding in other states. For example, in 1868 South Carolina had "almost literally a Black Parliament," with African Americans occupying 75 of 124 house seats and 10 of 31 senate seats. In contrast, only one black, Sampson W. Keeble of Nashville, served in Tennessee's General Assembly before 1880, and his election came in 1872, several years after the end of Radical rule in the state. In the shifting political environment following Tennessee's brief reconstruction, Democratic divisions and occasional Republican concessions eventually allowed some blacks to attain office; but again, the comparison with other Southern states is striking. From the late 1870s through the 1880s, there were 99 black state legislators in Mississippi, 75 in South Carolina, 79 in North Carolina, 30 in Louisiana, 56 in Arkansas, and 49 in Texas, but only 12 in Tennessee.[36]

If black officeholders in Tennessee were relatively few, black Civil War veterans in office were even fewer. Nationally, of 1,465 documented black officeholders serving between 1867 and 1877, only 144 claimed Civil War service. Thus, although black soldiers constituted about 16 percent of the adult male black population of the United States immediately after the

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[35] Nashville *Union and American*, 2 January 1870, 28, 29, 30 April 1874.

[36] Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 217-18, 386; Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880's* (Knoxville, 1976), 9-12, 19-21; Joseph H. Cartwright, "Black Legislators in Tennessee in the 1880s: A Case Study in Black Political Leadership," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 32 (1973): 265. Keeble was a slave in Murfreesboro before the war, but became a successful barber in Nashville afterward. He was not a Union veteran, but a Nashville newspaper claimed in a biographical sketch following his election to the General Assembly that he "was in the Confederate lines during most of the war," suggesting that he may have been a slave attached to the Confederate army. See Nashville *Union and American*, 7 November 1872.

war, veterans made up less than 10 percent of black men holding public office during Reconstruction. In Tennessee, a significant proportion of nineteenth-century black political leaders and officeholders appear to have been previously established, relatively prosperous blacks who had avoided military service, or men who had been too young to enlist.[37]

The paths of Edward Shaw and Hezekiah Henley in postwar Memphis are suggestive of the course of black politics and the discouraging implications for black veterans. Shaw was born free in Kentucky, grew up in Indiana, and in the 1850s came to Memphis, where he opened a saloon and gambling house. After the war, he emerged as an outspoken advocate of black political rights, and in 1869 he was elected to the Shelby County commission, making him among the first black officeholders in Tennessee. Determined to challenge the racial prejudice of local white Republicans, in 1870 he launched an independent campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives. But Shaw had not served in the Union army, and during the 1870 congressional campaign, he told a group of blacks why: "The first reason I had for not going into the army was that they told me it was a white man's fight and they did not want negroes, and it was, therefore, easy for me to step out. The first . . . negroes were put in the war . . . as slaves, and I did not go in. Another thing, they did not allow promotion among the colored soldiers, and I did not want any fighting on that plan. Another reason was that there was killing going on, and . . . I was afraid I might get shot [loud cheers and laughter from the audience]." The Democratic candidate soundly defeated both Shaw and the white Republican candidate, but later, after Shaw supported white Republican Barbour Lewis's congressional campaign in 1872, he was rewarded with the

[37] Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 73-74.

patronage post of Memphis wharfmaster. In the early 1870s, he studied law and was admitted to the Memphis bar.[38]

Shaw's comments were clearly tongue-in-cheek, as his audience's response makes clear—and in any case, if he was afraid of being shot, he should have avoided politics after the war. He probably was not lacking in personal courage, as he shot back at Klansmen who fired on a Republican meeting in 1868. But his comments suggest compelling reasons why certain blacks might have avoided military service. For relatively prosperous blacks, military service presented much hazard for smaller possible gains than their white counterparts could earn, and it is unsurprising that even patriotic blacks might conclude that their resources could be put to better use in civilian life. Other examples are Nelson Walker and William Sumner, two members of Nashville's postwar black elite who were free before the war and who recruited enlistees for the 17th USCI but did not join the regiment themselves.[39]

While Shaw's bold maneuvering yielded some personal gains, Hezekiah Henley took a decidedly different approach in the changing political climate of the 1870s. As disillusionment with the Republican party set in, Henley, a Memphis blacksmith who owned his own shop and was president of the Independent Order of Pole-Bearers (a local black fraternal order), advocated racial reconciliation. In the summer of 1874, the Pole-Bearers briefly provoked white fears when they substituted rifles for their customary walking sticks during marches, but Henley's actions

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[38] Memphis *Daily Avalanche,* 25 October 1870*,* quoted in David M. Tucker, "Black Politics in Memphis, 1865-1875," *West Tennessee Historical Papers* 26 (1972): 14-16; Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, 1996), 193.

[39] Lovett, "Negro in Tennessee," 296; Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 61. Lovett suggests that Sumner "became a musician for the regiment's band," but he apparently did not enlist. Pension files reveal that a man named William Sumner did enlist as a musician in the 17th USCI, but he was a much younger Nashville resident with the same name who was not a blood relation to the older, better known William Sumner. In fact, age also may be a reason the elite Walker and Sumner did not enlist when the regiment formed in 1863: the 1870 census lists Nelson Walker's age as 45 and William Sumner's as 53. See pension file of William Sumner, 17th USCI, RG 15, NA; 1870 Ninth Census, Davidson Co., Tenn., Second Ward Nashville, 207, Fifth Ward Nashville, 295, Sixth Ward Nashville, 336.

soon reassured local whites. In 1875, Henley planned a celebration on July 5 and invited former Confederate generals, including Nathan Bedford Forrest, to speak to a black audience. After receiving a bouquet of flowers from a mulatto girl "as a token of reconciliation," Forrest stated that he had been maligned and misunderstood by the black race: "I want to elevate every man, and to see you take your places in your shops, stores, and offices. I assure you that every man who was in the Confederate army is your friend. We were born on the same soil, breathe the same air, live on the same land, and why should we not be brothers and sisters." After the event, Henley had "the enthusiastic support of local Democrats," and in the next elections he led more than half of the black voters to abandon black candidates and vote an entire slate of Southern whites into office. The Memphis *Appeal* gleefully reported that "The colored people of Memphis forever buried their antagonism to the whites. . . . They sank race prejudices in a noble desire to promote the material interests of Memphis." The reconciliation between prosperous blacks and whites in Memphis must have been particularly disheartening for black veterans, as Henley hailed General Forrest—slave-trader before the war, villain of the Fort Pillow massacre during the war, and Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan after the war—as the model friend of the black race. Given these circumstances, Eric Foner's observation that in the 1880s Edward Shaw "left the political arena in frustration, devoting the remainder of his life to work for the black Masons and the A.M.E. church" comes as little surprise.[40]

Interestingly, the 1880s witnessed the election of the only black Civil War veteran to serve in the Tennessee legislature. Monroe W. Gooden was elected in 1886 to the 45th General Assembly as a Democrat from Fayette County, which had a black-majority population and had been Republican-controlled since the Civil War. Gooden worked as a farmer and ginner near

[40] Memphis *Daily Avalanche*, 6 July 1875, quoted in Tucker, "Black Politics in Memphis," 17-19; Memphis *Daily Appeal*, 15 January 1876; Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers,* 193.

Somerville, served as a deacon in his Baptist church, and was active in the Masonic Order. Little is known about his alliance with the Democratic party or other aspects of Fayette County politics in the years surrounding his election and legislative term. It is interesting to note, however, that Fayette County had elected another black legislator, David Foote Rivers, in the two previous elections—but unlike Gooden, Rivers ran as a Republican. Before he completed his second term, however, Rivers left Fayette County, moving to Nashville and later Washington, D.C. A legislative biography rather vaguely remarks that his departure from West Tennessee was "because of racial unrest."[41]

It is unclear from available evidence whether Gooden maintained his Democratic affiliation or sought a second term in 1888. While details of Fayette County's racial politics are lacking, however, events in adjoining Haywood County, which also had a black-majority population during the 1880s, provide insight regarding racial politics in the region. In 1882, the year Fayette County elected Rivers, Haywood County elected a young Fisk University student named Samuel A. McElwee as a Republican to the legislature. McElwee won reelection twice, and sought a third term in 1888, but his last campaign was thwarted by Democratic intimidation of the county's black electorate. Like Fayette County, Haywood County had been Republican-controlled from the Civil War into the 1880s. In 1888, however, white citizens mustered an armed patrol to secure the "safety of the ballot box." Rumors spread that blacks were stockpiling ammunition, prompting bands of "heavily armed whites" from across West and Middle Tennessee to descend on the county seat to reinforce the Democrats on election day. Additional reinforcements arrived that evening "to squelch any inclinations among the defeated Republicans to rise." Though there were nearly 3,000 eligible black voters in the county, McElwee received

[41] Robert M. McBride and Dan M. Robison, *Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly, Vol. 2: 1861-1901* (Nashville, 1975), 771-72.

only 723 votes. Armed white partisans foiled McElwee's election day attempt to travel into the county and rally black support and soon forced him out of town. According to McElwee's grandchildren, on the night of the election, armed white men gave the defeated politician "ten minutes to leave"; he "used five minutes to speak, and then . . . he used his remaining five minutes to escape." He moved his family to Nashville and later Chicago.[42]

Monroe Gooden, in the meantime, remained in Fayette County. Following his death in January 1915, a local newspaper ran an obituary which offers further insights into the area's race relations:

> Fayette county lost one of her best colored citizens on last Tuesday when Monroe J. Gooden of the fifth district, died at a ripe old age. Monroe was one of the most thrifty men of his race in the county and owned several hundred acres of good land. He lived on this land and can be counted as a good citizen. He was quiet, unpretentious, and lived in peace and harmony with his white neighbors, holding their friendship and respect. He represented Fayette county in the state legislature in 1887 and was the last negro to sit in a legislature in any of the southern states during the reconstruction times. In recent years he has taken no part in politics, never even voting for years. Many negroes could help to improve the condition and standing of their race by emulating the example of honesty and right living set by Monroe Gooden."

The obituary made no reference to Gooden's Union military service.[43]

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[42] Cartwright, *Triumph of Jim Crow*, 95-96; Richard A. Cuoto*, Lifting the Veil: A Political History of the Struggles for Emancipation* (Knoxville, 1993), 42, 68-74, 89-92.

[43] *Fayette Falcon*, 22 January 1915. A comparison between the obituaries of this West Tennessee Democrat and several East Tennessee Republicans reveals both similarities and differences. In 1911, the Maryville *Daily Times* eulogized Thomas Lillard as "one of the old time darkies that are fast disappearing. Kind, polite, and good he enjoyed the confidence, respect and esteem of both white and colored. None stood higher with the white people of Maryville than 'Uncle Tommy' as he was familiarly called." The obituary did not list all the local offices Lillard had held but did refer to his service in "a number of positions of honor and trust," including school director, and also noted that he "was one of the boys who wore blue in the 'Sixties,' was a member of the town's integrated GAR post, "and took great delight in displaying his Grand Army Badge." On the other hand, following Allen Garner's death in 1905, a local newspaper simply referred to him as "a familiar character around the courthouse for several years" and did not mention his decade as justice of the peace, his other political activity, or his military service. Garner's reputation apparently suffered a rather inglorious fall after 1879, when word spread that a fire that destroyed the Blount County courthouse began in his office. A few years later he was convicted of forgery in connection with his legal practice and spent several years in prison. He eventually returned to the rebuilt courthouse, where he found employment as a janitor. See Maryville *Times,* 1 September 1911; Maryville *Record*, 14 July 1905; Slater, "Distinctive Minority," 33.

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, black political involvement was circumscribed not only by violence and intimidation, but also by new legislation. Some lawmakers hoped to undermine black political influence by introducing complicated registration procedures and secret balloting to confuse the illiterate and levying poll taxes to disfranchise the poor. An 1889 Australian-ballot law explicitly prohibited election officials from assisting illiterate voters, and Tennessee was among the first Southern states to adopt a (modified) educational requirement for voting. Such measures obtained the desired results: black voting dropped precipitously between 1889 and 1890. But even in the face of such obstacles, some black veterans persistently participated in Tennessee politics.[44]

Perhaps the most visible political statements were embodied in the black parades that coursed through the principal streets of Tennessee cities, winding their way through black and white neighborhoods alike. Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage explains that the "harsh realities" of illiteracy and poverty facing blacks in the New South inhibited the development of literature and physical monuments during this time of increasingly conspicuous Confederate commemoration. Given their limited resources, public celebrations offered black Southerners the best opportunities to cultivate an "ennobling historical memory." Black marchers' martial displays of immaculate uniforms and fine-tuned drills, first evidenced during the Civil War, remained a source of racial pride in the ensuing decades. If anything, such displays appeared to gain popularity in the late 1880s, as benevolent societies in quasi-military garb were joined by newly formed black militia companies. Between 1885 and 1888, black militia companies formed in Nashville, Chattanooga, Memphis, Murfreesboro, Columbia, Gallatin, Pulaski, and Clarksville. The extent of ex-soldiers' participation in these militia companies is not entirely clear, but at least two Civil War veterans commanded companies. Samuel Shane, who had

[44] Cartwright, *Triumph of Jim Crow*, 223-53.

served as corporal in the 17th USCI, was the captain of Murfreesboro's Sparks Rifles, and George Irvin of the 106th USCI commanded the Maury Rifles of Columbia.[45]

The heyday of these black militia units was brief: the state disbanded all of them by 1892. However, black Civil War veterans continued to occupy a place of distinction in public observances. For example, in June 1897, one hundred black GAR members marched in the opening parade of "Negro Day" at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition in Nashville. Among the most sacred occasions for black Southerners was the January 1 anniversary of emancipation, and the significance of the black military experience was often a prominent theme. The 1892 observance in the chamber of the state house of representatives in Nashville drew a "very large audience" that listened to an address on "The Colored Soldier" and a recitation of "The Black Regiment," a poem written in 1863 by George Henry Boker to commemorate the charge of black Union soldiers at the battle of Port Hudson in Louisiana. Boker's poem was a stirring tribute to the valor of black soldiers as well as an appeal to whites for recognition and justice for blacks. The final stanza of the poem reads:

> Hundreds on hundreds fell;
> But they are resting well;
> Scourges and shackles strong
> Never shall do them wrong.
> O, to the living few,
> Soldiers, be just and true!
> Hail them as comrades tried;
> Fight with them side by side;
> Never, in field or tent,
> Scorn the black regiment!

[45] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, 2005), 55-104; Brian D. Page, "'Stand by the Flag': Nationalism and African American Celebrations of the Fourth of July in Memphis, 1866-1887," in *Trial and Triumph: Essays in Tennessee's African American History*, ed. Carroll Van West (Knoxville, 2002), 191-93; Charles Johnson, Jr., "Black Soldiers in the National Guard, 1877-1949" (Ph.D. diss., Howard University, 1976), 133-37.

The celebration of black heroism was tinged with bitterness, however. After the traditional reading of the Emancipation Proclamation, the day's keynote speaker, Rev. C. S. Smith, told the gathering that he was putting aside his prepared remarks and that he could not join the applause "because he did not see anything special in [the proclamation] to invoke applause." Smith "doubted whether the people had stopped to analyze this proclamation." Pointing out that Lincoln issued the proclamation and initiated black military recruitment only as "a war measure based upon military necessity," he reminded his listeners that freedom did not come until "the government's destiny hung in the scales of possible defeat and dissolution." Eventually, Lincoln freed the slaves "that the scales might be borne down on the side, and that the unity of the republic might be sustained by the negroes, not in cotton fields, but on the gory fields of battle." White men overlook contributions of black soldiers to the Union victory, Smith continued, and "seem to think that only qualities of greatness reside in the white man. He is heaven and all outside of him is hell." Smith concluded by urging blacks to have self-respect and protect their women, admonishing them, "whenever they find a white man sneaking around their homes to debauch their daughters . . . shoot him down." "Lift yourselves in the scale of magnitude and you will compel others to respect you," he urged; "Be manly men and virtuous women." Here was a forceful interpretation of the occasion's theme of the legacy of the black military experience.[46]

At the turn of the century, some black veterans continued to take political stands. In response to broadened state and local Jim Crow measures, for example, Preston Taylor and other Nashville leaders organized a boycott of the city's streetcars in 1905. When the boycott failed to force the repeal of the discriminatory laws, Taylor helped found a black-owned bus line, the

[46] Richard A. Couto, "Race Relations and Tennessee Centennials," in *Trial and Triumph: Essays in Tennessee's African American History*, ed. Carroll Van West (Knoxville, 2002), 251; Nashville *Banner*, 2 January 1892; Clinton Scollard, ed., *Ballads of American Bravery* (New York, 1900), 101-104, 216-17.

Union Transportation Company, and served as its president. Virtually from the start, the enterprise was hampered by white opponents in the city government and by the buses' mechanical problems, and within two years the company failed, leaving Taylor with a heavy personal financial loss. Nevertheless, the Nashville protest offered evidence that blacks would refuse to submit docilely to Jim Crow.[47]

Black veterans' pension files present additional evidence of continuing political engagement. After one of Tennessee's own ascended the U.S. pension bureaucracy, some black veterans hoped to gain favor by reminding him of their political faithfulness. H. Clay Evans, the pension commissioner between 1897 and 1902, was a leading white Tennessee Republican who ran for governor in 1894 but lost to his Democratic opponent after a controversial recount by the state legislature. In August 1899, black veteran James Grady wrote to Commissioner Evans for assistance in processing his claim, appealing to him as "a constituent of your[s] in the Post for Governor of Tennessee and a friend to the Present time." The state's Republican party was split by rivalries, but Grady assured Evans that he was "one of your true and tried friends that don't kick or talk lightly about you" and expressed hope that the commissioner would "take favorable action" on the pension to which he was "justly entitled." Similarly, Edward Copeland, a veteran of the 14th USCI, wrote to the commissioner in 1898 emphasizing his shared military experience and political loyalties. "You know what we, the soldiers, had to go through in Tennessee," he wrote, and furthermore "I put my shoulder to the wheel to help you out when you ran for governor of Tennessee." In 1894 Democrats forged documents to sabotage Copeland's application as punishment for his Republican activism, but the black veteran assured the

[47] Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville, 1977), 20-36.

commissioner that he remained "a republican from principle and [even] if every [other] black man votes the Democratic Ticket I shall remain a republican."[48]

In some cases, black veterans' political contacts helped them secure benefits. David Hannum of Maryville gained support from his district's Republican U.S. representative, R. W. Austin. Between 1909 and 1917, Austin sent a series of letters to the pension commissioner inquiring why Hannum's pension had not increased, relaying information about Hannum's age and medical condition, forwarding affidavits, and even notifying the Pension Bureau of Hannum's change of address. In July 1914, when the Bureau had failed to act to Representative Austin's satisfaction, he orchestrated the passage of a special act of Congress personally awarding Hannum a pension of $24 per month. Jordon Hodge also benefited from the persistence of well-placed white advocates. Dr. W. H. Taylor of New Market met Hodge in the early 1880s and supported his efforts to attain a pension over the course of the next four decades. Taylor offered the veteran medical advice, served as a witness for declarations of pension increase, and wrote a letter to the pension commissioner on Hodge's behalf. In July 1925, Dr. Taylor wrote a letter to U.S. Representative J. Will Taylor explaining, "Uncle Jordon Hodge is in very decrepit condition, scarcely able to get about on his feet, and feels that he is entitled to the full allowance or rating of a civil war veteran." Noting that Hodge was "81 years old and has no help in his house or other means of support than the aid of the Government," Taylor requested

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[48] Helen S. Beeson, "Walter P. Brownlow, Republican" (M.A. thesis, East Tennessee State University, 1967), 118-45; pension files of James Grady (alias Redmond), 16th USCI, and Edward Copeland, 14th USCI, RG 15, NA. Veterans' marking of time in pension files also indicates continuing political interest. The Pension Bureau's special examiners frequently complained about black Southerners' imprecision with dates (see Chapter 4), but at least some veterans used national politics as a reference point. For example, Alexander Pettis testified in 1894 that he was sure the wedding of his comrade William Sumner occurred in the spring of 1872 because he attended the ceremony and "got the papers the next morning announcing Grant's nomination for a second term of the Presidency." In 1899 Sandy Pollard recalled that he went to Memphis "the next day after Pres. McKinley's election [November 1896]," and in 1910 Ballard Preston recalled that a fellow veteran moved away from Chattanooga "during the time of Cleveland's 2nd inauguration [March 1893]." See pension files of William Sumner, 17th USCI, George E. Pollard, 12th USCI, and Nathan Steel, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

the congressman's help in securing a medical examination for the veteran, and within a few weeks Pension Commissioner Winfield Scott reported that Representative Taylor "personally called in behalf of this claimant and requested a home examination." Scott instructed the medical board to schedule the home examination, and Hodge quickly was approved for $72 per month, backdated to July 18, 1925, the date of Representative Taylor's letter to the pension commissioner. The two Taylors's influence was decisive in the prompt and favorable response, but other Tennessee politicians had also acted on Hodges behalf for more than fifteen years. U.S. Representative R. W. Austin sent several pension related inquiries to the bureau between 1909 and 1915, and in 1920 even a Democratic U.S. Senator, John K. Shields, wrote to the pension commissioner on Hodge's behalf.[49]

Other Southern Democrats in the U.S. Congress also supported pensions for individual black soldiers, explaining to pension officials that their white constituents had expressed an interest in the matter. In 1912, for example, U.S. Representative Finis J. Garrett wrote to the pension bureau urging an expedited, favorable settlement for veteran Thomas Baker of Haywood County, "an old colored man whose claim is believed by some white friends interested in him to be just." Baker did not know the whereabouts of his officers, but he found the support of prominent local whites, including physician T. K. Powell, on whose land Baker lived. In 1893, Dr. Powell wrote to the pension bureau that Baker claimed to have been captured, shot, and left for dead in Nathan Bedford Forrest's attack on Fort Pillow, but the veteran had lost his proof of discharge, was "ignorant as the proper course to pursue under the circumstances," and was "unable to incur much expense in seeking a bounty" as he had no money. To avoid the sixty-mile trip to Memphis for a medical examination, Dr. Powell offered to examine the black veteran himself. The interest of local whites in Baker's case continued over the ensuing years. In 1899

[49] Pension files of David Hannum, 1st USCHA, and Jordon Hodge, 1st USCHA, RG 15, NA.

and 1912, merchant T. R. Short also wrote to the pension bureau to inquire about the status of the "old negro" who visited his store every few days and claimed to have survived Forrest's attack on Fort Pillow. After Baker's death, the political support for his family's pension claims continued. Between March and November 1922, Representative Garrett sent a series of letters in support of Baker's widow's claim, even advising the pension office of her recent move to a different post office. In 1924, Democratic U.S. Senator Kenneth McKellar sent an inquiry into the claim of Baker's daughter.[50]

Applicants surely appreciated political support for their claims, and access to these resources could be a source of personal comfort in times of financial and physical hardship; however, white Southerners' support for hobbled black veterans' pensions did not necessarily signify an acceptance of black men's broader post-emancipation aspirations. Historian Donald Shaffer concludes that "the tragedy of the political involvement of these men was that with their victory in the battle for suffrage, black Civil War veterans reached the peak of their influence as a political force." In Tennessee, where the franchise was won relatively early, black veterans seemed poised to play a significant part in the paramilitary politics of Reconstruction, but Union Leagues and Radical rule in the state abruptly collapsed under a storm of white violence, with black veterans frequently bearing the brunt of the onslaught. As a consequence, black political gains were meager by the standards of other Southern states. Black veterans never disappeared completely from politics; from their presence in parades and other public gatherings to their private correspondence with white leaders, they continued to assert their claim to the Civil War's legacy. But, of course, they were never the only ones trying to shape the meaning of the conflict.

[50] Pension file of Thomas Baker, 3rd USCHA, RG 15, NA.

In fact, as the surviving members of Tennessee's black Civil War generation entered their twilight years, others offered a striking reinterpretation of the black military experience.[51]

[51] Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 74.

Conclusion

In June 1930, a field representative from the Pension Bureau visited Jacob Forney, a veteran of the 40th USCI, in Johnson City, where Forney lived with his daughter and son-in-law. The ninety-three-year-old man grumbled to the examiner that "he didn't get much pay" for his work, but overall he appeared to be in a "rather jovial mood" and "rattled on" about his pleasant morning stroll to the nearby Carnegie train depot. He explained that "he was accustomed to taking exercise" because he "thought it was good for him." Forney also told the examiner that he had found the depot's blazing stove comforting on this cool morning. The examiner's report, however, revealed that in fact the depot "had been abandoned for years and the thermometer was high up in the eighties." In truth, Forney needed assistance to get out of bed and had not left his room in over a year. "It was very evident that his mind was out of balance," and the examiner "could not get a connected statement out of him." William Estes, another black Civil War veteran living nearby, had visited Forney several times each month for some fifteen years and tried to assist his comrade's pension claim. The two veterans had sometimes talked about their military service, and Estes remarked that Forney "seems to remember things that occurred during his army life, but don't seem to know anything about the present."[1]

Forney's mental lapses stemmed from a stroke and the onset of dementia, but in some ways his confusion parallels Americans' understanding of the Civil War's legacy from the early twentieth century to the present. While the subject of black Civil War soldiers draws increasing interest today, Americans remain largely oblivious to the postwar fate of the veterans. With

[1] Pension file of Jacob Forney, 40th USCI, RG 15, NA.

regard to the meaning of blacks' military experience and the legacy of this war, Americans have long struggled to provide "a connected statement."

The definition of the military experience itself has been contested at times. Visitors to the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville might expect the documents filed under the title "Tennessee Colored Soldiers' Pension Applications" to pertain to Union veterans in the state, but this is not the case. In fact, the collection relates to state legislation of 1921 extending a "colored man's pension" to slaves who had accompanied their Confederate masters to war. To claim a pension, applicants had to prove that they were now indigent and that they had "remained with the [Confederate] army until the close of the war, unless legally relieved from service." This last clause made little sense considering the implications of the Emancipation Proclamation and the fact that few potential pensioners had been formally enrolled in Confederate service, but essentially applicants must have remained "loyal" slaves without compensation through the end of the war.[2]

In enacting this legislation some sixty years after the outbreak of the Civil War, legislators could not have expected a very large response. But in the first year of the law, 159 applications reached the review board, frequently with attached references from concerned whites. The board continued to receive applications until at least 1938, with an eventual total of 285. Proving that one was "clearly under the law," however, was often easier said than done. In January 1922, for example, E. H. Crump, the former mayor of Memphis and a powerful figure in state politics, wrote to J. B. Thomason, the state comptroller of the treasury, on behalf of Sam McNeil. Crump described McNeil as "a fine old negro of the antebellum type" and explained that he had "always been a Democrat and is what is known as 'a white man's nigger'"—however, finding witnesses who were alive during the war and could verify McNeil's service in

[2] "Tennessee Colored Soldiers' Pension Applications," passim, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

the Confederate army proved difficult. Thomason sympathized, noting that "it is very hard to secure proof in cases like this," and suggested that "hearsay testimony should be admitted in these cases." In Thomason's opinion, "If it was the general impression in the neighborhood in which he lived that he had served in the army and returned to his owner, that would be good grounds for a pension," but he admitted he was "not sure the Pension Board would accept this evidence." A local (white) Confederate veteran initially could not remember McNeil, but after extensive questioning he concluded that the black man "tells a pretty straight story" (aside from the "usual discrepancies . . . which we may always expect from an old man") and declared that he was "convinced" that he was with the Confederates during the war. McNeil got his pension.[3]

To an even greater extent than black Union veterans' applications, the state applications depended on the support of white patrons. Former owners themselves were rarely still living, but the applications frequently contain appeals from children or grandchildren of masters on behalf of an "old family darkey." Frank M. Seay's white Rutherford County neighbors, including the family of his old master, characterized him as "a good quiet law abiding citizen, and worthy of the respect and confidence of the public," "polite, courteous, upright, and honest in all his dealings with his fellow man, a good and law abiding citizen." The use of the term "citizen" and absence of the more commonly used "darkey" in Seay's file suggests that perhaps he enjoyed more respect among whites in his community than some other applicants. However, this testimony also indicates that whites' conception of proper black "citizenship" was far from the manly independence that would be expected of whites. When questioned about whether Seay remained loyal to his master for the duration of the Civil War, the owner's family testified that

[3] Pension file of Sam McNeil, no. 146, ibid.

he had not only done that but also “remained with his old master without compensation as long as his old master lived,” not leaving his side until the man died in 1890 at the age of 87.[4]

The 1924 application of R. William Etherly of Nashville is the last file in the state archives’ collection. Etherly’s claim was rather unconventional, but it pursued the logic of the “colored man pensions” to its natural end. Etherly freely admitted that he “was never with the army”; however, he insisted that he was eligible for a pension because he had been “detailed” by his Confederate owners “to remain at their home on the farm which I did.” A white patron, Henry A. Boyd, also admitted that Etherly “was not actually enlisted in the Confederate Army as such, but technically and in reality he was with the Army, because he was assigned by his master to remain on the farm and keep the family comfortable by his work as a laborer.” Boyd maintained that because Etherly “worked as a farm hand for both of his owners throughout the civil war” and thus enabled them to remain with the Confederate army, he “was actually engaged in the service of the states of the Confederacy.” Surely, Boyd reasoned, the state pension law was designed “to provide for just such characters.” The review board apparently did not find this argument convincing; the file’s cover was stamped neither “Accepted” nor “Rejected,” but in a blank where a date of filing was normally entered the completed application is categorized as “not filed.” The state law had vastly expanded the definition of the black Civil War military experience, but the review board was unwilling to extend this modest reward more broadly.[5]

On a cold, blustery December day in 2004, some eighty years after Etherly attempted to collect a slave’s pension, a group of Nashville blacks gathered at Fort Negley to advance a very different interpretation of the Civil War’s meaning. Bill Radcliffe, a local firefighter bearing the flag of the 13th United States Colored Troops Memorial Regiment, led a group of blue-clad

[4] Pension files of A. Henry Gore, no. 132, George McEwen, no. 95, Frank M. Seay, no. 145, ibid.
[5] Pension file of R. William Etherly, no. 285, ibid.

reenactors and Nashville's mayor on a short march to the defensive works for a ceremonial dedication of the renovated fort. After the black reenactors fired their muskets in salute and Radcliffe received a hug from Abraham Lincoln (portrayed by Lincoln reenactor Dennis Boggs), a journalist caught up with Radcliffe and asked him what he was feeling. Tears welled in the man's eyes and, his voice choked with emotion, he said, "This is a very special day." Over the past eighteen years, Radcliffe had often come to the site, and he annually camped out on the anniversary of the battle of Nashville "to think," "to remember," and to "say a prayer for the souls" of the slaves and soldiers who died while constructing the fortifications and defending their families. Markers in and around the fort commemorate the contributions to Union victory not only of black soldiers but also of the hundreds of slaves conscripted for engineering projects. Ironically, many of these laborers received no more compensation from federal authorities than Etherly did from the Confederacy.[6]

The commemoration at Fort Negley was not an isolated event, but rather part of a broader movement to recognize Tennessee's black Union soldiers. In February 2006, a nine-foot tall bronze statue of an African-American Union soldier memorializing the state's 20,133 black soldiers was unveiled near the Nashville National Cemetery's two thousand USCT graves. The statue was only the second in the former Confederate states to honor U.S. Colored Troops. Kwame Leo Lillard, who helped Nashville's African-American Cultural Alliance spearhead the campaign for the statue, explained that before he stumbled across the cemetery's USCT graves in 1979 at the age of "40-something," he "didn't know there were black men that fought in the Civil War." He considered himself "half-way intelligent" but "didn't have a clue there was anything called the USCT." Holding up a commemorative stamp of Hattie McDaniel, who won an Academy Award in 1940 for her role of Mammy in the film *Gone With the Wind*, Lillard said,

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[6] Nashville *Tennessean*, 12 December 2004, B.1.

“when I was growing up, what a lot of people thought of when they thought of the Civil War and blacks was this.” He was confident that the statue would finally “set the record straight.” “We want kids to come to this cemetery and see this statue and touch it. We purposely put it on a low pedestal so kids could touch it,” he said. “We want the lesson to be learned early.” [7]

The fundraising effort for the $56,000 USCT statue drew donations from schoolchildren, churches, country music stars, and the Tennessee Historical Commission. But interestingly, among the patrons—and in attendance at the monument’s dedication—were members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. David Chaltas, an SCV chaplain, explained his involvement: "We won't know who we are until we know who they were. We cannot separate history; we must remember it altogether. With our diversity, we become more united.” In September 2010, more than one hundred reenactors, including an actor portraying Nathan Bedford Forrest, staged a “desperate” charge of outnumbered Confederates against a federal garrison at Fort Negley (commemorating an 1862 event) as part of an effort to raise money and draw attention to preservation efforts. Following the battle, black reenactors of the 13th USCT Living History Association held a funeral for a “young drummer boy killed in battle,” and throughout the day reenactors demonstrated weapons and military drills, while civilian reenactors instructed visitors on “everyday life during the war years.” Again, SCV members played a prominent role in organizing the reenactment and preservation work. A museum coordinator praised the SCV for “breathing life into a Union fort,” and her assessment that “it's not about blue and gray anymore. It's the history that matters,” captured the tone of the event. John Mertz, a local SCV chapter commander explained, “It's important to teach this history to the kids.” Despite his position in the SCV, Mertz donned a blue federal officer’s uniform for the event. He joked that blue wool

[7] Ibid., 18 February 2006, A.1, 19 February 2006, B.1. The other statue for black troops was dedicated in February 2004 in Mississippi at the Vicksburg National Military Park. Monuments honoring black Civil War soldiers can also be found in Massachusetts, Kansas, Missouri, Maryland, and Washington, D.C.

was no itchier than a Confederate uniform—in fact, he had "the uniforms of both sides, just like he has ancestors who fought on both sides in the war." "We remember things most people would rather forget," said a gray-clad reenactor—even if they also sometimes remembered things that did not exactly happen. "Technically," the newspaper noted, "Forrest's raid on Nashville on Nov. 5, 1862, didn't get within a mile of the fort, but a skirmish on modern-day Murfreesboro Pike just wouldn't have had the same period feel." It might also have noted that there were no black Union troops in service in Tennessee in 1862.[8]

While the early twentieth-century reunion between North and South tended to come at the expense of African Americans, in the early twenty-first century some Tennesseans saw Civil War commemoration as an opportunity to reconcile the races or even to "blur racial lines." In response to a letter published in the Nashville *Tennessean* complaining about the presence of Confederate flags in the city's 2008 Veterans Day parade, Fred Tucker submitted his own letter pointing out that the parade included white Union and Confederate reenactors as well as black Union reenactors. Also noting the presence of "an African-American re-enactor carrying a large Confederate flag," Tucker explained that "African-Americans fought on both sides, both willingly and pressed into service" and concluded, "perhaps we all could benefit by observing and emulating the re-enactors who intermingle and develop friendships across racial and political lines as they represent and honor their ancestors' roles in our nation's history."[9]

Most Tennesseans no doubt find civility and friendship preferable to acrimonious picking at old wounds. But if in fact "it's the history that matters," at times it seems that something besides racial lines are being blurred in modern interpretations of the black military experience. In February 2008, Shirley Farris Jones contributed a column to the *Murfreesboro Post* arguing

[8] Nashville *Tennessean*, 18 February 2006, A.1, 18 September 2010; Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, 21 February 2006.
[9] Nashville *Tennessean*, 18 November 2008, A.12.

that while Black History Month celebrated important people and events, "black Southerners who fought for the Confederacy" have "never received the recognition [they] deserved." Citing historians Ed Bearss and Ervin L. Jordan, as well as her own exploration of Tennessee's "African-American soldiers' roll" (Tennessee's Confederate "colored man's pensions" discussed above), Jones suggested that a "cover-up" had kept "black Southerners in Confederate gray" from receiving their due. Although she outlined in considerable detail the failed efforts of General Patrick Cleburne and Jefferson Davis to secure broader black recruitment late in the war, she nevertheless concluded that 65,000 Southern blacks found their way "in some form or fashion into Confederate ranks" and estimated that more than 13,000 "met the enemy in combat." "[Confederate] blacks fought for the very same reason as whites—to defend their homes and their families," she asserted. Jones acknowledged that others who had also studied official records disagreed with her, but insisted that "historical data can sometimes be a matter of interpretation and the facts can sometimes contradict themselves." "Regardless of how black Southerners participated, whether voluntary or involuntary," she concluded, "they, too, should be remembered for the suffering, sacrifices and contributions they made."[10]

Despite Jones's assertion that "the thousands of [pro-Confederate] slaves and free persons of color in the South are the most forgotten group of the Civil War," an internet search almost instantly locates a vast array of material with titles such as "The Forgotten Confederates" and "Forrest: Memphis' First White Civil Rights Advocate." The "Southern Heritage 411" website has an entire section devoted to the organization's black president, H. K. Edgerton, whom the site hails as "a man ahead of his time" and "one of the greatest civil rights activists of our generation." Edgerton has marched thousands of miles across Tennessee and throughout the South in a gray uniform with a large Confederate battle flag, and he embraces the role of

[10] *Murfreesboro Post*, 10 February 2008.

technology in spreading his message. Praising the "resolve" of today's youth, he notes that "now they have these things called computers," and once "these babies start plucking in these things . . . these teachers can't get away with that stuff they used to get away with about [how] our [Confederate] ancestors were demonic." Edgerton is featured on the homepage of the Tennessee SCV's official website in a video clip titled "The True South—Through My Eyes." In the video, he insists that he is not "defending the institution of slavery," which he characterizes as "part of man's inhumanity to man." However, in almost the same breath, Edgerton declares that he is "so glad" that his great-great grandmother "didn't get left behind" in Africa, because "the only people that ever showed any love for us were those same white folks in those cotton fields and corn fields [with whom] we lived side by side and called ourselves family." Edgerton also argues that the Ku Klux Klan was a heroic defender of Southerners ("red, yellow, black, and white") and that the atrocities attributed to it during Reconstruction were actually the work of Pennsylvania Republican "Thaddeus Stevens and his boys," who sent their own ruffians disguised as Klansmen to "commit terror in the South" and discredit the noble organization. According to Edgerton, "from all the accounts of what you do find, there was not a single man who looked like me that wouldn't have given his life for Nathan Bedford Forrest." Making personal connections with the past is a driving impulse of many Civil War enthusiasts, and trying to make sense of the complexity of human relationships in the Civil War era South is a worthy, if challenging, undertaking. However, equating the very limited anecdotal evidence regarding black Southerners in gray with the copious documentary evidence of the 180,000 black men who served in the Union army grossly distorts history.[11]

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[11] Ibid. On "The Forgotten Confederates," which draws heavily from the TSLA's "colored man's pensions," see http://www.angelfire.com/ga3/confederaterebels/forgotten.html; for a discussion of black Southerners riding with Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry, see "Forrest: Memphis' First White Civil Rights Advocate" at http://www.tennessee-scv.org/ForrestHistSociety/forrest_speech.html. The latter website badly misconstrues

While Americans remain largely inclined to view the Civil War as a sort of national "treasury of virtue," an examination of the experience of black Union veterans in Tennessee presents a more complicated and in some ways less comforting picture. To be sure, the determination of men who rose from bondage, their courage in the face of enormous obstacles, and cases of postwar success are moving stories. As the history of the black military experience finds a wider audience, there are plentiful examples of bravery, dedication, and perseverance through enormous adversity to inspire modern Americans. In a fundamental way, service in the military was a path to freedom for many black Southerners, and this experience unquestionably helped propel some men into leadership roles in their families and communities. Any form of interracial fellowship was a remarkable development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and Tennessee's white-dominated GAR honored its black members with prominent assignments as flag bearers. But examination of the black military experience also offers tragic examples of the war's destruction and bleak images of the war's aftermath. Many of those fortunate enough to survive battlefield carnage and filthy camps nevertheless emerged with their health ruined. Some slipped into dependence on family, friends, or even their former owners. The government relieved some of the worst suffering by offering pensions to black veterans, but successfully prosecuting a claim was often a challenge and tended to underscore the need for white patrons. USCT soldiers were perhaps the ultimate symbol of black assertiveness in the

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Memphis's postwar political history, describing the Independent Order of Pole-Bearers as a "predecessor to the NAACP" that was "organized after the war to promote black voting rights, etc." and claiming that Forrest was the first white ever invited to address the organization (see Chapter 5). The site http://www.southernheritage411.com/truehistory.shtml offers dozens of related links on Black Confederates. On H. K. Edgerton, see http://www.southernheritage411.com/hke.shtml and http://www.tennessee-scv.org/. Conversely, Bruce Levine's extended analysis of the issue finds that Confederate efforts to arm blacks were "half-hearted, feeble, and ultimately fruitless" because most Southern blacks and whites alike were either hostile to such measures or extremely reluctant to offer support; see Bruce Levine, *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves during the Civil War* (New York, 2006). For one journalist's insightful exploration of modern Americans' tendency to draw personal connections to the Civil War, see Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York, 1998).

battle for postwar civil rights and political power, but their efforts made them lightning rods for white terrorism and produced disappointingly meager returns. Finally, the experience of Tennessee's black veterans offers a vivid reminder that although the past is not infinitely pliable, historical memory is. The meaning of the Civil War was contested within the veterans' lifetimes and continues to be so in the twenty-first century—all the more reason for a careful study of history.[12]

[12] On the "treasury of virtue," see Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York, 1961), 46-76. On the continuing relevance of Warren's concept in the twenty-first century, see Edward L. Ayers, *What Caused the Civil War? Reflections on the South and Southern History* (New York, 2005), 103-30.

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