

The Untold Story of Black Confederates

Truth Suppressed Is Still the Truth

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By Mike Scruggs

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If you Google "Black Confederates," you will know a lot about Google's politics. It should also be obvious that there is a tremendous and undoubtedly well-funded effort to dismiss and ridicule the idea that anything more than a tiny minority of blacks would willingly resist and even take up arms against the Northern invasion of the South from 1861 to 1865. The most recent escalation of this demonization of the South and anyone connected to its resistance to Northern domination coincides with the emergence of Neo-Marxist Critical Race Theory (CRT) and woke identity politics, but it is also a continuation of propagandistic false historical narratives on the causes and conduct of the Civil War and postwar Reconstruction policies. This brand of identity politics garners votes by inciting racial tensions and promoting attitudes of militant hostility to win elections and advance political agendas. Suppression of important Civil War truths and the important role of Black Confederates in the war serve anti-American agendas.

A major false assumption of these politically correct enthusiasts is that most black slaves strongly resented their white masters. There is major evidence in more than 2,000 interviews of former slaves during the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration in the 1930s that this is far from true. The other false assumption made by these party line scholars is that ending or defending slavery was the only primary cause of the Civil War. There is an enormous volume of scholarship that refutes this. Skeptics should read Thaddeus Stevens' speech in New York City on September 27, 1860, where the most powerful of Lincoln's supporters in Congress clearly indicates tariff issues were more important than limiting slavery to the South. Near the end of the war, in a letter to Speaker of the House, Schuyler Colfax, Lincoln's chief economic adviser, Henry C. Carey, admitted that the issues of tariffs and free trade were the real cause of the war.

Author and publisher Gene Kizer, Jr, a magna cum laude graduate of the College of Charleston, pointed out in a February 2020 article in the *Charleston Athenaeum Press*, "The North Did Not Go to War to End Slavery," that even Pulitzer Prize winning historian and Lincoln scholar, David H. Donald, back in 1960 was concerned about the overemphasis of slavery as the cause of the war and that the Civil Rights Movement was over-stressing slavery as the cause of the war. In 1994, esteemed historian Eugene D. Genovese in *The Southern Tradition*, called the exaggerated emphasis of the media and academic elite on slavery as the cause of the Civil War "a cultural and political atrocity."

Dr. Samuel W. Mitcham Jr, author of more than a dozen military books on the Civil War and World War II, wrote recently that most of the estimates of Black Confederate soldiers vary between 80,000 and 96,000. Presumably, this includes teamsters driving Confederate supply wagons. Despite abundant evidence of this both formidable and faithful service, the politically correct identity politics zealots are on a full court press to minimize, belittle, or erase this history.

Yet in September 1861, Frederick Douglass, a famous black abolitionist and former slave, wrote what he had personally told Abraham Lincoln:

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“There are at the present moment, many colored men in the Confederate Army doing duty not as cooks, servants and laborers, but as real soldiers, having muskets on their shoulders and bullets in their pockets ready to shoot down loyal troops and do all that soldiers may do to destroy the Federal government.”

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This had become obvious to many after the First Battle of Manassas on July 21, 1861, after which the *Northern Exchange* angrily editorialized:

“The war has dispelled one delusion of the abolitionists. The Negroes regard them as enemies instead of friends. No insurrection has occurred in the South—no important stampede of slaves has evinced their desire for freedom. On the contrary, they have jeered at and insulted our troops, have readily enlisted in the rebel army and on Sunday at Manassas, shot down our men with as much alacrity as if abolitionism had never existed.”

These remarks may refer in part to the Richmond Howitzers, which was partially manned by black militiamen. They saw action at First Manassas (Bull Run) where they operated battery number 2.

“Many colored people were killed in the action”, recorded John Parker, a former slave.

In 1863, Horace Greeley, the famous abolitionist founder and editor of the *New York Tribune*, wrote:

“For more than two years, Negroes have been extensively employed in belligerent operations by the Confederacy. They have been embodied and drilled as rebel soldiers and had paraded with white troops at a time when this would not have been tolerated in the armies of the Union.”

On September 10, 1862, seven days before the bloodiest battle in American history at Antietam (Sharpsburg), Dr. Lewis Steiner, Chief Inspector of the United States Sanitary Commission (USSC) observed and recorded in his diary while observing Gen. “Stonewall” Jackson’s occupation of Frederick, Maryland, that:

“Over 3,000 Negroes must be included in this number. These were clad in all kinds of uniforms, not only in cast-off or captured United States uniforms, but in coats with Southern buttons, State buttons, etc. These were shabby, but not shabbier or seedier than those worn by white men in the rebel ranks. Most of the Negroes had arms, rifles, muskets, sabers, bowie-knives, dirks, etc., and were manifestly an integral portion of the Southern Confederate Army.”

There were probably about 25,000 men in Jackson’s corps at that time, but the next day Steiner claimed to have counted another 8,000 men, probably part of A. P. Hill’s division. Another account by Dr. Charles Goldsborough of the USSC, published after the war in the *National Tribune* in October 1886, indicated that Lee’s Army first entered Frederick on September 6, and that Lee himself was in Frederick. Goldsborough claimed to have had a brief conversation with Confederate cavalry leader Jeb Stuart as Lee’s Army left Frederick. Most likely, Lee’s entire army,

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Steiner report has been widely used to estimate the number of blacks serving in the Confederate Army. Most of them run anywhere from 47,000 to 120,000 based on a fairly generous estimate of approximately 1.0 million soldiers serving in Confederate forces at some time during the war. Scott K. Williams, using Steiner's report, came up with an estimate of 65,000 Black Confederates in the Confederate Army with at least 13,000 engaged in direct combat with Union forces. Anthony Harvey, the founder of the Black Confederate Soldier Foundation, estimated that there were at least 100,000. Using my own different manipulation of scarce and varied military and logistical statistics for the Confederate Army, I would estimate at least 75,000, of which as many as 30,000 were teamsters. A few more must be added for the Confederate Navy.

Confederate President Jefferson Davis requested late in the war, December 1864, a draft of 40,000 slaves from the plantations to be teamsters. This was controversial and scarcely implemented, but it puts my teamster estimate in the ballpark. Not all teamsters were black. Regular Confederate soldiers sometimes supplemented logistical demand.

The only precise number on blacks in Confederate service comes from the Confederate Navy, which with 101 ships had only one-sixth the number of ships as the Union Navy. There were probably less than 7,000 men in the Confederate Navy, but the number of blacks has been more precisely estimated by Dr. Edward Smith, Dean of American Studies at American University, because of more complete records, as 1,150. The Confederate Navy was eager to have blacks with merchant marine experience but limited ship crews to a maximum of 20 percent blacks. Many Confederate commerce raider ships, such as the famously successful CSS Alabama, Shenandoah, and Florida had some American black crewmembers. These ships were manned by American officers but had predominantly British crews. Adding the Confederate Navy, my total estimate for Confederate blacks would be at least 77,000.

Many of the blacks counted by Steiner were probably teamsters. Teamsters usually rode on the left-rear mule rather than on the wagon. Confederate teamsters were actually paid directly or through contractors by the Confederate government rather than the Army at the same rate as Confederate privates, \$11 per month. Blacks were also widely used as teamsters by the Union Army. Confederate teamsters dressed just as Steiner described. They often came under Union fire and were usually armed for self-defense. These teamsters were the equivalent of Army truck drivers in later American wars.

The mule was the logistical backbone of both the Confederate and Union armies and is still the West Point mascot. The typical Army wagon was about 10 feet long, 4 feet wide, and 2 feet deep with a canopy. It weighed about 1,000 pounds. Four mules could pull an additional load of 2,000 pounds, and six mules, which were preferred, could manage 3,000 pounds on a 15-mile trip. The average load was about 2,650 pounds.

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To illustrate how important teamsters were to both armies, leaving Atlanta on his mission of Confederate devastation through Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, Sherman had 60,000 men, 6,300 wagons, 900 ambulances, 36,500 horses, and 36,000 mules.
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Mules and horses are remarkably strong, but horses are faster, braver, and more agile athletes. However, mules are stronger; more sure-footed, have much greater endurance, and require less rest. Mules are also less prone to injury and less expensive to keep. Mules do not spook easily, but their acute sense of danger made them less suitable for use around the deafening sounds of artillery. The mule's reputation for stubbornness is related to his greater instinct for survival. Physical punishment just makes mules more stubborn. Many observers consider mules more intelligent and good natured than horses. Cavalry, artillery, ambulances, officers, scouts, messengers, and various special personnel usually used horses.

Besides teamsters, blacks were most common in Confederate artillery, cavalry, civil engineering, and hospital units, but they were also scattered throughout Confederate infantry and home guard militias. They were noted as sharpshooters in defending Vicksburg. Bedford Forrest brought 45 of them into his Tennessee cavalry regiment, and 7 of these served in his elite escort company. He praised their performance and loyalty and gave 44 of them their freedom before the end of the war.

Black Confederates were significant in both numbers and impact in serving the cause of Southern independence and resistance to Northern invasion. Erasing and belittling the matchless courage and devotion of these honorable soldiers and servants is an unconscionable tyranny. This tyranny is strongly associated with cultural Marxism and race-obsessed radical identity politics. All Americans need to stand against this lawless suppression of truth and free speech capable of destroying our country and the last vestiges of freedom and moral reason.