

Resource Sheet #3

Primary and Secondary Excerpts on Black Confederate Soldiers (*from various cited sources*)

More than 80 percent of the free black population in New Orleans in 1860 had European blood in their veins. In contrast, fewer than 10 percent of slaves in Louisiana gave evidence of white ancestry. Because skin color and free status were highly correlated, many free blacks identified more closely with Southern whites than with African blacks.

Free blacks joined the Louisiana militia for varied and complex reasons; some free blacks thought that would lose their property. Others fought for economic self-interest. "The Defenders of the Native Land," were men of property and intelligence, representatives of a free black community in New Orleans that was both prosperous and well-educated. There were even slave owners among its ranks. Not even New York City could boast of having more black "doctors, dentists, . . . silversmiths, portrait-painters, architects, brick-layers, plasterers, carpenters, tailors, cigar-makers, &c.

Furthermore, the "hommes de couleur libre," as they were called in New Orleans, enjoyed privileges not afforded blacks elsewhere in the South, allowing them by 1860 to accumulate more than 2\$ million worth of property. It was not surprising, therefore, that free blacks were eager to defend their holdings.

Hollandsworth, James G. Jr. *The Louisiana Native Guards*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995, 3-5.

No officer in this regiment now doubts that the key to the successful prosecution of this war lies in the unlimited employment of black troops. Their superiority lies simply in the fact that they know the country, while white troops do not, and, moreover, that they have peculiarities of temperament, position, and motive which belong to them alone. Instead of leaving their homes and families to fight they are fighting for their homes and families, and they show the resolution and sagacity which a personal purpose gives. It would have been madness to attempt, with the bravest white troops what I have successfully accomplished with the black ones. Everything, even to the piloting of the vessels and the selection of the proper points for cannonading, was done by my own soldiers.

Excerpt from February 1, 1863 report by Colonel T. W. Higginson, Commander of the First Regiment South Carolina Volunteers (Union)

United States War Department. THE WAR OF THE REBELLION: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Series I, Volume 14. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901.

“Sambo’s Right To Be Kil’t”
(Air - The Low-Backed Chair)

“Some say it is a burnin’ shame
To make the naygurs fight,
An’ that the thrade o’ being kilt
Belongs but to the white;
But as for me, upon me sowl,
So liberal are we here,
I’ll let Sambo be murdered in place o’ meself
On every day in the year.
On every day in the year, boys,
An’ every hour in the day.
The right to be kil’t I’ll divide wid him,
An’ divil a word I’ll say.

In battle’s wild commotion
I shouldn’t at all object,
If Sambo’s body should stop a ball
That was comin’ for me direct;
An’ the prod of a Southern bagnet,
So liberal are we here,
I’ll resign and let Sambo take it,
On every day in the year.
One every day in the year boys,
An’ wid none o’ your nasty pride.
All right in a Southern bagnet prod
Wid Sambo I’ll divide.

The men who object to Sambo
Should take his place and fight;
An’ it’s betther to have a naygur’s hue
Than a liver that’s wake an’ white;
Though Sambo’s black as the ace o’ spades
His finger a thrigger can pull,
An’ his eye runs sthraight on the barrel sight
From under its thatch o’ wool
So hear me all, boys, darlins!
Don’t think I’m tippen’ you chaff
The right to be kilt I’ll divide wid him,
An’ give him the largest half!

Wilson, Joseph Thomas. The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, the War of 1812, and the Civil War. New York: Da Capo Press, 1994, 164. (originally published in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1887.)

Several free black Virginians were slave and property owners who deemed their way of life threatened by the Northern invasion and yearned to prove to their white neighbors that they, too, were Southern patriots. Those publicly loyal to the Confederacy were pragmatically acknowledging who and where they were. Their determination to stand with the South was akin to free men consciously performing a civic duty.

Jordan, Ervin L. Jr. Black Confederates and Afro-Yankees in Civil War Virginia Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995, 216.

I will leave...today for a scout about the woods for the Yankees...Give my love to mistress and master...P.S. Good by to the white folks until I kill a Yankee.

Thomas A. Phelps, a slave

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Our masters may talk now all dey choose; but one ting's sartin, --dey don't dare to try us. Jess put de guns into our hans, and you'll soon see dat we not only know how to shoot, but who to shoot. My master wouldn't be wuff much ef I was a soldier.

Tom, a slave (responding to the rumors that slaves would willingly volunteer to serve in the Confederate Army)

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