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978-1-107-01649-1 - I Freed Myself: African American Self-Emancipation in the Civil War Era

David Williams

Excerpt

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Introduction

Following the Footsteps of the Slaves

THEY ARE FREEING THEMSELVES

Duncan Winslow escaped from slavery in Tennessee during the Civil War and eventually joined the Union army. April of 1864 found him along the Mississippi River with the Sixth U.S. Heavy Artillery defending Fort Pillow, Tennessee, from attack by General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his Confederate cavalry. Outnumbered nearly four to one, the defenders were quickly overwhelmed. As rebel troops overran the fort, Winslow and his comrades threw down their arms and tried to surrender, but Forrest's men took few prisoners. In what came to be known as the Fort Pillow Massacre, Confederates slaughtered nearly 300 of their captives, most of them former slaves. To rebel officers' shouts of "Kill the God damned nigger," Winslow was shot in his arm and thigh. In the confusion, he managed to escape by crawling among logs and brush, hiding there until the enemy moved on. When darkness fell, Winslow made his way down to the riverbank and boarded a federal gunboat.

After his release from a military hospital in Mound City, Illinois, Winslow settled on a farm three miles west of town, where he raised garden vegetables and sold them house to house. One day a candidate for local office asked Winslow for his support in an upcoming election. As if to seal the deal, the candidate remarked, "Don't forget. We freed you people." In response, Winslow raised his wounded arm and said, "See this? Looks to me like I freed myself."¹

¹ Testimony of Duncan Harding [Winslow], U.S. House of Representatives, *Fort Pillow Massacre*, Thirty-Eighth Congress, First Session, Report no. 65 (1864), 15–16; Rollins Winslow, "Duncan (Hardin) Winslow," in *Pulaski County, Illinois, 1819–1987*



FIGURE 1.1. “I freed myself” – Duncan Winslow. Winslow is seen here in a postwar photo wearing a Masonic stole and gauntlets. His cap signifies membership in the Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal organization of Union veterans founded just after the war. Photo courtesy of Leonard L. Winslow.

Generations of Americans have grown up believing that Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves with a stroke of his pen by signing the Emancipation Proclamation. Lost in this simple portrayal is the role that African Americans such as Duncan Winslow played in forcing the issue. At the war’s outset, knowing that most white northerners were hardly abolitionists, Lincoln made clear that his intent was to save the Union, not to free the slaves.

(Paducah, Ky.: Turner Publishing, 1987), 355–56. *Fort Pillow Massacre* identifies Winslow as “Duncan Harding,” using the surname of his former owner. It was only after the war that he adopted the surname “Winslow” from a prominent abolitionist family. Winslow’s grandson, Rollins Winslow, gives the spelling of the former surname as “Hardin.”

The sort of demeaning presumptiveness that Winslow suffered continues to this day. When Darren Foreman, a black city employee in Fort Worth, Texas, directed a white worker to perform a task, the man balked and shot back, “We freed y’all.” It was but one example of repeated abuse from white coworkers and supervisors that finally compelled Foreman to file suit against the city. See Scott Gordon, “Fort Worth Employee Claims Racial Discrimination in Law Suit,” *NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth*, June 4, 2013 (www.nbcdfw.com).

Cambridge University Press

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David Williams

Excerpt

[More information](#)*They Are Freeing Themselves*

3

Although Lincoln personally disliked slavery, he claimed no authority to interfere with the institution. On the contrary, he promised to enforce all laws upholding slavery, including the Fugitive Slave Act. Desperate to appease slaveholders, Lincoln even supported a thirteenth amendment to the Constitution, the Corwin Amendment, which would have guaranteed slavery forever. Said Lincoln of the amendment in his first inaugural address, "I have no objection to its being made express and irrevocable."²

Nevertheless, enslaved men and women escaped to Union lines by the tens of thousands and could not or would not be forced back into slavery. The actions of those many self-emancipated refugees eventually compelled Lincoln and Congress to modify their war aims and formulate a policy that reflected a slave-initiated reality.³ To say, as the government at first did,

² Roy P. Basler, Marion Dolores Pratt, and Lloyd A. Dunlap, eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953–55), 4: 270. The amendment, authored by Thomas Corwin, a Republican congressman from Ohio, passed Congress and was sent to the states for ratification shortly before Lincoln took office. It read: "No amendment shall be made to the Constitution which will authorize or give to Congress the power to abolish or interfere, within any State, with the domestic institutions thereof, including that of persons held to labor or service by the laws of said State." The phrases "domestic institutions" and "persons held to labor or service" were direct references to slavery and slaves. See *Congressional Globe*, Thirty-Sixth Congress, Second Session (1861), 1284.

³ Although many modern historians eschew the phrase, and some are openly critical of it, "self-emancipation" was commonly used before the war, falling out of favor in the postwar era as whites increasingly claimed credit for ending slavery. William Lloyd Garrison referred to Frederick Douglass as "self-emancipated" in his foreword to Douglass's first book, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), v. For other examples see *An Exposition of Difficulties in West Brookfield, Connected with Anti-Slavery Operations* (West Brookfield, Mass.: Anti-Slavery Society, 1844), 15; Rev. Almon Underwood, *A Discourse on the Death of the Late Rev. C. T. Torrey, a Martyr to Human Rights* (Newark, N.J.: Small and Ackerman, 1846), 9; Rev. William H. Marsh, *God's Law Supreme. A Sermon Aiming to Point Out the Duty of a Christian People in Relation to the Fugitive Slave Law* (Worcester, Mass: Henry J. Howland, 1850), 19; *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* (New York: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1853), 113; *Speech of Hon. Horace Mann, of Massachusetts, on the Institution of Slavery* (Washington, D.C.: Buell and Blanchard, 1852), 22; Josephine Brown, *Biography of an American Bondman, by His Daughter* (Boston: R. F. Wallcut, 1856), 50; Osborne P. Anderson, *A Voice from Harper's Ferry* (Boston: author, 1861), 21; Rev. William H. Boole, *Antidote to Rev. H. J. Van Dyke's Pro-Slavery Discourse* (New York: Edmund Jones and Co., 1861), 8.

Some modern historians who emphasize black self-agency employ the phrase "self-emancipation," or some variation of it, quite unreservedly, especially when referring to fugitives. They include Graham Russell Hodges, *David Ruggles: A Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 4; Glenn David Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation: African Americans and the Fight for Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

that escapees within Union lines technically remained slaves was problematic. If escapees were neither free nor actually held in slavery, then what was their legal status? The label “contraband” imposed upon them in 1861 satisfied few and settled nothing. Lincoln and Congress wrestled with the issue of refugee status for more than a year before finally deciding with the Second Confiscation Act, then the Emancipation Proclamation, that the refugees had been right all along. They had effectively freed themselves.⁴ Lincoln practically admitted as much. Writing of slavery’s demise in April 1864, he stressed, “I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me.”⁵

North Carolina Press, 2012), 79; Anthony B. Mitchell, “Self-Emancipation and Slavery: An Examination of the African American’s Quest for Literacy and Freedom,” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 12 (July 2008): 78; Guyora Binder, “Did the Slaves Author the Thirteenth Amendment? An Essay in Redemptive History,” *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 5 (1993): 473–74; David Williams and Teresa Crisp Williams, “‘Yes, We All Shall Be Free’: African Americans Make the Civil War a Struggle for Freedom,” in Dixie Ray Haggard, ed., *African Americans in the Nineteenth Century: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 84.

⁴ The best collection of documents in print dealing with black refugees and their impact on slavery’s demise is Ira Berlin et al., eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*, series 1, vol. 1, *The Destruction of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), hereafter cited as *Destruction of Slavery*. This volume was published as part of the now six-volume *Freedom* series, compiled by the Freedmen and Southern Society Project headquartered at the University of Maryland. Students of the Civil War era owe a tremendous debt to the project’s many editors, associates, and assistants, especially Ira Berlin, the project’s founder and lead editor of *Freedom*’s first four volumes. These scholars combed through a maze of documents at the National Archives to bring us a collection that has helped transform our understanding of the emancipation process and its aftermath.

⁵ Lincoln to Albert G. Hodges, April 4, 1864, in Basler et al., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 7: 282. Among the best edited collections highlighting Lincoln’s views on blacks, slavery, and their relation to the war are Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Donald Yacovone, eds., *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), and Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery, and the Civil War: Selected Writings and Speeches* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001).

A number of books on Lincoln have appeared in recent years, mostly prosaic celebratory biographies timed to coincide with Lincoln’s 200th birthday and the Civil War’s sesquicentennial. Happily, a few are more insightful and enlightening. Those that best deal with Lincoln and race are Paul D. Escott, *What Shall We Do with the Negro?: Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), and Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010). Whereas Foner leans toward emphasizing Lincoln’s moral growth, Escott reminds us of the limits of that growth. Brian R. Dirck, in *Abraham Lincoln and White America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), addresses those limitations in terms of what it meant to be white in nineteenth-century America. Most critical of Lincoln is Lerone Bennett, who views Lincoln as an unrepentant white supremacist for whom the Emancipation Proclamation was a tactical step on the way toward his preferred solution of colonizing blacks out of the country. See Lerone Bennett Jr., *Forced into Glory: Abraham Lincoln’s White Dream* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 2000), 9–10.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*They Are Freeing Themselves*

5

Others knew that as well. Union General John Logan, speaking to a crowd of potential recruits, echoed Lincoln's assertion that saving the Union, not ending slavery, was the war's prime objective. "Yet," he acknowledged, "the negroes are getting free pretty fast. It is not done by the army, but they are freeing themselves; and if this war continues long, not a slave will be left in the whole South."⁶ Years after the war, the formerly enslaved Betty Guwn told how her husband "ran away early and helped Grant to take Fort [Donelson]. He said he would free himself, which he did."⁷

Roughly 200,000 blacks, most of them refugees from slavery, served in the Union armed forces. Hundreds of thousands more were employed as laborers.⁸ Without their efforts, and those of increasingly resistant slaves, the Union would likely not have survived. Freedom was what they struggled for, but that freedom is often viewed as dependent on,

⁶ Thomas M. Stevenson, *History of the 78th Regiment Ohio Veteran Volunteer Infantry* (Zanesville, Ohio: Hugh Dunne, 1865), 186.

⁷ Guwn is referring to Fort Donelson in Tennessee, which fell to Union forces under Ulysses S. Grant on February 16, 1862. See Betty Guwn, *Indiana Narratives*, 99, in *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The *Slave Narratives* collection is available online at the website *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–1938*. Interviews are collected into numbered volumes by state. In this book, I cite the interviews by state, with narrators' names appearing first. A more complete collection, which includes interviews from additional sources, is published as George P. Rawick et al., comp., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, series 1 and 2, and supplement, series 1 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972 and 1977).

Interviewers with the Federal Writers' Project and others who quoted former slaves, nearly all of them white, often attempted to preserve dialect and pronunciation in written form. The results were at best mixed, often misleading, at worst demeaning, even racist. Of course, the interviews were products of their time, reflecting nearly as much about the interviewers as the narrators. When quoting from the *Narratives* and other sources for which former slaves were interviewed, I have frequently taken the liberty of changing spelling and punctuation, but never the words or their meaning, to improve flow and clarity.

⁸ Blacks in the Union army totaled almost 179,000. Figures for those in the Union navy, according to Howard University's Black Sailors Project, show that approximately 18,000 served, although some sources give higher estimates. At least eleven black women passed themselves off as men and served in the Union navy. Three are known to have served in the Union army, although there were probably more. See John David Smith, ed., *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), xiii; Barbara Brooks Tomblin, *Bluejackets and Contrabands: African Americans and the Union Navy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 188; DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook, *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 6.

Historian W. E. B. Du Bois estimated the number of black military laborers at about 300,000. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1935), 716.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

almost a by-product of, a war to preserve the Union. Considering the invaluable contributions of black folk toward Union victory, one could as easily say the opposite – that preserving the Union was dependent on ending slavery.

For most northerners who backed the war, it remained primarily – and for many exclusively – a war to save the Union. Slavery was almost beside the point. “If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave,” Lincoln wrote in August 1862, “I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union.”⁹

Lincoln meant what he said. Of course he felt that slavery was wrong, knew it was a source of conflict, and wished it to end sooner or later. But, like most whites who thought slavery wrong, he was deeply conflicted regarding when, how, and to what extent. He led no drumbeat for abolition. He could hardly have been elected had he done so. The Union was Lincoln’s priority, and he frequently said so in public and private. When Lincoln moved against slavery, he did so cautiously, even reluctantly, fearing that it might do more harm than good to the Union war effort. But by the summer of 1862, although still hesitant, he came to see that the issues of Union and slavery could not be separated. Blacks would not allow it. Every refugee who entered federal camps, by the act of escape and refusal to be reenslaved, issued a personal statement that slavery was over. Arriving in such numbers that they could hardly be ignored, the government had little choice but to recognize their claim to freedom. Thus it was, as W. E. B. Du Bois observed, that “with perplexed and laggard steps, the United States Government followed the footsteps of the black slave.”¹⁰

⁹ Lincoln to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862, in Basler et al., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 5: 388.

¹⁰ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 81. Among the first works to stress African American roles in bringing on freedom, notably by black authors, were William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1867); George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1888); and Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing, 1890). In the early twentieth century, Du Bois led the call for more attention to black roles in the emancipation process. His *Black Reconstruction* became a springboard for later research. Other Du Bois contemporaries who shed new light on black resistance during the Civil War era include Harvey Wish, “Slave Disloyalty under the Confederacy,” *Journal of Negro History* 23 (1938): 435–50; Raymond A. Bauer and Alice H. Bauer, “Day to Day Resistance to Slavery,” *Journal of Negro History* 27

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*They Are Freeing Themselves*

7

By the war's second year, the government badly needed black support. White recruits were difficult to come by. Lincoln and Congress had at first refused to enlist black volunteers, but the war was not going well for Union armies, and there was no end in sight. They now wanted blacks to fight, and they knew that blacks would fight only for liberty. That was the price of their service, a service that Lincoln knew was indispensable to the Union's survival. "Any different policy in regard to the colored man," Lincoln wrote in 1864, "deprives us of his help, and this is more than we can bear. . . . This is not a question of sentiment or taste, but one of physical force which may be measured and estimated as horse-power and Steam-power are measured and estimated. Keep it and you can save the Union.

(1942): 388–419; Bell Irvin Wiley, *Southern Negroes, 1861–1865* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1938); Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1953).

In more recent years, Professor Ira Berlin has stressed that "no one was more responsible for smashing the shackles of slavery than the slaves." See Berlin, "Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning," in David W. Blight and Brooks D. Simpson, eds., *Union and Emancipation: Essays on Politics and Race in the Civil War Era* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), 111. Other modern works that draw attention to black self-agency during the Civil War era include Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976); John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Larry Eugene Rivers, *Rebels and Runaways: Slave Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Florida* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012); John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995 and 2007); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); David Williams, *Bitterly Divided: The South's Inner Civil War* (New York: New Press, 2008); William W. Freehling, *The South vs. the South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Armstead L. Robinson, *Bitter Fruits of Bondage: The Demise of Slavery and the Collapse of the Confederacy, 1861–1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005); Richard M. Reid, *Freedom for Themselves: North Carolina's Black Soldiers in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); John Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861–1865* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985); Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). Both McCurry and Hahn view the Civil War, with considerable justification I think, as "among other things, a massive slave rebellion" (McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 259). See also Hahn's essay, "Did We Miss the Greatest Slave Rebellion in Modern History?" in Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 55–114.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Throw it away, and the Union goes with it.”¹¹ Lincoln finally came to realize, although he did not always make it so clear, that the Union was as dependent on freedom as the other way around.

Blacks had known that from the start. They publicly and repeatedly stressed that Lincoln’s initial notion of preserving the Union without reference to slavery was self-defeating. Slavery and slave resistance had brought on the war. There could be no Union victory without slavery’s defeat. With a foresight born of experience, Frederick Douglass warned in May 1861 that the war against secession “bound up the fate of the Republic and that of the slave in the same bundle.”

Any attempt now to separate the freedom of the slave from the victory of the Government over slaveholding rebels and traitors; any attempt to secure peace to the whites while leaving the blacks in chains; any attempt to heal the wounds of the Republic, while the deadly virus of slavery is left to poison the blood, will be labor lost.¹²

Less than a year later, with the war going badly for Lincoln, Harriet Tubman made much the same point in her own direct way. “They may send the flower of their young men down South. . . . They may send them one year, two years, three years, till they are tired of sending, or till they use up all the young men. All no use! God’s ahead of Master Lincoln. God won’t let Master Lincoln beat the South till he do the right thing.” Decades after the war, former slave Marshall Mack remembered that the war’s tide began to turn only after Lincoln committed the Union to emancipation. The Confederacy was whipping the Union “two battles to one,” he said.

¹¹ Lincoln to Isaac M. Schermerhorn, September 12, 1864, in Basler et al., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8: 1–2. Some of the best works on blacks in the Union military include Keith P. Wilson, *Campfires of Freedom: The Camp Life of Black Soldiers during the Civil War* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002); Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Tomblin, *Bluejackets and Contrabands*; Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861–1865* (1956; reprint, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987). The best collection of documents in print dealing with blacks in the Union military is Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*, series 2, *The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), hereafter cited as *Black Military Experience*.

¹² *Douglass’ Monthly* (Rochester, N.Y.), May 1861. For a fine collection of Douglass’s most important works see Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, 4 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1950–1955).

Cambridge University Press

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David Williams

Excerpt

[More information](#)*They Are Freeing Themselves*

9

“Then Grant whipped Lee two battles to one ‘cause he had Negroes in the Union Army.”¹³

Northern blacks volunteered for the army early on and sometimes served despite Lincoln’s refusal to accept them. Nicholas Biddle, a former slave, went to war with Pennsylvania’s Washington Artillerists in May 1861 and became perhaps the first man wounded in the conflict.¹⁴ When the army officially allowed blacks to enlist, they came forward by the tens of thousands. On the civilian side, northern blacks organized to aid southern refugees. Others went south to render assistance. Many became politically involved, demanding not only freedom for slaves but equal rights for themselves.

Blacks in the South contributed mightily to the freedom war as well. They helped refugees, black and white, escape to federal lines. They helped Confederate deserters make their way back home. And they served as spies, guides, and informants to Union forces. As one escaped Union prisoner of war later wrote, “They were always ready to help anybody opposed to the Rebels. Union refugees, Confederate deserters, escaped prisoners – all received from them the same prompt and invariable kindness.”¹⁵

Slave resistance took many forms during the war. In what W. E. B. Du Bois called a “general strike” against the Confederacy, southern blacks staged work slow-downs, refused instruction, resisted punishment, demanded pay for their work, gathered freely, traveled at will, and took freedom for themselves in various other ways long before the Union army arrived. In doing so, they forced the Confederacy to divert tens of thousands of men who might otherwise have been put on the front lines, engaging them in a vain effort to maintain control.¹⁶

Enslaved blacks also struck out violently against slaveholders and local authorities, sometimes cooperating with anti-Confederate whites in the effort. Two slaves in Dale County, Alabama, helped John Ward, leader of a local deserter gang, kill their owner in his bed. In the spring of 1862, authorities arrested three white citizens of Calhoun County, Georgia, for

¹³ Tubman quoted in Lydia Maria Child to John G. Whittier, January 21, 1862, *Letters of Lydia Maria Child* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1883), 161; Marshall Mack, *Oklahoma Narratives*, 213.

¹⁴ Francis B. Wallace, *Memorial of the Patriotism of Schuylkill County, in the American Slaveholder’s Rebellion* (Pottsville, Pa.: Bannan, 1865), 77–78; Heber S. Thompson, *The First Defenders* (n.p., 1910), 14.

¹⁵ Albert D. Richardson, *The Secret Service, the Field, the Dungeon, and the Escape* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Co., 1866), 445.

¹⁶ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 57; Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 177.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

supplying area slaves with firearms in preparation for a rebellion. Two years later, slaves in nearby Brooks County conspired with a local white man, John Vickery, to take the county and hold it for the Union.¹⁷

A STORY TOO LONG IN THE SHADOWS

Although the Union, to a large extent, owed its survival to blacks both on and off the battlefield, white America quickly forgot black contributions in the postwar years. It became the martyred Lincoln, and by extension magnanimous white northerners, who had removed the nation's stain of slavery and granted an unearned freedom to the slaves. In his 1928 biography of Ulysses S. Grant, W. E. Woodward expressed white America's prevailing view that "negroes are the only people in the history of the world, so far as I know, that ever became free without any effort of their own. . . . They twanged banjos around the railroad stations, sang melodious spirituals, and believed that some Yankee would soon come along and give each of them forty acres of land and a mule."¹⁸

Sadly, the public's general view of blacks during the Civil War has changed little despite decades of scholarly attention. Pop culture media has been far more influential. The 1939 film *Gone with the Wind*, which shapes public views of the war to this day, presents blacks as hardly fit for anything but slavery and perfectly content to remain enslaved. Even the 1989 film *Glory*, which focuses on the white Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and an assortment of fictional black characters, portrays enslaved people of the southeastern lowcountry as hapless "ragamuffins" who simply waited to be freed.¹⁹

¹⁷ Fred S. Watson, *Winds of Sorrow: Hardships of the Civil War, Early Crimes and Hangings, and War Casualties of the Wiregrass Area* (Dothan, Ala.: Hopkins Printing, 1986), 13–14; *Augusta (Ga.) Constitutionalist*, June 14, 1862, and August 26, 1864; *Macon (Ga.) Daily Telegraph*, August 26, 1864. See also Christopher C. Meyers, "The Wretch Vickery" and the Brooks County Civil War Slave Conspiracy," *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 12 (1997): 27–38.

¹⁸ W. E. Woodward, *Meet General Grant* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing, 1928), 372. In *Black Reconstruction*, W. E. B. Du Bois pointed to Woodward's comment as an example of the deliberate falsehoods perpetrated by most historians with regard to blacks and the Civil War. "The North went to war without the slightest idea of freeing the slave," Du Bois reminded his readers. "They attacked slavery only in order to win the war," and that with the aid of half a million black servicemen and laborers without whose help "the war against the South could not have been won" (Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 716).

¹⁹ Shaw is the only nonfictional member of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment portrayed in *Glory*. Other real-life members of the Fifty-Fourth included Henry Lewis