### Fire and Thunder Massachusetts Blacks in the Civil War

It is not light that we need, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake.

- Frederick Douglass

he institution of slavery was a disease deeply embedded in the tissue of the newly formed American republic. It proved beyond the sagacity of the Founding Fathers to cure, and left undisturbed it festered, ready to prove fatal to the Union.

In Massachusetts, slavery was abolished not through legislative fiat, but by judicial action in the 1780s. On the national stage, slavery survived, to be destroyed only after a long and bloody civil war. While causes for the Civil War – political, economic and cultural – were varied, the essence of the fight, especially for Massachusetts, was always about slavery and the defense of human dignity and freedom. The call to this fight went out and was answered. In the press and on the streets, from the pulpit, lecture podium, and eventually the battlefield, blacks in the Commonwealth stepped forward and helped change the course of history.

Writing about people of African descent in the Atlantic Monthly in 1863, Edward Pierce asked the question, *"Will they fight for their freedom?"* For blacks in Massachusetts, the answer was a resounding *"Yes!"* Theirs is a story of courage, strength, and sacrifice; a story of the quest for a nation free from slavery and a state where one day an African-American might speak words of hope and inclusion as Governor of the Commonwealth.

It is a story worth telling.

### The First Black Regiments

Is the present war so much higher and holier than the war of the Revolution, that the employment of black soldiers would lower its character or debase its purpose? Are our Generals so much better than Washington, and Jefferson, and Jackson, that they may be contaminated by the apparition of negro regiments in their camps?

> frican-Americans had fought bravely in both the American Revolution and the War of 1812, yet when they tried to enlist at the beginning of the Civil War they were turned away. The conflict was, in the view of the War Department, a "white man's war." The Lincoln administration considered authorizing the use of black troops, but did not for fear of losing allegiance of the border states. When Generals John C. Fremont in Missouri and David Hunter in South Carolina attempted to emancipate slaves and train them as soldiers, Lincoln ordered them to stop. Such actions, however, fueled continued debate. Passage of the Second Confiscation and Militia Act (July 1862) and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (January 1863) finally allowed for the formal enlistment of black troops into the ranks of the Union Army.

Profecto Jackson lout tik

1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry One of the first black regiments raised, the 1st South Carolina was also one the first, black or white, to see service before its official recognition as a military unit. The soldiers depicted in this image wear a uniform of regulation issue except for the red trousers which were probably used as an enlistment inducement. Painting by Don Troiani, www.historicalartprints.com



### Petition to the General Court, 1861

Boston's black community had long advocated for the right to serve in the military, and called for repeal of the laws that restricted that service. They petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for the removal of the word "white" from the state militia law in 1861, and the same year organized a black drill society in Boston. *Massachusetts Archives* 



1st Regiment Louisiana Native Guards

The Louisiana Native Guards, free African-Americans from New Orleans, first offered their services to the Confederacy in 1861, but without success. After Union capture of the city, General Benjamin Butler reorganized the Native Guards and mustered them into federal service. They became the 1st Louisiana Native Guards, the first officially sanctioned black regiment in the Union Army.

Courtesy of Trustees of the Boston Public Library

# The sath Nassachusetts Infantry

he first African-American regiment raised in the North, the 54th Massachusetts Infantry served with honor until the end of the Civil War.

> O n January 26, 1863, Massachusetts Governor John Andrew was authorized to raise a regiment of African-American soldiers. Recruiting began immediately, and by May over 1000 men had enlisted in the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Under the command of Boston native Robert Gould Shaw, the soldiers were sent to South Carolina to participate in the operations against Charleston. In July 1863, the 54th valiantly lead the assault on Fort Wagner and lost over 200 men. The regiment continued to serve in the South, and fought bravely in several more battles before returning to Boston in August 1865.



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54th Massachusetts Vols

**Letter describing the Battle of Olustee** The 54th Infantry fought in several other battles of Fort Wagner. This letter describes the 54th's role in Battle of Olustee, Florida. *Massachusetts Archives* 

> The Xew State Fing to the Fifty-Fourth Egmman. We learn from Morris Island correspondence that on the 2d inst. the 64th Massachusetts Volunteera rocorred from Gov. Andrew a very beautiful new State place that partially destroyed in the desperate charge on Fort Wagner of July 18. When the original flag was presented by vide. Andrew, he enjoined on the regiment to bring it back at the cut of the war is a straight of the test of the state of the state of the regiment to bring it back at the cut of the war is stated by the state of the state of the state of the regiment to bring it back at the cut of the war is state. Thering the optic of the 18th, is worshed what the color-guard, and tere away had the flag. The starf with the multilated remand remained with the colorbearer, who bore it safely away when the retreat was ordiered. Their cheres made a sensation for a milo around their camp. No more soldierly men exist than the 64th Massachusetts.

**"The New State Flag to the 54th Regiment"** During the assault on Fort Wagner, the regimental flag was torn from its staff and captured by the enemy. A new color was sent to replace it. *Massachusetts Archives* 

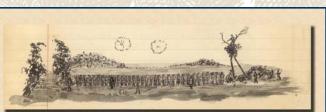
STORMING FORT WAGNE

### **Depiction of the attack on Fort Wagner, July 18, 1863** Fort Wagner was an integral part of the defenses of Charleston Harbor. The attack on the fort folded up to mean aperdiaction by the Julian off arm approximation the battle

the fort failed due to poor coordination by the Union officers commanding the battle, and the 54th suffered terrible casualties in the costly assault. *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division* 

Sketches of the 54th Infantry in battle

These drawings were made by Captain Nathaniel Appleton, a white officer in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. Drawn while under fire at the battle of Secessionville, July 16, 1863, they provide a rare depiction of the 54th in action. Courtesy of West Virginia Regional History Collection, West Virginia University Libraries





# The Soldiers of the 54th

### ver one thousand men served in Massachusetts's first

### African-American regiment.

Wirginia in 1840. He earned his freedom and moved to New Bedford before enlisting in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. During the assault on Fort Wagner, Sergeant Carney saved the flag of the 54th from capture. Despite being separated from his regiment and suffering from three severe wounds, Carney refused to relinquish his hold on the colors. Returning the flag to camp after the battle, Carney was greeted with cheers, and exclaimed to his comrades, "Boys, the Old Flag never touched the ground!" His actions were recognized in 1900, when he was awarded the Nation's highest military award, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

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### Letter describing the heroics of Sergeant Carney

This letter from an officer in the 54th relates the heroic tale of Sergeant Carney's efforts to save the regimental flag from capture at the battle of Fort Wagner. *Massachusetts Archives* 



### Photograph of Drummer Miles Moore, 54th Massachusetts Infantry

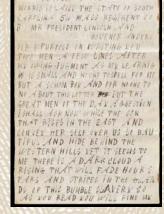
Miles Moore was only fifteen years old when he enlisted as a drummer in the 54th Massachusetts. During the battle of Fort Wagner, he served as a stretcher-bearer for the wounded. He remained in the United States Army after the war, and served with the famous "Buffalo Soldiers" on the frontier.

Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society

### **Sergeant William H. Carney, 54th Massachusetts Infantry** Later in life, Carney worked for the Secretary

of the Commonwealth's Office in the Massachusetts State House. He was killed there in an elevator accident in 1908.

Courtesy of Museum of African American History



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Letter from Private Ezekiel Barcus, 54th Massachusetts Infantry While sick in the hospital, Ezekiel Barcus wrote to Massachusetts Governor John Andrew and President Abraham Lincoln, imploring the two men to do everything in their power to bring about a quick end to the war and to eradicate slavery. Barcus died of dysentery two months after this letter was written.

Massachusetts Archives

# The sth Nassachusetts Cavair

rganized to fight on horseback, the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry served with distinction in Virginia and Texas.

The 5th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Cavalry was organized in the Commonwealth in early 1864. The unit arrived in Virginia and fought in the opening battles around the Confederate stronghold of Petersburg. After performing guard duty over prisoners of war in Maryland, the 5th returned to Virginia and had the honor of being among the first troops to ride into Richmond, the captured capital of the Confederacy. After the end of hostilities in Virginia, the regiment was transferred to Texas before returning to Massachusetts for discharge in November 1865.

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**Telegram authorizing the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry** This telegram from the War Department in Washington, D.C., authorize. Governor John Andrew to enlist a regiment of African-American cavalry. *Massachusetts Archives* 

Photograph of the ruins of Richmond, Virginia The capture of Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, was an important victory for the North. When Confederate soldiers abandoned the city in 1865, they burned everything thought to be of military value, leaving much of the city in ruins. Lawrence Collection, Courtesy of Medford Historical Society



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### Letter from Charles Francis Adams, Jr., describing the fall of Richmond

This letter from regimental commander Charles Francis Adams, Jr., great grandson of President John Adams, describes the honor bestowed upon the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry as it rode through the streets of Richmond. *Massachusetts Archives* 

### The Soldiers of the 5th

espite being the last African-American regiment raised in Massachusetts, the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry had an impressive roster of soldiers.

> C harles Douglass was the youngest son of famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass. He was said to be the first soldier enlisted in the African-American regiments from Massachusetts. After briefly serving in the 54th Infantry, he was commissioned as a first sergeant in the 5th Cavalry. After his discharge from the Army in 1865, he moved to Washington, D.C., and played for the Mutuals, one of the first African-American baseball clubs. In later life he worked as a clerk in the Pension Office, and died in Washington, D.C., in 1920.

Photograph of Sergeant Charles Douglass, 5th Massachusetts Cavalry As a soldier in a cavalry regiment, Charles Douglass wore a distinctive uniform. This included a shortened coat, sturdy leather boots, and a heavy saber. Courtesy of Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives

1951. E. M. Stanton. Seoj of war. Washington: D. S. Str: I beg & reguese Unat Orwial Charles F. Douglass of Company I SHA Raif Mag. Vot. Infli may be clischarged form the service wi orser to cusk hui to réculie and receive a First Segents warrant wi the Sth Magsachustt Wellendy reversiving here. S.F. Douglass is a servi of Frederick Douglass, Sla, with a brother, culist a in the Sthe Mags. Infli when that cast was commended early to Res. Just before the

Letter from Governor John Andrew recommending Charles Douglass for promotion Charles Douglass received a personal recommendation from the Massachusetts governor for his position as an officer in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry. *Massachusetts Archives* 

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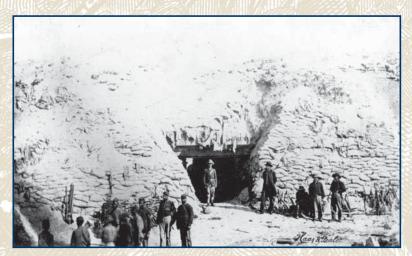
### Descriptive roll of the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry

As with other African-American regiments from Massachusetts, over one thousand men served in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry. This roll provides personal information on soldiers at the 5th including their ages, occupations, and places of residence. *Massachusetts Archives* 

# The 55th Massachusetts Infan

ften overshadowed by the 54th, the 55th Massachusetts Infantry had an illustrious record of service equal to its predecessor.

o many men had been recruited for the 54th Massachusetts that a second regiment of African-American soldiers was organized. By the end of June 1863, the 55th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was ready for service, and was sent to South Carolina. The regiment was employed in constructing fortifications in Charleston Harbor during the summer and fall of 1863. The 55th fought bravely in several battles, and lost over 200 men in combat. At the end of the war, the 55th was employed in policing the South Carolina countryside before returning to Boston in September 1865.



African-American Soldiers in Fort Wagner, 1863 Fort Wagner was finally captured in September 1863. Later, it was occupied by both the 54th and 55th Massachusetts infantry regiments. Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society

### Presentation of Colors to the Fifty-fifth Regiment.

**Regiment.** The departure of the Fifty-fifth Regiment (colored) having been announced to take place early this week, Gov. Andrew on Saturday formally presented the national and State colors, and also two banners pur-chased by colored women of Ohio, which is largely represented in the regiment. The attendance of friends was not large, but comprised many who have been connected with the formation of the regiment. The Governor was attended by his staff, and accompanied by Wendell Phillips, Eev. Mr. Grimes and others. The men were formed in a hollow square, the ceremo-nies taking place in the centre. The colored band greeted the Governor with a tune apparently intended for "Hall to the Chief." The Governor spoke as fol-lows:

### SPEECH OF GOVERNOR ANDREW.

Colonel Hallowell: At the request of the Governor of Ohio and of the committee of colored women of the

these have embrowned a huc foreign to our Saxon blood. I have the honor and grand satisfaction to de-clare that no longer is the employment of Americans of African descent an experiment in the camp, on the march, in the siege, or on the field of battle. Your regiment has already been preceeded by brave men of African descent who have faced danger, who have endured fatigue, who have assailed hights, who have stormed batteries, who have met bayonets and bullets and the cannon ball with savage, determinaed, and sometimes victorious foes. But they have never wavered in their duty to their flag.

semicrometer of their mission from appearing to-day, have in like manner ren-dered it both a duty and pleasure to myself to ap-pear not only for the purpose of delivering the regulation colors of Massachusetts and the flags of the Union to the Massachusetts 55th, but also for the pur-pose of passing into your hands, Mr. Commander, these emblems and tokens of the affectionate patriot-ism of the women of Ohio. I take especial satisfaction in being the instrumentality to-day of expressing in living signs and by vivid tokens the interest (which no words can adequately convey,) which the mothers and relatives of these men take in the welfare and the honor not less of the 55th regiment, than of those whose names and whose blood they inherit. I present you, Mr. Commander, in behalf of the com-mittee of colored women of Ohio, this splendid em-

Detail of "Presentation of Colors to the Fifty-fifth Regiment" This newspaper clipping describes the presentation of flags to the 55th Massachusetts Infantry before it left for the front. After the war, the flags donated by the African-American women of Ohio were given to Governor Andrew. The national and state flags were returned to the Massachusetts State House, where they are kept to this day.

Massachusetts Archives

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### Regimental return of the 55th Massachusetts Infantry

This return lists the numbers of men enlisted in the 55th Regiment and gives their places of birth. More than half the states in the Union were represented in the regiment, along with Canada and Africa. Massachusetts Archives

Document conserved through the generosity of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts.

## The Soldiers of the 55th

he men of the 55th Infantry Regiment were a diverse mix of soldiers from all parts of the country and all corners of the globe.

n escaped slave living in Illinois, twenty yearold Andrew Jackson Smith enlisted in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry early in 1863. During fierce fighting at Honey Hill, South Carolina, in 1864, Smith took up the regimental colors after the bearer was killed by enemy fire. Even though a third of the regiment was killed and wounded in the fighting, Smith continued to wave the flag defiantly in the face of enemy fire. His heroism would go unrecognized until 2001, when President Clinton posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor to Andrew Jackson Smith for his bravery under fire. The medal was presented to Sergeant Smith's descendents who had worked tirelessly for the recognition of their ancestor's heroic achievements.

The 55th (colored) regiment, at Readville, j now full. They will probably have their guns to day, and go South on Wednesday next. The Transcript gives the following account of one of he sergeants:-

Transcript gives the following account of one of he sergeants:— Nutrotas Sam is the name of a sergeant in the 6th Massachusetts Volunteers, whose curious and wen romantic history is one of much interest. He is an intelligent looking negro, perfectly black, addest and gentlemanly in his bearing, and alike emarkable for his experiences and his culture.— Is we understood his story, as he told it in a brief interview, he is a native of Central Africa, born in he neighborhood of Timbuctoo. In some way he rad inveigled into slavery to a party of Arabs, and ound his way first to Egypt and from thence to furkey. After awhile he reached St. Petersburg, ras converted to Christianity and oaptized as a nember of the Greek church, dropping the name of Mohammed and taking that of Nicholas. He is now a Protestant, he says emphatically. From t, Petersburg he went to Germany and entered because all his folks seemed to be doing so." Saib speaks five languages, and can read and write three or four of them. His French is quite aristion and his lialian correct. He gives an en-ertaining description of his native region, the em-loyment of its inhabitants, and heir manners and wastoms. They are generally Mohammedans.— Were it not for his color and position, Saib would assany where for a person of no small acquisi-nistions. As it is, no one can see or talk with his performent and nitelligence. He is one, but not he only one of the "persons of African descent" n camp at Readville, whose acquisitions and be-avitor go far to dispel ignorant and valgar preju-lices against the colored race.

**Photograph of Sergeant** Andrew Jackson Smith, 55th **Massachusetts Infantry** Andrew Jackson Smith was one of only two soldiers in the African-American regiments from Massachusetts to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Courtesy State Library of Massachusetts, Special Collections

Jack 55 Reg.

ices against the colored race. A Hilton Head letter of the 17th states that lontgomery's expedition, consisting of the 54th hass, the 2d South Carolina, and Brayton's R. I. attery, proceeded up St. Simon's Sound, Ga., and urtle river, above Brunswick, on the 8th, and de-royed the railroad bridge over Buffalo creek.— he expedition also ascended Altamaha river on he 11th, above Darien, and captured a schooner iden with 40 bales of cotton and brought her a-ay. The expedition then returned to St. Simon's sland without the loss of a man, and awaited or-ers from Gen. Gilmore and the supply of certain elects of what was found necessary to its work.

Newspaper article describing Nicholas Saib Nicholas Saib was a subject of fascination for many authors. He was featured in an article in the Atlantic Monthly in 1867, and in 1873 he published his autobiography. Massachusetts Archives Document conserved through the generosity of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts.



55th Massachusetts Infantry

Born Mohammed Ali Ben Saib in the Sudan, Nicholas Saib was a slave in Africa, Asia, and Europe before gaining his freedom and migrating to the United States. He was fluent in five languages, and worked as a teacher after the war. Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society



### Naval Service

assachusetts' long seafaring tradition meant that for hundreds of years, many African Americans living in coastal areas such as Boston and New Bedford went to sea.

The Civil War Navy, unlike the Army, had a long history of being integrated, so from the beginning of the war, thousands of African-Americans enlisted as sailors. Because professional sailors of the time were often away from their home base, many blacks enlisting in Massachusetts were from other states, while Massachusetts-born sailors often enlisted in such places as Philadelphia, New York, and New London. The lack of state or racial groupings in the Navy, combined with the fact that the Union did not count sailors in its recruiting quotas until 1864, meant that sailors (especially African-American ones) did not receive the same recognition as soldiers for their Civil War service.

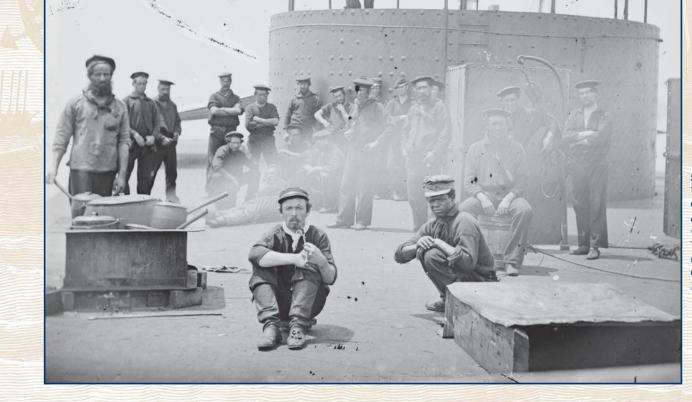
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New Bedford naval enlistments A Congressional act of July 4, 1864 allowed states to receive retroactive recruiting credit for their sailors enlisted since the beginning of the war. This selection from a certified list of sailors submitted by New Bedford's aldermen includes the names of two black sailors, Benjamin Anderson and Caesar Boston. *Massachusetts Archives* 

**Certificate of enlistment, July 1, 1865** Many African-Americans sailors enlisted in Massachusetts were from other states, including this one assigned to the recruiting ship *Ohio* in Charlestown. Not all had seafaring experience, and in line with stereotypes of the time, many blacks were assigned to such positions aboard as steward, waiter, or cook. *Massachusetts Archives* 

I hereby certify that I have on board this Ship. Is one of the Mile 5 ft. Tim States for Ouly No other receipt has been given to my knowledge. Cha Green

A. S. Receiving Ship "Ohio,"



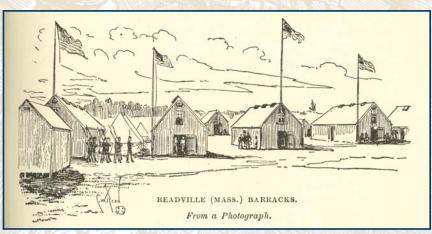
Sailors on board the U.S.S. Monitor, July 9, 1862 One of many that had black sailors in its crew, the famous ironclad U.S.S. Monitor was photographed on the James River in Virginia. Many Civil War sailors served on rivers rather than on the open sea. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

determined and far-reaching recruitment effort provided IN CAMP AT READVILLE! soldiers for the black regiments.

for Freedom

'n Massachusetts, recruitment of troops occurred mainly on a local level, with each city or town given a series of quotas to fulfill. Governor John Andrew, an early proponent of black military service, finally gained permission to establish a Massachusetts black regiment in 1863. New recruiting methods were needed, as Massachusetts itself did not have a large enough black population to fill one. African-Americans from other states also sought ways to enlist in order to seek freedom for their black brothers in bondage. Recruiting agents for the Massachusetts black regiments were established in a number of states, with most joining from New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio. Prominent members of the African-American community, including Frederick Douglass and Lewis Hayden, were involved in promoting recruiting efforts. These efforts provided not only enough men to form the 54th infantry, but a second regiment, the 55th, as well.

The (all to Fig



54th Infantry Regiment recruitment poster State aid was a Massachusetts program that supported families while the breadwinner was at war. While this was an attractive inducement to enlistment, the many black soldiers in the regiment from outside Massachusetts found that they were not eligible for this benefit.

Pay, \$13 a Month's

Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society

COR. CAMB



McD. Ralli, "Robbid the Flag of Freedom"

NURATION OF THE TERM OF SERVICE.

Good Food & Clothing!

RECRUITING OFFICE.

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APPLETON, Recruit

**Barracks at Readville** 

Camp Meigs at Readville (then part of Dedham, now Hyde Park) was the major Massachusetts rendezvous camp where recruits were sent and regiments formed and

trained, including the 54th Infantry (which left May 28, 1863), the 55th Infantry (left July 7 1863) and the 5th Cavalry (left May 5-8, 1864). Illustration by C.W. Reed, from Hardtack and Coffee, by John Billings

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### John Mercer Langston

John Mercer Langston, an Oberlin College graduate and the first black lawyer in Ohio, was the western recruiting agent for the Massachusetts 54th and 55th regiments. Courtesy of Oberlin College Archives

### Enlistment roll, 1863-1864

This roll of Bristol County recruits includes descriptions of African-Americans assigned to the 54th Infantry and the 5th Cavalry. The occupation "hostler" describes one who cares for horses - an ideal background for a soldier in a cavalry unit. Massachusetts Archives

## Massachusetts and the U.S. Colored Troops

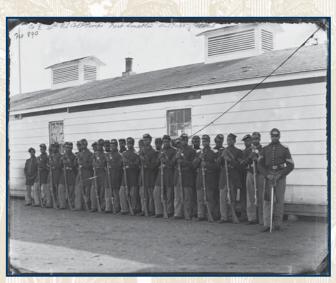
fter Massachusetts led the way with the formation of the 54th and 55th regiments, scores of federal black regiments were then formed, called the United States Colored Troops.

n July 4, 1864, Congress passed an act allowing any state to appoint agents to recruit southerners, primarily into the all-black United States Colored Troops. In exchange for providing bounties, states received credit towards their own recruiting quotas. Massachusetts recruiting agents were sent to southern locations and enlisted almost 2,500 men, most in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Hilton Head, South Carolina. These southern recruits could be credited to Massachusetts towns, to drafted men seeking substitutes, or even to patriotic citizens who donated funds to sponsor a "representative recruit." As a number of states competed for these southern recruits, Massachusetts offered the same \$325 bounty paid to its own troops at the time. Later, some raw recruits were found to have been cheated out of promised bounties by unscrupulous agents or officers.

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**Descriptive list, Norfolk, Virginia, 1864** This roll provides physical descriptions and occupations of black men recruited by a Massachusetts agent in Norfolk, Virginia. These soldiers were primarily assigned to the 38th Infantry Regiment and the 1st Cavalry Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops. *Massachusetts Archives* 



**U.S. Colored Troops** This image, taken in Washington, D.C., depicts Company E of the 4th U.S. Colored Infantry.

I have the how to furnish you with the fth-- lowing extract of my report- addressed to Brev All W.S. In Broger a.a. In Sept 9.5.6. data Sic 16th 1865. "Str. Ma River a H/21t MSCJ credited to "Mapaohusto, State that he received him-"self from the state Pay Master that fin "Self from the state Pay Master that fin "Self from the state Pay Master that fin "(\$35.00) Sollars and place the deminde "(\$3900) Sollars in the have foliat the "mithin Rice, the principal reducting "(\$2900) Sollars, in the have foliat the "mithin Rice, the principal reducting "(\$2900) Sollars, the principal reducting "(\$2900) Sollars, in the have foliat the "mithin" Rice, the principal reducting "agent for Mapaohusetto, who, as he state, "promises to pay the money to his (the "recuits) mother. Al also alleges "that Col Rice has new paid it-"to his Mother". (on)

### Testimony, 1866

Newton native Colonel Alfred Stedman Hartwell, a white officer in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry, was asked to lead an investigation after the Civil War into irregular recruiting practices in the South. This letter received by Hartwell describes how one southern Massachusetts recruit had been cheated out of most of his bounty. *Courtesy State Library of Massachusetts, Special Collections*  Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

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### Bounty elective roll, Vicksburg, Mississippi, December 1864

Recruits from the South chose how they wished to have their bounties paid by Massachusetts, with most electing to receive the \$325 at once. While most were African-American, a number of white men also signed up and were assigned to Union regiments in both northern and southern states. This roll shows that many southern recruits, both black and white, were illiterate, as they marked Xs rather than signing their names. *Massachusetts Archives* 

# The Struggle for Equal Pay

he refusal of Massachusetts African-American troops to accept pay and bounties that were less than what was given to other regiments meant that many of the soldiers went without pay for almost eighteen months.

> Despite assurances given to the newly enlisted soldiers of the 54th and 55th infantry regiments that they would receive the same pay, equipment, and bounties as other Massachusetts soldiers, United States paymasters were ordered to pay them three dollars less each month. The men refused to accept the lesser amount. In November 1863, the Massachusetts legislature, at the urging of Governor Andrew, appropriated enough money to make up the difference in the soldiers' pay, but again the regiments refused to accept

> > it. Governor Andrew pressured the federal
> > government to end this discrimination, using
> > Reverend Samuel Harrison of Pittsfield,
> > a chaplain in the 54th Regiment, as a test
> > case. After much wrangling, and a favorable
> > opinion from the U.S. Attorney General,
> > Congress passed legislation in July 1864 that
> > authorized equal pay and benefits for
> > African-American soldiers. The
> > Massachusetts men were paid off in
> > October allowing them to finally
> > send money home to their

families.

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A. Stelens's Seland J. G. Spaly 2 1863

This I last unter you, the see that. Regt he light Summ's below, and returned to mate there is new Stiller stead. It are now encaused in a healthy glace the to hallow, wheele me get the daily breeze. Washington, which cut down the bay of actual hole poor 13 - to - of course, if this appet the bases achieve to regiments, it will be a gree piece of injustice to them - as they are enlisted on the appress understanding that this gave to be on precisely the same while the server he put to appet the source on the oppress understanding that this gave to be on precisely the same while any is healt be servet end of the source on the appress understanding that this gave to be on precisely the same while any they shall be serveteed out of the source on trans to full have a deal one premised them. The height them to it mobile to these was a transverent them is mobiled to the way

Letter of Robert Gould Shaw, July 2, 1863 After Colonel Shaw received notice from the Paymaster General in Washington that his men would be paid three dollars less than soldiers in other regiments, he wrote to Governor Andrew stating that he thought the soldiers of the 54th Infantry should be mustered out if they did not receive the full pay promised to them. *Massachusetts Archives* 



assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows : -

Surve 1. Then shall be first, out of the Survey of the hommonically, to the new commissions of first mainting and privates of the Fifty Furth and Fifty Fifth Hope most of Massachuster Vetentian Conferency, and some of mong, as added to to the amount part think by the Units Anter, shall remain this monthly for grant to that, of the other non-commissional officed manines and private in the Manutan of types with they apare of the United State.

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### Act making up the deficiencies in the monthly pay of the 54th and 55th Regiments

Governor Andrew urged the General Court to pass this legislation and an accompanying resolve in November 1863, which stated, "while Massachusetts has undertaken to repair this injustice to a portion of her military contingent, she does so declaring that this duty belongs to the national government, and should be immediately assumed." *Massachusetts Archives* 

### Governor John Albion Andrew, 1818-1867

Governor Andrew pressured both the state and federal governments to equalize pay and other benefits for the black regiments. Engraving by F.T. Stuart from a photo by Black, used as the frontispiece in A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War, written by William Schouler

### The Struggle for Equal Pay

Many of those who marched in these regiments from this Commonwealth, have been worn out in service, or have fallen in battle on James Island, in the assault upon Fort Wagner, or in the affair of Olustee, yielding up their lives for the defence [sic] of their native country, in which they had felt their share of oppression, but from which they never received justice.

Letter of Major James Sturgis, December 12, 1863

Major Sturgis traveled to South Carolina to pay the men the money appropriated by the Massachusetts legislature, but reported back to Governor Andrew that the soldiers would not accept the extra pay because they felt it would legitimize the discrimination of paying the black soldiers a lower rate. *Massachusetts Archives* 

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**Letter of Andrew Sinclair, January 5, 1863** This letter, written by a private in the 55th Infantry Regiment, expressed the sentiment of the soldiers who refused the additional money raised by Massachusetts, saying that they would stay in the field for three years and still not accept the lower rate of pay. *Massachusetts Archives* Letter conserved through the generosity of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts.

Letter of Governor Andrew, May 13, 1864 Governor Andrew's letter to President Abraham Lincoln regarding the Harrison case was printed and widely distributed, to counter complaints of inactivity on the subject. The issue of pay became increasingly important as the months passed and morale in the African-American regiments dropped. Massachusetts Archives

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

STON, MAY 10, 19

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As a proper representative of Chaplain Haaroos, and also of all the noncommissioned officers and privates of the Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth Regiments of

### Rev. Samuel Harrison, 1818-1900

Samuel Harrison served as chaplain in the 54th Infantry for four months, but received a medical discharge for debility caused by worry over his family's financial situation. Governor Andrew used Harrison's case to advance the cause of equal pay. *Courtesy of Museum of African American History* 

## The Homefront

he black community of Massachusetts contributed much to the Union war effort — men for the regiments, workers for local training camps, and even clothing and food for the troops.

Following federal approval, the African Meeting House in Boston became a central place for recruitment from the African-American community. In February 1863, local community members such as waiter Robert Johnson, abolitionist Wendell Phillips, and Lieutenant Colonel Edward Hallowell of the 54th Infantry Regiment spoke there, encouraging enlistment. Similar meetings occurred in New Bedford.

As enlistment increased, the community at home contributed to the war effort as best it could. Many of those who remained at home began to work as domestics and laborers at Camp Meigs at Readville. The Colored Ladies Relief Society presented a flag to the 54th Regiment as well as clothing and foodstuffs. Family members left at home struggled to support their families as soldiers went unpaid and state aid promised to their families was continually denied.

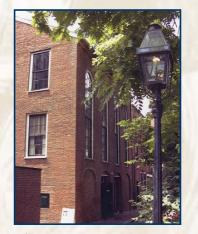
Letter of Joseph Kelson, July 30, 1864

His son of the same name having reenlisted in the Massachusetts 54th Infantry, Joseph Kelson complained that the soldier received no pay and hence he himself was having difficulty supporting his grandchildren. It is unclear whether Joseph, Sr., ever received assistance from the state. His son died of disease less than a year later in Georgetown, South Carolina.

Massachusetts Archives

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"Joe, Camp Meigs, Readville, Mass, Oct 1862" Although not clearly identified as such, it is likely that "Joe" was one of the many Massachusetts blacks who served as laborers and domestics at Camp Meigs both before and after the recruitment of the black regiments. *Courtesy State Library of Massachusetts, Special Collections* 



African-American Meeting House, Boston, Massachusetts

The oldest standing African-American house of worship in the United States, it served as a center for recruitment for the Massachusetts black regiments during the Civil War. *Photograph by T. C. Fitzgerald* 

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### Deposition of Mary Ann Clark, June 30, 1863

In her continued effort to obtain the state aid promised to the families of enlistees of the black regiments, Mrs. Clark recounts her exasperating experiences and the constant denial of such aid by Massachusetts authorities, even though she had been married to her husband since 1858. Her request was eventually granted by the state auditor. *Massachusetts Archives Document conserved through the generosity of the Military* 

Historical Society of Massachusetts

### The Promise Made



**Study heads for the Shaw Memorial** Courtesy of U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, Cornish, N.H. "If they stake their lives for us, they must be prompted by the strongest motive – even the promise of freedom. And the promise made must be kept."

> —Abraham Lincoln to James C. Conkling, August 26, 1863



**Dedication of the Memorial to the Massachusetts 54th Infantry** In 1884, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, with funds raised by an interracial committee, was commissioned to create a memorial to the Massachusetts 54th. Twelve years later some 225 veterans of the state's three black regiments assembled for the dedication ceremony. *Massachusetts Archives* 

rederick Douglass said, "Who would be free themselves must strike the blow...." Though they comprised less than one percent of the North's population, African-Americans who wore Union blue made up nearly one tenth of the Union forces. Despite unequal pay and treatment, some 180,000 African-American men served in the Army, another 18,000 in the Navy. Many more performed vital non-combat support functions, as did black women who served as nurses, scouts, or spies. Nearly

### 40,000 gave their lives.

The promise of freedom did not come easily. The end of slavery did not mean the end of prejudice and injustice. Many continued the struggle. Men like Lewis Hayden and Joshua B. Smith, ardent abolitionists before the war, later served in the Massachusetts legislature, and fought to preserve and expand hard-won freedoms. They, like countless other African-Americans through the nineteenth century and beyond, were prompted by the promise of freedom, and the belief that a promise made must be a promise kept. illiam Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth, would like to extend his sincere appreciation to the following for their assistance in making this exhibit a success:

Bernard Margolis, Earle Havens, and the staff of Rare Books and Special Collections at the Boston Public Library; Peter Drummey and the staff of the Massachusetts Historical Society; Sarah Ann Shaw and the League of Women for Community Service; Don Troiani and Historical Art Prints; Greg Schwarz of the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site; and Andrea Still at the Massachusetts State Library, Special Collections, for providing images for the exhibit.

Susan Greendyke Lachevre of the Massachusetts Art Commission and Neil R. Kilpeck, Superintendent of the Bureau of State Office Buildings, for the loan of the replicas of the regimental flags of the Massachusetts 55th Volunteer Infantry and the artifacts from the G.A.R. Collection.

The Military Historical Society of Massachusetts for their generosity in providing for the conservation of several volumes of the Executive Letters Collection, which were consulted and featured in this exhibit.

Tom Blazej and Allison Furkey of the Graphic Communications Division for their patience and hard work in completing the design and production of this exhibit.

A special thanks to Beverly Morgan-Welch, Chandra Harrington, Marion Kilson, Tracy Gibbs, and Amber Moore of the Museum of African American History for providing images that are featured in the exhibit and for consulting with us and offering their expertise and research derived from the creation of their new exhibit, A Gathering Place For Freedom.