

GENERAL WASHINGTON

AND

GENERAL JACKSON,

ON

NEGRO SOLDIERS.

PHILADELPHIA:  
HENRY CAREY BAIRD,  
1863.

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## NEGRO SOLDIERS.

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WE are in the midst of a great war for the existence of free institutions.

No one can be so blind as not to see that the triumph of the Confederacy would insure the overthrow of rational liberty.

In the heart of the Rebel States there exist four millions of an oppressed race, who would gladly aid us in the war we are carrying on, but from regard to the feelings and interests of our enemies we have hitherto refused their assistance.

That we should have hesitated so long to accept and secure the cooperation of these people, shows a degree of forbearance unequalled in history.

There certainly does exist at this time a strong prejudice in the minds of many against employing Negroes as soldiers, but the following extracts from authentic documents will show that this prejudice is unfounded, and that our wisest and best men, our bravest and most patriotic generals, our Washington, and our Jackson, did not hesitate to solicit, to employ, and to reward the military services of Negroes in the War of the Revolution, and again, within the memory of many of us, in our last war with England.

If our fathers in 1812, and our grandfathers in 1776, did not hesitate to put muskets into the hands of Negroes, why should we? If Washington and Jackson thought it no disgrace to lead Negroes to battle, why should any officer now hesitate to follow their example?

George Livermore, Esq., has lately published "An Historical Research respecting the Opinions of the Founders of the Republic on Negroes as Slaves, as Citizens, and as Soldiers." As its size and

scarcity prevents its general circulation, the following extracts have been taken from his work to bring the views of our ancestors relative to the policy of Negro enlistments before the public.

Bancroft in his *History of the United States*, vol. vii., p. 421, speaking of the Battle of Bunker Hill, says :

“Nor should history forget to record, that as in the army at Cambridge, so also in this gallant band, the free Negroes of the colony had their representatives. For the right of free Negroes to bear arms in the public defence was at that day as little disputed in New England as their other rights. They took their places, not in a separate corps, but in the ranks with the white men ; and their names may be read on the pension-rolls of the country, side by side with those of other soldiers of the Revolution.”

Major Samuel Lawrence served through the war of the Revolution.

“At one time he commanded a company whose rank and file were all Negroes, of whose courage, military discipline and fidelity he always spoke with respect. On one occasion, being out reconnoitering with this company, he got so far in advance of his command that he was surrounded, and on the point of being made prisoner by the enemy. The men, soon discovering his peril, rushed to his rescue, and fought with the most determined bravery till that rescue was effectually secured.”—*Memoir of William Lawrence, by Rev. S. K. Lothrop, D.D.*, pp. 8, 9.

On the 23d of October a Committee of Conference, “to consider the condition of the army, and to devise means for its improvement,” agreed that Negro soldiers be rejected altogether. But notwithstanding this action of the Committee of Conference, Washington, on the 31st of December, 1775, wrote from Cambridge to the President of Congress as follows :—“It has been represented to me that the free Negroes who have served in this army are very much dissatisfied at being discarded. As it is to be apprehended that they may seek employ in the ministerial army, I have presumed to depart from the resolution respecting them, and have given license for their being enlisted. If this is disapproved of by Congress, I will put a stop to it.”—*Sparks' Washington*, vol. iii., pp. 218, 219.

On the 16th of January, 1776, Congress decided “That the free Negroes, who have served faithfully in the army at Cambridge, may be re-enlisted therein, but no others.”—*Journals of Congress*, vol. ii., p. 26.

General Thomas, in a letter to John Adams, says :

“I am sorry to hear that any prejudices should take place in any southern colony with respect to the troops raised in this. I am certain the insinuations you mention are injurious, if we consider with what precipitation we were obliged to collect an army. In the regiments at Roxbury, the privates are equal to any that I served with in the last

war; very few old men and in the ranks very few boys. Our fifiers are many of them boys.

“We have some Negroes; but I look on them, in general, equally serviceable with other men for fatigue; and in action many of them have proved themselves brave.

“I would avoid all reflection, or any thing that may tend to give umbrage; but there is in this army from the southward a number called riflemen, who are as indifferent men as I ever served with. These privates are mutinous, and often deserting to the enemy; unwilling for duty of any kind; exceedingly vicious; and I think the army here would be as well without as with them. But to do justice to their officers, they are, some of them, likely men.”—*M. S. Letter, dated 24th October, 1775.*

The following is an extract from the journal of a Hessian officer, dated October 23d, 1777:

“From here to Springfield, there are few habitations which have not a Negro family dwelling in a small house near by. The Negroes are here as fruitful as other cattle. The young ones are well foddered, especially while they are still calves.

“Slavery is moreover very gainful. The Negro is to be considered just as the bond servant of a peasant. The Negress does all the coarse work of the house, and the little black young ones wait on the little white young ones. *The Negro can take the field instead of his master; and, therefore, no regiment is to be seen in which there are not Negroes in abundance; and among them are able-bodied, strong and brave fellows.*”—*Schloezer's Briefwechsel, vol. iv., p. 365.*

We next give an extract from an act of the “*State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in General Assembly. February Session, 1778.*” “Whereas, for the preservation of the rights and liberties of the United States, it is necessary, that the *whole powers of Government should be exerted* in recruiting the Continental battalions; and whereas His Excellency, Gen. Washington, hath inclosed to this State a proposal made to him by Brigadier-General Varnum, to enlist into the two battalions, raising by this State, such slaves as should be willing to enter into the service; and whereas history affords us frequent precedents of the *wisest, the freest, and bravest* nations having liberated their slaves and enlisted them as soldiers to fight in defence of their country; and also whereas, the enemy, with a great force, have taken possession of the Capital and a great part of this State; and this State is obliged to raise a very considerable number of troops for its own immediate defence, whereby it is, in a manner, rendered impossible for this State to furnish recruits for the said two battalions without adopting the said measure so recommended:

“*It is Voted and Resolved, That every able-bodied Negro, Mulatto, or*

*Indian* man slave in this State, may enlist into either of the said two battalions, to serve during the continuance of the present war with Great Britain; that every slave so enlisting shall be entitled to and receive all the bounties, wages, and encouragements allowed by the Continental Congress to any soldier enlisting into their service."

"It is further Voted and Resolved, That every slave so enlisting, shall, upon his passing muster before Col. Christopher Green, be immediately discharged from the service of his master or mistress, and be absolutely FREE, as though he had never been incumbered with any kind of servitude or slavery."

The Negroes enlisted under this act were the men who immortalized themselves at Red Bank.

Arnold, in his "History of Rhode Island," vol. ii., pp. 427, 428, describing the "Battle of Rhode Island," fought August 29th, 1778, says: "A third time the enemy, with desperate courage and increased strength, attempted to assail the redoubt, and would have carried it, but for the timely aid of two Continental battalions despatched by Sullivan to support his almost exhausted troops. It was in repelling these furious onsets, that the newly raised *black regiment*, under Col. Green, distinguished itself by deeds of desperate valor. Posted behind a thicket in the valley, they three times drove back the Hessians, who charged repeatedly down the hill to dislodge them."

On March 29th, 1779, we find in the Secret Journals of Congress, vol. i., pp. 107-110:

"Resolved, That it be recommended to the States of South Carolina and Georgia, if they shall think the same expedient, to take measures immediately for raising three thousand able-bodied Negroes.

"That the said Negroes be formed into separate corps, as battalions, according to the arrangements adopted for the main army, to be commanded by white commissioned and non-commissioned officers."

After other provisions for their organization the last section provides,

"That every Negro who shall well and faithfully serve as a soldier to the end of the present war, and shall then return his arms, *be emancipated*, and receive the sum of fifty dollars."

Washington, Hamilton, General Greene, General Lincoln, and Colonel John Laurens were warm friends of this measure.

That the "Mother of Statesmen" also enlisted Negroes during the War of the Revolution, and emancipated them for their services, is shown by the heading of a law passed by the General Assembly of Virginia, in 1783, entitled "*An Act directing the Emancipation of certain Slaves who have served as soldiers in this State, and for the emancipation of the slave Aberdeen.*"—*Hening's Statutes at Large of Virginia*, vol. xi., pp. 308, 309.

In the navy, Negroes have always been entered on the ship's books

without any distinction. The following extract from a letter of Commodore Chauncey gives his views on this subject. "I regret that you are not pleased with the men sent you by Messrs. Champlin and Forrest; for to my knowledge a part of them are not surpassed by any seamen we have in the fleet; and I have yet to learn that the color of the skin, or the cut and trimmings of the coat, can affect a man's qualifications or usefulness. I have nearly fifty blacks on board of this ship, and many of them are among my best men."

In 1814 the State of New York passed

"An Act to authorize the raising of two regiments of men of color; passed October 24, 1814."

In conclusion we offer the proclamation and address of General Andrew Jackson to the Negroes.

*"Headquarters 7th Military District.*

*MOBILE, September 21, 1814.*

"TO THE FREE COLORED INHABITANTS OF LOUISIANA :

"Through a mistaken policy you have heretofore been deprived of a participation in the glorious struggle for national rights in which our country is engaged. This no longer shall exist.

"As sons of freedom, you are now called upon to defend our most inestimable blessing. As Americans, your country looks with confidence to her adopted children for a valorous support, as a faithful return for the advantages enjoyed, under her mild and equitable government. As fathers, husbands, and brothers, you are summoned to rally around the standard of the Eagle, to defend all which is dear in existence.

"Your country, although calling for your exertions, does not wish you to engage in her cause without amply remunerating you for the services rendered. Your intelligent minds are not to be led away by false representations. Your love of honor would cause you to despise the man who should attempt to deceive you. In the sincerity of a soldier and the language of truth I address you.

"To every noble-hearted, generous freeman of color, volunteering to serve during the present contest with Great Britain, and no longer, there will be paid the same bounty in money and lands, now received by the white soldiers of the United States, viz. : one hundred and twenty-four dollars in money, and one hundred and sixty acres of land. The non-commissioned officers and privates will also be entitled to the same monthly pay and daily rations, and clothes, furnished to any American soldier.

"On enrolling yourselves in companies, the major-general commanding will select officers for your government from your white fellow-citizens. Your non-commissioned officers will be appointed from among yourselves.

"Due regard will be paid to the feelings of freemen and soldiers. You

will not, by being associated with white men in the same corps, be exposed to improper comparisons or unjust sarcasm. As a distinct, independent battalion or regiment, pursuing the path of glory, you will, undivided, receive the applause and gratitude of your countrymen.

"To assure you of the sincerity of my intentions, and my anxiety to engage your invaluable services to our country, I have communicated my wishes to the Governor of Louisiana, who is fully informed as to the manner of enrolment, and will give you every necessary information on the subject of this address.

"ANDREW JACKSON, *Major-General Commanding.*"  
*Niles's Register*, vol. vii., p. 205.

At the close of a review of the white and colored troops in New Orleans, on Sunday, December 18th, 1814, General Jackson's address to the troops was read by Edward Livingston, one of his aids, and the following is the portion addressed :

"TO THE MEN OF COLOR.—Soldiers! From the shores of Mobile I collected you to arms,—I invited you to share in the perils and to divide the glory of your white countrymen. I expected much from you; for I was not uninformed of those qualities which must render you so formidable to an invading foe. I knew that you could endure hunger and thirst and all the hardships of war. I knew that you loved the land of your nativity, and that, like ourselves, you had to defend all that is most dear to man. But you surpass my hopes. I have found in you, united to these qualities, that noble enthusiasm which impels to great deeds.

"Soldiers! The President of the United States shall be informed of your conduct on the present occasion; and the voice of the Representatives of the American Nation shall applaud your valor, as your general now praises your ardor. The enemy is near. His sails cover the lakes. But the brave are united; and if he finds us contending among ourselves, it will be for the prize of valor, and fame, its noblest reward."—*Niles's Register*, vol. vii., pp. 345, 346.

Such are some of the views of our ancestors in regard to the employment of Negro soldiers. Is it not the duty of every loyal man to give a careful consideration to these facts?

By utilizing this element the Government can secure the services of 700,000 able-bodied men, acclimated to and familiar with the seat of war, and at the same time strike the Rebels a vital blow. Will not posterity hold to a severe account the statesman who would neglect to use so powerful a force for the suppression of the Rebellion?