In 1862, President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation opened the door for African Americans to enlist in the Union Army. Although many had wanted to join the war effort earlier, they were prohibited from enlisting by a federal law dating back to 1792. President Lincoln had also feared that if he authorized their recruitment, border states would secede from the Union. By the end of the war, approximately 180,000 African-American soldiers had joined the fight.

In addition to the problems of war faced by all soldiers, African-American soldiers faced additional difficulties created by racial prejudice. Although many served in the infantry and artillery, discriminatory practices resulted in large numbers of African-American soldiers being assigned to perform non-combat, support duties as cooks, laborers, and teamsters. African-American soldiers were paid $10 per month, from which $3 was deducted for clothing. White soldiers were paid $13 per month, from which no clothing allowance was deducted. If captured by the Confederate Army, African-American soldiers confronted a much greater threat than did their white counterparts.

In spite of their many hardships, African-American soldiers served the Union Army well and distinguished themselves in many battles. Of their service to the nation Frederick Douglass said, “Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States.” African-American soldiers comprised about 10 percent of the Union Army. It is estimated that one-third of all African Americans who enlisted lost their lives.
TO COLORED MEN!

FREEDOM,

Protection, Pay, and a Call to Military Duty!

On the 1st day of January, 1863, the President of the United States pronounced freedom to over Three Millions of Slaves. This decree is to be enforced by all the power of the Nation. On the 21st of July last he issued the following order:

**PROTECTION OF COLORED TROOPS.**

*[War Department, Adjutant General's Office]*

**EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, July 21.**

"The following order of the President is published for the information and guidance of all concerned:

**EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, July 21.**

"It is the duty of every Government to give protection to its citizens, whether of whatever color, age, or condition, and especially to those who are only organized as soldiers in the public service. The law of nature, and the usage and customs of war, are uniform, and by general consent, parallel to the duties incumbent on each government in the maintenance of its public interests. To all, we extend our essential protection for the sake of its citizens, and for the benefit of the whole community. We invoke the aid of all nations in the maintenance of our public safety. It is, therefore, ordered, by the command of the President of the United States, that all persons of color, who have taken up arms against the rebellion of the United States, shall be considered as soldiers in the public service, and as such shall be entitled to all the privileges of the same."

"By order of the Secretary of War.

"R. B. TOLEDO, Assistant Adjutant General."

That the President is in earnest the rebels soon began to find out, as witness the following order from his Secretary of War:

**WAR DEPARTMENT, Washington, September 1, 1862.**

"Sir: Your letter of the 31st last, calling the attention of this department to the facts in the cases of Otto H. Buena, William H. Robinson, and William W. Watson, for captures in the state of Missouri, is received and incorporated in the instructions to the officers in charge of them. Very respectfully your obedient servant.

"F. D. STANTON, Secretary of War."

And retaliation will be our practice now—man for man—to the bitter end.

**LETTER OF CHARLES SUMNER,**

Written with reference to the events of the Civil War, July 15th and 31st, 1862, in answer to Colored Richmonders.

**Boston, July 31st, 1862.**

"Sir: In these parts, our victory could have excited the colored men in my public service. Back service is the route for protection. Be sure that protection has begun, the service should begin. All that see and suffer, and are weighed with whisper, is a weight that our nation, amount to 3,000,000, and the colors of every race are strong, and in America, they are strong, and the colors of every race are strong, and the colors of every race are strong, and the colors of every race are strong. *

"I am a nationalistic, a true American, and I would not sell it to any foreign power. I now am the last in the land of the free people. Help us to bear in mind your own victory in triumph against your enemies, and in this way you can truly express them when they are Americans. How are you, and able to improve your own condition for the benefit of the Negroes. This is not the time to be indolent or be forgetful. Do your duty to your country, and you will see how small, and eyes at home, you will still seek to depend on you. Very truly yours,

"CHARLES SUMNER."

Broadside encouraging men of color to join the Union Army in 1863. Includes excerpts of relevant legislation and quotations from officials. Courtesy of the National Archives.
The soldiers of Company E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry. After the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in Union-occupied territory, African Americans in both North and South joined the Union army. Image courtesy of Library of Congress.

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