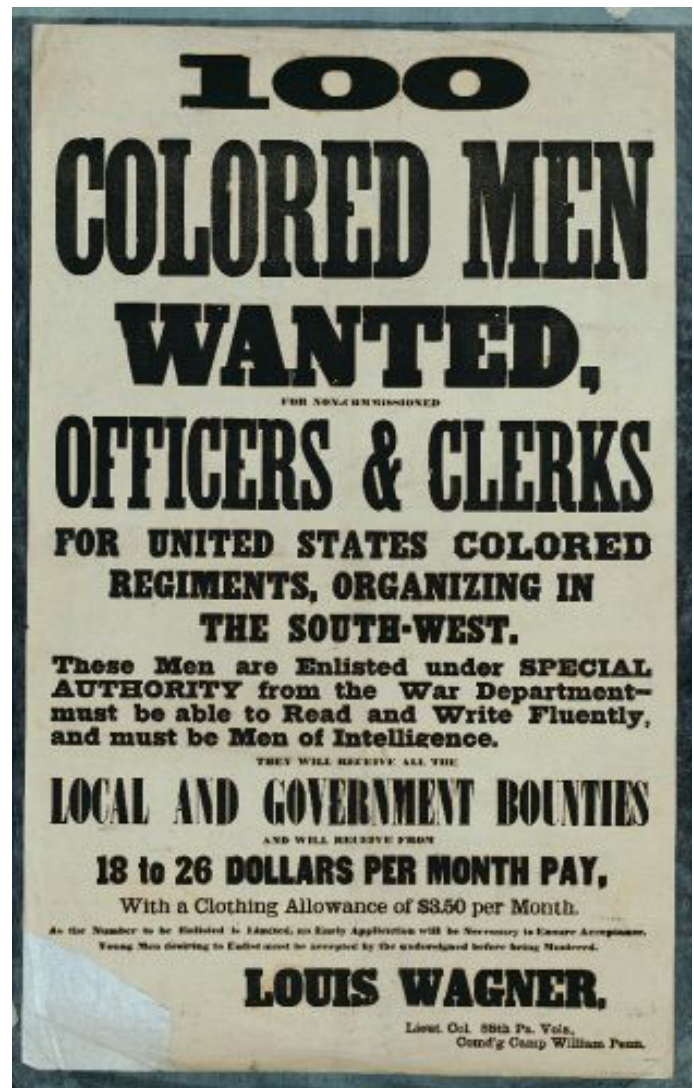


Historical Context of the Source

The American Civil War (1861-65) was fought in the United States between the North (the Union) and the South (the Confederacy). Early on in the war, black men were sent away when they tried to volunteer for the Union. However, as recruitment became harder the Second Confiscation and Militia Act (1862) was implemented, allowing President Lincoln “to employ as many persons of African descent as he may deem necessary” in any capacity for the Union army. Months later Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in rebellious states so that they could formally join the army. The United States Colored Troops (USCT) were formed to recruit African Americans and other minority groups, eventually comprising of 175 regiments and 178,000 free black men. However, racial prejudice still pervaded the Union army. While African American soldiers typically received \$10 per month including a clothing allowance of \$3, white soldiers would receive \$12.00 per month as well a clothing allowance of \$3.50. Black soldiers were not allowed to command over white soldiers, and were disproportionately given menial labour. At this time there were many white men who, after the Emancipation Proclamation, feared that freed slaves would add further competition to the labor market. This discontent manifested itself in New York in 1863, when a protest against the drafting became a violent racially-charged riot.

Source Context

This Civil War recruitment poster for a ‘coloured regiment’, was created with the intended purpose of persuading and incentivising black men to enlist in the Union army. Although it is not dated, it can be assumed that the propaganda is from after 1863, as this was when the USCT formed and began recruiting. It is issued on behalf of the Union by Colonel Louis Wagner, an individual known for his role in recruiting black men, as he volunteered for the command of Camp William Pen, the first camp for the training of African American soldiers. Its intended audience was not simply just newly emancipated “colored men”, as the source also stipulates that they had to be able to “read and write fluently”. While this does narrow the range of eligibility, it still did target the considerable number of Northern black men who could read and write as well as most whites.



Your primary source - a Union army recruitment poster from <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/10/civil-war-recruitment-posters/247420/>

Discussion Questions - use information from parts A and B and the source to help you answer these

1+2 - What is used to incentivise men to join the coloured regiment in this source? Does this reflect the experience of black soldiers in the Union army?

(In the poster volunteers are promised “local and government bounties” and “from 18 to 26 dollars per month pay”, an attempt of the Union army to give these newly emancipated men money that they could use to progress and further their place in society. The source’s reverential tone, referring to their enlistment under “special authority” and the black volunteers being “men of intelligence” suggests that they would not only have experienced better material treatment, but that they would also have been viewed differently. This use of language exploited the hope of black men that now that they could be seen as providing a service to the state after being turned away by it for so long, they would have earned the same masculine connotations of respectability, bravery and strength associated with the white soldier. However, this is not reflective of their experience in reality. Despite being supposedly seen as “men of intelligence”, black men were not seen as equals, and were not allowed to have a commanding role over a white man in the Union army. This demonstrates that their identity as a soldier could not erase their racial identity as they may have hoped. Furthermore, while the source suggests that black soldiers were earning “18 to 26 dollars per month”, in reality the average black soldiers received only \$10 per month. This demonstrates that while the source may not be reflective of the typical experience of black soldiers, it does indicate the propagandistic measures used to try to recruit more black men, and the acknowledgement of what would have persuaded them to sign up.)



Another recruitment poster which appeals to a sense of masculinity by asserting that "no boys need apply", from <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/10/civil-war-recruitment-posters/247420/>

3 - How do you imagine white men would have reacted to this poster?

(The poster’s attempts to propose the equal and fair treatment of black soldiers, offering “local and government bounties” and fair pay, suggests that the white soldiers were forced to accept black soldiers in their ranks as equals. Thus it follows that they had to extend the masculine ideals they associated with white soldier, including being ‘gentlemanly’ and brave, to black men too. Until recently being a US soldier had only ever meant being a white man, so this ‘tarnished’ their source of identity and put their white masculinity under threat by forcing them to re-identify themselves as equal to black men. The fact that black soldiers were not allowed to command over white men demonstrates their inability to accept this as it shows their inability of accepting that white men could see a black man as their superior. The occurrence of the New York draft riots further highlights the insecurity of white men at the prospect of fighting alongside, or competing for work with, black men.)

4 - How do you imagine the opportunity at enlistment for African American men would have affected their sense of manhood?

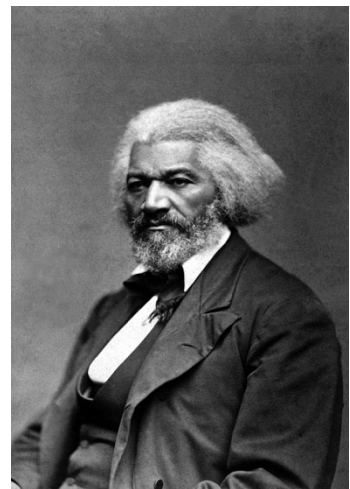
(Previous to this point, the only people who could formally become soldiers were men. Thus the fact that African American men were now being allowed to join a group of men that they had previously been excluded from empowered them to embrace their masculinity in a way that they had not been allowed to before. There was hope among black men that their enlistment would provide them with a chance of gaining the same level of respectability that was afforded to white soldiers. The civil war, a period lacking political and social stability, was a time when the idea of what it meant to be a US citizen was changing and there was no settled sense of identity. This provided an opportunity for black men to re-conceptualise their new sense of identity. There was hope that becoming soldiers would allow black men to prove themselves as deserving the right to citizenship. This was central to their reassertion of their black manhood as an essential step for these black men to embrace their manhood as being treated equally to the other men in society.)

5 - Abolitionist Frederick Douglass wrote

“Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship”.

Based on this, what do you imagine would have been the differences between why white men volunteered to fight and why black men volunteered to fight for the Union army?

(White men, united behind the Union, embraced the patriotism associated with their strong desire to save the Union. Unlike them, black men were not driven to fight by a love for the state as they fought for much more personal reasons. They did not adopt this similar macho camaraderie as they were excluded from what being a citizen of the union actually meant. Douglass’ reference to the black man wearing an “eagle on his button” highlights that while black soldiers were representing the might of the state, they were not yet even granted citizenship to it. Army enlistment provided black men with the opportunity to prove themselves as legitimate in their plight for equality and deserving of this right.)



Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who argued that the aim of the Civil War was to end slavery, and thus that African Americans should become soldiers and fight for this

Further Reading

<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/10/civil-war-recruitment-posters/247420/>

(More examples of Civil War recruitment posters)

<https://southernspaces.org/2004/greatest-slave-rebellion-modern-history-southern-slaves-american-civil-war/>

(Lecture by Steven Hahn, arguing that the engagement of slaves in the Civil War was a “slave rebellion that dwarfed all other slave revolts)



Film poster for *Glory*, starring Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman and Matthew Broderick

Edwin S. Redkey, *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army 1861–1865* (Cambridge, 1992)
(Collection of letters from black Union Army soldiers, providing an insight into the reality of their experiences during the Civil War)

Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (2010), ch. 3, 'Men in the Making,' pp. 80-108
(Exploration of the experience of African American men and the impact of enlistment on their sense of manhood, but in the context of World War I)

Glory, 1989 film

(Fictional depiction of the experiences of African American men during the Civil War, based on the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment)