February 18, 1861, the voters of Arkansas cast ballots against secession. Then on May 6, 1861, after a successful Confederate attack on Federal Fort Sumter, South Carolina, the campaign swung in favor of the southern nationalists who persuaded all but one convention delegate to approve Arkansas's ordinance of secession. On May 7, 1861, Arkansas became the ninth slave state to join the Confederate States of America. Yet, what the Confederates needed most to win the war, they would never gain—the loyalty and support of a majority of black and white Arkansans.

The action by the secessionists divided the state between pro-Unionists and Confederates, and along class lines as well. According to Unionist A. W. Bishop, "the poor whites of the South, when their attention is drawn to the real nature and object of this war, do not fail to perceive that they have nothing in common with those [members of the slavocracy] who rule at Richmond." Some anti-secessionists, in particular in northwestern counties where only 26 percent of the slaves were located, vowed that "they would never muster under the damned nigger [Confederate] flag, but if any one would just come along with the stars and stripes they would arise at midnight and go to it." The slaveholders and their Confederate allies continued to maintain control of Arkansas by passing loyalty laws and conscription acts. They also used domestic violence and intimidation to keep the pro-Union citizens in check. In his effort to inform northerners about the suffering of loyal citizens in Arkansas, William Baxter wrote in Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove that Confederate conscription acts forced Unionists into the army only to see them desert and sign with the Union army.5

As an upper South state with 22.4 percent slaves (111,115), by 1860 Arkansas ranked eleventh among fifteen slave states. Only 490 persons...
owned five or more slaves in Arkansas, and a mere 1,149 of the 57,208 white families, or some 11,481 persons out of a white population of 324,191 owned any slaves. But some 9 percent of Arkansas’s slaveholders held 25 or more slaves, or 46 percent of the state’s black bondsmen. Compared with neighboring Tennessee’s median holding of 15.1 slaves, Arkansas’s median slaveholding of 23.4 slaves ranked it seventh among the slave states. The slaves were concentrated in eastern and southern areas where six counties contained 50 percent of Arkansas’s slaves. Only 3,799 blacks (3.41 percent) lived in Arkansas’s largest towns. But slaves made up 27.62 percent of Little Rock’s 1860 population.

As a result of the concentration of slaves among a few owners mostly in the rural Delta and lowlands, the slaves endured a harsh and tightly controlled environment in Arkansas. Slaves frequently lived under managers (overseers) who directed slave farm life with a greater regard for profits than for human workers. Group interaction between slaves on different farms was discouraged by slave patrols and black codes. While they were forced to live in large work groups with limited family cohesion, black bondsmen learned to adapt to slavery and seldom rebelled against it. Yet some slaves did rebel in various ways by running away, stopping work, breaking tools, and wounding work animals, but in Arkansas never by mass revolt.

Slaves became increasingly valuable, and slave society in Arkansas became so tight that neither the pre-1840 southern manumission movement nor the succeeding northern abolitionist movement influenced local slaveowners to free large numbers of blacks. Since slaves were bought into Arkansas to exploit the rich soil, the prices of bondsmen rose above $1,350. In Pulaski County alone in 1845, some thirteen hundred slaves helped to produce 508 bales of cotton and 145,515 bushels of grain. In 1860 Arkansas ranked sixth among the states for cotton production, and thousands of slave farms raised much of the cotton. According to the U.S. Eighth Census (1860), the number of officially manumitted slaves grew in Arkansas from one slave (.002 percent) freed in 1850 to forty-one (.0369 percent) manumitted slaves in 1860. The Eighth Census also reported twenty-one and twenty-eight fugitive slaves in Arkansas for 1850 and 1860, respectively. However, masters really chose not to report missing slaves to census-takers so as not to encourage runaways and fanatical northern abolitionists.

Arkansas’s highly structured system of slavery rendered the blacks socially and culturally isolated from white society and largely unready to live in America’s free society. And to make matters worse, one could not hope to rely on local free blacks for leadership against slavery and the preparation of social and cultural foundations for post-slavery times. Although there surely were literate, capable, and ambitious men among antebellum Arkansas’s free black settlers, antebellum Arkansas had few black leaders, primarily because Arkansas officials did not welcome free black settlers, and eventually forced most to leave the state. Little Rock alone had some 43 free black residents (8.5 percent of the black population) as early as 1845 and just as many free blacks living in the adjacent areas of Pulaski County. By 1850 some 608 free blacks had settled in Arkansas even though an 1843 law prohibited any more free black settlers. Later, by the mid-1850s, the national debates about slavery created a hostile confrontation between North and South and caused southern leaders to become more defensive about slavery and fearful of the influence that free blacks could have on the slaves. And non-slaveholding farmers and white workers had no desire to compete with ambitious free black persons. Following the heated presidential election of 1856, for example, a December 1856 “race riot” occurred in Nashville, Tennessee, in which white workers attacked privileged (quasi-


^Kolchin, American Slavery, 184, 241, 244; Arkansas Gazette, April 15, 1846; Stuart Bruchey, Cotton and the Growth of the American Economy: 1790-1860 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), see tables D, E, F, H.

battle on Arkansas soil took place March 6 at Pea Ridge. Confederate general Earl Van Dorn was forced by Union forces to retreat southward. Just one month before the battle of Pea Ridge, the Union army had taken the gateways to the upper South, Forts Henry and Donelson (where some Arkansas Confederate troops suffered casualties) in northern Tennessee. Arkansas’s Confederate officials were committed to the rebellion, and when the Union secretary of war requested 780 troops from Arkansas, Confederate Governor Rector flatly refused. That issue of the Gazette reported many wounded Confederate soldiers were being shipped into Little Rock’s makeshift hospitals by wagon, boat, and train because of the crippling Confederate defeat suffered at the infamous Battle of Shiloh in west Tennessee. Then everyone (blacks and whites) knew that mere boasting and bragging by the slavocracy and the southern nationalists could not stop the Union army.

Despite early setbacks in 1861, things went so well for the Union army by September of 1862 that President Abraham Lincoln yielded to the abolitionists’ arguments and made a strategic decision to declare the slaves free in rebellious territories effective January 1, 1863. Most Confederate officials in Arkansas were unaware of the effect that the Proclamation would have on the slaves, although the Confederates feared that it would interfere with foreign help such as England’s diplomatic recognition of the Confederacy. Yet President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation caused social upheaval in Confederate Arkansas, because once they sensed the disruption of the war and then heard about the President’s Proclamation, the rebellious slaves ran away in increasing numbers. To keep slavery intact, the Confederates passed a law to exempt white men from military service if their farms included twenty slaves or more. Later (May 1863), the Confederate government changed the “20 Negro law” to cover mostly plantations with minors and dependents. In upland Arkansas, where less than 10 percent of the slaves lived, some loyal citizens tried unsuccessfully to gain an exemption from the Emancipation Proclamation. Whenever Federal forces appeared in


3Arkansas Gazette, March 7, April 22, 1862.

Arkansas, the most capable adult blacks left their owners and sought refuge within the Union lines.

Historian Michael B. Dougan suggests that "while the slaves undoubtedly hoped for Federal success and while individual acts of resistance occurred, there is little to suggest that Arkansas blacks actively prepared the way for the coming of the Yankees." But surely the self-guided movement of thousands of fugitive slaves signaled a mass resistance that inevitably helped to pave the way for the arrival of the Union army. The Emancipation Proclamation became a topic of discussion on the black grapevine. Near Helena in November 1862, Union navy officer James W. Shirck said: "The slaves had heard of the President's proclamation, and that in spite of all the owners could do they would get to the river. I was surprised at the amount of information possessed by the slaves. All of those who came on board the Lexington tell me that they are to be free on the 1st of January [1863], but their owners are getting ready to move them back from the river as soon as possible."

Some Arkansas slaveowners did run their slaves into Confederate territories. For example, Texas was reportedly filled with refugee slaves, many of whom were from Arkansas. But the sudden movement of slaves on their own, the Union naval raids, and the rapid successes by

the Union army stunned and overwhelmed Confederate Arkansans. Plans to move the slaves to Confederate areas were devised too late for most slaveowners in Crittenden, Desha, Mississippi, Phillips, and Arkansas counties, where blacks outnumbered whites in many districts.

Even earlier than November 1862, the Arkansas Delta became the first area to lose slaves. Blacks fled the river plantations when Union naval ships boldly began to cruise the rivers, displaying their new iron-plated armor, sporting huge guns, and belching stacks of steam, smoke, and ash. Slaves merely had to run to the Union boats and camps, and this they did in droves. The secretary of the navy issued an order on April 30, 1862, which directed his commanders to take advantage of the August, 1861, Confiscation Act and the large numbers of contrabands who flocked to the "protection of the United States flag" and employ them "as boys at $8, $9, or $10 per month and one ration." Many of the black men brought aboard bales of cotton to sell for the support of their fugitive slave families, whom they insisted must go with them if they were moved further north. Because "they could easily be obtained from Helena," the Union naval commanders shipped many fugitive slaves to Memphis and points as far north as Cairo, Illinois, to provide needed labor for naval operations by November 1862. By the end of 1862 the naval regulations allowed blacks to hold jobs that paid wages above those of landsman, seaman, ordinary seaman, fireman, and coal heaver. The Union navy desperately needed blacks to help man the many new boats coming into service, and Rear Adm. David Porter also wanted more blacks because "the white men cannot stand the southern sun . . . and the blacks must also be used to defend the vessels where there is a deficiency in the crew." Near Helena, Porter ordered his forces to raid the neighboring Mississippi plantations owned by Jefferson Davis (president of the CSA) and his brother, free all slaves, and take the cotton. Around the mouth of Arkansas's White River, some owners came out to ask for their slaves' return. Admiral Porter refused their requests. The
slave masters felt betrayed, because the slaves they "trusted most" had fled to the Yankees.13

Between the spring of 1862 and the fall of 1863, Confederate control of the Mississippi Valley and Arkansas faded fast. Such control had been precarious at best. Governor Rector and other Confederate state officials seemed too disorganized to present a unified military front. In the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, too, President Jefferson Davis and his cabinet appeared to be mere administrators and poor war leaders. After the battle of Pea Ridge, the Union army entered the northwestern counties without much resistance. On June 6, 1862, the Union forces secured the Mississippi River and took Memphis, Tennessee. On the day that Confederate general Robert E. Lee began his great retreat from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 4, 1863, the Union army conquered Vicksburg, Mississippi, while other federal troops held Helena against enemy forces. From the strategic Mississippi River port of Helena (an excellent military base of huts, tents, large plank warehouses, and pools of black laborers) the Union army easily transported huge amounts of supplies, arms, and men into Arkansas. On August 10, 1863, Maj. Gen. Frederick Steele left Helena with a large Union army expedition including regiments from Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Arkansas's new black regiments. With great excitement fugitive slaves followed his army's trail every step of the way to Little Rock. On September 10, 1863, Steele's army secured the capital city of Little Rock and later extended Union army posts along the White River from Root Smith to Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and Camden, and from DeVall's Bluff east to Helena.14 Governor Rector and his government fled toward the southwest to set up a temporary capital in the tiny town of Washington, Arkansas.

When the summer of 1864 arrived, the Confederate threat in Arkansas and Missouri was so fragmented and faded that William T. Sherman, the general in charge of the Union armies in the western theater, saw no need to divert his attention from the successful conquest of Atlanta, Georgia (September 1864). Sherman even removed many troops (including the 18th U.S. Colored Troops Infantry Regiment) from Arkansas's northern neighbor, Missouri, to fight in middle Tennessee where the Union army won the decisive battle of Nashville on December 15–19, 1864.15

Slaves in west Tennessee, eastern Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana walked away from the farms without fearing the mistress's empty threats and pleas. In neighboring Texas, where the war failed to reach the interior, slavery remained relatively intact. However, in Arkansas, even more slaves rushed to meet the Yankees, partly because of crop failures and the cut-off of meat and flour from the North. And things got worse when the Union army commandeered farmers to give up horses, wagons, hogs, corn, cattle, fodder, mules, sheep, mattresses, flour, meal, oats, whiskey, and poultry. But many citizens (blacks and whites) submitted claims and were paid after the war for those deemed legitimate by the U.S. Commission of Claims.16 In the Union army's presence, black Arkansans, who had used a Sambo psychology to pretend to be loyal to the master, quickly revealed their true loyalties to Unionists, the men of freedom.

Beginning in August 1862, to prevent being overwhelmed by the flood of black fugitives, the Federal government established a contraband camp system throughout the lower Mississippi Valley, from west Tennessee southward to Corinth, Mississippi, and Helena. Many slaves

13ORN, vol. 24, 179; 213; ORN, vol. 27, 256; ORN, vol. 26, 177; ORN, vol. 23, 253–254, 509, 537, 624, 638; ORN, vol. 25, 328, 378, 774–775; Dougan, Confederate Arkansas, 115, 116, 117; also for more details on naval operations in the area, see Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Commanding Officers of Squadrons, 1861–1865, Mississippi Squadrons, RG 125, microcopy 89, National Archives, Washington, DC.


16See Records of the Commissioners of Claims (Southern Claims Commission), 1871–1880, RG 56, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, National Archives, Washington, DC, which lists persons, claims, and amounts paid to individuals.
traveled from eastern Arkansas to Memphis, Tennessee, where the Union army housed them with thousands of regional fugitives in plank-floored tents and contraband camps with such names as Camp Dixie, and New Africa. Some blacks headed back home after finding little food, poor shelter, and no work in Helena’s overcrowded Camp Ethiopia. In the summer of 1863, northern missionary societies were encouraged to enter occupied territories, where they and army officers worked together to obtain blankets, tents, and clothing for the contrabands. It was too late to save some 25 percent of Helena’s earliest contrabands who died from disease and exposure.17

However, in March 1864 federal authorities reduced Helena’s contraband camp population to some 3,300 blacks by forcing many inhabitants to resettle on supervised and protected “home farms” and plantations. By October 1864, the federal government’s efforts to resettle the urban contrabands continued successfully, reducing the population in the Helena camps to 1,290 inhabitants.18 Helena still suffered strain because the town was built to accommodate only 2,000 black and white residents before the war. In October 1863 the federal authorities instituted a labor and wage system to convert idle fugitive slaves into active workers. Union army commanders ordered all able-bodied contraband dwellers to work either on military installations (in labor battalions) or on supervised plantations. The Union army used Treasury Department funds to hire thousands of blacks as teamsters, cart drivers, herders of cattle and horses, cooks, servants for commissioned officers, nurses for hospitals, laundresses, and laborers at fifteen dollars a month for boys, thirty dollars a month for adult males, and ten dollars a month for strong females. Black women served as common laborers on military construction projects (sometimes pushing wheelbarrows and driving wagons), as servants in commanding officers’ homes, and workers in military hospitals and kitchens. White workers often received ten to fifteen dollars a month more than the black workers, but the blacks’ wages were augmented by fuel, shelter, army rations, and protection. Some blacks were paid forty dollars per month working on the riverboats, wages which attracted some fugitive slaves to come from neighboring states to Arkansas to work.19 But not all blacks wanted to work for whites as they had done during slavery.

A few blacks gained permission to lease some abandoned lands and farm their own small plots of ten to fifty acres, many growing vegetables for subsistence and cotton for profit. The largest concentration of black lessees resided in the Helena area, where they leased an average of ten to forty acres. The black lessees included William F. Allen, who farmed twenty-four acres and cleared six thousand dollars, and Sam Bladen, who made two thousand dollars on thirteen acres. In 1864 the total income for black farmers near Helena was forty thousand dollars. The Freedman’s Journal (December 1865) reported that “The freedmen here [in Arkansas] are now well cared for and are in a prosperous condition. Nearly all are sober, industrious, and many of them are making money.”20

But the land-lease system for blacks was short lived in Arkansas. Few blacks had either proper tools or adequate supplies to take advantage of the system. In 1865 the restoration of land to white owners came swiftly under President Andrew Johnson, a Tennessean. Moreover, a sharecrop system (not a free-wage system) became slavery’s replacement.

After abolitionists and missionarieds argued that the former slaves needed help to transcend slavery, in March 1865 the Congress created the Bureau of Freedmen, Abandoned Lands, and Refugees (Freedmen’s Bureau) to help convert America’s former slaves into self-supporting citizens. In Arkansas the Freedmen’s Bureau immediately became

17See Bobby L. Lovett, “The Negro in Tennessee, 1861–1866: A Socio-Military History of the Civil War Era” (University Microfilms International Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 1978, chapter 1, 1–37, on contraband camps and black laborers. Note: Lovett’s maternal great-grandmother (Callie) left rural West Tennessee, moving to Arkansas by boat. By 1894 Callie’s sister’s granddaughter was vice-mayor and councilwoman in Helena.


20Gertieis, From Contraband to Freedman, 161, 171, 191.
involved in the sharecrop system for black workers. Bureau agents visited farms to air grievances for workers and employers, although black workers had neither legal tenant rights nor rights to bring liens against their crops and recover their shares. The Bureau agents encountered difficulty trying to persuade black workers (particularly the militant ones near DeVall's Bluff) to return when they left abusive, dishonest, or bankrupt employers. Still the Bureau improved the system to some extent. The white farmer furnished supplies, tools, seed, and “everything but clothes” and gave the freedmen “one third of the crop they made,” said one Freedmen's Bureau agent. Another agent reported that in Arkansas “a majority of planters give a share of the crop . . . generally . . . from one-tenth to one fourth.” Former slave Solomon P. Patillo recalled that his father made share crops and never had any problems with master Patillo.” Former slave Ike Worthy moved from Conway County to Pine Bluff where he sharecropped for fifty-two years and “cleared as much as $150” in good years. In December 1865 a report to the Freedmen's Bureau claimed that 400 freedmen and their families worked the plantations as sharecroppers in the Arkansas Delta. Some thirty-one Arkansas counties were involved in the Bureau's contract system while 75 percent of the contracts involved from 2 to 50 black workers. In 1866 Phillips County had the largest number of black sharecrop labor agreements with 650 contracts involving 4,149 workers.22

With just enough agents to cover some twenty-eight Arkansas counties, the Freedmen's Bureau attempted to service the freedmen. Not only did it attempt to revive the agricultural system, but the Arkansas Freedmen's Bureau supported schools, hospitals, and cemeteries for the freedmen. Under Maj. William S. Sergeant, the Arkansas Freedmen's Bureau set up a Freedmen's Court to dispense justice and confiscate abandoned post office packages to buy food and supplies for thousands of destitute whites and blacks. The Freedmen's Bureau was the first federally-funded social work program for blacks.

The Freedmen's Bureau still failed to give economic independence to black Arkansans. Too many Bureau agents helped to corrupt the Arkansas system by taking bribes to furnish other whites (land owners and renters) with inexpensive black labor. Instead of a cash economy, most rural blacks moved from a slavery to a barter system, exchanging their labor in return for needed goods and services. Seldom did some black agricultural workers receive any money after the employers deducted “living expenses” from profits made on crops. With the Unionists' pericpic focus on growing cotton for cash, the farm workers had to buy (not grow) food, almost always from the whites who owned and leased the land. Furthermore the Freedmen's Bureau had other interests to protect—to retain the blacks as agricultural workers in Arkansas and discourage them from migrating to local towns and particularly to northern cities. The Columbus Ohio State Journal (January 23, 1865) reported that putting them to work in Arkansas and Tennessee “had done much to reduce northern [laborers']” fear of a Negro invasion.”23

The sharecrop system, the violence of the war, the legacy of violence left by the war, and the persistent attempt of local whites to preserve slavery all impeded the freedmen's progress. Confederate guerrillas raided some contraband farms, captured a few black workers, and took


a number of mules and other animals in a ominous attempt to keep Arkansas's crumbling slave system intact. But in the presence of a powerful Union army and navy, the Confederate raiders' acts of desperation were not enough to save Arkansas's slave system. Nevertheless, in decades to come, white radicals, including many former Confederates, would openly engage in public violence and night terror to contain black Arkansans in subordinate socioeconomic positions.

Violence by white radicals plus the sharecrop (neo-serfdom) system encouraged whites to believe something resembling the antebellum system could be restored and that blacks would adjust to it. A former slave, Joseph Badgett of Dallas County, recalled that as late as the 1870s some freedmen continued to address white employers as master. In 1866 the Freedmen's Bureau reported that "In St. Francis County [where whites outnumbered the blacks nearly two to one], and wherever we have no troops, the Negro is treated as a slave still." Therefore the circumstances of Civil War and Reconstruction forced most freedmen to enter labor contracts and sharecrop agreements, which caused the sharecrop system to become a negative factor in the socioeconomic progress of Arkansas's freedmen.

However, the use of black soldiers in the Union army became a positive factor relative to the achievement of freedom and the opportunity for blacks to make socioeconomic progress in Arkansas. This development came about because of the need for massive numbers of men to fill the federal government's armies, labor units, and gunboats. It was not difficult to get slaves to join the Union army or to persuade northern black leaders to campaign for the recruitment of black soldiers. A national recruiting agent, former slave Frederick Douglass, said: "This is our golden opportunity... Let us win for ourselves the gratitude of our country, and the blessings of our posterity through all time." And although the idea of arming blacks once was opposed by some northern whites, the performance and the immense contribution of black soldiers to Union victories led to northern white acceptance of black military men.

Many Arkansas slaves began their employment in the Union navy by 1862, and some Unionists tried to organize a black Arkansas regiment, also in late 1862. But the real organization of Arkansas's black troops began on April 6, 1863, when the commissioner for Recruitment and Organization of Colored Troops arrived near Helena. Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas derived his authority from the congressional legislation of July 17, 1862, and President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which included a paragraph for the authorization of black soldiers: "And I further declare... that such [black] persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service." On April 7 Thomas reported that he "authorized a regiment this morning and at noon three companies of one hundred men each were ready for muster." A few days later he issued Special Orders No. 13 which announced the appointment of thirty white officers for the Arkansas Volunteers Regiments of African Descent (AD).

Thomas's success was due to the cooperation received from local Union army officers and troops as well as support from the blacks.

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21 Woodson, Negro Orators, 232-255; Cornish, The Sable Arm, 205, 286, 288.
22 Paul D. Escott, Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth Century Slave Narratives (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 160-161; Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the Civil War (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 284; see Letters Received, Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands [BRFAL], RG 155, National Archives, Washington, DC.
Thomas easily transformed some local black labor battalions (98 persons each plus 2–3 black drivers) into military companies (98 men and 3 non-commissioned officers). In 1863 Arkansas had 23,088 male slaves and 12 free black males of military age (18–45 years). In late February of 1864 the Union army declared that “All able-bodied males between the ages of 18 and 45 within the lines of occupation in the Department of Arkansas will be immediately enrolled for service.” All slave recruits were declared free, and loyal masters were promised three hundred dollars per slave. By November 7, 1864, Arkansas had six regiments of black Union troops, and a year later the Department of Arkansas included 6,551 black troops and officers in infantry regiments and artillery batteries. Additionally blacks served in regiments of Home Guards at Fort Smith and other places as well as in the aforementioned positions in the Union navy. The early Union army units were designated the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th Arkansas Volunteers (AD) Infantry Regiments. On March 11 and April 26, 1864, Thomas issued Special Orders No. 7 and No. 17 to rename the black units as United States Colored Troops (USCT).

The recruitment of blacks as soldiers was not without some problems. The non-commissioned positions of corporal and sergeant were customarily filled by blacks. In Arkansas’s case almost all black soldiers were illiterate slaves, a factor that forced the Union army to recruit literate free blacks from northern states to fill non-commissioned officer positions in many black regiments. Northern whites, like Captain James Madison Bowles (112th USCT), held the commissioned officers’ slots in the black regiments, and because of the labor and military needs for black males in southern states, including Arkansas, the War Department made it illegal for loyal states to fill draft quotas with southern blacks.

Because Arkansas’s military-age black men had to supply labor for regiments, navy boats, labor battalions, home farms, and contraband camps, and because they suffered impressment into service by Confederates and exiled slaveowners, Adjutant General Thomas had to recruit additional slaves and free blacks from outside the state. Randolph B. Campbell states that Arkansas “was denuded of slave labor.” Some of the first Arkansas recruits were organized in contraband camps in nearby Tennessee and Missouri. Then the black soldiers and their regimental music bands traveled by boat to Arkansas to recruit slaves in rural areas. Thomas recruited the 3rd Arkansas Volunteers (AD) in St. Louis and Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and shipped them to Helena. The 7th Louisiana Volunteers (AD) Infantry Regiment served in more than five Arkansas posts and contained many fugitive slaves from Arkansas. The 3rd U.S. Colored Cavalry skirmished and pursued guerrillas in Arkansas, although this Mississippi unit was organized in Memphis.

The Union army organized and imported some black regiments from as far away as Iowa. After the organization of nine companies of the First Iowa Volunteers (AD) Infantry Regiment (60th USCT) in October 1863, Colonel John G. Hudson moved the regiment from Keokuk, Iowa, to Benton Barracks (St. Louis, Missouri) and raised a tenth company. Then the Iowa regiment traveled to Helena where it was joined on September 14, 1863, by the Liberian Guards Independence Company D.

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22OR, pt. 2 of 3 pts., Reports, 1, 24, 158, 430, 450.

23Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 238.

was the last to leave the field." Also, in a letter printed in the Lawrence, Kansas, Daily Tribune another Union soldier said: "It was a question with the [white] soldiers from Little Rock whether the blacks would fight. The 30th of April settled the point with some of the rebels, as well as convinced the white soldiers of our army." 35

There was no underestimation of the need for black Arkansans to serve in military capacities. The 112th USCT Infantry Regiment served at Huntsville, and the 113th USCT guarded the north side of Little Rock and DeVall's Bluff before these two units consolidated into the new 113th USCT Infantry Regiment. The 63rd USCT served at Pine Bluff. The 64th USCT guarded Freedman's Fort, Arkansas, among other places. The invalid, contraband-camp-dwelling black males also were organized to help defend Union facilities. For example, in October 1863 the black men in Pine Bluff's contraband camps rushed to build defenses of cotton bales and armed themselves to repulse a rebel attack; Confederate raiders took two blacks and eight mulattoes and killed five blacks and wounded twelve others, but "the Negroes . . . did an excellent service" in defending the camps. 36


(AD) consisting of seventy black men from Cairo, Illinois. The 60th USCT suffered eighty casualties in the battle of Saline River. 33

The federal government recruited blacks in Kansas and also sent them to join the Army of the Frontier, Department of Arkansas. Kansas raised 2,080 black Union troops, many of them the result of a large influx of fugitive slaves and free blacks from Missouri, Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas. By 1862 Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, had a black community of 1,500 persons. Some Kansas fugitive slaves were listed as students in the freedmen's schools at Lawrence. There were some 8,000 black fugitives in Kansas by 1863. 34 In spite of some local white opposition, in August of 1862 abolitionist James Henry Lane organized the first black regiment in a free state. But not until January 13, 1863, did the Union army accept "Jim Lane's [black] regiment," the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers Regiment (79th USCT). Soon the 2nd Kansas Colored Volunteers Regiment (83rd USCT) was formed. In 1863 the Kansas Colored regiments engaged the enemy at Center Creek, Missouri, and Island No. Sixty-five on the Mississippi River before moving to Fort Smith, Arkansas. At the latter place the whites at first manifested considerable prejudice and hatred toward the black soldiers but they came to respect them as soldiers who knew and performed their duty well. In April 1864 (a few weeks after General Nathan Bedford Forrest's troops massacred black soldiers at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, overlooking the Mississippi River) the 79th USCT suffered many casualties at the battle of Poison Springs, where some Union officers reported that Confederate soldiers shot some black prisoners in cold blood. The commanding officer for the 83rd USCT said that the trapped black soldiers captured a Rebel battery, and his "regiment, though among the first in action, and having suffered a greater loss than that of any other,
Throughout eastern Arkansas the USCT made contact with the enemy. In December 1863 Battery E, 2nd Light Artillery (AD), fought enemy soldiers near Bolivar’s Landing. In July 1864 Battery E helped the 56th USCT and the 60th USCT to fight off an attack during a patrol near Big Creek (twenty-two miles southwest of Helena). The 56th USCT’s regimental report claimed that “the colored troops fought like veterans; none flinched.” Shortly afterwards, a force of 1,866 men comprising the 56th USCT, the 60th USCT, and Battery E, was sent to reinforce Little Rock. Battery H (2nd USCLA) and the 11th, 54th, 79th, and 83rd USCT also distinguished themselves in battle. The writer David Y. Thomas said, “The colored troops raised in Arkansas appear to have conducted themselves well.” According to Dudley T. Cornish: “Negro soldiers won an enviable reputation by their stubborn fighting with the Army of the Frontier.”

In particular, the 4th Arkansas Volunteers of African Descent (57th USCT) Infantry was a proud but rebellious regiment. It was organized at Little Rock and Helena. John Young of Monticello recalled that he and other young slaves followed the Union soldiers to their Pine Bluff camp after seeing the Yankees take the master’s livestock.

We heard if we could get with the Yankees we’d be free, so we run off here to Pine Bluff and got with some Yankee soldiers the 28th Wisconsin. Then we went to Little Rock and I joined the 57th colored infantry. We went to Fort Smith from Little Rock and freedom come on us while we was between New Mexico.

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and Fort Smith. They mustered us out at Fort Leavenworth and I went right back to my folks in . . . Monticello. I have been a farmer all my life till I got too old.41

When President Lincoln was assassinated in April 1865, members of the 57th USCT and other Arkansas USCT donated some $3,530 to build a Lincoln monument in the nation's capital.42 In 1866 the 57th USCT regiment rebelled against orders to serve as a pioneer unit (labor and forage troops) for a Union expedition from Fort Smith to New Mexico. Black soldiers already were fatigued from heavy labor duties: constructing National Cemeteries that were authorized by Congress in 1866, recovering Union dead, and burying human remains in the new cemeteries. On May 23, 1866, the 57th USCT was disarmed, deprived of its proud colors and shipped from Fort Smith back to Little Rock under white cavalry guard. On June 2 the 57th USCT was sent back to Fort Smith to begin the march to New Mexico and other points west where the black unit completed the expedition and mustered out of service in October.43

Arkansas's USCT companies and regiments made a significant difference in the war for the Union side. By using black soldiers to augment combat units in the western theater, the Union army was able to concentrate its main forces east of the Mississippi River and keep the Confederate forces divided and demoralized. Moreover, the black labor pool helped the Union military machine to keep its huge number of ships in control of southern waters (i.e., the Mississippi River) and its land armies more than adequately fortified and supplied. The blacks also served in many non-combat jobs including spy and scout service for white Union regiments in Arkansas. According to Desmond W. Allen's index, *Arkansas' Damned Yankees*, among the rosters for white Arkansas Union regiments some blacks are listed as paid cooks, teamsters, laborers, and assistant surgeons.44

The record makes it clear that a demoralized Confederate Arkansas facilitated the Union Army's effective alliance with black soldiers and laborers. However, some Arkansas Confederates believed that the outcome of the war depended on the blacks. Masters often took some young slaves with them to serve involuntarily as personal servants, cooks, teamsters, assistant surgeons, and fortification builders. But even though the southern war was being fought mostly to protect their interests, the slaveholders generally refused to turn their valuable slaves over to military commanders. In a futile effort to overcome such reluctance, the Arkansas Confederate government authorized the impressment of slaves into labor battalions against the wishes of the owners. In neighboring Tennessee on June 28, 1861, the General Assembly passed a law to draft free blacks into labor battalions, but Arkansas could not do likewise, because the free blacks had been forced to flee the state. In July 1861 a Confederate leader in Helena wrote the CSA's secretary of war and requested permission to organize black regiments: "I wrote you a few days since, for myself and many others in this district to ascertain if we could get Negro regiments rec'd for Confederate service — officered of course by white men. . . . The North cannot complain at this. They proclaim Negro equality." In a letter sent on August 2, 1861, the Confederate war department rejected the Arkansas idea because of "a shortage of arms." Yet because slaves were so dependent on white families, the CSA authorities believed that blacks would "gladly defend the South." In late 1864 there was a suggestion by

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44See Compiled Service Records, microcopy rolls 206 and 211, 11th USCT, 6th USCHA, Battery E, 53rd-58th USCT Regiments.


Confederate general John B. Magruder to import Confederate slave workers from northern Texas into Arkansas. On March 23, 1865 (the same day that President Lincoln began his impressive review of twenty-five thousand USCT on the James River), the CSA hurriedly mustered a slave regiment for a parade in Richmond.45

But the Confederates failed to mobilize the slaves to support their war. As southern historian Bell I. Wiley said, "It hardly seems likely that slaves who greeted the Yankees and grasped freedom with such alacrity under ordinary circumstances would by the dawn of Confederate uniforms have been transformed into loyal and enthusiastic fighters for the establishment of the institution of slavery."46 The slaves opted for alliance with the Yankees.

In March 1865 it was too late for either a revival of southern nationalism or a resurrection of the slavery’s former hold over the South. Major Confederate armies under General Robert E. Lee in the East were skeletons of their former selves. With no hope of reinforcements from the defeated Confederate armies in the West after the disasters at Atlanta and Nashville and with their own armies ravaged by disease, hunger, casualties, and massive desertion rates, General Lee and eastern Confederate generals ended their "defensive war." Eastern USCT regiments were given the honor of being the first Union troops to enter and occupy Petersburg and Richmond where the USCT bands played "John Brown’s Body." In April 1865 Lee surrendered entire armies and accepted the humiliating defeat of southern nationalism.

The blacks, too, paid a dear price for victory and freedom. The black Union soldiers suffered over 25 percent casualty rates from combat deaths and wounds, inadequate medical care, habitual neglect, and camp diseases. At Pine Bluff’s colored military hospital, some 92 of 343 black patients died. At Fort Smith, too, they frequently died from minor wounds, unsanitary hospital conditions, dysentery, pneumonia, typhoid fever, and measles. A white inspector cited the black military hospital in Helena, as "the dirtiest place inside and the filthiest place outside that was fall to my lot to inspect." Ironically, on the way from Helena to St. Louis to be mustered out of service in August 1866, the 56th USCT suffered a cholera outbreak, and within a few weeks 178 men and one officer died.47 Many former black Union army soldiers were interred in the National Cemeteries where their tombstones bear the distinctive initials USCT.

During the war and Reconstruction the civilian blacks, too, suffered much sickness and death. In 1864 10 percent of the blacks in the Pine Bluff contraband camp died because of exposure, disease, and malnutrition. Thousands of freedmen graves could be found at Little Rock by 1866. Smallpox ravaged the black populations at Camden, DeVall’s Bluff, and other places where large numbers huddled for safety and housing. When warm weather and heavy rains washed raw sewage into drinking water supplies (i.e., wells), thousands died from cholera, and white missionaries regularly fled to the North to wait out the epidemic. The Freedmen’s Bureau tried to maintain some crude hospitals at Fort Smith, Helena, Pine Bluff, Little Rock, Napoleon, Washington, and Camden by 1867. Black benevolent societies also operated cemeteries and facilities for sick and destitute freedmen at Helena, Little Rock, Camden, and other places. Albert G. Gratton, a black missionary and African Methodist Episcopal Church leader at DeVall’s Bluff, wrote to the Freedmen’s Bureau to ask for help to stop the high death rate of "2-3 a day" among local freedmen.48

More than half a generation after slavery, black Arkansans continued to suffer the legacies of enslavement and postwar poverty. They labored primarily in agriculture (i.e., cotton), and few of them held manufactur-

4W. S. Turner to L. P. Walker, Helena, July 17, 1861; A. T. Bledsoe to Turner, Richmond, August 2, 1861, "Confederate Archives," RG 94, I-II; Thomas, Arkansas in War and Reconstruction, 1-10; Cornish, The Sable Arm, 1-20; Williams, History of the Negro Troops, 140, 293; Arkansas Narratives, vol. 11, pp. 13, 17, 192, 255; Campbell, An Empire for Slavery, 238, 243, 247.

46Wiley, Southern Negroes, 162.


ing jobs. For example, in Phillips County, where blacks outnumbered whites nearly two to one, there were only 256 persons employed in manufacturing as late as 1880. Impoverished conditions and little hope of transcending such conditions also contributed to poor health statistics for Arkansas's freedmen. Deaths for black babies were three to one compared with deaths for newborn whites. For example, in Phillips County, some 61 deaths of black children to 20 deaths for white children were reported in 1880. Another predominantly black county, Chicot, had 126 black infant deaths to 4 white deaths reported in one year. Blacks died at higher rates than whites from scarlet fever, malaria, diphtheria, consumption, pneumonia, heart disease, and still births by 1880. Though they were younger than whites, the blacks suffered an inordinate share of poor conditions, inadequate housing, exposure to severe environmental conditions, disease, sickness, death, and discrimination.49

Arkansas's freedmen also experienced victory and defeat in politics. Reconstruction began in Arkansas (1863) as well as neighboring Tennessee (1862) even before the war ended and prior to the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in December 1865. In September 1863, President Lincoln appointed Isaac Murphy provisional governor of Arkansas. Delegate Murphy had cast the lone vote against Arkansas's secession in May of 1861. On January 20, 1864, the President accepted a loyal citizens' petition and ordered elections in Arkansas with a "Constitution...so modified as to declare that there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude." The CSA President, Jefferson Davis, declared Lincoln's action "fraud and falsehood." Nevertheless, in March 1864, a civilian government with a provisional governor came into existence. During the fall of 1865, the delegates at a Unionist convention in Little Rock voted to disenfranchise the treasonous Confederates, endorse Emancipation, and paradoxically, limit the civil rights for the blacks.50

Even though Confederate armies were still in the field, Colored Men's Convention fever swept the nation and spread to Reconstruction Arkansas. In October 1864, the National Colored Men's Convention met in Syracuse, New York, and set a Reconstruction agenda: constitutional emancipation, citizenship, civil rights, suffrage, and fair economic treatment. In August 1865, black Tennesseans held their first State Colored Men's Convention at Nashville, where they voiced disapproval of conservative and anti-black movements among the Unionists.52 With the help of articulate black leaders who migrated from the North into Reconstruction Arkansas, local freedmen began their postwar movement in October 1865 when Arkansas's black leaders held a mass meeting in Little Rock. The delegates called for national approval of the anti-slavery amendment to the national Constitution. The new Arkansas legislature had ratified the Thirteenth Amendment in April 1865. After neighboring Tennessee blacks held their second State Colored Men's Convention in Nashville in August 1866, black Arkansans held another State Colored Men's Convention at Little Rock on November 30, December 1-2, 1866. By then, national legislation guaranteed the former slaves equal protection of the laws, due process of law, and federal citizenship. The states also had to guarantee these rights in their own constitutions and laws. The leading delegate at the Arkansas Colored Convention, William H. Grey, blasted the "bastard republic" of the South and reminded southerners that black soldiers had helped throw "off the mask" of slavery. Grey said, "Give us the franchise, and if we do not exercise it properly you have the numbers to take it away from us." Grey also argued that "it would be impossible for the Negro to get justice in a State where he was not a full citizen." Blacks, too, had "a human soul, with a will and a purpose of its own," said Grey, a thirty-eight-year-old free.


51Moneyhon, The Impact of the Civil War, 189, 193.
black native of Washington, D.C., who worked in Virginia and Missouri before moving to Helena in September of 1863. In 1867 the Arkansas Republicans responded to the demand and even recognized blacks as a possible political asset. Potential black voters outnumbered white voters in several counties: Chicot, Jefferson, Lafayette, Phillips, Pulaski, and Arkansas. In April the Arkansas Republicans convened their state convention in Little Rock, where several blacks were among the delegates. One of the black delegates was John Payton of Pulaski County, who engaged in the discussions about the reorganization of Arkansas for formal readmission to the Union. In July Edward W. Gantt, a former secessionist turned Unionist and a Freedmen's Bureau agent, began to organize and educate potential freedmen voters. Indubitably the black voters would support the Republican party and the Loyal Union League clubs.

When the Arkansas Constitutional Convention met in late January and early February 1868, among some five dozen delegates were eight black men who represented 13 percent of the delegates, although black Arkansans constituted 25 percent of the population. Three blacks became assistant doorkeepers and pages for the convention. Black delegates were James W. Mason, Richard Samuels, William Murphy, Monroe Hawkins, William H. Grey, James T. White, W. A. Rector, and Thomas P. Johnson. Only two native black delegates participated in the convention. All black members participated as part of biracial delegations from the counties of Hempstead, Jefferson, Lafayette, Phillips, and Pulaski. Most of these young men served in occupations including postmaster, farmer, and minister. The Reverend J. T. White, a Baptist preacher, was born to free parents in Indiana in 1837 before moving to St. Louis and then Helena in the fall of 1865. He took over a congregation in a government horse stable and moved it to a vacated church before building Helena's first black brick church building and organizing the Arkansas Missionary Baptist Association in 1867. White was later elected to the Arkansas state house (twice) and the senate before gaining appointment as commissioner of public works and internal improvements. White's equally capable brother, the Reverend R. B. White, moved to Pulaski County and became involved as a black Reconstruction leader. And Grey and Rector became local religious leaders for the northern-based African Methodist Episcopal Church in Arkansas. Arkansas's early Reconstruction black leaders were elite men of education, influence, and aspiring

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\*Arkansas Gazette, April 2, 1867.


wealth. Like the northern white missionaries and carpetbaggers, most had come south for opportunities: to give leadership to the illiterate freedmen, to seek economic wealth and political power, to help build new institutions, and to bring morality and order to a decadent southern society.

The black delegates fought hard to gain approval for black suffrage. But a frail white Conservative delegate, J. W. Cypert of White County (Searcy), led the convention fight against black suffrage. Cypert argued that giving suffrage to ignorant blacks implied racial equality and was an insult to the white race. Grey responded that blacks built the great pyramids of Egypt and deserved to be treated equally and continued, "We are here, sir, to receive the amount of [liberty and suffrage] due us from the State of Arkansas. . . . Why, sir, every Negro vote registered in this State I can duplicate with the vote of a white man that can neither read nor write; and still we [blacks] are charged with ignorance." White Conservatives attacked blacks as poor and degraded. But Grey pointed out that many white Arkansans were "poor, degraded, half fed, half clothed, and ignorant," too. "We desire simply the means and incentives to industry and education." William Murphy of Pine Bluff (via Illinois) reminded the white delegates that "the colored troops have proved their loyalty; they protected the Union flag."99 The well-educated James T. White said: "I contend, friends, that the elective franchise is a God-given right, which comes to every man born into the world—he be black or white, green or gray, little or big, it is his right."99 In April 1868 the voters approved the new Arkansas constitution, including the black suffrage provision. On June 22, 1868, Congress readmitted Arkansas into the Union.

With the help of black voters, the guns of black militiamen, and the dispensation of patronage to blacks and Unionists, the Republicans ruled Arkansas for the next five years—three years longer than the blacks and the Republicans ruled neighboring Tennessee. In 1868 and 1873

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cians that set us free.” But not all black leaders gave unconditional support for the Radical Republicans.

The Reverend Tabbs Gross and a few other black leaders advised the black voters to diversify their support among native politicians, Radical Republicans, and independents. Gross, the founder and the editor of the Arkansas Freeman newspaper (1869), criticized his fellow black leaders for not demanding more from the Radical Republicans. An 1867 black migrant from Cincinnati, Ohio, Gross said: “The colored voters of this city [Little Rock] are largely in the majority [of voters], and they have heretofore allowed themselves to be used only for the purpose of putting a certain class of white men in office who have no better claims to the office than the colored men who do most all the voting.” Gross continued: “We have been helping a few white men to make fortunes long enough.” He pointed out that only one high office was held by a black man and blacks held only 10 percent of the political jobs in Little Rock where they supplied “90 percent of the votes.” Gross urged the blacks to form an independent ticket, boycott the local Republican conventions, and nominate more blacks or “vote . . . for good honest true Republicans.” Surely many so-called Republicans were Democrats, Conservatives, and mean racists in disguise. Gross’s editorial campaign resulted in several blacks gaining seats on Little Rock’s city council but also in the demise of the Arkansas Freeman newspaper by 1870. Nevertheless, some other blacks agreed with Gross. Black leaders Blackwell Shelton and A. M. Johnson preferred to support native white politicians instead of outsiders and Radical Republicans. Shelton said that he wanted to cement “the bonds of union between white and black men, that peace, harmony, and prosperity may prevail.”

Yet most black leaders (including the preacher element) favored the Radical Republicans because blacks needed changes now rather than waiting for gradual modifications as proposed by Arkansas’s native, conservative Republicans. The most influential black leaders were certain that Democrats and neo-Confederates had no intention of giving blacks an inch.

The black-Republican coalition’s control of Arkansas politics generally ended in 1874 when Conservatives, Democrats, and former Confederates regained political power. Indeed, the 1874 return to power “of the landed elite and their political spokesmen created a world that resisted modernization and one in which the lives of Arkansans in 1900 would not be dissimilar to those of their forebears in 1860.” Some black voting rights and office-holding remained, but socioeconomic factors and President Rutherford B. Hayes’ 1877 decision to withdraw Federal troops from the once turbulent South helped to continue the decline of black political participation in Arkansas.

Although caught between the Radical Republicans who offered some immediate concessions, native-conservative Republicans who preferred gradualism, and Conservatives and Democrats who offered not an inch of ground, the blacks continued to support the Republican party. Blacks were loyal to the national Republican party, and from 1868 they turned out in huge numbers to vote for Republican presidents. Consequently some blacks, including eight in 1876, managed to gain election to the Arkansas General Assembly through the 1890s whereas 1888 saw the last of black state legislators in Reconstruction Tennessee. But William E. B. Du Bois concluded that although law, order, and civil government were restored early in Arkansas, blacks gained real economic or political power only in their schools and in the exercise of civil rights.

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63Moneyhon, The Impact of Civil War, 258 (quote); Thompson, Arkansas and Reconstruction, 87, 161, 164; Staples, Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1-10.

To support the Republicans blacks paid another great price. They served in the state militia during the turbulent Republican years and had to face the white counter-revolution, which included attacks by the Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist groups. Black militiamen, for example, got caught between warring Republican factions in the Brooks-Baxter war in 1872–1874. And black militiamen also suffered injury and death when white radicals isolated and attacked them at their homes. Sometimes black men took the law into their own hands. A mob of black men lynched three white men in Chicot County after the white men murdered a black lawyer in a local store. Mason, the black politician who controlled the county, argued that resentment against recent Klan atrocities caused the blacks to Lynch the white men. The Arkansas Gazette claimed there was no evidence of an organized Ku Klux Klan in Arkansas. Yet white violence against blacks and white Unionists became an everyday threat during Reconstruction in Arkansas. By 1870 the federal government responded to organized white violence all over the South by enacting the Force Acts. This legislation failed to prevent the lynching of 244 persons in Arkansas between 1882 and 1927.

Although many blacks left the state during the war, Arkansas’s black population increased after the war. There were exceptions—Pope County’s black population had declined by 1870, and no blacks owned their own land there. But most former slaves remained in the state after the war and generally lived within a few miles of where they had served as slaves. Lack of money and no invitation to migrate elsewhere accounted in part for this tendency. Some 95 percent of former slaves stayed in Arkansas after the war compared with 87.7 percent in Texas and 79 percent in Tennessee. A former Arkansas slave, Sallie C. Miller, recalled: “When the war closed he [the master] told his colored people they was free and could stay on the place and he would give them one half of what they made on the farm.” Then postwar black migrations began within the southern states, moving from countryside to town and city. Between 1869 and 1885 thousands of eastern freedmen joined the Black Exodus, crossing the Mississippi River in search of federal homestead lands—the elusive “forty acres and a mule” that the federal government never promised. Many blacks migrated to Arkansas during the 1870s and the 1880s, partly because they believed that better wages and good conditions existed there.

Some Arkansas Republican party leaders encouraged black and white families to enter the labor-poor state. In 1867 the Arkansas Gazette reported the formation of the German Immigrant Aid Society in Little Rock. In 1869 the Arkansas Colored Immigration Society was formed with support from some whites and the Arkansas Freeman. On October 15, 1872, the governor appointed a leader of the Arkansas Union League, William H. Grey, as commissioner of immigration. Grey accomplished little before May 1874, when triumphant Conservatives and Democrats impeached the black politician while he was away in Washington, D. C. Nevertheless, the effort to attract black immigrants was not in vain. Conway County’s black population increased from 7.8 percent in 1870 to 25.1 percent in 1880 and to 39.4 percent by 1890. A black man even won a legislative seat in Conway County in 1887. According to 696 former slaves interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project Slave Narrative program (1936–1938) all but 69 of them came to Arkansas after slavery; among 534 former slaves asked about migration, 53.9 percent of them selected Arkansas as their destination. Some freedmen recalled being recruited by labor agents in Georgia and shipped to Arkansas by train and steamboat. Andrew Gregory of

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65Arkansas Gazette, January 2, 1869.

68Arkansas Gazette, October 1, 1867.
Brinkley recalled moving to Arkansas after a mass migration meeting with a large group of his black neighbors in rural Tennessee. 69

Many black families came to Arkansas after Congress passed the Southern Homestead Act of 1866, which provided eighty acres of land on easy terms. During the fall many freedmen left parts of South Carolina to migrate to Florida, Louisiana, and Arkansas. A black colony of 150 families from Georgia applied for lands near Fort Smith but met rejection because they had no supplies and tools. Some northern missionary societies raised a little money to help blacks settle in Arkansas, but bureaucratic regulations and white opposition to black land ownership allowed more whites than blacks to take advantage of the homestead lands. By 1866 black Arkansans did not own more than one percent of lands in any given county, and only 116 black families had acquired Arkansas homestead lands by 1867. No more than 250 regional black applicants successfully gained homestead lands. Perhaps with the idea of encouraging more blacks to make application for the federal lands, the Republican presidents appointed a black man, Mifflin W. Gibbs, as Register of the U.S. Land Office at Little Rock from 1876 through 1889. Gibbs visited some of the Arkansas black homesteaders and “found them in comfortable log or frame houses of two or more rooms, sheds, with a cow, calves, swine, and poultry, and ten or more acres under cultivation.” Henry C. Pettus, who came to Arkansas in 1866, became owner of an eighty-acre farm. Generally, however, when Reconstruction ended, “the Negro who owned his own land in the South was the exception rather than the rule,” said historian Claude P. Oubre in his book, Forty Acres and a Mule. And black Arkansans mostly remained concentrated heavily in the sharecrop areas, the Delta and lowland counties such as Jefferson, Arkansas, Desha, Chicot, Phillips, Crittenden, LaFayette, Little River, Pulaski, Union, Hempstead, Ouachita, Mississippi, Monroe, and St. Francis. 70

Yet there is no doubt that the Civil War was a socio-military force that helped to increase the urbanization of Arkansas’s black population. The war created contraband camps which increased the urbanization of Arkansas’s black population and produced urban black neighborhoods and institutions: marriages, schools, churches, and even colleges. So, if the Civil War and its aftermath did not bring economic success to Arkansas’s freedmen, black Arkansans did make some cultural and social progress.

The black urbanization process was a painful one for the former slaves and constituted a fearful phenomenon for white southerners and northerners. When blacks began to assert individuality and freedom of movement, whites grew especially anxious. White Arkansans had few experiences with free black urban population: “a surging sea of black faces which at times seemed to flood out the white man’s presence and threaten his fragile dominance.” In late 1865 the Freedmen’s Bureau began to relocate (“scatter”) thousands of urban blacks by arresting “idle Negroes,” imposing fines in the Freedmen’s Courts, and assigning the convicted persons to white farmers who paid the fines. 71 The Bureau also collected and classified displaced freedmen for placement on home farms near DeVall’s Bluff, Helena, Little Rock, and Pine Bluff.

Still the black population of Arkansas became more urban. It doubled and even tripled in some cities such as Fort Smith, Little Rock, Helena, and Pine Bluff, where contraband camps were located. By 1870 the blacks represented nearly 26 percent of Arkansas’s population, and they maintained majorities in Pulaski, Jefferson, Arkansas, Desha, Chicot, Lafayette, Phillips, and Crittenden counties. Blacks also had heavy

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71See Field Office Records, Arkansas, BRFAL, RG 105, National Archives, Washington, DC, hereafter cited as FORA.
representations in Ashley, Drew, and Union counties by 1870. Neighboring Tennessee also had a 26 percent black population but only two counties (in West Tennessee) had black majorities. Arkansas's black population increased between 1860 and 1870 by 9 percent (10,910 persons) to 122,169 black persons including 61,680 men and 60,489 women. By 1880 blacks represented 26.3 percent (210,666) of Arkansas's total population (822,524).

Little Rock's black community illustrated the social, economic, political, and migratory effects of Civil War and Reconstruction. The city's black population increased from 23 percent in 1860 to 43 percent (5,274 of 12,380) by 1870. The capital city of Nashville, Tennessee, had 12,000 blacks in 1870 but its black population percentage reached only 40 percent in 1890. Leaders like Tabbs Gross urged the blacks to take advantage of their numbers and invest in enterprises to benefit black people. They supported a Little Rock branch of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company Bank which received nearly $200,000 in deposits (November 1870-March 1874). According to the bank's records, local blacks included several black businessmen; mulatto George W. Thompson owned a grocery business; George Duncan operated a fruit business; and Thomas Williams took advantage of skills learned as a slave to operate his shoemaking business.

Their urban concentration and the alliance with the Republicans also helped blacks in Little Rock to enjoy a period of great political participation. Blacks made up half the city council by 1869, and for some time they continued to hold four or five council seats. In 1873 Mifflin W. Gibbs became America's first black municipal judge, a position that propelled Gibbs to national prominence. He published his autobiography,
After 1845 the slaveholding families increasingly took their extended family members (the slaves, who often outnumbered the white family members) to church services in efforts to solidify an imaginary alliance between masters and slaves and to prove that slavery was not sinful and evil. In 1854 the Arkansas Baptist State Convention urged owners to be just and fair to their slaves. Pine Bluff’s First Baptist Church included a black woman among the charter members and had about one-third black membership when the war began. Small rural churches like Shady Grove Baptist Church in Bradley County, had racially integrated Sunday services. By 1860 blacks probably composed 25 percent of Arkansas’s 3,000 Baptists. And the Methodist churches included 1,343 black members among 14,897 members.  

Religious separatism began to develop in some urban churches just before the war when rubbing shoulders with blacks in the overcrowded churches became a social problem for the white members. Arkadelphia’s First Baptist Church had morning services for whites and afternoon services for blacks. The Methodists supervised African Missions at Little Rock with 219 members and at Red River with 220 members by 1852. Besides, black preachers wanted their own services. In Ashley County, the white Methodists allowed Green Wimberley, a black man, to be licensed to preach. By the Confederate period, some 900 blacks attended two quasi-independent (white-supervised) black churches in Little Rock.  

The Civil War accelerated the evolution of the black church into an independent institution. Believing that religion could have sobering and civilizing effects upon the former slaves, Union army chaplains preached and taught both religious and secular lessons to USCT and contrabands. Again, however, blacks preferred their own preachers. Ben Wall, a Pine Bluff slave who had been ordained a minister just before the war by an American Missionary Association preacher, was brought to the contraband camp to preach to blacks, who were troubled by drinking, gambling, cursing, and fighting amongst themselves. The army also recruited a Methodist chaplain to preach to Pine Bluff’s black Methodist contrabands.  

The militant African Methodist Episcopal Church came to Arkansas as a result of the Civil War. Founded by free northern blacks during the late eighteenth century, the aggressive AME denomination generally had been excluded from the slave South, and this black church was ostracized by prejudiced northern missionaries and white Methodist officials. In the winter of 1863–1864, after receiving President Lincoln’s blessings, the AME Church sent its missionaries to establish churches in occupied territories, including Virginia and Tennessee. This work was eventually extended westward to Arkansas. In 1866 the exiled free black Nathan Warren returned from Ohio, and with the help of Anthony and Lucy Eldord, Susan Anderson, Lucy Hall, Louis Barnes, and others, he established Little Rock’s Bethel AME Church in the Eldords’ small home. Later they built a church on the northeast corner of Ninth and Broadway. A trained AME minister arrived from New Orleans in 1867, and the Arkansas AME Conference was organized at “mother” Bethel in November of 1868. By then the AME denomination claimed 2,881 members in Arkansas. The AME churches embraced some of Arkansas’s most influential black leaders including Albert G. Grattan, John W. Payton, Caleb Jackson, and Lemuel Weekly.

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79Jennifer, Centennial Retrospect History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 97–105.
Many former slaves preferred the Methodist religion because of its fiery sermons and emotional appeals. Moreover, the Methodists' centralized governmental system gave the black churches a sense of order and dignity. Again, learned, militant, middle class and elite blacks were attracted to the AME and other black Methodist denominations. By 1906 some 32.4 percent of Arkansas' black church members belonged to three black Methodist denominations: AME, 9,462; AME Zion, 2,404; Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, 11,728.10

A generation after Emancipation the blacks operated their own Baptist and Methodist churches with 106,445 members in 1,432 buildings. In 1895 America's largest black church denomination, the Baptists, united into the National Baptist Convention, with Elias C. Morris of Helena as the NBC's first president. After 1906 hundreds of blacks belonged to other denominations in Arkansas: Presbyterians, 467; Episcopal, 262; Catholic, less than 100.11

Segregated churches and religion based on race spread rapidly throughout postwar Arkansas. Yet for years after slavery some black and white Christians continued to attend a few integrated churches such as Edwards Chapel Christian Church at Coal Springs. Meanwhile, the black church generally remained non-militant and accommodationist as reflected in the leadership of J. T. White, W. H. Grey, and others. Class divisions did not truly exist within black churches; almost all black Arkansas had been slaves and few of them had been privileged house servants. Even the elite free blacks who arrived in Arkansas after the war and gave leadership to black Reconstruction politics were too few and scattered to separate themselves into exclusive, class-based institutions.


The elite blacks mingled with ordinary and middle-class black church members and furnished leadership, particularly in the Methodist and Baptist churches. For example, Elias C. Morris of Georgia, a graduate of Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee, and later a Baptist pastor in Helena, represented black Arkansans in state Republican committees and attended the National Republican Conventions. Morris said: "I have never been with the class [of men] who hold that ministers of the Gospel should have nothing to do with politics."12 The black churches did things like promoting benevolent societies and cemetery associations addressing the freedmen's most critical postwar social problems. But most important was the leadership the black churches gave in local matters of religion, social reform, education, and even politics during the critical period of Reconstruction.

The Civil War and urbanization also gave missionaries, federal authorities, and black leaders some opportunities to reorganize and promote black families and marriages. Union army policy provided that a black soldier's wife (beneficiary) was any female with whom "he cohabitated and had children." This rule allowed the black soldier's family to be declared free and entitled his wife and children to government rations and death benefits. In March 1864 the superintendent of freedmen in the Department of Tennessee and Arkansas instructed the chaplains to "solemnize rites of marriage among the freedmen."13 The Freedmen's Bureau officers, black preachers (of the freedmen's preference), and army chaplains performed the ceremonies, which sometimes involved dozens of black couples at one time. These Freedmen's marriages were recorded in county records. Between March 1864 and July 1865 the marriage registers at Pine Bluff listed 222 blacks married by army chaplains. The greatest number of freedmen's marriages took place in 1865 and 1866, particularly in Helena, Pine Bluff, and


Arkansas to teach blacks, through the aid of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Indiana. The Western Freedmen’s Aid Commission sent copies of picture-books, freedmen’s newspapers, and abolitionist literature to teach spelling, word recognition, and reading. The Northwestern Freedmen’s Aid Commission focused its educational efforts in Little Rock. Blacks also received help from the northern Presbyterian Church and the Western Sanitary Commission. The northern missionaries hoped to reform the morals of the backward southerners (blacks and whites). The freedmen thirsted for knowledge because illiteracy was a reminder of slavery times, when whites forbade them to learn to read and write. And it was understood by national black leaders like Frederick Douglass that the former slaves must “learn or die.”

Among northern missionary agencies and anti-slavery societies, the American Missionary Association made the greatest effort to establish black schools in Arkansas. In December 1863 the AMA established a new district comprising the whole of Arkansas and the Mississippi River islands below Memphis. Helena, and later Little Rock, served as the AMA’s district headquarters. On January 1, 1864, AMA missionary Daniel T. Allen opened a freedmen’s school in the First Colored Baptist Church of Little Rock. The following month Edward A. Young opened another school in Little Rock’s Colored Methodist Church. On January 30, 1864, the AMA started a school for twelve hundred students in Pine Bluff and employed Daniel Todd, Herman J. Heilmann, John Bradshaw, and Eliza Austin as teachers. The AMA established another school in a Pine Bluff brick church. Over twelve hundred black pupils attended freedmen schools in Helena, while other AMA freedmen schools existed

at Batesville, Camden, Van Buren, Fayetteville, and Fort Smith, among other places, where AMA students attended classes through 1874.\footnote{Maj. William C. Sargent to W. E. Whiting, December 17, 1863; M. N. Anthony to John Ogden, April 13, 1866; D. Allen to C. Fowler, January 1, 1864; B. A. Young to C. Cowles, February 4, 1864; D. Allen to G. Whipple, April 5, 1864; Executive Secretary of the NFAS to C. Cowles, February 6, 1866; Allen to Whipple, March 12, 1864; D. Todd to AMA, July 4, 1864; E. M. Cravath to Supt. of Education for Freedmen in Arkansas, April 29, 1867; Todd to Whipple, April 1, 1863; Monthly Report for Pine Bluff Colored School at Brick Meeting House for Month of March 1865; Todd to AMA, December 31, 1864; Todd to AMA, January 2, 1865; Todd to Whipple, November 1, 1864; Monthly Report for Colored School Taught by Daniel Todd at Pine Bluff, September 2, 1864; Francis Thomas to Whipple, September 19, 1864; Monthly Report for Home School No. 1, Pine Bluff, August 1864; Thomas to Whipple, August 1, 1864, Todd to Whipple, Pine Bluff, June 2, 1864; Monthly Report for Colored Children Taught by Todd at Pine Bluff for the Month of June 1864; I. C. Bradshaw to Whipple, May 14, 1864; Todd to Whipple, July 1, 1864, AMA Papers: Arkansas. See also Larry W. Pearce, "The American Missionary Association and the Freedmen in Arkansas, 1863–1868," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 30 (Summer 1971): 123–144; L. W. Pearce, "Enoch K. Miller and the Freedmen's Schools," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 31 (Winter 1972): 305; Richard B. Drake, "The American Missionary Association and the Southern Negro," (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1997), 286, 300; Larry W. Pierce, "The American Missionary Association and the Freedmen in Arkansas, 1863–1878," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 30 (Summer 1971): 121–141.}

Despite the inclusion of religious lessons, some white Arkansans resented the freedmen schools. During the Civil War, most white southerners could neither read nor write, had little or no access to formal schooling, and felt that freedmen’s schools gave the former slaves social advantages and dreadful lessons on racial equality. According to the *Arkansas Gazette*, the first serious attempt to establish public schools for whites in all townships had been authorized by the General Assembly in 1851. Only in 1853 did Little Rock get its first public school. After slavery, terrorist attacks on black school houses became common and gave creditability to the northern missionaries’ belief that white Arkansans were adamant about maintaining control over the blacks and getting rid of the northern educators. AMA agent Daniel T. Allen, complained that some Union army officers “do nothing for us, only as compelled; and we receive little sympathy from the citizens, as we expected; they are bitterly opposed to the [black education] movement, so much so that we are advised by friends to not be out evenings.”\footnote{D. Allen to C. Fowler, January 3, 1864, AMA Papers: Arkansas; *Arkansas Gazette*, January 11, 1851, August 26, 1853.}

However, some planter class persons did allow freedmen schools as part of their effort to retain cheap black labor.

The Union army helped to bring black education to Arkansas. Black soldiers attended regimental classes taught by black teachers, white missionaries, and chaplains and financed by pay deductions. Black troops often guarded the missionary schools and could be seen studying their own spelling books when on guard duty. Some black Union army regiments, like the 113th USCT near DeVall’s Bluff, donated part of their pay to support nearby freedmen’s schools. In northwest Arkansas the white citizens expressed surprise that a third of the 57th colored regiment could read. A newspaper reporter said: “Notwithstanding the heavy guard and fatigue duties they have to perform, [they] are making rapid strides toward the attainment of knowledge and knowledge is power.”\footnote{Edwin Bears and Arrell M. Gibson, *Fort Smith, Little Gibralter on the Arkansas* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1969), 270–309.}

In 1864 bickering and religious differences between the missionaries emerged. After the superintendent of the Freedmen’s Department warned the missionaries that “prejudice, sectarianism, and partisan rivalry have no place here,” he took charge of the freedmen’s schools system. Black families were assessed $1.25 per month to pay the fifteen dollars monthly salary to teachers. The Union army furnished fuel and teachers’ quarters. The missionary societies continued to raise educational funds in northern churches and towns, and Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas requested that local governments support freedmen’s schools for children under twelve years of age.\footnote{C. H. Cobb, *Report and Extracts Relating to Colored Schools in the Department of the Tennessee and State of Arkansas* (Memphis: Freedmen’s Department, 1864), 8; John Blassingame, “The Union Army as an Educational Institution for Negroes, 1862–1865,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 34 (Spring 1965): 152–166.}

In the fall of 1865 the Freedmen’s Bureau took charge of the Freedmen’s Department school system. The existing curriculum was continued: reading, writing, mathematics (adding, subtraction, multi-
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plication), spelling, geography, and history. A few agents attempted to establish freedmen schools in the remote areas but some local whites resisted the effort. In its Arkansas "Report of Schools for November 1865," the Freedmen's Bureau included freedmen's schools at Little Rock, Helena, Pine Bluff, Fort Smith, Arkadelphia, Washington, and DeVall's Bluff. The freedmen schools system in Helena expanded to seven schools and eight teachers. Freedmen's schools were more plentiful in the urban centers.

While they operated mostly in the urban areas, black leaders insisted on access to education. They believed that education could rid the former slaves of their ignorance, superstition, and crude manners. As for themselves, elite blacks believed that education could force the better class [elite] whites to accept them as equals. When the Union army occupied Little Rock, black minister Wallace Andrews opened a school but later turned the classes over to missionaries of the Society of Friends of Indiana. By 1866 Little Rock had six freedmen schools including classes financed by Bethel AME Church—the AME denomination insisted on education for its ministers and members. Black teachers such as James Johnson and Albert G. Grattan operated schools at Fort Pinney, Freedman's Camp, Camden, DeVall's Bluff, and on home farms. The

Bureau's July 1866 report called Gratton's school at DeVall's Bluff "the only good school taught by coll'd [black] teachers."92

By December 1866 the freedmen's tuition and donations sustained 38 percent of Arkansas's black schools, and blacks paid 29 percent of the cost to operate all freedmen schools. Considering the continuing work pattern of using children in Arkansas's agricultural industries and the opposition of local employers to black education, the freedmen's daily attendance rates of nearly 60 percent were acceptable. Not only children but adult blacks as well attended the freedmen schools, and some of the schools had night classes to fit the black worker's schedule. In the most remote areas of Arkansas, however, the former slaves had no schools.

Black leaders, missionary societies, black church denominations, and Republican governments continued their efforts to extend education to postwar Arkansas. In 1867 when state authorities authorized public schools for whites only, Little Rock's defiant black community formed the Colored Educational Association, paid the teachers, and operated free schools for their children. The Governor participated in the opening ceremonies for Little Rock's first school building, a forty-two by forty-eight foot structure on Sixth Street, with four rooms and four teachers. Then in 1868 the new state constitution authorized public education for black and white citizens, an act that truly helped to transform Arkansas's old slave society. Out of a school population of 136,423 whites and 40,478 blacks, in 1869 some 57,117 white and 10,884 black children attended schools. In 1870 some 88,583 whites and 19,280 black children attended Arkansas's schools. Nine years later, an equal percentage (22 percent) of the black and white school population attended schools in Arkansas. In Pope County, with a small black

92Bentley, A History of the Freedmen's Bureau, 75, 145; Arkansas Gazette, November 10, 1865; E. M. Cravath to Supt. of Education BRFAL at Little Rock, April 1, 1866; W. Colby to AMA, April 29, 1867; Enoch K. Miller to Jacob Shepherd, January 15, 1868; R. W. Trimble to Whipple, November 25, 1868; M. N. Anthony to J. Ogden, April 3, 1866; Thomas E. Hughes to AMA, February 22, 1869; Miller to AMA, January 15, 1868; Dora Ford to AMA, November 24, 1869 and May 19, 1870; Report of Howard School at Fort Smith, Arkansas for Month of February 1871; Report of Mission School at Pine Bluff, Arkansas for Month of February 1871; O. Lyman to C. H. Howard, September 6, 1873, AMA Papers: Arkansas; Monthly and Other School Reports, Arkansas, October 1865-July 1870, in Records of the Education Division, BRFAL, 1865-1871, National Archives, RG 103, Washington, DC, microcopy no. 15; National Freedman, vol 1, no. 7 (August 15, 1865); Clark B. Kennan, "The First Negro Teacher in Little Rock," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 9 (Autumn 1950): 194-204; also see Randy Finley, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Arkansas," (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 1992).

93Kennan, "The First Black Teacher," 194-204; see Finley, "The Freedmen's Bureau"; Monthly and Other School Reports, BRFAL.


95Arkansas Gazette, October 10, 1867.
population, the number of literate blacks increased from forty-four in 1870 to over three hundred by 1880.65

For the training of black teachers and other professionals there emerged several normal schools and colleges: Southland College (Helena); Branch Arkansas Normal School, which became Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal State College and then the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff; Shorter College which began in Bethel AME Church’s basement as Bethel Institute (Little Rock); Philander Smith College (Little Rock); and Arkansas Baptist College (Little Rock). Mulatto Joseph Carter Corbin, a graduate of Oberlin College and Arkansas’s superintendent of education from January 1873 until October 1874, established Branch Normal College and served as its first principal. A generation after the Emancipation, black colleges produced 105 college graduates, and Arkansas’s black literacy rate declined from nearly 100 percent to 53.5 percent.66

The creation of the Confederate state government and the arrival of the Union army meant the de facto end of slavery in Arkansas. And the failure of the Confederate military effort in Arkansas made it easier for blacks to desert the farms and help the Union army to conquer and effectively occupy the Mississippi Valley. So the Civil War and Union occupation of Arkansas served as catalysts for social, economic, and political changes among slaves and free blacks. Especially in the occupied urban areas, with the help of northern white missionaries and imported free blacks, black Arkansans began to build and rebuild their institutions: marriages, families, churches, businesses, and schools. Blacks then rose from non-participation to participation in politics. If Arkansas’s minority Confederates had not rebelled and taken control of the state, slavery would have remained intact as it did in loyal states. But the neo-Confederates and other conservative whites regained power quickly enough to disfranchise most black citizens by the turn of the twentieth century. The sharecropping system and abundant cheap black labor helped Conservatives to return to power and counter the challenges by Radical Republicans, blacks, poor landless whites, and small farmers. Despite the 1866 Southern Homestead Act and the Black Exodus, few black families acquired ownership of land in Arkansas, causing most blacks to remain renters and sharecroppers. The sharecropping system lasted well into the twentieth century and caused millions of blacks and poor whites to migrate to southern towns and northern cities by 1955. Sharecropping and Jim Crow systems helped to suspend Arkansas, Tennessee, and much of the South in a century of socioeconomic backwardness.

Both the South’s desire to retain cheap black laborers in a neo-feudal system and the North’s determination to discourage the migration of black Americans to cheap lands in the West and jobs in the industrial North condemned most blacks to generations of economic dependency. Union authorities did a disservice to the freedmen by encouraging their containment in the South rather than encouraging them to go West to available lands or North to gain industrial jobs. But between 1890 and 1955, the years of the black Northern Migration, black migrants streamed from the black belt in the Mississippi Valley (including Arkansas), flooded the northern industrial cities and towns, and contributed to industrial development as well as race riots and slums.

In the South the former Confederates and their descendants tried to shield themselves from the dominant facts about the humiliating military defeat. By 1874, with great parades and public ceremonies in Richmond and other southern cities, and with the help of local historians armed with pen and paper, a smartly organized effort was begun to construct legends, heroes, statues, parks, and associations to honor the Confederate Lost Cause and transform a bitter defeat into a glorious history. For a persistent few, the Confederate battle flag would become a symbol of pride and a decadent South risen again, and they would portray Confederate history as if it were the dominant history of the majority of
southerners. As Michael B. Dougan put it, "Only after the destruction was repaired, the hatreds forgotten, and the survivors in their old age, could the experience of Confederate Arkansas be romanticized into gallant heroic men, and noble, hard-working patriotic women." The real southern story of the participation of blacks and southern white Unionists in the region's most notable chapter of history was suppressed or forgotten. But no distortion of history can undo the loyalty and service of hundreds of thousands of black laborers and soldiers which helped accomplish the Union army's swift and decisive victories. And truly the Civil War and Reconstruction years proved to be pivotal and developmental years for black Americans in Arkansas.

USCT Units or Parts Thereof That Served in Arkansas

57th USCT or 4th Arkansas Volunteers (AD) was formed near Helena and DeVall's Bluff on December 2, 1863. The regiment also served at Little Rock, Fort Smith, and New Mexico before ending service in New Mexico and Kansas, October 17–December 31, 1866.

60th USCT or 1st Iowa Volunteers (AD) was formed at Keokuk, Iowa, and Benton Barracks, Missouri, in October 1863 and sent to Helena. The regiment was attached to the District of Eastern Arkansas until April 1865. Its companies served at Helena, Big Creek, DeVall's Bluff, Jacksonport, White River District, and Batesville. The unit was mustered out on November 2, 1865.

63rd USCT or 9th Louisiana Volunteers (AD) was formed on November 26, 1863, and attached to the Post of Natchez. The regiment moved into Memphis in December 1863 to guard contraband camp Dixie on President's Island. Some companies left Memphis to serve in Arkansas's contraband camps, home farms, and at Pine Bluff and Helena. The companies mustered out between December 16, 1865, and January 9, 1866.

69th USCT or 7th Louisiana Volunteers (AD) was formed in 1863 and attached to the District of Vicksburg with detachments at Helena and Pine Bluff and garrisons at Freedman's Fort. The regiment was mustered out on March 13, 1866.

69th USCT was organized at Memphis on December 14, 1864, from men incapacitated for combat duty and was augmented with fugitive slaves from Arkansas. After training, the four companies left Memphis and crossed into Arkansas on March 17, 1865. More blacks were recruited at Pine Bluff, DeVall's Bluff, Point Pleasant, Little Rock, and Helena. The regiment never reached full strength and was consolidated with the 63rd and the 64th USCT on September 20, 1865.

79th USCT or 1st Kansas Colored Regiment was organized at Fort Scott, Kansas, in August 1863 and accepted into the Union army on January 13, 1864, before being attached to the Frontier District (Department of Arkansas) by January 1865. The regiment served at Fort Smith, Clarksville, Poison Springs, and Pine Bluff. It was mustered out at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, on October 30, 1865.

83rd USCT or 2nd Kansas Colored Regiment was formed in August 1863 at Fort Scott and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and attached to...
the Frontier District (Department of Arkansas) until January 1865. It served at Fort Smith, Dardanelle, and Little Rock before being mustered out there on October 9, 1865, and discharged at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, on November 27, 1865.

112th USCT or 5th Arkansas Volunteers (AD) was organized at Little Rock, March–April 1864, as the 5th Arkansas Volunteers (AD) and attached to the Colored Brigade (Post Garrison of Little Rock). This regiment never completed more than four companies (about 400 men); so it was consolidated into the 113th USCT on April 1, 1865.

113th USCT or 6th Arkansas Volunteers (AD) was formed March–April 1864 and attached to the Colored Brigade, Post of Little Rock. This regiment was consolidated with the 11th USCT (Old) and the 112th USCT to form the 113th USCT (New). The new 113th was mustered out in April 1865.

2nd USCLA, Battery E or 3rd Louisiana Volunteers (AD) was organized during the summer 1863 and sent to the District of the East (Department of Arkansas) before being mustered out on September 26, 1865, in Arkansas.

2nd USCLA, Battery H or 1st Arkansas Battery (AD) was formed on June 4–December 13, 1864. The unit served in the Post Garrison of Pine Bluff before being mustered out on September 5, 1865.

"The Enemy Were Falling like Autumn Leaves." Fraudulent Newspaper Reports of the Battle of Pea Ridge

David Bosse

The New York Tribune of March 20, 1862, announced the Union victory at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, with the headline: "THE GREAT BATTLE OF SUGAR CREEK—THE UTTER ROUT OF THE REBELS—TERRIFIC FIGHTING BY UNION FORCES." Under the byline, "From Our Special Correspondent," appeared a stirring, full-page account complete with a map showing troop positions and important landmarks.1 Datelined "March 10, Battle-field on Sugar Creek, Benton Co., Ark.," the article reported on the progress and outcome of the battle in breathless prose. What the readers of the Tribune and the paper's editorial staff believed to be an eyewitness account had, in fact, been composed far from the scene. With no more danger to themselves than the risk of a guilty conscience, two New York journalists had perpetrated one of Civil War journalism's most blatant deceptions.

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1 Prior to 1863, most Civil War news reports either went unsigned or were identified only by initials or pen names. Editors believed that anonymity protected their correspondents from military reprisals. J. Cotter Andrews, The North Reports the Civil War (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955), 359.

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