



AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE CIVIL WAR

When the Civil War began in 1861, African Americans wanted to join the Union army to help end the rebellion. Their offers to become soldiers were refused. It was believed that this was a white man's war, and white soldiers would not serve next to black soldiers.

During the second year of the war, conditions changed. The army needed more men to serve as soldiers. More important, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. It added ending slavery to the North's war goals. African Americans could now join the army.

Some northern states moved quickly to organize African American **regiments**. One of these was Massachusetts. After many Michigan men left the state to join other regiments, Henry Barns, editor of the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, suggested Michigan

needed to raise a regiment of black soldiers. In August 1862, Governor Austin Blair received permission to organize a regiment of black soldiers. Barns was made the colonel of the First Michigan Colored Infantry.

As with all African American regiments during the Civil War, all the officers in the First Michigan were white. Black soldiers also were paid less than white soldiers. Besides

receiving unequal pay, black soldiers were often treated unfairly. When the First Michigan was stationed at Fort Ward in Detroit, it was reported that "the barracks were unfit for human habitation and there is not a barn or pig-sty in the whole city of Detroit that is not better fitted for human habitation than Fort Ward."

Near the end of 1863, the First Michigan toured cities in the southern Lower Peninsula. It stopped in Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Marshall, Cassopolis, and Niles. In these cities the First was well-received and its regimental band won many praises. After visiting Jackson, Governor Blair declared, "This is the first time I ever saw Negro troops and I am very proud of your general bearing."

On March 28, 1864, the First left Detroit for Maryland. By late April, the 895 officers and men of the First were

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State Archives of Michigan

Kinchen Artis served with the First Michigan Colored Infantry.

Courage to Fight and Die

One of the first African American regiments formed during the Civil War was the 54th Massachusetts (Colored) Infantry. The black men who joined the regiment were from many other states, including Michigan. The experienced white officers who commanded the 54th had “firm antislavery principles.” The regiment’s colonel, Robert G. Shaw, came from one of Boston’s leading **abolitionist** families.

Organized in early 1863, the 54th trained in the Boston area for months. By the summer of 1863, the regiment was stationed with other Union forces in South Carolina.

On July 18, 1863, the 54th led an attack against Fort Wagner, a rebel fort that protected the city of Charleston.

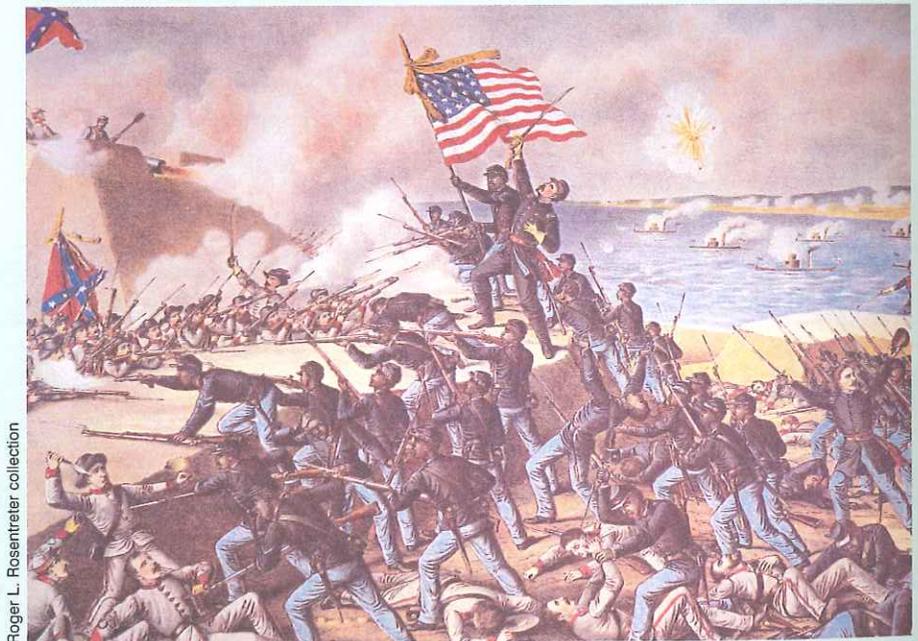
At dusk, 630 men of the 54th marched along the beach toward the fort. When the black soldiers were

packed in a narrow pocket of land with the ocean on one side and a swamp on the other, the rebels opened fire with rifles and cannon. The enemy bullets tore huge gaps in the Union ranks. According to one survivor, “Not a man flinched though it was a trying time.”

When the 54th reached the fort’s walls it had suffered many **casualties**. Colonel Shaw, who led the

charge, was killed as he urged his men forward. Those soldiers of the 54th who got into the fort were outnumbered. They were either killed or captured. The rest of the 54th retreated when **reinforcements** failed to arrive on time.

Although the attack on Fort Wagner failed because the northern generals had **underestimated** the strength of the fort, the attack had important **consequences**. It showed white Northerners that African Americans had the courage to fight and die as soldiers. After this, more African Americans joined the Union army to help their country.



Roger L. Rosentreter collection

This drawing (called a lithograph) was created after the Civil War. It shows the 54th Massachusetts attacking Fort Wagner on July 18, 1863. Colonel Shaw is shown on top of the fort’s wall. He is the officer who has just been struck by an enemy bullet.

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stationed in South Carolina. Since the state of Michigan transferred the regiment to the control of the federal government, the First saw its name changed to the 102nd U.S. Colored Infantry. At this time, Colonel Barns resigned. He was replaced by Henry L. Chipman, who had joined the army when the war began. A Detroitier, Chipman led the 102nd for the remainder of the war.

The 102nd served in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. It was engaged in only a few battles. On one occasion, Lieutenant Orson W. Bennett “gallantly led a small force fully 100 yards in advance of the Union lines” and saved several cannon from being captured. For his action, Bennett was awarded the Medal of Honor.

The Civil War ended in April 1865. In October, the 102nd arrived back in Detroit and was disbanded. The regiment’s total enrollment included 1,673 men. Losses totaled five killed, seven dead of wounds, and 118 dead of disease.

Like all black regiments, the 102nd U.S. Colored Infantry played an important role in winning the Civil War for the North. These black soldiers, who won the respect of many white soldiers, also helped win freedom for their race.

Speaking of Slavery

SOJOURNER TRUTH

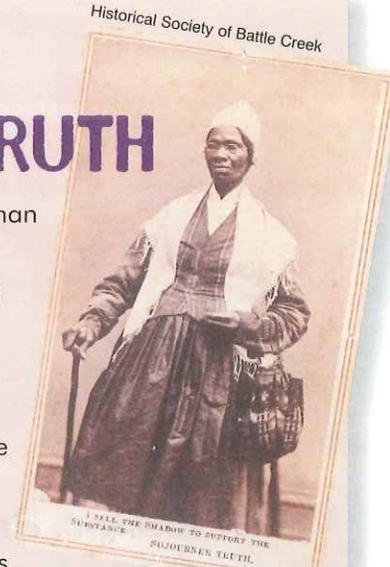
A WELL-KNOWN African American woman during the Civil War was Sojourner Truth. Truth was a powerful speaker who argued against slavery and for women’s rights.

People listened to Truth because she knew what it was like to be a slave. Truth was born a slave around 1797 in the state of New York. Her masters sold and abused her before she became free in 1827. Truth wrote a book about her life as a slave and as a free woman. It was called *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. Money from book sales allowed Truth to buy a house in Battle Creek, Michigan, where she moved in the 1850s.

During the war, Truth traveled throughout Michigan and the North, giving speeches and supporting the Union army. Her grandson James served with the 54th Massachusetts Infantry and spent part of the war in a rebel prison camp. In 1863, Truth collected food in Battle Creek for the First Michigan Colored Infantry camped in Detroit. The following year, Truth went to Washington, DC, where she worked in one of several hospitals that cared for former slaves who escaped the South.

Even before the Civil War, many Americans had heard of Truth. She traveled with famous abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. Large crowds listened to her tell about the evil of slavery. Religion and spiritual themes were part of her speeches. Truth also urged her listeners to support women’s rights and freedom for people of all races.

After the Civil War, Truth continued to speak publicly, working to convince audiences that women and blacks should have the same rights as white men. Truth died in 1883 and is buried in Battle Creek.



Historical Society of Battle Creek

Where to Take Your Family

The **Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History** in Detroit offers exhibits about African Americans and the Civil War. Telephone (313) 494-5800 or visit www.maah-detroit.org.

Battle Creek honors Sojourner Truth with a monument in Monument Park at the intersection of Michigan and Division Streets. The Historical Society of Battle Creek operates the Kimball House Museum, which showcases a variety of Truth memorabilia. Telephone (616) 695-261

What Did You Learn?

BONUS:

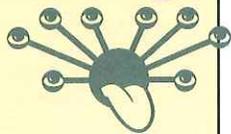
What Michigan city has a statue of Sojourner Truth?

1. What was one of the things the Emancipation Proclamation did?
 - a. It encouraged African Americans to join the Union army.
 - b. It gave voting rights to African Americans.
 - c. It allowed African American men to become officers in the army.

2. What was the original name of the African American regiment from Michigan?
 - a. the First Michigan African American Infantry
 - b. the First Michigan Colored Infantry
 - c. the 102nd Michigan Colored Infantry

3. What did the attack on Fort Wagner prove?
 - a. That African Americans had the courage to fight and die as soldiers.
 - b. That the North was going to lose the war.
 - c. That African Americans made poor soldiers.

Vocabulary WORDS



Abolitionist: a person who works to end slavery

Casualty: a military person killed, wounded or captured during war

Consequence: a result of an action

Disband: to break up a group

Regiment: a group of 1,000 soldiers

Reinforcement: something or someone added for strength or support

Underestimate: to think something is less than it really is

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Find the following
CIVIL WAR
 words
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