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# State of the Union

NEW YORK AND THE CIVIL WAR

*Edited with an Introduction by*

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*Foreword by*

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First Edition

# What's Gender Got to Do With It?: New York in the Age of Civil War

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NEW YORK played a major role in the Civil War on the on the home front, as well as on the battlefield. It was the largest and wealthiest state in the Union and by the war's end it had contributed more soldiers, money, and supplies to the effort than had any other state.<sup>1</sup> The war in New York actually began to take shape long before the 1861 Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina.

New York had been the site of several conventions that addressed issues of freedom and states' rights that were played out during the course of the war. The New York Anti-Slavery Convention of 1837 highlighted the inequities that free blacks experienced in the North and the hypocrisy of Northern attacks on the South because of its racial atrocities. The Free Soil Party held its 1848 convention in Buffalo, New York and committed itself to "free soil, free speech, free labor, and free men." The National Negro Convention movement also held several meetings in the state. In Buffalo in 1843, a spirited debate between Frederick Douglass of Rochester and the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet of Troy ensued and delegates pursued a more militant stance towards abolition, while they simultaneously sought to guarantee the rights of citizenship to free blacks.<sup>2</sup> In 1864

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<sup>1</sup> New York contributed nearly one-fourth of the men and one-half of the money. Governor James Wadsworth gubernatorial campaign, 1862. Broadside SCO BD 152-153; A3063, NYS Manuscript Collection.

<sup>2</sup> Howard H. Bell, "National Convention of Colored Men, Held at Buffalo, 1843." in *Proceedings of the National Negro Convention, 1830-1864* (New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1969).

delegates meeting in Syracuse still decried the atrocities that blacks were continuing to experience and called for freedom and equality.<sup>3</sup>

James McPherson, Noah Andre Trudeau, Allen Ballard, Joseph Glathaar, and other scholars have documented the subsequent participation of African-American men in Union war efforts. However, they have paid little attention to the impact that the war played in redefining gender and gender roles.<sup>4</sup> The process by which African Americans were enlisted in the armed forces was a protracted one that raises a number of issues surrounding manhood and who could engage in manly activities. Manhood was characterized by a patriarchy in which men headed their families, displayed noble principles, manifested reason and intellect, governed, voted, and waged war. For substantial numbers of African Americans, slavery made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to head their families or to support them.<sup>5</sup> Free blacks lived in a state of quasi-freedom that gave them all of the responsibilities of citizenship, but few of its benefits. For example, in the election of 1862 New Yorkers defeated the suffrage bill that would have enfranchised blacks and instead elected a Democratic governor and Democratic-controlled legislature that opposed Lincoln's policy of extending the war and emancipation.<sup>6</sup>

Blacks had effectively been excluded from the military throughout the North by the National Militia Act of 1795. Although they had fought in all United States wars, they had no official status and they reaped few rewards for their efforts. White men persistently resisted black men's efforts to form militias and to volunteer to fight in the Civil War. Some contended that this was a "white man's war" and that there was no place for blacks. From the early days of the war the

<sup>3</sup> "National Convention of Colored Men, Held in the City of Syracuse, N.Y., 1864, in *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> James McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 1965); Hans L. Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969); Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War 1862–1865* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998); Allen Ballard, *Where I'm Bound* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> See Aldon Morris in the foreword to Darlene Clark Hine and Ernestine Jenkins, *A Question of Manhood* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xi–xii.

<sup>6</sup> Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). Pivotal election in New York, "Campaign for the Union 1862, Broadside 13, Manuscript and Special Collections, New York State Library; Jerome Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy, 1861–1874* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981), 70.

issue of black men's participation was questioned, despite the early defeats that the Union suffered. An 1862 *Harper's Weekly* cartoon criticized the white resistance by depicting a drowning aristocratic white man refusing the rope that a black man extends to save him because no "decent White Man is going to allow himself to be saved by a confounded n——." <sup>7</sup> For some to employ black soldiers meant that white soldiers were not up to the task. Felix Brannigan, a young New York private in a letter to his sister, rationalized that "we don't want to fight side by side with the n——. We think we are too superior a race." <sup>8</sup> For white men, then, the war raised questions about their manhood as it was socially constructed. Increasingly, Northern white men perceived slavery as incompatible with their own freedom. As the war intensified the dilemma for white men became one of either sacrificing whiteness or losing their status as free men. <sup>9</sup>

While the war progressed, with no apparent end in sight, the notion of arming blacks began to be debated and embraced by more whites, even in the Confederacy. Senator John Sherman wrote his brother, the general, in late August of 1862 that "men of all parties who now appreciate the magnitude of the contest, and who are determined to preserve the unity of the government at all hazards, agree that we must seek and make it the interest of the Negroes to help us." <sup>10</sup> Some white observers rightly noted that the Civil War would effect a social revolution as far as blacks and their manhood were concerned. In June 1863 Francis Barnes, second lieutenant in the 80th United States Colored Troops (Corps d'Afrique), served in Louisiana and was a keen observer of his troops and the politics of the war. This resident of Phoenix, Oswego County, New York, informed his wife:

It is a grand idea—this raising a great army of Colored men to fight for their freedom and the Union. My only regret is that the policy was

<sup>7</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, August 16, 1862, 528 (app.harpweek.com).

<sup>8</sup> Private Felix Brannigan (74<sup>th</sup> NYSV) to his sister, quoted in Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), 31.

<sup>9</sup> David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (New York: Verso, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Scott L. Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> John Sherman to William Tecumseh Sherman, August 24, 1862, quoted in Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War*, 158.

not adopted long ago. . . . The mills of God grind slowly, but I think that slavery has got caught between the "upper and the nether mill-stone" this time so that it will be effectually ground out. There is no disputing the fact that negroes make good soldiers, however much some may cavil about it. . . . [T]he experiment thus far has been eminently successful. . . . At any rate it is to be thoroughly tried and that will settle the question for all time to come. It will elevate the negro to a new sphere and will make men of them instead of mere brutes.<sup>11</sup>

*Harper's Weekly* illustrated "rebel" Louisiana governor Henry Allen's call for the arming of black slaves in 1864. Allen noted further that the "conscription of Negroes should be accompanied with freedom and the privilege of remaining in the state."<sup>12</sup>

Prominent black spokesmen, from the outset, perceived the outbreak of the Civil War as an opportunity to achieve manhood. Frederick Douglass and other civilians responded immediately to the 1862 United States government's request to recruit "Colored" soldiers.<sup>13</sup> Douglass's sons Charles and Lewis were among his first recruits.<sup>14</sup> Blacks serving in the U. S. Colored Troops responded enthusiastically and with valor. Initially, many, such as the Douglass sons, had enlisted in the famous 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts regiment because New York State refused to accept them. These soldiers eventually comprised about ten percent of the troops from New York, just as they did nationwide. Lincoln and General Ulysses S. Grant and their immediate commanders all praised them for their valor and contended that the war could not have been won without their contributions.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Francis Barnes to his wife, Headquarters 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Before Port Hudson Tuesday June 23, 1863, folder 3, NYSM, SC 20332.

<sup>12</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, November 5, 1864, 720.

<sup>13</sup> Adjutant General to Frederick Douglass, August 13, 1863, Frederick Douglass papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (LC), taken from the Library of Congress exhibit, *African American Odyssey*.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Douglass to Frederick Douglass, Readville, Camp Meigs, July 6, 1863, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Negro Regiment* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960). Black recruits sometimes sang Tom Craig's "The Colored Volunteer," which spoke to their commitment and dedication. Broadside SCO BD 153, MSC New York State Library; Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 48; Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), frontispiece; Grant to Lincoln, August 23, 1863 in McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War*, 191. In a public letter of August 26, 1863, Lincoln reproved opponents to the use of black troops. He wrote that some black men will remember that they . . . have helped mankind on to this great consummation . . ." (*Ibid.*, 192).

Black men expressed their views regarding the Civil War in impassioned tones at the 1864 National Convention of Colored Men that met in Syracuse. Douglass chaired the convention and noted, “The cause which we come here to promote is sacred. Nowhere in the ‘wide, wide world,’ can men be found coupled with a cause of greater dignity and importance than that which brings us here. . . . [L]ike all progressive races of men, we are resolved to advance in the scale of knowledge, worth, and civilization, and claim our rights among men.”<sup>16</sup> Delegate John S. Rock reiterated Douglass’s sentiment when he informed the convention that “all we ask is equal opportunities and equal rights. . . . [O]ur brave men are fighting for liberty and equality. We ask the same for the black man that is asked for the white man; nothing more, and nothing less.”<sup>17</sup> In some ways, then, the Civil War became for white men a manifestation of their manhood and for black men a means to achieve manhood.

Just as the war challenged the meaning of manhood and expanded its definition to include blacks, the nineteenth-century notion of womanhood, characterized by domesticity, also was placed on the debate floor. Since the experiences of Southern women during the Civil War have tended to dominate the literature, we know little about the involvement of Northern women. The New York experiences offer a unique opportunity to explore questions pertaining to womanhood because of women’s roles in abolition and because of its influential feminists like Susan B. Anthony and Sojourner Truth, who saw the war as an opportunity to expand the freedoms for both women and black men.<sup>18</sup>

When Southerners attacked Fort Sumter, Northern women wasted no time in claiming the Civil War as theirs, too. They expressed the war’s importance to them and their opinions appeared in mainstream publications. The fictional character Fleta asked, “What do women know about war?” In the *Flag of Our Nation*, a Northern publication, she responded to her query thus: “What drop in all the bitter cup have they not tasted?” Fleta goes on to discuss the hardships that

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<sup>16</sup> Howard Bell, Proceedings, National Convention of Colored Men held in Syracuse, October 4–7, 1864 in *Proceedings of the National Negro Convention, 1830–1864* (New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1969), 23.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1995).



were wrought for women as a result of the war—loneliness and despair, the agony of the loss of a loved one, the efforts required to maintain the homestead, and the anxiety they felt when they received infrequent correspondence. For Fleta this was the counterpart to man's battlefield experience.<sup>19</sup> Herkimer County resident Flora Avery also expressed the human toll that the war exacted on her and members of her community. She became a widow at age eighteen when her young husband was killed in the conflict. Flora Avery had lost her father-in-law in battle, too. Avery observed that "there are few families that escape the ravages of this war. They have my sympathy and that is all I can do for I feel that it is worse than useless to offer anything like consolation."<sup>20</sup> Avery documented the war casualties from her town, for many of their funeral services were held at her church.<sup>21</sup> She commented that her friend's brother-in-law was a prisoner of war in Richmond and suffered from a lack of food and clothing.<sup>22</sup> She later noted that "my bereavement [is] more forcefully [brought] to mind as it is my husband's birthday. One year ago today he was with me. . . . I am left alone and must spend the remainder of my days in loneliness."<sup>23</sup> Despite her grief, she remained committed to the Union cause.

An 1861 article in *Harper's Monthly* indicated the level of support that women gave to the war effort and, simultaneously, their views on men's participation. A heroine "drank with every breath the spirit of heroism and self-sacrifice." When her suitor chided her for knitting socks for the soldiers, she dumped him summarily and stated, "Don't, I pray you, hinder with light words even, the feeble service that a weak woman's hands may render. I am not a man, and cannot, therefore, fight for liberty and good government; but what I am able to do I am doing from a state of mind that is hurt by levity." In an 1862 *Harper's* cartoon titled "Scene on Fifth Avenue," when a young suitor informed his betrothed that he had found a substitute to replace him in the military, she registered her displeasure by sneering,

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Alice Fahs, "The Feminized Civil War: Gender, Northern Popular Literature, and the Memory of the War, 1861–1900," in *The Journal of American History* 3 (March 1999), 1461.

<sup>20</sup> Flora Avery Diary, January 22, 1863, Salisbury Center, Herkimer County BD18940, MSC, New York State Library.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, May 10, 1863.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, December 8, 1863.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, March 20, 1863.

“Have you? What a curious coincidence! And I have found one for YOU!”<sup>24</sup> This was a persistent theme in “Scene on Fifth Avenue.” Another soldier on furlough returned to visit his ladyfriend only to be informed by a servant that she would not be available to him until Richmond had been defeated.<sup>25</sup>

The implications were clear. These women were imbued with the contemporary ideal of manhood and only wanted to be associated with real men. Married women embraced this definition of manhood also and took leadership in supporting the war effort, also. In an 1861 *Harper’s* cartoon, a wife refused to celebrate the return of her husband from the war because he had volunteered to serve for only three months, earning this rebuke: “Get Away! No husband of mine would be here while the country needs his help.”<sup>26</sup> Wives sometimes took the initiative to encourage reticent spouses to volunteer for military service. A “Horrorified Husband” queried his butler. “What! My wife—gone! Did you say GONE?” “Yes, sar. She says she’s gone Nussing to Fortress Monroe and she told me to rub up your regimentals, case you wanted to follow her.”<sup>27</sup> White women were operating within the acceptable realm when they thus responded.

During the early years of the Republic (1776–1820) the role of elite women had been redefined. Full political identity for Americans was based upon a willingness to bear arms for the nation, as well as property ownership. Women were thought to be unfit to bear arms and married women could not exercise control over their property.<sup>28</sup> The ideology of the republican mother sought to redefine the role of women in a manner that emphasized that they were a part of a deeply radical republican experiment.<sup>29</sup> The responsibility of the republican mother, then, was to prepare her sons to serve their country. With the outbreak of the Civil War this notion prevailed and the family and community merged. Operating within this acceptable domestic sphere, the women of New York made major contributions to the war. For one thing, New York women maintained their families,

<sup>24</sup> *Harper’s Weekly*, April 30, 1862, 560, app.harpweek.com.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, August 2, 1862, 496, app.harpweek.com.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, August 10, 1861, 510, app.harpweek.com.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, August 16, 1862, 528, app.harpweek.com.

<sup>28</sup> See Peggy Rabkin, *Fathers to Daughters* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, reprint edition, 1981).

<sup>29</sup> Linda Kerber and Jane Sherron DeHart, *Women’s America*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3–24

homes, and businesses.<sup>30</sup> At the same time they became “historians” and “journalists” who chronicled the progress of the war and its impact on their families and communities. Flora B. Avery was one of them. She highlighted community celebrations and the course of the war. In her July 8, 1863 entry she wrote, “As I am returning just at dusk the [citizens] begin to manifest their joy by the firing of guns and the ringing of bells and in various other ways for the war news still continues good and their enthusiasm breaks forth in noise and mirth. But alas! It brings my loneliness more forcefully to mind and speaks in too strong terms of the frightful cost.”<sup>31</sup> Avery also observed the military’s movement in her area and described their age and appearance.<sup>32</sup> She also was a keen observer of political issues surrounding the war at home and noted that there were “great riots” in Troy and New York on July 15, 1863.<sup>33</sup> Mary Peck recounted in great detail the jubilation that her townspeople expressed upon learning that General Lee had surrendered at Appomattox and suggested that gender tempered her response.<sup>34</sup>

Flora Avery provided another example of women’s contributions on the home front. Avery made clothing, farmed, and provided aid to the indigent members of her community. She also prepared meals for the soldiers who were traveling through her community en route to the battlefields and noted the flag-waving and cheers that accompanied them.<sup>35</sup> Avery and her neighbors dried or pickled fruits and vegetables to send to the war front for the soldiers.<sup>36</sup> Making flags

<sup>30</sup> Francis Barnes even suggested that the war may have altered the relationship between spouses forever. *Ibid.*, January 1, 1864, SC20332, Folder 5.

<sup>31</sup> Flora B. Avery Diary, July 8, 1863. Salisbury Center, Herkimer County, SC 18940, Manuscript Collection, New York State Library.

<sup>32</sup> Monday, April 13, 1863. “There was a brigade of soldiers passed today from Michigan. . . . They were fine looking—very clean and fresh looking. I should take them for new recruits—One little drummer boy I noticed that did not look as if he could be over 12 years of age. Alas! How melancholy.”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, July 15, 1863.

<sup>34</sup> “The old church bell in Castleton sent forth its many peals at intervals through the day and evening. . . . Then the bell at Orleans began to peal. I heard the canons at Canandaigua—Clifton—Phelps. I felt as if I must fly to hear the glorious sound for I knew they must be glorious! Bradley came . . . to tell Mr. B. [the news]. And the way they took off their caps and rent the air with their cheers! It seemed as I must join them—but I am a woman so I only said Thank God—and went in the house—& cried. . . .” Mary Peck to Henry Peck, April 12, 1865, SC 19406, MSC New York State Library.

<sup>35</sup> Flora B. Avery Diary, March 31, 1863.

<sup>36</sup> Flora B. Avery Diary, November 25, 1863.

allowed women to take their domestic skills into the public world of politics. In April 1861, R. W. Murphy observed that his wife Anne and the women of Burnt Hills were making a twenty-by-twenty-five-foot flag for a mass rally that would send men off to battle. He noted, "We cannot permit the Southern Seceders to have it all their own way and the Ladies are as warm in the cause and are all of them for Union. The Union of the States! And the good of their country."<sup>37</sup> Socialite Eliza Woolsey presented the 16<sup>th</sup> New York regiment with a stand of state and national colors, made by Tiffany and Company, when it left Albany for Washington.<sup>38</sup> Some women expressed their support for the Union cause by wearing on Broadway that "fearful object of contemplation, 'a Union bonnet' composed of alternate layers of red, white, and blue, with streaming ribbons."<sup>39</sup>

Prominent socialite Jane Newton Woolsey of New York City, whose family had been Virginia plantation owners for generations, was a staunch abolitionist and avowed Unionist. She made her home at 8 Breevoort Place available to promote the cause. For months, bandage rolling was "the family fancywork, and other festivities really ceased."<sup>40</sup> Her home became a headquarters for the Union military and the new home to the campaign printing office. Some women were concerned about the quality of life of military men, including their educational needs. Elida B. Rumsey established a free library for soldiers in Judiciary Square in Washington on land that Congress had donated.<sup>41</sup>

Other groups of women organized to enhance their ability to make contributions to the war. New York women joined the U.S. Sanitary Commission, an organization that was dedicated to providing comfort for the military personnel; they made 26,000 quilts and sent them to the soldiers on the battlefield.<sup>42</sup> This was only one of many women's organizations that supported soldiers on the battlefield and their fam-

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<sup>37</sup> R. W. Murphy Diary, Manuscripts 18464, New York State Library.

<sup>38</sup> Sylvia Dannett, *Noble Women of the North* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 76.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Mary A. Gardner Holland, *Our Army Nurses* (Boston: Wilkins and Company, 1895), 67.

<sup>42</sup> See Judith Ann Giesberg, *Civil War Sisterhood* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000).

ilies at home. Through their fundraising activities, women's groups raised huge amounts of money to support soldiers and the Union war effort. The Albany Army Relief Bazaar featured Professor Charles Doring and his band in a concert that performed classical and contemporary music to benefit the sick and wounded soldiers of the Union.<sup>43</sup> The Ladies Soldiers' Relief Society presented "dramatic entertainment" by Miss Mary C. Hathaway of the Parker Collegiate Institute of Brooklyn. This school reputedly was the most celebrated literary and scientific female institution in the country.<sup>44</sup> So while they raised money for the Union cause, they also were able to provide a forum for the artistic talents of women.

The war allowed women to play a more public role in other areas as well. It especially expanded the range of job opportunities for them and moved them out of the home and the domestic sphere. Nursing previously had fallen within the privatized labor sector. The large numbers of wounded and sick soldiers returning from the battlefield necessitated the creation of a profession and institutions to serve these veterans. Dorothea Dix devoted herself to hospital work. As superintendent of nurses she controlled all appointments and assignments.<sup>45</sup> All seven daughters of Jane Newton Woolsey became nurses in the war. Georgeanna Woolsey of New York City described the training of Civil War nurses in New York: "The Women's Relief Association organized a nursing staff for the army, selected 100 women and sent them to various New York City hospitals for training. The United States Sanitary Commission sought recognition for their contributions from the War Department with the pay of privates. They were sent to the army hospitals on requisitions from Dorothea Dix and others, 'as needed.'"<sup>46</sup> Georgeanna Woolsey and her sister Eliza Howland were among the first trainees and after they completed their education they went to war with Eliza's husband Joe, serving in Washington, D.C.<sup>47</sup> Nursing the sick and wounded military

<sup>43</sup> Broadside 41, New York State Library.

<sup>44</sup> Dansville Ladies Soldier Relief Society, July 14, 1864, Broadside 1656, Manuscripts, New York State Library.

<sup>45</sup> Holland, *Our Army Nurses*, 33. See also Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp* (New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1968), 42-43.

<sup>46</sup> Dannett, *Noble Women*, 63-64.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

personnel provided opportunity for many young women to be independent, for they supported themselves and later some even received pensions for their military service.<sup>48</sup>

Still other women waged war, or acted as spies in defiance of the gender expectations of the day. Sarah Rosetta Wakeman and Harriet Tubman were two of the estimated 400 women who joined the Union and Confederate armed forces, most of them early in the war, when physical examinations for new recruits were not yet stringent. Wakeman, alias Private Lyons Wakeman, enlisted in the 153<sup>rd</sup> New York Volunteers in October 1862. She performed her duties diligently until she died in the federal army hospital in New Orleans on June 19, 1864.<sup>49</sup> While her military career places her among a small number of pioneering women, little is known about Wakeman's political views. Nor do we know why she did not reveal her gender to the medical staff at the military hospital. Did she believe that women would be condemned as a result of her activities, or did she fear the repercussions of being discovered as a female patient in an all-male establishment?

With a letter from Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts, Harriet Tubman reported on March 31, 1862 to General David Hunter at Hilton Head, S.C., where she worked effectively in the Union army as a cook, nurse, and spy. But Harriet Tubman also earned distinction as the only American woman to plan and execute a military expedition. In 1863, as an assistant to Colonel James Montgomery, she led a raid up the Combahee River from Port Royal, S.C., and destroyed many plantations that had provided provisions for Confederate troops. Known as the "Moses" of her people, in the process she freed some 800 slaves. In the spring and summer of 1865 Tubman worked briefly at a freedmen's hospital in Fortress Monroe, Virginia. Following her death from pneumonia in March 1913 she was honored with a full military funeral. She is buried in Fort Hill, Auburn, New York.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Lisa Y. King, "In Search of Women of African Descent Who Served in the Civil War Union Navy," *The Journal of Negro History* 83, #4 (Fall 1998) 307–308.

<sup>49</sup> Civil War Muster roll abstracts New York State Volunteers, United States Sharpshooters, and United States Colored Troops (ca. 1861–1900), roll 247, box 259, 153<sup>rd</sup> Infantry.

<sup>50</sup> Earl Conrad, *Harriet Tubman* (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1943), 160–168; "Campaign on the Combahee", 169–178; 224. Also, see Sarah Bradford, *Harriet Tubman* (New York: Corinth, 1886).

Black women also saw service in the navy. Many were nurses, cooks, or domestics, while others donned male apparel and served alongside their husbands and other male relatives.<sup>51</sup> Still others, like Sojourner Truth, received appointments from the National Freedmen's Relief Association and became counselors to newly emancipated slaves. They taught them the skills that they would need to live and work in a free economy.<sup>52</sup> These women all made enormous contributions to the war effort. Simultaneously, they enhanced their skills in the area of public speaking and negotiations. Beyond that, they improved their ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

It took extraordinary courage for African Americans, regardless of their gender, to fight in the Civil War, for at the outset they faced discrimination in wages, work assignments, and treatment. They often were denied the status of prisoner of war when captured, and even risked the possibility of being sold into slavery. Further, the question of womanhood for African Americans was highly contested. From their arrival in the seventeenth century, black women were put to tasks that no white woman was expected to perform. They were not accorded the status of mother or citizen; hence, the republican mother ideology eluded them. Black women had been relegated to what Patricia Hill Collins describes as the controlling images of "Jezabel, Sapphire and Mammy."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, in 1851 Sojourner Truth deconstructed the meaning of womanhood to include women's strength, as well as the weaknesses that resulted from poverty or forced dependency, when she asked an Ohio audience, "Aren't I a Woman?" Nevertheless, black womanhood too often was violated. Some contended that black women's emotional make-up differed from that of white women. One observer commented that Irish women "are incensed when they think they are to be deprived of the companionship of their husbands [who were being drafted to free blacks], while no such sad catastrophe is likely to befall the nagur

<sup>51</sup> Lisa Y. King, "In Search of Women . . .," 302–310.

<sup>52</sup> Olive Gilbert, *Sojourner Truth: Narrative and Book of Life* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, reprinted 1970), 139; Carleton Mabee, *Sojourner Truth* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1996). See also Taylor, *Reminiscences*, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 67–90. For an expanded definition of black womanhood, see, Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), 69–96.

women.<sup>54</sup> Even Union soldiers marching through the South raped black women with virtual impunity.<sup>55</sup> So while military necessity had expanded the definition of womanhood for white women and black men, the struggle to achieve womanhood and respectability for African American women would remain an uphill battle and one that the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs would wage at the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.<sup>56</sup>

So what's gender got to do with it? Men and women, white and black, were involved in every aspect of the war on the battlefield as well as on the home front. Men and women, regardless of their race, used the war to mediate the ideals of American democracy and directly linked the successful waging of the war to the extension of freedom. Black men gained freedom from slavery and the right to wage war, which ultimately resulted in their becoming enfranchised citizens—hence, men—but not until the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1870.<sup>57</sup> White women were em-

<sup>54</sup> Jacob C. White to Joseph C. Burstill, August 19, 1862, in Quarles, 183.

<sup>55</sup> The elderly Eliza Handy reported that the Union soldiers who passed her South Carolina home were "a bad lot [that] disgrace Mr. Lincoln" and insult black and white women. At Haine's Bluff, Mississippi, a white Union Army cavalryman raped "a grandmother in the presence of her grandchildren." White soldiers raped two Fortress Monroe, Virginia, women. Another woman was raped "after a desperate struggle" in the presence of "father and grandfather." A Natchez black wrote the *Christian Recorder* that husbands and fathers had witnessed the forcible violation of the virtue of their wives and daughters by white [Union] guards and soldiers." Blacks sought redress. Richmond blacks gathered in the Second African Baptist Church to petition the military authorities because Union Army soldiers were "gobbling . . . the most likely looking negro women" and placing them in the New Market Jail where some were "robbed and ravished at the will of the guards." They asked for protection or "the privilege of protecting themselves." Some black soldiers actually went AWOL to return home to protect their women from such outrages and remained there until the military assured them that their families would be safe. See Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1976), 386–88. Chapter nine, "Let Not Man Put Asunder," offers detailed accounts of the sexual exploitation of African-American women by Union soldiers and the response of their community to such crimes (363–431).

<sup>56</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of African-American Women," *Signs* 14 (1989) 912–920; Shaw, Stephanie J., *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). See also Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999) and Lillian S. Williams, ed., *The Records of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, 1895–1990*, "Introduction," Volume I (Bethesda, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1993).

<sup>57</sup> William Seraille, "The Civil War's Impact on Race Relations in New York State, 1865–1875," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 25 (January 2001), 57–89.



powered and began an aggressive campaign to get the vote. Black and white women experienced expanded job opportunities and greater access to the public sector and for some perhaps greater independence as a result of the Civil War. For unprecedented numbers of African-American women the war provided an opportunity to work in a free labor market for the first time. Their inclusion into the category of American woman, however, remained on contested ground. By successfully waging the Civil War, Northern white men were assured that their freedom was certain and that bondage would not be an element that could undermine that freedom.