From *Freedom’s Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War*, Edited by Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland

**Letter 1**: [Letter from Mississippi planter to state legislator]

October 22, 1865

**I wish to call your attention to a serious & growing evil**…that you will give it your earliest midst—**The Negro Soldiery here are constantly telling our negroes, that for the next year, The Government will give them lands, provisions, Stock & all things necessary to carry on business for themselves…Strange to say the negroes believe such stories in spite of facts to the contrary told them by their ~~masters~~ employers.**—The consequence is they are becoming careless, & impudent more & more, for they are told by the soldiers that they are as good as the whites & that they have come here for their protection & that they have come here for their protection…furthermore I have good cause to believe that our negroes are told that when the soldiers are withdrawn, that the whites will endeavor to enslave them again--& that they are urged to begin at an early day, perhaps about Christmas a massacre of the whites, in order to ensure their freedom, & that if the whites are got out the way here, that then they will have no further apprehension--& that this Country will then be given to them by the northern people forever as an inheritance….**In truth the people of the South are in very great danger, more so than many suppose—…I am no alarmist, but I tell you most seriously that the whole south is resting upon a volcano--& that if the negro troops are not removed from our mids pretty Soon—that trouble of the direst kind will befall us—They will stimulate the negroes to insurrection & will then lend them a helping hand--…**Get the negro Soldiery removed from our midst & no danger will follow…Let the Soldiery remain—…they…will endeavor by universal Massacre to turn this fair land into another Hayti…

E.G. Baker

**Letter 2**: [Letter to General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck from Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood]

Des Moines Iowa, August 5, 1862

…. “I hope under the confiscation and emancipation bill just passed by Congress to supply my regiment with a sufficient number of ‘contrabands’ to do all the ‘extra duty’ labor or my camp. I have now sixty men on extra duty as teamsters & c. whose places could just as well be filled with n\*\*\*\*\*\*s—**We do not need a single negro in the army to fight but we could use to good advantage about one hundred & fifty with a regeiment as teamsters & for making roads, chopping wood, policing camp &** c. There enough soldiers on extra duty in the army to take Richmond or any other rebel city if they were in the ranks instead of doing negro work”

I have but one remake to add…When this war is over & we have summed up the entire loss of life it has imposed on the country **I shall not have any regrets if it is found that a part of the dead are n\*\*\*\*\* and that all are not white men—**

Samuel Kirkwood

**Letter 3**: [From corporal in 54th Mass. Infantry]

Sept. 28th 1863

…On the 6th of the last Month, the Paymaster of the department, informed us, that if we could decide to receive the sum of $10 (ten dollars) per month, he would come and pay us that sum, but, that, on the sitting of Congress, the Regt would, in his opinion, be allowed the other 3 (three.) …Now the main question is. **Are we Soldiers, or are we LABOURERS**. We are fully armed, and equipped, have done all the various Duties, pertaining to a Soldiers life, have conducted ourselves, to the complete satisfaction of General Officers, who, were if any prejudiced against us, but who now accord us all the encouragement, and honour due us: have shared the perils, and Labour, of Reducing the first stronghold, …But when the war trumpet sounded o’er the land, when men knew not the Friend from the Traitor, the Black man laid his life at the Alter of the Nation—and he was refused. ..**Now Your excellency, We have done a Soldiers Duty. Why cant we have a Soldiers pay?** …We of this Regt. Were not enlisted under any “contraband” act. But do not wish to be understood, as rating our Service, of more Value to the Government, than the service of the exslave, Their Service, is undoubtedly worth much to the Nation, but Congress made express, provision touching their case, as slaves freed by military necessity, and assuming the Government, to be their temporary Gaurdian—Not so with us—Freemen by birth, and consequently, having the advantage of *thinking*, and acting for ourselves…We do not consider ourselves fit subjects for the Contraband act We appeal to You, Sir: as the Executive of the Nation to have us Justly Dealt with…

**Letter 4**: [Unsigned Letter to unidentified official]

New Orleans Camp Parpit Louisiana [1864]

I thake up my Pen to Address you a fiew simples and facts We so called the 20th u.s. Colored troops we was got up in the state of New York so said by A grant of the President…**we are treated in a Different maner to what others Rigiments** is Both Northern men or southern Raised Rigiment **Instead of the musket It is spad and the Whelbarrow and the Axe** cutting in one of the most horable swamps in Louisiana stinking and misery Men are Call to go on thes fatigues wen sum of them are…sick…**we havent received A cent of Pay Since we Bin in the field. ..And Another thing we are Cut short of our Ration in A most Shocking maner. I wont Relate All now But we Are nerly Deprived of All comforts of Life Hardly have Anough Bread to Keep us From starving…It is A hard thing to be kept in such a state of misery Continuly…**Remember we are men standing in Readiness to face thous vile traitors an Rebeles who are trying to Bring your Peaceable homes to Destruction. And how can we stand them in A weak and starving Condition

**Letter 5**:

Camp Nelson, Ky 25 March 1865

**I am a widow** and belonged to Warren Wiley of Woodford County Ky. My husband Julius Leach was a member of Co. D. 5 “U.S.C. Cavalry and was killed at Salt Works Va. About six months ago…I was living with aforesaid Wiley when he died. He knew of my husbands enlisting before I did but never said anything to me about it. From that time he treated me more cruelly than ever by whipping me frequently without any cause and insulting me on every occasion. **About three weeks after my husband enlisted a Company of Colored Soldiers passed our house and I was there in the garden and looked at them as they passed our house and I was there in the garden and looked at them as they passed. My master had been watching me and when the soldiers had gone I went into the kitchen. My master followed me and Knocked me to the floor senseless saying as he did so, “You have been looking at them darned N\*\*\*\*\* Soldiers”** When I recovered my senses he beat me with a cowhide **When my husband was Killed my master whipped me severely saying my husband had gone into the army to fight against white folks and he my master would let me know that I was foolish to let my husband go…**

Signed Patsey Leach

**Letter 6**: [Letter from Colonel James S. Brisbin]

Lexington Ky Oct 20/64

General **I have the honor to forward herewith a report of the operations of a detachment of the 5th U.S. Colored Cavalry**…they had been drawn with the intention of using them only for the purpose of drilling…On the march the Colored Soldiers as well as their white Officers were **made the subject of much ridicule and many insulting remarks by the White Troops and in some instances petty outrages such as the pulling off the Caps of Colored Soldiers, stealing their horses etc** …but in no intance did I hear Colored soldiers make any reply to insulting language used toward [them] by the White Troops…On the 2d of October …Col Wade ordered his force to charge and the Negroes rushed upon the works with a yell and after a desperate struggle carried the entire line killing and wounding a large number of the enemy and capturing some prisoners **Of this fight I can only say that men could not have behaved more bravely. I have seen white troops fight in twenty-seven battles and I never saw any fight better…on the return of the forces those who had scoffed at the Colored Troops on the march out were silent…**

**Letter 7:** [Letter from black soldier to enslaved children]

September 3, 1864

My Children I take my pen in hand to rite you A few lines to let you know that I have not forgot you… be assured that I will have you if it cost me my life on the 28th of the mounth 8 hundred White and 8 hundred blacke solders expects to start up the rivore to Glasgow…when they Come I expect to be with, them and expect to get you both in return….Your Miss Kaitty said that I tried to steal you But I’ll let her know that god never intended for man to steal his own flesh and blood…

[Spotswood Rice]

[Black Tennesseans petitioning convention of white unionists]

Nashville, Tenn. January 9, 1865

We the undersigned petitioners, American citizens of African descent…devoted friends of the great national cause, do most respectfully ask a patient hearing of your honorable body in regard to matters deeply affecting the future condition of our unfortunate and long suffering race…**We claim freedom, as our natural right**, and ask that in harmony and co-operation with the nation at large, you should cut up by the roots the system of slavery…**Devoted as we are to the principles of justice, of love to all men, and of equal rights on which our Government is based**…we know the burdens of citizenship and are ready to bear them…Near 200,000 of our brethren are to-day performing military duty in the ranks of the Union army. Thousands of them have already died in battle, or perished by a cruel martyrdom for the sake of the Union,…**But what higher order of citizen is there than a soldier? …If we are called on to do military duty against the rebel armies in the field, why should we be denied the privilege of voting against rebel citizens at the ballot-box?** …

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