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"Did You Ever Hear of a Man Having a Child?": an Examination of the Risk and Benefits of Being an African American Female Soldier During America's Civil War

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May, 2018

To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Kirsten Chaney entitled “Did You Ever Hear of a Man Having a Child?": An Examination of the Risk and Benefits of Being an African American Female Soldier During America’s Civil War. We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

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“DID YOU EVER HEAR OF A MAN HAVING A CHILD?”: AN EXAMINATION OF
THE RISK AND BENEFITS OF BEING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE
SOLDIER DURING AMERICA’S CIVIL WAR

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty
of the
College of Arts and Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the
Requirements for the Degree
Of
Master of Arts
in
History

Winthrop University

May, 2018

By
Kirsten Chaney

Abstract

Title: "Did You Ever Hear of A Man Having a Child?" An Examination of the Social, Economic, and Political Benefits of Being an African American Female Soldier During America's Civil War

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the social, economic, and political benefits for African American females who cross-dressed to join both the Confederate and Union Armies during the American Civil War. The benefits gained by the African American women who disguised themselves as males improved their overall quality of life when compared to other African American women of their era. The improved quality of life for these disguised women was made available through the increased number of options granted to African American males in the social, economic, and political spheres that were denied to African American women. The results were increased status in all three spheres for the select group of women who were able to successfully disguise their gender through the end of the Civil War.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Did you ever hear of a man having a child?” is the question Sergeant Joseph Cross wrote to his wife in a letter following the birth of a child in the trenches outside of Petersburg, Virginia on February 28, 1865.¹ The question of the motivation behind women disguising themselves as men in order to join the army has been asked many times since the conclusion of the American Civil War. The primary focus of this question has been Caucasian women. In focusing on the Caucasian women soldiers of the Civil War, the women soldiers of minority groups, such as those belonging to the Colored Regiments, have been largely ignored. This leaves a gap in the overall understanding of female motivations to cross-dress during the Civil War. Evidence of the existence of African American women soldiers can be found in discharge papers that list gender as the reason for discharge, in pension applications where they list themselves as the soldier, in birth records for prisoner-of-war camps and contraband camps where women are listed as the mother while they lived under male aliases, as well as, newspapers and records for insane asylums. All of these sources provide valuable insight into the lives of African American women who chose to take up arms during the Civil War. This thesis will address the

¹ DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook. *They Fought Like Demons : Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* (New York: First Vintage Civil War Library, 2003), 105.

economic, social, and political benefits for African American women who cross-dressed during the Civil War to join the army in addition to the risk they took upon donning both a male identity and a military uniform.

Noralee Frankel addresses the various roles that African American women took during and after the Civil War in Mississippi in her book *Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi*. Frankel's book involves the use of pension petitions and plantation records to trace the lives of a group of women. Frankel examines various roles they took both in and out of the home through "marriages, love affairs, children, and friendship."² Frankel offers a valuable view into the personal life of some African American women during and after the Civil War that gives valuable insight into the possible motivation for some women to join the fight.

Professor Mary Elizabeth Massey contributed a great deal to the study of women during the Civil War. Massey's book, *Bonnet Brigades*, provides glimpses in what life was like for roughly fifteen million women during their lives in the Civil War era. Massey's research led to the discovery of over four hundred women who disguised themselves as men in order to enlist. The four hundred women are in addition to others who served the armies behind the lines in various roles

² Cam Walker. "Reviewed Work: Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi by Noralee Frankel," *The Journal of Southern History* 67, vol. no. 4 (2001), 870-71.

such as nurses and spies.³ Massey's research is valuable in helping to compare the motivation of the African American women who cross-dressed to their Caucasian counterparts in deciphering various motivation to join the armies.

There are multiple first-hand accounts of the Civil War by African American women. Susie Taylor states in her memoir of the war "there are many people who do not know what some of the colored women did during the war."⁴ Taylor supplies valuable information on the Civil War from her perspective as both an African American woman and as a nurse. Her memoir is a valuable resource in providing information on African American women during the Civil War and what they experienced.

Bentley Historical Library of the University of Michigan houses letters from Sarah Emma Edmonds under the alias of Frank Thompson. The letters contain personal correspondence that gives the perspective of a woman who worked as both a soldier and as a nurse. Sarah Edmonds letters also contain her obituary. The letters and the death announcement provide a different perspective on the war. Sarah Edmonds cross-dressed when she wished to fight and wore a dress

³ Anne Firor Scott. "Reviewed Work: Bonnet Brigades. Civil War Centennial Commission Series by Mary Elizabeth Massey," *The Journal of Southern History* 33, no. 3 (1967), 410-11.

⁴ Susie King Taylor and Catherine Clinton. *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp: An African American Woman's Civil War Memoir* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press. 2006), 67.

when she served as a nurse. She would often go back and forth depending on her location and the events surrounding her regiment.⁵

University manuscripts, private collections, and historical societies were valuable resources for DeAnne Blanton and Lauren Cook. The duo wrote *They Fought Like Demons* in which they successfully identified two-hundred and forty women soldiers of the Civil War. Of all the women they identified only three were African American. Blanton and Cook explore not only the tactics and actions of these women soldiers but also their personal motivation in joining the Civil War. The duo traveled to a variety of archives in order to identify as many women as possible. Blanton and Cook cite Joseph Cross's letter home to his wife about an unknown woman soldier who gave birth in the trenches.⁶

In *Amazing Women of the Civil War*, Webb Garrison introduces thirty different women. Each chapter is dedicated to a specific person and her contributions during the Civil War. Garrison includes a letter and hospital records to confirm the placement of various women at different locations and battles. In addition, Garrison uses journals from people who knew these women to provide background information and greater insight into their way of life. Only one African American woman is mentioned in his books and that is Harriet Tubman.

⁵ Bentley Historical Library University of Michigan. "Letters from Sarah E. (Emma) Edmonds, alias Frank Thompson [Folder 11]." Advertisement. *Erome John Robbins papers, 1861-1913*.

⁶ Blanton and Cook, *They Fought Like Demons : Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*, 105.

Tracy J. Revels, in her book, *Grander and Her Daughters*, relied heavily on personal papers and journal entries from the Civil War. Revels includes census records and last wills in her exploration of Florida Women of the Civil War. Revels arranges her book based on time frame dedicating each chapter to a different major event. Revels's book also introduces readers to multiple women, including, a former slave named Ellen Thompson.

There are multiple avenues for identifying African American women who served in the Confederate or Union armies. In this study, discharge papers will identify African American women who were able to disguise themselves well enough to join the army on both the Confederate and Union sides. The process of using discharge papers to identify these women has already been successful in naming Cathay Williams and Maria Lewis. In addition to discharge papers, African American women soldiers have also been mentioned in letters and journals such as the unnamed soldier in Sergeant Joseph Cross's letters home. Pension applications provide another avenue for identification. When Civil War veterans grew to old age, many of them submitted requests for pensions as well as admittance into old soldier homes. These applications provide another way to identify women who masqueraded as men during the Civil War. The birth records from prisoner-of-war-camps and contraband camps allow for the discovery of women who gave birth after they were captured by opposing armies while they served under male aliases.

Insane asylum records from the post-Civil War era will allow the identification of some women soldiers. Insane asylums grew near the end of the nineteenth century to admit the aging poor of the Civil War era.⁷ The effects of post-traumatic stress disorder and various tales of their time as soldiers along with the records for various admitted women patients will assist in identifying additional African American female soldiers. The records of insane asylum admissions have been largely ignored in identifying female Civil War veterans. These primary sources will assist in identifying African American women soldiers and their motivation behind joining the army.

The second chapter will focus on the economic benefits available to African American members of the army that were denied to their civilian women counterparts. The chapter will explore both wage disparity and job availability. This chapter will also touch on the ability of men to gain access to the old soldier homes and pension while poverty-stricken African American women were often institutionalized in their final days on Earth. The third chapter will address how soldiers were able to gain some political power through military promotions. The African American women who disguised themselves as men also had access to this very limited political power. The third chapter will also touch on disparities in the legal system during the Civil War that favored African American

⁷ John R Sutton. "The Political Economy of Madness: The Expansion of the Asylum in Progressive America," *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 5 (1991), 665-78.

men over African American women. The chapter will include information from the U.S. National Archives on promotions for African American soldiers as well as information on court cases involving African American men and women and Caucasian women to show the different rulings based on gender and race.

The fourth chapter will focus on the risks taken by the African American females who disguised themselves as men in order to join the military. The risks include forced institutionalization, re-enslavement under the guise of contraband camps, and the possibility of death both from combat situations and from disease. At the end of chapters one through four a short summary will be provided on one African American woman who served during the Civil War based upon the limited information historians have. The conclusion will provide a summary of each chapter and the major points therein. The conclusion will also answer the question of why these women's role in history is important. It will suggest what the evidence examined could mean for historians of the Civil War.

The identification of African American women Civil War veterans and the understanding of their motivation is an important piece of Civil War history that has largely been ignored. The exploration of these women's motivation will provide a new perspective on Civil War-era African American women. The identification of their motivation is important in understanding the development of African American women's evolution in the history of the United States. The information garnered from various primary sources will show a difference

between the lives led by the African American women soldiers and their Caucasian counterparts. The experience of these African American women soldiers has not fully been explored and demands attention.

Maria Lewis

Maria Lewis, also known as George Harris, was an African American woman who served in the New York 8th Cavalry during the Civil War. Julia Wilbur wrote in her diary about her interactions with Maria Lewis. In her journal entry dated April 4, 1865, Julia Wilbur writes that Maria Lewis has been with the regiment for “the last eighteen months. She is known as Mr. Griffin, She wore a uniform, rode a horse & carried a sword & carbine just like a man. The officers protected her & she was with them mostly. The regiment didn’t know she was a woman.”⁸ Julia Wilbur’s journal provides all the information historians know about Maria Lewis which is very limited. Maria Lewis is portrayed as a light-skinned African American woman. Her whereabouts and fate after her unit left Julia Wilbur’s area are unknown.

Julia Wilbur’s journal can be used to calculate that Maria Lewis joined the unit around October 1863. The New York 8th Cavalry rode in the 1st Brigade, 1st Division, Cavalry Corps, and Army of the Potomac from February 1863 until March 1864. The unit then moved on to ride in the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Division, Cavalry, Army of the Potomac until October 1864. In the time between October 1864 and March 1865 the unit remained with the Army of the Shenandoah. From

⁸ Alexandria Archeology. "Diaries of Julia Wilbur, Relief Worker." Alexandria During The Civil War: First Person Accounts. May 2015. Accessed September 26, 2017. www.alexandraiva.gov/uploadfiles.30.

March 1865 to June 27, 1865, the unit remained with the Army of the Potomac until the company dispersed.⁹

At the time of Maria Lewis's encounter with Julia Wilber, she had participated "in the fight at Waynesboro on the 2d Mar. When Gen. Early had such a narrow escape, & 500 men were taken prisoner, several flags were taken & when those who took them came to W. to present them to the War dept. About a week ago, she came with them."¹⁰ The 8th New York Cavalry participated in multiple battles during her eighteen months with them including Sheridan's raid on Richmond in May 1864. This information shows that not only were women enlisted in different active military units but they experienced combat first-hand along with their comrades.

There is only one mention of a George Harris in the muster records for the New York 8th Cavalry. The entry reads, "HARRIS, GEORGE W.—Age, 37 years. Enlisted, March 2, 1865, at Goshen; mustered in as private, Co. C, March 2, 1865, to serve one year; mustered out with company, June 27, 1865, at Alexandria, Va."¹¹ Maria Lewis is stated as being seventeen years old in Julia

⁹Henry Norton, ed., *Deeds of daring; or, history of the Eighth N.Y. volunteer cavalry, containing a complete record of the battles, skirmishes, marches, etc., that the gallant Eighth New York cavalry participated in, from its organization in November, 1861, to the close of the rebellion in 1865.* (Norwich, NY: Chenango Telegraph printhouse) 1889.

¹⁰ Alexandria Archeology, "Diaries of Julia Wilbur, Relief Worker," 30.

¹¹ New York State Adjutant General Office. "Eighth New York Cavalry." New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs: Military History . July 31, 2012. Accessed August 8, 2017. https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/rosters/cavalry/8thCavCW_Roster.pdf. 912.

Wilbur's journal so whether or not this is actually referencing her is questionable. Should the documents have been falsified to show her as older than she really was, these alterations would have provided Maria Lewis with access to a pension and eventually an Old Soldier's home should she have decided to remain living as a man.

Maria Lewis joined the 8th New York Cavalry after fleeing from the Albemarle County in Virginia. Charlottesville was the nearest city to multiple large plantations when the Civil War began. Julia Wilber states that Maria Lewis's motivations for her prolonged time in the service as a member of the Cavalry were due to, "it not being convenient to leave the army at first & soon she became accustomed to it & began to like the excitement. She rode in the front ranks & scouted, & skirmished, & fought like they did."¹² In joining the military, Maria Lewis gained access to the wages, food, protection, and other necessities that as a woman she would not have been able to access. In donning the attire of a man she was able to enjoy these benefits which provided her with an improved standard of living that otherwise she would not have been able to achieve or maintain in the volatile state of the nation.

Maria Lewis sought out the benefits that were reserved for those serving in the military. She joined out of necessity and survival. The financial benefits that

¹² Alexandria Archeology, "Diaries of Julia Wilbur, Relief Worker," 30.

were provided to her allowed for a better standard of living than other African American women of her time. By entering into the military service in a non-colored regiment, Maria Lewis was able to successfully gain access not only to consistent wages but a higher wage than those earned by other African Americans during the war. The existence of a military record gave her the proof she needed to secure pension funds after the Civil War's conclusion. Maria Lewis stands as proof that one could receive monetary benefits by joining the military. Maria Lewis had protection from the officers in her cavalry unit and with their support, she was able to survive and thrive in a different kind of harsh environment than other African American women of her time. While many remained in the feminine sphere, Maria Lewis sought protection and financial stability that came with enlisting followed by the thrill of adventure. Lewis was not only able to survive in the masculine sphere, she was able to thrive. Julia Wilber's diary referenced that the officers knew that Maria Lewis was a woman and protected her secret from the rest of the regiment. Lewis stands as an example that not only did women serve and fight but some men supported women in the pursuits on the battlefield.

Chapter 2: Economic Benefits

In the time following the Civil War, there were limited job opportunities available for African American men and women. The restricted range of employment options also created a wage disparity between the maximum amounts an African American woman could earn and that of an African American man. The increase in job opportunities offered to men extended into the realms of military service. Since women were not allowed to join the military, they did not have access to the promotion, training, wages, and networking that men did nor were they provided the same food and housing that soldiers were issued by the military.

The lack of opportunities had long-term effects on African American women of the nineteenth century. "As one black man in Mississippi put it: 'Gib us our own land and we take care ourselves; but widout land, de ole massas can hire us or starve us, as dey please.'"¹³ The racial and gender discrimination of the period affected one's ability to find employment and gain higher wages. The fact that women were not accepted in the military meant that the brave women who served did not have access to pensions or, near the end of their lives, were they able to remain in old soldiers' homes as their health deteriorated. Starting at the

¹³ G. B. Tindall, and D. E. Shi. *America: A Narrative History*, 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), 756.

conclusion of the Civil War and the commencement of Reconstruction there was a distinct disparity between the maximum economic opportunities available to African American women. The lack of opportunity provided an incentive for some African American women to conceal their gender and enlist and to maintain their disguise beyond the end of the Civil War. The ruse was deemed necessary by some in order to gain access to better jobs, higher wages, pensions, and training that could potentially be the difference between life and death, such as the ability to fire a weapon and hunt.

In the era of Reconstruction, the South began the long process of repairing the damage done by the war to the southern states' economic system. Prior to the Civil War, plantation owners had a booming source of constant and reliable labor for their crops in the form of slaves. The labor source was maintained through an increase in the population with each generation. There are cases of slave owners raping women in order to ensure the continuation of a slave labor force in the future. Gregory Smithers, in his book *Slave Breeding: Sex, Violence, and Memory in African American History*, states that slave breeding "is a phrase with broad interpretive significance in African American culture."¹⁴ After the Civil War ended, southern landowners faced the question of how to maintain their plantations and production cost. Without the added ability to

¹⁴ Gregory D Smithers. *Slave Breeding : Sex, Violence, and Memory in African American History*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 10.

have children with slave women, slave owners could no longer sell their children for additional revenue or retain them as workers. The constant threat of rape and assault was an additional reason for women to leave and enlist in the army. Cross-dressing provided the appearance of being a man to others which freed women from the constant threat of sexual assault that could have befallen them if they were to identify their gender and remain within acceptable parameters of the feminine sphere.

Over the next decade and throughout Reconstruction, a new system was organized that promoted the pre-Civil War way of life, where former slaves provided the labor required to maintain plantations. Under new laws, however, plantations and landowners had to ensure the government that they would not use slave labor. It took some plantation owners months to begin to provide wages to the newly freed women and men. The African American men and women who continued to remain in the United States did not see an end to their unfair treatment upon being granted emancipation by Abraham Lincoln nor at the conclusion of the Civil War. The rapid passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments provided slaves with their freedom and confirmed their citizenship of the United States but did not provide the necessary protection needed in order to overcome racism and achieve the American dream. African American men were legally given the right to vote while African American women, like their Caucasian counterparts, were denied this right. Plans for

Reconstruction were created, lobbied, and negotiated by various groups in order to ensure the continued constitutional and legal rights of formerly enslaved persons. The successful passage of these amendments did not provide a path for newly freed people to learn how to make their way in the world in avenues outside of the positions they held while enslaved. Congress did attempt to assist them by creating the Freedmen's Bureau in March 1865. The Bureau's purpose was to help alleviate the problems facing the former slaves by providing clothing and other necessities to families such as medical care. The Bureau expired in 1872.¹⁵

Four paths emerged for newly freed African American men who did not desire to join the military and wished to survive in the Reconstruction era of the South: first they could move north to more industrialized areas in hopes of obtaining factory work, second they could move west to become homestead owners, third they could return to work for their former masters, or fourth they could become sharecropper. In an interview by G. L. Summer, freedman Francis Andrews stated that:

I come from the Indian Creek section of Newberry County. After about 1880 when things got natural, some of the slaves from this

¹⁵ David M. Kennedy and Elizabeth Cohen and Thomas A. Bailey, *The American Pageant*, 12th ed, vol. 2: since 1865. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 480.

section rented small one-horse farms and made their own money and living. Some would rent small tracts of land on shares, giving the landlord one-half the crop for use of the land.¹⁶

In the beginning, freedmen saw sharecropping as an increase in social status from wage labor because it was viewed as a pathway to gaining land ownership. The system rapidly evolved into another form of servitude due to freedmen having to live on a line credit provided by the landowner until the crops were eventually sold. This is important because the sharecroppers rarely if ever had the opportunity to break even with what they owed to the landowners because of high-interest rates and inflated prices on items such as seed. The line of credit was taken out of the sharecropper's crop earning at the end of the season which left no profit and a substantial amount of debt they had no hope of ever fully repaying.

In an interview by Everett R. Peirce, Victoria Adams stated that:

It wasn't long after de Yankees went thru dat our missus told us dat we don't belong to her and de massa no more. None of us left dat season. I got married de next year and left her. I like being free more better. Any niggers what like slavery time better, is lazy people dat don't want to do nothing.¹⁷

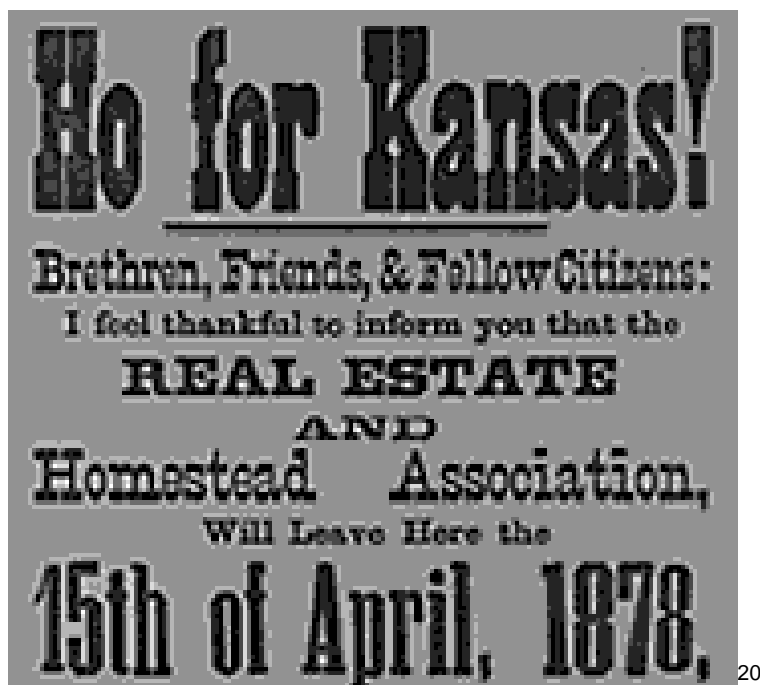
¹⁶ Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 14, South Carolina, Part 1, Abrams-Durant. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn141/>. (Accessed November 04, 2017.), 18.

¹⁷ Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, 12.

After the end of the Civil War, while some remained in the area of their old master's estates, many relocated in hopes of finding a better life. This was a mass exodus of newly freed people from the South, but the results of relocating out west, for many, were poor. One group of brave freedmen traveled from Kentucky to the northwestern plains of Kansas and, once there, they established the community named Dunlap Village.¹⁸ They experienced several crop failures and continuous harassment from the area Caucasian occupants. All but a handful of these homesteaders abandoned their claims. While women at this time could own land, the path to obtaining title was riddled with obstacles that made it almost impossible for African American woman to obtain a claim. The Homestead Act protected many of the freedmen the ability to become settlers and acquire land in Kansas and other parts of the West. President Abraham Lincoln signed the act into law on May 20, 1862. The Homestead Act "provided that any adult citizen, or intended citizen, who had never borne arms against the U.S. government could claim 160 acres of surveyed government land."¹⁹ It also stated that "after 5 years on the land, the original filer was entitled to the property, free and clear, except for a small registration fee. Title could also be acquired

¹⁸ Damani Davis. "Exodus to Kansas." *Exodus to Kansas*, National Archives, 19 July 2017, www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2008/summer/exodus.html.

¹⁹ Act of May 20, 1862 (Homestead Act), Public Law 37-64, 05/20/1862; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.



The image above is a poster encouraging Exodusters to leave for Kansas.

²⁰ Ho for Kansas! Nashville, Tennessee, March 18, 1878. Copyprint of broadside. Historic American Buildings Survey, Prints and Photographs Division, (Washington: Library of Congress), 5-13.

after only a 6-month residency and trivial improvements, provided the claimant paid the government \$1.25 per acre.”²¹ The act was later amended to include a provision that any soldier that served in the Union Army could subtract the time he spent in the service from the residency restrictions. Since women were not able to claim this benefit, those that moved west found additional motivation to continue living their lives under the disguise of men. Entire towns were founded under the Homestead Act, but without savings or a safety net, one bad season was the difference between continued land ownership and having to sell your land to nearby Caucasian men who had some form of established collateral to safeguard their labors.

A portion of freedmen elected to follow the third option and continued to work for their old masters. William Ballard of Greenwood, South Carolina said that:

When freedom come, he told us we was free, and if we wanted to stay on with him, he would do the best he could for us. Most of us stayed, and after a few months, he paid wages. After eight months, some went to other places to work. The master always had a very big garden with plenty of vegetables. He had fifty hogs, and I helped mind the hogs. He didn't raise much cotton, but raised lots of wheat and corn. He made his own meal and flour from the mill on the creek; made home-made clothes with cards and spinning wheels.²²

²¹ Act of May 20, 1862 (Homestead Act), Public Law 37-64, 05/20/1862; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.

²² Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, 26.

The people who continued to work for their previous masters were eventually paid wages and were able to remain in, possibly, the only home they had ever known. The options to continue working for the ones who had once owned them were open to both men and women. The decision between continuing to remain in a close relationship to a master who could maintain the aptitude to perpetuate sexual assault or risk the unknown with limited to no skills was a decision that many African American women faced.

The ability to own land allowed for a transition from being seen as property to having control of one's own life. Being self-sufficient was a great incentive for the pilgrimage to the West. On plantations, working in the fields was considered to be in the masculine sphere. However, a large portion of African American women did. The remainder stayed firmly in the feminine sphere of occupational duties that surrounded childbearing, child rearing, and less physically demanding options such as cooking and cleaning. Prior to the end of the Civil War, slave men were sometimes loaned out in order to learn valuable skills, such as blacksmithing, providing additional training in skilled occupation that made their work more valuable. While women could make money by sewing, they could never hope to make the same as a man who was skilled in the trade of blacksmithing. The disparity between job opportunities due to lack of training and the societal

constraints on appropriate work based upon gender placed African American women at a distinct disadvantage once freed from slavery.

Wages

The difference in the wages earned per month by workers shows a disparity from the beginning of the Civil War. The disparity crosses both gender and racial lines. In the chart on the next page, the wages are depicted for both Confederate and Union armies, as well as, the wages for journalists, nurses, and spies during the war. The data shows a large gap between what African American and Caucasian soldiers were paid during the war but an even larger gap between what men and women were paid during the war. For example, Harriet Tubman served as a spy for the Union Army during the war and was supposed to be paid twenty-five dollars a month. In actuality, she was paid twenty dollars a month. Caucasian male spies were paid roughly two hundred dollars a month plus expenses. A male nurse made roughly twenty dollars and fifty cents per month while female nurses earned forty cents per day, roughly eleven dollars and twenty cents per month. For African American soldiers the pay was ten dollars a month minus three dollars a month for clothing which left a take-home pay of seven dollars a month. Maria Lewis had a light enough skin color to join the Caucasian cavalry unit so her monthly pay was roughly thirteen dollars a month.

The wage gap for the military between African American and Caucasian personnel was closed in part due to the actions of Private Sylvester Ray of the 2nd U.S. Colored Cavalry. Private Ray refused to sign for his pay because it was less than what his lighter-skinned counterparts were making for doing the same job and holding an equal rank to him. The recommendation of his superiors was for him to go to trial. However, later that same month Congress increased pay for African American soldiers and made the legislation retroactive.²³ Congress enacted the equal pay in June 1864. This action allowed for African American soldiers to claim the difference in what they were making and that of other soldiers since their initial time of enlistment.

Prior to the end of the Civil War, slaves were sometimes able to hire themselves out and pay a portion of those wages earned to their master. For unskilled labor, a slave could earn roughly one hundred dollars per year. However, for skilled labor they could earn up to five hundred dollars per year. By hiring themselves out, some were able to buy their way out of slavery.²⁴ The ability to hire oneself out for additional work was primarily restricted to men. The gap that is shown in the table continues in modern day where the earnings of "African American women ranges from 48 to 69 cents for every dollar paid to

²³ Roy Sylvester; Detachment Murster Role; Retroactive Pay; [Electronic Record]; Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group 94; (Washington: National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD).

²⁴ Charlotte Hodgeman. "Slave Labor." *BBC History Magazine*, April 4, 2011.

The Price of the Job: Average Pay Per Month

Occupation	Confederate	Union
Private	\$11.00	\$13.00
Corporal	\$13.00	\$13.00
Sergeant	\$17.00	\$17.00
First Sergeant	\$20.00	\$20.00
Quartermaster Sergeant	\$21.00	\$21.00
Sergeant Major	\$21.00	\$21.00
Second Lieutenant	\$80.00	\$105.50
First Lieutenant	\$90.00	\$105.50
Captain	\$130.00	\$115.50
Major	\$150.00	\$169.00
Lieutenant Colonel	\$170.00	\$181.00
Colonel	\$195.00	\$212.00
Brigadier General	\$301.00	\$315.00
Major General	\$301.00	\$457.00
Lieutenant General	\$301.00	\$748.00
General	\$301.00	
African American Privates	\$7.00	\$7.00
Male Nurses	\$20.50	\$20.50
Female Nurses	\$11.20	\$11.20
Male Reporters	\$12.50	\$12.50
Female Reporters	Not Paid	Not Paid
Caucasian man Spies	\$200.00	\$200.00
African American Female Spies	\$20.00	\$20.00

Sources: Albert A. Nofi, *A Civil War Treasury* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1995), 381-383; Alice P Stein. "Civil War Nurses." *America's Civil War* (Vienna, Va: World History Group, September 1999), 17-24; David H Weaver, and G. Cleveland Wilhoit. "A Portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work" *The American Journalist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 6; "Women Spies of the Civil War." *Smithsonian Magazine: Special Edition* (New York: Smithsonian, May 8, 2011), 12-18; Thomas Allen. "Intelligence in the Civil War." *Central Intelligence Agency* (Washington: Public Affairs Central Intelligence Agency, September 25, 2015), 17.

ability to develop a trade skill prior to gaining freedom allowed for higher wages to be obtained by African American men after the end of the Civil War. The wage Caucasian, non-Hispanic men.”²⁵ The wage gap can be traced back to the Civil War if not farther and shows a large disparity between the treatment of African American women and the rest of the population over time.

Pensions

At the conclusion of the Civil War, over two million veterans needed government assistance. Everyone who fought was affected by the war, having experienced emotional or physical trauma and in many cases both. The thing that most veterans needed upon returning home was economic assistance much like what had been provided to soldiers in the United States since the conclusion of the Revolutionary War. Due to a large number of veterans, a system did not exist to accommodate the request from everyone who had a right to access pension funds. There was not an expansive enough pension system so veterans and their dependents suffered. Those veterans who suffered the most were members of the Colored Regiments. When a system was finally constructed it required documentation that many African American veterans could not easily

²⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015, Geographies: All States within United States, Table B20017B: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2015 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months (Black or African American Alone). Retrieved 7 March 2017.

provide. African Americans who fought on the Union side during the war were immediately eligible for pensions. The process to obtain pensions required proof of combat service and hospitalization if they were requesting disability pensions.

There were several pension systems put in place after the war. Northern soldiers were covered under the federal system while Southern states had to create and fund their own pension system for their veterans. Like Caucasian male veterans, African American veterans on the Union side were also eligible for pensions from the very beginning. Eventually, women were also included both as widows and nurses. Orphaned children were also eligible for assistance although the process was daunting. Every category that people were placed under had its own set of eligibility rules and benefit that changed over time and affected politics on both sides of the Civil War.

For Union soldiers, the pension system was initiated in 1862. Soldiers who were disabled as a result of their service to the Union army were eligible for pension immediately after the war. The dollar amount a soldier received depended on their rank and their injury. Dependents of soldiers who were killed on duty were also eligible. A disabled private received just eight dollars per month. Pension amounts increased as the need to recruit soldiers to fight in the Civil War increased.

For widows, eligibility rules centered on the date of marriage and whether the widow had remarried. In the beginning, widows' pensions required that the

service member died in service. The widow had to have been married to him at the time of his death. She could not have remarried. As the rules for veterans changed, so did the rules for their widows to gain access to pensions when their spouse was disabled for any reason. Also, widows gained access to pension funds at the time of their husband's death regardless of whether an injury had occurred while in service during the war. In 1901, the laws changed again and one's widow became eligible for a pension even if she had remarried, so long as her second husband was also deceased. Congress remained opposed to allowing widows to gain access to pension funds if she had remarried and her new spouse still lived. The rules that were passed regarding a widow's decision to remarry decreased over time. Eventually, the government no longer opposed a widow whose spouse received an honorable discharge from service from receiving pension with the passage of the Increased Rate to Certain Widows Pensions for Certain Remarried Widows Act of September 8, 1916.²⁶

The pension system was not designed to require proof of race in order to gain access to funding. The system was designed, however, to create major hurdles for African American veterans who wished to access it. The records for the colored troops throughout the war and afterward were poorly kept, making it

²⁶ Chas E Fuller, and John W. Langley and Wm. N. Rucker. "Pensions and Increase of Pensions to Certain Soldiers and Sailors of the Civil and Mexican Wars, Ect." *United States Senate Committee on Finance*, 67th Congress 4th Session, www.finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/CONFRPT67-1304.pdf.

more difficult for these veterans to gain access to their records to prove service. In addition to proving a veteran's service the wives of African American veterans also had to provide proof of marriage. Many couples did not have marriage certificates. Marriage certificates were not issued to slaves so anyone who was married prior to the end of the Civil War while still enslaved could not provide proof of marriage while in service. Veterans and widows who wished to gain access to pension funds had a difficult time providing proof.

African American female soldiers of the Civil War faced all the challenges of their male counterparts and more. When one of these brave women applied for a pension it was almost guaranteed to be denied. The hurdle that could not be crossed is that they were women. Even if they invested the money into gaining the physical evidence and the doctors' visits and the signature of witnesses stating they were who they claimed to be, their claims were denied. It was highly unlikely that these soldiers would ever gain access to as much as a penny of pension funds. The reasons for denial included the claimant's name would not match the service name, there is no proof of marriage or relation that one is the soldier they claim to be unless they continue to live out the remainder of their lives under their male aliases.

Cathay Williams served in the Army and submitted a request for a pension on multiple occasions. Her pension applications were always rejected. Williams served in more than just the Civil War but was unable to gain access to pension

funds because she was a woman and could not clear the additional hurdles applied to her. No matter what proof she submitted, her application was consistently rejected with a request for further evidence.²⁷ Cathay Williams suffered from multiple medical conditions including diabetes and her doctors provided her with supporting evidence of their diagnoses. The medical records provided did nothing to sway the pension's committee's decision to deny Williams's claim.

On March 1, 1865, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs and the Militia, Senator Henry Wilson, introduced legislation to "incorporate a National Military and Naval Asylum for the relief of the totally disabled officers and men of the volunteer forces of the United States"²⁸ For veterans of the Civil War who were disabled, the option for African American women at this time was limited to being committed to an insane asylum for their final days if they had no family. The women who served in the army during the Civil War faced the fate of institutionalization much sooner than others.

²⁷ "Disapproved Pension Application File for Cathay Williams (AKA William Cathay), 38th U.S. Infantry Regiment, Company A (SO-1032593)." *Disapproved Pension Application File for Cathay Williams (AKA William Cathay), 38th U.S. Infantry Regiment, Company A.*

²⁸ Plante, Trevor K. "The National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers." *Prologue Magazine*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2004, www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2004/spring/soldiers-home.html.

(3-125.)

ORIGINAL INVALID CLAIM.

Soldier, Cathay Williams William Cathay
P. O., Trinidad Rank, Private
County, Las Animas Company, A
State, Colo. Regiment, 38th U.S. Infantry
Rates, \$ _____ per month, commencing _____

REJECTED.

Pensioned for _____

RECOGNIZED ATTORNEY.

Name, Charles and William B. King Fee, \$ _____, Agent _____ to pay.
P. O., Butte Articles filed _____, 18 _____

APPROVALS.

Approved for rejection for deafness. Repl. Jefferson, Examining.
Submitted for rep. Feb. 19, 1891
Rejection for deafness found to exist, and as
result of same.

Approved for rejection for deafness Repl. Med. Ref. for
rejection on the ground of from cause alleged since
no disability from alleged filing claim.
impaired hearing since
date of filing.
The question of disability is not now under
consideration in this case as it is a veteran medical fund.

Feb. 25, 1892 Legal Reviewer, Re-Review Feb. 27, 1892 Med. Reviewer, Med. Referee

IMPORTANT DATES.

Enlisted, Oct. 15, 1866 service from _____
 Mustered, _____, 1866, to _____, 1866, in _____
 Discharged, Oct. 14, 1866, after service not subsequent to _____
 Declaration filed June 19, 1891 Not in service since Oct. 14, 1866

BASIS OF CLAIM.

Alleges that she contracted deafness (on declaration filed June 19, 1891)
In supplemental declaration, filed Dec. 9, 1891, she alleges
that she contracted small pox at Ft. Union, N.M., Oct. 1866; that while
suffering from said disease she was exposed to strong light and noise
the result of which of small pox caused deafness

29

²⁹ "Disapproved Pension Application File for Cathay Williams (AKA William Cathay), 38th U.S. Infantry Regiment, Company A (SO-1032593)." Disapproved Pension Application File for Cathay Williams (AKA William Cathay), 38th U.S. Infantry Regiment, Company A.

Conclusion

In more than one case, women were caught in the act of cross-dressing to join the army during the Civil War. Often times they would simply be let go and their record destroyed or misplaced to save the enlisting officer the embarrassment of not being able to differentiate between a man and a woman. From that point African American women had few choices after leaving the regiment: enlisting in a different town, attempting to make their way in the world, or being institutionalized. African American women were institutionalized when they spoke of their enlistment or the time they served. There are multiple newspaper articles that tell of African American women or women with bronze skin who claim to have served in the army. The end result was almost always the same, with a line being written that stated the woman was now in the custody of an insane asylum pending an evaluation. The institutionalization of African American women will be discussed further in Chapter 4. The belief that women could serve in the military or would only enlist if they were insane, resulted in the imprisonment of women who made the claim that they enlisted.³⁰

The economic benefits for African American women to cross-dress in order to join the army were substantial. The wages offered were higher in any male station that women would attempt. The drastic difference between what a

³⁰ *Daily Bulletin*, March 2, 1865." *Women in the Ranks: Concealed Identities in Civil War Era North Carolina*, North Carolina Civil War Sesquicentennial, 2017, www.nccivilwar150.com/features/women/women.htm.

female nurse made and that of a male nurse shows an early example of the gender wage gap. The pay difference between soldiers who served in the Colored Regiments when compared to other regiments shows an origin of the racial wage gap. The additional cost of having to pay a fee for members of the Colored Regiments' uniforms out of their wages shows that strong racial prejudices existed in both Union and Confederate militaries. The retirement opportunities for those able to maintain their disguise long enough to access pension funds provided a level of security that other freed slaves, and specifically freed women, did not have a hope of matching. The risk involved in donning the guise of a man during the Civil War might result in any manner of death that befell their fellow soldiers or in the institutionalization of the discovered woman. Institutionalization would still result in food and lodging being provided for the women but would also put them in a state of captivity for an indefinite period if they were deemed insane. The wages, pensions, and retirement opportunities offered each African American woman who took the risk for an opportunity at self-sufficiency. While African American veterans often faced great challenges in gaining access to pensions and Old Soldier Homes, as time progressed approval rates increased. The economic opportunities for cross-dressing far outweighed the alternatives of remaining enslaved or impoverished.

Cathay Williams

In 1861, Cathay Williams, also known as William Cathay, was forced into a supportive role with the Union Army by the 8th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Union forces had occupied the area where she lived since summer and all slaves, including those that fled their masters for the protections offered by the Union Army, were now deemed contraband under the Confiscation Act of 1861 and 1862. The Confiscation Act allowed for armies to seize property in Confederate areas without regard to whether the property had been used in opposition to Union troops. The results of Congress passing these laws allowed for armies to confiscate slaves from their owners and force them into military supporting rolls. Cathay Williams and other slaves left their master's residence and moved to Jefferson City to gain access to assistance by Union troops who occupied the city. In essence, through the occupation of the area by the Union Armies, Cathay Williams had gained her freedom from enslavement when she left her master's plantation to travel to Jefferson City. Colonel William Plumber Benton, upon learning that she was once enslaved, deemed her contraband of war and subjected her to a new state of enslavement under the Confiscation Act.³¹ Cathay Williams rapidly went from slave to free woman and back into the confines of slavery. Williams's transition through multiple states was due, in part,

³¹ Phillip Thomas Tucker. *Cathy Williams : From Slave to Buffalo Soldier*. 1st pbk. ed. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2009), 31-35.

to racial prejudices held by high ranking military officers who were opposed to the recognition of African Americans as human beings rather than objects. This mentality resulted in a wage gap upon the creation of the Colored Regiments.

“When the war broke out and the United States Soldiers came to Jefferson City they took me and other colored folk with them...Colonel Benton was the officer that took us off.”³² Cathay Williams, one of many slaves impressed into serving the unit, was stereotyped into feminine roles during her time of forced servitude with the 8th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Williams’s original servile occupation was the designation of cook to the officers. She did not know how to cook when she was assigned this position and this led to her reassignment to the role of laundress to the officers. The assumption that Cathay Williams would know how to cook was due in part to her being a woman and in part to serving as a house slave to her masters, the Johnson Family. While her position on the plantation allowed her to remain inside, she was never given any training in the kitchen, much to the disappointment of Colonel Benton who endure multiple meals before Williams’s reassignment.³³

After the Civil War ended, Cathay Williams enlisted in the U.S. Army under the name of William Cathay in Independence, Missouri in 1866. Williams served

³² *Daily Times*, January 2, 1876; Pvt. Williams Cathay Service Records, RG 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³³ Tucker, *Cathy Williams : From Slave to Buffalo Soldier*, 37.

in one of the few Colored Regiments that existed after the conclusion of the Civil War. Williams's actions support the idea that newly freed women would see the positive opportunities of joining the army and that the benefits outweighed the negative. Cathay Williams's time as an impressed slave allowed her to view the benefits that soldiers gained and compare the soldiers' situation to her own. During her time of forced servitude, Williams's unit spent time under General William T. Sherman's command. During General Sherman's March to the Sea, in 1864, two cross-dressing women were identified. General Sherman quickly dismissed both of them from the service of the Union Army. After the war, this event served as inspiration to Williams in her pursuit to join the military.

Cathay Williams was denied a pension and died sometime between 1894 and 1900. "In poor health, nearly destitute, and stricken with diabetes, the tragic end almost certainly came for Cathay," who lies in an unmarked grave of which the whereabouts are unknown.³⁴ Cathay Williams dedicated a large portion of her life to military service, at times forced and other times voluntary, because she was a woman she was denied assistance that she desperately needed in order to prolong her life and to perhaps ensure her grave was properly marked.

Cathay Williams is one of many figures lost to history whose remains sleep in unmarked graves. Many of those who did not have the money needed to

³⁴ Tucker, *Cathy Williams : From Slave to Buffalo Soldier*, 15.

acquire a tombstone remain forgotten. Cathay Williams was a soldier in the military and a hero. While her whereabouts are unknown, she will not be forgotten as easily as others. The denial of Williams's rights to access pension funds is an example of the times. Her status as both a woman and African American made her ability to access funds nearly if not completely impossible. Today, Williams is honored as the first woman to join the army. While there were others before her, Williams's actions as a Buffalo Soldier earn her some distinction among the other women who fought for the United States. Williams is an example of not only the bravery of women who joined the military but also of the harsh conditions experienced by African Americans once they gained freedom during the Civil War. The ability to re-enslave African American citizen under the status of contraband prolonged the dehumanization of a portion of the population. Cathay Williams pushed back against being placed in the inhumane submissive roles of slave and contraband after the Civil War concluded by forging her own path as a woman and soldier by finally enlisting and serving as a Buffalo Soldier.

Chapter 3: Promotions, Politics, and Legal Standing

There were a variety of benefits for African American women who decided to cross-dress and join the military, including potentially gaining access to military promotions during the war. After the Civil War concluded, the brave women could decide to continue their charade and gain the ability to vote. The results of maintaining their masculine disguise after the war allowed for a select few women to gain access to the benefits of posing as male.

Many African American women continued in their military careers and spent a fair amount of time in the service after the conclusion of the Civil War and like Cathay Williams, they persevered in a realm that was taboo to females in order to obtain a better standard of living and access to valuable benefits. While most of the women who cross-dressed during the war exited the military at the conclusion of the Civil War in order to avoid further detection, those who remained continued to have steady wages and fairly consistent knowledge of where their next meal was coming from. The knowledge that they would constantly be fed was an incentive to stay with their military units when faced with an unknown future.

The decision then arose as to whether or not to maintain their disguise for some time after mustering out and reap the benefits associated with the masculine gender or to revert back to the feminine sphere and the constraints of

societal norms of the time. The ability to vote allowed men to have a voice in government and reconstruction long before their female counterparts. The favoring of a man over a woman in the legal system were also tempting incentives to remain in the assumed identity of being a man.

Promotions

The ability to gain power was limited for African Americans in the military during and for some time after the Civil War. Promotions were not frequently distributed to members of the Colored Regiments when compared to other regiments in the Army. The pay increases that were supposed to accompany an increase in rank had to be demanded by those in the Colored Regiments rather than issued with the processing of the promotion paperwork. Even after the Enrollment Act was passed by Congress in June 1864, African American soldiers still had to fight for equal pay with promotions as brevet promotions were passed with more frequency. A brevet promotion was a promotion for an act of bravery and given only in title and not in pay. In other units, the act would have earned a medal or a true promotion accompanied by a pay increase. In Colored Regiments the result was a higher rank without an increase in monetary benefits. There was also a greater scrutiny for promotions within Colored Regiments, which made it more difficult for the African American women who disguised themselves as men to pass undetected into the higher levels of command.

There is some evidence of women gaining promotions during the Civil War but there has yet to be an African American woman identified. The lack of identification could be due to African American woman maintaining their disguise after the Civil War ended or that anyone up for promotion was discovered and promptly discharged. The advantage that a higher rank would have provided to women and did provide to men was an increase in pay. Although originally the pay was still less than their Caucasian counterparts, when provided as deserved it was a hefty sum for the times. The added money would have provided for additional needs or been set aside to start a new life after the conclusion of the war in order.

African American soldiers were not only discriminated against with a pay disparity of thirteen dollars per month to ten dollars per month in favor of their lighter-skinned counterparts, but members of the Colored Regiments were expected to pay an additional fee for their uniforms. Members of the Colored Regiments were generally excluded from consideration for promotion to the rank of officer.

There have currently been roughly 120 commissioned officers identified who served in the Colored Regiments of the Union Army during the Civil War. Many more soldiers were given honorary titles by their troops that were not officially recognized. One such case is that of Colonel William H. Singleton of the First North Carolina Colored Infantry. Singleton was given the rank of Colonel by

Enrollment Act Poster

TO COLORED MEN!

FREEDOM,

Protection, Pay, and a Call to Military Duty!

On the 1st day of January, 1863, the President of the United States proclaimed Freedom to over THREE MILLIONS OF SLAVES. This decree is to be enforced by all the power of the Nation. On the 21st of July last he issued the following order:

PROTECTION OF COLORED TROOPS.

"WAR DEPARTMENT, ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, July 21."

"General Order, No. 233.

"The following order of the President is published for the information and government of all concerned:—

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, July 30.

"It is the duty of every Government to give protection to its citizens, of whatever class, color, or condition, and especially to those who are duly organized as soldiers in the public service. The law of nations, and the usages and customs of war, as carried on by civilized powers, permit no distinction as to color in the treatment of prisoners of war as public enemies. To sell or enslave any captured person on account of his color, is a relapse into barbarism, and a crime against the civilization of the age.

"The Government of the United States will give the same protection to all its soldiers, and if the enemy shall sell or enslave any one because of his color, the offense shall be punished by retaliation upon the enemy's prisoners in our possession. It is, therefore, ordered, for every soldier of the United States, killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved by the enemy, or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works, and continued at such labor until the other shall be released and receive the treatment due to prisoners of war.

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN."

"By order of the Secretary of War.

"E. D. TOWNSEND, Assistant Adjutant General."

That the President is in earnest the rebels soon began to find out, as witness the following order from his Secretary of War:

"WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON CITY, August 8, 1863.

"Sir: Your letter of the 24 inst., calling the attention of this Department to the cases of Orin H. Brown, William H. Johnston, and Wm. Wilson, three colored men captured on the gunboat Isaac Smith, has received consideration. This Department has directed that three rebel prisoners of South Carolina, if there be any such in our possession, and if not, three others, be confined in close custody and held as hostages for Brown, Johnston and Wilson, and that the fact be communicated to the rebel authorities at Richmond.

"Very respectfully your obedient servant,

"EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War.

"The Hon. GIDEON WELLES, Secretary of the Navy."

And retaliation will be our practice now—man for man—to the bitter end.

LETTER OF CHARLES SUMNER,

Written with reference to the Convention held at Poughkeepsie, July 15th and 16th, 1863, to promote Colored Enlistments.

BOSTON, July 13th, 1863.

"I doubt if, in times past, our country could have expected from colored men any patriotic service. Such service is the return for protection. But now that protection has begun, the service should begin also. Nor should relative rights and duties be weighed with nicety. It is enough that our country, aroused at last to a sense of justice, seeks to enrol colored men among its defenders.

"If my counsels should reach such persons, I would say: enlist at once. Now is the day and now is the hour. Help to overcome your cruel enemies now battling against your country, and in this way you will surely overcome those other enemies hardly less cruel, here at home, who will still seek to degrade you. This is not the time to hesitate or to hizzle. Do your duty to our country, and you will set an example of generous self-sacrifice which will conquer prejudice and open all hearts.

"Very faithfully yours,

"CHARLES SUMNER."

³⁵ To Colored Men: Freedom. January 1863. Black Soldiers in the U.S. Military During the Civil War, National Archives, Washington DC.

the men he recruited and trained. Between 1862 and 1863, Colonel Singleton recruited over one thousand volunteers for the Colored infantry. May 1863, Colonel Singleton's troop was accepted into the Army and Singleton was enlisted at the rank of First Sergeant of "G" Company, 35th US Colored Infantry of North Carolina.³⁶ The primary point that stunted the recognition and promotion of many African American soldiers was racial prejudice that was as strongly held in the North as in the South.

The disparity between the promotions of African American soldiers to officers was justified by claims that many did not have the same amount of experience to serve in the higher ranks as their Caucasian counter-parts. Among the few men to be promoted beyond the rank of private was Sergeant William Carney of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Sergeant Carney became the first African American to be awarded the Medal of Honor on July 18, 1863, for "most distinguished gallantry in action" during the attack on Fort Wagner, South Carolina. Sergeant Carney was shot in the thigh and then crawled uphill on his knees while carrying the Union flag to encourage the troops to continue advancing.³⁷ At the time of Sergeant Carney's actions, he was making less than

³⁶ "United States Commissioned Officers of African-American Descent Who Served During the Civil War." Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. Accessed June 10, 2017. <http://suvchw.org/mollus/usctofficers.htm>.

³⁷ William Carney; Medal of Honor [Electronic Record]; Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group 94; (Washington: National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD).

other members of the Union Army who held his rank. He was still making roughly six dollars less a month than those in non-colored regiments. In fact, his pay was not above that of a newly enlisted white private.

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Thomas Augusta was the highest ranking African American soldier in the Union Army during the Civil War. Lieutenant Colonel Augusta achieved his rank in 1865 before he was released from service in 1866. Augusta achieved the brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel for his outstanding service but did not receive the pay equal to his rank. He was the first of only eight African American men to gain the rank of Major in the Union Army. Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Thomas Augusta's tombstone is located in Arlington National Cemetery. The rank on his public records indicates that he only achieved the rank of Major though on his tombstone the rank of Lieutenant Colonel is listed.³⁸ This shows there is still a disparity today in recognizing African American soldiers' achievements during the Civil War because the records have not been updated to reflect the correct rank. The online records of Lieutenant Colonel Augusta, both through Arlington National Cemetery and the U.S. National Archives, shows the rank of Major. In refusing to fully recognize Lieutenant Colonel Augusta's proper rank his place in history is not being fully recognized.

³⁸ Michael Robert Patterson. "Alexander T. Augusta, Major United States Army Tombstone." Alexander T. Augusta, Major, United States Army. August 6, 2006. Accessed June 22, 2017, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/ataugust.htm>.

The disparity extends to African American females who cross-dressed in order to enlist. There are no known African American officers who served during the Civil War that were women in disguise. The increase in rank provided limited power to African American officers and in some cases that power was issued by the troops themselves in the form of honorary ranks that were not formally recognized. There was limited need for many regiments for the Union Army to recognize the ranks of their officers because a pay increase was not always given upon a promotion without a fight.

At the end of the Civil War, around 179,000 African American men served in the Army making up roughly ten percent of its ranks.³⁹ Only around 120 commissioned officers have been identified from Colored Regiments. That means that less than one out of every one thousand African American soldiers that joined the military during this time was promoted. For those who were promoted an increase in pay was not automatic. After the Enrollment Act passed, brevet promotions were used as a way to circumvent an increase in pay for African American soldiers. The benefits for those promoted had to be fought for in order to meet parity with their counterparts from other regiments. The scrutiny paid to men who achieved an officer rank made it highly unlikely any of the

³⁹ Elsie Freeman, Wynell Burroughs Schamel, and Jean West. "The Fight for Equal Rights: A Recruiting Poster for Black Soldiers in the Civil War." *Social Education* 56, 2 (February 1992), 118-120.

African American women who cross-dressed would have been able to achieve a higher rank without garnering too much attention and revealing their gender.

Political Position During Reconstruction

On December 6, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. On July 9, 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment established that all people who were born in the United States or naturalized were citizens. On February 3, 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment made it illegal for males to be denied the right to vote based on race or previous enslavement. The three Reconstruction amendments made it possible for millions of newly freedmen to vote and resulted in the election of African American representatives to various offices across the country. On February 25, 1870, Hiram Rhodes Revels was elected as a Senator for Mississippi. Senator Revels was the first African American Senator and served until March 1871. Revels had served as a chaplain to multiple regiments during the Civil War. After the conclusion of his term, he turned down multiple offers by President Ulysses S. Grant for various positions and chose instead to become President of Alcorn University.⁴⁰ Revels was able to win the Senate seat despite racial prejudice in Mississippi, taking a seat that had been vacant since the conclusion of the Civil War. He was a modestly educated man who was born

⁴⁰ "Revels, Hiram Rhodes." History, Art & Archives. Accessed June 23, 2017. [http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/REVELS,-Hiram-Rhodes-\(R000166\)/](http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/REVELS,-Hiram-Rhodes-(R000166)/).

free and was elected in a location where very few African American men had access to education. During the years prior to the Civil War, Revels traveled around the country studying academics and the Bible. Revels's education set him on the path to first become a preacher, then a chaplain, and eventually the first African American Senator. As a senator, Revels considered himself "a representative of the State, irrespective of color."⁴¹ His election shows that, with access to the right to vote and a voice in government, African Americans ensured that they would be heard as soon as the protections of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments were implemented.

Joseph Rainey was the first African American to serve in the House of Representatives. He was elected in 1870 and was born into slavery. Rainey was the first African American official to be elected by popular vote. Rainey stated on the House floor that "I tell you that the Negro will never rest until he gets his rights. We ask [for civil rights] because we know it is proper not because we want to deprive any other class of the rights and immunities they enjoy, but because they are granted to us by the law of the land."⁴² Rainey was soon followed into the House of Representatives by Jefferson Long of Georgia, who was sworn in one month after Rainey in January 1871. Rainey originally won sixty-three

⁴¹ *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 2nd sess. (16 March 1870): 1986–1988. For an indication of the number of African Americans in the gallery for Revels's maiden speech, see "By Telegraph," 15 March 1870, *Atlanta Constitution*, 2.

⁴² *Congressional Record*, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (3 March 1874): 2263.

percent of the vote and Long won in an area where the population was primarily white. Rainey and Long's success and education made them excellent choices for leadership during Reconstruction to push for equal rights after the Civil War. The fact that both Long and Rainey won in the South shows a desire for change among voting African American males. Long and Rainey both served their state but also made some broader pushes for equal rights. Long was the first African American to speak on the House floor.

The women who disguised themselves as men during the Civil War and remained in disguise after had access to the right to vote that other women did not. In maintaining their disguise they were able to vote freely until the era of Jim Crow laws. The ability to vote allowed the women in disguise to have their voices heard beyond simply writing to their Congressman or other elected officials. The ability to vote was not granted to women in the United States until August 18, 1920, with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. The inability to vote prior to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment provided a strong incentive for some women to continue with their charade beyond the conclusion of the Civil War in order to ensure that they would not be forced back into a role where they had no say in what their futures might hold.

Many laws were passed after the Civil War in an attempt to protect former slaves from retaliation by those that once called themselves their masters and to

Jefferson Franklin Long⁴³**Joseph Hayne Rainey⁴⁴****Hiram Rhodes Revels⁴⁵**

⁴³ "Long, Jefferson Franklin." History, Art & Archives. Accessed December 16, 2017. [http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/L/Long,-Jefferson-Franklin-\(L000419\)/](http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/L/Long,-Jefferson-Franklin-(L000419)/).

⁴⁴ "Rainey, Joseph Hayne." History, Art & Archives. Accessed December 16, 2017. [http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/Rainey,-Joseph-Hayne-\(R000016\)/](http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/Rainey,-Joseph-Hayne-(R000016)/).

⁴⁵ "Revels, Hiram Rhodes." History, Art & Archives. Accessed December 16, 2017. [http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/Revels,-Hiram-Rhodes-\(R000166\)/](http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/R/Revels,-Hiram-Rhodes-(R000166)/).

which ensured that all American citizens had the right to purchase, sell, or lease property.⁴⁶ The Civil Rights Act of 1870, also known as the First Ku Klux Klan Act, worked in part with the Fifteenth Amendment and gave both federal marshals and the Army a right to enforce it to ensure that all men had the right to vote. The Civil Rights Act of 1870 was followed a year later Civil Rights Act of 1871 which ensured that all elections fell under federal control and granted federal marshals the ability to ensure fair elections at polling locations. Two additional Civil Rights Acts were passed, one in 1871 and another in 1875 known as the Civil Right Act of 1875. After the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, no other major Civil Rights Acts were passed until 1957.⁴⁷ The lack of additional Civil Rights Acts after the ending of Reconstruction made way for the rise of the Jim Crow Era, which denied African Americans Civil Rights by using a variety of legal loopholes and illegal actions. The end of martial law in the southern states created a distinct shortage in law enforcement's ability to enforce the protective acts and a loss of incentive for those who did not wish to uphold the acts or abide

⁴⁶ "Constitutional Amendments and Major Civil Rights Acts of Congress Referenced in Black Americans in Congress | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives." Constitutional Amendments and Major Civil Rights Acts of Congress | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives. Accessed December 17, 2017. <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Constitutional-Amendments-and-Legislation/>.

⁴⁷ Constitutional Amendments and Major Civil Rights Acts of Congress Referenced in Black Americans in Congress | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives."

by them. The repercussions for not adhering to the laws that protected African Americans waned as troops left the South as Reconstruction ended.

The second African American to be seated in the Senate was Blanche Bruce of Mississippi in 1875, but there would not be another African American Senator to be elected to that body until 1967. The laws passed by states during the Jim Crow Era were successful in preventing the voices of African Americans from heard and excluding them from representation in public office. For a brief time after the Civil War, African American women who disguised themselves as men were able to have a voice in government through voting. The voice they gained by continuing their charade was limited when Reconstruction ended and the military's ability to enforce Congressional Laws on racial equality evaporated.

Education and Winning the Case

In the time following the Civil War, it was not uncommon for newly freed slaves to draw up suits and cases against former masters and their descendants. In Melissa Milewski's article, "From Slave to Litigant: African Americans in Court in the Postwar South, 1865-1920," she shows that within these cases between the end of the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction, roughly sixty-four percent of Civil Court cases between African American and Caucasian citizens were won

by the African American litigants.⁴⁸ The percentage dropped to fifty-five percent between 1878-1899 when Reconstruction ended. One-third of the civil court cases took place between two African American litigants. The decrease in court cases won was due to the rise of Jim Crow laws which limited African Americans' ability to exercise their rights in the political and judicial realms. Milewski states about the educational state of the African American litigants that:

The black litigants who turned to the courts in the weeks, months, and years after the Civil War often had little formal preparation for such endeavors. Even the African Americans who would be most successful in their legal journeys, eventually gaining a hearing of their cases before the highest state courts, usually had very little formal education: most signed their names on court documents with a solitary 'x'.⁴⁹

A benefit that joining the military granted to African American women was that of somewhat restricted education and trade skills that would help in learning to navigate the world after the Civil War ended. After the conclusion of the war, being a woman would not immediately ensure that you would lose a court case against your male opposition. However, women's rights were still very limited during this time and education was rarer for females than males.

⁴⁸ Melissa Milewski. "From Slave to Litigant: African Americans in Court in the Postwar South, 1865—1920." *Law and History Review* 30, no. 3 (2012), 723-69.
<http://www.jstor.org.winthropuniversity.idm.oclc.org/stable/23489550>.

⁴⁹ Milewski, "From Slave to Litigant: African Americans in Court in the Postwar South, 1865—1920," 728.

Joining the military allowed the select few women who chose to cross-dress to be in a better position at the end of the war to be able to afford legal counsel. The women who followed the path of joining the military would also have a better understanding of the rights they had when compared to their civilian counterpart, who remained in the same area and did not receive an education due to racial discrimination. Many prejudice people had the desire to continue taking advantage of African Americans after the war ended but that became more difficult with the expansion of knowledge and African Americans gaining a greater understanding of their rights as citizens of the United States.

On March 3, 1865, Congress passed the Freedmen's Bureau Act which was meant to ensure that food, shelter, supplies, and land was provided to newly freed African Americans and other displaced people.

The Freedmen's Bureau assisted in providing educational opportunities to African American by assisting in hiring teachers and providing school supplies.⁵⁰

Harriet Beecher Stowe stated in an interview that the Freedmen's Bureau "rushed not to the grog-shop but to the schoolroom--they cried for spelling books as bread and pleaded for teachers as a necessity of life."⁵¹ The demand for education was quickly met after the end of the war. Segregated schools opened,

⁵⁰ Anderson, James D Anderson. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 17, 2017), 4.

⁵¹ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 5.

and overcrowding was standard as those locations where African American's had been denied formal learning all their lives finally granted access.

The expansion of education to newly freed slaves allowed for all to gain a better understanding of the world in which they lived. The schools were poorly funded and staffed compared to those of their Caucasian counterparts, but still provided basic formal education to those who wished to learn. Education provided a gateway into better understanding for the new generation in order to challenge societal norms and attempt to invoke change later in life. The education that was provided to members of the military was limited and specialized to the soldier's assigned task and necessary military training in order to win a battle. Chances for a formal education later in life, while an asset to those who chose to pursue it, and did not compensate for the trade skills that the army taught soldiers in the way of basic survival skills.

Conclusion

The ability to gain power during and after the Civil War was limited for African American men and nearly nonexistent for African American women. Promotions and the increase in pay that accompanied them were beyond the reach of a female African American to match at the height of her earning capabilities. The ability to hold a political office was reserved for men and the right to vote was denied to women, making their ability to have their voices heard

after being freed from enslavement still very difficult. The court system did not favor male above female but education opportunities tended to lean towards males.

The benefits that were gained by African American women when they cross-dressed expanded beyond the economic sphere and into the realm of politics. The fact that during the Reconstruction Era multiple African American men were elected to office shows not only a desire for change but also the utilization of the right to vote by many African American men. In the North, no such officials were elected until well into the twentieth century while the South produced a semi-steady stream of African American members to the House of Representatives. The ability to vote or to have a chance in being elected to a public office was a temporary incentive for women to continue their disguise. The ability to purchase land and possibly gain a pension in order to have their voices be heard for the direction they wanted their lives and the country to head was an incentive to disguise oneself and enlist.

Brevet promotions were scarce in the Colored Regiments of the Civil War and being given honorary promotions by one's troop was more common. There was a struggle that occurred for African American officers to receive an increase in pay equal to others of their station and the act of granting brevet promotion was one way that higher officials got around paying the additional amounts after the passing of the Enrollment Act in June 1864. The educational opportunities

that were supported by the Freedmen's Bureau allowed for the slaves that were denied any kind of education to learn about some of their rights.

Prior to the end of slavery, it was illegal for slaves to be educated. The few that were, quickly rose to the forefront in the organization of Civil Rights activities during the Reconstruction Era by running for office. The information they gained prepared those that went on to file Civil Court cases against others in their community where they win frequently during the Reconstruction Era.

The political benefits that were gained by African American women who chose to maintain their disguise after the conclusion of the war was primarily the right to vote and own land. The denial of African American women's right to vote and own land forced them to remain in a state of dependency rather than self-sufficiency. The inability to own land hindered African American women's ability to move away from their former masters and generate a new life for themselves.

Margaret Torry

Margaret Torry revealed herself to be a woman after her husband died at the battle of Bentonville which occurred two months before the Tri-Weekly News printed a newspaper article about her arrest on March 19-21, 1865. Margaret Torry was sent to a hospital for further evaluation. Once a woman's true gender was discovered and revealed in the military during the Civil War, the possibilities were for her to be let go without punishment or to be sent to a hospital to be institutionalized. Margaret Torry was sent to a hospital and her situation was not an uncommon one for women who cross-dressed to join the military. The belief that women had to be insane and mentally unstable to cross into the traditionally masculine sphere of combat military roles was one of the justifications for preventing women from enlisting in the military.

Margaret Torry did what many women during the Civil War did by following their husbands into the military to remain close to them. The alternative was to become a camp follower and sit by during battles hoping their husband, son or brother would return alive. By enlisting, Margaret Torry was there during the battle, beside her husband and in a better position to help him when he needed assistance rather than

IMPORTANT ARREST—A young soldier was arrested here yesterday on suspicion of being a female, and she admitted she was. She gave her name as Margaret Plyde, and says she is from Union county, in this State, and has been nine months in the army. We learn she was sent to a hospital for further examination.—*Raleigh Progress*.

The Raleigh Conservative gives the following account of this female soldier:

Mrs Margaret Torry, alias Charley Mills, of Co. D, Jeff Davis Legion, Butler's Cavalry Division, came to this city on Wednesday last as one of the guards to some of the prisoners sent up. She is 20 years of age, has good features, bronzed skin, dark eyes and short hair. She states that 10 months ago she married, and one month thereafter she joined the command of her husband, and has been on duty since that time, has been in all the fights, was never sick or absent from duty. Her husband was killed in the battle of Bentonville, and having no longer any inducement to remain in the army, she now made known her sex and wished to return to her home in Union county, N. C. Her maiden name was Plyler. She is a native of Lancaster District, S. C.

⁵² "Important Arrest" *The Tri-weekly news*. (Winnsboro, S.C.), 06 May 1865. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.
<<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026922/1865-05-06/ed-1/seq-2/>>.

everyday washing clothes and cooking back at camp in a more traditional feminine role. Torry was unable to save her husband's life and after the traumatic loss, she could no longer justify continuing her masquerade in the military service. Torry revealed herself to be a woman to her superior officer, and once her gender identity was known, she was promptly dismissed from her role in the military under the male alias of Charley Mills to return home to Lancaster District in South Carolina.

Torry did not keep silent about her escapades in the army and for that reason, her sanity and mental stability were challenged by the community and she was quickly institutionalized.⁵³ Her story served as a warning of what would happen to women who told of their experiences with cross-dressing to enlist and explains why many never came forward with their experiences. In leaving the feminine sphere, the women who cross-dressed to serve in the military opened themselves up to physical harm on the battlefield and emotional harm through the possibility of institutionalization if they spoke of their experience. All the women who fought during the Civil War will never be identified due to the destruction of records, rapid burials of the dead, and a fear that speaking out about their experiences while they were alive could result in institutionalization or being ostracized by members of their home community.

⁵³ "Important Arrest" *The Tri-weekly news*. (Winnsboro, S.C.), 06 May 1865. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026922/1865-05-06/ed-1/seq-2/>>.

Margaret Torry is an important figure in history. Her story shows not only why some women enlisted but also what happened to those that shared their story. Margaret Torry had no one to protect her or assist her once her husband died. Once she began her journey home she shared her story. As a result, she was forced into an insane asylum where she was most likely treated harshly in an effort to cure her of a perceived madness. The risk that many women took in joining the military did not end when they mustered out but continued to follow them so long as they lived. The repercussions of their brave actions would be viewed by many of their era as signs of madness. Instead of being honored for their service the brave women who enlisted would be committed to an insane institution to undergo harsh conditions and procedures all in the name of fixing them. The conditions of insane asylums were not temporary but a permanent fixture. Without the assistance of someone outside of the asylum, one could easily remain there for the rest of their lives. Margaret Torry was proud of her time in the service and the reason why she was travelling alone. She told of both her and her husband's brave actions, the repercussions of which were institutionalization because she broke social norms in enlisting prompting the assumption that she must be mentally ill and in need of medical evaluation.

Chapter 4: The Risk

When it was revealed that a soldier was a woman, rumors quickly spread throughout the camp. Questions rapidly arose and speculation ran rampant among the unit. Who was she? Why did she join? Is she insane? The answers to these questions were often never answered fully to the satisfaction of the camp community. The answer that is known today is that many went home, reenlisted in a different unit, switched jobs to become spies or nurses, or were institutionalized.

The South Carolina Lunatic Asylum broke ground in 1822 and was completed in 1828. From October 1864 to February 1865 the courtyard of the Asylum held Union officers who were prisoners of war. The South Carolina Lunatic Asylum received applications from African American patients, both free and enslaved since it opened.⁵⁴ The asylum remained open throughout the war, housing both patients and citizens of Columbia when Sherman's army passed through. Asylums, like the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum, held the women who were sent by communities to be evaluated upon the discovery of the women's cross-dressing ways. Once the women were discharged from the military on the

⁵⁴ John S Hughes. "Labeling and Treating Black Mental Illness in Alabama, 1861-1910." *The Journal of Southern History* 58, no. 3 (1992): 435-60. doi:10.2307/2210163.

grounds of sex incompatibility of military standards their journey home began and in some cases ended in an insane asylum.

The fear of it being exposed as one who cross-dressed to join the military did not dissipate after leaving the military or after mustering out with one's true sex undetected. Lisa Tendrich Frank, in her book, *Women in the American Civil War*, tells of one case where a seventy-year-old Civil War Veteran was institutionalized when her sex came to light. Frank states that:

The female identity of Cashier was not discovered after he mustered out of the army. Injured in an accident in 1911 and discovered by a physician who treated her, Cashier's secret was not revealed by the doctor or by the senator for whom she worked. In addition, once the news of Cashier's sex became general knowledge, her former comrades in arms maintained a loyal and somewhat protective response. Forced by her true identity to finally become a woman, the state of Illinois placed Jennie in the women's wing of the mental hospital at the age of seventy. The state also determined that Jennie should look the part and dress as a woman. Unaccustomed to the female attire, she had worn men's clothes her entire adult life, she tripped, fell, and broke her hip, an injury from which she never recovered.⁵⁵

Albert Cashier, also known as Jennie Rodgers, shows that women did continue to live their lives under the guise of being men after the Civil War. Cashier's story also shows the repercussions of being found out even with the support of the

⁵⁵ Lisa Tendrich Frank. *Women in the American Civil War, Volume 1*. Vol. 1. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 28.

members of one's past regiment and a senator. The fear of being forced into a mental institution was grounded in real life experience.

The abuses that took place in insane asylums during the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century are well documented both in historic medical journals and photographic records. The instruments used to subdue and attempt to rehabilitate patients were painful and ineffective. The instruments used include "bleeding lancets, straitjackets, Utica cribs, and tranquilizing chairs which delivered electric shocks and streams of hot and cold water."⁵⁶ To be discovered was to risk being tortured in the name of maintaining separate masculine and feminine spheres. The ideology that a woman would only go into combat because she was insane was rooted in the belief that to join the military and fight for any cause was a man's place while women were supposed to remain home and take care of the children.

The Utica Crib was designed so that the patient was locked inside. Once secured, the patient sometimes was hoisted into the air to be rocked much like a cradle. There are multiple instances of patients dying while confined to the Utica Crib. The possibility of living out one's life confined to a small box or unable to leave an asylum was more than enough to silence those who reverted back to the feminine sphere after the war.

⁵⁶ Andrew Scull. *Contemporary Sociology* 25, no. 5 (1996): 695-97.
<http://www.jstor.org.winthropuniversity.idm.oclc.org/stable/2077606>. (Accessed November 8 2017).

The inhumane treatments of many who were institutionalized was not a private affair. Many asylums in the United States were open for the public to come and tour. The tours were often orchestrated to be more like a carnival sideshow, displaying the mentally ill as unfamiliar, strange, and inhuman beings rather than people. Janet Miron writes in her book, *Prisons, Asylums, and the Public: Institutional Visiting in the Nineteenth Century*, that “those that engaged in institutional tourism were from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds that transcended the lines of gender, ethnicity, class, and age.”⁵⁷ When one was institutionalized they were treated poorly and belittled to less than human. Privacy became a thing of the past once they was placed in an asylum where their history was then put on display not only inside a chart for the doctors that treated them but also in newspapers and tour guides.

Miron claims that among those that visited Asylums “no trace of black visitors were found in historical record.”⁵⁸ The reason behind the lack of representation of African Americans in records kept of visitations to insane asylums is unknown. The causes could be anywhere from unkempt records to racially prejudiced actions barring African Americans from gaining entrance to the institutions. The ramification of the lack of African Americans visiting insane

⁵⁷ Janet Miron. *Prisons, Asylums, and the Public : Institutional Visiting in the Nineteenth Century*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2011), 58.

⁵⁸ Miron, *Prisons, Asylums, and the Public : Institutional Visiting in the Nineteenth Century*, 60.

asylums for the women that cross-dressed that were caught and then institutionalized is that they were unable to gain assistance from members of their regiment who accepted their actions and served alongside them. Without an outside advocate, the women of lower socioeconomic status who were sent to insane asylums against their will had little to no hope of being able to be released quickly if ever.

The risk to the African American women who cross-dressed during the Civil War coming forward after the conclusion of the war could have resulted in a variety of responses from their community ranging from disbelief and ostracization, to forced institutionalization. The benefits to African American women who decided to remain in their disguise as men carried the constant risk of ending up in the bleak environment of an insane asylum, while for those who reverted back to the feminine sphere, there was a decreased likelihood of being institutionalized provided their escapades in cross-dressing never came to light.

Contraband Camps

In the event of capture, members of the Colored Regiments faced an added challenge that they would not necessarily go to a prisoner of war camp but rather be labeled as contraband of war and end up residing in even worse conditions that a member of the other regiments would have. Contraband camps grew to hold not only members of the Colored Regiments but also held slaves

who had fled from the South or who had abandoned by their masters, such as in the case of Cathay Williams. The result was that those placed in the Contraband camps ended up being re-enslaved and forced to labor in various positions. In the North, there are multiple examples of members of the Contraband Camps being used to support the Union cause through the construction of forts, as well as, through less labor intensive positions, such as cooks. When African American troops enlisted in the military as part of their enlistment they were freed from slavery. Contraband camps countered that by labeling the African American population as property of the Confederacy and putting them to work. Labeling the members of the Colored Regiments as property denied African American soldiers the same protections as prisoners of war.

On February 5, 1864, Major W. G. Sargent received a report that stated that the population of the Contraband camp located at White River were experiencing bleak conditions:

cabins consist of an incongruous assemblage of miserable huts no attempt having been made towards introducing any system whatever. Their floors are on or quite near the ground. They have no windows and are only lighted by holes in the roofs consequently in rainy weather most of their seamy bedding is wet. Their floors are damp and no wonder that from their little community they have already furnished one hundred and sixteen subjects for the graveyard notwithstanding quite a number had been sent off sick.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ A. W. Hearlan's report, "Condition of the Camp at the Mouth of White River and of abandoned disloyal land in that vicinity and suggestions," is found among the Retained Copies of Reports, Reports Received, and Miscellaneous Papers 1864–1865. The records have been reproduced as the *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees*,

Many members of the camp located at White River had been impressed into the Army, leaving behind women and children with very few options to make a living in the bleak environment of the camp. Even with the assistance provided by the government, a lot of necessities were missing from the lives of people who resided in the Contraband Camps. The death toll was high in part because of the few supplies that were provided to cover a large number of people and the infrequency with which it was provided. While the prisoner of war camps had high death rates in both the North and the South, the possibility of re-enslavement would have dissuaded African American women from cross-dressing to join the military. The threats that were faced by African American soldiers were greater than that of members of other military units. The threats faced by African American women who cross dressed to serve in the military were even greater than other members of Colored Regiments.

Death

The greatest risk the African American women took in donning their disguises and joining the military during the Civil War was that of facing death.

Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1901, roll 16), Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group (RG), 105.

Causes of death ranged from wounds acquired on the battlefield to dysentery before ever setting foot in a combat environment. Elsi Freeman states in her article, "The Fight for Equal Rights: A Recruiting Poster for Black Soldiers in the Civil War," that "by the end of the Civil War, roughly 179,000 black men (10% of the Union Army) served as soldiers in the U.S. Army and another 19,000 served in the Navy. Nearly 40,000 black soldiers died over the course of the war—30,000 of infection or disease."⁶⁰ The likelihood of a member of the Colored Regiments dying was higher than other regiments which added an additional layer of risk to those women who cross-dressed to join the military. The number of deaths estimated to have occurred during the Civil War is shown as being too low and as the number of overall casualties from the war rises so does the percentage of members of the Colored Regiments that died out of those that enlisted. Based on Freeman's numbers, twenty-two percent of African Americans who enlisted perished and of the members of Colored Regiments who died, seventy-five percent passed away because of disease or infection. The percentage of deaths that occurred when compared to a total number of enlisted personnel in the Colored Regiments is much higher than that of other regiments. The conservative estimate of the number of soldiers who died during the Civil War is around 625,000. The number accrues from the start of the Civil War in

⁶⁰ Elsie Freeman, Wynell Burroughs Schamel, and Jean West. "The Fight for Equal Rights: A Recruiting Poster for Black Soldiers in the Civil War," 119.

1861 to the conclusion in 1865. The first Colored Regiment, the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, was formed on July 18, 1863, twenty-two months before the conclusion of the war.⁶¹

The Civil War lasted a total of forty-nine months. Colored Regiments existed for roughly forty-five percent of the war. The men who served in Colored Regiments made up roughly ten percent of the Union and Confederate armies. Six percent of total casualties for the war came from Colored Regiments, which means that each month that the Colored Regiments were active they lost roughly 1,818 men on average. All the other regiments lost 12,449 men roughly per month when calculated over the course of the entire war. The total loss to the militaries by these conservative calculations is roughly 14,267. For the twenty-two months that the Colored Regiments were engaged in Civil War, they made up roughly 12.7 percent of casualties on average while making up only 10 percent of the military. The risk of death was statistically higher in Colored Regiments than in any other regiment.

Seventy-five percent of deaths in Colored Regiments occurred due to disease or infection. Glenna R. Schroeder-Lein states in her book *The Encyclopedia of Civil War Medicine* that “because Civil War doctors did not know about bacteria, they sometimes used their antiseptics and disinfectants less

⁶¹ "Shaw Memorial Commemoration of the First Unit of African-American Soldiers to Fight for the Union in the Civil War." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 14 (1996): 131. <http://www.jstor.org.winthropuniversity.idm.oclc.org/stable/2962854>.

effectively. For example, physicians often waited until a wound infection developed before treating it with antiseptics.”⁶² The Civil War provides many examples of less than sanitary medical practices, such as the failure to sanitize surgical equipment, which is due in part to a lack of research being tested and confirmed paired with the lack of information being easily accessible to the masses.

Robert F. Reilly writes in his article “Medical and surgical care during the American Civil War, 1861–1865” that “three of every four surgical procedures performed during the war were amputations. Each amputation took about 2 to 10 minutes to complete. There were 175,000 extremity wounds to Union soldiers, and about 30,000 of these underwent amputation with a 26.3% mortality.”⁶³ The lack of proper sanitary procedures created an environment perfect for the spreading of disease across large groups of people. Infections were treated only after they occurred rather than with preventive measures. The lack of sterilization of medical instruments between amputation procedures created an easy access point for the spread of infection. The wound of one soldier could easily become infected due to the unhygienic actions of the surgical personnel in the high patient volume situation in the aftermath of a battle.

⁶² Schroeder-Lein, Glenna R. *The Encyclopedia of Civil War Medicine*. London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2015.

⁶³ Reilly, Robert F. “Medical and Surgical Care during the American Civil War, 1861–1865.” *Proceedings (Baylor University. Medical Center)* 29.2 (2016), 138–142.

W. W. Keen wrote in his article "Military Surgery 1861-1918" that during the Civil War "we used undisinfected instruments from undisinfected plush-lined cases, and still worse, used marine sponges which had been prior pus cases and had only been washed in tap water. If a sponge or instrument fell on the ground it was washed and squeezed in a basin of tap water and used as if it were clean."⁶⁴

Various diseases were listed by doctors as cause of death in addition to infection. The most common diseases that plagued both the Union and Confederate camps were typhoid, measles, malaria, smallpox, and pneumonia. All of these diseases are easily spread among large populations. Dysentery and other diseases spread rapidly once introduced to camp when water supplies that were contaminated with the disease was paired with the unsanitary living conditions of the average soldier. The ease with which disease was spread made it difficult for a member of the military to ever fully recover before being exposed to another disease. The lack of recovery time paired with unsanitary medical practices made the possibility of being exposed to one or more diseases rise if one was injured on the battlefield.

Typhoid fever was another major disease that swept through both Union and Confederate camps. Typhoid fever is accompanied by a rose-colored

⁶⁴ W. W. Keen. "Military Surgery in 1861 and in 1918." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 80 (1918): 11-22.
<http://www.jstor.org.winthropuniversity.idm.oclc.org/stable/1013902>, 14.

speckled rash and a fever over one hundred and three degrees, in addition to the loss of appetite and stomach pains.⁶⁵ Typhoid fever is highly contagious and there was no known treatment for it during the Civil War. Shauna Devine states in her article "Learning from the Wounded: The Civil War and the Rise of American Medical Science" that "by 1864 the fatality rates for typhoid fever were still a staggering 60 percent."⁶⁶ In the event that typhoid fever was not fatal, there was still a barrage of diseases to work in sync to kill the soldier with a weakened immune system.

Malaria was frequently responsible for the death of troops during the Civil War. The disease, which is spread through exposure to contaminated blood, traveled from victim to victim through improperly sanitized surgical equipment and mosquitoes. The symptoms associated with Malaria include fever, nausea, vomiting, and both sweats and chills.⁶⁷ Malaria is caused by a parasite, and while one can recover without treatment, that rarely occurs. During the Civil War if a member of the military contracted Malaria they would most likely be dead within two weeks.

Dysentery was a constant threat even before troops saw combat.

⁶⁵ "Typhoid Fever." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. May 12, 2016. Accessed January 09, 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/typhoid-fever/symptoms.html>.

⁶⁶ Shauna Devine. "Learning from the Wounded: The Civil War and the Rise of American Medical Science" (University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

⁶⁷ "Malaria." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. October 07, 2015. Accessed January 09, 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/malaria/about/disease.html>.

The risk of death was present from the time of enlistment. The cause of dysentery is most commonly attributed to the *Campylobacter* infection or a different infection known as the Shigellosis. Those that suffered from the *Campylobacter* infection experienced bloody diarrhea, abdominal pains, fever, nausea, and vomiting. A *Campylobacter* infection is a form of food poisoning when the symptoms present themselves within days of exposure.⁶⁸ Shigellosis symptoms are very close to that of *Campylobacter*, however, Shigellosis is additionally spread through contact with contaminated water or coming into contact with the stool of someone who was exposed.⁶⁹ The poor sanitation standards meant that once a member of the kitchen crew was infected the diseases had an easy path to the rest of the regiment. Disease rather than combat was the cause of death for the majority of the lives lost during the Civil War.

Conclusion

The risk posed to African American women who cross-dressed during the Civil War included the same risk that any other soldier would face but with additional perils. The risks of injury or death by disease existed for all troops

⁶⁸ "*Campylobacter (Campylobacteriosis)*." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. October 02, 2017. Accessed January 09, 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/campylobacter/symptoms.html>.

⁶⁹ "Shigella – Shigellosis." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. July 25, 2017. Accessed January 09, 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/shigella/symptoms.html>.

during the Civil War. The additional risk of being placed in a Contraband Camp and viewed as more expendable by a high-level officer was the cost of joining a Colored Regiment. The risk of being placed in an Insane Asylum to spend the remainder of one's day in an abusive environment as a spectacle for tourist lay solely with the women who decided to don the disguise of men and join the military. All of these risks were taken by the select few African American women who enlisted under an alias in order to fight for both the Confederate and Union militaries.

As mentioned earlier, the insane asylums of the nineteenth century were abusive environments where patients were forced to receive experimental treatment, often without consent from the closest living relative. Patients were strapped to chairs or beds and went long durations of time without being able to freely move. Patients were treated with a variety of methods from strange concoctions that had no scientific basis for possibly curing the perceived sickness to shock therapy and hydrotherapy session which inflicted pain upon the patients in an attempt to change their behavioral patterns. Without the assistance of someone outside the Asylums walls, the possibility of ever being able to escape the daily torture was miniscule short of convincing the doctors one was no longer insane or dying a most likely excruciating death alone.

The Contraband Camps were a double-edged sword to the slaves that fled the South in hopes of finding sanctuary in the North. Provisions and

necessities were provided, though scarcely, and living conditions were poor. With harsher winter, the death tolls in these camps skyrocketed. Both men and women who resided in the Contraband Camps were forced to serve the Union troops in a variety of way in order to assist in the war effort. Eventually, minimal wages were provided to compensate for the work done. The poor living conditions made the already rough lives of the African American populations that resided in Contraband Camps even harsher as families were torn apart when young men were forced into joining the military and women were forced to serve in non-combative roles. The decision to take on these roles did not lie with the African American men and women but rather with high ranking officials in the Union and Confederate military. The Union Army took advantage of those most vulnerable during the Civil War as the social and economic structure of the entire country began to change rapidly. Those that were displaced by the war with nowhere else to go were put to work doing jobs that in some cases they were not trained to do and did not understand fully what was expected of them in order to be successful in that position. When Cathay Williams was unable to serve as a cook she was reassigned to the role of a laundress. It is not outside the realm of possibility that if a man assigned to the role of carpenter proved to be inadequate he would be assigned to the new role of a soldier.

Nearly every soldier that served in the Union or Confederate military was exposed to diseases at one time or another during the Civil War. No camp was

without someone dying either from a wound or an illness they contracted through contaminated water or unsanitary living conditions. The result was a long list of names paired with the symptoms and doctor's notes on their experienced and the best guess the doctor could give for the cause of death. Many of the diseases experienced involved the stomach pains, nausea, and vomiting. The death of those who passed from disease was not quick nor was it painless and the number of deaths that occurred as a result of the Civil War is still up for debate as the estimated number rises as more records are uncovered and examined.

The African American women who chose to risk their lives by disguising themselves to take on combat roles did so knowing that many people were dying in the military from the repercussions of battle and disease. The risk of forced servitude was something that all members of the Colored Regiments were aware of, but the risk of institutionalization simply for choosing to fight was a risk only faced by the women who enlisted. The risk when weighed against the benefits were too great for many women but a select few made the decision to fight regardless the consequences.

Lucy Berington

Lucy Berington enlisted in the Union Navy in January 1864 and died a few months later when she contracted smallpox. The hospital that Lucy Berington served at was the United States Naval Hospital located in New Bern, North Carolina. Lucy Berington was forty-five years old when she joined the Navy and enlisted as a wash-boy. In exchange for enlisting Lucy Berington gained access to food and shelter in addition to her wages she received. Her pay was roughly seven dollars per month, much like the rest of the African American members of the military for most of the Civil War. Lucy Berington died not by serving in a combat role but in a servile occupation washing clothes.⁷⁰

The death Lucy Berington experienced was not a gentle passing. The initial signs of smallpox is a high fever, body aches, and occasional vomiting followed by a rash all over the body. The virus is spread through contact with an infected person's bodily fluid such as mucus from a cough or sneeze. As the laundress for the hospital, Lucy Berington was constantly exposed to all the diseases that passed through the hospital by coming into contact with the soiled

⁷⁰ Lisa Y. King. "In Search of Women of African Descent Who Served in the Civil War Union Navy." *The Journal of Negro History* 83, no. 4 (1998): 302-09. doi:10.2307/2649029. Accessed November 7, 2017.

sheets and gowns of the patients, both those who recovered and those who did not. During the time she was enlisted in the Navy, Lucy Berington would have seen first-hand the decline of patients in the hospital and their fate. In seeing this she would have known when she became ill what was going to happen to her and how her disease would most likely progress. Lucy Berington survived months in the military before succumbing to disease and leaving this world. The tale of her death is not rare for the time of the Civil War but the fact that she enlisted as an African American woman in the Navy at a time when women were forbidden from enlisting in the military in any capacity is rare.

The information available on Lucy Berington is limited. Her origins are unknown. The name she went by prior to enlisting, if different from the one she chose of Lucy Berington, is unknown. The information available surrounding the life of Lucy Berington is largely a mystery that has yet to be uncovered. The wages that Lucy Berington earned could have been her incentive for enlisting, though at a time when laundress contracted by the Navy made roughly fifty cents a day, racial prejudices may have prevented her from obtaining work via that route. Berington's superiors may have known she was female when she enlisted and chose to ignore the fact in order to pay her less than a contracted laundress. By donning a disguise and enlisting she was able to ensure that she would have consistent work, food, shelter, and clothing. Lucy Berington also had the protection of the Union Navy in the event that anyone tried to claim her as a

runaway slave or contraband. In dressing as a man she was able to further hide from anyone in her past who she chose to avoid. When someone from her past would seek out a forty-five year old female all they would find was a wash-boy cleaning laundry.

Lucy Berington's role in the military is a complex one. Lucy Berington sought the security offered by a steady paycheck even though it was less than what she would have made as an independent contractor laundress. Berington died in harsh conditions for the security of a steady job and knowing where her next meal was coming from. The job that Lucy Berington did was dangerous though that was not acknowledged at the time. Her constant exposure to smallpox made it not a question of if she would become sick but when. Lucy Berington's service earned her a proper burial and a tombstone but she was not given one. Like Cathay Williams, Lucy Berington lies in an unmarked grave in New Bern, North Carolina. Her life and death have been reduced to a few newspaper articles on the scandal of a woman in the Navy rather than the bravery it took to enlist or the security that joining the military offered to a single African American woman in the nineteenth century. The risks that she took in enlisting in the Navy were limited to the hospital she to which she was assigned. Berington took the risks in enlisting and died like many others during the Civil War by succumbing to disease.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Maria Lewis, Cathay Williams, Margaret Torry, and Lucy Berington all enlisted in the military for different reasons, as did hundreds of other women, some of whom will never be identified. The sacrifices made by many of these brave women were not acknowledged during their lifetime and their service in the military will never come to light. For those who are not named, there are sometimes whispers in records of their existence, “Did you ever hear of a man having a child?” is the question Sergeant Joseph Cross wrote to his wife in a letter following the birth of a child in the trenches outside of Petersburg on February 28, 1865.⁷¹ The name and life story of the women who gave birth outside of Petersburg is unknown but her existence in the world is recognized as one of the few who served while posing as male. The question of the motivation behind the brave women who left the feminine sphere to disguise themselves as men in order to join the Confederate military and Union military has been asked many times since the conclusion of the United States Civil War. Cathay Williams, Margaret Torry, Lucy Berington, and Maria Lewis offer insight into these motivations. In focusing on the Caucasian women soldiers of the Civil War, the women soldiers of minority groups, such as those belonging to the Colored

⁷¹ Blaton and Cook, *They Fought Like Demons : Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*, 105.

Regiments, have been largely ignored. Time passed during the lifetimes of women such as Cathay Williams, Margaret Torry, Lucy Berington, and Maria Lewis and the information available for the identification and examination of the African American women who chose to dress as men and join the military has rapidly deteriorated. The graves of many of these brave women are unmarked with no way of confirming the identities if the graves are found. There is a large gap in the overall understanding of the motivation of the women who chose to cross-dress during the Civil War. Evidence of the existence of African American women soldiers can be found in discharge papers that list gender as the reason for discharge, in pension applications where they list themselves as the soldier, in the records of contraband camps, newspapers, and in records for insane asylums. All of these sources provide valuable insight into the lives and deaths of African American women who chose to take up arms during the Civil War. The economic, social, and political benefits for African American women who cross-dressed during the Civil War to join the army, for a select few, outweighed the risk they took by enlisting in either the Union or Confederate militaries. The risks they took did not end with the conclusion of their military service, and the benefits beyond mustering out, such as pensions and entrance to old soldier homes, were elusive.

The economic benefits for African American women to cross-dress in order to join the army were enticing. The wages offered were higher for men in

any station that women would pursue. While some women who were of lighter-skin, such as Maria Lewis, were able to gain access to higher wages earlier, many fell into the pay gap created by racial prejudices until equal pay and back pay for Colored Regiments were established. Others, like Cathay Williams, were paid a fraction of what their Caucasian counterparts were paid while they were impressed into service under the title of contraband. The drastic difference between what a female nurse made versus a male nurse shows consistency with the wage gap that is still present today and the wage disparity based upon gender and race went beyond merely medical personnel to nearly every occupation. The retirement opportunities for those who were able to maintain their disguise long enough to access pension funds, provided a level of security that other freedmen, and specifically freed women, did not have a hope of obtaining. The advertised pension funds were believed to be guaranteed at the time of enlistment and the obstacles to obtaining pensions after the conclusion of the Civil War came as a surprise. Once pensions became more accessible, they provided both stability and a safety net to veterans who otherwise were denied access without proof of marriage or dependency upon the veteran. Women who served in the war but could not prove that they were married to someone who also served were denied a pension on the false premise that women did not serve and could not serve. The denial of pension funds to the women of the Civil War who chose not to marry or were married in name alone resulted in a lower

economic status and more unmarked graves than necessary. The added funds could have, at the minimum, ensured that every veteran regardless of race or gender received a proper burial.

The risk involved in donning the guise of a man during the Civil War could result in any manner of death that befell their fellow soldiers or in the institutionalization of the discovered woman. Institutionalization would still result in food and lodging being provided for the women but would also put them in a state of captivity for an indefinite period if they were found to be insane. Margaret Torry did not wish to be institutionalized but was put away simply because she told her story while journeying home. The wages, pension, and retirement opportunities offered each African American woman who took the risk of enlisting an opportunity for self-sufficiency but only if they were willing to leave the traditional feminine sphere. While African American veterans often faced great challenges in gaining access to pensions and Old Soldier Homes, as time progressed the approval rates of pension applications increased. The economic opportunities in cross-dressing were preferable to the alternatives of remaining enslaved, or impoverished, at the time that the opportunity presented itself to enlist in the military during the Civil War.

The political power through military promotions that was obtained by many during the Civil War was rarely granted to members of the Colored Regiments. The African American women who disguised themselves as men also had

access to this very limited political power though there was an additional level of scrutiny for those promoted from Colored Regiments that added another possibility of being exposed as female. Promotions and the increase in pay that accompanied promotions were outside of what was possible for a female African American to come close to matching at the height of her earning capabilities regardless of the occupation in which she was employed. The ability to hold a political office was reserved for men and the right to vote was denied to women, making their ability to have their voices heard after being freed from enslavement very difficult. The court system did not favor male above female but education opportunities that could be acquired tended to advantage males.

The benefits that were gained by African American women when they cross-dressed expanded beyond the economic sphere and into the realm of politics. The fact that during the Reconstruction Era a number of African American men were elected to office shows not only a desire by African American males for change but also the utilization of the right to vote by many African American men. The election of African American men to Congress shows that freedmen understood the power they gained not only through abolition but also through the recognition of their political legitimacy. The acknowledgment of citizenship that freedmen gained from the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments were important because they added layers of protection for freedmen and women that would be challenged across the country, but more frequently in the

South during the Jim Crow Era. The challenges that the amendments protected against made many laws, such as the grandfather law, passed during the Jim Crow Era unconstitutional. The protections granted by the amendments ensured that dehumanizing laws could be struck down when passed by setting clear precedents on the recognition that all people are human beings and deserve access to basic human rights.

Promotions were scarce in the Colored Regiments of the Civil War and being given honorary promotions by one's troops was not uncommon. African American officers struggled to receive an increase in pay equal to others of their rank and the act of granting brevet promotions was one way that higher officials got around paying the additional amounts after the passing of the Enrollment Act in June 1864. The educational opportunities supported by the Freedmen's Bureau allowed for the former slaves who were denied any kind of education to learn about some of their rights. The education they acquired prepared those that went on to file Civil Court cases against other members of their community, those that went to court won frequently during the Reconstruction Era.

The risks that were taken by the African American females who disguised themselves as men to join the military included forced institutionalization, re-enslavement through the use of contraband camps, and the possibility of death, not just from combat but also from disease. The risk posed to African American women who cross-dressed during the Civil War included the same risks that any

other soldier would face but also additional perils. The risk of injury or death by disease existed for all troops during the Civil War. The additional risk of being placed in a Contraband Camp and viewed as regiments that were more expendable lay with joining a Colored Regiment. The risk of being placed in an insane asylum to spend the remainder of one's day in an abusive environment as a spectacle for tourist lay solely with the women who decided to don the disguise of men and join the military. All of these risks were taken by the select few African American women who enlisted under aliases in order to fight for both the Confederate and Union militaries.

The insane asylums of the nineteenth century were abusive environments where patients were forced to receive experimental treatment often without the patient's consent or permission from the patients' closest living relatives. African Americans had even more difficulty with accessing their loved ones that were contained within asylums walls. Patients were frequently strapped to chairs or beds and went extended periods without being able to freely move. The doctors administered painful treatments under the guise of curing the patient when little theoretical scientific support existed to support the doctors' techniques. Concoctions were given to patients in attempts to cure them of their perceived affliction. Without the assistance of someone outside the asylum's walls, the possibility of ever being able to escape the daily torture was miniscule until one was able to act in a manner that convinced the doctors one was no longer insane

or mentally unstable or until one died either alone or in the company of one's tormentors.

The Contraband Camps were a harsh reality to many of the slaves that fled the occupied southern areas in hopes of finding sanctuary under the protection of the Union Army. Provisions and necessities were provided, though scarcely, and living conditions were poor and, with harsher winter, the death tolls in these camps skyrocketed. The work options provided were often grueling and the pay was mere cents on the dollar for that of outside contractors. A form of re-enslavement awaited those who traveled to the North with harsher winters and less food to scavenge for made life bleak for those who thought they would find freedom and comfort in fleeing from their masters. Both men and women who resided in the Contraband Camps were forced to serve the Union troops in a variety of ways in order to assist in the war effort. Eventually, minimal wages were provided to compensate for the work done. The poor living conditions made the already difficult lives of the African American populations that resided in Contraband Camps even harder as families were torn apart when young men were forced to join the military and women were forced to serve in non-combatative roles. The decision to take on these roles did not lie with the African American men and women but rather with high ranking officials in the Union and Confederate military.

Every soldier that served in the Union or Confederate military was exposed to various diseases during the Civil War. No regiment was immune from death either from a wound or an illness they contracted through contaminated water or unsanitary living conditions. The result was a long list of names paired with the symptoms that were experienced and the doctor's diagnosis for possible cause of death. The letters written to the soldier's family told of the death experienced by their loved one that, through different sanitary medical conditions, could have been prevented. Many of the diseases experienced involved the stomach pains, nausea, and vomiting. The death of those who passed from disease was not quick nor was it painless, and the number of deaths that occurred as a result of the Civil War is still up for debate as the estimated number rises as more data is uncovered and examined. The long-term effects of the diseases contracted during military service will never fully be known as the death tolls estimated for the Civil War continue to increase.

The African American women who chose to risk their lives by disguising themselves to take on combative roles did so knowing that many people were dying in the military from battle and disease. The risk of re-enslavement was something that all members of the Colored Regiments were aware of but the risk of institutionalization simply for choosing to fight was a risk only faced by the women who enlisted. The risk when weighed against the benefits were too great

for many women but for a select few made the decision to fight regardless of the consequences.

Maria Lewis, Cathay Williams, Margaret Torry, and Lucy Berington all enlisted in the military for different reasons. Maria Lewis first sought protection and then embraced adventure as her time with the cavalry extended beyond her primary needs for survival and she found a place in this world with a family composed of the members of her unit. Lewis gained protection and a community during her time in the service that allowed her to live a life that she otherwise would have been unable to obtain. Cathay Williams was forced into re-enslavement as a member of a Contraband Camp when she left her master. The re-enslavement that Williams experienced stereotyped her into the role of chef when she had no experience with or knowledge of cooking. When the Civil War ended, Williams made the decision to make her own way by donning the disguise of a man and becoming a Buffalo Soldier. Williams claimed her life as her own in making this choice rather than risking being forced into another dehumanizing role. Williams was repaid for her service by being denied the pension she rightly deserved and left to die in poverty. Cathay Williams, like many others, rests in an unmarked grave lost to time instead of in a place of honor which she rightfully deserves for her service to the United States of America. Margaret Torry joined the army to follow her husband into battle and after he had died revealed her identity and was ultimately institutionalized. Lastly, Lucy Berington joined the

Navy for the security that a steady paycheck and consistent meals would provide, only to succumb to one of the many diseases that the hospital she worked at treated. Each of these women had their unique life stories and reasons for joining the military.

The immediate benefits outweighed the risk in the minds of these and other women, which allowed them to break free of the restraining feminine sphere and create their own path, intersecting areas reserved for men. These women are important because they show the action of women that defies the stereotype of the period. These women demonstrate not only what women could have done but did do. The identities of most women who fought during the Civil War will most likely never be determined. The knowledge of what percentage of the military were female will never be solidified because, by revealing their identity, the women who fought would have taken an even greater risk. The repercussions of disguising oneself as a man and joining the military could never be escaped. The risk of institutionalization was enough to silence many women who served and could have spoken out during their lifetime. The further examination of not just the women who have been identified as having served but specifically the African American women who served during the Civil War is important. They lived and contributed to both sides of the war effort. The records available for identifying African American women who served in Colored Regiments have not been fully investigated.

Over four hundred women have been identified as having cross-dressed to serve the military, but of those identified it would be difficult to come up with ten names that belonged to women of African American descent. The Colored Regiments made up roughly 10 percent of both the Union and Confederate militaries yet less than 1.5% of females identified as having fought belong to the Colored Regiments. The question then becomes, why? The records of Colored Regiments were not as properly preserved as other regiments in both the Union and Confederate militaries. Physical examinations upon entrance to the military were poorly executed and mainly focused on whether the enlisted man had any obvious disabilities. The identification and recognition of a woman in the ranks would be seen as an embarrassment to their superior officer so there was adequate incentive for the sequestering of their records to avoid any additional humiliation at having been unable to identify that the soldier was a woman at. The lack of education of African American women during the nineteenth century makes written primary sources rare. While some undiscovered sources may exist, there needs to be an active search for these texts before they have been degraded beyond readability in order to grant the few women who can be identified their rightful place in history alongside all of the other soldiers who served and died during the American Civil War. The effort reflected in this study hopes to contribute and encourage that investigation.

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