

## THE NORTHERN PERSPECTIVE ON USING BLACK TROOPS IN THE CIVIL WAR

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*Demea Richards is a freshman pre-nursing major. She wrote this assignment using primary documents for an American history survey class. As part of a role-playing exercise, Demea takes the position of opposing the use of black troops in the Union Army.*

*A few words about the assignment:*

This is just one essay based on the assignment given, which was meant to be in debate form. The basis for the papers was our readings about the Civil War and the controversy that surrounded the argument that blacks should be allowed to fight in both the Union and Confederate armies. The class was divided into four groups, each of which had a different aspect of the issue to argue. Some students were to argue in support of allowing blacks to fight in the North or the South; and there were those who were assigned to argue against allowing blacks to fight in either army. The essay below opposes using black troops in the North.

**L**adies and gentlemen, much has been made of the discussions about whether or not to arm Negroes, whether or not to accept them into and allow them to fight for the Union Army. Despite all of the confusion surrounding this issue, I am here tonight to settle this issue, to erase any lingering doubt that there cannot be any other position except an unequivocal and resounding "No" to that question.

The most compelling reason why Negroes should not be recruited and armed comes from the delicate state of the Union itself. Currently, Southern states have elected, because of their dedication to slavery and allegiance to themselves rather than the greater good of the Union, to secede. All but four Southern states have chosen this option. Are we to arm Negroes to gain the support of Europeans who sit from afar and judge our conflict and never lift a hand in our defense, still alienating ourselves from the few states who hold the idea of treason and betrayal as unfathomable as we ourselves do? Is this our reward for their bravery and commitment?

We must understand that this conflict cannot and should not become about slavery, for this would be a direct and unjustified affront to those states who did not choose secession. We do not wish to enrage and possibly propel them to the other side, which would welcome them with open arms.

Although this argument is the most compelling and definitely one deserving much consideration, it is not the only argument to consider. Once we have included and accepted their conscription, we must also arm, feed, and clothe them. Although this may seem simple enough, supplies and equipment are not always available to our white troops, who should undoubtedly come first. Also, we must consider that arming slaves in rebellious territories exposes us to the danger that the ammunition will end up in the hands of Confederate soldiers. Union armies must not only face the danger of battle, but must also concern themselves with whether or not they are being attacked with weapons that should have been meant for them.

Genetic differences must also be figured into the equation. Negroes are a race that has been exposed to centuries of servitude, and it is possible that they are incapable of any type of military or civil service due to this exposure. Slavery is an injustice, but to give blacks an opportunity of volunteering to fight for the Union cause on equal footing with whites would perhaps be more independence and quality than most whites in the North and those in the border states could imagine. If former slaves are allowed to take up arms for the sake of the Union, then we are offering to them the argument that they are indeed equal to white soldiers who have done the same.

We must also consider the numbers of troops already trained and in action that we may lose due to the drafting and recruiting of Negroes. Many could refuse to fight with Negro troops and may resign if forced to do so. The result is that the Union army would gain many more bodies to sacrifice, but would have less of the leadership and experience to prevent unnecessary deaths.

Although the idea of arming Negroes seems, at first glance, to be one that would solve our immediate needs for more manpower, the questions and problems that would arise as a result of such actions definitely outweigh the consequences. We would be inviting the world to focus on the racial issues inherent in our struggle when it is perhaps our outrage at the treason of our Southern states that is most central to our resolve. We would likewise be inviting problems in the ranks of our brave and valiant militia—problems they ill need in these delicate and dangerous times. This challenge is monumental, and we must avoid unnecessary complications. We must say no to the idea of arming Negro troops for our Union army.