

The Mystery of the Civil War's Camp Casey

From the Archive: President Trump says removing “beautiful” Confederate statues erases U.S. history, but the South ignored other Civil War heroes, the freedom fighters in the “colored regiments,” as Chelsea Gilmour noted in 2015.

By Chelsea Gilmour (Originally published on Feb. 26, 2015)

As much as Virginia loves its Civil War history – chronicling and commemorating almost every detail – Camp Casey isn't one of the places that gets glorified or even remembered. Located somewhere in what's now Arlington County, just miles from the White House and U.S. Capitol, Camp Casey was where regiments of African-American troops were trained to fight the Confederacy to end slavery.

While not the largest Union base for training U.S. Colored Troops (USCT), Camp Casey was one of the few located within the boundaries of a Confederate state. Yet, despite its historical significance, or perhaps because of it, Camp Casey has been largely lost to history.

In the decades after the war, as the white power structure reasserted itself across the South including in Virginia, the narrative of the Blue and the Grey took hold, two white armies battling heroically over conflicting interpretations of federal authority, brother against brother. Though slavery was surely an issue, African-Americans were pushed into the background, almost as bystanders.

In Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, statues of Southern heroes were erected seemingly everywhere. One city street called Monument Avenue is lined with statues starting with one to Gen. Robert E. Lee (erected in 1890) and then (between 1900 and 1925) others to Gen. J.E.B. Stuart, Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, Navy Lt. Matthew Fontaine Maury and President Jefferson Davis.

If you drive north toward Washington along I-95, you see a gigantic Confederate battle flag flying next to the highway near Fredericksburg, the site of a Confederate victory in 1862, as well as frequent historical markers remembering not only battles but skirmishes. Across Virginia, there are eight national parks dedicated to Civil War battles and events.

The honors bestowed on Confederate leaders reach even into Arlington and Alexandria, though Union forces maintained control of those areas throughout the war. In 1920, at the height of Jim Crow segregation, parts of Route One, including stretches through or near black neighborhoods, were named in honor of Jefferson Davis, an avowed white supremacist who wanted to continue slavery

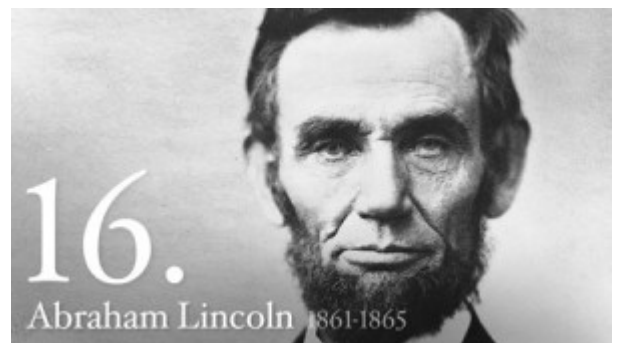
forever. (In 1964, during the Civil Rights era, Davis's name was added to an adjacent part of Route 110 near the Pentagon.)

Throughout Arlington itself, there are markers designating where Union forts and battlements were located. But there are no markers remembering Camp Casey, where the 23rd USCT regiment was trained and outfitted to go south to fight for African-American freedom and where other USCT units bivouacked and drilled on their marches south. Even Camp Casey's precise location has become something of a mystery with county historians offering conflicting accounts.

That haziness itself raises troubling questions, since Camp Casey arguably was the most historically significant Civil War site in Arlington. It was not just some static fort that never was attacked but an active training ground for hundreds of African-Americans to take up arms against the historic crime of black enslavement.

Camp Casey's Role

Named after Major General Silas Casey, who oversaw the training of new recruits near Washington, Camp Casey was in operation from 1862-1865 and served as an important rendezvous point for Union troops, accommodating some 1,800 soldiers. It also housed prisoners of war and included a hospital.



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1865 and at least 16 of those USCT regiments spent time at Camp Casey from 1864-1865, including the 6th, the 29th, and the 31st.

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USCT soldiers also faced hostility and mistrust from some white Northern troops, meaning that they often were not placed on the front lines but got assigned to "fatigue duty," such as accompanying wagons and moving supplies. Nevertheless, USCT regiments battled heroically in several major clashes near the war's end and faced special dangers not shared by their white Northern comrades.

When blacks were admitted into the Union Army, Confederate President Jefferson Davis instituted a policy that refused to treat them as soldiers but rather as slaves in a state of insurrection, so they could be murdered upon capture or sold into slavery. The USCT soldiers were trained to expect no mercy and no quarter if wounded or captured.

In accordance with that Confederate policy, U.S. Colored Troops did face summary executions when captured in battle. When a Union garrison at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, was overrun by Confederate forces on April 12, 1864, black soldiers were shot down as they surrendered. Similar atrocities occurred at the Battle of Poison Springs, Arkansas, on April 18, 1864, and the Battle of the Crater in Petersburg, Virginia, on July 30, 1864. In one of the most notorious massacres of black Union soldiers, scores were executed in Saltville, Virginia, on Oct. 2, 1864.

Bravery Under Fire

When the 23rd USCT was dispatched to join the battle against General Robert E. Lee's vaunted Army of Northern Virginia, one of Union General George Meade's staff officers wrote in a demeaning letter about them: "As I looked at them my soul was troubled and I would gladly have seen them marched back to Washington. We do not dare trust them in battle. Ah, you may make speeches at home, but here, where it is life or death, we dare not risk it."

However, on May 15, 1864, the 23rd USCT engaged in what may have been the first clash between Lee's army and black troops. A chronology of the 23rd's history cites Noel Harrison at Mysteries & Conundrums describing how the 23rd came to the support of an Ohio cavalry unit confronting a Confederate force southeast of Chancellorsville.

According to an account uncovered by historian Gordon C. Rhea, one of the Ohio cavalrymen wrote, "It did us good to see the long line of glittering bayonets approach, although those who bore them were Blacks, and as they came nearer they were greeted by loud cheers." The 23rd charged toward the Confederate position causing the Southern troops to withdraw, suffering several dead.

But the lack of faith in the African-American soldiers' commitment and skill would play a decisive role in the disastrous Battle of the Crater. The 23rd and 29th USCT regiments, both of which spent time at Camp Casey, were part of Union General Ambrose Burnside's Fourth Division, which was comprised of nine USCT regiments.

These regiments (the 23rd, the 29th, the 31st, the 43rd, the 30th, the 39th, the 28th, the 27th, and the 19th) were to lead the charge against Confederate defenses after a Union-crafted mine explosion blew an enormous crater under Confederate lines. Plans were changed, however, at the last minute when General Meade refused to allow the USCT to lead the advance.

Instead, the war-weary white troops commanded by General James Ledlie (a notorious drunk, whose lack of presence, much less leadership, during the battle was notable) led the way. Instead of charging around the crater, as the U.S. Colored Troops had been trained to do, the unprepared white replacements surged into the crater and were unable to get out. Union troops piled in on top of each other and were completely stuck, serving as easy targets for the Confederate soldiers above.

Finally, the USCT were called forth and served as a last stand against Confederate troops. Since they had initially been trained for the operation, they knew to avoid the crater and search for higher ground. But by that point, the botched attempt to take Petersburg had deteriorated into a massacre.

Lt. Robert K. Beecham, who had helped organize the USCT 23rd regiment, wrote about the soldiers' bravery: "The black boys formed up promptly. There was no flinching on their part. They came to the shoulder like true soldiers, as ready to face the enemy and meet death on the field as the bravest and best soldiers that ever lived."

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The Mystery of Camp Casey

Arlington historians have various takes on why the history of Camp Casey has been so neglected with even its precise location a mystery. The Arlington Historical Society's stance is that it is not unusual to have lost a camp's location, since Arlington and Alexandria were both heavily fortified during the Civil War and there were many camps located throughout the area.

Further, unlike a fort, which would consist of a large physical construction, most training camps had tents pitched in a field with only a few solid wood-framed buildings.

But Franco Brown, a historian with the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington, had a different take on why its location has been mostly lost to history. Calling Camp Casey "one of the biggest mysteries of the Civil War," he has spent the past eight years researching Camp Casey and had encountered many of the same difficulties that I did in finding definitive information.

While acknowledging that Camp Casey was not the biggest USCT base – Camp Penn in Pennsylvania and Camp Nelson in Kentucky were more important training locations – Brown said Camp Casey was largely lost to history because it wasn't significant to the state's dominant historians. They favored the conventional narrative of the Civil War, the storyline of two white armies, brothers fighting brothers.

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Brown said a key factor to consider when questioning how Camp Casey could have been ignored is to look at the attitudes of Virginians and the South after the war. At the war's conclusion, resentments ran high, and it would have been particularly galling to Southerners loyal to the Confederacy to acknowledge that there were African-American soldiers actively training on Virginian soil to fight for the North.

"After the war you get things like the KKK, which was started by five Confederate generals," Brown said, "and they don't want mixing of the races. The South is still mad about the Civil War. The South is still mad at the black man, because he helped win the Civil War."

This explanation takes into account the realities of Virginia's society and culture following the war and, in many ways, continuing to today. While there may be some truth to the argument that the story of Camp Casey was simply lost

in the chaos following the war, it isn't hard to imagine a concerted effort by resentful whites to diminish the role of black soldiers during the war.

Where Was It?

There even remains the question: where was Camp Casey? When I set out recently to try to solve that mystery, I found remarkably little information and some of it was conflicting. The National Archives in Washington had little about the camp, mostly letters and muster rolls, and it wasn't until I asked the Arlington Historical Society's official historians that they seemed to give the matter much thought.

As far as the exact location of Camp Casey, there are a couple of conclusions. One thing seems certain, that it was located on or near Columbia Pike, then the main thoroughfare from Northern Virginia to Washington D.C.

Some letters from the time suggest that the camp was within sight of the Custis-Lee Mansion overlooking the Potomac River (now known as Arlington House above Arlington National Cemetery). That and other references to landmarks, including its supposed proximity to Freedman's Village, led some historical investigators to place Camp Casey on the south side of Columbia Pike, not far from the Long Bridge which crossed into Washington.

An advertisement on Sept. 5, 1865, from the *Daily National Republican*, a Washington, D.C. newspaper in circulation from 1862-1866, announced the sale of government buildings at Camp Casey situated "about one and one-half miles from Long Bridge."

Jim Murphy of the Historical Society explained, "We think it [Camp Casey] would have been between the Long Bridge and Fort Albany, in a field in what is currently the [south] parking lot of the Pentagon. ... We concluded it was located there after going through letters and dispatches from the camp that discuss the colored troops training next to a field." (Long Bridge was located near today's I-395's 14th St. Bridge across the Potomac, and Fort Albany was just south of the current Air Force Memorial on Columbia Pike.) [To see a Civil War-era map of the area with some of the landmarks, [click here.](#)]

The Pentagon-parking-lot location would likely have put it within sight of the Custis-Lee mansion and would place it close to Freedman's Village, a semi-permanent community for African-Americans freed by President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation who escaped the Confederacy and were settled on a portion of Lee's plantation on the north side of Columbia Pike.

But Franco Brown cites other evidence in letters from the soldiers placing Camp Casey in the vicinity of Hunter's Chapel, which no longer exists but was then

located at the intersection of Glebe Road and Columbia Pike, about two miles further southwest from the location cited in the newspaper ad.

Brown also has a contemporaneous lithographic depiction that puts Camp Casey on a bluff near an area that looks to be around the intersection of what is now Glebe Road and Walter Reed Drive. "This area is at the highest apex of the surrounding land," Brown said.

Brown also noted that the lithograph shows a tall tower in the distant left-hand background, the Fairfax Seminary, which still stands today as the Virginia Theological Seminary, about four miles further south in Alexandria.

Thus, he concluded that "the general vicinity [of Camp Casey] is likely between the present day locations of Glebe Road, Walter Reed Drive, Columbia Pike, and Route 50 [Arlington Boulevard]." Brown said he is confident in this conclusion saying, "I've got it within 500 yards of the original location."

Brown's location would place Camp Casey about three miles from the Long Bridge, among Fort Albany, Fort Berry and Fort Craig. There is also the possibility that Camp Casey involved several military way stations stretching along Columbia Pike, all known collectively as Camp Casey, which might explain the disparate descriptions of its location. [For an overview map of the forts in the Washington area, [click here.](#)]

Though Arlington County has no plans to honor Camp Casey (or even work to ascertain its exact location), county officials have responded to public pressure to acknowledge Freedman's Village, where Sojourner Truth lived and worked for a time.

Freedman's Village gave freed slaves refuge both during the Civil War and for decades later (until it was razed in 1900). In 2015, Arlington dedicated a new bridge on Washington Boulevard that crosses over Columbia Pike as "Freedman's Village Bridge."

It is a much deserved (albeit meager) recognition of the historic area which became a Freedom Trail for African-Americans, both those escaping slavery by heading northward and those marching southward as soldiers to end it.

Chelsea Gilmour, a lifelong resident of Arlington, Virginia, is a student of International Studies and World Religions and an assistant editor at Consortiumnews.com.

Trump's Fragile Grasp of History

President Trump may have been a reality-TV star but his grasp of reality has always been tenuous, underscored by his weak understanding of U.S. and world history, as Michael Winship explains.

By Michael Winship

Gene Tunney, the champion prizefighter of the 1920s, wanted to promote an image of himself as a great intellectual. Trying to prove it, he always carried in his pocket a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets. Many members of the press weren't buying it. When Tunney published a volume titled *A Man Must Fight*, one sportswriter began his story about it with this immortal line: "Gene Tunney, who has written one book and read several others..."

It's a line that would work for Donald Trump, too, but only if flipped: "Donald Trump, who has *written* several books and *read* one other..."

Of course, his various books have been written with the considerable help of long suffering ghosts. And yes, I know that on several occasions Trump has bragged to reporters about the many books he claims to have read. In 2011, for example, he told the official Chinese news agency Xinhua, "I've read hundreds of books about China over the decades." If you believe that, I've got a Great Wall to sell you. A real one. In China, not Mexico.

As I wrote a couple of weeks ago, one of Trump's least appealing of many unappealing traits is his incuriosity, his total lack of interest in history or pretty much anything that somehow doesn't pump up his ego or profits. It's deeply dangerous for all of us.

On Monday, here he was again, the man who just claimed an unprecedented first 100 days (must have been a helluva shock to FDR), who may have thought Frederick Douglass was still alive ("somebody who's done an amazing job") and who seemed eager to spread the news that Abraham Lincoln was a Republican ("Does anyone know? A lot of people don't know that!").

Now he was sharing his thoughts on the Civil War: "People don't realize, you know, the Civil War – if you think about it, why? People don't ask that question, but why was there the Civil War? Why could that one not have been worked out?"

When my eyes uncross and my head stops coming to a point, I'd like to read aloud to him from the Emancipation Proclamation. Trump's remarks came as he discussed

in a radio interview his oft-stated admiration for Andrew Jackson. But as Aaron Blake at *The Washington Post* notes, Trump pulled yet another groaner when, “Just last week, in an interview with Reuters, Trump suggested there was really no reason for the Israelis and the Palestinians to have been fighting for all these decades.

“‘I want to see peace with Israel and the Palestinians,’ Trump said. ‘There is no reason there’s not peace between Israel and the Palestinians – none whatsoever. So we’re looking at that, and we’re also looking at the potential of going to Saudi Arabia.’”

“No reason whatsoever! You know, besides the whole claim-to-the-very-same-holy-land thing. Minor details.”

Don’t Know Much...

It boggles the mind. My former colleague, historian David McCullough, is no stranger to American presidents, having written Pulitzer Prize-winning biographies of Harry Truman and John Adams. He has been making the rounds promoting his new book, a collection of his speeches called *The American Spirit: Who We Are and What We Stand For*.

When he appeared on Leonard Lopate’s talk show on New York public radio a couple of weeks ago, McCullough noted that in Donald Trump we had “put someone in the pilot seat who has never ever flown a plane before; who doesn’t understand how our government works, who has no interest in the history of the country and has said so on more than one occasion, who has never read a book about the presidency or a biography of a president and claims... that he doesn’t need to read books because he knows so much intuitively.”

And yet when Trump declares that health care reform or pretty much anything else – in fact the entire job of being president – is much more complicated than he imagined it would be, it’s precisely because he has no knowledge of history, the kind of knowledge that might at least from time to time buffer for him the shock of reality by offering the golden gift of precedence.

History, McCullough writes, is “an aid to navigation in such troubled uncertain times. ... All problems have histories and the wisest route to a successful solution to nearly any problem begins with understanding its history. Indeed, almost any attempt to solve a problem without an understanding of its history is to court failure – an example our tragic plunge into Vietnam with hardly a notion of its past.”

Or our plunge into Iraq. Or Afghanistan. Or Iran. Or North Korea – especially when the sum total of Trump’s knowledge of that country’s fraught history seems

to have been a 10-minute tutorial from the president of China.

History is that proverbial butterfly flapping its wings in Mexico and causing a tsunami in Malaysia. Which makes it all the more perilous when you have a president who uses "America First" as a campaign slogan, revealing little knowledge of the isolationist movement before World War II; whose press secretary makes ill-considered statements comparing Nazi Germany, Syria and the use of poison gas to massacre civilians; and who calls Sen. Elizabeth Warren "Pocahontas," demonstrating a willful, repugnant ignorance of Native American history that goes all the way back to a time some 24 years ago when he claimed owners of tribal casinos "are not Indians" because they didn't conform to his stereotype of what Native Americans should look like.

'A Bad Thing'

But even worse than any of these is a lack of knowledge of history and government that puts our very existence as a free and democratic government in peril. Embracing other countries' dictators is one slippery slope. And then on Sunday there was Trump's chief of staff Reince Priebus suggesting to Jonathan Karl of ABC News that his boss is contemplating amending or even eliminating the First Amendment to curb negative coverage of the president. And finally, there was Trump himself, complaining to Fox News about the difficulty of getting his program through Congress: "It's a very rough system. It's an archaic system... It's really a bad thing for the country."

In other words, history, the system of checks and balances and the Constitution itself are just getting in Trump's way, despite his prior claims to regard as inviolate the original language of the founders.

David McCullough has said that our past is an invaluable asset, but "if you've inherited some great work of art that is worth a fortune and you don't know that it's worth a fortune, you don't even know that it's a great work of art and you're not interested in it – you're going to lose it."

Trump and his minions seem determined to send the admittedly flawed masterwork that is our legacy to the trash. One of David's favorite quotes comes from Thomas Jefferson: "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

Sadly, those words are probably unfamiliar to Trump precisely because of what Jefferson suggested. Past presidents have embraced our past as prologue, read books, invited eminent historians to the White House for advice and consultation. But Trump takes his history, as little as it is, from the dark spoutings of pseudointellectuals like Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka, or in

tweets and soundbites from *Fox & Friends*. When he tries to parrot the words back as public statements, they come out even more mangled and malevolent.

While he is so ignorant we cannot be free.

Michael Winship is the Emmy Award-winning senior writer of *Moyers & Company* and BillMoyers.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@MichaelWinship](https://twitter.com/MichaelWinship).

[\[http://billmoyers.com/story/dont-know-much-about-history/\]](http://billmoyers.com/story/dont-know-much-about-history/)

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From the Archive: U.S. history is distorted by the prism of race, even the Civil War, which was fought over slavery but then enshrined white heroes when Jim Crow racism quickly asserted itself, a reality relevant to Black History Month and to Chelsea Gilmour's investigation into the mystery of Camp Casey.

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"After the war you get things like the KKK, which was started by five Confederate generals," Brown said, "and they don't want mixing of the races. The South is still mad about the Civil War. The South is still mad at the black man, because he helped win the Civil War."

This explanation takes into account the realities of Virginia's society and culture following the war and, in many ways, continuing to today. While there

may be some truth to the argument that the story of Camp Casey was simply lost in the chaos following the war, it isn't hard to imagine a concerted effort by resentful whites to diminish the role of black soldiers during the war.

Where Was It?

There even remains the question: where was Camp Casey? When I set out to try to solve that mystery, I found remarkably little information and some of it was conflicting. The National Archives in Washington had little about the camp, mostly letters and muster rolls, and it wasn't until I asked the Arlington Historical Society's official historians that they seemed to give the matter much thought.

As far as the exact location of Camp Casey, there are a couple of conclusions. One thing seems certain, that it was located on or near Columbia Pike, then the main thoroughfare from Northern Virginia to Washington D.C.

Some letters from the time suggest that the camp was within sight of the Custis-Lee Mansion overlooking the Potomac River (now known as Arlington House above Arlington National Cemetery). That and other references to landmarks, including its supposed proximity to Freedman's Village, led some historical investigators to place Camp Casey on the south side of Columbia Pike, not far from the Long Bridge which crossed into Washington.

An advertisement on Sept. 5, 1865, from the *Daily National Republican*, a Washington, D.C. newspaper in circulation from 1862-1866, announced the sale of government buildings at Camp Casey situated "about one and one-half miles from Long Bridge."

Jim Murphy of the Historical Society explained, "We think it [Camp Casey] would have been between the Long Bridge and Fort Albany, in a field in what is currently the [south] parking lot of the Pentagon. [...] We concluded it was located there after going through letters and dispatches from the camp that discuss the colored troops training next to a field." (Long Bridge was located near today's I-395's 14th St. Bridge across the Potomac, and Fort Albany was just south of the current Air Force Memorial on Columbia Pike.) [To see a Civil War-era map of the area with some of the landmarks, [click here.](#)]

The Pentagon-parking-lot location would likely have put it within sight of the Custis-Lee mansion and would place it close to Freedman's Village, a semi-permanent community for African-Americans freed by President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation who escaped the Confederacy and were settled on a portion of Lee's plantation on the north side of Columbia Pike.

But Franco Brown cites other evidence in letters from the soldiers placing Camp

Casey in the vicinity of Hunter's Chapel, which no longer exists but was then located at the intersection of Glebe Road and Columbia Pike, about two miles further southwest from the location cited in the newspaper ad.

Brown also has a contemporaneous lithographic depiction that puts Camp Casey on a bluff near an area that looks to be around the intersection of what is now Glebe Road and Walter Reed Drive. "This area is at the highest apex of the surrounding land," Brown said.

Brown also noted that the lithograph shows a tall tower in the distant left-hand background, the Fairfax Seminary, which still stands today as the Virginia Theological Seminary, about four miles further south in Alexandria.

Thus, he concluded that "the general vicinity [of Camp Casey] is likely between the present day locations of Glebe Road, Walter Reed Drive, Columbia Pike, and Route 50 [Arlington Boulevard]." Brown said he is confident in this conclusion saying, "I've got it within 500 yards of the original location."

Brown's location would place Camp Casey about three miles from the Long Bridge, among Fort Albany, Fort Berry and Fort Craig. There is also the possibility that Camp Casey involved several military way stations stretching along Columbia Pike, all known collectively as Camp Casey, which might explain the disparate descriptions of its location. [For an overview map of the forts in the Washington area, [click here.](#)]

Though Arlington County has no plans to honor Camp Casey (or even work to ascertain its exact location), county officials have responded to public pressure to acknowledge Freedman's Village, where Sojourner Truth lived and worked for a time.

Freedman's Village gave freed slaves refuge both during the Civil War and for decades later (until it was razed in 1900). In 2015, Arlington dedicated a new bridge on Washington Boulevard that crosses over Columbia Pike as "Freedman's Village Bridge."

It is a much deserved (albeit meager) recognition of the historic area which became a Freedom Trail for African-Americans, both those escaping slavery by heading northward and those marching southward as soldiers to end it.

Chelsea Gilmour, a lifelong resident of Arlington, Virginia, is an assistant editor at Consortiumnews.com.

John Brown's Anti-Slavery Legacy

For some American abolitionists, President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of Jan. 1, 1863, was a long time coming, but it was a moment for rejoicing among a racially mixed force in Kansas that included veterans of John Brown's anti-slavery uprisings, writes William Loren Katz.

By William Loren Katz

Only the skies were gloomy as Emancipation Day 1863 dawned and the First Kansas Colored Volunteers – a mix of African-Americans, Native Americans and Black Indians – assembled at Fort Scott to celebrate President Abraham Lincoln's long-delayed Emancipation Proclamation.

The men had been fighting the Confederacy since war broke out in 1861. The white officers even longer – as radical abolitionists whom John Brown commanded in his Kansas battles to free slaves in the 1850s (before his failed raid against the armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, which led to his trial for treason and his death by hanging in 1859).

Celebrating Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation issued on Jan. 1, 1863 about 500 people gathered at Fort Scott in eastern Kansas. As flags, sewn by women of color, floated above the fort, people sang the "The Star-Spangled Banner," then they shared a barbecue and strong liquor. Next, soldiers and officers burst into *their* song. They honored their "immortal hero" with "the John Brown song." The soldiers added this line: "John Brown sowed, and the harvesters are we."

This self-liberated army was commanded by officers whom John Brown had trained and led in a Kansas guerrilla war to end slavery. By the Civil War, the First Kansas Colored Volunteers included the kind of fighters that Brown had dreamed of rallying to the cause. For this multi-racial force, this was the time to complete "the old man's work."

The men of color were recruited from 10,000 people from the Seminole, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee Nations who followed Chief Opothla Yahola on what began as a peace march – to avoid serving the Confederate cause – from the Indian Territory. Attacked three times by Confederate cavalry on their desperate voyage, they finally decided to head for Union lines in Kansas.

By the time they reached Kansas, only 7,000 survived and many decided they were no longer pacifists. As early as October 1862, 225 men of the regiment drove off 500 Confederate troops.

The force continued Brown's work with forays into Missouri to free slaves,

relatives, loved ones and strangers. Their white officers – once hunted by the Federal government as “John Brown traitors” – now were appreciated as experts in guerrilla warfare and were deployed in Kansas, then regarded as a less significant Civil War battle zone. There they and their men transformed the Civil War into a Revolution.

This heroic story is told in Mark A. Lause, *Race and Radicalism in the Union Army* (University of Illinois Press, 2009) largely ignored since publication.

William Loren Katz is the author of *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* and 40 other books. His website is <http://www.williamlkatz.com>

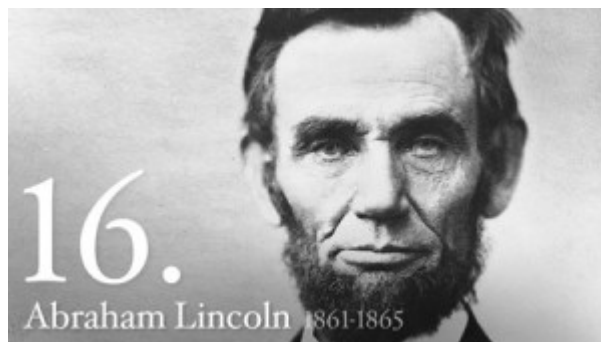
When New Year's Meant Freedom

Some white Americans still try to dismiss the evils of slavery, pretending that many slaves were happy serving their white masters. But the morning of Jan. 1, 1863, showed a different reality when President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and blacks celebrated, as William Loren Katz recalls.

By William Loren Katz

When the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect Jan. 1, 1863, African-Americans had been fighting the Confederacy near the South Carolina Islands for months. These soldiers assembled with their families to celebrate. Their commander, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, had been a militant Abolitionist minister who together with black people in Boston had stormed jails to free captured people of color.

In South Carolina he was devoted to his courageous soldiers. His *Diary* describes their New Year's Day ceremony:



“About ten o'clock the people began to collect by land, and also by water, in

steamers sent by General Saxton for the purpose; and from that time all the avenues of approach were thronged. The multitude were chiefly colored women, with gay handkerchiefs on their heads "There were many white visitors also, ladies on horseback and in carriages, superintendents and teachers, officers, and cavalry-men. Our companies were marched to the neighborhood of the platform, and allowed to sit or stand, as at the Sunday services; the platform was occupied by ladies and dignitaries, and . . . the colored people filled up all the vacant openings in the beautiful grove around, and there was a cordon of mounted visitors beyond. . .

"Then the President's Proclamation was read by Dr. W. H. Brisbane, a thing infinitely appropriate, a South Carolinian addressing South Carolinians. . . . Then the colors were presented to us by the Rev. Mr. French, a chaplain who brought them from the donors in New York. "All this was according to the program. Then followed an incident so simple, so touching, so utterly unexpected and startling, that I can scarcely believe it on recalling, though it gave the keynote to the whole day. The very moment the speaker had ceased, and just as I took and waved the flag, which now for the first time meant anything to these poor people, there suddenly arose, close beside the platform, a strong male voice (but rather cracked and elderly), into which two women's voices instantly blended, singing, as if by an impulse that could no more be repressed than the morning note of the song-sparrow.,

"'My Country, 'tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, Of thee I sing!'

'People looked at each other, and then at us on the platform, to see whence came this interruption, not set down in the bills. Firmly and irrepressibly the quavering voices sang on, verse after verse; others of the colored people joined in; some whites on the platform began, but I motioned them to silence. I never saw anything so electric; it made all other words cheap; it seemed the choked voice of a race at last unloosed.

"Nothing could be more wonderfully unconscious; art could not have dreamed of a tribute to the day of jubilee that should be so affecting; history will not believe it; and when I came to speak of it, after it was ended, tears were everywhere."

As cited in several of my books: from Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in A Black Regiment* (Boston, 1882) 40-41.

William Loren Katz is the author of *Black Indians: A Hidden History* and 40 other books on U.S. history. His website is williamlkatz.com

How to Eradicate Racism

The massacre of nine black churchgoers in Charleston and a rash of arson at other black churches across the South show that despite conservative self-serving claims and liberal wishful thinking about racism becoming a thing of the past, much more work needs to be done, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

On the evening of June 17, a 21-year-old white man by the name of Dylann Roof walked into an old and famous black church, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in Charleston, South Carolina, where a Bible study group was underway. Roof sat in on the class for an hour before allegedly pulling out a .45 caliber handgun, announcing that black people were "taking over our country. And, you have to go," and shooting 10 of the 12 people in the study group, nine of whom died.

It should be pointed out that at 21 years of age Roof presumably doesn't have a fully developed pre-frontal cortex (which, in part, means his risk-aversion impulse is not fully developed) – a fact that is likely to do as little good in court for him as it did Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (also 21) in his Boston Marathon bombing trial.

It did not take long for the authorities to identify and apprehend Roof. It turned out that he is a thoroughgoing racist with delusions of starting a second Civil War. He also had a thing for flags. Among the Facebook-posted pictures of Roof that soon surfaced were ones showing him with the flag of apartheid South Africa and the flag of white-ruled Rhodesia. Both of these are reported to be used as symbols of white supremacy in the U.S. And, there is the picture of him, with his handgun displayed, with the Confederate battle flag – the same flag that flies on the grounds of the South Carolina statehouse.

By the day after the shooting the issue for the media was no longer Dylann Roof (who had confessed to the murders, according to police). The issue was whether or not the Confederate battle flag on the statehouse grounds should be removed. For much of the country, the flag was a symbol of the racism that had moved Roof to commit the massacre.

As Nikki Haley, South Carolina's Republican governor, stated, the flag is a "deeply resented symbol of a brutally offensive past," and literally overnight, the AME massacre galvanized most of the country to show support for the victims by demanding the flag's removal.

But it wasn't going to be that easy. It turns out that many white citizens of South Carolina and beyond don't see the flag as a symbol of a "brutal past," much less the symbol of the nine dead people shot down inside the Emanuel AME Church. No. They claim that flying the battle flag simply honors their ancestors who fought in the Civil War for the cause of "states' rights." Based on this interpretation, Dylann Roof got it wrong when he sported that handgun along with the battle flag.

Well, most of the African-American population, along with many American whites, think this ancestor story is a rather poor ploy. Honoring one's ancestors who fought in a lost cause to sustain the institution of slavery (which is why states' rights were important to the Confederate South) is a bit weird in today's cultural environment, but one can show such respect in the privacy of one's own home or even at a veterans center.

However, making it an obligation of the state (in this case South Carolina) is downright dangerous because what you have is half the population commanding the government to pay homage to those who fought to maintain the enslavement of the other half. From a socio-political standpoint, that homage validates the historic actions of those ancestors i.e., fighting to maintain a slave society thus possibly encouraging their descendants (like Mr. Roof) to mimic them. This is just asking for trouble, and on the evening of June 17, South Carolina and the rest of us experienced a horrific example of that trouble.

Why Do Dylann Roof's Exist?

The Civil War ended over 150 years ago. So one can reasonably ask why Americans are still dealing with this issue of racism? Why is it that, as President Barack Obama said, shortly after the murders, that "slavery still casts a long shadow" on American life? There is no shortage of those who recognize that racism is still deeply ingrained in U.S. culture, but there are few suggestions as to why that is and what can be done about it.

That being the case, I thought I might revive my thoughts on these questions ones originally posted in March 2013 in an analysis entitled "Civil Rights Takes a Hit." It was written on the occasion of the Supreme Court's consideration of an Alabama suit to rescind Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, which allowed the Justice Department to review any changes in voting procedures in areas of the country traditionally tainted by racism.

Here are some of the points I made in that essay:

,Cultures can evolve over centuries, yet once their major parameters are set, they have remarkable staying power. The notion that such parameters can be

reversed in, say, 48 years (counting from the 1965 Voting Rights Act) is naive at best.

,Why would that be the case? A good part of the answer is that a culture of racism shaped the way of life, particularly in the southern United States, for hundreds of years. This culture was only briefly interrupted by the Civil War. After that war, there followed a period known as Reconstruction, when the U.S. Army's occupation of the South interfered with ingrained racist practices. But Reconstruction lasted only a brief 12 years, until 1877.

Thereafter the South reverted to racist ways under a "legal" regime commonly known as "Jim Crow." That lasted until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Subsequent Republican administrations have been chipping away at civil rights laws and regulations ever since. Because, over hundreds of years, the interruptions in Southern racial practice were relatively brief, racism has persisted in that region of the country to a relatively greater degree than in other areas.

,This pervasive and long-lasting culture was reflected in local and regional laws. Laws, in turn, are to be understood as educational tools that tell citizens what society deems to be right and wrong behavior. If laws are consistently enforced over a long period of time, most citizens will internalize these messages and they will become part of their moral code. Except for the 12 years of Reconstruction, the South had known nothing but legally sanctioned racist rules of behavior right up to the middle of the Twentieth Century. And so it was racist rules that were thoroughly internalized.

,What the Civil Rights laws of the 1960s did was to suddenly, and partially, reverse the behavioral messages based on the older racist laws. They did so only partially because these new laws concentrated on making discrimination illegal within the public sphere. You could no longer segregate public schools, hotels, restaurants and the like, as well as government offices.

Today, African-Americans in the South check into a hotel, eat at a restaurant, shop where they want to without much trouble. However, if they do happen to have trouble, there is recourse under the law to deal with the problem. That has now been the case for 48 years. *Yet this is not nearly enough time to have the message that racial discrimination is wrong penetrate deeply into the private sphere* of a region where the opposite attitude has long been the default position.

My guess is that among some Southern citizens, the new egalitarian way of thinking is superficially there, and among others it is not there at all.

Communities with historically ingrained patterns of thinking and behaving may be bludgeoned, say, by violent revolution, into changing their ways. However, if you are to change them in a non-violent fashion you must bring to bear all of society's traditional rule-making devices. These are primarily the law and the schools.

In the case of the United States, laws that enforce civil rights must be strengthened and steadily applied for multiple generations (at least four or five) until obeying these laws is habitual. That should permanently reform the public sphere.

Yet if Dylann Roof's actions teach us anything, the rules regulating the private sphere must also be addressed. The teaching of the essential correctness of civil rights and the essential wrongness for racist attitudes must be put into the curriculum and taught in all the schools, public and private, from K to 12, and probably in undergraduate college as well. This too must be universal (whether parents like it or not), consistent and multigenerational.

None of this is really impossible. It can be done. We know enough about psychology to recognize that such an effort is not a waste of time. All it takes is the political and institutional will to do these things with patient persistence. Not until there are clear signs that racism has been erased from both the public and private spheres should anyone breathe a sigh of relief.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.

Confronting Southern 'Victimhood'

Exclusive: Many white Southerners are getting their backs up again over demands that the Confederate flag and other symbols of slavery be removed. But the core problem is that the South never admitted that slavery and then segregation were wrong, instead offering endless excuses, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Unlike the Germans after World War II who collectively shouldered blame for the Holocaust and the war's devastation, America's white Southerners never confessed to the evil that they had committed by enslaving African-Americans and then pushing the United States into a bloody Civil War in their defense of human

bondage.

Instead of a frank admission of guilt, there have been endless excuses and obfuscations. Confederate apologists insist that slavery wasn't really all that bad for blacks, that the North's hands weren't clean either, that the Civil War was really just about differing interpretations of the Constitution, that white Southerners were the real victims here from Sherman's March to the Sea to Reconstruction. Some white Southerners still prefer to call the conflict "the war of Northern aggression."

Indeed, Southern white "victimhood" has been at the heart of much bloodshed and suffering in the United States not only during the Civil War and the ensuing decades but through the modern era of the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s to the present bigoted hatred of the first African-American president and the coldblooded murders of nine black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina.

Dylann Roof, the alleged perpetrator of the Charleston murders, apparently was motivated by racist propaganda that highlighted incidents of black-on-white crime and led Roof to believe that he was defending the white race, under siege from blacks, another excuse used to justify the Confederate cause.

Yet, the overriding reality has been centuries of white racist violence against blacks from the unspeakable cruelties of slavery to Jim Crow lynchings to the murders of Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders to recent police shootings targeting blacks.

Considering that grim history, what is perhaps most remarkable about white Southerners is that they as a group have never issued an unequivocal apology for their systematic abuse of African-Americans, let alone undertaken a serious commitment to make amends. Instead, many white Southerners pretend that they are the real victims here.

We see this pattern again with the white backlash against public calls from South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and others to retire the Confederate battle flag and other pro-slavery symbols. This weekend, news reports revealed a rush among white Southerners to buy the flag and clothing items featuring the flag. And across the Internet, Confederate apologists rushed to reprise all the sophistry that has surrounded the pro-slavery cause for generations.

In Arlington, Virginia, I encountered some of that when I again urged the County Board to petition the state legislature in Richmond to remove the name of Confederate President Jefferson Davis from roadways that pass Arlington National Cemetery (founded to bury Union soldiers killed in the Civil War) and that skirt

historic black neighborhoods in South Arlington (conveying a racist message of who's still the boss).

Jefferson Davis's name was put on the stretch of Route One in the early 1920s amid a surge of Confederate pride, a period of increased lynchings of blacks, a growth in Ku Klux Klan membership, and release of the movie, "Birth of a Nation," celebrating the KKK as the brave defender of innocent whites endangered by rampaging blacks. In 1964, as a counterpoint to the Civil Rights Act, Virginia extended Jefferson Davis Highway to a roadway near Arlington Cemetery and the Pentagon.

'Rankled' and 'Crazy'

A year ago when I first suggested removing Jefferson Davis's name, the local newspaper treated my appeal as something of a joke, referring to me as "rankled" and prompting angry responses from some Arlingtonians. One hostile letter writer declared, "I am very proud of my Commonwealth's history, but not of the current times, as I'm sure many others are."

A top Democratic county official confronted me after a public meeting and upbraided me for raising such a divisive issue when there were more practical and immediate issues facing the county. The official said the state legislature would think Arlington County was "crazy" if it submitted a recommendation on removing Davis's name.

However, after the Charleston massacre, I wrote to the board again: "When even South Carolina's Republicans say it's time to retire old symbols of the Confederacy – especially ones associated with slavery, white supremacy and violence – isn't it time for Arlington County to petition the state legislature to rename Jefferson Davis Highway something more appropriate to our racial diversity?"

"As we've seen tragically in recent days, symbols carry meaning. They encourage behavior, either good or bad. And, in the case of Confederate symbols, it is clear how individuals like Dylann Roof interpreted them, as a license to murder innocent black people. As for Confederate President Davis, not only was he a white supremacist who wished to perpetuate slavery forever, but he also authorized the murder of captured or surrendering black soldiers of the Union Army, an order that was acted upon in some of the final battles of the Civil War.

"There's even an Arlington connection to some of those U.S. Colored Troops murdered based on Davis's order. Some were trained at our own Camp Casey before marching south to fight for freedom. Some Camp Casey recruits fought in the

Battle of the Crater in a desperate effort to save white Union troops who were being slaughtered in battle. However, after the fighting stopped, Confederate troops – operating under President Davis’s order – executed captured USCT soldiers.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Mystery of the Civil War’s Camp Casey.”](#)]

My letter continued: “As a longtime resident of Arlington, I have often wondered what we think we are honoring when we name a major highway after Jefferson Davis. Are we saying that we think slavery was a good idea? Are we saying that we believe in white supremacy? Are we saying that we favor murdering black people simply because of the color of their skin? What message are we sending to our children – and indeed perhaps to some troubled young people like Dylann Roof?

“Please, finally, petition the legislature to remove Davis’s name from these Arlington roadways – and keep at it even if it requires multiple efforts. It is way past time to do so.”

I have received no reply from the County Board. My guess is there will be the same timidity about riling up the Confederate defenders who will draw fury from their bottomless well of victimhood. When my letter circulated on some local message boards, it did prompt a number of hostile responses (as well as some supportive comments).

But history should tell us that a grave injustice that is not confronted that is allowed to lie dormant while its perpetrators nurse their imaginary grievances will resurface in a myriad of ugly and destructive ways. It is best, albeit difficult, to take on the injustice and demand accountability.

(Update: Sadly, some of the comments to this story only prove my point. Confederate apologists just can’t bring themselves to admit that American slavery was one of history’s great evils. Instead, they engage in endless sophistry, obfuscation, excuses and misdirection. The goal apparently is to confuse the topic and distract from the heart of the matter – that many of them still believe in slavery and white supremacy. If they don’t, why don’t they just say so.)

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Shaking Off the Symbols of Racism

A century and a half after the Civil War, many U.S. politicians still pander to Confederate sympathizers and hesitate to object to the South's racist symbols, an attitude shaken by the murders of nine African-Americans in a Charleston church, as William Loren Katz describes.

By William Loren Katz

The Confederate flag represents a threat to citizens of color, a symbol of treason against the United States, and a war fought on behalf of slaveholders.

But there are other equally offensive symbols that have not attracted the attention they should. For example, a statue of former South Carolina governor and U.S. Sen. Ben Tillman stands in the state Capitol though Tillman was an advocate of lynching.

Tillman entered politics in 1875-1876, just before the end of Reconstruction, directing a mob called "The Red Shirts," in a massacre in Hamburg, South Carolina. As Tillman himself would later put it, "The leading white men of Edgefield" had decided "to seize the first opportunity that the Negroes might offer them to provoke a riot and teach the Negroes a lesson" by "having the whites demonstrate their superiority by killing as many of them as was justifiable."

Tillman was still around in 1907, regaling fellow senators with racial tirades: "I would lead a mob to lynch the brute who had ravished a woman." He identified the brute as "negroes . . . a black flood of semi-barbarians," "a lurking demon." Whites, Tillman claimed, faced "an irrepressible conflict between civilization and barbarism."

What about replacing Tillman with statues of heroic African-American men and women who fled to Union lines and volunteered to help, thousands served as spies or in the Union Army and Navy. Or Robert Smalls and his enslaved crew who hijacked the *Planter*, a Confederate gunboat from Charleston harbor, and sailed to the Union fleet?

What about a commemoration of the daring white and African-American radical Republicans of South Carolina? In 1868, 76 African Americans and 55 whites wrote a new state constitution that promised equal justice for all. The new multicultural legislature (with a black majority) opened public schools, reduced taxes for the poor, reformed prisons and the criminal code, and extended new rights to women.

What about a statue to celebrate Elias Hill, a formerly enslaved South Carolinian in York County? At age 5, he became too ill to stand or walk, or take care of his needs. Hill, who taught himself to read and write, became an ordained Baptist minister and a community leader who started schools and taught adults citizenship rights.

Rev. Hill changed history when raiders from the huge Ku Klux Klan chapter in York beat him savagely. Hill was carried by relatives into Federal Court in York to testify against the KKK. Others were inspired to testify. Enough convictions followed to close the York County KKK. The York trials inspired successful federal prosecutions in other Southern states.

Rev. Hill was among many South Carolinians of both races who suffered while building a multiracial democracy. Many lost their jobs, some their lives, and others were driven into exile. After his testimony, Hill had to flee to Liberia with his family and congregation.

Citizens in South Carolina and other states that have placed inciters of racial violence, like Sen. Ben Tillman, on pedestals should not only remove them but begin a discussion on their replacements. This meaningful discussion and its choices would properly celebrate those ordinary people who, in the face of unrelenting murder and fear, including state-sponsored terror and Federal indifference, rose to defend the rights of all people.

William Loren Katz is the author of 40 books on African-American history, and has been associated with New York University as an instructor and Scholar in Residence since 1973. His website is www.williamlkatz.com. Read an interview with Katz about his life teaching and writing history.

The Mystery of the Civil War's Camp Casey

Special Report: During the Civil War's final years, a Union base in Northern Virginia trained hundreds of African-American soldiers to fight to end slavery, one of only a few such bases inside a Confederate state. But Camp Casey has nearly disappeared from history, a mystery examined by Chelsea Gilmour.

By Chelsea Gilmour

As much as Virginia loves its Civil War history chronicling and commemorating almost every detail Camp Casey isn't one of the places that gets glorified or

even remembered. Located somewhere in what's now Arlington County, just miles from the White House and U.S. Capitol, Camp Casey was where regiments of African-American troops were trained to fight the Confederacy to end slavery.

While not the largest Union base for training U.S. Colored Troops (USCT), Camp Casey was one of the few located within the boundaries of a Confederate state. Yet, despite its historical significance, or perhaps because of it, Camp Casey has been largely lost to history.

In the decades after the war, as the white power structure reasserted itself across the South including in Virginia, the narrative of the Blue and the Grey took hold, two white armies battling heroically over conflicting interpretations of federal authority, brother against brother. Though slavery was surely an issue, African-Americans were pushed into the background, almost as bystanders.

In Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, statues of Southern heroes were erected seemingly everywhere. One city street called Monument Avenue is lined with statues starting with one to Gen. Robert E. Lee (erected in 1890) and then (between 1900 and 1925) others to Gen. J.E.B. Stuart, Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, Navy Lt. Matthew Fontaine Maury and President Jefferson Davis.

If you drive north toward Washington along I-95, you see a gigantic Confederate battle flag flying next to the highway near Fredericksburg, the site of a Confederate victory in 1862, as well as frequent historical markers remembering not only battles but skirmishes. Across Virginia, there are eight national parks dedicated to Civil War battles and events.

The honors bestowed on Confederate leaders reach even into Arlington and Alexandria, though Union forces maintained control of those areas throughout the war. In 1920, at the height of Jim Crow segregation, parts of Route One, including stretches through or near black neighborhoods, were named in honor of Jefferson Davis, an avowed white supremacist who wanted to continue slavery forever. (In 1964, during the Civil Rights era, Davis's name was added to an adjacent part of Route 110 near the Pentagon.)

Throughout Arlington itself, there are markers designating where Union forts and battlements were located. But there are no markers remembering Camp Casey, where the 23rd USCT regiment was trained and outfitted to go south to fight for African-American freedom and where other USCT units bivouacked and drilled on their marches south. Even Camp Casey's precise location has become something of a mystery with county historians offering conflicting accounts.

That haziness itself raises troubling questions, since Camp Casey arguably was the most historically significant Civil War site in Arlington. It was not just

some static fort that never was attacked but an active training ground for hundreds of African-Americans to take up arms against the historic crime of black enslavement.

Camp Casey's Role

Named after Major General Silas Casey, who oversaw the training of new recruits near Washington, Camp Casey was in operation from 1862-1865 and served as an important rendezvous point for Union troops, accommodating some 1,800 soldiers. It also housed prisoners of war and included a hospital.

General Casey wrote the *Infantry Tactics for Colored Troops* in 1863, differentiating the training procedures for colored troops based on the racist notion that black soldiers were not as well equipped for combat or to follow orders, and would need to be spurred in order to fight as valiantly as whites.

To give an idea of Camp Casey's significance as a USCT base, a letter from the camp dated Aug. 2, 1864, directs Colonel Bowman of the 84th Pennsylvania volunteers to forward all recruits for the colored regiments in the Army of the Potomac to the recruiting rendezvous at Camp Casey instead of Camp Distribution as previously directed.

There were 138 African-American units serving in the Union Army during the Civil War making up about one-tenth of the federal forces by the war's end in April 1865 and at least 16 of those USCT regiments spent time at Camp Casey from 1864-1865, including the 6th, the 29th, and the 31st.

Camp Casey was the recruiting and training camp for the 23rd Regiment U.S. Colored Infantry with many recruits coming from Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania, Virginia, slave country about halfway between Washington and Richmond. In line with the standards of the time, USCT soldiers were not as well trained as white troops, were not given the best equipment, and were not paid as well.

USCT soldiers also faced hostility and mistrust from some white Northern troops, meaning that they often were not placed on the front lines but got assigned to "fatigue duty," such as accompanying wagons and moving supplies. Nevertheless, USCT regiments battled heroically in several major clashes near the war's end and faced special dangers not shared by their white Northern comrades.

When blacks were admitted into the Union Army, Confederate President Jefferson Davis instituted a policy that refused to treat them as soldiers but rather as slaves in a state of insurrection, so they could be murdered upon capture or sold into slavery. The USCT soldiers were trained to expect no mercy and no quarter if wounded or captured.

In accordance with that Confederate policy, U.S. Colored Troops did face summary executions when captured in battle. When a Union garrison at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, was overrun by Confederate forces on April 12, 1864, black soldiers were shot down as they surrendered. Similar atrocities occurred at the Battle of Poison Springs, Arkansas, on April 18, 1864, and the Battle of the Crater in Petersburg, Virginia, on July 30, 1864. In one of the most notorious massacres of black Union soldiers, scores were executed in Saltville, Virginia, on Oct. 2, 1864.

Bravery Under Fire

When the 23rd USCT was dispatched to join the battle against General Robert E. Lee's vaunted Army of Northern Virginia, one of Union General George Meade's staff officers wrote in a demeaning letter about them: "As I looked at them my soul was troubled and I would gladly have seen them marched back to Washington. We do not dare trust them in battle. Ah, you may make speeches at home, but here, where it is life or death, we dare not risk it."

However, on May 15, 1864, the 23rd USCT engaged in what may have been the first clash between Lee's army and black troops. A chronology of the 23rd's history cites Noel Harrison at Mysteries & Conundrums describing how the 23rd came to the support of an Ohio cavalry unit confronting a Confederate force southeast of Chancellorsville.

According to an account uncovered by historian Gordon C. Rhea, one of the Ohio cavalymen wrote, "It did us good to see the long line of glittering bayonets approach, although those who bore them were Blacks, and as they came nearer they were greeted by loud cheers." The 23rd charged toward the Confederate position causing the Southern troops to withdraw, suffering several dead.

But the lack of faith in the African-American soldiers' commitment and skill would play a decisive role in the disastrous Battle of the Crater. The 23rd and 29th USCT regiments, both of which spent time at Camp Casey, were part of Union General Ambrose Burnside's Fourth Division, which was comprised of nine USCT regiments.

These regiments (the 23rd, the 29th, the 31st, the 43rd, the 30th, the 39th, the 28th, the 27th, and the 19th) were to lead the charge against Confederate defenses after a Union-crafted mine explosion blew an enormous crater under Confederate lines. Plans were changed, however, at the last minute when General Meade refused to allow the USCT to lead the advance.

Instead, the war-weary white troops commanded by General James Ledlie (a notorious drunk, whose lack of presence, much less leadership, during the battle

was notable) led the way. Instead of charging around the crater, as the U.S. Colored Troops had been trained to do, the unprepared white replacements surged into the crater and were unable to get out. Union troops piled in on top of each other and were completely stuck, serving as easy targets for the Confederate soldiers above.

Finally, the USCT were called forth and served as a last stand against Confederate troops. Since they had initially been trained for the operation, they knew to avoid the crater and search for higher ground. But by that point, the botched attempt to take Petersburg had deteriorated into a massacre.

Lt. Robert K. Beecham, who had helped organize the USCT 23rd regiment, wrote about the soldiers' bravery: "The black boys formed up promptly. There was no flinching on their part. They came to the shoulder like true soldiers, as ready to face the enemy and meet death on the field as the bravest and best soldiers that ever lived."

According to the National Park Service, 209 USCT soldiers were killed in the battle with 697 wounded and 421 missing. The 23rd USCT from Camp Casey suffered the heaviest losses, with 74 killed, 115 wounded, and 121 missing. Confederate troops murdered a number of the USCT soldiers as they sought to surrender.

After the Battle of the Crater, soldiers from the 23rd were among the Union troops to enter the Confederate capital of Richmond after it fell and were present for General Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865.

The Mystery of Camp Casey

Arlington historians have various takes on why the history of Camp Casey has been so neglected with even its precise location a mystery. The Arlington Historical Society's stance is that it is not unusual to have lost a camp's location, since Arlington and Alexandria were both heavily fortified during the Civil War and there were many camps located throughout the area.

Further, unlike a fort, which would consist of a large physical construction, most training camps had tents pitched in a field with only a few solid wood-framed buildings.

But Franco Brown, a historian with the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington, had a different take on why its location has been mostly lost to history. Calling Camp Casey "one of the biggest mysteries of the Civil War," he has spent the past eight years researching Camp Casey and had encountered many of the same difficulties that I did in finding definitive information.

While acknowledging that Camp Casey was not the biggest USCT base Camp Penn in

Pennsylvania and Camp Nelson in Kentucky were more important training locations Brown said Camp Casey was largely lost to history because it wasn't significant to the state's dominant historians. They favored the conventional narrative of the Civil War, the storyline of two white armies, brothers fighting brothers.

"This information [about Camp Casey] does not want to be out it is part of their power," Brown said.

Brown said a key factor to consider when questioning how Camp Casey could have been ignored is to look at the attitudes of Virginians and the South after the war. At the war's conclusion, resentments ran high, and it would have been particularly galling to Southerners loyal to the Confederacy to acknowledge that there were African-American soldiers actively training on Virginian soil to fight for the North.

"After the war you get things like the KKK, which was started by five Confederate generals," Brown said, "and they don't want mixing of the races. The South is still mad about the Civil War. The South is still mad at the black man, because he helped win the Civil War."

This explanation takes into account the realities of Virginia's society and culture following the war and, in many ways, continuing to today. While there may be some truth to the argument that the story of Camp Casey was simply lost in the chaos following the war, it isn't hard to imagine a concerted effort by resentful whites to diminish the role of black soldiers during the war.

Where Was It?

There even remains the question: where was Camp Casey? When I set out recently to try to solve that mystery, I found remarkably little information and some of it was conflicting. The National Archives in Washington had little about the camp, mostly letters and muster rolls, and it wasn't until I asked the Arlington Historical Society's official historians that they seemed to give the matter much thought.

As far as the exact location of Camp Casey, there are a couple of conclusions. One thing seems certain, that it was located on or near Columbia Pike, then the main thoroughfare from Northern Virginia to Washington D.C.

Some letters from the time suggest that the camp was within sight of the Custis-Lee Mansion overlooking the Potomac River (now known as Arlington House above Arlington National Cemetery). That and other references to landmarks, including its supposed proximity to Freedman's Village, led some historical investigators to place Camp Casey on the south side of Columbia Pike, not far from the Long Bridge which crossed into Washington.

An advertisement on Sept. 5, 1865, from the *Daily National Republican*, a Washington, D.C. newspaper in circulation from 1862-1866, announced the sale of government buildings at Camp Casey situated “about one and one-half miles from Long Bridge.”

Jim Murphy of the Historical Society explained, “We think it [Camp Casey] would have been between the Long Bridge and Fort Albany, in a field in what is currently the [south] parking lot of the Pentagon. ... We concluded it was located there after going through letters and dispatches from the camp that discuss the colored troops training next to a field.” (Long Bridge was located near today’s I-395’s 14th St. Bridge across the Potomac, and Fort Albany was just south of the current Air Force Memorial on Columbia Pike.) [To see a Civil War-era map of the area with some of the landmarks, [click here.](#)]

The Pentagon-parking-lot location would likely have put it within sight of the Custis-Lee mansion and would place it close to Freedman’s Village, a semi-permanent community for African-Americans freed by President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation who escaped the Confederacy and were settled on a portion of Lee’s plantation on the north side of Columbia Pike.

But Franco Brown cites other evidence in letters from the soldiers placing Camp Casey in the vicinity of Hunter’s Chapel, which no longer exists but was then located at the intersection of Glebe Road and Columbia Pike, about two miles further southwest from the location cited in the newspaper ad.

Brown also has a contemporaneous lithographic depiction that puts Camp Casey on a bluff near an area that looks to be around the intersection of what is now Glebe Road and Walter Reed Drive. “This area is at the highest apex of the surrounding land,” Brown said.

Brown also noted that the lithograph shows a tall tower in the distant left-hand background, the Fairfax Seminary, which still stands today as the Virginia Theological Seminary, about four miles further south in Alexandria.

Thus, he concluded that “the general vicinity [of Camp Casey] is likely between the present day locations of Glebe Road, Walter Reed Drive, Columbia Pike, and Route 50 [Arlington Boulevard].” Brown said he is confident in this conclusion saying, “I’ve got it within 500 yards of the original location.”

Brown’s location would place Camp Casey about three miles from the Long Bridge, among Fort Albany, Fort Berry and Fort Craig. There is also the possibility that Camp Casey involved several military way stations stretching along Columbia Pike, all known collectively as Camp Casey, which might explain the disparate descriptions of its location. [For an overview map of the forts in the

Washington area, [click here.](#)]

Though Arlington County has no plans to honor Camp Casey (or even work to ascertain its exact location), county officials have responded to public pressure to acknowledge Freedman's Village, where Sojourner Truth lived and worked for a time.

Freedman's Village gave freed slaves refuge both during the Civil War and for decades later (until it was razed in 1900). In September 2015, Arlington plans to dedicate a new bridge on Washington Boulevard that crosses over Columbia Pike as "Freedman's Village Bridge."

It is a much deserved (albeit meager) recognition of the historic area which became a Freedom Trail for African-Americans, both those escaping slavery by heading northward and those marching southward as soldiers to end it.

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Raw Deal for Black Freedom Trail

Exclusive: Columbia Pike has long been the most neglected corridor in Arlington, Virginia, despite or perhaps because of its historic role as the freedom trail for thousands of African-Americans fleeing the Confederacy and slavery. That neglect now has a new chapter as a planned Streetcar is killed, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

When President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on Jan. 1, 1863, thousands of African-Americans began trudging north escaping the slaveholding Confederacy, finally reaching Union defenses in Arlington, Virginia. Many came via Columbia Pike, then the principal roadway to Washington DC and what became their freedom trail.

Some of these former slaves joined the U.S. Colored Troops training at nearby Camp Casey and went on to fight to eradicate slavery once and for all. Considered "contraband" or runaway slaves by the Confederates, the Colored Troops were sometimes subjected to summary executions if captured in battle. By the end of the war, they represented ten percent of the Union Army. Some 2,751 perished as combat casualties during the last two years of the war.

Meanwhile, many African-American families were settled along Columbia Pike in what had been Gen. Robert E. Lee's plantation before he deserted the U.S. Army and became commander of Confederate forces. In 1863, as the flow of former slaves became a flood, U.S. Congress created Freedman's Village as a semi-permanent refugee camp on land that now includes the Pentagon, Arlington National Cemetery and the Air Force Memorial.

Freedman's Village survived until the end of the Nineteenth Century when it was disbanded with many of its residents moving into the historic black neighborhoods of South Arlington. However, by then, the white power structure had reasserted itself across the Old South. Segregation was the law of Virginia, enforced by lynching and other abuses while the federal government did little to intervene.

By the early Twentieth Century, there was also a fetish about honoring Confederate leaders. To drive home the point of who was in charge, the Daughters of the Confederacy in 1920 had the state government name a portion of Route One, which skirted South Arlington's black neighborhoods, in honor of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, a dyed-in-the-wool white supremacist who had favored keeping African-Americans in chains forever.

This history is relevant again because it is the fact that South Arlington has remained the most racially diverse part of the county now with many Latinos and Asians as well as blacks and whites that has contributed to its perennial neglect. That was how things were during segregation and it is how they still are. Indeed, since the end of segregation in the 1960s, the divergence between predominantly white North Arlington and racially mixed South Arlington has widened, not narrowed.

Billions upon billions of taxpayers' dollars have been invested in North Arlington, especially with the state-of-the-art Metro, both the Orange Line, which gives easy access to Washington, and the new Silver Line, which will reach Dulles Airport. This modern transportation system has spurred private development and has produced a financial windfall for residents lucky enough to have owned property in North Arlington.

There has also been pressure on the County Board to provide amenities suitable for the higher-income white professionals who live near the Orange Line, such as a \$2 million "dog park renovation" near the Clarendon stop. By contrast, one of the biggest public works projects for South Arlington was an expanded sewage treatment plant to handle the increased sewage flow from North Arlington.

Bypassing the Pike

It's not that there weren't plans for some improvements along depressed and shabby Columbia Pike, where you'll find check-cashing services and down-in-the-mouth strip malls. Initially, there was supposed to be a Metro line, but that was scrapped for financial reasons.

Then, early last decade, a series of neighborhood meetings were held to discuss how to improve the Columbia Pike corridor. It was at one of those meetings that an elderly black man rose to voice a longstanding complaint, that the historic black cemetery on Columbia Pike had been dug up to make room for a hotel.

A consensus emerged that it was important to retain the area's ethnic diversity and its affordable housing while simultaneously making it less of a congested commuter pass-through. At the center of the plan was what amounted to a consolation prize for losing out on the Metro, a much cheaper light-rail Streetcar.

Though the County Board embraced the community's plan, actual spending on South Arlington remained at the bottom of the to-do list. When it came to rebuilding the County's three high schools, the two North Arlington schools came first and South Arlington's came last. The two North Arlington schools now rank as the second and third best in Virginia. South Arlington's school is in the forties.

Finally, the County Board got around to the Columbia Pike Streetcar, though over the intervening decade the projected price tag had risen substantially. Some opportunistic politicians and the local newspaper, the Sun-Gazette, which doesn't even bother to distribute in much of South Arlington with its less desirable demographics, saw a useful wedge issue: why should money be "wasted" on South Arlington.

It turns out that one of the easiest political sells in the Old Confederacy is still to get white people to resent spending money on the black and brown parts of town even though possibly as much as half of the Streetcar budget (or around \$150 million) was coming from the state (with much of the rest coming from a business transportation tax and nothing from homeowners).

So, when Republican John Vihstadt, who was running as an Independent on what amounted to a Tea Party anti-government platform, made killing the Columbia Pike Streetcar the centerpiece of his County Board campaign, the outcome had the feel of inevitability. Money poured in to Vihstadt's campaign, so much so that he was able to put on television commercials in prime time.

Though unable to compete financially, Vihstadt's Democratic opponent, Alan Howze, managed to hold his own in South Arlington. But Vihstadt ran up huge margins in North Arlington and won in a landslide.

The shaken Democrats were soon ready to run up the white flag, though they still held a three-to-two majority on the County Board. Abruptly, two North Arlington Democrats, Jay Fisette and Mary Hynes, switched sides on the Columbia Pike Streetcar, leaving only Walter Tejada, the County's top Hispanic leader, favoring going forward.

But almost no one in Arlington wants to talk about the issue of race or the historical reasons why Columbia Pike and South Arlington are the way they are. The white people of North Arlington seethe over any suggestion that the continuing neglect of South Arlington has any racial aspect to it at all. They see themselves as living in a post-racial world with enlightened attitudes about non-white people.

However, everyone knows that it remains common practice in Arlington for realtors to steer young white professionals away from South Arlington because of "the schools," which amounts to a code word for the area's racial diversity. My disgust with this sly appeal to racism was why I bought a house in South Arlington in 1978 and sent all four of my children to "the schools."

What I didn't anticipate was that Arlington County would blithely continue to favor white North Arlington and do so little for racially diverse South Arlington, essentially maintaining the discriminatory pattern of public investments that were the rule during segregation.

So, when it comes to investing public money in Columbia Pike, the road that became the pathway to freedom for thousands of African-Americans escaping slavery, it has been decided that those people along the Pike don't deserve anything approaching a modern, fast-moving and neighborhood-friendly system – even if that decision means turning back \$150 million to the state for spending in other parts of Virginia.

While many of the upwardly mobile people of North Arlington now can operate almost car-free by using the Metro augmented by Zip cars and Uber taxis the people of South Arlington are told to make do with buses and the assurance that race has nothing to do with the disparity.

And, in case you're wondering, the stretch of Route One through South Arlington is still called Jefferson Davis Highway. When I tried to make this outrage a county issue, I was told by a senior Arlington Democrat that any effort to rename it would simply be too divisive.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Shameful History of Jeff Davis Highway](#)" and "[Is Arlington County, VA, Racist?](#)"]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for

The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).
