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CIVIL WAR TO CIVIL RIGHTS: UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS REUNION FLAG



Kentucky Historical Society collections

STATEWIDE — The Emancipation Proclamation gave African Americans the opportunity to serve in the Union army. President Abraham Lincoln’s edict, however, did not legally affect Kentucky since it was a loyal state.

Although African American men were officially authorized to enlist in Kentucky in the spring of 1864, opposition, persecution and violence

continued. In Danville, citizens threw stones and shot pistols at 250 black recruits who were marching to Camp Nelson. In Louisville, stone-throwing youths harassed black troops. In Adair County, one young slave who attempted to enlist was told that he could not do so without his master’s consent. Upon his return home he was whipped severely. In Taylor County, some recruits were beaten and thrown in jail. White officers who attempted to enlist African Americans also were persecuted. In Spencer County, the deputy provost marshal was beaten and run out of town and, in LaRue County, a recruiting agent was captured and almost killed by angry citizens.

Despite harsh persecutions, Kentucky’s African Americans understood that their service in the Union army was a step toward freedom, citizenship and equality. Black men enlisted in force in 1864 and 1865. Eventually, nearly 24,000 Kentucky African Americans — the most from any state except Louisiana — joined. This flag commemorates the battles of the Fifth Regiment, USCT, which included many Kentucky African American troops.

The Kentucky Historical Society (KHS) links Kentuckians with their past via archival collections that document people from every walk of life, reaching back to 1509. Letters, diaries, oral histories and photographs, as well as the first and second Kentucky Constitutions, are included. Find these and other KHS collections online at khs catalog.kyvl.org

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The Kentucky Historical Society is an agency of the
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