In Search of Freedom:
African Americans and Massachusetts' Militia From 1852-1917

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ABSTRACT

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A thesis presented to the Department of History
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
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The scope of the research paper focuses on how African Americans utilized Massachusetts' militia. From 1852 till around 1917 black men enlisted in independent and state recognized militia companies. The independent Blues formed in New Bedford, while in Boston there was the Liberty Guard. Over time the latter became L Company of the 6th Infantry Regiment. In a state with a small black population, the military provided an intersection between the elite and lower classes. Together they celebrated black culture and pushed the boundaries of the persistent color line. Local armories helped internal and external communities find some relief from socioeconomic pressures placed upon them. They also allowed access to various forms of social entertainment and amusement. For men, a uniform conveyed manhood which granted access to economic mobility, while it also yielded respectability. Their presence as armed soldiers was a symbolic representation of a more militant approach to secure and defend liberties as citizens. The overall goal of this work is to highlight how participation in the militia
both as soldiers and civilians, became a way to secure a sense of inclusion into society as racial discrimination and political uncertainty grew in the periods.
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Introduction

On November 2, 1857, fifty-five black men who called themselves the Liberty Guard dressed in black uniforms and armed with rifles and swords, paraded from their armory in the African-American enclave of what is now Beacon Hill, through the streets of Boston. The men laid claim to their natural born rights as American citizens in a Baptism of blood as tensions between black and white onlookers erupted into violence.¹ From the mid-1840's through the 1850's, northern free African American men, affluent and impoverished, began to take up arms and don uniforms within the margins of state and federal laws. The men pushed back against mid-19th-century racial perceptions of black people as timid individuals, while they challenged their exclusion from state militias under the federal Militia Act of 1792. Public displays of black men with rifles were also an abandonment of respectability politics, which required a request for civil rights within white cultural and political standards. Massachusetts Antebellum movements against slavery and discrimination achieved much of their success through respectability, but overt actions eventually led to the formation of black militia companies in Boston, New Bedford, and the states "colored" Civil War Regiments. After the war a soldier's status allowed black men to distinguish and elevate themselves from racial and socioeconomic pressures. However, by the 1880s and the start of the Progressive Era, these soldiers and veterans could not escape the

¹ “First Public Parade of the Liberty Guard,” The Liberator, Nov 27, 1857, 192.
prejudices that had risen in Massachusetts as the country became consumed by racial tension and violence in the period known as the *Nadir*. They countered the uncertainties of black American daily life through the continuation of militia social traditions at home and abroad, which included competitions, theatrical performances, banquets, balls, and cultural celebrations. These moments of joy offered the chance to push back against the persistent color line to achieve a sense of equality and assert their citizenship under the laws of the nation.

Often in the narratives of Massachusetts' military history, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Regiment are given the most attention in the fight for racial equality. Research request for other African American soldiers and units in archives are redirected to the nearly mythical feats of the men. The campaign for militia inclusion and continuation of their social traditions before and after the assault on the ramparts of Fort Wagner in January of 1863, has been regulated to the background. The state did not solely have the moral obligation to arm black men to fight for their freedoms, rather by foot and by mouth they demanded their natural born rights. Litigation against discrimination was ineffective while public demonstrations and parades through militant intent created the most changes. The 1857 Liberty Guard who became the Shaw Guards in September of 1863 and Company L in December in 1878, were the result of grassroots efforts. Boston's black enclave in the West End sustained the militia for generations as a symbol of manhood and a form of entertainment. With the segregation of the city's public amusements more prominently in the 1880's and early 20th century, militia social life was a refuge against the color line. Newspapers from the *Liberator*, to the *Boston Evening Transcript*, *Boston Globe*, and the *Guardian*, reported and advertised the activities. In the state with a city formerly known as the "Birthplace of Liberty," freedom for all of its citizens was not an easy process.
1792 Federal Militia Act, Antebellum Litigation, and the Liberty Guard

The fabled Crispus Attucks became a martyr for an independent American liberation struggle built on racialized perceptions of liberties and citizenship in 1770. In the colonial period as hostilities grew over oppressive British governance, racialized codes had been implemented to restrict the freedoms of people of African descent as slavery was institutionalized. The hierarchy of white supremacy, though, was still malleable and undermined by security threats from indigenous polities and outside intrusions.

Colonial powers in need of soldiers often called upon black men to serve in their militias and were vital in the early stages of the American Revolution. In late 1775 as British forces besieged the city of Boston, the colonial armies sent to repulse the attack were integrated with black and indigenous soldiers, but equality did not last.\(^2\) Their presence on the battlefield evoked citizenship and conflicted with property rights which endangered the alliance of the colonies especially with the slaveholders of the south.

As confrontations with slave owners and fears of armed rebellions grew, the Continental Army and Congress were forced to ban the recruitment of slaves and regulate the enlistment of free blacks. General George Washington issued a policy to allow free blacks to re-enlist in the

army on December 30, 1775, after his Cambridge headquarters witnessed a protest by free blacks over an initial disbarment. The decision of Virginia's British Governor Lord Dunmore's to offer freedom to all slaves and persons of color within his domain in exchange for military service also influenced Washington's policy reversal.  

The fight over nonwhites in the militia in Massachusetts led the colonies legislature to create a militia act on January 20th, 1776. The law which barred the recruitment of Negroes, "Mulattoes," and Indians, established a model for the other colonies and later federal decisions after the war.  

Fears of armed insurrections by indigenous societies and enslaved Africans plagued the new United States and led to the passage of the Federal Militia Act on May 8th, 1792. The federal law restricted access to weapons through the designation of militia service to white males only. Over time the law was circumvented due to shortages of soldiers in the early republic.  

In all of the United States conflicts before the Civil War, African American soldiers and sailors served on the battlefield. With a relatively weak federal government, state and territorial authorities often dismissed the 1792 Militia Act for their security needs. Whether it was the War of 1812 or the Mexican-American War in 1846, a black military tradition was carved out with the margins of the law.  

By the 1840's the abolitionist cause had grown militant over the vulnerability of slaves and free persons of color to armed institutionalized resistance. A resolution was presented to

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6 Johnson Jr., African American National Guard, 5-6.
train black men in armed warfare at the 1847 National Convention of Colored People and their friends in Troy, New York attended by Massachusetts delegates William Cooper Nell and Fredrick Douglas. A year later a trend of independent quasi-militia companies began with the formation of the Hannibal Guards in Brooklyn, New York. Seven years later the Independent Village Guards were formed in New York City with several other black militia companies in the 1850's in states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania. The independent companies were symbolic representations of black American commitment to civil rights and manhood. Many of the militiamen did try to petition their state legislators for formal recognition without much success.

Though Massachusetts had a smaller black population compared to New York or Philadelphia, the state offered the best platform to gain militia rights. The state's cohesive abolitionist and civil rights movements made great strides towards racial integration except for the militia. The black elite who sought further inclusion into white society began the campaign for militia inclusion in 1852. Their efforts would go on to be a struggle between the politics of respectability and moral demands for equality.

In the 1830's African Americans broadened their attacks against slavery with the support of white abolitionist while they stretched the boundaries of race relations in Massachusetts to secure more liberties for themselves. Boston and New Bedford were the largest centers of black political resistance due to their small but significant populations. At this time were nearly 400

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7 Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People, and Their Friends, Held In Troy, N.Y., on the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th October, 1847: (Troy, New York: Steam Press of J. C. Kneeland and Co, 1847) 14-17.

8 John Ernest, A Nation Within a Nation: African American Communities Before the Civil War (Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 2011) 18-20.

9 Johnson Jr., African American National Guard, 9-10.
black residents in New Bedford while there were about 1,400 in Boston.\textsuperscript{10} Led by the black elite who used their privilege and closeness to white aristocracy as leverage, the state reached a point of racial integration where blacks had nearly equal rights as citizens compared to whites by the 1850s. Antebellum litigation against discrimination was an umbrella campaign that targeted an assortment of issues such as interracial marriage and public schools. The desegregation of the state's public schools was the pinnacle achievement which led to the passage of the 1855 Desegregation Act. The act made it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on race, color, or religion in public schools.\textsuperscript{11} The civil rights campaigns opened spaces to both men and women to assert their citizenship, but men were also able to profess their manhood.

The militia was the only public space that remained legally off-limits to non-whites. Robert Morris who was one of the first black men to practice law in the country became a critical leader in the effort to change this.\textsuperscript{12} With his experience as a lawyer and activist, he brought a petition to the state legislature in 1852. Seasoned activist William C. Nell and William J. Watkins, were some of the most prominent individuals who joined Morris’ coalition.

Robert Morris elevated himself from life as a servant and achieved success as a lawyer through respectability. He owed much of his good fortunes to the benevolence of white


benefactors from Massachusetts' social elite, such as Ellis Gray Loring. His position as a black lawyer and his abilities as one made him a crucial member of several civil rights coalitions. In the fight to desegregate public schools, Morris brought the case of Roberts V. Boston before the state's supreme court in 1848. The primary arguments which led to the passage of the Desegregation Act of 1855, were partially formulated by him. Two years after Roberts V. Boston, he was a co-conspirator in the escape of fugitive slave Shadrach Minkins from the custody of U.S. Marshals.

These experiences enabled him to organize a militia petition in 1852. The primary demand of the petition was the removal of the word "White" from the state's militia laws. Morris believed if the state's militia laws did not mention race, black men could be allowed to join based upon their citizenship. He eloquently went before the legislature and attempted to justify that it was their constitutional right to have the privilege to serve. The signers of the petition were not only in line with his ideology but his social background as well. Some of those who signed the petition were his brothers and prominent black lawyer George Ruffin though their support was not enough. Morris' was able to generate an appeal in March of 1853. Joined by William J. Watkins son of accomplished Maryland abolitionist, they presented their arguments in front of a legislative committee on the Militia. Watkins, unlike Morris, gave a more passionate moral plea based on the hypocrisies of the country on race and liberties. His plea was a direct challenge to white supremacy that centralized on collective black aspirations for equality.

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13 Kantrowitz, More Than Freedom, 137-139.

14 Kantrowitz, More Than Freedom, 190-193.

15 Box 1. “Petition to Strike 'White' From the Militia Law” and Robert Morris Papers. Boston Athenaeum, Boston, MA.

On March 3, 1853 a second petition was presented to the state legislature. As Morris focused on the removal of the designation of "white" from the militia law, Watkins wanted approval to form legally recognized black militia companies. From his viewpoint, American-born males possessed the same natural rights and liberties. He went before the committee and demanded that they live up to the nation's principles. For Watkins, the upliftment of black Americans could only occur if they received the same freedoms as whites. In one of the more impassioned parts of his speech, Watkins declared, "...All we demand, is, the unrestricted right to breathe unmolested, the pure unadulterated atmosphere of Heaven...We are told we can not rise! Take the millstone off our necks...We are inferior to the white man...Give us our rights...We can not be elevated in the land of our birth! Give us our rights ask no more." The combined efforts of Morris and Watkins still could not convince the committee. An amendment to the state's constitution became an option.

To strengthen their argumentative approaches, both Morris and Watkins used histories of black soldiers in America's wars. The evidence presented came from research conducted by writer and activist William Cooper Nell. He published his research in two volumes, and the 1855 history of The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, included a description of the events that took place at the convention. Nell was not just an early black historian who traveled in Boston's elite circles, but was an experienced organizer for civil rights causes and became an abolitionist under the tutelage of William Lloyd Garrison. His knowledge was instrumental in the creation of the militia petitions, especially the one for the convention.

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17 William J. Watkins, An Address Delivered in Boston, Before the Legislative Committee on the Militia (Boston: Benjamin F. Roberts, 1853)

18 Kantrowitz, More Than Freedom, 41-43.
Watkins, Nell, and sixty-four other men signed and delivered the petition in February of 1853. The most crucial lines written in the petition come near the end of the document which says, “. . .If this be not granted, then they respectably ask that this protest may be placed on the records of the convention, and published with the official proceedings, that stigma may not rest upon their memories of having tamely acquiesced in perception, equally at war with the American Constitution, the Massachusetts Bill of Rights, and the claims of human rights.”

The convention committee denied the petition. In a prelude to the Dred Scott decision, the integration of black men into the militia would have placed them on a level of equality on par with white men. The decision would have established a precedent for other litigations against discrimination.

Though defeated, Robert Morris did not give up but rather shifted his approach. He chose to go ahead and form a militia company in the hopes that it would eventually be recognized. In 1855 Morris formed the Massasoit Guards with some of Boston's most prominent men. The inability to be funded by the state became an immediate problem. Massachusetts would have been in violation of the Federal Militia Act if they supplied the men with items such as firearms. To reassure doubts and fears, Morris proclaimed they would be able to raise the necessary funds for themselves. He also assured that the militia would be open to all men, not only those in the upper realms of black society.

From its inception, the drive to reform the state's militia law was a top down crusade. John Van Surely DeGrasse, the first African American admitted into the Massachusetts Medical School, co-founded the Massasoit Guards.

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19 William C. Nell, The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, 110

He not only came from an aristocratic background, but he also married into a well-established family. DeGrasse's brother in law Alfred G. Howard who worked in his family-owned chain of hairdressers received the rank of lieutenant.\textsuperscript{21}

With Massachusetts' relatively small black population, the small pockets of elite citizens could not succeed with white allies alone. A broad grass movement needed the support and physical presence of members of the lower classes.

Through his hesitation to commit the Massasoit Guards to operate openly in public, Robert Morris added to his problems. Committed to the politics of respectability, Morris wanted to avoid any conflict with the government of the state. With much of his success achieved through appeals to white political and cultural sentiments, he did not want to agitate those in power. Armed uniformed marches in any parades or celebrations brought the chance of a backlash since it was an illegal act and struck at the heart of white fears over black militancy. Hindered the Massasoit Guards were undermined from the start and could not function. Two years prior William J. Watkins vented his frustration with the politics of the elite, both black and white. At a celebration of West Indian Emancipation in New Bedford shortly after his convention address, he reasserted his beliefs. He ridiculed patronage and hypocrisy over the plight of black "men" within political parties and from the ideologies of elitist like Morris. In an assertion of his citizenship, Watkins declared, "I have the right, and I shall exercise it fearlessly and boldly, and above-bored, to call into question the validity of the process by which I am made a pilgrim and a stranger; modus operandi by which I am made an alien in

the land of my birth.” 22 The fight over the militia controlled by the upper class shifted into the grasp of lower class men not bound by the politics of respectability. They saw the benefits of a militia company but demanded it outright based on their natural born rights.

In August of 1857, the independent militia company the Liberty Guard was formed in Boston. Their formation occurred after the disbandment of the Massasoit Guards and five months after the Dred Scott decision. From their inception, they were opposed by Robert Morris as in violation of state law even after the Dred Scott V. Sanford declared constitutionally African Americans were noncitizens. 23 On August 13, 1858 at New Bedford’s annual celebration of West Indian emancipation, were both the Liberty Guard and a local independent militia company the Blues paraded, Morris vowed these men would not receive the support from black Bostonians. 24 What he meant was elite men such as himself would not support radical lower class efforts.

However, there is evidence the Liberty Guard was not an entirely separate endeavor from the previous movement. The captain of the company Lewis Gaul was a signer of the 1853 petition for the state convention, but he wasn't a part of the elite. 25 Gaul was born in Danbury, Connecticut and is listed in the 1855 Massachusetts census as a 35-year-old coachman. 26 All of the company officers held jobs as laborers or profession that did not entitle them to respectability from the upper class.

22 “Extracts From a Speech,” The Liberator, August 19, 1853, 130.


24 “Anniversary of British West India Emancipation,” The Liberator, August 13, 1858, 132.


26 “Lewis Gaul,” Massachusetts, State Census, 1855.
2nd Lieutenant T. G. Williams ran a billiards saloon, while both 3rd Lieutenant James B. Watkins and 4th Lieutenant Hawkins were laborers. Under their leadership, the Liberty Guard chose to make bold encroachments that altered social dynamics. Though Morris’ tactical approaches contradicted his political agendas, the politics of respectability offered upsides. His work through litigation on the edges of white comfortability helped prevent harmful racial backlashes.

While many white Americans in the mid-19th century denounced the institution of slavery as a form of barbarism, several also didn't believe in racial equality. Paternalism and vast ideologies drove desires to free black men and women them from bondage, but what to do with them afterward was uncertain. For African American's came the need to prove themselves as worthy citizens, though militaristic viewpoints grew and some decided not to wait for white approval such as the Liberty Guard. When the men claimed the customary practice associated with whiteness as their own, they agitated the racial order.

In their first public appearance in November of 1857 under police escort, the Liberty Guard left their armory on the corner of Cambridge and Joy St., then proceeded through the streets of Boston to the state house. The appearance of fifty-five black men armed and dressed in all black uniforms attracted dozens of black men and women and disgruntled white onlookers. Captain Gaul discarded his police escort once at the state house, then made his way to the home of the city's mayor before the march proceeded back to the armory. On the return route, the nearly one hundred black soldiers and supporter were encircled and harassed by the white onlookers. Violence erupted as the parade route became a scene of pitched battles with clubs, bricks, and some of the men broke rank to use their bayonets. Miraculously no one was

killed and the Liberty Guard continued their festivities at Faneuil Hall. In a minimalist banquet, the company was joined by members of their militia community for a feast of coffee, pies, apples, and ice cream. Men in their uniforms and women in their best dresses danced the waltz. The women organized and presented a banner to the company from the Revolutionary War. A woman named Sarah Hill addressed the attendees and declared, "...Your organization presents a novelty in the community which we live... Under the constitution of our Commonwealth, you cannot get a charter with the big seal of the state attached.... But this day has proven you can exist without a charter." As the festivities carried on into the late hours these individuals experienced a sense of liberation.28

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The Civil War, Post War Years, and Northern Migration

With the outbreak of the Civil War in January of 1861, Robert Morris reemerged in the fight for full inclusion into Massachusetts' Militia. A lot of African American’s were interested in more involvement in the war, but Morris would not act until the militia laws of the state removed the word the "word." So in February 1860 before the official conflict and in May of 1861, he petitioned the state legislator. Some of the signers of the petitions were Dr. John V. DeGrasse, activist Lewis Hayden, abolitionist agitator John S. Rock, and William C. Nell. The men did not succeed, but the war soon shifted into their favor.²⁹ As the Union Army, advanced casualties rose with each clash, while enslaved peoples also ran into their lines for protection. The large numbers of contraband slaves under federal control presented an option to replenish Union forces. On July 17, 1862, a federal Militia Act with provisions designed to allow the use of freedmen as soldiers and laborers, was enacted. The federal government placed the control of all black regiments within a separate bureau.³⁰ Abraham Lincoln's administration enticed black enlistment with the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.


³⁰ Johnson Jr., African American National Guard, 11-12.
With the war overtly about slavery, black activists galvanized their states to take action. Massachusetts' Governor John Andrew received permission from the War Department in May of 1863 to form two black regiments. The state's small black population forced a recruitment drive to fill the rosters, but there was another problem. The black elite who had become accustomed to a high level of equality protested the lack of black officers. Robert Morris became a leader in an anti-black Bostonian enlistment protest. Nonetheless the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, the 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, and 5th Massachusetts Volunteer Cavalry were formed. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Regiments famed assault on South Carolina fortress Fort Wagner, in July of 1863 became a symbolic representation of black manhood and the willingness of black Americans to fight for their rights.

On September 21, 1863, Captain Lewis Gaul petitioned the state for a black home guard. Approved the “Liberty Guard” was designated the 14th Unattached company. The men of the company then changed their name to “Shaw Guards” in honor of Colonel Robert Shaw. Away from the battlefields they mustered up support for the war and honored those who served. Their community also provided soldiers as well. One these men were Captain Lewis Gaul's son, Lewis Jr, who served in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry. He succumbed to an illness before the end of the war. On November 25, 1864 the Shaw Guards provided a military escort for fallen member Sergeant William Henry Skeene from the Joy St. Church to the Cambridge Cemetery. An American flag draped his casket while soldiers from each of the state's black

31 Kantrowitz, More Than Freedom, 275-295.


regiments served as pallbearers. The *Liberator* called this symbolic event the first "colored" military funeral in Massachusetts history.\(^{34}\) The next year on the second anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the Shaw Guards paraded for an event held at the Tremont Temple. The ceremony had several distinguished speakers such as William Lloyd Garrison and Robert Morris.\(^ {35}\) For a militia unit built by men near the bottom of the socioeconomic order, it was near the center of the fight for black liberation.

With the support of Captain Lewis Gaul, another black home guard, the Blues was formed as the 74th Unattached Company in New Bedford by 1866.\(^ {36}\) Men who had prior experience in independent militias and bands before the war, most notably the Blues made up the 74th's roster. In the antebellum period, New Bedford was a center of radicalism and militancy in the fight for African American rights. The city's black residents were a part of the Boston-centered militia campaign. The independent Blues formed around the time as the Liberty Guard in the late 1850's. They paraded together for the Convention of the colored Citizens of Massachusetts, on the anniversary of West Indian Emancipation in August of 1858. Under the command of a Captain Robert Gibson, the Blues marched through the streets of New Bedford with the Liberty Guard and bands from across the state and Rhode Island to a community clambake.\(^ {37}\) The Blues helped New Bedford provide some of the highest amounts of enlistees for the 54th regiment. For instance Company, C was nearly comprised completely of New Bedford men. The company was named the Toussaint Guards after Toussaint L'Ouverture

\(^{34}\) "Died," *The Liberator*, Nov 25, 1864, 191.

\(^{35}\) "Celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation," *The Liberator*, Jan 6, 1865, 1.

\(^{36}\) "Military, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Cambridge Chronicle*, May 26, 1866, 3.

leader of the Haitian revolution. A drill club named after Medal of Honor recipient William Carney greeted the Toussaint Guards when the Company returned home in September of 1865.38 Women from the Colored Ladies' Soldiers Relief Society, who had sent shirts, socks, and other clothes to the men in war, put together a public banquet for them at city hall. Attended by some of the most prominent members of the city both black and white, the color line was not an issue and equality based on citizenship was obtained for the moment.39

As the Civil War ended and Reconstruction began, there was still hope for universal prospects of better lives for African Americans. Even with uncertainties, caused by regional violence in the South and national political divisions.

Access to a militia continued to be a source of protection and symbolically represented the willingness to take up arms for liberties. Veterans who showed their manhood on the battlefield, returned home to form and swell the ranks of militia companies. For instance, a great uncle of mine Jeremiah Kellogg is listed on a payroll for the 14th Unattached Company in May of 1866. Born a freeman in Wilmington, North Carolina he served in Co A. of the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry Regiment. Listed alongside his name are other veterans such as Cato Wallace, who served in an artillery regiment.40 In a reorganization of the Massachusetts militia, the 14th and 74th unattached remained independent. They were not the only companies without a regiment or battalion, but their blackness separated them further. A Cambridge Chronicle ad

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38 “Reception of the Toussaint Guards,” The Liberator, Sept 15, 1865, 1.


dated May 26th, 1866, cites their respective commanders as Captains Lewis Gaul and Abraham Conklin.\(^{41}\) Four days after the Cambridge Chronicle ad was published, the 74th Unattached Company marched in a New Bedford parade to memorialize the war. Several of the militiamen were veterans of the 54th Regiment, who most likely had experience in the pre-war independent organizations. The festivities included addresses by prominent men of the city and refreshments at Captain Conklin's home. A few months later they participated in a ceremony for a monument dedicated to the war's soldiers and sailors.\(^{42}\) The home guards reverted back to pre-war conditions as representatives of the race and vanguards of black American cultural success.

In August of 1866, the 74th Unattached Company was combined with the 14th Unattached Company to form the 2nd Battalion of Infantry. Captain Gaul was placed in Command of the battalion after he received the commission of Major. The companies were redesignated Co. A Boston and Co. B New Bedford.\(^{43}\) Up until the mid-1870's, the battalion continued the traditions their communities had gotten accustomed to, both militarily and cultural. They became essential as reconstruction policies began to change the political landscape of Boston and Massachusetts in general. Inspired by federal efforts towards equality, members of the black elite and their white counterparts petitioned the state legislature to enact laws against discrimination. In May of 1865 state Republicans passed a Civil Rights Act which made it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on their color or race in any public place. The law was later amended to explicitly include the word theater to prevent discrimination in an important place of social amusement. As congressional Republicans

\(^{41}\) "Military, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Cambridge Chronicle*, May 26, 1866, 3.


\(^{43}\) Folder 1. "Sixth Regiment Infantry, Company 'L,' (Colored Company),” and other secondary sources. Massachusetts National Guard Museum and Archives, Concord, MA.
worked to secure and facilitate the suffrage rights of black men in the South, so did Massachusetts' state Republicans. In the fall of 1866 Veteran of the 54th regiment Charles Lewis Mitchell and Edward Garrison Walker the son of abolitionist David Walker, were elected to the state house. Mitchell and Walker became the voices of their people in debates over Reconstruction acts and amendments. They also became pawns in a struggle for power between the political parties, as Democrats ran black candidates to undermine the Republicans. Walker switches his allegiances about the same time the state's demographics began to change.

Black migrants attracted to the progressive tendencies of Massachusetts white residents began to make the state their home in the Antebellum Period. The population was small and significant growth did not occur until full emancipation and the end of the Civil War. By 1870 the number of black residents in Boston was over 3,000 but dwarfed other cities on the eastern seaboard. The disbursement of black migrants in Massachusetts' cities and towns contributed to the low number. For comparison, New York's population was about 13,000, while Philadelphia’s was over 22,000. Many of the migrants who arrived in the first wave of migration after the war were veterans who had served in the state's black regiments. Others came from northern cities, Canada, and a small amount came from the Caribbean.

Southerners did not arrive in large numbers but gradually over time became the majority with the deterioration in race relations. The location of a city such as Boston further north than other large urban centers also was not the first choice for a lot of migrants. The migration to Boston was a much more selective and unique process, especially for those from the South. The majority of southern migrants for a time derived from Virginia's coastal regions. Early on in the

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44 Kantrowitz, More Than Freedom, 312-320.

45 Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck, Black Migration to Boston in The Late Nineteenth Century: (Ann Arbor, MI: Xerox University Microfilms, 1974) 47.
Civil War, the region came under the control of Union forces after George McClellan launched the Peninsula Campaign in March of 1862. Northern freedmen's aid societies quickly followed Union advances and established resources in contraband camps like schools.46

Some black Virginians arrived in Boston through the aid of an agency or a relative, but most arrived on their own. A common characteristic amongst them was a skin tone of a light complexion derived from slavery and brought a close connection to whiteness. For instance, my second great grandfather William Henry Phillips was a light skinned migrant who arrived in Boston sometime after his marriage in 1866.47 He was born enslaved in 1845 and lived in a complex community in the coastal city of Hampton. The city's black population both free and enslaved lived amongst white residents who they knew were their relations.48 Though he was a slave, he migrated north as an educated man who had experience in political activism. He worked beside one of his younger brothers who would go on to graduate from the Hampton Institute in 1872.49 Other notable individuals from Virginia were lawyers George Lewis Ruffin, William Henry Lewis, and Clement Morgan. Divided by economic and geographic conditions, the common ancestral home of Virginia linked Massachusetts’ small black communities together. The kinship ties also turned militia celebrations into familial affairs.


47 “Golden Anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Wm. H. Phillips,” The Guardian, Saturday, October, 28th, 1916, Phillips Family Bible.


49 Enges, Freedom’s First Generation, 143.
In the 1870's state governments turned to their militias to cut expenses from their budgets. To make them more efficient whole units and companies were dissolved. Other factors for the decision included animosity and racism towards black soldiers and officers. Vulnerable black militiamen were easy targets, which sealed many of their fates. On April 16, 1876 the Massachusetts legislature enacted a militia act which dissolved the 2nd Battalion of Infantry. Major Lewis Gaul, who successfully asserted his manhood and citizenship for over two decades, was forced to resign. He went on to work in the state's Adjutant General's office until his death in 1884. The next year messenger and 2nd Lieutenant of the Shaw Guards Charles F. A. Francis presented a petition to reform the company. Respectability politics became the way forward with resurgence in white supremacy. The petition was approved through the signatures of "prominent men" and Francis was ordered to create an enlistment roll, plus an election of officers. He selected men were then tested to make sure their character met the standards of the state. In 1878 the newly formed company was attached to the all-white 6th Infantry regiment with the designation of L Company. No longer independent the Shaw Guards were the only all-black militia company to be a part of a white unit. Though still segregated their position challenged the boundaries of the color line.

50 Johnson Jr., *African American National Guard*, 33.

51 Folder 1. “Sixth Regiment Infantry, Company 'L,' (Colored Company),” and other secondary sources. Massachusetts National Guard Museum and Archives, Concord, MA.

Traditions of the Shaw Guards, Demographics & Socioeconomic factors in Boston, and Northern Discrimination

Armed uniformed public demonstrations challenged nineteenth-century perceptions of black people as weak and cowardly.\textsuperscript{53} The displays of manhood by black militia companies showcased their willingness to assert and claim citizenship. They did this not only in public forums at home but also outside of their states through participation in cultural celebrations and military competitions. The Shaw Guards traveled throughout the northeast and even the South after the Civil War. As the liberties of all African Americans became challenged in the rise of racial violence at the dawn of the \textit{Nadir} South and Northern discrimination, the occasions gave black militia companies the chance to expand their social networks. Often with the help from women's auxiliaries within the militia and veterans groups such as the Grand Army of the Republic, host companies organized accommodations and festivities. The women took pride in their ability to make veterans communities a center of black social life and charitable relief.\textsuperscript{54} In Boston, on October 28, 1875 a few months before the demobilization of the 2nd Battalion of Infantry, a veteran’s march was organized by Providence Rhode Island's black Ives Post of the G.A.R and Boston's integrated Robert A. Bell Post. The Civil War Veterans were


escorted by forty uniformed members of the Shaw Guards, the Excelsior Band of Boston, and mounted police. The column of men marched from Boylston to Tremont and made their way to State Street before a banquet at the armory of the Shaw Guards on the edge of the West End's black enclave. A black cultural celebration such as this within proximity of Massachusetts center of political and social power rebuked white supremacy.

In March of 1874, the body of Massachusetts accomplished senator Charles Sumner was placed in Doric Hall at the State House for a public farewell. Because of his advocacy for the rights of African Americans, his body was guarded by the Shaw Guards. Summer was a reconstruction radical who introduced legislation designed to target discrimination. His death marked the decline of congressional allies in the fight for equality, though it also led to the passage of the 1875 Civil Rights Act. The persistent Shaw Guards completed the construction of their armory on the corner of Cambridge and Russell St, in the fall of 1874. With a length and width of seventy feet by forty-three feet, there was plenty of space for all aspects of militia life. Illuminated by eighteen glass windows and gas lights, the armory had a rack for rifles, knapsacks, and a large ballroom. There also was an office for Major Lewis Gaul and the staff of the 2nd Battalion of Infantry. Optimistic about their future the Shaw and Schouler Guards hosted the battalion's first joint ball in Boston on January 28th, 1875.

The event was a post-war adaptation made by the militiamen to maintain traditions from the 1850's. One, in particular, the clambake, which is still a New England cultural practice, was carried on. For instance, in August of 1875, the 2nd Battalion traveled to Providence Rhode Island for a clambake hosted my militiamen of the state, most likely the Burnside Guards. Militia social life achieved longevity through interconnections with the communities that supported them.

Seven months before they received the redesignation of Company L, thirty-two members of the Shaw Guards under the leadership of Captain Charles F. A. Francis traveled to Philadelphia in the summer of 1878 for a friendly drill competition with the Gray Invincibles. The militiamen marched together through the streets of Philadelphia before they made their way by streetcar to an exhibition hall. The drill took place in front of a large crowd of black and white Philadelphians. They were both awarded prizes of lavish sets of silverware that included a large silver ice pitcher and punch bowl. Similar to the Shaw Guards the Gray Invincibles were the only black company in Pennsylvania to survive the state's reduction of its militia. Jointly all of these militiamen faced uncertainty over their futures. African Americans as a whole became vulnerable to the deterioration of race relations that coincided with the end of Reconstruction. A year before President Rutherford B. Hayes helped initiate the Nadir with the rollback of federal policies in the south. With this backdrop, the Shaw Guards officially began

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62 Johnson Jr., *African American National Guard*, 34.

their history as Company L in 1879. They held their first annual military, civic ball, and Banquet at Boston's Paine Hall on Wednesday, February 26th. In attendance were several invited guest and over eighty couples. Major Lewis Gaul attended with a number of the state's military officers and the Governor Thomas Talbot. It was a prestigious affair which showed the importance of the Shaw Guards for race relations within their community and the political and social circles of the state at the moment.

With a city population of nearly 363,000 people in 1880, the number of black citizens in Boston remained small 6,000. From the Antebellum Period till the turn of the century, the majority of Boston's black residents lived on and around what is now Beacon Hill in the West End. There was never a chance for a black dominance to manifest in the area after the Civil War. As the West End became an expensive place to live Black Bostonians began to abandon the neighborhood about the same time the first large wave of black migrants occurred. The more fortunate inhabitants emigrated to nearby Cambridge and black enclaves in predominantly white suburban cities and towns such as West Medford and Newton. Those who stayed in the city populated the South End and a portion of Roxbury with the new migrants. By 1900 roughly a quarter of all Black Bostonians remained in the West End. In 1917 it ceased to be a distinguishable black enclave about the same time when Company L entered federal service. The armory of the Company L located on the corner of Cambridge and Russell St. was a short distance away from the home of George L. Ruffin at 170 Cambridge St. Most of the

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64 “Paine Hall,” *Boston Investigator*, Wednesday, February 26th, 1879, 6.

65 Pleck, *Black Migration*, 49.


more affluent citizens like Ruffin lived near state house and the Joy Street Church. The lower classes lived on the Northern slope of Beacon Hill and near the edges of the community. However what distinguished the black aristocracy from everybody else was not solely defined by wealth. Comparatively William H. Phillips who worked as a porter resided a few streets over from Ruffin on 29 Grove St. Economic tensions did arise as discrimination and European immigration shrunk the available jobs.

Boston's small dispersed black population faced economic disadvantages as well, which made competition over jobs prevalent. Though they made strides towards equality in the Antebellum period, a rise in discrimination and economic tensions with European immigrants forced them primarily into the service industry. Some of the occupations black men worked included messengers, waiters, bootblacks, and hostlers. The South End was home to a lot of railroad porters because of their easy access to the Back Bay Station. Work as a porter was a commonly held job and William H. Phillips who was a porter for the Boston and Albany Railroad, elevated himself and brought his sons into the profession. Hairdressers and barbers were some of the most lucrative trades as in contemporary America that offered entrepreneurial opportunities. One of the benefits of the trade was both black and white clientele until the early twentieth century. As previously mentioned Alfred G. Howard worked in his family-owned chain of hairdressers. One of his employers was his brother Peter M. Howard who amassed

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70 Daniels, *In Freedom’s Birthplace*, 151.

a Cambridge real estate fortune of five thousand dollars before his death in 1874. One of his shops located on Poplar St. became co-owned by one of his daughters and Alfred's wife.\textsuperscript{72} As members of the elite, the achievement is significant, but a sign of privilege compared to other women of lower socioeconomic classes. A majority of women also found themselves in service industry jobs such as maids. To take part in the affairs of a club or the militia provided a space to define their womanhood and a place within the male-oriented struggle against the color line.

Known as the "Black Brahmins" Boston's African American elite dominated all aspects of black life in Massachusetts from the Antebellum period through the 1900's. Often detached from the masses, they maintained their own social circles and aligned themselves with the white elite. William B. Greenwood in his book \textit{Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920}, argues by 1890 Boston's elite had gained a reputation of a collective belief in their superiority and coldness towards the lower classes. Black Brahmins did hold these attitudes which were on par with their white counterparts. However, before the lines of division became rigid, common regional ancestry blurred socioeconomic distinctions in the early stages of post-Civil War migration. The upper class was connected to the lower classes for a time through their common coastal Virginian origin. Their light skinned complexions did become markers of class and wealth as large numbers of dark-skinned southern migrants arrived. Though it also granted access to white social circles and institutions. Many of the Brahmins lived in predominantly white neighbors with servants, were admitted in schools like Harvard, indulged in the city's music and performance arts, and vacationed in Newport, Rhode Island.\textsuperscript{73} Restaurateur


Josh Lee traced his roots back to Robert E. Lee and the Lee family of Virginia. Lee was an accomplished caterer who ran several hotels and invented the first machine to make bread crumbs.\textsuperscript{74} Much like the rest of his Brahmin cohorts, he embodied black American potential.

By the 1880's discrimination began to rise again which prompted demands for protections under the state's laws. On August 1, 1883 after a series of incidents, two black men were denied entrance to a skate rink in Roxbury because of their race in violation of the 1865 Civil Rights Act. Community outrage forced lawyers Archibald H. Grimke and Butler R. Wilson who both later helped establish the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to petition the state legislature and draft a comprehensive law. The petition was taken up by newly elected black state representative Julius Caesar Chappelle who introduced the bill. After some protest, the bill was passed in June of 1885 and made it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on their race without a good cause in public establishments whether licensed or not.\textsuperscript{75} The bill would not be the last civil rights legislation to be created in Massachusetts. Chappelle was also one of the last black elected officials as the Republican Party started to lose ground to the Democrats under the power of an Irish political machine. Irish ward bosses seized upon the expansion of Boston through the annexation of immigrant suburbs to push aside the old Brahmin social and political class. Hugh O'Brien became the first Irish Catholic Mayor of Boston on January 5th, 1885. Irish politicians lived off a system of patronage and hardly concerned themselves with the socio-economic plights of black people.\textsuperscript{76} Republican districts were

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{74} Adelaide M. Crownwell, \textit{The Other Brahmins: Boston’s Black Upper Class, 1750-1950}: (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994) 52.


\end{footnotes}
reconfigured to split the black vote which marginalized their political voice in the process.

In July of 1883 Captain Charles F. A. Francis was an invited guest for a sword presentation for the commander of the Robert A. Bell G.A.R. Post, Thomas Younge. For a man who worked as a messenger, Francis was on an invitation list with some of Massachusetts's most prominent men. Names included Albert Palmer Mayor of Boston, Edward G. Walker, Lewis Hayden, Charles L. Mitchell, James Monroe Trotter veteran of the 54th Regiment, and Major Lewis Gaul. If Francis did attend the ceremony, the event would have been one his final ones as commander of Company L. After he retired in 1884 leadership went into a constant flux for a few years. Black historian and intellectual George Washington Williams served briefly as commander until he stepped down admits a corruption scandal. Stability came when G. W. Brady took over the company with lieutenants Frank Woods and Ellis E. Brown. Under Captain Brady's leadership Company L made a trip to Virginia in the fall of 1886.

Segregation at the moment was under way in the South as the 1875 Federal Civil Rights Act was ruled unconstitutional and President Grover Cleveland did little to protect the rights of black southerners. On September 9th, 1866, a Ms. Jennie Crew gave the forty militiamen eight thousand, one hundred, and forty-eight dollars for their journey. The money was raised by the women of the company from the militia’s social events. By train, the men made their way to Providence, Rhode Island, where a boat ferried them to Norfolk, Virginia. In Norfolk, the city's Mayor refused to see them but sent a black representative instead to greet them. They quickly

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moved on to Portsmouth and then Petersburg, were the Petersburg Guards welcomed them. The men were able to get an audience with the city Mayor and his staff, plus a tour which included a water excursion. After Petersburg, the company marched to the capital Richmond. Five black militia companies escorted the men to an address by Virginia's Governor Fitzhugh Lee. Once the celebrations ended the realities of black southern life came into focus. The men of Company L could hardly find a place to wash up and sleep with the money they had.80 A sign of the uncertainties of universal black American freedoms in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The Shaw Guards were unique, but not the only black militia company to survive forced demobilization under state budget cuts in the 1870's. After the Civil War, Connecticut's Veterans formed companies in the cities of New Haven, Bridgeport, Hartford, and Norwich. Many of the militiamen were veterans of Connecticut's 29th Volunteer Infantry Regiment which was formed a year after Massachusetts' black regiments. The regiment saw combat in and around Petersburg, Virginia, in the Battle of the Crater. Similar to the days of the Liberty Guard, the four companies remained independent without state funds for years. Hartford's independent company called the Cambridge Guards visited the Shaw Guards in the fall of 1874. Six years later the companies were formally recognized as the 5th Battalion of Infantry on February 26th, 1880. However, animosity and racist attitudes forced the state to dismantle the battalion. By 1899 only the Hartford's Cambridge Guards remained as the 1st Separate Company. Illinois was another state in which black militia companies were formed and disbanded in 1870's. Under the provisions of a state militia law, the 16th Battalion

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was created in Chicago on March 31, 1878, but lasted for only three years. The Battalion had two state-funded companies and two independent ones. In the 1890's prominent black Chicagoans with support from their community members launched a campaign for the recognition of another black militia unit called the 9th Battalion of Infantry. To show the battalions serious intent, the militiamen acquired their own uniforms and rifles. After an initial dismissal because of racial bias, the election of some members to the state legislature allowed for bills to be passed in their favor. The 9th Battalion was officially recognized in November of 1896.

The 1890's marked a period of reconciliation between the North and the South, while many northern African American began to lose faith in the hopes of a nation built on equal rights. In Boston, congressional Republican Representative Henry Cabot Lodge's failed Federal Elections Bill of 1890 was the first major defeat. Lodge introduced the bill as a race-neutral attempt to investigate fraudulent results in national elections. With the power to investigate elections, he hoped to save the Southern Republican party. While many black Bostonians rallied for support of the bill, their efforts could not save it. Tensions amongst Republicans combined with Democrat opposition, Southern boycotts of North industries, and interest in other issues killed the bill. Northern white interest in black Southern Civil Rights was over. Three years later, a fair complected Virginian named William H. Lewis was denied service at a barber shop in Harvard Square. Lewis was a student at Harvard Law and a star athlete. His case sparked another demand for protections under the law. Black state representative and writer for the Boston Globe, Robert T. Teamoh worked with lawyer Clement G. Morgan to enact another law.

84 Johnson Jr., African American National Guard, 41-57.

A few months after the death of black America's preeminent leader Frederick Douglass, the Civil Rights bill was passed on June 4th, 1895. The highest punishment for racial discrimination was set at three hundred dollars with one-year imprisonment. The bright spot did not last, in May of 1896 the Supreme Court ruled against Homer Plessey in Plessy V. Ferguson. Plessy argued his rights as a citizen were violated when he was arrested and removed from a white streetcar in New Orleans. The court's decision upheld a Louisiana separate car law which made racial segregation legal. Robert Morris' failed 1848 lawsuit to desegregate public schools was cited as a precedent in the case.

With the election of Ohio Governor William McKinley to the presidency in November of 1896, the United States began an assertion onto the international political stage. After years of neutrality American leaders began to envision a powerful imperialist U.S. built on overseas possessions. Men like Theodore Roosevelt who wanted to strengthen the Navy needed coal stations and places to sell American goods. The considered non-civilized and non-western white world became their target. Under a new sense of manhood and white supremacy, these men believed they couldn't keep their perceived gifts of knowledge and culture just for themselves. The "white man's burden" was their guide to conquer the underdeveloped world. As the government of Spain brutally crushed the island of Cuba's independence movement, the U.S. intervened. In a show of force, the battleship Maine traveled to Havana in January of 1898. While in the harbor of Havana, the Maine exploded and sank. Accusations over Spain's involvement led both countries to war.

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The conflict provided an opportunity for immigrants and marginalized people to prove their American identity. In Mid-April with the war officially declared, states began to mobilize their armies. At the armory of Company L on the corner of Chardon and Green streets in the West Ends Bowdoin Square, men from across Massachusetts showed up to enlist. One of those men was the son of William H. Phillips, Raymond Luther Phillips. At age 19 he worked as a clerk for the Boston and Albany Railroad.\(^89\) He was one of the twenty-five men out of a hundred and fifty selected for service. All of the men were eager to prove themselves worthy of citizenship as they yelled out the battle cry "Remember the Maine."\(^90\)

When Massachusetts' militias organized at Camp Dewey in Framingham in April of 1898, Governor Roger Wolcott issued officer commissions. The leadership of Company L which had been through transformative periods was novel. They were privileged but not members of the black Brahmin class. Apart of the first generation born after slavery, the men were in a W. E. B. DuBois conception "Race Men." The men held high amounts of respectability and manhood not solely defined by courage, but intellectual brilliance. Captain of the company William J. Williams was born in Canada and attended Harvard Law School in 1889. He opened a legal practice in Boston's Pemberton Square after he graduated. In 1891 he

\(^89\) "Raymond L Phillips," *Muster in Roll of William J William's Co. L, of the Proclamation of the President, Dated April 23rd*, Massachusetts National Guard Museum, Concord, MA.

\(^90\) "All Eager To Join," *Boston Daily Globe*, April 23, 1898, 3.
joined Company L and was elected to the rank of Captain.\textsuperscript{91} His 1st Lieutenant was William H. Jackson a student who enlisted at the same time. Jackson worked as a clerk when the company was mobilized. The 2nd Lieutenant George W. Braxton was a printmaker and enlisted in 1894. He later became a supporter of DuBois.\textsuperscript{92} The birthplace for most of the leadership was Virginia because of the first wave of black migration. Occupations for the rest of the company were still consistent with the confinement of black workers to the service industry. Many of them held jobs as clerks, porters, messengers, and coachmen, which was not a lot different than the days of the Liberty Guard. The militia offered a sense of pride and accomplishment from their daily lives.

The men of Company L held their annual drill competitions a month before the war with Spain broke out. Similar to the traditions of the past, but the event was far more extravagant because of the prizes handed out. Some of the prizes for the first competition included a silver watch and a camera. For the second drill competition, the platoons of Lieutenant Jackson and Braxton battled one another for a picture entitled Jameson's Last Stand. The scene depicted the climactic battle of South Africa's first Boer War.\textsuperscript{93} All festivities concluded with whimsical prizes, a parade, a marksman's contest, and a dance. Attendees were members of the company and friend from their community.\textsuperscript{94} With the West End in a steady decline by 1898, the leadership of Captain Williams helped maintain the communal ties. All of the officers


\textsuperscript{92} Braxton, George W... Postcard from George W. Braxton to W. E. B. Du Bois, February 23, 1918. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

\textsuperscript{93} Saul David, Military Blunders: (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc. 1997) 73-134.

\textsuperscript{94} “Prize Drill of Co L, 6th Regt,” Boston Daily Globe, March 5th, 1898, 7.
were distinguished men and the commissions they received added to their credibility. They became the first African American officers to enter the army with those ranks. Their company's attachment to an all-white regiment made them the first black militia unit to be mobilized.\textsuperscript{95} In Illinois, the 9th Battalion of Infantry was initially not called up for service. After some protest, the men of the battalion finally won their demands. Under the condition they form a complete regiment the unit was activated. In June the all black 8th Illinois Infantry Regiment was formed.\textsuperscript{96} The war with Spain marked the first time in decades the country had to rely upon black soldiers in its defense.

After a brief stop in Baltimore, Maryland Company L and the 6th Infantry Regiment made their way to Camp Alger in Virginia located a short distance from Washington D.C. The men camped and trained at Alger through June until orders came in early July for Charleston, South Carolina. On July 8th, they boarded the ship USS Yale and headed for Cuba, except for Captain Williams who became ill with typhoid fever and was left behind. After the defeat of Spanish forces in Cuba, the soldiers were kept on the ship for weeks with little provisions. On July 25th the men landed in Puerto Rico. Company L faced little combat and spent most of their time on patrols and guard duty. They remained in Puerto Rico after the war ended in mid-August to help maintain control of the island. The men returned home in October after the company suffered one death from an illness which was not Captain Williams. The 6th regiment was welcomed home as heroes as they paraded through the streets of Boston on


October 29th. In November a party was held at the People's Temple on Columbus Avenue for Company L, hosted by their Ladies Auxiliary and the black citizens of Massachusetts. The Mayor of Boston Josiah Quincy, Edward G. Walker, and William H. Carney were some of the illustrious guests. A photo of Company L taken by Robert T. Teamoh on the steps of the Massachusetts state house, which appeared with an article written by Lieutenant Braxton about their experience appeared in the Boston-based *Colored American Magazine*, in May of 1900. From their vantage point, all the men of Company L could do was maintain their service and traditions to uplift the race.

Shortly after the brutal lynching of a black man named Sam Hose in George on April 12, 1899, black Bostonians gathered at Young’s Hotel located on Court Street in Boston, to celebrate the anniversary of Charles Sumner's election. Out of the notable names in attendance, Captain William J. Williams, and Lieutenant William H. Jackson were present. Frustrated by the lack of protection and interest in the plight of black Americans from the McKinley administration, the tone of the event was highly militant. Both Captain Williams and Lieutenant Jackson urged the use of firearms in retaliation for every innocent black life taken. As two men who put their lives on the line for their country, they had heard and seen enough. Amid and after the Spanish-American War, explosions of racial violence plagued the nation in the period dubbed by Rayford Logan as the *Nadir*. The men of Company L returned home to receive the news of the violent


100 “Wrongs of the Negro,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, April 25, 1899, 7
violent expulsion of Wilmington, North Carolina's black political and economic center in November of 1898. President McKinley remained silent and refused to amend the damage that was left.\textsuperscript{101}

In June of 1900, Booker T. Washington brought his accommodation politics and plans of racial upliftment through economic progress to Boston. The National Business League was designed to create a council made up of Bostonian businessman to lead to the city politically. Capital to fund businesses was hard to come by in a political landscape without established organizations. Boston's small black population also didn't have a solid middle class to use as a foundation. The businesses which did get the past discrimination and found success tended to operate independently from their communities.\textsuperscript{102} William Monroe Trotter political agitator and founder of the Guardian came to see the league as a distraction to racial progress. On July 30, 1903, he moved to break up the league when Washington made a public appearance at the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Trotter at first wanted to ask a series of questions to challenge Washington's ideology. With tensions high, the event broke out into violence and Trotter was arrested.\textsuperscript{103} Seven years later Boston's branch of the National Advancement of Colored People was founded. It was founded by members of the white elite, who were remnants of the old abolitionist movement. Together with Trotter, they attempted to ban the showcase of the film \textit{Birth of a Nation}. After a protest at the Tremont Theater located on the Boston Commons, Trotter and NAACP members were arrested. Further attempts ended in


\textsuperscript{102} Schneider, \textit{Boston Confronts Jim Crow 1890-1920}, 73-76.

failure.\footnote{104} Perceptions of Boston as a progressive city on race relations ended.

At the American House hotel near Bowdoin Square, members of the Company L 6th Regiment Veterans Association held their first banquet in October of 1900. The event was presided over by Luther Dandridge who served as the 1st Sergeant in the Spanish-American War. Over a dozen current and former soldiers attend, which include Master Sergeant Frank E. Turbin. Several of the men sang songs accompanied by piano.\footnote{105} In January 1901 the company held a dance to commemorate their return home from Puerto Rico. The event was members only so the men could a have a reunion to remember the war.\footnote{106} January of the next year Captain Williams retired as a Major from the company. He continued his law practice and used his accolades to serve as an Alderman for the city of Chelsea. On October 2, 1902, the Veterans Association had their annual meet at Young's hotel. Dandridge and the members spoke about organizational politics and the history of the Company while they dined.\footnote{107} Many of the soldiers maintained ties with the company and ventured into other social forms of amusement

After the war, Raymond L. Phillips reenlisted with Company L while he continued worked as a clerk for the Boston and Albany Railroad. He remained active in the social affairs of the company. In June of 1904, he served as the senior vice commander of a committee which hosted a celebration of colored soldiers. William H. Carney was one of the selected speakers, who paid his respects to his fellow soldiers and read a eulogy to Colonel Shaw.\footnote{108} The ceremony


\footnote{108} “Tribute to Colored Troops,” *The Guardian*, June 4, 1904, 1, 8.
was a prelude to a G.A.R. hosted reunion of the 5th Cavalry, 54th, and 55th regiments in August. A form of entertainment Raymond L. dedicated some years to was theatrical performances. In April of 1904, he performed in an Elks Lodge minstrel show with a fellow member of Company L W. Spencer Carpenter. The company had a history of play productions since the 1870's. Members of the Shaw Guards who belonged to the Ira Aldrich Dramatic Club put on performances of *Stage-Struck Yankee* and *Oliver Twist* at their armory in January of 1876. A more elaborate play called the *Commandant* was performed by Company L at Boston's Bijou Theater on April 26, 1906. Though no longer enlisted in the company, Raymond L. was one of the lead actors. His wife Mrs. Hannah Jane Kellogg-Phillips was a patroness. The *Commandant* was whimsical but what is insightful is a booklet written by Carpenter for the play. It provides a look into the company's community which had become stretched and pushed apart by the decline of their West End Neighborhood. Included inside is a roster of soldiers, the men, and women who helped put it together, community sponsors and photographs. George W. Braxton, who was Captain of the company at this time, also included a revision of his history of Company L originally published in the *Colored American Magazine*, in May of 1900. When he describes their years of service, he concludes it was a way to help resolve the “Great Race Problem.”

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111 “Amusement Notes,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Jan 14, 1876.

About 200 men gathered at the armory of Company L on Bulfinch St in Bowdoin Square on April 29, 1916, for a reunion of the 6th Infantry Regiment. The same number of men passed away from the original regimental roster of 13,400. Current soldiers and veterans dined together while they watched a cabaret show and listened to the regimental band. Over 22 officers still with the regiment had served in Puerto Rico. They were career soldiers and some of them followed their units into the First World War. After the retirement of Captain William J. Williams, Company L held an election in February of 1902. George W. Braxton became Captain, William B. Gould 1st Lieutenant, and Joseph G. Holmes 2nd Lieutenant. All of these men were officers in the Spanish-American War. Another soldier who did this was W. Spencer Carpenter the actor who re-enlisted after 1898, rose to the rank of 2nd lieutenant before he became a deacon of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in July of 1908. All three of the Company commanders on the day of federalization in March of 1917, were soldiers who had enlisted in the 1890's. One of the men George F. Seamon started out of as a wagoner and served as the company's 2nd Lieutenant in France. The oldest man to serve in the company was William E. Carter. He first enlisted in 1878 and lost his life in World War I. The war marked an end of one generational fight and start of another


Conclusion

The grass roots efforts of black residents in Boston’s West End brought them access to Massachusetts’ state militia. Respectability politics and litigation used by the affluent members of the community were often ineffective to create changes. Many of them were too interconnected with the city’s white upper class to take radical approaches. Robert Morris’ persistent petitions fell into this trap as the greater implications of racial equality and black citizenship prevented their passage. His content to wait for approval from his white counterparts made him an inept leader. The boldness of Lewis Gaul and the Liberty in 1857 to operate overtly in public became the path forward. Their skirmish in the streets of Boston shattered racial perceptions and was part of a national trend of black American militancy towards civil rights. Gaul and his men built a foundation which allowed the formation of the state's black civil war regiments. They survived as the Shaw Guards in the post-war years as an important center of black manhood and communal ties. Their presence as black soldiers was a constant societal reminder of the willingness of black Americans to fight for their freedoms under the laws of the nation. Social events were also a way to push back against the color line through the celebration of black joy and cultural achievements. When William J. Williams and Company L returned home from Puerto Rico in October of 1898, there was still hope their sacrifices as career soldiers would help establish a period of racial equality. The liberation struggle was instead passed on to another generation of civilians and veterans.
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