

56th Virginia Regiment
to
Richmond Whig, 14 February 1865

[Excerpt]

Camp, 56th Virginia Regiment
Near Dutch Gap, Feby. 14th, 1865

To the Editor of the Whig:

Enclosed please find a copy of resolutions passed by the 56th Va. Regiment, to-day, which I send you for publication. In obedience to one of the resolutions, I am requested to call your attention particularly to the resolution expressing the approbation of the regiment of the enlistment of negroes as soldiers; the resolution was passed with great spirit and entire unanimity, and is, so far as known, the first voice uttered in definite form and solemn meeting that has gone from the army on that subject. It is also worthy of note that the 56th Va. Regiment is composed of companies from the most populous slave districts in Virginia, and its members, perhaps, own in the aggregate, as many slaves as any other regiment from Virginia.

Henry G. Allen, Secretary

. . . Resolved, That slavery is the normal condition of the negro -- that the right of property in slaves is just and perfect, and is entitled to the same protection, by constitutional guarantees and legislative enactments, as any other right of property -- that involuntary servitude is as indispensable to the moral and physical advancement, prosperity and happiness of the African race as is liberty to the whites; but if the public exigencies require that any number of our male slaves be enlisted in the military service in order to [contribute to] the successful resistance to our enemies, and to the maintenance of the integrity of our Government, we are willing to make concessions to their false and unenlightened notions of the blessings of liberty, and to offer to those, and those only who fight in our cause, perpetual freedom, as a boon for fidelity of service and loyalty to the South. . . .

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SOURCE: Richmond Whig, 23 February 1865, reprinted in Robert F. Durden, *The Gray and the Black: The Confederate Debate on Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), pages 222-223.