

Dan Gediman: This is the Reckoning, I'm Dan Gediman. Even though there are very few remnants left of slavery in Louisville, there are quite a few reminders of the Civil War. And none is more vivid and poignant than the national military cemetery at Cave Hill. There is one area in particular that truly got my attention the first time I saw it. If you walk down one side of the hill, you see the headstones of the Union dead, and on the other side, the Confederates. But if you look closer, another story emerges, when you realize that many of the same last names show up on both sides of the hill, often with the same death dates, presumably killed in the same battle.

This was the first inkling for me that something unusual, and quite tragic, had happened here. If you read many older books about the Civil War in Kentucky, they tend to describe it in lofty, heroic terms. On one side were the loyal Unionists, who supported a strong national government, and on the other side, an equally principled pro-Confederate group which embraced the Jeffersonian ideal of states' rights. But according to Anne Marshall, a professor of history at Mississippi State University, things weren't nearly that simple.

Anne Marshall: Well, I think the crucial thing to realize here is that when White Kentuckians were forming their allegiances at the outbreak of the Civil War, they didn't know what we know now, which is that the civil war would become a war about ending slavery. And so at the outset of the Civil War, most White Kentuckians were, for the union. In fact, they saw the union cause and the union itself, and particularly the constitution as being the best protector of slavery. In fact, they saw secession as a really big risk.

Dan Gediman: I don't know about you, but this whole idea of pro-slavery Unionists was new to me. At least in the northeast, where I grew up, we were taught a highly simplified, very binary set of facts about the Civil War. The North was against slavery, the South was for it, and that was about it. But in Kentucky, at least, things were far more complicated. This is the Reckoning.

By and large, Kentuckians were not big fans of Abraham Lincoln. During the election of 1860, Kentucky voters gave their native son less than one percent of the vote¹. And yet, pro-slavery Kentuckians were largely in agreement with the newly elected president that the number one priority for the nation was preserving the Union, not ending slavery. By the time of his inauguration in March of 1861, seven states had already voted to secede, though the Civil War had not yet begun. So by the time of his first inaugural address, he was trying to do whatever he could to reassure the Southern states that he meant them no harm, saying "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists."

As several additional states voted to secede, Lincoln became more and more concerned about Kentucky. He wrote about this in a letter to Illinois senator, Orville Browning.

Abraham Lincoln: I think to lose Kentucky, is nearly the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we cannot hold Missouri, nor I think Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large. We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of this capitol.²

Dan Gediman: One of the most helpful resources available to us to understand the complex nature of pro-slavery unionism is a remarkable diary kept by a White woman named Ellen Wallace from Hopkinsville, in Western Kentucky. Here is her entry from one week after the attack on Fort Sumter, which began the Civil War.

Ellen Wallace: April the 19th, 1861. The whole country is in a state of convulsion. When or where it will end no one can tell. All men are looking with anxiety and dread to the future. I pray God in his infinite wisdom and mercy to guide and protect us, for the very foundations of our glorious

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1860_United_States_presidential_election_in_Kentucky

² September 1861 letter to Orville Browning
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln4/1:1003.1?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>

Republic seems to be broken up and heaving in wild commotion. Virginia seceded from the Union tonight. Kentucky it is feared will soon follow. She has all to lose and nothing to gain by such a course but ruin.³

Dan Gediman: Again, history professor Anne Marshall.

Anne Marshall: And at the outset of the war, Wallace was an ardent unionist. She was sort of the typical conservative Kentucky, slave owning unionist who felt like the union stood for not only the values of her forefathers, but also to protect her rights, and her husband's rights as slave owners. Well, this starts to change over the course of the war.

Ellen Wallace: April the 29, 1861 The passions of the people are lashed to fury by wicked and designing politicians. The storm is now beyond human control. The very ground is as it were, rocking under our feet and the sky rent with thunder bolts above our heads. In no direction is there one ray of light or spark of hope. There is yet one deeper shade to be added to the scene, which I pray Our Father in heaven will in his great mercy spare us. That is servile insurrection.⁴

Dan Gediman: Within the Bullitt family at Oxmoor, there was a split over the Civil War. Three of the younger Bullitt sons, Thomas, James, and Henry, all joined the Confederate army. James was eventually killed, and Thomas and Henry were wounded and taken prisoner. Their parents, Mildred and William were enthusiastic Confederate supporters, as was their daughter Helen and her husband, Dr. Henry Chenoweth. But there was at least one family member who stayed loyal to the Union, and that was eldest sister Susan Bullitt, who married Sen. Archibald Dixon, one of the largest

³ Wallace Diary 1861-1863.pdf, Pg. 13

⁴ Ellen Wallace Diary 1861-1863, Pg 14

slaveholders in Kentucky and an ardent pro-slavery unionist throughout the war. Here is an excerpt from a speech he gave in April of 1861.

Archibald Dixon: My sympathies are with the South, but I am not prepared to aid her in fighting against our government. If we remain in the Union we are safe. In a just cause I will defend our state at every point and against every combination, but when she battles against the law and constitution I have not the heart, I have not the courage, to do it... Never strike at that flag of our country, nor follow Jefferson Davis to tear down the Stars and Stripes.

Dan Gediman: For slave-holding Kentuckians like the Bullitts, the Civil War represented an existential threat to their wealth and way of life. If the North won, radical Republicans might abolish slavery outright, but if the South won, the Confederate states would secede from the Union and laws like the Fugitive Slave Act wouldn't apply if enslaved people crossed the Ohio River to the North. And every step that Lincoln took seemed to inflame these fears even more.

In July 1862 Lincoln floated the idea of compensating slave holders in states like Kentucky if they would agree to eventually emancipate their enslaved, perhaps later in the century. But any mention of emancipation, however distant in the future, was a non-starter in Kentucky, and the state legislature loudly voted it down⁵. Then, when the Emancipation Proclamation was announced, life became even more confusing in Kentucky in terms of the tenuous status of enslaved people. Historian Patrick Lewis.

Patrick Lewis: After it goes into effect in January of 1863, it affects the states in rebellion, right. And so it affects everything south of Kentucky, but it doesn't affect Kentucky because Lincoln wanted to steer clear of angering those pro-slavery unionists in this state. Well, you know, enslaved people in areas that the Union Army control, they leave their

⁵ Lowell H. Harrison, "Lincoln, Slavery, and Kentucky.pdf Pp 14-18

plantations, they know they can't stay in those areas because the Confederate Army is likely to come back. And so they start moving north, they start moving to Kentucky because this is there's a general understanding in the African American community that you go north to find freedom. But it actually moves them into greater danger. It moves them into a state where slavery is still legal.

Dan Gediman: When they heard about the Emancipation Proclamation, many White Kentuckians felt truly betrayed, especially those who had been supporting, and even fighting for the Union. History professor Anne Marshall.

Anne Marshall: It really proves what they had been starting to suspect, which is that the war for union was really turning into a war to end slavery. You can really see it, you can see it in the letters of soldiers who are fighting for the Union Army, that they're, really disgusted. Some of them even decide that they don't want to fight anymore because of this. So it's a real game changer, because there's a sense that if slavery anywhere falls, that slavery everywhere, is vulnerable.

Ellen Wallace: September 29, 1862 Lincoln proclamation emancipating all the slaves is justly creating great indignation. The consequences of it are too awful to contemplate. The blood of women and children...will flow in torrents if its carried into effect. The vile wretch ought to suffer all the torments that could be inflicted on him, body and soul. This to place innocent women and helpless infants at the mercy of Black monsters who would walk in human shape⁶.

Dan Gediman: Starting in January 1863, the Union Army began to accept both free and enslaved Black men as soldiers. Lincoln took pains to exempt Kentucky from this

⁶ Ellen Wallace Diary 1861-1863, Pg 60.

policy as long as possible, knowing how passionately Kentuckians felt about keeping their enslaved, and how paranoid they were about the idea of armed Black soldiers. But by the spring of 1864, Lincoln was so desperate for more troops that he finally decided to open up enlistment to Black Kentuckians, cushioning the blow by promising loyal enslavers \$300 per slave if their enslaved men joined the Union Army⁷.

Thousands of enslaved men answered Lincoln's call. And a handful of them left behind their written and transcribed memories of this time. In their words, we can hear a combination of hope, pride, and underlying fear -- sometimes all at the same time. Rev. Elijah P. Marrs was a Sergeant in the 12th Heavy Artillery Regiment of the U.S. Colored Troops.

Elijah P. Marrs: I remember the morning I made up my mind to join the United States Army. I started to Simpsonville, and walking along I met many of my old comrades on the Shelbyville Pike. I told them of my determination, and asked all who desired to join my company to roll his coat sleeves above his elbows, and to let them remain so during the day. I had twenty-seven men, all told, and I was elected their captain to lead them to Louisville⁸.

William Emmons:⁹ I left and joined the army when I was 18.

Dan Gediman: William Emmons was a Private in the 117th Infantry Regiment¹⁰

William Emmons: Forty of us from the plantation round near Carlisle went at the same time. When we went off for the army, going down a dusty road, three White fellows we knew come riding up, and said, "Where you darkies

⁷ See Lowell H. Harrison, "Lincoln, Slavery, and Kentucky" for this fact and much else about Lincoln's decision making about slavery and Kentucky

⁸ Life and History of the Rev. Elijah P. Marrs, Pg. 10

⁹ <http://bit.ly/3a8ew1b>

¹⁰ As per military record at Ancestry.com (see Ancestry screen shot in fact-checking folder or <https://ancestry.me/3916k2t>)

going?" We told them we were going to war, and they tried to make us go back to the plantation. We told them we'd kill them if they kept on meddling with us, and they got scared and left us alone¹¹.

Elijah P. Marrs: Breakfast time came, the tattoo was beat, and the men formed into line... The Orderly Sergeant called the roll, and when he called "Marrs, Elijah," I promptly answered... I felt freedom in my bones, and when I saw the American eagle, with outspread wings, upon the American flag, with the motto, "E Pluribus Unum," the thought came to me, "Give me liberty or give me death." Then all fear banished. I had quit thinking as a child and had commenced to think as a man¹².

Dan Gediman: Eventually over 24,000 African Americans from Kentucky fought for the Union, more than any other slave-holding state other than Louisiana.¹³ And one of them was Russ Bowlds' ancestor, Jim Sanders.

[phone ringing]

Dan Gediman: Hello, Russ?

Dan Gediman: Both Russ and I had largely hit a dead end trying to learn more about Jim Sanders, who disappeared from the written record after the 1900 census. Then I got the idea of looking under the name of Jim Dixon, since so many enslaved people either took, or were given the last name of their enslaver, And when I did that, I found a lengthy military file on a "Jim" Dixon, who was enslaved by former Kentucky Senator Archibald Dixon, who if you remember, was married to Susan Bullitt. I emailed the file to Russ and then called him to ask for his reactions.

Russ Bowlds: It was really interesting to get to see more detail about his life and, and his movements across the country. to find out what his what his health problems were, when he was discharged from the military. It was

¹¹ William Emmons WPA Narrative.docx, Pg 4

¹² Life and History of the Rev. Elijah P. Marrs.docx Pg. 12

¹³ <http://bit.ly/2IhEnb3>

so interesting. I never thought that I would be able to find anything that was so detailed about his life.

Dan Gediman: In these military files I found an application for a disability pension.¹⁴ In reading that, we learned that Jim had served as a corporal in an infantry regiment that was part of the Siege of Petersburg and Richmond, which involved more Black troops than any other campaign during the Civil War. The casualties were enormous, with an estimated 70,000 soldiers killed.¹⁵ Among the many wounded was Jim Sanders, who was accidentally shot in the hand while loading his rifle.

This injury led to a long period of convalescence, which also included treatment for what was diagnosed as rheumatism--a term that isn't used much anymore, but refers to a painful condition that affects the joints and other connective tissues, often in the back. This diagnosis really caught Russ' attention. :46

Russ Bowlds: That's very interesting.

Dan Gediman: Yeah.

Russ Bowlds: And the reason why I say that is because of the illness that that I'm suffering from. I tend to think that it's hereditary, and for a long time the illness went untreated because they didn't know what it was. So, I'm wondering if what his problems were that he never got well from is the same thing that that that you know troubles me.

Dan Gediman: And what do you call that?

Russ Bowlds: It's called multiple myeloma, it's a blood cancer that attacks the bone, causes problems with your back, causes the vertebrae to

¹⁴ James Sanders/Dixon's "Pensions document packet".

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Petersburg and <http://bit.ly/3aoXZWI>

collapse or fracture. It manifests itself in a lot of different ways. None of them are very, very comfortable. [laughs]

Dan Gediman: Jim Sanders was eventually mustered out of the Army and was able to go home to his family in Henderson. But his health problems lingered and when Congress passed legislation offering military pensions to disabled Union veterans, James found a lawyer and applied for one.

Somewhere in the first decade of the 20th century, Jim Sanders' health had deteriorated to such a degree that he moved into a home for disabled soldiers in Marion, Indiana where he died in March 1910 at the age of 73. He was buried with military honors at the nearby National Cemetery, which is just a few miles away from where Russ lives.

Russ Bowlds: You know, my Dad always told me that his one of his great grandfathers was buried up to the veterans' cemetery. And I had gone out there and looked and I was looking for the last name Saunders and I couldn't find it. And I had no idea until I got these papers that he went by Jim Saunders Dixon, and once I got that information, I went back out there and I was able to find his resting place. And I don't know, it's it was just a tingly feeling inside, to have known him only through research and to be able to find where, where he, where he's buried. It was, it was very it was kind of an emotional thing. For me, finding James Sanders was really an inspirational moment. And to find him just two miles down the road from me was a special thing. I feel proud to be one of his descendants, you know, he was in the war fighting for our freedom, and seems like a great guy.

Dan Gediman: While Lincoln's policy of allowing Black soldiers may have served the short-term needs of the Army, it gravely harmed any remaining goodwill toward the Union among White Kentuckians, even those who had previously been strong supporters. We can hear this clearly in the diary entries of Ellen Wallace, a slaveholder from Hopkinsville, Kentucky.

Ellen Wallace: December 25, 1863. Lincoln has trodden underfoot the laws of our state and usurped entire control. He has made the Negro master of the White man, as far as his power goes, putting arms in their hands, stationing Negro pickets at the toll gates and bridges, where they defy their former masters to pass on peril of their lives. The White man has to turn his horses and obey Lincoln's Negro troops with clenched teeth...They feel that Lincoln is indeed a greater traitor than Jeff Davis. because he pretends to support the constitution by the very means he takes to destroy it. We look upon him as a wretch only fit to rule over the most degraded part of the Negro population¹⁶.

Dan Gediman: The conscription of enslaved men into the Union Army was not only disturbing to White civilians like Ellen Wallace, it also enraged many White Kentuckians serving in the Union Army, some of whom spoke out publicly against their commander in chief. Professor Anne Marshall.

Anne Marshall: Frank Wolford was a colonel in the Union Army. And he is probably the preeminent example of someone who just was disgusted with Lincoln's actions. And so, he stands up and gives this what people reported as being a nearly four-hour long speech, a tirade against Lincoln. And this eventually gets back to Lincoln and Wolford gets a dishonorable discharge. But a couple decades later, Wolford is one of the only union officers from Kentucky to be accorded his own monument.

¹⁶ Ellen Wallace Diary 1861- 1863.pdf, Pg 113-114

Dan Gediman: Although enlisting Black soldiers into the Union Army was deeply unpopular with White Kentuckians, it had a major effect on enslaved families all over the state. Again, Anne Marshall.

Anne Marshall: In 1864, when the Federal Army starts to enlist African American soldiers, this provides a huge opportunity for enslaved Kentuckians, if you could prove that you were, you know, de facto marriage and had children, enlisting men could gain freedom for themselves and for their wives and their children by joining the army.

Dan Gediman: This new policy was a mixed bag for enslaved Kentuckians. It created a loophole for them to be freed, but because slavery was still legal in the state, it presented real dangers for the wives and children of Black soldiers if they chose to leave their enslavers and follow their men to military outposts. They could be arrested by slave patrols along the way, and they were at the mercy of whichever commanding officer was in charge when they got there. Nonetheless, thousands of families, like that of Joseph Miller and his wife Isabella, headed to the freedom and safety of the Union camps. Joseph and Isabella had been enslaved by a man named George Miller in Lincoln County, Kentucky¹⁷.

Joseph Miller: When I came to camp for the purpose of enlisting about the middle of October 1864, my wife and children came with me because my master said that if I enlisted, he would not maintain them, and I knew that they would be abused by him when I left. I had then four children ages respectively ten, nine, seven and four years.

Dan Gediman: Miller and his family traveled to Camp Nelson, in Nicholasville, Kentucky, where roughly 10,000 formerly enslaved African Americans would eventually enlist in the Union Army, many of them bringing their families. In late 1864, the camp's

¹⁷ <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/Nov64.pdf>

commander, General Speed Fry, decided these families were no longer welcome.
Gettysburg College History Professor Jim Downs.

Jim Downs: One morning in November of 1864, was a particularly cold morning Joseph Miller would later recount in an affidavit, he was woken by a mounted guard a union soldier. Who said that the refugee camp was ending, and that all of the freed people were expelled from the camp.

Joseph Miller: My little boy, about seven years of age had been very sick and was slowly recovering. About 8 o'clock, Weds morning, November 23rd, a mounted guard came to my tent and ordered my wife and children out of camp. The morning was bitter cold, I told the man in charge of the guard that it would be the death of my boy. I told him that my wife and children had no place to go. And I told him that I was a soldier of the United States. He told me that it did not make any difference.

Jim Downs: And the union guard who is often sort of remembered as the sort of saviors of the freed people as the people who were there to end slavery, pointed a gun at him and his family, and they said if you don't leave now, I will shoot every last one of them.

Joseph Miller: On thus being threatened, my wife and children went into the wagon. My wife carried her sick child in her arms. When they left the tent The wind was blowing hard and cold and having had to leave much of our clothing when we left our master, my wife with her little one was poorly clad. I followed them as far as the lines.

Dan Gediman: The families were driven out of the camp and their cabins destroyed¹⁸. Over 100 refugees, including Miller's son, died in the coming days and the tragedy

¹⁸ <https://www.nps.gov/cane/learn/historyculture/index.htm>

became a national story. The policy was eventually reversed, and barracks were built for the soldiers' families. But sadly this was not the end of the tragedy for Joseph Miller.

Jim Downs: One by one, each of his children slowly died. Then his wife Isabella dies and then within two months, he dies. So between November of 1864 in January of 1865, the family was free because they escaped from slavery, but they died in this transition from slavery to freedom.

Dan Gediman: In retrospect, it would be hard to overestimate the impact of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on Kentucky, and the entire country. For Kentucky's African Americans, it gave them a chance for freedom, however complicated and even dangerous that was in reality. But for many White Kentuckians, the emancipation of enslaved people was the last straw in an already frayed relationship with the U.S. government. For some, it inspired distrust and resentment against that government for generations to come, and inspired deadly hatred against the formerly enslaved, once they could no longer be considered property.

Next time on The Reckoning: the war might be over, but the violence against Black Kentuckians, had only begun.