

DAVID A. WELKER

African American Intelligence Contributions during the American Civil War

Abstract: My research article offers the first detailed assessment of African American intelligence contributions during the American Civil War, using contemporaneous primary source documents. These contributions have never been considered in their totality because earlier historians focused mainly on a few well-known personal stories. My research corrects that oversight by revealing the full extent of African American intelligence contributions, drawing on contemporaneous primary sources to demonstrate that leaders at all levels of the Union drew on this information, and that it contributed to the course of every major battle, in several noted cases decisively so. My research also considers the ways in which African Americans personally contributed to meet the Union's intelligence needs, often at great personal risk. My research for the first time reveals that African Americans also provided intelligence supporting the South, a role mainly occurring in the war's early years, and which diminished greatly once the Union declared the demise of slavery as a strategic goal. The article closes by using contemporaneous primary source records to reevaluate several widely known individual accounts highlighted by earlier generations of writers, shedding much-needed light on these stories that in some cases exposes fabrication or doubt, while in others reinforces or clarifies these accounts' accuracy.

“The real war will never get in the books” poet Walt Whitman famously observed about America's Civil War experience, while former Lieutenant

David A. Welker is a Historian at the Central Intelligence Agency. The author can be contacted at dawelker1861@gmail.com.

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General U.S. Grant a few years later remarked that “[w]ars produce many stories of fiction, some of which are told until they are believed to be true.” Understanding of African Americans’ role in providing intelligence during the Civil War reflects both observations because for generations after the war that contribution was diminished, sidelined, or ignored. Yet, when roughly 40 years ago historians and popular culture began reevaluating traditionally underexamined groups and persons, generating a more inclusive perspective, they sometimes strayed into overcorrection that turned a few accounts into stories of near-mythic, and even outright false, proportions.

One notable example of such overcorrection is the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)’s 1997 *Studies in Intelligence* article, “Black American Contributions to Union Intelligence during the Civil War,” that was reissued in 1999 as “Black Dispatches.” Widely cited—generating its own Wikipedia page—the article drew heavily and unquestioningly from six secondary works, recounting without context those authors’ errors and biases.¹ Even the “Black Dispatches” title, which the author asserts was “a common term used among Union military men for intelligence ... provided by Negroes,” misleads because it never appears in any contemporaneous sources nor even in participants’ postwar accounts.

A review of contemporaneous primary sources, dating to the 1861–1865 Civil War, however, reveals more clearly and accurately the influence and contribution of African Americans’ intelligence at nearly every decisionmaking level, from President Lincoln to the lowest-ranking officers. It is the totality of this collective contribution, rather than the few well-known individual stories of daring-do, that truly helped guide the nation through its most difficult, darkest days.

This article seeks to explore those contributions that are supported by the most reliable information, contemporaneous primary sources. Establishing an understanding of the unique time and conditions during which these actions occurred, it will first consider African Americans’ intelligence support for the Union cause, including use by military leaders, impact on major battles and specific instances in which this information proved decisive, and highlight the various ways in which African Americans personally provided intelligence support that enabled Union victory. It will also consider African Americans’ albeit brief intelligence contribution to the Southern cause during the war. It closes by examining the intelligence contributions of several well-known individual African Americans, considering what contemporaneous primary sources reveal about these widely accepted accounts.

CHALLENGES TO UNDERSTANDING: A DIFFERENT TIME, WITH SOME SIMILARITIES

Readers consulting wartime primary sources on African American intelligence contributions should be aware at the outset that modern sensitivities and

cultural awareness are, unsurprisingly, absent in most cases. Persons today described as African American or Black were during the Civil War referred to in written documents by a variety of terms perhaps unfamiliar to modern readers. Most frequently in the 127-volume *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*—compiling and publishing participants' wartime reports, correspondence, and other primary sources—these individuals are described as Negro or Negroes, the English term deriving originally from both Spanish and Portuguese that was in vogue during the nineteenth century.² Other frequently used terms include “colored” and the Union wartime slang expression “contraband.” Although specifically denoting an escaped or former slave, using the word for liberated or stolen goods, it was frequently applied to describe all African American persons. The term Black was used in primary source documents, although infrequently, often to describe an individual or group of persons in order to contrast them with White persons. Very infrequently used—and in my findings, mostly early in the war—were terms today considered offensive racial slurs.

During the Civil War, just as in today's intelligence world, providing accurate, concise descriptions of human sources was vital to establishing their bona fides, in order to persuade superior officers and other decisionmakers why the source's information should be believed and perhaps acted on. For this reason, wartime descriptions of nonmilitary intelligence sources cited in the *Official Records* almost always includes the person's race, even if not explicitly intending to do so. For example, the term “gentleman” or “citizen” never appears when describing African American sources, probably reflecting both the racial bias of the era and because these individuals—even free Blacks—were not then full citizens of either the Union or the Confederacy. Even so, noting a source as Negro in many Union *Official Records* documents was frequently clearly meant to reinforce their reliability and the value of their intelligence. Similar also to today's Intelligence Community (IC), the Civil War era's various intelligence collectors turned to the widest possible variety of human sources for information, including African Americans. My research shows that both Union and Confederate military officers utilized intelligence provided by Blacks, as did mounted cavalry troops both North and South whose tactical intelligence role grew as the war progressed.

A major challenge facing those seeking a fuller, more accurate understanding of African Americans' Civil War intelligence role is the often flawed nature of source materials available to inform those conclusions. Wartime primary source records, many compiled in the published *Official Records*, offer the best overall source of information on Black intelligence contributions and actions. Even these records have holes and gaps, of course, because selecting for publication only those documents judged the most significant obscured some examples of African American intelligence contributions. Many other primary source

writings are unfortunately of diminished value to today's scholars because they were written years or decades after the war—often introducing error, intended or not—or were created with a purpose other than recording or informing, such as boosting sales, influencing debate, or persuading government officials to take a desired action.

Vital to appreciating the significance and value of intelligence contributions, including those of African Americans, is understanding that, unlike in most popular characterizations of intelligence—which frequently depict a single report or source providing sensational, turning-point information—decisionmakers normally want to evaluate multiple, independent intelligence reports before acting with confidence. Given this, even seemingly fragmentary or limited data can combine to have considerable impact. During the Civil War, this approach meant that military leaders routinely welcomed volunteered intelligence from locals, including Black sources, but also depended on independently secured information from cavalry, scouts, or other sources to corroborate or refute this information before acting. Similarly, any information that influences an action—successful or not—may be considered as impactful intelligence.

These African American intelligence contributions to the Union cause that led to victory, including their use by military leaders, contribution to major battles, and specific instances in which they provided decisive information, highlight the various ways in which African Americans' intelligence role made personal contributions to Union victory.

SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNION CAUSE

Contemporaneous primary sources reflect that Union leadership at all levels utilized intelligence provided by African Americans, throughout the war and beyond. President Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, and every commander of each of the Union's armies—including generals Burnside, Grant, Hooker, McClellan, McDowell, Meade, Pope, Rosecrans, Sheridan, and Sherman—paid heed to such information in planning campaign moves and combat actions. Union officers from senior corps commanders to lieutenants leading small details in the field also used Black-provided intelligence, affecting their operations in ways large and small. Federal Navy officers, too, utilized intelligence from Black sources—particularly in guiding riverine naval actions—ranging from admirals Samuel F. DuPont, Samuel Lee, and David Dixon Porter—to ironclad and other vessels' captains and officers.³

Intelligence provided by African Americans informed Union actions in nearly every major battle of the war, as well as in untold numbers of smaller fights and movements between these events, according to a review of contemporaneous primary sources. These extend from the earliest major

action at Big Bethel on 10 June 1861, to Union actions prompting Lee's surrender of his Army of Northern Virginia on 9 April 1865, and throughout the winding down of military operations later that year. Similarly, primary sources show Black sources provided intelligence to Union decisionmakers involved in some of the war's and American history's most significant battles, including the First Battle of Bull Run; the various battles of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign and the Seven Days; the Virginia Campaign leading to the Second Battle of Bull Run; Antietam; Fredericksburg; Chancellorsville; Gettysburg; Vicksburg; Chickamauga; Chattanooga; Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign and its battles; actions connected to the Siege of Petersburg; Sherman's campaign in Georgia, March to the Sea, and Carolinas Campaign; and the Appomattox Campaign.⁴

A review of contemporaneous primary sources, particularly the *Official Records*, clearly demonstrates the highly valuable intelligence contributed by African Americans to the Union war effort. By my count, that record alone lists 767 specific instances of Black Americans providing the Union with intelligence or supporting intelligence and military operations during the war. It also reveals that Union officers at every level widely recognized the value of African American-provided intelligence and quickly advocated for its use. For example, reporting his brigade's actions during the September 1863 Battle of Chickamauga and noting important intelligence provided by a Black man, Colonel Charles G. Harker observed,

I desire respectfully to call the attention of the general commanding the department [Major General William S. Rosecrans] to the fact that such vital information to our safety was derived from a negro slave driving a team on the highway. ... I found his statements verified in every respect. It has taught me that in these critical times we should endeavor to elicit information from every conceivable source, and that the most humble may profitably be used in the promotion of our great cause.⁵

Tenth Corps Provost Marshall Major Atherton Stevens similarly reported on 6 November 1864 that "[a] free negro by the name of Webb tendered his services as a guide and proved to be 'true as steel,' and, in fact, I found the colored people almost always to be so. The information gained from them was invariably correct and often of the highest importance."⁶ For their part, Confederate leaders understood the significant threat posed by African Americans' intelligence role. General Robert E. Lee commented on 26 May 1863 that "the chief source of information to the enemy is through our Negroes. ... Secrecy, diligence, and constant attention must always be practiced."⁷ The threat this posed to Southern military operations was evident as early as 30 June 1861—nearly a month before the war's first major

battle—when then-Colonel John B. Magruder reported “two negroes were seen running toward the enemy, making it very improbable that we should accomplish our purpose by surprise.”⁸

Contemporaneous primary source records contain several instances in which African American-provided intelligence played central or vital roles in driving Union actions during the Civil War. Perhaps the most significant of these is reviving the 1862 Peninsula Campaign by ending the Siege of Yorktown and opening that campaign's first major offensive conflict, the Battle of Williamsburg. Major General George B. McClellan's Union Army of the Potomac languished for a month before strong Confederate works at Yorktown, Virginia, which blocked his planned advance on the Confederate capital at Richmond. At dawn on 4 May 1862, two Black “contrabands” walked into the camp of Brigadier General Winfield Scott Hancock's Fourth Corps division, reporting that Confederate troops had overnight abandoned their nearby positions. Confirmed by Lt. Col. George A. Custer while aloft that morning in a Union balloon, Hancock pushed forward a 26-man infantry reconnaissance-in-force to verify further the information before sending the two African Americans to report their intelligence to corps commander Brigadier General William F. Smith. Smith in turn notified army commander McClellan while pushing additional troops forward into the void, enabling McClellan to order a general advance on Confederate rear defenses and opening the Battle of Williamsburg on 5 May 1862.⁹

Similarly impactful is the 1863 warning that Lee's army was moving north toward Pennsylvania, enabling Union forces to pursue them ultimately to battle at Gettysburg. After remaining largely static following victory on 6 May 1863 at the Battle of Chancellorsville, Lee's Confederate Army of Northern Virginia disappeared from Union view beginning on 3 June 1863, leaving Federal Army of the Potomac head Major General Joseph Hooker guessing about his enemy's next move. Union cavalry, scout, and balloon reports and the 9 June 1863 Brandy Station cavalry fight helped confirm Lee's shift west toward Culpeper, Virginia, but Union leaders remained unsure of his next goal. This answer was supplied by Charlie Wright, a “contraband, a servant of an officer in Stuart's artillery” captured on 9 June 1863 after the Brandy Station action, who reported that the bulk of Lee's army was at Culpeper, the impact of damage wrought on Stuart's cavalry that day, and that Stuart's objective before being drawn into battle had been Pennsylvania. Wright's bona fides were reinforced when Union Bureau of Military Information (BMI) officers, after several subsequent interviews of Confederate prisoners, concluded Wright's details of specific Rebel units passing Culpeper were accurate. Although this intelligence suggesting Stuart could be forging the route of Lee's entire army was discounted—being a single, unverified data point—on 11 June another African American source confirmed that Southern

forces were indeed moving west and north toward the Shenandoah Valley and these two reports, verified by cavalry and scout intelligence, prompted Hooker the following day to launch his army north after Lee.¹⁰

Another significant impact of Black-provided intelligence was sparking the Union retreat that ultimately ended the 1862 Peninsula Campaign by further undermining McClellan's confidence in facing new Army of Northern Virginia chief General Robert E. Lee before Richmond at the opening of the Seven Days battles. On 26 June 1862, McClellan alerted Secretary of War Stanton that a Black servant from the Confederate 20th Georgia Infantry had arrived in Union lines that morning "who confirms in a remarkable manner the story of [Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall"] Jackson being on our flank and his intention of attacking our communications," leading McClellan to conclude, "There is no doubt in my mind now that Jackson is coming upon us, and with such great odds against us we shall have our hands full." Intelligence confirming the presence of Jackson's force—fresh from a string of victories in the Shenandoah Valley—and reporting his intention to strike Union supply and reinforcement-route communications could only have added to McClellan's concerns about the security of his advanced position. The vulnerability of this position was further exposed when Confederate cavalry commander J.E.B. Stuart conducted his 13–15 June ride into the Union rear. Rattled by the implication of this subsequently confirmed information and Lee's unexpected, aggressive strike at Mechanicsville that same day, McClellan shifted his base of operations south across the Peninsula—beginning the retreat that eventually ended the Union's 1862 Peninsula Campaign with its objective Richmond still in Southern hands.¹¹

An African American source provided the first report of Confederate cavalry chief General J.E.B. Stuart's mortal wounding on 11 May 1864, during the Battle of Yellow Tavern. Amid fighting that day, Private John A. Huff of the 5th Michigan Cavalry's Company E shot and unhorsed a Confederate officer who was immediately attended to by his staff, instantly ignoring the ongoing fight to take this officer away for treatment. Thirty minutes later, a Black man and a woman reported to the regiment's commander Colonel Russell A. Alger that Stuart had been badly wounded and taken to their house until being removed by an ambulance. Stuart's death was a major blow to the Confederacy and awareness of this loss allowed his Union counterpart Major General Philip Sheridan to press Southern mounted troops more aggressively, beginning in mid-1864.¹²

Similarly significant was locating the source who enabled confronting President Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth. Leading a 16th New York Cavalry detachment pursuing Booth, Lieutenant Edward P. Doherty and Detective Lafayette Baker on 25 April 1865 met a Black man who confirmed

that Booth and his accomplice David Herold had passed by the day before and stopped at a nearby home. Interviewing the home's residents and others led Doherty and Baker to a residence where two different African Americans led them to former Confederate Captain Willie Jett, who subsequently directed the 16th New York Cavalry to the Garrett farm where Booth and Herold were hiding in the barn.¹³

Intelligence provided by an African American source enabled Union control of South Carolina's Stono River, leading to the war's only federal land assault threatening Charleston. In the early hours of 13 May 1862, Robert Smalls led ten fellow slaves in taking unauthorized command of the sidewheel steamer *CSS Planter*, guiding it past Charleston Harbor's Confederate defenders to deliver her to the Union blockade ship *USS Augusta*, ensuring their freedom in the process. Smalls also provided intelligence, sharing documents aboard *Planter* and his detailed knowledge of Charleston's Confederate defenses with Flag-Officer (Admiral) Samuel F. DuPont.¹⁴ Based on Smalls' reports of weak and unprepared Southern defenses, on 24 May DuPont ordered a naval probe that confirmed this reporting and secured the Stono River to Union control by 31 May. Seeking to exploit this gain, Federal Department of the South chief Major General David Hunter in early June began planning a land assault on Charleston, which resulted in the ultimately failed 16 June 1862 Battle of Secessionville.¹⁵

Enabling the capture of former Confederate President Jefferson Davis was another result of such intelligence. Davis fled southwest from the fallen Confederate capital Richmond, reaching a wooded campsite near Irwinville, Georgia, by 10 May 1865, along with his wife Varina, their family, and an eight-wagon train of Confederate officials and personal property. On 9 May, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin D. Pritchard, commanding the 4th Michigan Cavalry in searching for Davis, encountered a Black man who reported the president's party had earlier crossed the Ocmulgee River before continuing along the river's south bank. Using either this man or another Black guide, Pritchard located and surrounded Davis' camp, quickly and bloodlessly capturing the former Confederate president and his party.¹⁶

Yet another impact was precipitating the opening attack at the 9 May 1864 Battle of Cloyd's Mountain, leading to a Union victory that severed rail and telegraph communications between Richmond and Tennessee. Guided by a local Black man, Colonel Carr B. White's Second Brigade navigated extremely difficult terrain to launch the opening, flanking attack on strong Confederate defensive positions that ultimately resulted in Union victory.¹⁷

A final key impact of African American-provided intelligence was in prompting Union attacks on Spanish Fort and Ft. Blakely, the last combined arms assaults of the war, which completed federal control of Mobile Bay, Alabama. On 3 April 1865, a "contraband" and three Confederate deserters

together snuck into Union lines, where they reported details of the size and faltering condition of Rebel forces manning Ft. Blakely, which, along with adjacent Spanish Fort, served as the last Confederate control over the port of Mobile Bay. Confirming similar intelligence from Spanish Fort deserters, on 4 April Major General Edward Canby, commanding the Union 13th and 16th Corps, cited this information to set in motion assaults on the two positions, striking Spanish Fort on 8 April and Ft. Blakely the following day, the same day on which Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia to the Union.¹⁸

African American-provided intelligence made other notable contributions to Union military decisionmaking during the war, frequently by corroborating or adding to other sources' reporting. For example, such intelligence provided Union leaders with details of Confederate force movements and deployments before the 10 June 1861 Battle of Big Bethel, the 19 January 1862 Battle of Mill Springs in Kentucky, and the 27 May 1862 Battle of Hanover Court House. African Americans informed McClellan of enemy positions in Virginia when he finally set the army in motion after two months on the Antietam battlefield. It deepened Major General Meade's hesitation to strike Lee's army until late November 1863, following the July Gettysburg victory. Reporting by Blacks helped confirm that Lieutenant General James Longstreet's First Corps had moved west to reinforce General Braxton Bragg's Army of the Tennessee, also offering important early indications that Bragg's entire force had concentrated south of Chickamauga Creek before the battle there. African American sources reported Lee was moving his army to Spotsylvania in early May 1864 after retreating from the Wilderness battlefield. They provided important, periodic insight into Southern troop conditions, morale, and order of battle within Confederate lines during the ten-month Siege of Petersburg. Intelligence from Black persons first told Major General William T. Sherman on 24 February 1865 that Charleston—the "cradle of the Confederacy"—had fallen. Similarly, Meade's aide recorded on 9 April 1865 that "two negroes said ... that Lee was now cut off near Appomattox Court House. That gave us new wings!" in explaining the final push that prompted the Confederate surrender that day.¹⁹

African Americans also personally supported Union military operations with their knowledge of local road networks, terrain, and rivers. A review of the *Official Records* yielded 55 instances of Black persons serving as land guides and eleven cases of serving as ship pilots. Usually lacking reliable maps of Southern areas—and mistrusting most local White residents they presumed to be Confederate supporters—Union army officers frequently recruited local Blacks to serve as guides to ensure secure, timely movements overland. Reflecting the value of these guides, on 15 June 1864, Union

Second Corps commander Major General Winfield Hancock explained to headquarters his delay in reaching Petersburg, Virginia, by “the nearest and most direct route,” noting, “I have found some guides and have ceased traveling by the map.” Contemporaneous primary sources record the names of only a few such guides, including John Gambler (perhaps a pseudonym), Webb, James Hall, and Jesse Turner.²⁰ African Americans also served as couriers, carrying important messages for Union officers by utilizing their knowledge of the local terrain and ability to move freely across combatant lines (until Black men becoming Union soldiers complicated this role). Union Signal Corps Lieutenant Franklin Ellis noted on 8 June 1862 that, although he could not securely transmit messages by flag signal, “many free negroes can be found who can be trusted with the transmission of messages in cipher.”²¹ Union Navy ship commanders too turned to local African Americans familiar with navigable river channels and potential concealed obstacles—who, even though enslaved, had piloted or commanded vessels bearing goods—to pilot warships during operations. Indicating the serious threat posed by this Union support, Confederate Brigadier General Henry Wise on 30 May 1862 noted that nearby was “a rendezvous of free negroes who live by fishing and are good pilots” whom he proposed to stop by arresting the men and burning their boats. Union warship pilots too risked their lives, as reflected in the case of a runaway slave who Confederate authorities intended to hang for piloting Union gunboats *Penguin* and *Henry Andrew* in raiding Smyrna, Florida’s Confederate arms stores on 23 March 1862.²²

As this case suggests, providing intelligence and personally serving the Union was tremendously risky for African Americans, who frequently paid with their lives if captured. The Confederacy demonstrated early on that captured enemy spies, regardless of race, would be executed when White Pinkerton detective Timothy Webster was hung on 29 April 1862 in Richmond. Examples noted in contemporaneous primary sources of such sacrifices include that on 8 April 1863, Confederate Colonel Samuel W. Ferguson—commanding the 28th Mississippi Cavalry in defending Vicksburg—reported, “[Y]esterday I hanged a negro man, slave of William F. Smith, who, mistaking two of my men for the Abolitionists, hailed them across the creek, and volunteered to conduct them to the rebel camp, so as to surprise it; informed them of my strength and position...”²³ On 29 June 1862, a Black presumed guide was shot during combat that erupted while accompanying the 17th New York Infantry in its retreat following the Seven Days Battles.²⁴ Even Union officers in some situations posed a threat, with perhaps the most notorious such case being the incident in which Colonel Ulric Dahlgren, lost and frustrated during his failed 1864 raid to free Union prisoners in Richmond, hanged a Black guide he believed had intentionally misdirected the group.²⁵

Being returned to slavery was another risk knowingly undertaken by African Americans providing the Union intelligence and support if seized by Confederates and even, in one notable example, by Union officials as well. In April 1863, Sandy and George—two men who had actively supported Major General Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Tennessee for nearly a year as spies and teamsters—were arrested by border state Kentucky officials, who seized the two as fugitive slaves and advertised them for sale in a Hardinsburg newspaper.²⁶ Families of Black persons aiding the Union also could be called on to sacrifice for their loved one's efforts, as when free Black guides and spies James Hall and Jesse Turner found their families had been taken from their homes by Confederate Brigadier General Mosby M. Parsons and offered in exchange for the Union returning runaway slaves for use as laborers.²⁷

UNION INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATIONS' USE

Union intelligence units—particularly the BMI, the nation's first all-source intelligence organization—frequently tapped African Americans for information and to conduct collection operations, according to a review of contemporaneous primary source materials. Such use was made by Major General Joseph Hooker—later founder of the BMI—during the Peninsula Campaign's early days, reporting in March and April 1862 of intelligence provided by "my Negro spies."²⁸ By late 1863, BMI chief Colonel George Sharpe and his civilian analyst John Babcock regularly utilized African American-provided intelligence alongside information from Confederate prisoners and deserters, White locals, intercepted messages, and other sources to inform Union decisionmakers and corroborate or refute other sources' reporting.²⁹

The BMI's scout leader, Captain John McEntee, also routinely reported intelligence his collectors had obtained from Black sources during their covert missions.³⁰ As the BMI became more skilled and influential, the volume of reporting from Black sources increased during the 1864 Overland Campaign, Siege of Petersburg, and through to the Appomattox surrender. Major General Grenville Dodge, who provided a BMI-like role in the war's Western Theater, too utilized Black sources, as reflected by his 19 March 1864 directive allowing into Union lines only potential army recruits and Black persons "whom we can use to advantage."³¹ African American sources also provided valuable counterintelligence information by identifying Confederate spies, as reflected by the 15 April 1862 report of 1st Maine Cavalry captain Robert Dyer, noting that two Black women had that day alerted him of a local blacksmith who frequently entered Union camps to collect intelligence for Confederate forces.³² The Richmond Underground—the Union's most significant and productive spy ring of the war, formed and led by Elizabeth

Van Lew—also reportedly made extensive use of African Americans as collectors, couriers, and in operations enabling and supporting Union officers' escape from Confederate prisons. Van Lew used Blacks' ability to move largely unfettered throughout the Richmond area as a means for both gathering information and moving it across lines beginning in December 1863, initially to Major General Benjamin Butler and later to the BMI and generals Grant and Meade.³³

For these intelligence collectors, African Americans' clear noncombatant status and corresponding ability to move freely and cross enemy lines made them highly valued as operations agents throughout the war. For example, in December 1862, the USS *Yankee's* Lieutenant Commander Samuel McGaw reported to Army of the Potomac chief Major General Burnside of having sent that evening a Black man behind Confederate lines to spread a "big story" as disinformation misleading the enemy.³⁴ On 16 May 1863, following Union defeat at the Battle of Chancellorsville, Army of the Potomac chief of staff Major General Daniel Butterfield directed that an African American be tasked to enter enemy lines and gather intelligence of Rebel troop movements.³⁵ The BMI similarly utilized Black Americans who could cross the lines to gather intelligence during the ten-month Siege of Petersburg. William Henry was one such man, who drove his wagon into Union lines from the besieged city on 24 June 1864—the Rebels assuming he was collecting horse feed—to report the location of the headquarters of generals Lee and Beauregard, the condition and location of Confederate troops, and other valuable information.³⁶

This diverse African American intelligence support for the Union cause, utilized by political and military leaders at all levels, contributed to the course of every major battle fought during the war, in selected cases decisively so. Beyond providing intelligence, African Americans also frequently risked life and limb by personally supporting Union intelligence needs throughout the war. Backed by a wealth of contemporaneous primary source documents, these examples firmly demonstrate the important role African Americans' intelligence played in securing Union victory and their own freedom.

SUPPORTING THE SOUTH, BRIEFLY

African Americans also provided intelligence support to the Confederacy, although greatly diminished in scope and duration when compared to such aid for the Union, according to a review of contemporaneous primary sources. For example, the *Official Records* note 43 instances of Black individuals providing intelligence support to the South, compared with 767 identified cases of aiding the Union. Although this number may reflect former Confederates' unwillingness to support U.S. government postwar record collection efforts, the destruction of Confederate records during the

war, and other reasons, it seems clear that Black intelligence support for Richmond was very limited.³⁷ A review of the *Official Records* shows that twelve Confederate officers reported using intelligence provided by Black persons, including Army of Northern Virginia commander General Robert E. Lee, Lieutenant General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, Southern cavalry head Major General J.E.B. Stuart, and Major General George Pickett (although this source had been doubled and in fact supported the Union).³⁸

Although intelligence provided the South by Black persons had minimal impact compared with its value for the North, nonetheless in some instances it proved valuable and occasionally decisive. One such instance was reported by Southern cavalry chief Stuart, relating that a captured Black man "... who had known me in Berkeley, and who, recognizing me, informed me of the location of General Pope's staff, baggage, horses, &c and offered to guide to the spot." This man enabled the 22 August 1862 Battle of Catlett's Station, in which Stuart captured important documents prior to the Second Battle of Bull Run and embarrassed the Union Army of Virginia's commander Major General John Pope by taking his personal baggage, including one of Pope's uniform coats, which was later publicly displayed in Richmond.³⁹ African Americans served as guides for Confederate troops on several occasions and during the spring 1862 Peninsula Campaign, Confederates exploited the Union need for intelligence by sending Black spies to collect behind federal lines. Similarly, an enslaved man informed Confederate Brigadier General Alfred H. Colquitt of Fort Fisher's fall on 17 January 1865, and an enslaved man reported to Confederate authorities an imminent slave uprising in Florida in April 1863.⁴⁰ Other instances of African Americans providing Confederate forces with intelligence were compelled, such as the February 1862 instance in which an enslaved woman was forced to lure the Union gunboat *Delaware* ashore where 1,000 Rebels waited in ambush, or were probably provided under fear of death or punishment, such as the several examples of captured U.S. Colored Troop soldiers (the Civil War term for Black soldiers) who reported to captors that their officers had directed "no quarter" be given to captured Confederates in battle.⁴¹ In an unusual case, a Confederate spy entered Union lines disguised as a Black man and conversed with Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Steele, one of Sherman's division commanders during the drive on Vicksburg, Mississippi, obtaining considerable actionable intelligence.⁴²

Contemporaneous primary sources show African Americans also provided intelligence support to the Confederacy, sometimes willingly and in other cases through coercion, but in considerably diminished scope compared to that aid for the Union and mainly during the war's early period. Regardless, once it became clear that Union victory would secure African Americans'

freedom, such Confederate support nearly ceased, correspondingly enabling Union objectives.

FAMOUS FIGURES AND CONTEMPORANEOUS PRIMARY SOURCES

Historians and authors considering African Americans' Civil War intelligence contributions have long focused mainly on accounts of several individuals, probably in order to make the issue relatable and to generate readers' interest. Determining the origin of many accounts and their details is challenging because few of the secondary works in which these stories first appear, many dating to the 1950s, include source notes. Even if some derive from oral traditions—a source bearing its own considerable accuracy challenges—reexamining these stories under the light of what wartime primary sources tell us about them is long overdue. Doing so reinforces or adds substance to some accounts, while in other instances it weakens or substantially undermines the story. In every case, however, this focus sharpens modern understanding of African Americans' overall intelligence contributions to the war.

Charlie Wright

Recent sensational claims that Wright “told Union troops to stage at Little Round Top, which was key to the Union’s victory,” or that he was a “walking order of battle chart” create a myth in comparison to which Wright’s contemporaneous primary source documented contributions appear meager, diminishing his actual, important contribution. As noted earlier, Charlie Wright was the first source providing intelligence that Lee’s army was heading to Pennsylvania and, although initially discounted, once confirmed by additional reporting Wright’s intelligence contributed to the decision to move Union forces north in pursuit.⁴³

George Scott

Some accounts claim “one of the first large-scale Civil War battles was the result of information” he provided, while others assert “this black man, a gun at his side, was preparing to lead thousands of Union soldiers forward into combat—indeed, into the first significant land battle of the Civil War.” Such hyperbole aside, review of contemporaneous primary sources show George Scott was a runaway slave who served as an intelligence-collecting scout and guide for Major General Benjamin Butler before, during, and after the 10 June 1861 Battle of Big Bethel—the war’s first battle, but a minor skirmish even when compared to other early war fights. Although mentioned just once in the *Official Records*—in Butler’s operational plan for the coming battle,

“George Scott is to have a revolver”—and with no role stated, this and the casual use of his name suggests Butler and other officers were familiar with Scott, so no further elaboration was unnecessary.⁴⁴ Butler’s 1892 autobiography claims that a “negro scout”—although not specifically Scott—reported enemy troop strength before the battle and that Scott was to “accompany [Butler’s staff officer Major Theodore] Winthrop” during the battle, probably as a guide. That evening, after the fight, Butler sent Scott back to the battlefield to scout for remaining enemy troops, carrying a basket of “restoratives and bandages” to care for Union wounded but in reality to help conceal his true intelligence-gathering mission.⁴⁵ June and July 1861 newspaper accounts—both Union and Confederate—claimed George Scott later supported Butler at his Fort Monroe headquarters by identifying citizens brought in for questioning.⁴⁶

Mary Louveste

Her widely repeated story claims Mary—sometimes bearing the apparently inaccurately transcribed last name Touvestre—was a former slave working as housekeeper for a Portsmouth, Virginia, Confederate engineer employed in converting the wooden warship USS *Merrimack* into the ironclad CSS *Virginia*. Some accounts have Mary overhearing her employer discussing the ironclad and committing these to paper, while others claim she stole the *Virginia*’s plans her employer had left unguarded at home. She then fled—either on foot or aboard a ship—to Washington, DC, where she secured a meeting with Union Navy Secretary Gideon Welles, during which she gave him the smuggled documents. Some accounts report Mary was a seamstress and had secreted the papers within the folds of her dress. Most stories claim this new intelligence caused Welles and the Union Navy to accelerate construction of the Union’s own ironclads, particularly the famous USS *Monitor*, enabling the first-ever battle of iron warships and preventing *Virginia* from operating unanswered for a longer time to wreak havoc on the Union Navy.⁴⁷

Recently uncovered contemporaneous primary source documents tell a different story of both Mary Louveste’s life and her intelligence efforts. Born free—probably about 1812 in Norfolk, Virginia—Mary Ogilvie (her maiden name) had obtained an 1838 business license, probably to open a tavern or restaurant, and in 1844 married immigrant Michael Louvestre, who had left Guadeloupe serving aboard the U.S. Navy’s USS *Vandalia*. In 1838, Mary purchased a 10-year-old slave named Mark Rene DeMortie (freed on turning 21, Mark moved to Massachusetts and became a businessman and abolition activist) and had given birth to three children, two of whom were lost during Norfolk’s 1855 Yellow Fever outbreak. Michael Louvestre later leased a building in Norfolk where he and Mary operated a tavern, restaurant, or

boarding house, living above in apartments, when Union forces abandoned the nearby Gosport Shipyard to Southern control in April 1861.⁴⁸

On 11 July 1861, Confederate Navy Secretary Stephen Mallory approved converting the captured *Merrimack* into an ironclad warship and work began shortly thereafter in the Gosport Shipyard, continuing until nearly the hour of her 8 March 1862 launch. Word of *Merrimack*'s conversion appeared in Northern newspapers by August 1861, sparking a broad Union effort to obtain intelligence about this threat.⁴⁹

Contemporaneous primary source documents suggest Mary Louvestre acted as a courier, delivering to the Union Navy a valuable document, provided by a source with firsthand knowledge, which deepened Washington's understanding of this emerging Southern naval technology threat. In December 1861, Mary secured from Union Department of Virginia commander Brigadier General John E. Wool a pass allowing her to travel across Union lines, listing "colored woman" as her reason for traveling. Subsequently journeying to Washington, DC, Mary met Navy Secretary Gideon Welles and provided him "important and truthful information ... in regards to the Merrimac" and "took from her clothing a paper, written by a mechanic who was working on the 'Merrimac,' describing the character of the work, its progress and probable completion. The information corroborated and confirmed that which we had, in various ways, received from others."⁵⁰

Dabney Walker

A runaway slave named Dabney and his wife entered Union lines near Fredericksburg, Virginia, in early 1863 seeking their freedom, only to have Dabney's wife a few days later return home behind Confederate lines. Shortly thereafter, Dabney began reporting intelligence of Rebel troop movements to Major General Joseph Hooker's headquarters that proved highly accurate. When questioned how he knew this information, Dabney revealed it came from a secret prearranged signal the couple had devised to share any troop movements she observed, in which a particular color, order, or position of laundry drying on a line would carry a meaning. This system remained active until Hooker's headquarters moved to a new location and according to some accounts helped inform Union leaders of enemy troop movements during the Battle of Chancellorsville.⁵¹

Dabney Walker and the "clothesline signal" are mentioned twice in the 1863 diaries of Union Captain William H. Paine, then working as assistant to the Army of the Potomac's chief engineer and attached to army headquarters. On 28 February 1863, Paine recorded,

My intelligent contraband Dabney Walker has in successful operation a telegraph by signals, by which he receives communications from the other side of the [Rappahannock] river. An old col[ore]d woman hangs clothes upon a line arranging alternate dark & light in such numbers to represent various leaders...

The system remained active into March, as on the 7th Paine recorded, "Dabney keeps his telegraph at work across the river." Paine's journal also notes Walker's role as a scout and guide probing the vital Banks' Ford crossing two days before the Battle of Chancellorsville began. Although gauging its specific impact remains difficult, the Walkers' clothesline signal system nonetheless would have added another useful intelligence source for Major General Hooker's use in understanding Confederate troop movements during the months leading up to the 30 April to 6 May 1863 Battle of Chancellorsville.⁵²

Mary Bowser

Known also as Mary Richards, widely published accounts report she was a slave of the Van Lew family in Richmond who was given her freedom and sent to Philadelphia to be educated. After Union spy ring leader Elizabeth Van Lew requested she return to Richmond at the war's start, various accounts have Mary sent to work as either a servant or assumed slave in the Confederate White House, while secretly being part of the Richmond Underground. In this position, she reportedly played the silent, illiterate slave and so was ignored while hovering behind President Davis' chair during dinners and while cleaning his office, all the while gathering intelligence from his conversations. Similarly, her duties and status provided free access to the house, allowing Mary to read and later report the contents of unguarded documents. Mary has been labeled Van Lew's "agent in place" or "penetration" of the Confederate White House.⁵³

Claims that Mary Bowser/Richards was a penetration of the Confederate White House are contradicted by a key contemporaneous primary source, while no similar information exists to support assertions that she played this role. President Davis' wife Varina, in a 1905 personal letter, denied not only these claims, but also declared that the Davis family's only wartime Black maid had been born and raised on the family's Mississippi estate and was brought with them to Richmond. Similarly undermining Bowser's role as a penetration is that the story fails to make sense; the Confederate president and his family had no reason to hire a servant from a family widely known as Union supporters, when numerous pro-Confederate sources could as easily and more securely have served the same purpose.⁵⁴

Nonetheless, Mary Bowser/Richards probably worked in the Richmond Underground as one of the many unnamed Black couriers, messengers, or information sources frequently noted by Elizabeth Van Lew in her journal and writings. Mary herself claimed when writing to a Freeman's Bureau official on 7 April 1867 that during the war she had been "in the service ... as a detective," suggesting she played some role in the organization. Unfortunately, Elizabeth destroyed most of her intelligence-related documents during or after the war, to protect herself and others from retribution, and neither Mary's name nor any contribution is noted in Van Lew's few extant writings.⁵⁵

W.H. Ringgold

A steward aboard a Baltimore-based vessel visiting Fredericksburg, Virginia, when that state seceded, both ship and crew were put to work by Confederate officials transporting troops on the York River. When a storm took the vessel out of service, Ringgold and other crewmen were sent back to Baltimore via a route on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Once home, Ringgold volunteered to Union officers the information he had acquired during his six months in the Confederacy, prompting Major General John A. Dix, commanding the Union Department of Maryland, to send Ringgold to McClellan's intelligence chief Pinkerton in December 1861. Pinkerton reported Ringgold's intelligence to McClellan, then weighing routes—including the one traveled by Ringgold—for his upcoming spring 1862 drive on Richmond. The sparse enemy defenses Ringgold reported probably helped shape McClellan's preferred route, named in the Urbana Plan, which called for landing troops on the Rappahannock River near Urbana, Virginia, before driving on Richmond. Although the appearance of the Confederate ironclad CSS *Virginia* in early 1862 rendered the plan and route obsolete, contemporaneous primary sources nonetheless show that W.H. Ringgold was one of the many Black Union supporters, albeit whose name was recorded, to volunteer intelligence to the Union.⁵⁶

William A. Jackson

Although some modern accounts claim Jackson was an "agent in place" penetration of the Confederate White House, contemporaneous primary sources provide a more accurate, nuanced record. A slave hired to work as coachman for Confederate President Jefferson Davis, he entered Union lines near Fredericksburg, Virginia, sometime before 4 May 1862, in the process securing his freedom, and was debriefed by the Union Department of the Rappahannock's commander Major General Irvin McDowell. McDowell that day wrote Secretary of War Stanton, not mentioning Jackson's name or

race: "Jeff Davis' coachman has come, and brings a good deal of interesting gossip from Richmond, which I will send you soon," adding in another letter on 5 May intelligence William Jackson had shared about the reported whereabouts of Stonewall Jackson and his command, whom had again slipped from Union view. That William A. Jackson had indeed been Davis' coachman is supported by a 2 June 1862 *Richmond Dispatch* article mockingly reporting the escaped slave's recent New York City speaking engagement. Jackson quickly became a minor celebrity in the North, befriended by wealthy abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison who may have helped make him—barely a month after reaching freedom—the subject of a notable 7 June 1862 *Harpers Weekly* article. Eventually Jackson took his speaking tour to England to foster antislavery sentiment there and prevent London from actively supporting the Confederacy. No contemporaneous primary source reporting supports claims Jackson provided any information before permanently entering Union lines, reflecting that William A. Jackson was yet another African American who volunteered to the Union what intelligence he possessed, on a short-term or one-time basis.⁵⁷

Harriet Tubman

Although best known for her Underground Railroad work—risking freedom and safety to lead friends and family north—and role as a noted speaker and Civil Rights advocate throughout the mid-nineteenth century, Harriet Tubman also reportedly conducted Union spying missions behind Confederate lines in coastal South Carolina sometime after her arrival there in May 1862. Widely repeated claims have Tubman forming a "spy organization" of local former slaves for intelligence-gathering missions and frequently personally conducting collection disguised as a "field hand or poor farm wife." Some accounts assert she served as a scout and guide before and during the 1–2 June 1863 Combahee River Raid, a joint army–navy operation that destroyed considerable personal property on pro-Confederate plantations and removed some 750 slaves to freedom. These and other accounts of Harriet Tubman's intelligence work have become widely known today, depicted in numerous books, television programs, and a feature film. The federal government too has publicized this role and, in June 2021, the U.S. Army's Military Intelligence Corps inducted Tubman into its Military Intelligence Hall of Fame—calling her "a leader, a warrior, and a Military Intelligence operative of the highest caliber"—while the U.S. IC has declared Tubman a "successful intelligence operative" and a "covert spy behind enemy lines." In September 2022, at its Virginia headquarters, the CIA erected a new statue honoring Tubman.⁵⁸

However, only a single contemporaneous primary source confirms Harriet Tubman's support of Union intelligence efforts. This document, a 7 January

1863 letter from Assistant Adjutant General Edward N. Smith to Provost Marshal General Lieutenant Colonel James J. Hall, directs him to “pay the bearer, Mrs. Harriet Tubman (colored), one hundred dollars \$100 (secret service money).” Although a 10 July 1863 *The Commonwealth* biographic article by abolitionist leader and journalist Franklin B. Sanborn first publicly asserted she played an intelligence function in the Combahee Raid, the source of these claims is unclear because the author’s information on the raid is drawn solely from a 6 June 1863 *Wisconsin State Journal* article, which is silent on any Tubman intelligence role.⁵⁹

Defining Harriet Tubman’s wartime intelligence role with documented certainty unfortunately is not possible, barring some new discovery, because the content of this single contemporaneous primary source document is insufficient to prove or disprove that she was a spy, intelligence organization leader, or military intelligence planner and commander. Such assertions that Tubman personally acted as a spy or scout trace to postwar efforts by her friends and supporters to secure the by-then financially destitute Harriet a U.S. government pension. Chief among these is a handwritten 1868 pension claim by Auburn, New York, banker Charles P. Wood asserting work as a nurse, scout, and spy to persuade federal pension officials to grant Tubman compensation. The same absence of contemporaneous primary source documents that frustrate modern scholars similarly prevented U.S. Pension Bureau officials from granting Tubman payment for any claimed intelligence work. Nonetheless, that Harriet Tubman was in one instance given Secret Service funds—which was not payment to her—reflects both an intelligence connection and her ability to interact with Union officers, suggesting she may have performed a liaison-like function that linked White officers desiring intelligence with newly freed slaves possessing such information and knowledge of local terrain that enabled their service as guides and river pilots.⁶⁰

John Scobell

Featuring prominently in *A Spy of the Rebellion*, the autobiography of the Union’s first Civil War intelligence chief Allan Pinkerton, Scobell “had formerly been a slave in the State of Mississippi but had journeyed to Virginia with his master ... [who] but a few weeks before had given him and his wife their freedom. I immediately decided to attach him to my headquarters with a view of eventually using him in the capacity of a scout ... ”⁶¹ Pinkerton declared he sent Scobell south on various intelligence collection missions during the war, using his natural intelligence and easy ability to adopt a nonthreatening servant personae. Pinkerton wrote that Scobell several times accompanied detectives Timothy Webster and Carrie Lawton [true name, Hattie Lewis], who gathered information within White

society circles while Scobell did the same among slaves and free Blacks. Pinkerton even reported Scobell's "splendid baritone" accompanied by banjo helping on one occasion to bolster his cover as a Southern river steamer crewman.⁶²

However, Scobell is not mentioned in any contemporaneous primary source materials. Because he first appears in Pinkerton's 1883 book, Scobell may have been fabricated by the author, perhaps as a literary device to better relate disparate fragments of unnamed Black persons' stories. Complicating the search for Scobell, most Pinkerton Agency records were destroyed in the 1871 Great Chicago Fire and those surviving from the 1850s and 1860s are fragmentary. Moreover, Pinkerton used only initials when referring to employees in records and correspondence, and employed a John Scully during the war who shared John Scobell's initials. Finding no trace of him in these records and researching a possible Scobell biography, historian and author Cory Recko searched General McClellan's extensive Library of Congress papers—Pinkerton provided his employer frequent, highly detailed accounts of his detectives' actions and intelligence—but was unable to locate a single mention of Scobell by name or initials, nor could Recko correlate Pinkerton's Scobell stories with any information provided to McClellan. Recko also discovered in his research that primary sources who personally met Webster and Lawton [Lewis] never mention a Black servant or companion, nor did Scobell appear in Pinkerton's correspondence in the Library of Congress. Pinkerton's fanciful, freewheeling writing—he records throughout his book others' thoughts and dialogue he could not have known or heard, suggesting much of his book is fiction—further undermines the credibility of this sole record of John Scobell's existence.⁶³

Delving into the contemporaneous primary sources behind the well-known accounts of several African American individuals credited with playing an intelligence role during the war sheds much-needed light on these stories. In some cases, this exposure reveals fabrication or doubt, while in others it reinforces or clarifies these accounts' accuracy. In any case, African Americans' valuable intelligence contribution deserves to be accurately and honestly accounted for, so that the American people might learn the full truth of that role.

CONCLUSION

Wartime primary sources show that African Americans contributed valuable intelligence throughout the Civil War that joined alongside other sources' information to influence the conflict's course and eventual outcome, preserving the Union and ending slavery in America. That role grew increasingly important as the war progressed, giving the Union an expanding intelligence edge that was correspondingly denied the Confederacy by the

very nature of its strategic goals and defining nature. Weighing most significantly in its collective effect, rather than in mythologized and inflated personal tales, it is this record that offers modern America an honest, insightful understanding of the role and service of these American patriots.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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- ⁴⁸ Norfolk and Portsmouth City Directories: 1851–1931, 1859 Norfolk City Directory, "Michael Louveste," p. 85; St. Patrick's Catholic Church (Norfolk, VA), "Marriage, 1 June 1844." Marriage Register; Norfolk, Virginia; Hustings and Corporation Court, "Assignment of Lease, from John Dodd to Michael Louveste (31 August 1854)," Deed Book 35, p. 198; "Accounting for Dr. Robert B Stark, estate (purchase of Mark by Mary Ogilvie)," Will Book 6, pp. 376–383, "Licensing for Mary Ogilvie, 1838," Order Book 31, p. 372, "Licensing for Michael Louveste," Order Book 35, pp. 76, 249, 357, "Manumission of Mark," Order Book 36, p. 148. For an extensive list of primary sources related to Michael and Mary Louvestre, see Stover Library's Sargent Memorial Collections' Special Collections Librarian Troy Valos' website, https://localwiki.org/shr/Louveste%2C_Mary_%28Abt._1812-1883%29
- ⁴⁹ *The Louisville Daily Courier*, 17 August 1861.
- ⁵⁰ Gideon Welles Papers: Correspondence, –1878; 1864, Aug.–Sept. 1864. Mss45054, Box 23; Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss450540102/>, Image 103, Letter Gideon Wells to Unknown, 23 September 1864 (handwritten), https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss45054.mss45054-022_0696_0812/?sp=103; Gideon Welles to Unknown, 17 August 1872, Esther

- Wilson Room, Portsmouth Public Library, <http://www.usgwarchives.net/va/portsmouth/letters/letter1.html> (transcription).
- 51 Complicating the Dabney Walker story, Moore's volume lists only Dabney's first name and carries an account of another Dabney, a Union scout, without making it clear if they are the same or different people. Some authors appear to have mixed their details together. Frank Moore, *Anecdotes, Poetry and Incidents of the War: North and South, 1861–1865* (New York: Printed for the Subscribers, 1866), pp. 263–264, 268–269; Rose, "Black American Contributions to Union Intelligence during the Civil War," p. 48; George P. Noyes, *The Bivouac and the Battlefield; or, Campaign Sketches in Virginia and Maryland* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1863), pp. 46–47; Janet Halfmann, *The Clothesline Code: The Story of Civil War Spies Lucy Ann and Dabney Walker* (Richmond, VA: BrandyLane Publishers, 2021).
 - 52 New-York Historical Society, William H. Paine Papers, Series I, Box 1, Diary, 1862 September–1863 June, Entries for February 28, March 7, 28 April 1863.
 - 53 *Richmond Evening Leader*, 27 July 1900; John P. Reynolds, Jr., "Biographical Sketch of Elizabeth L. Van Lew," Elizabeth Van Lew Papers, University of Virginia, pp. 254–257; Rose, "Black American Contributions to Union Intelligence during the Civil War," p. 47.
 - 54 Varina Davis to Isabelle Maury, 17 April 1905, Davis Family Collection, Eleanor Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.
 - 55 Mary J. R. Richards to G. L. Eberhardt, 7 April 1867, Registered Letters Received, Georgia Superintendent of Education, Vol. 1, 1865–1867, Education Records, Bureau of Refugees, Freeman, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives; Elizabeth R. Varon, *Southern Lady, Yankee Spy* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 167–168.
 - 56 The McClellan Papers, the Library of Congress, Nos. 6907, 8109, 8147, 8247.
 - 57 Although what gossip McDowell might have sent Washington has been lost, if the patently untrue stories of imminent Confederate collapse and a broken Jefferson Davis packing to flee Richmond contained in the 7 June 1862 *Harpers* article are any indication of this material, it would have been of little value. OR, Vol. XII, pt. III, pp. 131, 134; *Richmond Dispatch*, Richmond, Virginia, 2 June 1862; *Harpers Weekly*, 7 June 1862; *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Virginia, 31 May 1862; *The Liberator*, Boston, Massachusetts, 10 October 1862; *Sheffield Daily Telegram*, Sheffield, England, 9 January 1863; <https://acwm.org/blog/seizing-and-speaking-out-freedom/>.
 - 58 Rose, "Black American Contributions to Union Intelligence during the Civil War," pp. 47–48; <https://www.wearethemighty.com/popular/harriet-tubman-military-leader/>; <https://www.dia.mil/News-Features/Articles/Article-View/Article/740621/harriet-tubman-intelligence-operative/>; https://www.army.mil/article/243867/leader_warrior_military_intelligence_operative_harriet_tubman_davis_honored_in_womens_history
 - 59 James J. Hall letter to Edward N. Smith, 7 January 1863, National Archives and Records Administration, Records of United States Army Continental Commands—1821–1920, Letters Sent—April 1862 to March 1867, Vol. 13, RG393-1, Entry Number 4088; Franklin B. Sanborn, *The Commonwealth*,

Boston, 10 July 1863, Vol. 1, No. 45. Because neither Sanborn nor a *Commonwealth* correspondent can be shown to have traveled to South Carolina while Tubman was there or had any other communication, it is likely this article's claims of her intelligence role may be fabricated.

⁶⁰ That no other documents citing Tubman's asserted intelligence work exist certainly undermines later claims that she frequently, personally performed such work. Wood's narrative asserts these claims by citing passes she was issued, several Department of the South military leaders' wartime correspondence, and two lists of escaped slaves whom Tubman reportedly claimed had served as scouts and river pilots. However, a thorough search of the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, the National Archives, and other sources uncovered no copies of the documents Wood cited. Moreover, the most significant document in this application—Colonel James Montgomery's 6 July 1863 message to General Gillmore—contains a significant factual error, suggesting it may have been prepared after that date or the war. Montgomery's 6 July 1863 dispatch—introducing Tubman as a scout to Department of the South's General Gillmore—lists the place of composition as "Headquarters Colored Brigade," even though Montgomery's command would not bear that title until two months after the letter's 6 July creation date (it was established on 24 August 1863 by Special Orders No. 493). James J. Hall letter to Edward N. Smith, 7 January 1863, National Archives and Records Administration, Records of United States Army Continental Commands—1821–1920, Letters Sent—April 1862 to March 1867, Vol. 13, RG393-1, entry Number 4088; Charles P. Wood Document, National Archives and Records Administration; Record Group 233: Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–2015; Series: Accompanying Papers, 1865–1903; File Unit: Accompanying Papers of the 55th Congress, 3/15/1897–3/3/1899; ARC #306575; OR, I, Vol. XXVIII, Pt. II, pp. 3, 15, 62, 76–77; Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1 December 1862, p. 577; OR Vol. XIV, pp. 13–15, 86; *Wisconsin State Journal*, 20 June 1863; File Unit: Accompanying Papers of the 55th Congress, 3/15/1897–3/3/1899, ARC #306575; Sarah H. Bradford, *Scenes from the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn, NY: W.J. Moses, Printer, 1869); *Brooklyn Union*, 23 October 1865; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 21 October 1865.

⁶¹ Pinkerton, *A Spy of the Rebellion*, p.344.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 344, 346, 348–349, 351, 354–355, 375, 359, 360–361, 363–364, 366–367, 370–373, 376–377, 379, 381–384, 385–386, 393, 389, 464.

⁶³ Corey Recko, "The Myth of Ex-Slave Turned Civil War Spy John Scobell," n.d., <http://www.coreyrecko.com/themythofjohnscobell>; Allan Pinkerton to Joseph Beale, 26 October 1882, Recko private collection; Cory Recko email to David A. Welker, 5 June 2021.