

UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS BACKGROUND ESSAY

Thousands of people attended the July 4th event outside Lexington in 1867. Among the groups present were several *regiments* of the United States Colored Troops (USCT). In the painting, men are shown holding a banner for the 5th United States Colored Cavalry (USCC). Other men are holding flags for the USCT 12th Heavy Artillery Regiment. Both of these regiments were organized in Kentucky. Like all of the USCT regiments, they were commanded by white officers. Colonel James Brisbin served as the first commander of the 5th USCC. Colonel Brisbin was a speaker at the July 4th event.



Nearly 200,000 African American soldiers were recruited during the Civil War. There was more opposition by whites to African American recruitment in Kent-

ucky than in other Union states. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 freed the slaves in the Confederate states. But it did not free the slaves in Kentucky, because Kentucky was a Union state. President Lincoln did not have the right to free slaves in Union states.

Free blacks could join the Union Army in Kentucky by the spring of 1864. Enslaved black men in Kentucky had to have permission from their owners to join. But hundreds of black men escaped from slavery and went to Camp Nelson, outside Nicholasville, Kentucky in Jessamine County, to join the Union Army. Finally, there were so many of them that the Union Army had to change its policy. The Army allowed any able-bodied African American man to join the Union Army.

By the end of the war, 23,703 men had joined the USCT in Kentucky. About 10 percent of Union Army soldiers were members of the USCT. The USCT was *disbanded* between 1865 and 1867. Many veterans of the USCT were recruited to serve in *segregated* units of the Regular Army. The United States' military forces remained segregated until 1948, when all branches of the military became *integrated*.