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## Milton Holland: An enslaved Texan who earned the nation's highest military honor

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Milton Holland: An Enslaved Texan Who Earned the Nation's Highest Military Honor

by

Patrick C. Coan

HONORS THESIS

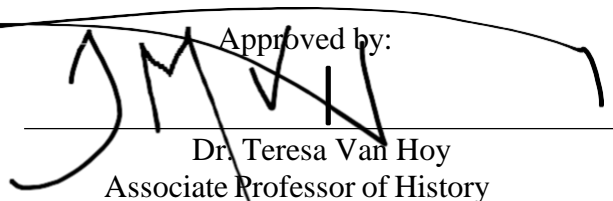
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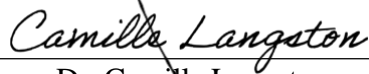
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## ABSTRACT:

Texans have long contended that slavery in Texas was marginal. Early scholars depicted Texas as a western state rather than a southern state dedicated to slavery. However, slavery was central to Texas from the 1830s-1860s. The story of Milton Holland offers a window into the importance of slavery in Texas and the importance of enslaved Texans in U.S. history. Holland was the first Texan to win the Medal of Honor (not just the first black Texan to win the Medal of Honor). Despite this achievement and Texas' affinity for military prowess, Holland remains missing in Texas history textbooks, the Bob Bullock official Texas State History Museum, and other major institutions. Two key details of his story oblige us to face the full force of the history of slavery in Texas: Milton Holland was enslaved by his own father and Milton Holland's father was a high-ranking Texan—interim Secretary of State for Confederate Texas. Indeed, Milton Holland demonstrates that slavery in Texas was significant and that enslaved Texans and their enslavers, including their fathers, played major roles during the Civil War. Milton Holland went from being an enslaved person in Texas to an enlisted soldier for the Union army in Ohio because Texas had some of the most restrictive laws regarding slavery. For example, enslavers were forbidden from freeing their enslaved people or their enslaved children without state congressional approval, and free blacks were banned from the state of Texas. What began as my modest query into the first Texan Medal of Honor winner unexpectedly uncovered two significant findings: first, a major role of U.S. Colored Troops as formerly enslaved liberators of fellow brother and sister enslaved people and second, a major role for former enslaved Union soldiers as black leaders of equality post-Civil War.

## INTRODUCTION

My two years' long inquiry into Milton Holland's Union service record produced a second finding, more important even than his Medal of Honor. I discovered two letters written by Holland and published in *The Messenger*, his local newspaper in Athens County, Ohio, from which his regiment was mustered that revealed his true motives for his military service. It turns out that the action for which Milton Holland won the Medal of Honor was nothing less than a case in which former enslaved people, serving as soldiers in the Union army, liberated their fellow enslaved brothers and sisters across the southern U.S. Milton Holland explicitly defined himself as a liberator by quoting the words of Patrick Henry to close his first letter. In addition, he directly faced the atrocities to which he thereby exposed himself in daring to liberate African Americans enslaved by Confederates bent on persecuting liberation or any other threat.

This research discovery opened up a whole hidden history of a Texan helping liberate enslaved North Carolinians who subsequently joined occupying Union forces in liberating enslaved Texans and were popularly known as Juneteenth soldiers. Little has been done on this hidden history except by Marvin Tupper Jones, the executive director of the Chowan Discovery Group, who recognizes the contributions of Juneteenth soldiers from North Carolina. Most often black soldiers get represented as suffering indignities, unqualified to lead or officer, unworthy of medals, yet courageous and worthy of citizenship. My research shows that they had a far more radical agenda than helping white Union soldiers defeat Confederate soldiers. They saw themselves as an army of liberation—enduring the worst conditions to face the worst enemies who were committing the worst atrocities, yet still achieving the greatest victories. The contributions of people like Milton Holland, the Juneteenth soldiers, and those such as Abraham Galloway who promoted their valor and organized them to redefine the history of black soldiers during the Civil War.

My research is academic and has been delivered in symposia and conferences, including the Western History Association conference. It also takes public history form by being used in media coverage and partnerships with organizations throughout the U.S. at local, state, and federal level in San Antonio, Texas, Ohio, and NC. I had the opportunity to share my preliminary findings about Milton Holland with KSAT 12 News with the help of the San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum. My research also helped scholars in Ohio who are involved in a campaign to rename an Ohio National Guard armory at Rickenbacker Air National Guard base after Milton Holland. I published a short piece for the Bullock Texas State History Museum's Texas Story Project digital exhibit. This fall, I won

funding from the National Park Service's Network to Freedom project to submit an application for a historical listing for Elizabeth City, North Carolina based on my Milton Holland research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on how slavery shaped Texas' politics is rich. Some sources discuss how Texas laws protected the institution of slavery. Paul Lack's article called "Slavery and Vigilantism in Austin, Texas, 1840-1860" identifies the special nature of urban bondage for enslaved people, the laws established to restrict their behavior, and the trouble local authorities faced in enforcing them. Enslaved people violated the prevailing concept of race relations: white supremacy and black servitude. Mexican Texans further loosened controls over enslaved people. Many people simply ignored the laws that were in place as well. For example, many citizens in Austin did not follow the provision that restricted the hiring of enslaved people.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Shelton also looked at urban slavery in an article called "Slavery in a Texas Seaport: The Peculiar Institution in Galveston." According to Shelton, Galveston maintained strict codes for enslaved people in response to militant abolitionism in the 1830s. Despite these codes, black seaport residents found greater possibilities for resisting or fleeing slavery.<sup>2</sup> They had more opportunities to do this because Galveston offered enslaved people the opportunity to work on lighter crews that ferried cargo. Male enslaved people also were hired out by their enslavers to serve as crew members on flat-bottomed steamers that traded with plantation communities. In 1848, Mayor Joseph Bates even hired out six people he had enslaved to work on a coastal steamer. However, many enslavers recognized the dangers that the urban landscape posed for slavery and repeatedly took action to end the practice of enslaved people hiring their

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<sup>1</sup> Lack, "Slavery and Vigilantism in Austin, Texas, 1840-1860," 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Shelton, "Slavery in a Texas Seaport," 155, 157-159.

own time. For example, in 1856, the city council passed an ordinance that increased the punishments of slaves who found their own employment. The city council also passed an ordinance that prohibited retailers from selling liquor to slaves.<sup>3</sup>

The reality that slavery was at the center of the debate about Texas' annexation has been written about in many scholarly works as well. Frederick Merk wrote about this in his book called *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*. According to Merk, tensions erupted throughout the United States during President John Tyler's administration over the issue of Texas' annexation to the United States. These tensions began on March 16, 1844, when a charge appeared in *The National Intelligencer*, a Washington newspaper written by Whigs. The editors of the newspaper charged that President Tyler was concluding a secret treaty with a foreign state, which would carry the nation into disaster. President Tyler was reversing the annexation policy of the Jackson administration, the Van Buren administration, and the Harrison administration through this action. President Jackson, though eager for Texas, had refused to approve annexation. Indeed, he was unwilling to even recognize Texas' independence until the end of his administration. President Van Buren had been positive against annexation, and the Harrison-Tyler administration had previously been silent on the issue of annexation. These administrations were reluctant to annex Texas because they feared that there would be a clash over slavery. Slavery had polarized public opinion in various regions of the United States. The North had been willing for the most part to abide by the compromises of the Constitution, which left existing slavery under the control of the individual states. However, it objected to the extension of slavery. Northerners also engaged in commemorative exercises celebrating the emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies by the British Parliament. On the other hand, the South believed that slavery was

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<sup>3</sup> Shelton, *Slavery in a Texas Seaport*,” 155, 157-159.

indispensable and benefitted slaves economically, spiritually, and morally. Congressmen from the South also adopted gag rules after the North petitioned for the interstate traffic of slaves to be subjected to congressional control and for slavery and the slave trade to be abolished in Washington D.C.<sup>4</sup>

Andrew Torget examined how slavery was connected to the debate over Texas' annexation in his book called *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850*. According to Torget, after the Texas Revolution, Texas became dedicated to slavery. Anglo-Texans hoped that Texas would become a profitable cotton empire through the institution of slavery. They also hoped that the desires of the international community for Texas cotton would force antislavery politicians in places like Great Britain and the United States to accept Texas as a republic dedicated to slavery. However, this was a false hope. Texas' status was problematic when it tried to receive assistance from Great Britain, the country leading the battle to end slavery. Not only did Great Britain not like Texas' dependence on slavery, but also it received its supply of cotton from the U.S. so it did not need to rely on Texas cotton. Things did not go much better when Texas tried to join the United States. President Jackson and the U.S. Secretary of State John Forsyth refused to even consider annexing Texas because of its dysfunctional government. They also said that northern congressmen objected to the admission of Texas because it would add power to the slave states in Congress. Despite this refusal to annex Texas, Southern political support caused President Jackson to recognize the Republic of Texas in one of his last acts as president. However, this was not enough to spur President Van Buren into action on annexation. President Van Buren did not want conflict to occur in the U.S. Congress because of the issue of Texas' annexation to the

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<sup>4</sup> Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, ix, 3-8.

Union as a slave state. In fact, when the Texas chargé d'affaires in Washington D.C. submitted a formal petition for annexation to the Van Buren administration, the U.S. Secretary of State promptly rejected it.<sup>5</sup>

Many scholars have analyzed how slavery in Texas influenced secessionist sentiment. Some have done this by writing about the Knights of the Golden Circle. Randolph Farmer's *Knights of the Golden Circle: How a Secret Society Shaped a State* argues that the American Civil War began because of the concerted action of the Knights of the Golden Circle, a secret military organization that operated in Texas and other states in the Deep South. The goal of the KGC was to establish a Southern empire rooted in slavery with Havana, Cuba at the center. The KGC also planned to have Texas serve as a base of operations for invasions that would convert Latin America into a part of this slave empire. By the beginning of the secession crisis, the KGC had established its headquarters in San Antonio, Texas. In order to bring about a Southern empire rooted in slavery, the KGC worked to bring about the secession of Texas from the Union. One way it tried to do this was through its instigation of a "slave panic" in North Texas. On July 8, 1860, a series of unexplained fires swept across North Texas simultaneously. The KGC leaders promoted mass hysteria and panic about the source of these fires through their social network and control of the media. They instigated a "slave panic" in North Texas because the counties in the region were populated by many Unionist Texans who did not support secession. The KGC was involved in the Secession Convention that took place in Texas in January 1861 and participated in the voting to choose whether to pass or reject an Ordinance of Secession as well. For example, Captain Andrew J. Hodge, an enslaver and doctor, represented one castle or headquarters from DeWitt County at the convention while William Samuel Rather, a merchant

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<sup>5</sup> Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 190-191.



and cotton planter, represented the Bell County castle. The convention voted to approve the Ordinance of Secession by a vote of 166 for and 8 against.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the hostile takeover of the US federal army headquarters in San Antonio under Ben McCulloch in 1861 was largely a mobilization of KGC militants.

Some scholars have focused on how slavery influenced secessionist sentiment by looking at specific incidents leading up to the Civil War. Wesley Norton's article, "The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil Disturbances in North Texas in 1859 and 1860" explores the tensions between Texas citizens and the Methodist Episcopal Church. Residents accused the church of being an abolitionist enterprise. Northern Methodists involved in Texas did not deny that the Methodist Episcopal Church aimed to eliminate slavery, but they stated that it would be done through "religious teaching and discipline." During this period of tension, fires were reported to be erupting at the same time throughout North Texas. These fires became associated with an alleged plot to bring about a slave insurrection in Texas. It was suggested that these incidents were brought about by members of the Methodist church.<sup>7</sup> Not only was the Methodist church blamed for the fires, but also Anthony Bewley, the Methodist preacher assigned to Texas, was lynched.<sup>8</sup> Texans were willing to resort to violence in order to defend slavery.

Little scholarship exists on Milton Holland. Ronald Coddington offers a brief biography of his Union service in *African American Faces of the Civil War*. Texas historical institutions offer little beyond short profiles by the Texas State Historical Association and the Texas Almanac. A treatment of Holland's post-Union service appears in R.G. Radcliffe's article "The Sons of Bird Holland" describing him as a champion of the African race by organizing the

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<sup>6</sup> Farmer, *The Knights of the Golden Circle*, 8, 170, 271-272.

<sup>7</sup> Norton, "The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil Disturbances," 317-318, 322-323.

<sup>8</sup> Norton, "The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil Disturbances," 327, 333.

celebration of Emancipation Day in Washington D.C. in 1883 and speaking about the importance of educating future generations about the significance of the celebration. Radcliffe also points out that Milton Holland was a champion of civil rights in the face of injustice. Milton Holland called a meeting to order after the Supreme Court declared that the Civil Rights of Act of 1875 was unconstitutional, and had to find a new venue for a ball and reception event that he organized for black women of Washington D.C. after they were refused entry into the Washington Rifles Armory, which was a Republican organization.<sup>9</sup> Other sources that have been written about Milton Holland are *Valor Across the Lone Star: The Congressional Medal of Honor in Frontier Texas* by Charles M. Neal, Jr. and “The Men in the Ranks” by Paul A. Cimballa. *Valor Across the Lone Star: The Congressional Medal of Honor in Frontier Texas* provides a biographical sketch of Milton Holland as part of a larger work devoted to analyzing all the Medal of Honor winners from Texas during the Civil War and the Indian Wars.<sup>10</sup> “The Men in the Ranks” briefly mentions how Milton Holland inspired blacks in Ohio to enlist in the Civil War.<sup>11</sup>

There is deeper literature on the contributions of black soldiers. One that focuses on freedmen as soldiers is *Freedom for Themselves: North Carolina’s Black Soldiers in the Civil Era* by Richard M. Reid. This work focuses on the gallantry that North Carolina black soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> North Carolina Colored Troops exhibited during the Battle of Olustee, Florida despite all the setbacks they experienced such as lack of supplies and illness. It also emphasizes how black soldiers were welcomed as liberators by enslaved blacks in Wilmington in 1865 and

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<sup>9</sup> Radcliffe, “The Sons of Bird Holland,” 5-7.

<sup>10</sup> Neal, *Valor Across the Lone Star: The Congressional Medal of Honor*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Cimballa, “The Men in the Ranks,” 68.

represented the specter of change confronting Southern society.<sup>12</sup> Another secondary source that emphasizes the contributions of black soldiers is *A Great Sacrifice: Northern Black Soldiers, Their Families, and the Experience of Civil War* by James Mendez. This work focuses on the bravery and capabilities that black soldiers in the Louisiana Native Guards and the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts exhibited during the attack on Port Hudson on the Mississippi and the Battle of Fort Wagner. Although both attacks were failures militarily, black men proved that they were capable soldiers and courageous in battle. They dispelled the doubts of many white Union officers who were prejudiced against them. For example, General Nathaniel Banks who served in the Union army and was prejudiced against blacks, recognized that their efforts were praiseworthy and that they erased all doubt of the ability of blacks to fight.<sup>13</sup> Another source that highlights black soldiers as liberators is *Black Troops, White Commanders and Freedmen During the Civil War* by Howard Westwood. This work demonstrates how black soldiers served as liberators by focusing on the efforts of an enslaved person named Robert Smalls. Robert Smalls was an enslaved man who was a chief crewman for the Confederate steamer, the *Planter*. This vessel was part of the Confederate naval force that was tasked with defending Charleston, South Carolina from a Union assault. While the captain and his two brother officers were ashore, Robert Smalls steered the *Planter* to the Union naval forces blockading Charleston and gave it to them. By doing this, Smalls not only helped the Union in their efforts to fight the Confederacy, but also brought freedom to the dozens of enslaved people on board.<sup>14</sup> Many other secondary literature about black soldiers focuses on the hardships that they experienced. My research

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<sup>12</sup> Reid, *Freedom for Themselves: North Carolina's Black Soldiers*, 78-79, 82, 297.

<sup>13</sup> Mendez, *A Great Sacrifice: Northern Black Soldiers*, 31, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Westwood, *Black Troops, White Commanders and Freedmen*, 75-77.

contributes to highlighting the contributions of black soldiers and how they served as liberators with emphasis on the link between these two feats.

#### MILTON HOLLAND: ENSLAVED TEXAN

Born an enslaved person who was owned by his own father, Milton Murray Holland became the first black Texan to win the Medal of Honor and became so prestigious as a businessman and government employee that his name earned mention in a short list with the likes of Frederick Douglass. Milton Holland was born in Austin, Texas on August 1, 1844.<sup>15</sup> Bird Holland was his father and enslaver, and his mother, Matilda Unk, was an enslaved woman.<sup>16</sup> Bird Holland was born in Texas and Matilda Unk was born in Kentucky.<sup>17</sup> Bird Holland was a politician. He was unanimously selected as Assistant Secretary of State for Texas on August 12, 1850 by the Texas Senate.<sup>18</sup> Bird Holland even served as a member of the Texas House of Representatives from 1853-1855. He represented Sour Lake in Jefferson County and was a member of the Education Committee, Enrolled Bills Committee, and Finance Committee.<sup>19</sup> In addition, he helped organize the inaugural procession for Governor Pease and Lieutenant-Governor Dickson. Bird Holland also was the acting secretary of state for Texas throughout the 1850s.<sup>20</sup> According to *The Charleston Mercury* newspaper, Bird Holland signed off on a proclamation that extended the time for proposals dealing with the construction of the Mississippi and Pacific Railroad to be submitted along with Governor Pease.<sup>21</sup> In 1858, Bird Holland was nominated for the position of Comptroller by the Jefferson Herald. This decision

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<sup>15</sup> “U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865,” 1.

<sup>16</sup> “Bird Holland 1815-1864- Ancestry,” 1.

<sup>17</sup> “Milton M. Holland: 1880 Census,” 12.

<sup>18</sup> “Senate Chamber: Aug.12, 1850,” 3.

<sup>19</sup> “Legislators: Bird Holland,” 1.

<sup>20</sup> *The Gonzales Inquirer*, Jan. 7, 1854.

<sup>21</sup> *The Charleston Mercury*, May 3, 1854.

was subjected to the authority of the Democratic National Convention.<sup>22</sup> Not only was Bird Holland a politician, but also he was an entrepreneur. According to *The Times-Picayune* newspaper in Louisiana, Bird Holland purchased Sour Lake in Jefferson County, Texas. Sour Lake had a variety of mineral springs that Bird Holland claimed cured all diseases except for the last stage of tuberculosis. He even went on to state that he would publish certificates proving the diseases that people were cured from due to the springs.<sup>23</sup> Bird Holland ironically died fighting for the Confederacy, which sought to protect slavery, at the Battle of Sabine Crossroads in April 1864.<sup>24</sup> Milton Holland also had two brothers named William H. Holland and James T. Holland and two sisters named Kate Holland and Eliza Holland. Another sibling, Inf Holland, died within the same year of their birth.<sup>25</sup> William H. Holland would eventually go on to serve in the 15<sup>th</sup> legislature for Texas and sponsored the bill that created Prairie View Normal, the first college for blacks in Texas. Prairie View Normal is now known as Prairie View A&M University.<sup>26</sup>

#### MILTON HOLLAND: EDUCATION

In the 1850s, Bird Holland freed Milton Holland and sent him to school in Ohio to be educated.<sup>27</sup> Milton Holland attended school at Albany Manual Labor Academy in Athens County, Ohio. The Albany Manual Labor Academy sought to provide a high-quality learning environment that had been inaccessible to black Texans.<sup>28</sup> Milton Holland's brothers attended

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<sup>22</sup> *Nueces Valley Weekly*, Jan. 10, 1858.

<sup>23</sup> *The Times-Picayune*, Aug. 9, 1851.

<sup>24</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 155.

<sup>25</sup> "Bird Holland 1815-1864- Ancestry," 1.

<sup>26</sup> "Milton M. Holland," 2.

<sup>27</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 155.

<sup>28</sup> "Albany Manual Labor Academy," 2-3.

Albany Manual Labor Academy as well.<sup>29</sup> When Milton Holland attended Albany Manual Labor Academy, it was experiencing peak enrollment. By the fall of 1857, Albany Manual Labor Academy had 284 students and seven faculty members. In the following school year, enrollment reached 302 students.<sup>30</sup> In April 1857, J. Cable, the principal of Albany Manual Labor Academy reported the total tuition cost, the total extra cost, and the boarding costs for the school. The total tuition cost was \$9.75 while the total extra cost was \$15.00.<sup>31</sup> Boarding for the school was \$1.60 to \$2.00 per week.<sup>32</sup> At Albany Manual Labor Academy, Milton Holland learned how to make shoes and became an apprentice to an Albany boot and shoemaker.<sup>33</sup> In the 1860 census, Holland is listed as a member of the Shots household in Albany, Ohio. It appears that John J. Shots was the Albany boot and shoemaker under whom Milton Holland served as an apprentice because Holland's occupation is listed as shoe apprentice.<sup>34</sup>

#### MILTON HOLLAND: MILITARY SERVICE

Once the Civil War began, Milton Holland wanted to enlist in the Union army. He tried to enlist on September 2, 1862 and was eighteen years old at the time.<sup>35</sup> However, he was considered ineligible for enlistment because of his race.<sup>36</sup> This is despite the fact that he could have passed for white. This can be seen in a photo that was taken of Milton Holland while he was an enlisted soldier. The fact that he was not allowed to enlist means that he acknowledged his African heritage.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Milton M. Holland," 2.

<sup>30</sup> Tribe, "Rise and Decline of Private Academies in Albany, Ohio," 193.

<sup>31</sup> Cable, "Albany Manual Labor University," 1.

<sup>32</sup> Cable, "Albany Manual Labor University," 1.

<sup>33</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 155.

<sup>34</sup> "Milton Holland: 1860 Census," 7.

<sup>35</sup> "U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865," 1.

<sup>36</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 155.

<sup>37</sup> "Milton Holland, Head and Shoulders Facing Right, In Uniform," 1.

Since he could not enlist, Milton Holland signed on as a personal servant to state politician Nelson Van Vorhes, who served as a first lieutenant in the Third Ohio Infantry. In 1863, once blacks were allowed to enlist in the Union army, Holland tried to raise a company of African Americans in Athens County, Ohio.<sup>38</sup> To convince blacks in Ohio to enlist in his company, Milton Holland said that there was good reason to “sacrifice home comforts” because they would win “the respect of the nation by fighting for the Union.”<sup>39</sup> He understood that the outcome of the Civil War would shape the future of blacks in the United States. Milton Holland successfully raised a company of African Americans in Athens County, and the group was mustered into the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops.<sup>40</sup> Milton Holland and the company he raised were mustered into service in June 1863 in Athens County, Ohio.<sup>41</sup> He eventually attained the rank of sergeant-major, which was the highest rank open to blacks at the time.<sup>42</sup>

According to Milton Holland’s wartime letters, the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops was very active during the Civil War. In his first letter, Milton Holland wrote about how the regiment fought in its first engagement when it was still young. The letter was written from Norfolk, Virginia on January 19, 1864. In this engagement, the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment charged at the Confederates who were hiding in the swamps firing at it. Only 4 people in the regiment were killed while several others were wounded. Milton Holland reports that the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment engaged in twenty days of scouting through swamps and marshes, certainly a risky assignment. Several of the white soldiers in the cavalry told him that no soldiers did hard marching as cheerfully as he and the other members of the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment did.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Milton M. Holland,” 2.

<sup>39</sup> Cimbala, “The Men in the Ranks,” 68.

<sup>40</sup> “Milton M. Holland,” 2.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, “Milton M. Holland: Muster Record,” 11.

<sup>42</sup> “Milton M. Holland,” 2.

<sup>43</sup> Holland, “Norfolk, Virginia: Jan. 19, 1864,” 2.

In his second letter, Milton Holland describes what the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment had been doing since he wrote his first letter. The second letter was written near Petersburg, Virginia on July 24, 1864. In this letter, Milton Holland talks about how the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment was in active service in the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. This service included liberating enslaved people and confiscating property from Americans who were supporting the Confederate army. The 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment also endured marches to Bottom Bridge which was within twelve miles of Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital. Milton Holland states that General Benjamin Butler rated the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment alongside the best grade of white troops when he reviewed it at Fort Monroe.<sup>44</sup> Both of Milton Holland's letters were published in the *Messenger*, the local newspaper of Athens, Ohio.<sup>45</sup>

The engagement for which Milton Holland won the Medal of Honor was the Battle of New Market Heights. This battle occurred after the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment went into action in Virginia along the front lines of Richmond and Petersburg in the autumn of 1864. On September 29, the Fifth Regiment assaulted New Market Heights, which was part of the defenses of the Confederate capital-high stakes indeed. These defenses included a fort, extensive earthworks, and two lines of slashed tree branches. The troops of the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment suffered heavy casualties during the battle, and four of the ten company commanders were wounded. Given the absence of white leadership, Milton Holland rallied the officerless companies and charged the Confederate army.<sup>46</sup> Thanks to their charge, a white military unit under intense pressure succeeded in returning to the Union line. Ultimately, his leadership at New Market Heights helped win the battle. Indeed, Milton Holland's actions earned the highest praise from General Ulysses S.

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<sup>44</sup> Holland, "Near Petersburg, Virginia: Jul. 24, 1864," 2.

<sup>45</sup> "Holland, Milton M," 3.

<sup>46</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 153.



Grant.<sup>47</sup> Holland emerged from the Battle of New Market Heights uninjured and went on to fight with the survivors in other engagements. These engagements were the sieges of Petersburg and Richmond, the capture of Fort Fisher, North Carolina on January 15, 1865, and the campaign that ended with the surrender of General Joseph E. Johnston's Confederate army on April 26, 1865.<sup>48</sup>

#### MILTON HOLLAND: LIBERATOR OF FELLOW ENSLAVED BLACKS

Perhaps more significant is Milton Holland serving in an army of liberation during the Civil War. According to one of his wartime letters and his muster record, Milton Holland participated in a raid in Elizabeth City, North Carolina that is often called "Wild's Raid." Black Union troops endured great hardships to liberate folks enslaved in Elizabeth City. This raid occurred in the December cold, after slogging through the Dismal Swamp, and lasted nearly 3 weeks. It ended on Christmas Eve, 1864. This marked the first time that black soldiers operated in North Carolina. They risked being targeted by Confederate guerrillas who threatened black troops even more so than did Confederate regular troops. Confederate atrocities against black soldiers included hanging, summary execution, and (re-) enslavement. Tensions ran high. Holland testified that General Wild ordered the hanging of one of the Confederate guerrillas during this raid. One recurrent theme of Holland's letters are Confederates' targeting black Union soldiers. Holland also attests to their counter-measures to protect the POW rights of black Union soldiers captured by Confederates. For these and other reasons, the Elizabeth City Raid was particularly dangerous and high-stakes.

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<sup>47</sup> "Milton M. Holland," 3.

<sup>48</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 155.

Milton Holland and black Union soldiers likely received key support from African Americans, enslaved and free, both resident in Elizabeth City and the Dismal Swamp. The Dismal Swamp was historically a refuge for enslaved freedom fighters who escaped to “maroon” communities. Slavery increased throughout the town during the 1850s. By the 1860 census of Elizabeth City, black residents (50.2%) outnumbered whites. Citizens in Currituck County, a neighboring county of Pasquotank County where Elizabeth City is the county seat, issued a petition to the state Congress of North Carolina in 1861 to remove the free black population because they were worried that they would help liberate its enslaved population.<sup>49</sup> Currituck County also had experienced an insurrection by enslaved people in 1860 that was caused by “Irish instigators,” which caused them to be more fearful of acts of liberation.<sup>50</sup> This probably caused residents in Elizabeth City to worry about their enslaved people escaping or being liberated.

According to General Wild’s official report of the Elizabeth City raid, 2,500 enslaved people were liberated by Milton Holland and black soldiers in the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment U.S. Colored Troops and the 36<sup>th</sup> Regiment U.S. Colored Troops.<sup>51</sup> Many of the black soldiers in these regiments were former enslaved people from Elizabeth City or Pasquotank County. These individuals were a part of Company B, Company D, and Company E of the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment U.S. Colored Troops. We know that they were former enslaved people because their occupation is listed as laborer or farmer, and their place of enlistment was New Bern, North Carolina.<sup>52</sup> This was one of the “contraband camps” that was organized by Abraham Galloway.<sup>53</sup> Galloway was

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<sup>49</sup> “Petition to the North Carolina General Assembly from Currituck County Citizens,” 1.

<sup>50</sup> “Insurrection in Currituck from *The Daily Progress*, Oct. 18, 1860,” 1.

<sup>51</sup> “Edward Augustus Wild Papers, 1861-1864: Writings,” 8.

<sup>52</sup> “35th Regiment, USCT, Company B, Company D and Company E,” 2, 3-4.

<sup>53</sup> Gerard, Philip. “Abraham Galloway: From Cartridge Box to Ballot Box,” 112.

a former enslaved person from North Carolina who was instrumental in recruiting black soldiers to join the colored North Carolina regiments that made up General Wild's liberation force.<sup>54</sup> 73 horse teams carried enslaved families to freedom on Roanoke Island. In addition, General Wild complimented Milton Holland and the other black soldiers of the liberation force by stating that they marched wonderfully, were watchful on pickets, always ready to fight, and were reliable soldiers. General Wild's report includes a list of prominent citizens of Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County who were specific enslavers that the liberation force was targeting during the raid as well.<sup>55</sup> In fact, the Elizabeth City raid that Milton Holland was part of was so significant that President Abraham Lincoln himself met with Galloway on April 29, 1864 to discuss the attainment of black political rights and to ensure that black soldiers would be treated as prisoners of war.<sup>56</sup> After Milton Holland helped liberate enslaved North Carolinians through the Elizabeth City raid, former enslaved North Carolinians helped liberate Texans who were still enslaved.

#### MILTON HOLLAND: MEDAL OF HONOR WINNER

On April 6, 1865, Milton Holland was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions at the Battle of New Market Heights.<sup>57</sup> The citation for his Medal of Honor states: "Took Command of Company C, after all the officers had been killed or wounded, and gallantly led it."<sup>58</sup> He was awarded the Medal of Honor after an official order from General Butler was issued on October 11, 1864. General Butler wrote that Sergeant-Major Milton Holland of Company C was left in command after all the company officers were killed and wounded, and led them gallantly. He

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<sup>54</sup> Cecelski, *The Fire of Freedom*, xiv.

<sup>55</sup> "Edward Augustus Wild Papers, 1861-1864: Writings," 7-9, 23-24.

<sup>56</sup> Cecelski, *The Fire of Freedom*, 115, 117-118.

<sup>57</sup> "Holland, Milton M.," 2.

<sup>58</sup> "Milton M. Holland," 2.

affirmed that the commanding general would cause a special medal to be struck in honor of Milton Holland.<sup>59</sup> Because he joined the Union army in Ohio, Texas-born and reared Milton Holland appears on the Medal of Honor Recipients Ohio Civil War list.<sup>60</sup> Milton Holland was awarded the Army of the James Medal as well by General Butler. This medal was designated for black troops who fought for the Union army. Moreover, General Butler recommended Milton Holland for a captain's commission, but this request was denied by the War Department because of his race. A photo was taken of Milton Holland wearing the Medal of Honor on the right side of his military uniform and the Army of the James medal on the left side of his uniform.<sup>61</sup> Milton Holland was not the only person to receive the Medal of Honor for his actions at the Battle of New Market Heights. Three sergeants who helped lead the charge during the battle were also awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions.<sup>62</sup> Finally, Milton Holland was mustered out of service in Carolina City, North Carolina on September 20, 1865.<sup>63</sup>

#### MILTON HOLLAND: CIVIL SERVANT

After the Civil War, Milton Holland returned to Ohio. When he returned, Milton Holland married Virginia Dickey on October 24, 1865 in Franklin, Ohio.<sup>64</sup> From 1865 to 1869, he resumed his job as a shoemaker and resided in Columbus, Ohio and Albany, Ohio.<sup>65</sup> Then, in 1869, Milton Holland and his wife moved to Washington D.C. In 1870, Holland's friend John Mercer Langston helped him obtain a clerkship in the U.S. Treasury Department in Washington D.C. with a salary of \$1,200. Langston was a noted abolitionist and went on to become a

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<sup>59</sup> "Official Records #89," 168.

<sup>60</sup> "Medal of Honor Recipients: Ohio Civil War," 2.

<sup>61</sup> Beck et al., "The Sharp End: Vignettes from the Union Military," 31.

<sup>62</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 155.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, "Milton M. Holland: Panola County Recipient," 13.

<sup>64</sup> "Ohio, U.S., County Marriage Records," 332.

<sup>65</sup> Momodu, "Milton Murray Holland," 2.

Virginia Congressman. Future President Rutherford B. Hayes and General Butler, Milton Holland's former commanding officer, both recommended him for the clerkship.<sup>66</sup> While he was working in the U.S. Treasury Department, Milton Holland studied law at Howard University.<sup>67</sup> He graduated with a law degree from Howard University in 1872. Milton Holland was one of 17 graduates and was the only Texan who graduated from Howard University in 1872.<sup>68</sup>

According to the *National Republican* newspaper, Milton Holland served on a petit jury for a court case in 1872, the year he graduated from Howard University.<sup>69</sup> Milton Holland also became one of the first black attorneys in the nation to be admitted to the bar of the U.S. Supreme Court during that time.<sup>70</sup> According to the 1880 census, he continued to work as a clerk for the U.S. Treasury Department after he graduated. He was only thirty-six years old at the time.<sup>71</sup> During this time, Milton Holland was also a part of the Washington Emigrant Aid Society. According to *The Marshall Messenger* newspaper, this organization was under investigation. It was under investigation because many blacks were emigrating from the South to the North and there were not enough jobs available. Some individuals such as James Buchanan of Indiana accused Republican leaders of encouraging this migration during the investigation. Milton Holland testified that the goal of the Washington Emigrant Aid Society was not to promote immigration, but rather to help emigrants and had no political purpose. He went on to assert that he helped settle 60 immigrants in Ohio because they requested help rather than out of political motivation.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Momodu, "Milton Murray Holland," 2.

<sup>67</sup> Momodu, "Milton Murray Holland," 2-3.

<sup>68</sup> "Howard University Law Department Graduates 1872," 45.

<sup>69</sup> *National Republican*, Feb. 23, 1872.

<sup>70</sup> Momodu, "Milton Murray Holland," 2-3.

<sup>71</sup> "Milton M. Holland: 1880 Census," 12.

<sup>72</sup> *The Marshall Messenger*, Feb. 20, 1880.

## MILTON HOLLAND: BUSINESSMAN

Milton Holland eventually served as Chief of Division in the U.S. Auditor's Office at a salary of \$2,000 per year. Through this position, he oversaw the accounts of the War Department and West Point Military Academy. In 1887, Milton Holland left the civil service.<sup>73</sup> After this, Milton Holland became active in the areas of banking, real estate, and insurance.<sup>74</sup> He became President of the Capital Savings Bank and Secretary and General Manager of Industrial Building and Savings Company, two black-owned financial institutions.<sup>75</sup> In the 1890s, Milton Holland also founded the Alpha Insurance Company in Washington D.C. This company was one of the first black-owned insurance companies in the nation.<sup>76</sup> In 1899, *The Washington Bee* newspaper claimed that no man had started a more successful business than Milton Holland.<sup>77</sup> The editor of the newspaper went on to discuss how Milton Holland was the first person who conceived of starting a bank, which was Capital Savings Bank. This bank became a monument for black people. After he resigned as president of Capital Savings Bank, Milton Holland founded the Alpha Insurance Company. The company eventually disbanded not because it was not successful, but rather the people who were connected to it wanted higher wages. Instead of bankrupting the company by trying to pay them with money the company did not have, Milton Holland disbanded it and met the financial obligations of everyone connected to it.<sup>78</sup>

## MILTON HOLLAND: CHAMPION OF THE AFRICAN RACE

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<sup>73</sup> Momodu, "Milton Murray Holland," 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 156.

<sup>75</sup> Momodu, "Milton Murray Holland," 2-3.

<sup>76</sup> "Milton M. Holland," 2.

<sup>77</sup> *The Washington Bee*, Mar. 18, 1899.

<sup>78</sup> *The Washington Bee*, Mar. 18, 1899.

Milton Holland was also a very active Republican who spoke on behalf of African Americans. His farm on the outskirts of Washington D.C. in Silver Springs, Maryland became a gathering place for black society.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, there was an organization called the Milton M. Holland and Loren M. Saunders Republican Club.<sup>80</sup> It appears that this club tried to help Milton Holland gain the position of Commissioner of Washington D.C. According to *The Critic* newspaper, a large black delegation visited the White House to convince President James Garfield to appoint Milton Holland as Commissioner of Washington D.C. on June 13, 1881. President Garfield said that he would consider the arguments that the delegation made about Milton Holland's military service and his prominence in Washington D.C.<sup>81</sup> That same year, Milton Holland was part of a reception committee that was preparing to receive visiting newspaper editors from Ohio in Washington D.C.<sup>82</sup> President Garfield, members of the Cabinet, the Ohio delegation in Congress, and editorial representatives from each of the Washington D.C. newspapers were invited to the reception as well.<sup>83</sup> Milton Holland was named to the reception committee after he became an honorary member of the James Garfield and Chester A. Arthur Wide Awakes Campaign Club.<sup>84</sup>

In 1883, Milton Holland gave a spirited speech in defense of Frederick Douglass and other blacks who had called for a national colored convention to take place in Washington D.C. He defended Frederick Douglass after Richard Theodore Greener insulted him. According to *The Washington Bee* newspaper, Greener was a black man from Boston, Massachusetts who did

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<sup>79</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 156.

<sup>80</sup> *The Evening Times*, Mar. 16, 1897.

<sup>81</sup> *The Critic*, Jun. 13, 1881.

<sup>82</sup> *Evening Star*, Jan. 13, 1881.

<sup>83</sup> *Evening Star*, Jan. 13, 1881.

<sup>84</sup> *National Republican*, Jan. 20, 1881.

not approve of black leaders or blacks who held office.<sup>85</sup> Milton Holland ultimately called the National Colored Convention to order on September 25, 1883. About 250 black citizens were in attendance, and Frederick Douglass was elected permanent chairman of the convention.<sup>86</sup> That same year, Milton Holland also helped organize the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the emancipation of enslaved people in Washington D.C. This celebration included a parade procession with one hundred fifty wagons that represented various trades. The procession was reviewed by Frederick Douglass, Milton Holland, Calvin Chase, president and secretary of the day, and Dr. R.S. Laws, who was one of the speakers at the celebration. When the procession passed these gentlemen, they saluted.<sup>87</sup>

Four years later, Milton Holland was still very active in the Republican party. According to the *Evening Star* newspaper, Milton Holland invited all Ohio Republicans who were residing in Washington D.C. to a meeting on September 14, 1887.<sup>88</sup> Milton Holland even appeared on a list of noted men who were going to speak about African Americans in Washington D.C in *The People's Friend* newspaper published on May 31, 1891. This short list included Frederick Douglass, John R. Lynch, Robert H. Terrell, and James H. Smith.<sup>89</sup> However, it appears that Milton Holland had to stop being active shortly after. This appears to be the case because on September 2, 1891, Milton Holland filed a pension request for his military services as an invalid.<sup>90</sup>

#### MILTON HOLLAND: LOSS OF PRESTIGE

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<sup>85</sup> *The Washington Bee*, May 12, 1883.

<sup>86</sup> *El Paso Times*, Sept. 25, 1883.

<sup>87</sup> *The Washington Bee*, Apr. 21, 1883.

<sup>88</sup> *Evening Star*, Sept. 13, 1887.

<sup>89</sup> "U.S., African American Newspapers, 1829-1947," 1.

<sup>90</sup> "U.S., Civil War Pension Index," 1437.



Despite filing a pension request as an invalid, Milton Holland kept receiving endorsements for various government positions. According to *The Washington Bee* newspaper, Milton Holland received endorsements for Judgeship of the Police Court in Washington D.C. The newspaper went on to state that he was a well-trained lawyer and qualified for the position. However, someone wrote the author of the article back and said that if Milton Holland was chosen for the position, the “world would be turned wrong side outwards.”<sup>91</sup> In 1897, the Milton Holland and Loren Saunders Republican Club had a meeting. According to *The Evening Times* newspaper, the meeting took place on March 16, 1897. At this meeting, Milton Holland and Loren M. Sanders were unanimously endorsed as Recorder of Deeds and Commissioner of D.C.<sup>92</sup> That same year, Milton Holland was the executor of the estates of a woman named Ann Toliver and a man named John Smith who had died. Tolliver’s property was a subdivision of Howard University while Smith’s property had a two-story house, a one-story house, and a well. Milton Holland originally planned to have a public auction for these properties on July 18, 1897.<sup>93</sup> However, the auction was postponed until July 26, 1897 because of rain and other unknown factors.<sup>94</sup> In 1898, Milton Holland was recommended to President William McKinley for the appointment of brigadier general in the United States Army by the Virginia Republican League. The Virginia Republican League made this decision at a meeting that it held on July 7, 1898.<sup>95</sup> The fact that it does not appear that Milton Holland received these positions during this time demonstrates the erosion of the rights of the blacks that occurred during the 1900s.

#### MILTON HOLLAND: DEATH AND LEGACY

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<sup>91</sup> *The Washington Bee*, Dec. 19, 1896.

<sup>92</sup> *The Evening Times*, Mar. 16, 1897.

<sup>93</sup> *Evening Star*, Jul. 26, 1897.

<sup>94</sup> *Evening Star*, Jul. 26, 1897.

<sup>95</sup> *Evening Star*, Jul. 7, 1898.

In 1910, Milton Holland was living with Virginia Holland, his wife, May Rowes, his adopted daughter, James T. Rowes, his son-in-law, and his grandson, Milton Rowes. He was listed as working as a government clerk again at the time.<sup>96</sup> On May 14, 1910, Milton Holland collapsed with a heart attack at his office and was brought home. A physician was summoned and administered treatment.<sup>97</sup> However, Milton Holland experienced another episode and died the next morning at age sixty-five.<sup>98</sup> His death was announced in the *Evening Star* newspaper on May 16, 1910.<sup>99</sup> In his last will and testament, Milton Holland left a life insurance policy for his wife which amounted to \$3560 and a life insurance policy for his adopted daughter totaling \$1500. He also bequeathed the two lots where his residence was to the executor of his will, Furmann J. Shadd, and his heirs.<sup>100</sup> After Milton Holland died, Virginia Holland filed a request for a pension as a widow on June 2, 1910.<sup>101</sup> On October 18, 1910, she contested the part of Milton Holland's will that stated that two lots of the property were going to be given to Shadd and his heirs. Virginia Holland contested this in the circuit court of Montgomery County. Alice Parke Shadd was the defendant. The circuit court ultimately decreed that Milton Holland's property would be sold to the highest bidder at a public auction on the property itself on October 22, 1910 at 3:00 pm. This property consisted of thirty-two acres of land, a twelve-room house with modern improvements, stables and carriage houses, and a good barn.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> "Milton M Holland: 1910 Census," 35.

<sup>97</sup> *Evening Star*, May 16, 1910.

<sup>98</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 156.

<sup>99</sup> *Evening Star*, May 16, 1910.

<sup>100</sup> Holland, "Last Will and Testament of Milton M. Holland," 1-2.

<sup>101</sup> "U.S., Civil War Pension Index," 1437.

<sup>102</sup> *Evening Star*, Oct. 18, 1910.

Milton Holland, the first African American Texan to win the Medal of Honor was buried with our nation's military heroes at Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>103</sup> Milton Holland was truly a military hero. He was not simply helping the Union defeat the Confederacy during the Civil War but rather he saw himself as a liberator of his fellow enslaved brothers and sisters. During the Elizabeth City raid, Milton Holland helped liberate thousands of enslaved people at the risk of being executed as a runaway by Confederate soldiers. In fact, a black soldier named Samuel Jordan of Company D in the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment U.S. Colored Troops which was Milton Holland's regiment met this very fate.<sup>104</sup> After the Civil War, Milton Holland could have simply focused on his own advancement. Instead, Milton Holland became a champion for the African race. The story of Milton Holland is a testament to the significance of slavery in Texas and to how former enslaved people were able to rise above a hegemonic system that was designed to keep them oppressed. Alas, by the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century, Milton Holland, who had excelled in all domains—military, business, community leadership and politics, and family honor—experienced the erosion of his prestige, position, and personhood. This was a fate shared by most of our African American compatriots. Research and outreach works to counter that erosion and erasure from history.

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<sup>103</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 156.

<sup>104</sup> "Edward Augustus Wild Papers, 1861-1864: Lists," 3.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Milton Holland: Enlisted Soldier



Appendix B: Milton Holland: Medal of Honor Winner



Appendix C: Milton Holland: 1900

