

## *William P. Powell, Jr.: Doctor and Soldier*



William P. Powell, Jr., August 1863  
Courtesy National Archives,  
Washington, D.C.

*One of only 13 African American surgeons to serve during the Civil War, out of more than 12,000 in the Union army*

Born: 1834

Died: 1915

Profession: Doctor

**Early Years:** William P. Powell, Jr., was born free in New Bedford, Massachusetts, to an African American father and a Native American mother. He was raised in New York City and as a teenager worked as an apothecary (pharmacist of today).

**Life in England:** To avoid racism, his family moved to England. There, he helped his father run a hotel for seamen and fugitive slaves. Eventually, Powell studied medicine in London, England.

**Doctor and Soldier:** As Dr. Powell, he returned to the United States. He became a contract assistant surgeon with the Union Army in May 1863. Dr. Powell was hired as an assistant surgeon at the Contraband Hospital in Washington D.C., a medical facility that cared for emancipated slaves known as “contrabands.” While at the hospital, he hired several African American nurses to work and earn wages. Dr. Powell worked at Contraband Hospital for one year.