

54th MASSACHUSETTS VOLUNTEER INFANTRY

Introduction

Show students the photograph on the magazine cover and ask them what they know about the role of African Americans during the Civil War. Record the students' observations in a list and ask them what questions they would have liked to ask an African American Civil War soldier if they had had the chance. After working with this issue, review the answers to the questions they raised and discuss where they might look for answers to questions still unanswered.

Mark It on the Map

Have students locate the following on a map: Massachusetts (Boston, Readville, New Bedford); Virginia (Norfolk); Louisiana (New Orleans, Milliken's Bend, Port Hudson); South Carolina (Beaufort, James Island, Fort Wagner or Morris Island, Honey Hill, Boykin's Mill); Florida (OluStee); Georgia (Andersonville).

Questions for Discussion

- How many African Americans lived in the United States at the beginning of the Civil War? How many were free? How many were slaves?
- How many soldiers were enlisted in the United States Colored Troops? How many African American soldiers died for the Union?
- Where were the first African American units recruited? When was the Massachusetts 54th recruited and where? What was distinctive about the Massachusetts 54th in relation to the earlier African American army units?
- How were African American troops discriminated against by the U.S. Army? What action did the 54th Massachusetts take to protest against unequal pay? Was their action successful?
- What additional risks did African American troops face if captured by Confederate troops?
- In what battles did the 54th Massachusetts participate? How many men and officers fought in the regiment during the Civil War? How many of the men of the 54th Massachusetts died during the Civil War? When was the regiment disbanded?
- Describe the assault on Fort Wagner, its results, and the casualties suffered by the 54th Massachusetts in that battle.
- In what ways have the accomplishments of the 54th Massachusetts been honored?
- Who was responsible for creating the fund for the Shaw Memorial? Who was responsible for creating the memorial itself? How did Saint-Gaudens use symbols and models of real people to capture the regiment's fierce determination?
- What in William Carney's background prompted him to join the Union army? How did Sergeant Carney's wartime experiences shape the rest of his life?
- Describe the type of noncombat services performed by African American soldiers during the Civil War.
- What were the accomplishments of some of the other African American units in the Civil War?
- How were New York City's riots of 1863 and government efforts at overseas colonization examples of wartime prejudice against African Americans?

Vocabulary

battery	infantry
bounty	intimidation
commemorate	menial
dedication	misapprehension
discharged	misrepresenting
drudge	noncommissioned
earthwork	quartermaster
emancipation	prejudice
fatigue duty	reenactment
hovering	regiment
impelled	reiterated
impregnable	subsisted
inefficiency	

➔ How did the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments bring to a culmination the hopes of African Americans at the time of the Civil War?

Think About It

➔ Long before Gandhi and Martin Luther King formally adopted the practice of passive resistance, or civil disobedience, as a means of achieving equality, the 54th Massachusetts petitioned, wrote letters to newspapers and Congress, and refused wages rather than accept discriminatory pay. Why do you think they selected this means of fighting discrimination?

➔ It was an accomplishment for African Americans to win the right to serve in the U.S. armed forces at the time of the Civil War, even though their units were segregated and discriminated against. President Truman's Executive Order 9981 ended segregation in the military in 1948. What advantages and disadvantages were there to having African American units during the Civil War?

Writing Workout

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- ➔ Read one or both of the following poems and then create your own poem about the experience of African American soldiers during the Civil War: Paul Laurence Dunbar's "The Colored Soldiers" or Robert Lowell's "Colonel Shaw and the Massachusetts' 54th" (alternatively titled "For the Union Dead").
- ➔ After reading Lewis Douglass's letter to his future wife, Amelia, compose a letter as if you were Sergeant William Carney, Sergeant George E. Stephens, or Corporal James Gooding writing to a family member about your experience at Fort Wagner or to a friend who is considering enlisting in a black regiment.
- ➔ Lewis Douglass didn't write about the particulars of the fight at Fort Wagner in his letter, trusting that "the papers will give a better [account] than I have time to give." Pretend you are a newspaper writer either for a Charleston or a Boston newspaper and write an account of the assault on Battery Wagner.
- ➔ Use a magnifying glass to read the names on the casualty list for the enlisted men of the 54th Massachusetts at Fort Wagner. Select one and create an acrostic poem honoring his sacrifice.
- ➔ Look at the pictures of either the Shaw Memorial or the African American Civil War Memorial ("Spirit of Freedom") and write a paragraph about the feelings they inspire in you.

Illustrated Time Line

Divide students into teams or small groups and assign entries from the time line on page 25. Have them illustrate the entry on poster board and then arrange the posters in chronological order and assemble them on the wall or bulletin board. Ask each group to explain the significance of its entry.

Get Into Art

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- ➔ Create a three-dimensional map or model of Battery Wagner using Captain Emilio's map on page 18 as the basis for your design.
- ➔ Design a sheet-music cover or CD insert for one of the two songs associated with the 54th Massachusetts, "When This Dreadful War Is Over" and "The Star-Spangled Banner."
- ➔ Make a Civil War recruiting poster designed to get African American men to enlist.
- ➔ Create a shoebox diorama or drawing of William Carney saving the flag at Fort Wagner or the assault by Butler's Native Guards on Port Hudson, Louisiana.
- ➔ Design a special commemorative medal for veterans of the 54th Massachusetts.

Research Projects

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- Write a report on African American navy personnel or about one of the other African American army units in the Civil War, for example: The Corps d’Afrique, Black Brigade of Cincinnati, Louisiana Native Guards, 1st South Carolina Infantry, 1st Kansas Colored Infantry, and the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers (for whom Harriet Tubman scouted).
- Learn about subsequent contributions of African American units as well as individuals to the U.S. armed forces and present your findings, for example: Buffalo Soldiers (9th and 10th Cavalry), Tuskegee Airmen, Colin Powell.
- Research the role of slaves in the Confederacy, both in fields and factories, and also in the Confederate army.
- In 1863, the Confederate Congress threatened to treat white officers of African American units more severely than commanders of white units, and to enslave captured black soldiers. President Lincoln issued General Order 233, threatening reprisals on Confederate prisoners of war. Research to find out how effective Lincoln’s order was, especially in light of the incident at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, in 1864.
- Read about the experience of Dr. Augusta as recounted in the Pulitzer Prize–winning *Reveille in Washington* by Margaret Leech. Discuss the ongoing problems of prejudice and discrimination faced by African Americans during the Civil War.
- Visit the Web site of the National Park Service’s Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site at www.sgnhs.org to learn more about Saint-Gaudens. Compare his Shaw Memorial with other designs he made, such as the Adams Memorial and U.S. \$10 and \$20 gold coins.

Math Work

Make a chart—either line, bar, or pie—illustrating the raw numbers and calculating the percentages for the following information:

- a) the number of African Americans in the population of the Union and their percentage in relationship to the total population;
- b) the number of African Americans in the population of the Confederacy and their percentage in relationship to the total population;
- c) the numbers of African Americans who served in the armed forces of the Union and their percentage in relation to the total population that served;
- d) the numbers of African Americans who served in the armed forces of the Confederacy and their percentage in relation to the total population that served;
- e) the numbers of African Americans who served in the armed forces of the Union in relation to the total African American population;
- f) the numbers of African Americans who died serving in the armed forces of the Union in relation to the total population who died serving in the armed forces of the Union.

Film Enrichment

- Rent the video of the 1989 film *Glory* and play it to the class over the course of a week. Explain that the film drew on Colonel Shaw’s personal letters and this is why director Edward Zwick filmed it from the point of view of their commander rather than from the point of view of the men of the 54th Massachusetts. Ask students to examine some of the primary sources in the issue and decide whether it was a mistake for the film to use only fictional characters for the African American soldiers or whether the flexibility in storytelling that it allowed was an advantage.
- Rent the video of the 1993 A&E documentary *The 54th Massachusetts* and ask students to evaluate the historical accuracy of *Glory*.

Let's Hear It

Bring some Civil War music to class. Show photographs of Civil War musicians and their instruments and illustrations of Civil War sheet music. Play the music and ask students to describe the music they have heard and to identify the instruments in the selections.

Just for Fun

Students may complete one or both of the following activities:

- Prepare Civil War fare using the recipe in “Let’s Make Journey Cakes” on pages 14–15.
- Create and display the Civil War–era flag following the instructions in “Your Turn to Save Old Glory” on pages 32–33.

Follow These Footsteps

John A. Andrew

Alexander T. Augustus

William H. Carney

Frederick Douglass

Abraham Lincoln

Augustus Saint-Gaudens

Robert Gould Shaw

Harriet Tubman