

African American Troops in the Civil War

"Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship." -Frederick Douglass

Overview

Through the exploration of primary source documents and the review of historical events, students will learn about the numerous contributions of African American soldiers to the Civil War, understanding the important impact they made to the Union. Students will then focus on a particular place, battle, or event where African American soldiers participated in the war effort and will create a historic site to educate the public regarding the "United States Colored Troops," as well as to honor their contributions.

Grades

5, 8

Essential Questions

- Why did Lincoln decide to allow African Americans to enlist in the Union military?
- What was Frederick Douglass's opinion regarding the enlistment of black soldiers?
- What impact did African American troops have on the Civil War?
- Why is important to learn about and acknowledge the role African Americans played in the Civil War?

Materials

- Company E image, attached
- What Was Lincoln Thinking, handout attached
- Fighting Rebels with Only One Hand, excerpt and questions, attached
- History of African American Troops in the American Civil War, reading attached
- Design a Historic Site, project assignment attached

Duration

- 60 minutes for initial lesson
- Additional class or homework time will be needed for the completion of the historical site project

Teacher Preparation

- "Victors, Not Victims - The USCT Role in the American Civil War," a lecture presented by Hari Jones, is an in-depth history of the origins and importance of the USCT contribution to the American Civil War. Teachers who would like to broaden their background knowledge on this subject before teaching this lesson can go to <http://www.civilwar.org/video/usctharijones.html> to view a recording of the lecture.

Student Preparation

- Students should have a basic understanding of the events leading to secession, as well as a basic understanding of the events of the Civil War.
- Students should be prepared for the historical terminology they will encounter throughout this lesson. Let students know that they will encounter words such as "colored" and "Negro," which were terms commonly used and accepted during the Civil War years. Ensure students understand that such terminology is considered inappropriate outside of their historical context.

Procedure

African American Troops and the Civil War

1. As a warm-up, discuss with students:
 - When you consider the roles and status of African Americans during the Civil War period, what do you first think of? What images come to mind?
2. Encourage students to offer descriptions, adjectives, individual people they can think of from this period, etc. Note student thoughts on the board. After compiling their thoughts, project the attached image of "Company E" and ask students to silently examine the photo. Ask for volunteers to comment on what they see, who they think is pictured, and what time period they think the photo is from. Let students know that the image is of Company E, also known as the "4th US Colored Infantry" during the Civil War. Refer back to the list students made and if no students thought of African Americans as soldiers during the Civil War, ask students to discuss why they think this is. Did they know that black people served as soldiers and greatly contributed to the Union Army during the Civil War? If the list students created focused predominantly on slavery, ask them why they think this is the case. If students did note that the image of a black soldier came to mind when considering the Civil War earlier, discuss this as well, and ask students to share what they already know regarding black soldiers during the Civil War.
3. Let students know there were approximately 200,000 African American soldiers and sailors serving in the Union Army and Navy and that often times, we overlook this important contribution when studying the Civil War, focusing instead on the unjust institution of slavery and the ways in which blacks were mistreated. While it is important to develop of comprehensive understanding of slaver, it is also important to acknowledge the ways African Americans empowered themselves and contributed to the United States during this period, despite the unjust circumstances they were in.

What Was Lincoln Thinking?

4. Remind students that after Abraham Lincoln's election in November 1860, the southern states began to secede, with North Carolina being the last southern state to secede on May 20, 1861. This, along with the events at Fort Sumter in April of 1861, set the Civil War in motion. As news spread, many free black men raced to enlist in the U.S. military, willing to offer their services and risk their lives to ensure the North was successful in the pending war. They were turned away, however, because a federal law dating from 1792 barred black people from bearing arms for the U.S. army, although they had bravely served in the American Revolution and in the War of 1812. (For detailed information, see the video link noted under "Teacher Preparation.") The Lincoln administration thus had to wrestle with whether or not to authorize the enlistment of black troops during the Civil War.
5. Tell students you want them to consider the predicament of this country in the 1860s and the decision before Lincoln regarding whether or not African Americans should be allowed to serve in the Civil War troops. Remind students that as the southern states seceded from the Union, they formed the Confederate States of America, with Jefferson Davis as their recognized president. Further remind students that there were five "border states," the slave states of Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and West Virginia, which bordered a free state and were aligned with the Union for the time being.
6. Pass out the attached handout "What was Lincoln thinking" and instruct students to partner up for approximately 5-7 minutes to discuss the pros and cons of Lincoln repealing the 1792 law and allowing black people to enlist in the war effort. What would he have to gain or lose politically? How might this decision benefit or hurt the Union? What impact might this decision have on the black population at the time? Urge students to review and consider the situation of the United States at the time, as well the mentalities present during this time.

7. Once students have discussed with their partners and filled out the worksheet, have them report their thoughts back to the remainder of class. Create a two-columned pro and con chart in front of the room, summarizing student thoughts in the appropriate column as they share. Discuss with students why, given the time period, this was such a weighted decision.

“Fighting Rebels With Only One Hand”

8. Next, to offer additional perspective, provide the attached excerpt of Frederick Douglass’s “Fighting Rebels with Only One Hand” and instruct students to again work with their partners to read and discuss the questions provided. (Alternatively, teachers may want to do or arrange a dramatic reading of the excerpt for the class then have students discuss the questions with their partners.) After approximately 8 minutes, bring the class back together and have students share their thoughts regarding the piece and what message they feel Douglass was trying to convey. Further discuss:
 - Did Frederick Douglass pose any additional reasons for why Lincoln should admit black troops that you do not see on the list we created before?
 - What is Douglass’s strongest argument in your opinion?
 - How do you think Lincoln would respond to this?

The Enlistment of “Colored Troops”

9. Let students know that the Lincoln administration wrestled with the idea of authorizing the recruitment of black troops, with one of their big concerns being that such a move may prompt the border-states to secede. Ultimately however, the decision was made (whether moral or political intentions were at play) to create “colored troops.” Explain:
 - “When Gen. John C. Frémont in Missouri and Gen. David Hunter in South Carolina issued proclamations that freed slaves in their military regions and permitted them to enlist, their superiors sternly revoked their orders. By mid-1862, however, the escalating number of former slaves (contrabands), the declining number of white volunteers, and the increasingly pressing personnel needs of the Union Army pushed the Government into reconsidering the ban. On July 17, 1862, Congress passed the Second Confiscation and Militia Act, freeing slaves who had masters in the Confederate Army. Two days later, slavery was abolished in the territories of the United States, and on July 22 President Lincoln presented the preliminary draft of the Emancipation Proclamation to his Cabinet members. These acts legalized the enlistment of African Americans, and black volunteers from South Carolina, Tennessee, and Massachusetts filled the first authorized black regiments. In May 1863, to handle the growing number of black enlistees, the U.S. Government established the Bureau of Colored Troops.” (Source: <http://dburgin.tripod.com/blackman.html>)

Discuss:

- Why do you think the government made the decision to allow the enlistment of black troops?
10. Further share with students a bit of information about North Carolina’s black regiments in particular:
 - “In April 1863, President Abraham Lincoln authorized Brigadier General Edward A. Wild to organize four black regiments in North Carolina--three infantry and one heavy artillery. Wild began recruiting on Roanoke Island* in June. Descriptive books for the three infantry regiments indicate at least 139 freedmen on the island were recruited for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd North Carolina Colored Infantry Volunteers, which were later renamed the 35th, 36th, and 37th U.S. Colored Troops. Since many of the soldiers whose families settled on the island were recruited elsewhere, and some of the freedmen from the island enlisted elsewhere, it is hard to know how many of the soldiers in Wild’s regiments had ties to the freedmen’s colony. Missionaries in the Roanoke Island freedmen’s colony noted that all the able-bodied men were away from the island serving in the Union army. Freedmen from Roanoke Island fought in battles throughout the South, including Olustee, Petersburg, and New Market Heights. Many died or sustained life-shattering disabilities.” (Source: <http://www.roanokefreedmenscolony.com>)

- **Teacher note:** For additional information on the Roanoke Island Freedmen’s Colony, go to www.roanokefreedmenscolony.com or see the Carolina K-12’s lesson plan, “North Carolina’s Settlements of Freedmen During the Civil War,” available in the Database of K-12 Resources or by e-mailing a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu.
11. Next, provide each pair of students with the attached “To Colored Men” primary source document. (Teachers may want to make a class set that they reuse throughout the day.) Instruct students to review the document with their partner. (Let students know that some of the words are small and blurry, so they should just do their best to make them out.) Write or project the following questions at the front of the room for students to discuss with their partners:
- What first catches your eye about this document?
 - What are the important messages being conveyed? (Note at least three.)
 - Who do you think the intended audience is for this document and what does the government want them to do?
 - What can this document teach us regarding discrimination during the 1860s?
12. After students have discussed for 5-7 minutes, allow students to share their thoughts with the class and further discuss:
- Why might a person of African descent choose to enlist in the military in the 1860s? Why might a person of African descent not want to enlist?
 - How does this document differ from recruitment advertisements today?
 - What impact do you predict the addition of black soldiers to the war made?

Exploring the History of African American Troops: Design a Historic Site

13. Next, provide students with the attached reading, “History of African American Troops in the Civil War.” Tell students that they will be reading the handout, which will provide additional information regarding African American troops and their role in the Civil War. As they read, tell students they will learn a little about several key battles where African American troops make a significant impact.
14. Pass out the attached “Design a Historic Site” project assignment. Explain to students it is also very important that they read carefully, since once they are finished with the article, they will choose a particular location (i.e. the location of one of the battles mentioned) and designing a historic site specifically honoring African American troops related to their chosen location.
15. Before moving further, discuss historic sites with the class:
- What is a historic site? (Encourage students to note examples, purposes, etc.)
 - What is the purpose of a historic site in general? Why is such preservation important?
 - Describe some historic sites you have visited or learned about.
 - What types of things determine whether a place may become a historic site?
 - What types of things do visitors usually do or learn at a historic site? What can historic sites teach us?
 - Why is it important to ensure our Civil War historic sites include the contributions of African Americans to the war and 1860s society?
16. Project the attached image of the African American Civil War Memorial and ask students to comment on what they see. After students have discussed, give them some background information on the Memorial:

“The African American Civil War Memorial, at the corner of Vermont Avenue and U Street NW in Washington, D.C., commemorates the service of 209,145 African-American soldiers and sailors who fought for the Union in the American Civil War. The sculpture was completed in 1997 and includes panels with the names of those who served in the war. The associated museum, located two blocks west of the memorial in the historic and traditionally African-American U Street neighborhood, opened to the public in January

1999. Its mission is to enable visitors, researchers, and descendants of the United States Colored Troops to better understand the story of these troops. To this end, it displays photographs, newspaper articles, and replicas of period clothing, and uniforms and weaponry of the Civil War. The African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation Registry documents the family trees of more than 2,000 descendants of those who have served with USCT and invites descendants to register. Visitors can search for relatives who have registered in the Descendants Registry.” (*Source: www.discoverblackheritage.com*)

Discuss:

- What is the difference in a historic site, a memorial, and a museum? (Make sure to note that memorials, monuments, and museums are often included as part of a historic site. Students can choose to add these to their own designs.)
- What is the purpose of such a monument or memorial?

- 17.** Go over the “Design a Historic Site” project with students, accepting any questions and ensuring students understand that the ultimate goal of their site is to educate the public regarding the role of African American soldiers in the Civil War and the importance of their impact. Let students know when the project is due and how much class and homework time will be allotted for project completion. Teachers should also determine whether to assign groups or allow students to choose who they work with.
- 18.** When the historical site projects are turned in, allowing students to share their work can provide an opportunity to review the material.

Name: _____

What was Lincoln thinking?

Imagine you are Abraham Lincoln in 1861. The Civil War is underway and there are many black people who have tried to sign up to fight for the Union. Given the situation in the 1860s and the historical perspectives of the time, what are the pros and cons of allowing African Americans to enlist? Discuss with your partner then note two thoughts Lincoln might have had as to why he should allow blacks to enlist, and two thoughts he may have realistically had as to why he should not allow them to enlist.

The worksheet features a central circular portrait of Abraham Lincoln. Surrounding this portrait are four large, empty thought bubbles, each connected to the portrait by a series of smaller circles. These bubbles are intended for students to write their thoughts on the prompt provided at the top of the page.

Fighting Rebels With Only One Hand
(by Frederick Douglass, from Douglass' Monthly, September 1861)

What on earth is the matter with the American Government and people?...Washington, the seat of Government...is now positively in danger of falling before the rebel army...Generals are calling...for men. "Men! men! send us men!" they scream, or the cause of the Union is gone...and yet these very officers...refuse to receive the class of men which have a deeper interest in the defeat of the rebels, than all others.

Men are wanted in Missouri--in Western Virginia...in Texas, and all along the sea coast, and though the Government has at its command a class... deeply interested in suppressing the insurrection, it sternly refuses to summon...a single man, and...insults the whole class by refusing to allow any of their number to defend with their strong arms and brave hearts the national cause.

Why does the Government reject the Negro? Is he not a man? Can he not wield a sword, fire a gun, march...and obey orders like any other?

If...we can be allowed to speak to the President of the United States, we should ask him if this...is a time for...prejudice? ...We would tell him that General Jackson...fought side by side with Negroes at New Orleans, and he bore testimony to their bravery at the close of the war. We would tell him that colored men in Rhode Island and Connecticut performed their full share in the war of the Revolution. We would tell him that this is no time to fight with one hand, when both are needed; this is no time to fight only with your white hand, and allow your black hand to remain tied. It is now pretty well established, that there are many colored men in the Confederate army doing duty not only as cooks, servants and laborers, but as real soldiers. That the Negroes are numerous in the rebel army, and do for that army its heaviest work, is beyond question...Negroes helped to build the batteries at Charleston. They relieve their...military masters from the drudgery of the camp, and devote them to the...use of arms...the slaveholding rebel accepts the aid of the black man as readily as that of any other. If a bad cause can do this, why should a good cause be less wisely conducted? We insist upon it, that one black regiment...would be worth to the Government more than two of any other. Men in earnest don't fight with one hand, when they might fight with two, and a man drowning would not refuse to be saved even by a colored hand.

Discuss/answer:

1. What is the tone of this passage? How do you think Frederick Douglass feels about the fact that blacks were not allowed to serve in the Union army in 1861?
2. What arguments does Douglass note as to why blacks should be allowed in the military?
3. What does Douglass mean by the title, "Fighting Rebels with Only One Hand"?
4. How might you feel hearing this if you were a:
 - Free black person
 - Slave owner
 - Confederate soldier
 - Abolitionist
 - Enslaved mother with two free black sons
5. If you had to pick one line or phrase that represents Douglass's strongest or most compelling statement, which would you pick?

TO COLORED MEN!

FREEDOM, Protection, Pay, and a Call to Military Duty!

On the 1st day of January, 1863, the President of the United States proclaimed FREEDOM to over THREE MILLIONS OF SLAVES. This decree is to be enforced by all the power of the Nation. On the 21st of July last he issued the following order:

PROTECTION OF COLORED TROOPS.

“WAR DEPARTMENT, ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, July 21.”

“General Order, No. 233.

“The following order of the President is published for the information and government of all concerned:—

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, July 30.

“It is the duty of every Government to give protection to its citizens, of whatever class, color, or condition, and especially to those who are duly organized as soldiers in the public service. The law of nations, and the usages and customs of war, as carried on by civilized powers, permit no distinction as to color in the treatment of prisoners of war as public enemies. To sell or enslave any captured person on account of his color, is a relapse into barbarism, and a crime against the civilization of the age.

“The Government of the United States will give the same protection to all its soldiers, and if the enemy shall sell or enslave any one because of his color, the offense shall be punished by retaliation upon the enemy's prisoners in our possession. It is, therefore, ordered, for every soldier of the United States, killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved by the enemy, or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works, and continued at such labor until the other shall be released and receive the treatment due to prisoners of war.

“ABRAHAM LINCOLN.”

“By order of the Secretary of War.

“E. D. TOWNSEND, Assistant Adjutant General.”

That the President is in earnest the rebels soon began to find out, as witness the following order from his Secretary of War:

“WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON CITY, August 8, 1863.

“SIR: Your letter of the 3d inst., calling the attention of this Department to the cases of Orin H. Brown, William H. Johnston, and Wm. Wilson, three colored men captured on the gunboat Isaac Smith, has received consideration. This Department has directed that three rebel prisoners of South Carolina, if there be any such in our possession, and if not, three others, be confined in close custody and held as hostages for Brown, Johnston and Wilson, and that the fact be communicated to the rebel authorities at Richmond.

“Very respectfully your obedient servant,

“EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War.

“The Hon. GIDEON WELLES, Secretary of the Navy.”

And retaliation will be our practice now—man for man—to the bitter end.

LETTER OF CHARLES SUMNER,

Written with reference to the Convention held at Poughkeepsie, July 15th and 16th, 1863, to promote Colored Enlistments.

BOSTON, July 13th, 1863.

“I doubt if, in times past, our country could have expected from colored men any patriotic service. Such service is the return for protection. But now that protection has begun, the service should begin also. Nor should relative rights and duties be weighed with nicety. It is enough that our country, aroused at last to a sense of justice, seeks to enrol colored men among its defenders.

“If my counsels should reach such persons, I would say: enlist at once. Now is the day and now is the hour. Help to overcome your cruel enemies now battling against your country, and in this way you will surely overcome those other enemies hardly less cruel, here at home, who will still seek to degrade you. This is not the time to hesitate or to hizzle. Do your duty to our country, and you will set an example of generous self-sacrifice which will conquer prejudice and open all hearts.

“Very faithfully yours,

“CHARLES SUMNER.”

History of African American Troops in the American Civil War

The issues of freedom and military service were intertwined for African Americans from the onset of the Civil War. News from Fort Sumter in 1861 set off a rush by free black men to enlist in U.S. military units. They were turned away, however, because a federal law dating from 1792 barred black people from bearing arms for the U.S. army (although they had bravely served in the American Revolution and in the War of 1812).

The Lincoln administration wrestled with the idea of authorizing the recruitment of black troops, concerned that such a move would prompt the border states to secede. When Gen. John C. Frémont in Missouri and Gen. David Hunter in South Carolina issued proclamations that freed slaves in their military regions and permitted them to enlist, their superiors sternly revoked their orders. By mid-1862, however, the escalating number of former slaves (contrabands), the declining number of white volunteers, and the increasingly pressing personnel needs of the Union Army pushed the Government into reconsidering the ban.

On July 17, 1862, Congress passed the **Second Confiscation and Militia Act**, freeing slaves who had masters in the Confederate Army. Two days later, slavery was abolished in the territories of the United States, and on July 22 President Lincoln presented the preliminary draft of the **Emancipation Proclamation** to his Cabinet members. These acts legalized the enlistment of African Americans, and black volunteers from South Carolina, Tennessee, and Massachusetts filled the first authorized black regiments. Recruitment further improved when black leaders such as Frederick Douglass encouraged black men to become soldiers and ensure eventual full citizenship. (Two of Douglass's own sons contributed to the war effort.) Volunteers continued to respond, and in May 1863 the Government established the **Bureau of Colored Troops** to manage the increasing numbers of black soldiers.

Due to the attitudes of the 1860s, many white soldiers and officers believed that black men lacked the courage to fight or the ability to fight well. However, in October, 1862, African-American soldiers of the **1st Kansas Colored Volunteers** silenced their critics by repulsing attacking Confederates at the battle of **Island Mound, Missouri**. By August, 1863, 14 "Negro Regiments" were in the field and ready for service. At the battle of **Port Hudson, Louisiana**, May 27, 1863, the African-American soldiers bravely advanced over open ground in the face of deadly artillery fire. Although the attack failed, the black soldiers proved their capability to withstand the heat of battle.

On July 17, 1863, at **Honey Springs, Indian Territory**, now Oklahoma, the **1st Kansas Colored** fought with courage again. Union troops under General James Blunt ran into a strong Confederate force under General Douglas Cooper. After a two-hour bloody engagement, Cooper's soldiers retreated. The 1st Kansas, which had held the center of the Union line, advanced to within fifty paces of the Confederate line and exchanged fire for some twenty minutes until the Confederates broke and ran. General Blunt wrote after the battle, "I never saw such fighting as was done by the Negro regiment...they make better soldiers in every respect than any troops I have ever had under my command."

The most widely known battle fought by African-Americans was the assault on **Fort Wagner, South Carolina**, by the **54th Massachusetts** on July 18, 1863. The 54th volunteered to lead the assault on the strongly-fortified Confederate positions. The soldiers of the 54th scaled the fort's parapet, and were only driven back after brutal hand-to-hand combat.

Although black soldiers proved themselves as reputable soldiers, discrimination in pay and other areas remained widespread. According to the **Militia Act of 1862**, soldiers of African descent were to receive \$10.00 a month, plus a clothing allowance of \$3.50. Many regiments struggled for equal pay, and some went without receiving any money until June 15, 1864, when Congress granted equal pay for all black soldiers.

African-American soldiers participated in every major campaign of 1864-1865 except Sherman's invasion of Georgia. The year 1864 was especially eventful for African-American troops. On April 12, 1864, at **Fort Pillow, Tennessee**, Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest led his 2,500 men against the Union-held fortification, occupied by 292 black and 285 white soldiers. After driving in the Union pickets and giving the garrison an opportunity to surrender, Forrest's men swarmed into the fort with little difficulty and drove the

Federals down the river's bluff into a deadly crossfire. Casualties were high and only sixty-two of the U.S. Colored Troops survived the fight. Many accused the Confederates of perpetuating a massacre of black troops, and the controversy continues today. The battle cry for the Negro soldier east of the Mississippi River became "Remember Fort Pillow!"

The **Battle of New Market Heights**, Virginia (Chaffin's Farm) became one of the most heroic engagements involving African-Americans. On September 29, 1864, the African-American division of the Eighteenth Corps, after being pinned down by Confederate artillery fire for about 30 minutes, charged the earthworks and rushed up the slopes of the heights. During the hour-long engagement the division suffered tremendous casualties. Of the sixteen African-Americans who were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Civil War, fourteen received the honor as a result of their actions at New Market Heights.

In January, 1864, General Patrick Cleburne and several other Confederate officers in the Army of the Tennessee proposed using slaves as soldiers since the Union was using black troops. Cleburne recommended offering slaves their freedom if they fought and survived. Confederate President Jefferson Davis refused to consider Cleburne's proposal and forbade further discussion of the idea. The concept, however, did not die. By the fall of 1864, the South was losing more and more ground, and some believed that only by arming the slaves could defeat be averted. On March 13, the Confederate Congress passed **General Order 14**, and President Davis signed the order into law. The order was issued March 23, 1865, but only a few African-American companies were raised, and the war ended before they could be used in battle. Historians continue to debate who many African Americans volunteered to fight for the Confederate side.

By the end of the Civil War, roughly 180,000 black men comprising 163 units (10% of the Union Army) had served as soldiers in the U.S. Army; another 19,000 served in the Navy. Bravely risking their lives in a country that had restricted their rights since its beginning, approximately one-third of all African-Americans enrolled in the military lost their lives during the Civil War.

Black soldiers served in artillery and infantry and performed all noncombat support functions that sustain an army, as well. Black carpenters, chaplains, cooks, guards, laborers, nurses, scouts, spies, steamboat pilots, surgeons, and teamsters also contributed to the war cause. There were nearly 80 black commissioned officers. Black women, who could not formally join the Army, nonetheless served as nurses, spies, and scouts, the most famous being Harriet Tubman, who scouted for the 2d South Carolina Volunteers.

Because of prejudice against them, black units were not used in combat as extensively as they might have been. Nevertheless, the soldiers served with distinction in a number of battles. Black infantrymen fought gallantly at Milliken's Bend, LA; Port Hudson, LA; Petersburg, VA; and Nashville, TN. The July 1863 assault on Fort Wagner, SC, in which the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers lost two-thirds of their officers and half of their troops, was memorably dramatized in the film *Glory*. By war's end, 16 black soldiers had been awarded the Medal of Honor for their valor.

Sources: <http://dburqin.tripod.com/blackman.html>; <http://www.americancivilwar.com/colored/histofcoloredtroops.html>

Group Members: _____

Design a Historic Site Honoring African American Troops in the Civil War

A historic site is an official location where pieces of political, military or social history have been preserved. Historic sites are usually protected by law, and many have recognized with *national historic site* status. Historic sites may be a building, site or structure that is of local, regional, or national significance.

In this project, you and your team will be choosing a site where a significant event took place involving African American troops in the Civil War. After choosing your location (based on the particular event that took place there) you will design a historic site for the location, making it accessible to the public for learning about the impact and contributions of African American soldiers to the Civil War. While the location you choose must be based upon actual research (i.e., if you choose a battle site, the site should be a place where African American troops were actually stationed or participated in some way), what you “find to preserve” on that location can be creative. (For example, perhaps you choose to pretend that a cannon was uncovered at Honey Springs that the 1st Colored Kansas used). When designing your site, remember that you can have it contain some type of memorial, museum, art, tour, markers, etc.

You must create the following for your historical site project:

- **Blueprint** - a map of the historical site, showing in vague shapes/outline what will be located where
- **Visual representation** – a creative, colorful sketch or 3-D representation of at least one aspect of the site (for example, if your historic site is an open battlefield containing a monument, you might do a close up drawing of what the monument would look like, or create a clay rendering of it)
- **1 recreated artifact with explanatory label**- this should be a sketch of a historical item that would have been uncovered from the site (i.e. a Civil War cannon, a piece of clothing, a journal, etc.)
- **1 primary source document with explanatory label** – in your research, find at least one primary source document that relates to your site; you will provide a copy of this document and create a label for it (If you can't find a primary source related to your site in particular, a primary source related to African American troops in general will suffice)
- **Docent speech** – A docent is a tour guide. Create a one page overview of your historic site that the docent will present to visitors upon their arrival; the speech should be an overview of the site, why the site is important, and should provide an interesting overview of the African American troops that made a difference in this place

You will present your historical site to the class. Through the presentation of your historic site, you will educate your classmates on the battle, place, and/or event you have chosen and the African American troops who made a difference there.

Steps for completion:

1. **Brainstorm:** Brainstorm ideas for the location of your historic site. Refer back to the article you read. Is there a particular battle noted that you would like to design a historic site for? Or, would you like to do some initial research on the USCT and pick another battle, regiment, event, etc. to base your historic site on? (For example, you could research the 35th United States Colored Troops, also known as the First North Carolina Colored Volunteers, and determine a spot within our state to honor them.)

After discussion and possibly some preliminary research, you should choose where you will locate your historic site. After conferring with your teacher for approval, you will move on to research.

2. **Research:** Next, begin to research the “United States Colored Troops (USCT)” in general, the battle/place you choose for your historic site, and the specific regiment(s) involved (if possible.) Each person should consult a different source and everyone should keep track of the sources consulted. Information to research must include but NOT be limited to:
 - Why were the USCT important? In what ways did they impact the Union army and navy? What contributions did African American soldiers make to the war?
 - Why is this particular place/battle/event significant?

- What specific events took place here?
- Who was involved? Can you discover any particular black soldiers who contributed?
- What was the result and impact of this battle/event?
- Are there any artifacts or primary source documents you can find related to this event, place, the people involved, the time period, etc? (These can be recreated when designing your historic site.)
- Why was the participation of black troops significant here in particular?
- What are the most important understandings people should learn regarding African American soldiers and this place/battle/event in particular?

Take detailed notes on anything interesting and significant you find out and ensure you write down your sources. You will use this information to design your historic site.

- 3. Design:** Review your research and begin to brainstorm how you will design your historic site. Consider:

 - Where will your historic site be located and why? (What is significant about this location in particular?)
 - What is or will be located at your historic site? (Remember, you can use your imagination to add particular items to your historic site, as long as they are historically accurate. For example, perhaps you imagine an old barn is found on the site of a battle, and that the African American troops stored artillery here.) Example items that might be included in your site:
 - Monument or memorial
 - Museum
 - Battle field
 - Trail/guided tour of grounds
 - Guided tour of a particular structure
 - What artifacts could be uncovered upon excavating this site? (Again, you can be creative and imagine that you find historically accurate items, i.e. old Civil War weapons; clothing items; old photos; pieces of writings such as journals, letters, etc.)
 - What will visitors do at your site? (Will there be a guided tour offered? Will there be a self-tour through a museum, a trail, etc.? Will reenactments or dramatic presentations be offered? Will visitors be able to make/eat Civil War food that African American soldiers may have eaten or listen to songs African American soldiers may have sung?) Consider how to bring history alive for your guests in creative but historically accurate ways!
 - As you brainstorm the design of the site, remember that your historic site should teach visitors about the impact and contributions African Americans made to the Civil War. Anything you include in your sites design should relate to this ultimate purpose.
 - How will your site educate visitors regarding this place/event/battle and the African Americans who contributed?
- 4. Presenting Final Project:** Remember that your final product must include a **blueprint map of your historic site, a visual representation, an artifact, a primary source document, and a docent speech**. All of these items should be created with the goal of teaching visitors about African American troops during the Civil War, their impact and their contributions, and specifically what took place at the place/location you have chosen.

You and your group will present your historic site to the class, discussing how your design of each of the above requirements will help visitors to understand and learn from the event that occurred on the site and about African American troops in the Civil War. You will present each aspect of the site to the class and deliver the docent speech in character. Extra credit will be provided for groups attempting time appropriate costumes!

Due Date: _____

What questions do you have about this assignment?

African American Civil War Memorial

