



Black Heroes of the Civil War: A Photographic Archive

Materials:

- Black Heroes of the Civil War PowerPoint
- South Secession Documents
- Harpers Weekly Compete list at RareNewspapers.com
- Copies of Tillman Valentine's Poem
- Copies of Sergeant Major Lewis Douglass' Letter to Amelia
- Copies of Corporal James Henry Gooding's Letter to President Lincoln
- Copies of Hannah Johnson's letter to President Lincoln
- YouTube - Battle of Chaffin's Farm - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cuvPsClu2g>

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction

Revisionist historians tell us that "The Civil War was about state's rights, not about slavery," but what was the seceding states' right to do what? It **was** about the states' rights to continue slavery. Wallbuilders.com compiled four categories of confederate documents to prove that the reason for the formation of the Confederacy was to preserve slavery: Southern Secession Documents; the Declarations of Congressmen who left Congress to join the Confederacy; The Confederate Constitution; and the Declaration of Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens.

After South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas seceded from the Union, they adopted their provisional constitutions. Two months later, on April 12, 1861, the Confederate military launched a terrorist attack on Fort Sumter - this was the beginning of the Civil War.

Lecture: Background Information:

a. **Slide 1: Title, *Black Heroes of the Civil War: A Photographic Archive***

b. **Slide 2: Robert Smalls, the CSS Planter**

Robert Smalls was a ship's pilot and sea captain and a black Civil War hero. He freed himself and his crew and their families by commandeering the Confederate transport ship, the Planter, in the Charleston harbor, and sailed it north to freedom. The CSS Planter was formerly used as a cotton-boat, but the newly Confederate Navy turned it into a rebel gunboat, and it was the most crucial vessel the rebels had in Charleston.

Smalls and nine others sailed the vessel out of the Confederate-controlled waters to the U.S. blockade and hoisted a white flag when near Union control. The CSS Planter was invaluable to



the Union, and the heroic black sailors distinguished themselves with this daring act. The CSS Planter was renamed the USS Planter.

Smalls served as a pilot for several Union ships, and was reunited with the USS Planter in December 1863 as its Captain. He was the first black to command a United States ship.

c. Slide 3: Robert Smalls and an unidentified sailor in the Union Navy

d. Slide 4: Frederick Douglass, “A Call to Arms”

On March 2, 1863, Frederick Douglass sent out this powerful message in his newspaper, *The Douglass Monthly*, titled “Men of Color, to Arms!” it urged black men to support the nation’s war and the crusade to end generations of slavery. Approximately 180,000 black soldiers took up the call to fight for the Union, comprising more than 10% of all Federal forces. Knowing that a Northern loss could mean possible re-enslavement, freemen and former slaves showed dedication to their country and a commitment to their people’s freedom forever.

2. Pass out copies of the Tillman Valentine Poem

- Have students read the poem and discuss what Tillman expected from this war.
- Tillman Valentine, a free black of biracial heritage, wrote this poem to encourage others to volunteer for service.
- Ask students what their feelings might be for enlisting as a black man in the Civil War.

d. Slide 5: Tillman Valentine: Poem (read the slide to the class and discuss poem)

Tillman Valentine was a free black man who was eloquent in his account of the black men’s motivations for enlisting in the war. These men understood the gains of their participation in war and were ready to fight at all costs for freedom.

e. Slide 6: From Laborers & Servants to Union Military Heroes

First, newly freed black men were common laborers for the Union, and later “servants” to white officers. Union commanders and other government officials sought to establish black people’s ability to be productive and pushed for blacks’ right to enlist in the Union army. On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation freeing all slaves and made them more determined to win the war. As the Union troops advanced across the South, thousands of slaves were freed. The Emancipation Proclamation also reaffirmed the President’s authority to enlist black servicemen and initiates an effort to organize all-black regiments.

f. Slide 7: 54th Massachusetts Attack on Fort Wagner

The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was one of the first African-American units in the Union Army to fight in the Civil War. Early in February 1863, the abolitionist Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts issued the Civil War’s first call for black soldiers. Massachusetts did



not have many African-American residents, but the 54th Infantry regiment headed off to training camp two weeks later, more than 1,000 men had volunteered. Many came from other states, such as New York, Indiana, and Ohio; some even came from Canada. One-quarter of the volunteers came from slave states and the Caribbean. Fathers and sons (some as young as 16) enlisted together.

Although Fort Wagner was not taken at that time, the Battle was fierce, the 54th was widely acclaimed for its valor, proving black soldiers' value. It spurred additional recruitment that gave the Union Army a further numerical advantage in troops over the Confederacy. The most famous enlistees were Charles and Lewis Douglass, two sons of the abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Also, Sergeant William H. Carney, a son of slaves, was awarded the nation's highest honor, the Medal of Honor for bravery beyond the call of duty in the Battle of Fort Wagner. He was the first black to receive this medal.

3. **Pass out copies of Sergeant Major Lewis Douglass' letter to Amelia**

- What did Lewis Douglass write to his fiancée about the brutality of war?
- How determined were the black soldiers in taking the fort?
- What did Sergeant Major Lewis Douglass feel about his black comrades' ability?

g. **Slide 8: Charles Redmond Douglass and Lewis Douglass**

Frederick Douglass found his politics and private life intersecting when he encouraged blacks to enlist in the Union Army along with his two sons. Both Charles and Lewis served in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. Lewis achieved the highest rank that a black soldier could attain. After the war, Charles was appointed, by President Ulysses S. Grant, as council to Santo Domingo.

4. **Pass out Corporal Gooding and Hannah Johnson's letters** (work in pairs or small groups)

- What do the letters have in common?
- How does each person express their concern about this issue?
- Do both Gooding and Johnson make a sound argument for equal pay for the black troops?
- Was this a reminder of the second-rate treatment of blacks in the army?

h. **Slide 9: Corporal James Henry Gooding & Hannah Johnson on equal pay**

Corporal Gooding and Hannah Johnson's son were members of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. Each of these individuals wrote to President Lincoln on the unequal pay that blacks received compared to white soldiers. A white enlisted man received \$13 a month that included a clothing allowance of \$3, to be spent at the soldier's discretion. A black soldier received only \$7; the remaining \$3 was withheld as a clothing allowance.



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- i. **Slide 10: Battle of Chaffin’s Farm:** September 29 – 30, 1864
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cuvPsC Iu2g>
The Battle at Chaffin’s Farm is one of the defining battles in black military history. The battle consisted of several engagements in and around Chaffin’s Farm. The confederates dug defensive war trenches and made the battles exceedingly difficult. It is estimated that 4,430 soldiers died from September 29 – 30. 1864. (have students watch the YouTube video)
- j. **Slide 11: Medal of Honor Winners, Sergeant William Carney, and Sergeant Major Christian A. Fleetwood**
William Carney was a slave that escaped through the Underground Railroad and joined the Union Army. He was a member of the 54th all-black Regiment and fought at the Battle of Fort Wagner. He was shot twice but advanced with the flag front. After being shot a third time, he was taken to the field hospital. He never dropped the flag. Sergeant Major Christian Fleetwood received his Medal of Honor in the decisive Battle of Chaffin’s Farm.
5. **Slides 12 -16 spotlight some of the individuals that were heroes and heroines from the Civil war:**
- k. **Slide 12: Medal of Honor Winners, Blake and Hawkins**
- l. **Slide 13: Women Activists: Charlotte Forten and Sojourner Truth**
- m. **Slide 14: Women Activists: Susie King Taylor and Mary Browser**
- n. **Slide 15: Taylor’s excerpt from *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp***
- o. **Slide 16: Women Activists: Harriet Tubman and Cathay Williams**
- p. **Slide 17: Union Soldier, Sergeant Samuel Smith with Family**
Sergeant Samuel Smith’s family celebrated freedom in this photograph.
Blacks overwhelmingly joined the Union Army, 180,000 strong, to fight for their freedom. They knew a Northern loss would mean the possibility of re-enslavement, so they fought with strength, resolve, and resiliency to secure their freedom.
- q. **Slide 18: Summary**



Letters & Poem

- A. Tillman Valentine poem
- B. Lewis Douglass letter to Amelia
- C. Corporal Gooding letter on equal pay
- D. Hannah Johnson letter on equal pay

Tillman Valentine's Poem: Firsthand Account of Black Men's Motivations for Enlisting

*Farewell, dear friends, we leave you now,
We are going to a country far;
We are going to meet the rebels,
And face the bloody war.*

*And if we ne'er return again,
May God protect you here;
Remember that we fought and fell
For the country we hold dear.*

*The day has come, the call is made,
Get ready for the war;
The men's gone out enrolled for draft;
They want some thousands more.*

*We believe the day has come
That slavery's brutal chain,
Shall be broken down,
And man shall stand with man.*

*We are going now, dear friends,
Farewell, to one and all,
And if we nevermore return,
We shall in battle fall.*

*If God intends us this,
It is to be our lot;
He can preserve us all,
Therefore I murmur not.*

*We hope he'll give us strength
To break the awful bar,
And subdue the rebel horde,
And stop this mighty war.*



Sergeant Major Lewis Douglass's Letter to his fiancée, Amelia.

My Dear Amelia,

I have been in two fights and am unhurt. I am about to go in another I believe to-night. Our men fought well on both occasions. The last was desperate we charged that terrible battery on Morris Island known as Fort Wagoner and were repulsed with a loss of 3 killed and wounded. I escaped unhurt from amidst that perfect hill of shot and shell. It was terrible. I need not particularize the papers will give a better than I have time to give. My thoughts are with your often, you are as dear as ever, be good enough to remember it as I no doubt you will. As I said before we are on the eve of another fight and I am very busy and have just snatched a moment to write you. I must necessarily be brief. Should I fall in the next fight killed or wounded I hope to fall with my face to the foe.

If I survive I shall write you a long letter. DeForrest of your city is wounded, George Washington is missing. Jacob Carter is missing, Chas Reason wounded Chas Whiting, Chas Creamer all wounded. The above are in hospital.

This regiment has established its reputation as a fighting regiment not a man flinched, though it was a trying time. Men fell all around me. A shell would explode and clear a space of twenty feet, our men would close up again, but it was no use we had to retreat, which was a very hazardous undertaking. How I got out of that fight alive I cannot tell, but I am here. My Dear girl I hope again to see you. I must bid you farewell should I be killed. Remember if I die I die in good cause. I wish we had a hundred thousand colored troops we would put an end to this war.

Good bye to all Write soon
Your own loving Lewis



Massachusetts Black Corporal to the President Morris Island [S.C.]. Sept 28th, 1863.

Your Excellency will pardon the presumption of a humble individual like myself, in addressing you. but the earnest Solicitation of my Comrades in Arms, besides the genuine interest felt by myself in the matter is my excuse, for placing before the Executive head of the Nation our Common Grievance: On the 6th of the last Month, the Paymaster of the department, informed us, that if we would decide to receive the sum of \$10 (ten dollars) per month, he would come and pay us that sum, but, that, on the sitting of Congress, the Regt would, in his opinion, be *allowed* the other 3 (three.) He did not give us any guarantee that this would be, as he hoped, certainly *he* had no authority for making any such guarantee, and we can not suppose him acting in any way interested. Now the main question is. Are we *Soldiers*, or are we LABOURERS. We are fully armed, and equipped, have done all the various Duties, pertaining to a Soldiers life, have conducted ourselves, to the complete satisfaction of General Officers, who, were if any, prejudiced *against* us, but who now accord us all the encouragement, and honour due us: have shared the perils, and Labour, of Reducing the first stronghold, that flaunted a Traitor Flag: and more, Mr President. Today, the Anglo Saxon Mother, Wife, or Sister, are not alone, in tears for departed Sons, Husbands, and Brothers. The patient Trusting Decendants of Africs Clime, have dyed the ground with blood, in defense of the Union, and Democracy. Men too your Excellency, who know in a measure, the cruelties of the Iron heel of oppression, which in years gone by, the very Power, their blood is now being spilled to maintain, ever ground them to the dust. But When the war trumpet sounded o'er the land, when men knew not the Friend from the Traitor, the Black man laid his life at the Altar of the Nation,—and he was refused. When the arms of the Union, were beaten, in the first year of the War, And the Executive called more food. for its ravaging maw, again the black man begged, the privelege of Aiding his Country in her need, to be again refused, And now, he is in the War: and how has he conducted himself? Let their dusky forms, rise up, out the mires of James Island, and give the answer. Let the rich mould around Wagners parapets be upturned, and there will be found an Eloquent answer. Obedient and patient, and Solid as a wall are they. all we lack, is a paler hue, and a better acquaintance with the Alphabet. Now Your Excellency, We have done a Soldiers Duty. Why cant we have a Soldiers pay? You caution the Rebel Chieftain, that the United States, knows, no distinction, in her Soldiers: She insists on having all her Soldiers, of whatever, creed or Color, to be treated, according to the usages of War. Now if the United States exacts uniformity of treatment of her Soldiers, from the Insurgents, would it not be well, and consistent, to set the example herself, by paying all her *Soldiers* alike? We of this Regt. were not enlisted under any “contraband” act. But we do not wish to be understood, as rating our Service, of more Value to the Government, than the service of the exslave, Their Service *is* undoubtedly worth much to the Nation, but Congress made express, provision touching their case, as slaves freed by military necessity, and assuming the Government, to be their temporary Gaurdian:— Not so with us—Freemen by birth, and consequently, having the advantage of *thinking*, and acting for ourselves, so far as the Laws would allow us. We do not consider ourselves fit subjects for the Contraband act. We appeal to You, Sir: as the Executive of the Nation, to have us Justly Dealt with. The Regt, do pray, that they be assured their service will be fairly appreciated, by paying them as american SOLDIERS, not as menial hierlings. Black men You may well know, are poor, three dollars per month, for a year, will suply their needy Wives, and little ones, with fuel. If you, as chief Magistrate of the Nation, will assure us, of our whole pay. We are content, our Patriotism, our enthusiasm will have a new impetus, to exert our energy more and more to aid Our Country. Not that our hearts ever flagged, in Devotion, spite the evident apathy displayed in our behalf, but We feel as though, our Country spurned us, now we are sworn to serve her.

Please give this a moments attention, **Corporal James Henry Gooding**



Letter from Hannah Johnson to President Lincoln

Buffalo [N.Y.] July 31, 1863

Excellent Sir

My good friend says I must write to you and she will send it. My son went in the 54th regiment. I am a colored woman and my son was strong and able as any to fight for his country and the colored people have as much to fight for as any. My father was a Slave and escaped from Louisiana before I was born morn forty years ago. I have but poor edication but I never went to school, but I know just as well as any what is right between man and man. Now I know it is right that a colored man should go and fight for his country, and so ought to a white man. I know that a colored man ought to run no greater risques than a white, his pay is no greater his obligation to fight the same. So why should not our enemies be compelled to treat him the same, Made to do it.

My son fought at Fort Wagoner but thank God he was not taken prisoner, as many were I thought of this thing before I let my boy go but then they said Mr Lincoln will never them sell our colored soldiers for slaves, if they do He will get them back quick he will rettallyate and stop it. Now Mr. Lincoln don't you think you oght to stop this thing and make

them do the same by the colored men they have lived in idleness all their lives on stolen labor and made savages of the colored people, but they now are furious because they are proving themselves to be men, such as have come away and got some edication. It must put the rebels to work in State prisons to making shoes and things, if they sell our colored soldiers, till they let them all go. And give their wounded the same treatment. It would seem cruel, but their no other way, and a just man must do hard things sometimes, that shew him to be a great man. They tell me some do you will take back the Proclamation, don't do it. When you are dead and in Heaven, in a thousand years that action of yours will make the Angels sing your praises I know it. Ought one man to own another, law for or not, who made the law, surely the poor slave did not. So it is wicked, and a horrible Outrage, there is no sense in it, because a man has lived by robbing all his life and his father before him, should he complain because the stolen things found on him are taken. Robbing the colored people of their labor is but a small part of the robbery their souls almost taken. They are made bruits of often. You know all about this

Will you see that the colored men fighting now, are fairly treated.

You ought to do this, and do it at once, Not let the thing run along meet is quickly and manfully, and stop this, mean cowardly cruelty. We poor oppressed ones, appeal to you, and ask fair play.

Yours for Christs sake

Hannah Johnson



Sources

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Robert Smalls

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Female Heroines of the Civil War

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