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Black History Month 2011 African Americans and the Civil War



Company E, 4th US Colored Infantry. Shown armed with rifles at Fort Lincoln.
Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-BB171-7890 DLE

In 1861, as the United States stood at the brink of Civil War, people of African descent, both enslaved and free persons, waited with a watchful eye. They understood that a war between the North and the South might bring about jubilee—the destruction of slavery and universal freedom. When the Confederacy fired upon Fort Sumter and war ensued, President Abraham Lincoln maintained that the paramount cause was to preserve the Union, not end slavery. Frederick Douglass, the most prominent black leader, opined that regardless of intentions, the war would bring an end to slavery, America's "peculiar institution."

Over the course of the war, the four million people of African descent in the United States proved Douglass right. Free and enslaved blacks rallied around the Union flag in the cause of freedom. From the cotton and tobacco fields of the South to the small towns and big cities of the North, nearly 200,000 joined the Grand Army of the Republic and took up arms to destroy the Confederacy.

They served as recruiters, soldiers, nurses, and spies, and endured unequal treatment, massacres, and riots as they pursued their quest for freedom and equality. Their record of service speaks for itself, and Americans have never fully realized how their efforts saved the Union.

In honor of the efforts of people of African descent to destroy slavery and inaugurate universal freedom in the United States, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History has selected "African Americans and the Civil War" as the 2011 National Black History Theme. We urge all Americans to study and reflect on the value of their contributions to the nation.

Source: Association for the Study of African American Life and History , <http://www.asalh.org/>

Black Soldiers in the Civil War

African American troops contributed greatly to the Union war effort

By Joyce Hansen

*A four-time winner of the Coretta Scott King Honor Book Award, Joyce Hansen has published short stories and 15 books of contemporary and historical fiction and nonfiction for young readers, including *Between Two Fires: Black Soldiers in the Civil War*.*

When the American Civil War began in 1861, Jacob Dodson, a free black man living in Washington, D.C., wrote to Secretary of War Simon Cameron informing him that he knew of "300 reliable colored free citizens" who wanted to enlist and defend the city. Cameron replied that "this department has no intention at present to call into the service of the government any colored soldiers." It didn't matter that black men, slave and free, had served in colonial militias and had fought on both sides of the Revolutionary War. Many black men felt that serving in the military was a way they might gain freedom and full citizenship.

Why did many military and civilian leaders reject the idea of recruiting black soldiers? Some said that black troops would prove too cowardly to fight white men, others said that they would be inferior fighters, and some thought that white soldiers would not serve with black soldiers. There were a few military leaders, though, who had different ideas.

On March 31, 1862, almost a year after the first shots of the Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, Union (northern) troops commanded by General David Hunter took control of the islands off the coasts of northern Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Local whites who owned the rich cotton and rice plantations fled to the Confederate-controlled (southern) mainland. Most of their slaves remained on the islands, and they soon were joined by black escapees from the mainland who believed they would be liberated if only they could reach the Union lines. It would not be that simple.

Even as Hunter needed more soldiers to control the region's many tidal rivers and islands against stubborn Confederate guerrilla resistance, he observed how escaping mainland slaves were swelling the islands' black population. Perhaps, he reasoned, the African Americans could solve his manpower shortage. He devised a radical plan.

Hunter, a staunch abolitionist, took it upon himself to free the slaves — not just on the islands but through-out Confederate-controlled South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida — and to recruit black men capable of bearing arms as Union soldiers. He would attempt to train and form the first all-black regiment of the Civil War.

With the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union began to recruit African-American soldiers.





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laid the groundwork for emancipation and the inclusion of men of African descent into the military. As white northerners increasingly understood that black slaves were crucial to the Confederacy's economy and to its war effort, Lincoln could justify freeing the slaves as matter of military necessity.

When Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, the military's policy toward enslaved people became clearer. Those who reached the Union lines would be free. Also, the War Department began to recruit and enlist black troops for newly formed regiments of the Union Army — the United States Colored Troops (USCT). All of the officers in these regiments, however, would be white.

By the fall of 1864, some 140 black regiments had been raised in many northern states and in southern territories captured by the Union. About 180,000 African Americans served during the Civil War, including more than 75,000 northern black volunteers.

News traveled slowly in those days, and President Abraham Lincoln did not hear about Hunter's regiment until June. While Lincoln opposed slavery, he feared moving more quickly than public opinion in the embattled North — and particularly in the slaveholding border states that had sided with the Union — would allow. He also was adamant that "no commanding general shall do such a thing, upon my responsibility, without consulting me." In an angry letter, the president informed the general that neither he nor any other subordinate had the right to free anyone, although he carefully asserted for himself the right to emancipate slaves at a time of his choosing. Hunter was ordered to disband the regiment, but the seed he planted soon sprouted.

In August 1862, two weeks after Hunter had dismantled his regiment, the War Department allowed General Rufus Saxton to raise the Union Army's first official black regiment, the First South Carolina Volunteers. This and other black regiments organized in the coastal regions successfully defended and held the coastal islands for the duration of the war.

The First Kansas Colored Volunteers was also organized around this time, but without official War Department sanction.

Meanwhile, President Lincoln had carefully



Although the black regiments were segregated from their white counterparts, they fought the same battles. Black troops performed bravely and successfully even though they coped with both the Confederate enemy and the suspicion of some of their Union military colleagues.

Once black men were accepted into the military, they were limited in many cases to garrison and fatigue duty. The famed Massachusetts 54th Regiment's Colonel Robert Gould Shaw actively petitioned superiors to give his men a chance to engage in battle and prove themselves as soldiers. Some of the other officers who knew what their men could do did the same. Black troops had to fight to get the same pay as white soldiers. Some regiments refused to accept lower pay. It was not until 1865, the year the war ended, that Congress passed a law providing equal pay for black soldiers.

Despite these restrictions, the United States Colored Troops successfully participated in 449 military engagements, 39 of them major battles. They fought in battles in South Carolina, Louisiana, Florida, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, and other states. They bravely stormed forts and faced artillery knowing that if captured by the enemy, they would not be given the rights of prisoners of war, but instead would be sold into slavery. The black troops performed with honor and valor all of the duties of soldiers.

Despite the Army's policy of only having white officers, eventually about 100 black soldiers rose from the ranks and were commissioned as officers. Eight black surgeons also received commissions in the USCT. More than a dozen USCT soldiers were given the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery.

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces. Today's military remains an engine of social and economic opportunity for black Americans. But it was the sacrifices of the Civil War-era black soldiers that paved the way for the full acceptance of African Americans in the United States military. More fundamentally, their efforts were an important part of the struggle of African Americans for liberty and dignity.

*This article is excerpted from the book *Free At Last: The U.S. Civil Rights Movement*, published by the Bureau of International Information Programs.*

Serving in the U.S. today

2.3 million

Number of single-race black military veterans in the United States in 2009. *Source: U.S. Census, 2009 American Community Survey.*



The African American Civil War Memorial Museum

The African American Civil War Memorial Museum opened to the public in January 1999. Using photographs, documents and state of the art audio visual equipment, the museum helps visitors understand the African American's heroic and largely unknown struggle for freedom.

Slavery to Freedom: Civil War to Civil Rights

The Museum's permanent exhibition portrays the extraordinary African American struggle for freedom in the United States.



African American Civil War Memorial

Descendants Registry

Tracing their lineage from USCT, more than 2,000 descendants have already supplied family trees, letters and other documents to the African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation Registry. Visitors receive help in

their search for relatives who may have served with USCT. Family members with soldiers who served with United States Colored Troops register in the Descendants Registry.

Computer Search for Your Soldier

Computer Search for your soldier via computers to the Internet and the National Park Service Civil War Soldiers and Sailors web site. The CWSS Names Index identifies black troops, along with their regiments, regimental histories, and information on 384 major Civil War battles.

The Gladstone Collection

Unrivalled, unique, worth more than \$2,000,000 and priceless for those who want to understand the significance of USCT in the Fight for Freedom in the United States, this is one of the largest collections assembled about black participation in the Civil War. William Gladstone spent more than 20 years locating the well cataloged pieces that have been the subject of several books and major exhibits.

Source: The African American Civil War Memorial Museum, <http://www.afroamcivilwar.org/>

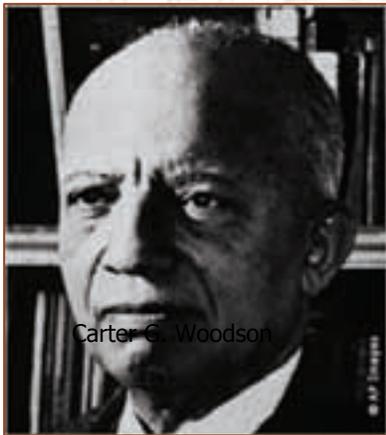


Black History Month Honors Legacy of Struggle and Triumph

By Louise Fenner

Washington — Each February, Black History Month honors the struggles and triumphs of millions of American citizens over the most devastating obstacles — slavery, prejudice, poverty — as well as their contributions to the nation’s cultural and political life.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, African Americans make up about 14 percent of the U.S. population and comprise the second-largest minority group, after Hispanics.



Carter G. Woodson

In 2009, the inauguration of Barack Obama, America’s first African-American president, lent Black History Month a special significance. Obama took the oath of office January 20, the day after Americans honored the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. with a federal holiday and national day of service.

In his inaugural address, Obama acknowledged the historical importance of a moment in which “a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.”

HONORING ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF BLACK AMERICANS

Black History Month was the inspiration of Carter G. Woodson, a noted scholar and historian, who instituted Negro History Week in 1926. He chose the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The celebration was expanded to a month in 1976, the nation’s bicentennial. President Gerald R. Ford urged Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

Woodson, the son of former slaves in Virginia, realized that the struggles and achievements of Americans of African descent were being ignored or misrepresented. He founded the Association for the Study of

African American Life and History (ASALH), which supports historical research, publishes a scholarly journal and sets the theme for Black History Month each year.



John Fleming, ASALH president from 2007 to 2009 and director emeritus of the Cincinnati Museum Center, said Obama's heritage — a black father born in Kenya and a white mother born in the United

States — "continues to reflect the contributions Africans and Europeans have made to American history from the very beginning."

Fleming said he believes Black History Month should focus on positive as well as negative aspects of the black experience. "Certainly, struggle has been an ongoing theme in our history from the very beginning. However, we were not slaves prior to being captured in Africa — and while slavery was part of our experience for 250 years, we have a hundred-and-some years in freedom that we also need to deal with."

He said he has seen "substantial progress on many fronts," but "at the same time there are still major problems that have to be addressed, one being the permanent underclass in urban areas now. We don't seem to be able to break that cycle of poverty. And there are still some major rural pockets of poverty" such as in the Mississippi Delta.

"I'm glad to see the National African American Museum being developed on the Mall, which will tell a much broader story," said Fleming. In 2003, President George W. Bush signed legislation to establish the new museum, which will be located on the National Mall near the Washington Monument. Although the new museum has not yet been built, it launched a photo exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery late in 2007 that is traveling to museums around the country through 2011.

"I think that African-American history gets more attention during February than during any other time of year," Fleming said, "and I think it's an opportunity for us in the field to emphasize that it is something that should be studied throughout the year."

Each year, the U.S. president honors Black History Month, or African-American History Month as it is also called, with a proclamation and a celebration at the White House. States and cities hold their own events around the country, and media feature topics related to black history.

ASALH has its headquarters in Washington, where Woodson lived from 1915 until his death in 1950. His home is designated a national historic site.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)



Presidential Proclamation

National African American History Month

The great abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass once told us, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." Progress in America has not come easily, but has resulted from the collective efforts of generations. For centuries, African American men and women have persevered to enrich our national life and bend the arc of history toward justice. From resolute Revolutionary War soldiers fighting for liberty to the hardworking students of today reaching for horizons their ancestors could only have imagined, African Americans have strengthened our Nation by leading reforms, overcoming obstacles, and breaking down barriers. During National African American History Month, we celebrate the vast contributions of African Americans to our Nation's history and identity.

This year's theme, "African Americans and the Civil War," invites us to reflect on 150 years since the start of the Civil War and on the patriots of a young country who fought for the promises of justice and equality laid out by our forbearers. In the Emancipation Proclamation, President Abraham Lincoln not only extended freedom to those still enslaved within rebellious areas, he also opened the door for African Americans to join the Union effort.

Tens of thousands of African Americans enlisted in the United States Army and Navy, making extraordinary sacrifices to help unite a fractured country and free millions from slavery. These gallant soldiers, like those in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, served with distinction, braving both intolerance and the perils of war to inspire a Nation and expand the domain of freedom. Beyond the battlefield, black men and women also supported the war effort by serving as surgeons, nurses, chaplains, spies, and in other essential roles. These brave Americans gave their energy, their spirit, and sometimes their lives for the noble cause of liberty.

Over the course of the next century, the United States struggled to deliver fundamental civil and human rights to African Americans, but African Americans would not let their dreams be denied. Though Jim Crow segregation slowed the onward march of history and expansion of the American dream, African Americans braved bigotry and violence to organize schools, churches, and neighborhood organizations. Bolstered by strong values of faith and community, black men and women have launched businesses, fueled scientific advances, served our Nation in the Armed Forces, sought public office, taught our children, and created groundbreaking works of art and entertainment. To perfect our Union and provide a better life for their children, tenacious civil rights pioneers have long demanded that America live up to its founding principles, and their efforts continue to inspire us.

Though we inherit the extraordinary progress won by the tears and toil of our predecessors, we know barriers still remain on the road to equal opportunity. Knowledge is our strongest tool against injustice, and it is our responsibility to empower every child in America with a world-class education from cradle to career. We must continue to build on our Nation's foundation of freedom and ensure equal opportunity, economic security, and civil rights for all Americans. After a historic recession has devastated many American families, and particularly African Americans, we must continue to create jobs, support our middle class, and strengthen pathways for families to climb out of poverty.



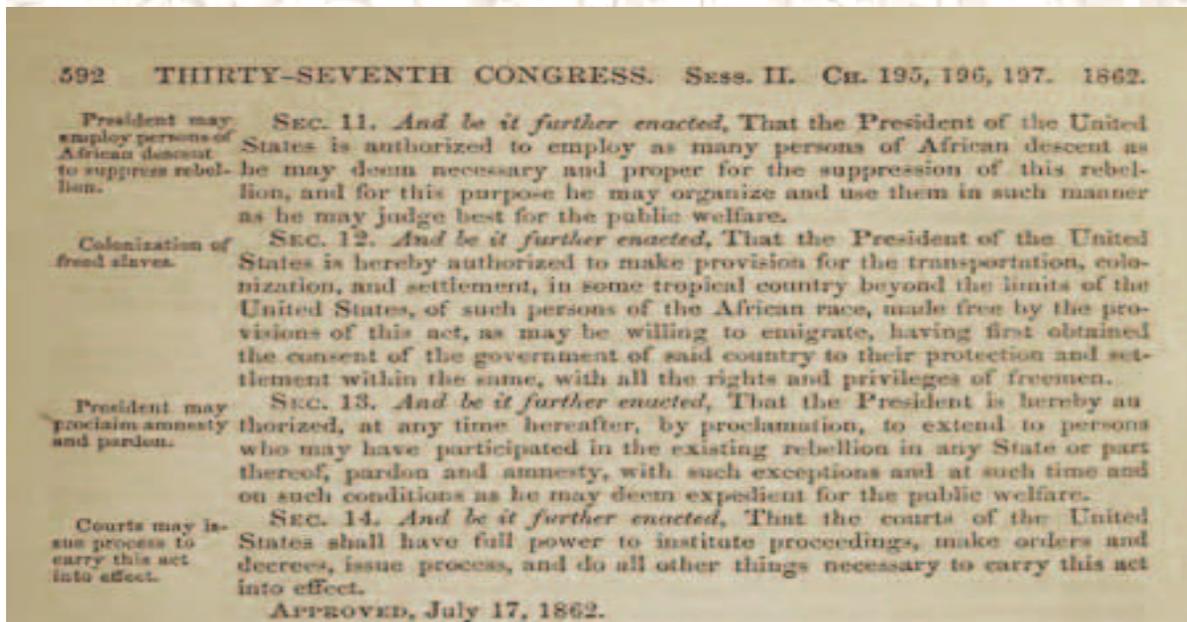
During National African American History Month, we recognize the extraordinary achievements of African Americans and their essential role in shaping the story of America. In honor of their courage and contributions, let us resolve to carry forward together the promise of America for our children.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim February 2011 as National African American History Month. I call upon public officials, educators, librarians, and all the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this first day of February, in the year of our Lord two thousand eleven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fifth.

BARACK OBAMA

The first official authorization to employ African Americans in federal service was the Second Confiscation and Militia Act of July 17, 1862.



Interesting facts about Black Soldiers in the Civil War

**By the end of the Civil War, roughly 179,000 black men (10% of the Union Army) served as soldiers in the U.S. Army and another 19,000 served in the Navy.

**"Nearly 40,000 black soldiers died over the course of the war—30,000 of infection or disease"

**On July 17, 1862, Congress passed the Second Confiscation and Militia Act, freeing slaves who had masters in the Confederate Army.

**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.

**Black soldiers were initially paid \$10 per month from which \$3 was automatically deducted for clothing, resulting in a net pay of \$7. In contrast, white soldiers received \$13 per month from which no clothing allowance was drawn.

**In June 1864 Congress granted equal pay to the U.S. Colored Troops and made the action retroactive. Black soldiers received the same rations and supplies. In addition, they received comparable medical care.

**Black soldiers served in artillery and infantry and performed all non-combat 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.

**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; Nashville, TN" (and the assault on Fort Wagner, SC by the 54th Massachusetts.)

**By war's end, 16 black soldiers had been awarded the Medal of Honor for their valor.

Source: The National Archives and Records Administration.

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