

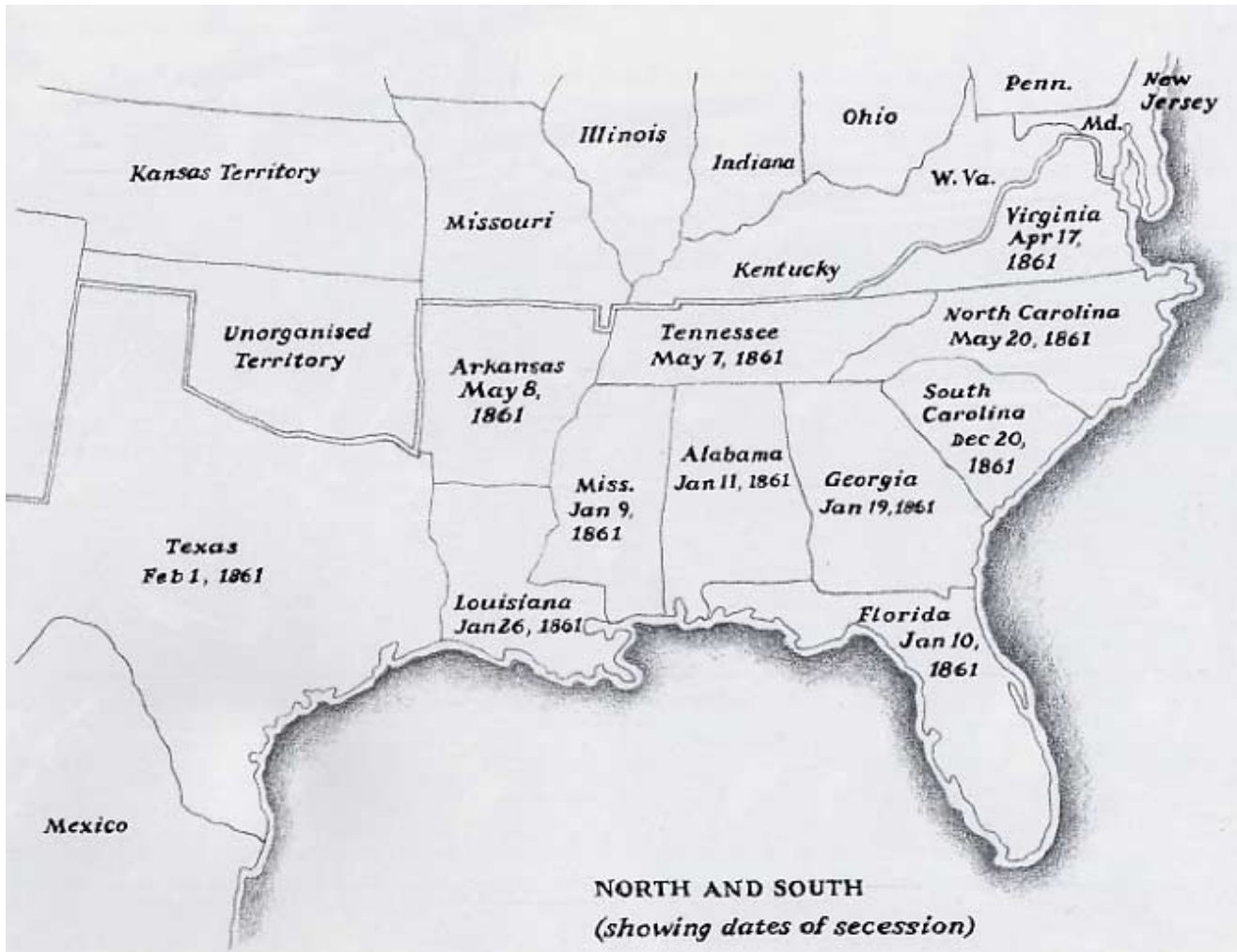


Gettysburg

F I L M
E D U C A T I O N

A S T U D Y G U I D E

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR – BACKGROUND



Many often think that the sole cause of the American Civil War was the issue of Slavery. Whilst this is true to a certain extent, there were also other factors which ought to be considered and also looked at in their historical perspective. In a guide of this length, it is impossible to examine all of these factors in detail. However, you ought to research the following areas which will give you some idea of the complexity of the whole issue.

RESEARCH

Find out as much as you can about the following. In each case see if you can relate the event to the outbreak of the Civil War.

- Industrial developments in the United States prior to 1862
- Economy of the Southern States
- The Fugitive Slave Act, 1850
- The Kansas-Nebraska Act, 1854
- John Brown's Raid, 1859
- The elections of 1860
- The Missouri Compromise, 1820
- The Compromise of 1850

In the end, the tensions between North and South grew to a point where only armed conflict seemed to be the solution. On December 20th 1860, South Carolina seceded

from the Union of states. By February of the following year another six states had also seceded, effectively creating a new country. The War itself was thus founded not only on the issue of slavery, which was the main cause of the divide between the states, but also on the issue of secession and the attempt to reunite the Union. It is against this background, therefore that the events of "GLORY" take place



FILM, HISTORY, MYTH

History is partly about what people in the present think and believe about the past. As such it can never be complete or "true". To recreate the past as accurately as possible, we must ask as many different questions as possible and examine whatever evidence we can find.

Film makers working on a film such as "GLORY" will have gone to great lengths to learn as much as they can about the period in which the film is set and also about the real life people that are portrayed in the film. However, as makers of a film which will be screened for "entertainment" they have a different view of the ways in which they present their version of history compared to an historian who is writing for either academics or students of history.

1. What should a good historian try to do when writing history?
2. What should a good feature film director try to do in his/her film?
3. What problems do you think face a film director when making a historical film?
4. How can film assist a student exploring an historical period?
5. Do you think it is possible to make a "good" historical film which would appeal to audiences and also satisfy historians?

In answering these questions you might have raised certain problems about "filming history".

FILMING HISTORY

Hollywood's past record of dealing with America's history has been chequered. At times Hollywood has created a myth about America's past, particularly with the Western. Many of the films that have been made about the Civil War have often centred on the Confederate experience (one thinks immediately of "Gone With The Wind"). Any representations of blacks has tended to portray them as in slavery or as subservient to the whites. "GLORY" therefore, is a very great departure for Hollywood, concentrating as it does on the black experience of the Civil War. The producer of "GLORY," Freddie Fields, has this to say about the film: "In the form of an entertainment vehicle, we tell a love story about the camaraderie between black and white men who learned and grew together. It is a story of how a black regiment and its white officers challenged history, racism and the fortunes of war. President Abraham Lincoln credited the 54th and other men of colour with turning the tide of war in favour of the Union. It's a very exciting, meaningful and heroic moment in American history." How does Field's presentation of the film link in with any of the answers that you gave about the relationship between film and history? What expectations does it give about the film? In what ways are the comments "historical" and in what ways are they "filmic"?

Imagine that you were the costume and set designer of "GLORY" and had to advise the producer about the American Civil War. What problems do you think you would face in your job? Draw up a brief about the following (you should include illustrations wherever possible).

- a. Civilian dress (both black and white of all classes)
- b. Military uniform
- c. Battlefields and methods of military operation
- d. Military hospitals
- e. Fort Wagner

ATTITUDES

"Standing outside the pale of American humanity, denied citizenship, unable to call the land of my birth my country and longing for the end of the bondage of my people, I was ready for any political upheaval which should bring about a change in the existing condition of thing' Frederick Doug/as, American Anti-Slavery Society

At the outbreak of the civil war, many blacks in the Northern States attempted to join the army yet were rejected. There was however, a deep seated reason for refusing coloured volunteers - the North sought to avoid anything relating to the Negro. Congress had not been in session three weeks, before both houses passed a formal declaration of intention which affirmed that the war was being waged to maintain the supremacy of the Constitution and to preserve the Union, and not to overthrow or interfere with slavery. Thus in the first year of the war, no regiments were raised to fight the Confederates from Northern black volunteers. The war itself was being fought in order to preserve the unity of the United States, to bring the Confederate states 'back into the fold." For black abolitionists, this was not enough. People such as Frederick Douglas saw the Civil War as a way of freeing blacks in the states that had not abolished slavery.

SOURCES

SOURCE A

"That on this day of January, AD. 1863, all persons held as slaves within any state or designated part of a state the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall then be thenceforward, and forever free; and the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any acts they may make for their actual freedom ... And by virtue of the power and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated states and parts of States are, and henceforth shall be, free; ... And I further declare and make known that such persons of suitable condition will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service"

The Emancipation Declaration, January 1st 1863

SOURCE B

"Resolved: That the Emancipation proclamation of the President of the United States is as unwarrantable in military as in civil law; a gigantic usurpation, at once covering the war, professedly commenced by the administration for the vindication of the authority of the constitution, into the crusade for the sudden, unconditional and violent liberation of 3,000,000 negro slaves; a result which would not only be a total subversion of the federal Union but a revolution in the social organisation of the Southern States, the immediate and remote, the present and far reaching consequences of which to both races cannot be contemplated without the most dismal foreboding of horror and dismay. The proclamation invites servile insurrection as an element in this emancipation crusade - a means of warfare, the inhumanity and diabolism of which are without example in civilised warfare, and which we denounce and which the civilised world will denounce as an uneffaceable disgrace to the American people."

Resolution of Illinois State Legislature, January 7th 1863

SOURCE C

"Another thing is, suppose you had kept your freedom without enlisting in this army; your children might have grown up free and been well cultivated so as to be equal in any business, but it would have been always flung in their faces 'Your father never fought for his own freedom'"

Private Thomas Long, First South Carolina Volunteers



Both sources A and B are made by Northern administrations, in one case the President and in the other one of the state legislatures.

1. What do the two sources A and B tell you about attitudes towards slavery in the Northern States?
2. What do sources A and B tell you about the possible reasons why the war was being fought?
3. What does source A say about slaves who were in states which were part of the Union? Were they to be freed?
4. What fears are expressed in source B?
5. In 1863, what chance did the Union actually have of freeing the slaves in the South? Depending on your answer to this question, what would you say was the potential effect of the Emancipation Declaration on the slaves in the rebel states?
6. In what ways does source C, a black soldier's comment on fighting for the North, put sources A and B into context? Which does it support?
7. In the film "GLORY," how are the effects of the Emancipation Declaration shown?

THE 54TH MASSACHUSETTS REGIMENT

"I know not Mr. Commander, in all human history, to any given thousand men in arms, has there been committed a work at once so proud, so precious, so full of hope and glory as the work committed to you"

Governor Andrew



Col. Robert Gould Shaw

Matthew Broderick as Col. Shaw



In February of 1863, the first black fighting unit raised in the North in the Civil War - the legendary 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry - was assembled under the command of Col. Robert Gould Shaw, a 25-year-old white Bostonian and veteran of the battle of Antietam. Whilst there were already regiments of freed slaves in existence, this was the first regiment which contained a substantial number of Northern blacks. Despite the fact that the regiment was being encouraged by both senators and by the Government, attitudes towards it were not all positive.

SOURCES

SOURCE A

"Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters "US"; let him get an eagle on his button and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States".

SOURCE B

"This regiment, like most of this class, have the old flintlock musket, altered to percussion, which have been in use for a longtime. The muskets of this regiment were condemned once, and have been condemned by an inspector a second time".

Lorenzo Thomas on guns given to a black regiment

In sources A and B above, describe the different attitudes towards black regiments firstly by the members of the regiments themselves and then by the military authorities. In what ways does the film "GLORY" reinforce these two attitudes? In the following chart list examples from the film where these attitudes are expressed.

TASKS

1. a) Explore the role of black soldiers in the U.S. Army from 1865 to the present day. What were the roles of the "Black Battalions"?
b) What was the role of blacks in the Vietnam War?

ATTITUDES OF BLACK SOLDIERS

ATTITUDE OF MILITARY AUTHORITIES TOWARDS THE 54TH
MASSACHUSETTS

THE STORY - HISTORY AND FILM

Gov. John A. Andrew swiftly mustered the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment under Col. Robert Gould Shaw ... On July 18th the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth led a gallant if hopeless assault on Battery Wagner, at the entrance of Charleston Harbour. This action, and the use of negro units in the Vicksburg Campaign, did much to win acceptance for both black soldiers and for emancipation, at least as a proper stratagem for war.

'America - A Narrative History' George Brown Tindall

The actions of one regiment of 1,000 men in a war where over 700,000 men died may seem like a minor incident. Tindall, in his history of the U.S.A., devotes five lines to the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth. Yet the film makers of "GLORY" have developed these few lines into a two hour film. 1 Reading Tindall's account of the Fifty-fourth, can you see which aspects the film makers have developed? 2 What do you consider to be the most important aspect of the formation of the Fifty-fourth? The historian therefore gives us an idea of the importance of the formation of black regiments within the overall history of both the Civil War and also the history of the U.S.A. Yet the film maker must interest an audience.

As the quotation earlier from Freddie Fields says, however, a film is "popular entertainment." Something as broad as "importance in U.S. history" might not sound very entertaining. So, how does a film maker take an important event and entertain an audience at the same time? If history can deal in events then film tends to deal with individuals. We trace a story through a number of characters, the way that they change, their attitudes and their actions. Look at the five characters in the following chart. For each, try to describe their character, how they change, what their attitudes are to the war and to the other characters. When you have completed this, try to think how each of these characters gives us a perspective on the events of the time.

INITIAL PRESENTATION

ATTITUDE TO WAR

CHANGE IN FILM



THEMES

If the film is about the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts regiment, then, as you have discovered above the story of the regiment is told through the lives of individuals, and the events in which they take part. Also, the film does not simply show things happening, it deals with certain themes. One could say that possibly the most important theme of the film is the ways in which the black soldiers gain respect for themselves as human beings and prove to the whites that they are as capable of doing a job as they are. What other ideas are dealt with in the film?

In the following chart, try to write down a list of the themes of the film and then think of incidents from the film which illustrate these themes. You might wish to refer back to Freddie Fields' comments about the film that were made earlier.

THEMES	INCIDENTS FROM THE FILM

WHAT ABOUT US? WHAT DO WE GET?

When Shaw offers Trip the post of flag bearer, Trip rejects the offer, despite the honour that such a post would bring. Trip talks to Shaw about the situation as he sees it with regard to what will happen after the war is over. How much can you remember of this conversation?

From the comments made by each of the characters, whose view of the future do you think bears most resemblance to the situation in America today of both Blacks and Whites? Trip or Shaw?



NORTH AND SOUTH

SOURCES

SOURCE A

"The very foundation of slavery would be fatally wounded if we were insane enough to treat black men as the equal of white, and insurgent slaves as equivalent to our brave white soldiers".

Virginia daily paper (Confederate)

SOURCE B

"I know as fully as one can know the opinions of others, that some of the commanders of our armies in the field, who have given us our most important successes, believe that the emancipation policy and the use of coloured troops constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion, and that at least one of these important successes could not have been achieved when it was but for the aid of black soldiers. Among the commanders holding these views are some who never had any affinity with what is called Abolitionism, or with Republican party politics, but who hold them purely as military opinions".

Abraham Lincoln August 1863

The valor of the 54th Regiment undermined any remaining Northern opposition to arming blacks by proving their abilities as fighting men and helped throw open the gates of the Union Army to more than 180,000 blacks. By risking their own lives in the war, these soldiers added credence to the calls for emancipation and citizenship for all black Americans. The Confederates, however, refused to arm any of their slaves or any of the free Blacks in the South. Look at the two sources above. In what ways do they typify attitudes of both North and South towards Black people?

THE ENDING

"I knew Colonel Shaw before the war, and then esteemed him. Had he been in command of white troops, I should have given him an honourable burial; as it is, I shall bury him in the common trench with the negroes that fell with him".

Johnson Hagood, commander Confederate troops, Fort Wagner.

The final image of the film is the burial of the dead troops after the assault on Battery Wagner... In what ways does this image work? What does it tell us about Shaw? What impression does it make on an audience? Why do you think that the director chose to end the film with this image?



FURTHER WORK

- The film "GLORY" opens with the battle of Antietam (1862). In what ways does this opening sequence set the scene for the rest of the film? What information are we given about Shaw and also about his attitudes to war?
- How does Trip's comment "What's in it for us?" relate to the current position of Blacks in America?
- Research -after the Civil War, what improvements were made to the lot of Black people in America?
- Discuss the choice of the title "GLORY."

FACT SHEET

THE CIVIL WAR, THE BLACK SOLDIER AND THE 54TH REGIMENT

I THE CIVIL WAR

- Approximately 700,000 Americans died in the Civil War, representing more than half of the 1.2 million who died in war throughout this country's history.
- During the 16 years of the Vietnam War, approximately 50,000 Americans died. At the Battle of Antietam -one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War approximately 40,000 Americans fell in just five hours of combat.
- The Civil War began at 4:30 a.m. on April 12th, 1861, as a mortar was fired from Charleston by the Confederates at Union-held Fort Sumter.
- The Civil War ended on April 9th, 1865, at Appomattox Court House when Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his sword and agreed to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's terms for unconditional surrender.

II THE BLACK SOLDIER - A CALL TO ARMS

- On December 23rd, 1862, Confederate President Jefferson Davis proclaimed that any Negro taken in arms against the Confederacy would immediately be returned to a state of slavery and any Negro taken in Federal uniform would be summarily put to death. On May 1, 1863, the Confederate Congress declared that any white officer taken in command of Negro troops would be deemed as inciting servile insurrection and would likewise be put to death.
- In February of 1863, the first black fighting unit raised in the North in the Civil War -the legendary 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry-was assembled under the command of Col. Robert Gould Shaw, a 25-year-old white Bostonian and veteran of the battle of Antietam.
- On July 18, 1863, the 54th attacked Fort Wagner on Morris Island, South Carolina, in the Union's quest for the city of Charleston. At day's end, one half of the 1,000-man regiment were taken prisoner, wounded, missing in action, dead or dying.
- The valor of the 54th Regiment undermined any remaining Northern opposition to arming blacks by proving their abilities as fighting men and helped throw open the gates of the Union Army to more than 180,000 blacks. By risking their own lives in the war, these soldiers added credence to the calls for emancipation and citizenship for all black Americans.
- The large addition of manpower represented by the black soldiers and the new spirit that they infused into the war-weary North gave the Union an advantage which President Abraham Lincoln, among others, credited as being an essential part in the final victory.

- Black soldiers proved so successful that a Southern general suggested late in the war that the Confederacy also put blacks in uniform. Not surprisingly, the President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, declined. Ironically, on March 13th, 1865, the Confederate Congress would authorise the enrolment of slaves in the army. The authorisation came too late - none ever fought.

III THE BLACK SOLDIER IN THE CIVIL WAR

- Official records show that a total of 186,107 men served in black regiments during the Civil War, making up nearly 10% of the Union Army.
- These men fought in 449 battles.
- The black Union soldiers were recruited from eight Northern states, seven Confederate states, the District of Columbia and even Canada.
- In addition to the 180,000 fighting black men, nearly 200,000 blacks also served the Union as labourers, teamsters, cooks, carpenters, nurses, scouts, etc.
- 37,300 blacks lost their lives while serving in the Union Army; countless others were maimed or wounded.
- 17 black Union soldiers and four black sailors were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The first recipient was a member of the 54th, Sgt. John Carney, for his heroic acts at Fort Wagner.

IV THE 54TH REGIMENT OF MASSACHUSETTS - A CHRONOLOGY

- On September 22nd, 1862, President Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation. It served notice to the South that as of January 1st 1863, all slaves within any state or district in rebellion against the United States "shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free",
- One month after the Proclamation became law, and with the President's sanction, the 54th Regiment was founded. However, there was great difficulty in filling the ranks; men had to be brought in covertly from many states, due to the lack of recruitable local blacks and to widespread racist sentiments.
- By May 1863, Col. Shaw and the 1,000 members of the 54th - which included two sons of famed black abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the brother of writer Henry James and philosopher William James - were trained and ready to board their boat bound for Charleston Harbour.
- On June 10th, 1863, under the command of Col. James Montgomery, Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts were ordered to participate in the sacking and burning of Darien, Georgia.
- Assigned to Maj. Gen. David Hunter, a proponent of black fighting units and commander of the Department of the South, the 54th experienced its first taste of combat on July 16th, 1863, at James Island, South Carolina. There, they proved their battle worthiness by withstanding an attack and then saving the 10th Connecticut, a white regiment, from defeat and certain massacre.

- President Lincoln decided that an important objective of the North was to take the city where the war began - Charleston. Troops were amassed to support that effort.
- Col. Shaw volunteered the 54th for the honour of leading the charge against Fort Wagner, a key fortification guarding the entrance to Charleston Harbour. Previously more than 50 Union warships had bombarded the fort for days expecting to weaken the Confederate forces. Protected in their bunkers, fewer than 100 of the 1,700 rebel troops were killed. On July 18th, 1863, the 54th Regiment, now at 600, launched its attack on the position and suffered 44% casualties, including Col. Shaw, who died on the ramparts of the fort. The remainder of the 54th Regiment regrouped and later went on to fight in many other battles.

V THEIR LEGACY CONTINUES TODAY

- On the Boston Commons there stands a bronze, marble and granite monument honouring both black and white men together who served the Union with Col. Robert Shaw. The monument was unveiled on Memorial Day, May 31st 1897, some 13 years after its commission was awarded to sculptor Augustus SaintGaudens.
- On Memorial Day, May 29th, 1989, the U.S. Veterans Affairs Office honoured 19 black Union soldiers, classified as missing in action since 1863, with a special reinternment ceremony in Beaufort, South Carolina. The remains of these soldiers - which included members of the 54th and its fellow black regiment, the 55th - were discovered at a recent construction site on an island in Charleston Harbour. Anthropologists from the University of South Carolina documented the remains.
- The 1989 ceremony called attention to the critical contribution of black soldiers to the Union effort- a contribution that is only beginning to be widely recognised.
- The motion picture "GLORY" similarly honours the 54th Regiment its participation in one of the most meaningful events in American history, and, indeed, all black men who joined the Union Civil War Effort.