

# ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

## African American Soldiers

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### Resources

**If you can read only one book**

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Dobak, William A.	<i>Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862-1867</i> . New York: Skyhorse, 2013.

### Books

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Berlin, Ira, Joseph P. Reidy & Leslie S. Rowland	<i>The Black Military Experience</i> , 2d ser., Vol. 1 of <i>Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867</i> . New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
Cornish, Dudley Taylor	<i>The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army 1861-1865</i> . New York: Longmans, 1956.
Glatthaar, Joseph	<i>Forged in Battle, the Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers</i> . New York: Meridian Books, 1991.
McPherson, James M.	<i>The Negro's Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for the Union</i> . New York: Pantheon, 1965.
Quarles, Benjamin	<i>The Negro in the Civil War</i> . Boston: Little Brown, 1953.
Williams, George Washington.	<i>A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion 1861-1865</i> . New York: Harper & Brothers, 1886.
Wilson, Joseph T.	<i>The Black Phalanx: African-American Soldiers in the War of Independence, the</i>

	<i>War of 1812 and the Civil War</i> . Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing, 1888.
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## Organizations

## Web Resources

URL	Name and description
<a href="http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm">http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm</a>	The National Park Service Soldiers and Sailors System provides a comprehensive database of all the United State Colored Troops and the states' all black regiments, includes brief regimental histories on each unit and descriptions of all major and minor battles.
<a href="http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war/article.html">http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war/article.html</a>	The National Archives: Teaching with Documents: The Fight for Equal Rights: Black Soldiers in the Civil War discusses the compiled military service records of the men who served with the United States Colored Troops (USCT) during the Civil War including the officers who were not African American. This major collection of records rests in the stacks of the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA).
<a href="http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/usct/usct-united-states-colored.html">http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/usct/usct-united-states-colored.html</a>	The Civil War Trust has several excellent articles on the United States Colored Troops (USCT).

## Other Sources

## Scholars

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John David Smith	<a href="mailto:jdsmith4@uncc.edu">jdsmith4@uncc.edu</a>

## Topic Précis

African American soldiers fighting in the Civil War mattered because their service advanced a broader and unstated strategic necessity—white Northerners accepting emancipation as a means of winning the war, if not as an end in and of itself. Voluntary recruitment of black soldiers began in 1863, just as the North began drafting white soldiers. While Northern whites welcomed a new source of soldiers, many doubted black soldiers' willingness to fight. White northerners shared white Southerners racial views. Ultimately, the need for more soldiers fighting for the Union and fewer slaves working for the Confederacy convinced many Northerners to accept African Americans in the Union Army and Northerners who rejected emancipation as a war aim accepted it as a military measure to save the Union. Some 180,000 African Americans served in the Union army and approximately 18,000 served in the Union Navy. Racial prejudice shaped the experience of black soldiers in state and federal units. Since most Americans believed that African Americans were inferior, they served in separate units commanded by white officers and only a handful of black soldiers received commissions. To begin with African American soldiers earned less than their white counterparts; the government equalized pay only after black soldiers and their white officers protested this injustice. Finally, the same racial attitudes that demanded that these soldiers prove their fitness for freedom made it more difficult; many United States Colored Troops (USCT) regiments served in support roles, either guarding supply lines or performing manual labor because white officials questioned their courage and fighting mettle. Confederates threatened to hang their white officers, enslave black soldiers, and refused to treat captured African American as POWs. Confederate massacres of black soldiers occurred at Fort Pillow and at the Battle of Poison Spring in Arkansas. Black soldiers retaliated for this massacre at Jenkins Ferry, Arkansas, and gave no quarter to Confederate soldiers. While fighting well was not as important as dying well, in their first two major battles, Port Hudson and Fort Wagner, African Americans proved that they could do both. George Washington Williams, a pioneering African American historian and Civil War veteran, stated "From a purely military standpoint the assault upon Fort Wagner was a failure, but it furnished the severest test of Negro valor and soldiership." During the final campaigns around Petersburg and Richmond many USCT regiments were heavily engaged and a number of African American soldiers were awarded the newly-created Medal of Honor for their heroism. USCT regiments helped trap Lee's army near Appomattox. Black soldiers also participated in one of the last major actions out west playing a critical role in the destruction of John Bell Hood's Confederate Army of Tennessee at Nashville. After the war, four black regiments served in the regular army and while black soldiers did not march in the Grand Review of the Army in Washington D.C. celebrating Union victory at the end of the war, those who were disabled received the same pensions as white veterans. Black veterans also joined veteran's organizations including the Grand Army of the Republic in all black or integrated posts. Sadly, the deeds of black soldiers are not as well known today as they were immediately after the war. Reminding Americans about black soldiers' Civil War service should be one of the most important priorities of the sesquicentennial.

