

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Decorations Medals and Recognitions of Valor

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Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Broadwater, Robert P.	<i>Civil War Medal of Honor Recipients</i> . Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year. “Title,” in <i>Journal</i> ##, no. # (Date): #.
Bishop, Randy	<i>African-American Civil War Medals of Honor</i> . College Park, GA: Author’s Tranquility Press, 2021
Bonds, Russell S.	<i>Stealing the General: The Great Locomotive Chase and the First Medal of Honor</i> . Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2006.
Cox, Shae Smith	<i>The Fabric of Civil War Society: Uniforms, Badges, and Flags, 1859-1939</i> . Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2024.
Kaminski, Theresa	<i>Dr. Mary Walker’s Civil War: One Woman’s Journey to the Medal of Honor and the Fight for Women’s Rights</i> : Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2020.

Neal, Jr., Charles M.	<i>Valor Across the Lone Star: The Congressional Medal of Honor in Frontier Texas.</i> Texas State Historical Association, 2003.
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Organizations

Organization Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
Congressional Medal of Honor Society	<p>The Congressional Medal of Honor Society is dedicated to preserving the legacy of the Medal of Honor, inspiring America to live the values the Medal represents, and supporting Recipients of the Medal as they connect with communities across America.</p> <p>Their website is: https://www.cmohs.org/</p>

Web Resources

URL	Name and description
https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-medals.htm#:~:text=As%20the%20only%20military%20award,were%20accorded%20this%20military%20decoration	National Parks Service List of Recipients of the Medal of Honor.
https://www.cmohs.org/news-events/history/the-great-locomotive-chase-the-first-awarded-medal-of-honor/	<p>The Great Locomotive Chase: The First Awarded Medals of Honor.</p> <p>This page at the CMOH Society recounts the story of Andrew’s Raiders, the first recipients of the Medal of Honor.</p>
https://oswegohistorical.org/collection/mary-walker/	The Oswego County Historical Society: Dr. Mary Edwards Walker Collection
https://www.cem.va.gov/history/Medal-of-Honor-history.asp#:~:text=recognition%20of%20courage.-.Civil%20War,Lincoln%20authorized%202%2C000%20Army%20medals	National Cemetery Administration: Medal of Honor History
https://www.battlefields.org/learn/topics/medal-honor	American Battlefield Trust: Medal of Honor

Other Sources

Scholars

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Topic Précis

The Medal of Honor, created during the Civil War, symbolizes the highest military valor in the United States. Initially established to recognize extraordinary actions during the Civil War, the Medal of Honor has undergone significant changes in its design, eligibility, and the standards for awarding it, reflecting broader societal values and historical contexts. General George Washington first introduced the concept of military honors with the Badge of Military Merit in 1782, a precursor to the Medal of Honor, but it fell into disuse after the Revolution. The idea of a medal for valor resurfaced during the Civil War when Senator James W. Grimes proposed a Navy medal of valor, which was approved by President Abraham Lincoln in 1861. A similar resolution for the Army followed in 1862. Initially, the Medal of Honor was a temporary wartime decoration, but it became a permanent military award in 1863.

The original Medal of Honor had a bronze five-point star with the Roman goddess Minerva repelling secession, symbolizing the Union's cause. Soldiers and sailors could be recommended for the medal by their commanding officers, and in some cases, the recognition included a monetary reward. The first medals were awarded in 1863 to six men involved in a daring raid in Georgia. However, the standards for awarding the Medal of Honor during the Civil War were not as stringent as they are today. The Confederate Southern Cross of Honor was instituted in 1898 to recognize Confederate valor as Confederate veterans were not eligible for the Medal of Honor.

The post-Civil War period saw the rise of veterans' organizations, such as the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) as well as their female equivalents the Woman's Relief Corps (WRC) and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), which created their own commemorative badges and symbols. These badges, like the Medal of Honor and the Southern Cross of Honor, were symbols of service and sacrifice, but they also served to assert the legitimacy and honor of the organizations and their members. The GAR badge, adopted in 1869, was notably similar to the Medal of Honor, which led to concerns about the distinction between the two. In response to these concerns, a redesign of the Medal of Honor was initiated in 1904. The new design retained

some elements of the original but featured a blue ribbon with 13 stars, symbolizing the Union, and a wreath encircling the star. This redesign was intended to differentiate the Medal of Honor from other badges and to protect its integrity as a symbol of the nation's highest military honor. The late 19th and early 20th centuries also saw a surge in Medal of Honor applications from Civil War veterans, many of whom self-nominated or were nominated by others long after their actions. This led to a review in 1916 by a Board of Generals, which removed 911 names from the Medal of Honor Roll, including those of the 27th Maine Infantry, who had been awarded the medal for extending their service at Gettysburg, and Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, a contract surgeon who was the only woman to receive the Medal of Honor during the Civil War. The board concluded that many of these awards did not meet the revised standards for valor. However, Dr. Walker's medal was later reinstated in the late 20th century.

The government presented 1,523 Medals of Honor for those that served during the Civil War. This group set a standard for valor and service in the face of danger laying the foundation for how to commemorate sacrifice. From the Medal of Honor to the GAR, WRC, UCV, and UDC membership badges, ribbons, and commemorative tokens that celebrate the dedication of these groups to their beliefs and causes, we learn why these physical items speak louder than words and the influence that they carry in society to this day.
