



## A New Birth of Freedom: Black Soldiers in the Union Army

## LESSON 3

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### Recruitment of black soldiers begins with the Emancipation Proclamation

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. In addition to declaring immediate freedom for more than three million African American slaves, the Proclamation boldly called for the enlistment of black soldiers in the Union army. Earlier in the war, several critics, including Frederick Douglass, had tirelessly urged Lincoln to recruit black soldiers. But the president had resisted, fearing whites would not serve alongside blacks. The efforts of Douglass and his contemporaries and the North's need for more troops finally persuaded Lincoln to change his mind. In the final years of the war, about 200,000 African Americans—including many former slaves—fought for the North.

#### Frederick Douglass, brief biographical sketch

After escaping slavery, Frederick Douglass settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1838. Once in the North, he advocated for the abolition of slavery, allowing black men to fight for the Union, and extending voting rights to African Americans. Despite concerns of endangering his freedom, he published his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written By Himself*, in 1845 and produced many abolitionist papers, including the *North Star* and *Douglass' Monthly*. He was a famous orator and traveled as far as Great Britain and Ireland to speak about his life and slavery. Eventually, British supporters of his movement purchased his freedom from his former owner and Douglass officially became free.

### FEATURED RESOURCES

- *Come and Join Us Brothers* recruitment poster, 1863
- Frederick Douglass's speeches, selected excerpts, 1863
- Battery A of the 2nd U.S. Colored Artillery, photograph, 1863
- Analysis worksheet

Copies of these materials are provided at the end of the lesson. All primary sources are from the Chicago History Museum collection. The selected excerpts of Frederick Douglass's work were compiled by the Museum's education staff.

### ILLINOIS STATE LEARNING STANDARDS

#### English Language Arts

Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

#### Social Science

Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

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## PRIMARY SOURCES: DESCRIPTIONS AND SUGGESTED ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

Use the worksheet (provided at the end of the lesson) to introduce your students to the primary sources. The questions below are provided for a more in-depth analysis.

### ● ***Come and Join Us Brothers*, recruitment poster, 1863**

As illustrated by this poster, black soldiers served under white officers to ease northern fears. A large majority of black Union soldiers were former slaves. Although not considered U.S. citizens, these men were willing to fight for their freedom and the nation's survival. Toward the end of the war, Lincoln was persuaded that black veterans should be granted equal citizenship rights.

- What do you notice about this poster?
- How does this poster try to convince black men to join the Union army?
- Is this an effective recruiting tool? Why or why not?

### ● **Frederick Douglass's speeches, selected excerpts, 1863**

Douglass strongly advocated for blacks to serve as soldiers in the Union army. He felt that military service was an important step to securing the rights of citizenship. To encourage enlistment, he and his sons worked as recruiters, writing and speaking on the topic. This selection of excerpts illustrates his arguments for blacks to enlist. More of Douglass's work is available at [www.teachingamericanhistory.org](http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org).

- What arguments does Douglass make for black enlistment?
- Are his arguments convincing? Why or why not?
- Why might some African American men decide against enlisting?

### ● **Battery A of the 2nd U.S. Colored Artillery, photograph, 1863**

At first, black soldiers were typically assigned fatigue duty or labor of a nonmilitary kind, such as cleaning. But, as the war continued, they assumed greater responsibility. For example, in 1864, Battery A of the 2nd U.S. Colored Artillery fought at the Battle of Nashville, a decisive Union victory in which artillery forces played a major role.

- What words or phrases would you use to describe this scene?
- Do you think this photograph is posed? Why or why not? Does it matter?
- What information does the photograph provide about the experience of black soldiers?

### ● **Analysis questions for this collection**

- Of these three resources, which is most persuasive? Why?
- The recruitment poster and Douglass's writings represent idealistic views of serving in the Union army. How did these portrayals compare to the reality of fighting in the Civil War for black soldiers? To help answer this question, share these statistics with students:
  - > Nearly 200,000 black soldiers served in the Union army and navy and approximately 40,000 died during the war. About 7,000 were killed in battle or as a result of wounds, while the rest died from disease. Disease accounted for about 80 percent of all black deaths, compared to about 60 percent of the deaths of white soldiers.
  - > Black soldiers comprised 9 to 12 percent of the Union army.
  - > At first, black soldiers received lower pay than their white counterparts. They were paid \$10 per month and had a one-time \$3 deduction for the cost of their uniform. White soldiers were paid \$13 per month and did not have to pay for their uniforms. In June 1864, Congress granted equal pay for black soldiers; this pay increase was retroactive.
  - > At first, black soldiers were most often assigned fatigue duty or non-military types of work such as cleaning. But, as the war continued, they assumed greater responsibility and served in combat.

Sources: *A Compendium of the War of Rebellion*, Vol. 1 by Frederick H. Dyer and *The Negro in the Civil War* by Benjamin Quarles.

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## SUGGESTED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Choose the instructional strategy that works best for your classroom and feel free to adapt the activity to meet the needs of your students. Please duplicate these materials to share with other educators.

### **Option 1: Peer to peer**

Divide the class into thirds. Distribute one primary source to each group. Instruct the groups to analyze their assigned source, using the suggested analysis questions (see page 2) or analysis worksheet. Afterward, jigsaw the students to form groups of three. Ask each student to teach the others about his/her source.

### **Option 2: All together**

Display Douglass's excerpts or distribute the resource as a handout. As a class, summarize the key ideas, symbols, and messages of his writing. Record responses on the board or chart paper. Repeat for the recruiting poster. Look at the two lists and circle similarities. Finally, study the photograph. How does it compare to the first two sources? Which source do students believe is the most realistic? Why?

### **Option 3: As individuals**

Distribute copies of the three resources to students. Discuss the sources as a class, summarizing key ideas and information. Then, using Frederick Douglass's work as an example, students should write a persuasive essay encouraging black soldiers to enlist in the Union army. Additionally, students can refine their writing and deliver it as oral presentations in class.

## JOURNAL PROMPTS

**Option 1:** How have the accomplishments of black soldiers who fought in the Civil War shaped our lives today?

**Option 2:** If you were an African American male living during the Civil War, would you join the Union Army? Why or why not?

## LISTENING TO HISTORY

### **A New Birth of Freedom history soundscape**

Available at <http://www.chicagohistory.org/lincolnjuarezaudio>

This short audio file sets the scene of African Americans enlisting in the Union Army. You may play the soundscape at the start of the lesson to set the mood or prior to journal writing to inspire students' entries.

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## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

### **History Lab: *Fighting for Freedom***

Available at [www.chicagohistory.org/education/resources/history-lab](http://www.chicagohistory.org/education/resources/history-lab)

Using primary source materials, discover the contributions of African American soldiers to the Union victory. Learn how U.S. government policy evolved regarding African American service and examine issues of propaganda and unequal treatment.

# COME AND JOIN US BROTHERS.



PUBLISHED BY THE SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE FOR RECRUITING COLORED REGIMENTS

1210 CHESTNUT ST. PHILADELPHIA.

P. S. DUNN & SONS, Lith. Cor. 2<sup>d</sup> & Market St. Phila.

*Come and Join Us Brothers* recruitment poster, 1863

# Frederick Douglass's speeches, selected excerpts, 1863



## Men of Color, To Arms!

Published in *Douglass' Monthly*, March 21, 1863

- "I have not thought lightly of the words I am now addressing you. The counsel I give comes of close observation of the great struggle now in progress, and of the deep conviction that this is your hour and mine. In good earnest then, and after the best deliberation, I now for the first time during this war feel at liberty to call and counsel you to arms."
- "From East to West, from North to South, the sky is written all over, "Now or never." Liberty won by white men would lose half its luster. "Who would be free themselves must strike the blow." "Better even die free, than to live slaves." This is the sentiment of every brave colored man amongst us. There are weak and cowardly men in all nations. We have them amongst us."

## Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?

Published in *Douglass' Monthly*, April 1863

In this article, Douglass gave nine reasons to enlist in the Union army. The excerpt begins with number nine.

- "Ninth. You should enlist because the war for the Union, whether men so call it or not, is a war for Emancipation."
- "When time's ample curtain shall fall upon our national tragedy, and our hillsides and valleys shall neither redden with the blood nor whiten with the bones of kinsmen and countrymen who have fallen in the sanguinary and wicked strife; when grim visaged war has smoothed his wrinkled front and our country shall have regained its normal condition as a leader of nations in the occupation and blessings of peace—and history shall record the names of heroes and martyrs—who bravely answered the call of patriotism and Liberty—against traitors, thieves and assassins—let it not be said that in the long list of glory, composed of men of all nations—there appears the name of no colored man."

## "Should the Negro Enlist in the Union Army?"

Address at a Meeting for the Promotion of Colored Enlistments, July 6, 1863

Published in *Douglass' Monthly*, August 1863

- "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 or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States."



Battery A, 2nd U.S. Colored Artillery (light) Department of the Cumberland  
To. Genl M.C. Meigs, General U.S.A. — Compliments 7 P. Meigs U.S.A.

Battery A of the 2nd U.S. Colored Artillery, photograph, 1863

