

**Subject: African American History**

**Essential Question: How would you characterize the response of African Americans to the outbreak of the Civil War? What actions did they take and what were the justifications for these actions?**

**Topic: The Civil War and African Americans**

What will you be learning:

- The ways that African Americans emancipated themselves during the Civil War
- Abraham Lincoln's road to emancipation
- The ways in which Black Americans contributed to the Civil War
- The experience of Black Soldiers in the Civil War

Key terms: contraband, emancipation, proclamation, compensated, confiscate, insurrection, motive

Background and Context: With the onset of the Civil War, contrary to Abraham Lincoln's statements, Black Americans always understood that the fate of American slavery was tied to the outcome of the war. Black Americans mobilized quickly and effectively to emancipate themselves, offer their services in the Union Army, serve as spies and so much more. This unit focuses on the roles that African Americans played in the Civil War.

These two weeks will consist of a deep study of African American responses to the Civil War, you will begin by going through the two powerpoints: [Lincoln's Road to Emancipation PowerPoint](#) and [Blacks and The Civil War PowerPoint](#) and taking notes using the linked [Virtual Cornell Notes](#). After going through the powerpoints, paying special attention to the content that relates to the Focus Question, you will analyze images of African Americans from the Civil War and take note on what you learned about the African American response to the Civil War based on those images. Lastly, you will engage in a document based activity in which you will read various perspectives on how African Americans responded to the Civil War. You will answer the Focus Question by writing an essay in which you cite the sources that you've been provided to justify your answer.

**\*When you are asked to characterize something, you are being asked to determine the best adjective(s) to describe that person or thing.**

Questions for you to consider:

- What motivated African Americans to fight in the Civil War
- What were the limits of the Emancipation Proclamation
- What were White Americans' and White politicians' concerns regarding the Black response to the Civil War?

Online Resources for Students:

[Lincoln's Road to Emancipation PowerPoint](#)  
[Blacks and The Civil War PowerPoint](#)  
[Harriet Jacobs: Life Among the Contraband](#)  
[Virtual Cornell Notes](#)



Photo, "Fugitive African Americans Fording the Rappahannock River" in Virginia, August 1862



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

*This photograph, taken by Timothy H. O'Sullivan, shows African Americans escaping to freedom behind Union lines. It was taken during the second battle of Bull Run in 1862.*

In the space below, analyze the image from the Civil War, be sure to consider what this image tells you about the African American response to the outbreak of the Civil War

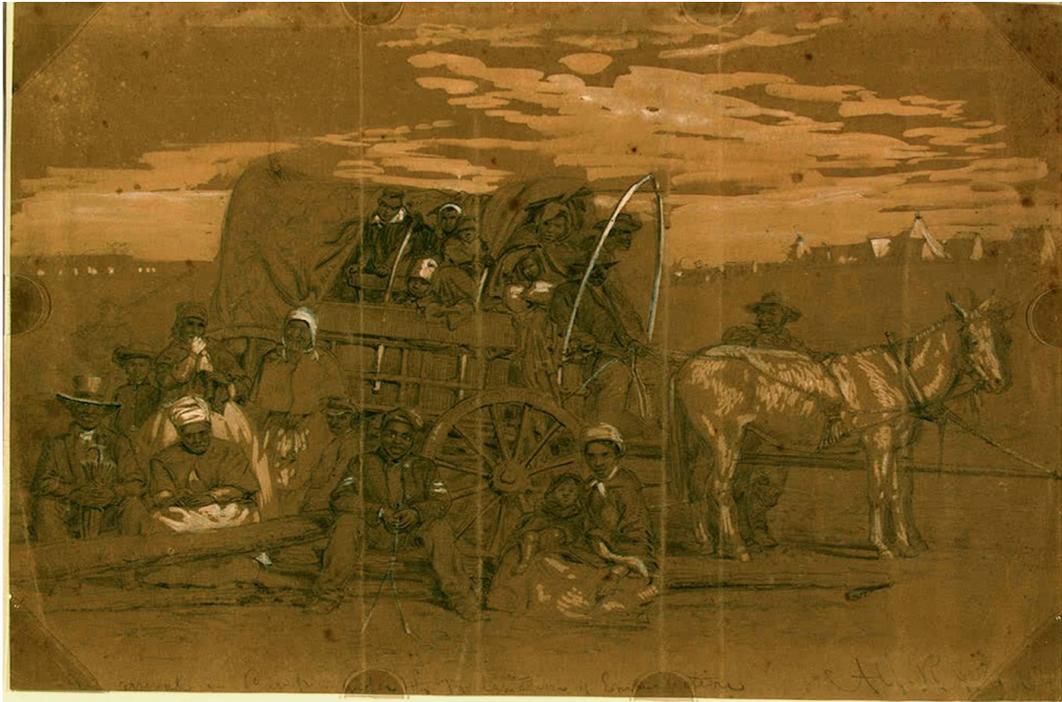
Observe: What stands out to you in the image? What does the caption tell you about the image?

Question: What questions do you have about the image?

Reflect: What does this image tell you about the African American response to the Civil War, how would you characterize this response?



**Drawing of “Contrabands Coming into Camp” January 1863**



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

*Alfred R. Waud took the photograph and then created the drawing for Harper’s Weekly, January 31, 1863. He wrote: “There is something very touching in seeing these poor people coming into camp—giving up all the little ties that cluster about home, such as it is in slavery, and trustfully throwing themselves on the mercy of the Yankees, in the hope of getting permission to own themselves and keep their children from the auction block.”*

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Reflect: What does this image tell you about the African American response to the Civil War, how would you characterize this response?

Illustration, "Colored troops, under General Wild, liberating slaves in Camden County, North Carolina," *Harper's Weekly*, January 23, 1864



COLORED TROOPS, UNDER GENERAL WILD, LIBERATING SLAVES IN NORTH CAROLINA.—[See Page 54.]

Courtesy of University of North Carolina, North Carolina Collection

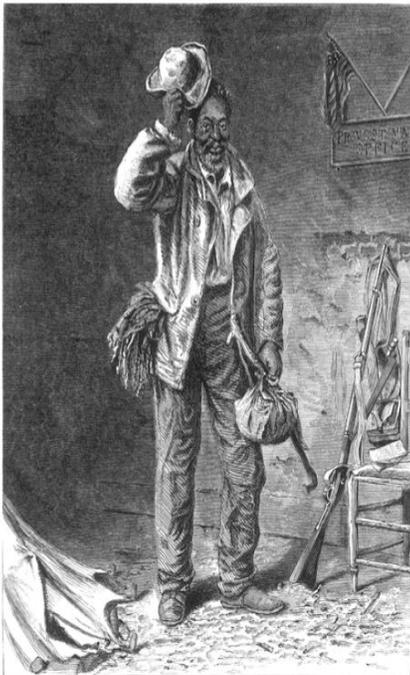
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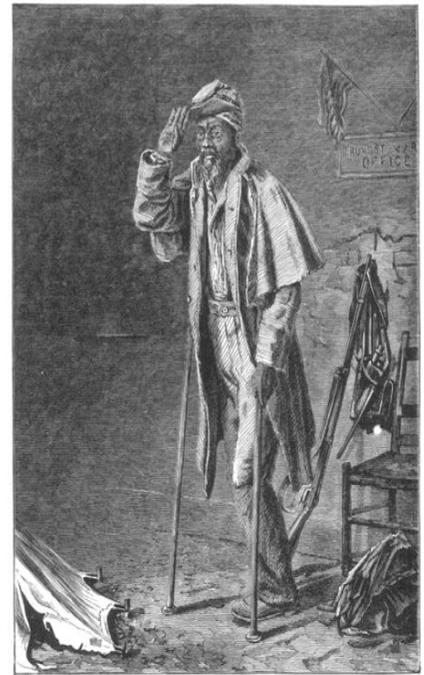
Series of three photos entitled: "Contraband, Recruit, Veteran," *Harper's Weekly*, May 4, 1867



THE CONTRABAND.—(PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROCKWOOD, 519 BROADWAY, FROM F. W. WOOD'S PICTURE.)



THE RECRUIT.—(PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROCKWOOD, 519 BROADWAY, FROM F. W. WOOD'S PICTURE.)



THE VETERAN.—(PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROCKWOOD, 519 BROADWAY, FROM F. W. WOOD'S PICTURE.)

Courtesy of The Granger Collection

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## African American Civil War Documents

Define the underlined terms with each document, and take notes from the document that relates to the focus question

### Document 1: Excerpt from a letter to the editor, *The Weekly Anglo-African*, October 19, 1861

Source: Reprinted in McPherson, James. *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

Purpose for Reading/Focus Question: **How would you characterize the response of African Americans to the outbreak of the Civil War? What actions did they take and what were the justifications for these actions?**

Highlight sections of the reading that...

- stand out to you
- **relate to the Purpose for reading/Focus Question.**
- that evoke questions/thoughts/concerns in you.

In the space below...

- identify and define new vocabulary
- write summaries of the reading
- write your reactions to the reading
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Troy, Oct. 7, 1861

We have nothing to gain, and everything to lose, by entering the lists as **combatants**. In the first place the authorities have not called upon us, next, to force ourselves upon the people uninvited would be to defeat the grandest ends the world has ever seen worked out.

And suppose we were invited, what duty would we then owe to ourselves and our **posterity**? We are in advance of our fathers. They put confidence in the word of the whites only to feel the dagger of slavery driven still deeper into the heart throbbing with emotions of joy for freedom. We are not going to re-enact that tragedy. Our enslaved brethren must be made freedmen, and the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," **solemnly** and religiously **stipulated** in the bond. We of the North must have all rights which white men enjoy; until then we are in no condition to fight under the flag which gives us no protection. . . .

**Document 2: Letter from General Ambrose E. Burnside to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, March 21, 1862 Newbern [N.C.] Mch 21/62** I have the honor to report the following movements in my department since my hurried report of the 16th inst—

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As I reported, our forces occupied this city & succeeded in restoring it to **comparative** quietness by midnight on the 14", and it is now as quiet as a New England village— I appointed Gen Foster Military Governor of the city & its **vicinity**, and he has established a most perfect system of guard & police— nine tenth of the **depredations** on the 14", after the enemy & citizens fled from the town, were committed by the negroes, before our troops reached the city— They seemed to be wild with excitement and delight— they are now a source of very great **anxiety** to us; the city is being overrun with **fugitives** from surrounding towns and plantations— Two have reported themselves who have been in the swamps for five years— it would be utterly impossible if we were so disposed to keep them outside of our lines as they find their way to us through woods & swamps from every side— By my next **dispatch**, I hope to report to you a definite **policy** in reference to this matter, and in the meantime shall be glad to receive any instructions upon the subject which you may be **disposed** to give

A. E. Burnside

**Document 3:**

**Letter from General Ormsby M. Mitchel to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, May 4, 1862  
Huntsville [Ala.] May 4, 1862**

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I have this day written you fully embracing three topics of great importance. The absolute **necessity** of protecting slaves who bring us valuable information—the fact that I am left without the command of my line of communications and the importance of holding Alabama north of the Tennessee. I have promised protection to the slaves who have given me valuable assistance and information. My Riverfront is 120 miles long and if the Government disapprove what I have done I must receive heavy **reinforcements** or abandon my position. With the assistance of the Negroes in watching the River I feel myself **sufficiently** strong to defy the enemy.

O. M. Mitchel

**Document 4: Excerpt from Henry M. Turner, in which he identifies reasons for enlistment, Christian Recorder, February 7, 1863**

Source: Reprinted in McPherson, James. The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

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*African American leaders across the north recruited men in their communities to join the fighting. Henry M. Turner, a lifelong fighter for racial justice, was at that time pastor of the Israel Bethel Church in Washington, D.C. Turner would later become the first African American chaplain in the Civil War. In response to one of Turner's recruitment efforts, one black man asked, "Do you suppose I am going to leave my home and comforts to be killed for nothing? I am not going to do any such thing." Turner replied:*

Ah! That may do for that portion of our people who have no interest in the South; those who have no sympathy, no friends, no relations, no care, nor no desire for a triumph of freedom and our heaven-**chartered** rights. But those who have been taught by a Godblessed experience to **abhor** the monster slavery, and have felt its inhuman crushings, will look from a different standpoint. . . .The cry has long been, Give us the opportunity; show us a chance to climb to **distinction**, and we will show the world by our bravery what the negro can do, and then as soon as we are invited to stand on such a basis as will develop these interior qualities, for us to **deride** the idea and **scornfully** turn away, would be to argue a **self-consciousness** of incapacity.

**Document 5: Description of violence toward an African American soldier in Washington, D.C., *The Christian Recorder*, June 20, 1863**

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Mr. Editor:—Passing along 7th Street, a few evenings ago, I saw an excited **rabble** pursuing a corporal belonging to the 1st Colored Regiment, District vols., named John Ross. Among the pursuers, was a United States police officer. Ross protested against being dragged away by these **ruffians**, at the same time expressing his willingness to accompany the police officer to whatever place he might **designate**; claiming at the same time his (the police officer's) protection from his **assailants**. But, shameful to say, that officer, after he had arrested Ross, permitted a cowardly villain to violently choke and otherwise maltreat him. After the **melee**, the corporal received some pretty severe bruises, whether from the policeman's club or from the stones that were thrown by the mob, I will not say. He quietly walked to the central guard house with this **conservator** of the peace, amidst the **clamoring** of the mob, their yells and shouts of "Kill the black \*\*\*\*" etc., "strip him, we'll stop this negro **enlistment**." Now Mr. Editor, what will an enlightened world think? What will posterity think? . . . that the United States, right under the shadow of the War Department, is insulted in the person of one of her defenders. But what, you ask, had Mr. John Ross done? Stop, I'll tell you.

He had dared to enlist at his country's call, and leave home and all that makes life dear, to burn, and bleed, and die for his country. This is his crime, (if crime he committed;) for this he is mobbed: but these

<p><b>indignities</b> must cease; the good time is coming when cowardly traitors will not insult United States soldiers, be they black or white. . . .</p> <p><b><u>LANCASTER</u></b></p>	
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**Document 6: Letter from a private in the Massachusetts 54th to his sister, printed in The Christian Recorder, March 5, 1865**

Source: Reprinted in McPherson, James. *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

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<p>Highlight sections of the reading that...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● stand out to you</li> <li>● <b><u>relate to the Purpose for reading/Focus Question.</u></b></li> <li>● that evoke questions/thoughts/concerns in you.</li> </ul>	<p>In the space below...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● identify and define new vocabulary</li> <li>● write summaries of the reading</li> <li>● write your reactions to the reading</li> <li>● <b><u>write how the section(s) relates to the Purpose for Reading/Focus Question.</u></b></li> </ul>
<p>The men in the 54th and 55th Massachusetts refused to accept any pay until it was equal to that of whites. My dear sister, it is with pleasure that I write these few lines, to let you know how we are getting along. When we enlisted we were to get \$13 per month, clothing and rations, and treatment the same as white soldiers; and now they want to cheat us out of what is justly due us, by paying us off with \$10 per month, and taking three dollars out of that for clothing....Why are we not worth as much as white soldiers? We do the same work they do, and what they cannot. We fight as well as they do. Have they forgotten James Island? Just let them think of the charge at Fort Wagner, where the colored soldiers were cruelly murdered by the notorious rebels. Why is it that they do not want to give us our pay when they have already witnessed our deeds of courage and bravery? They say we are not United States soldiers. They want to come around and say we are laborers. If we are laborers, how is it then we do soldiers' duty,</p>	



