

Slavery, the Civil War & Reconstruction The Massachusetts 54th Infantry

In the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, black men fought for the United States of America. Why should the Civil War be different? At first, free black men in the North were not allowed to **enlist**¹ in the Union army.

Frederick Douglass spoke out to encourage the government to allow black men to fight. He was a former slave. He wanted to demonstrate for the world that black men deserved to be United States citizens. By fighting side by side with white soldiers, black men would have an opportunity to show their **courage**² and fight for a cause.

By 1863, President Lincoln agreed that the Union should allow black men, including recently freed slaves, to fight for the United States and their own freedom! Though black men were allowed to be in the army, everything was far from equal. Black men were paid less than white men. At first they were given less responsibility and smaller tasks. However, black **regiments**³ were very brave. By the end of the war, they had proven their loyalty and their ability to fight.

The Massachusetts 54th **Infantry**⁴ was the first U.S. army regiment made up entirely of black men. In their first fight, the men in the regiment defeated a rebel charge. Not long after they were given the task of charging Fort Wagner. The men fought bravely and many died. The mission was nearly impossible. Almost half of the men from the regiment died at Fort Wagner. But they had all proved their courage and determination to fight for the cause of freedom and for the United States of America.

¹ **enlist** - to join the army as a volunteer

² **courage** - bravery

³ **regiments** - groups of soldiers made up of two or more units

⁴ **infantry** - the part of an army made up of soldiers who fight on foot

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. In the passage it says that Frederick Douglass “wanted to *demonstrate* for the world that black men deserved to be United States citizens.” The word **demonstrate** means:
 - a. to prove
 - b. to fight
 - c. to hide
 - d. to tell

2. At what times were black men allowed to fight for the United States of America?
 - a. The Revolutionary War, the Civil War, but not the War of 1812.
 - b. Only during the Civil War.
 - c. The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the entire Civil War.
 - d. The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and part of the Civil War.

3. Which event happened last in the passage?
 - a. The 54th Infantry defeated a rebel charge in their first fight.
 - b. President Lincoln agreed to allow black men to enlist in the army.
 - c. Frederick Douglass argued that black men should be able to enlist in the army.
 - d. The Massachusetts 54th Infantry was the first U.S. army regiment made entirely of black men.

4. Which of the following is *not* an example of how everything was not equal for black men in the army?
 - a. They were paid less than white men.
 - b. They received the same type of uniforms as white men.
 - c. They were given less responsibility than white men.
 - d. They were given smaller tasks than white men.

5. The passage “The Massachusetts 54th Infantry” is mostly about
 - a. how black men were allowed to fight in the Civil War and how brave they were.
 - b. how slavery worked in Massachusetts for 54 years.
 - c. how black men in the Union army were treated exactly the same as white men.
 - d. what 54 soldiers from Massachusetts did in the War of 1812.

6. Describe two ways that the Massachusetts 54th Infantry proved their bravery and determination to fight for freedom.

7. How did it probably make black soldiers feel to be paid less than white soldiers?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

Black soldiers showed that they were brave, _____ during the attack on Fort Wagner.

- a. but not
- b. especially
- c. currently
- d. although

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Frederick Douglass spoke out to encourage the government to allow black men to fight in the Civil War.

Who? Frederick Douglass

(did) What? _____

Why? _____

(in) What? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** courage: bravery.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 870

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: Black men were not allowed to fight in the Union army until 1863. The Massachusetts 54th Infantry was the first U.S. army regiment made up entirely of black men, and they proved their courage and loyalty during the Civil War.

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 - d. The Massachusetts 54th Infantry was the first U.S. army regiment made up entirely of black men.

4. Which of the following is *not* an example of how everything was not equal for black men in the army?
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5. The passage “The Massachusetts 54th Infantry” is mostly about
 - a. **how black men were allowed to fight in the Civil War and how brave they were.**
 - b. how slavery worked in Massachusetts for 54 years.

- c. how black men in the Union army were treated exactly the same as white men.
 - d. what 54 soldiers from Massachusetts did in the War of 1812.
6. Describe two ways that the Massachusetts 54th Infantry proved their bravery and determination to fight for freedom.

Suggested answer: The Infantry defeated a rebel charge in their first fight. They also charged Fort Wagner, which was a very difficult military challenge. Many of the men died in this battle.

7. How did it probably make black soldiers feel to be paid less than white soldiers?

Suggested answer: Being paid less than white soldiers probably made black soldiers feel like they weren't valued as much as white soldiers and that people thought they weren't as important.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

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Who? Frederick Douglass

(did) What? **spoke out**

Why? **to encourage the government to allow black men to fight**

(in) What? **in the Civil War**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** courage: bravery.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.