

Concealed Heroism:  
The African American in Battle

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## Introduction

History includes the past events and people that define who we are today. Carter G. Woodson (1933) believes that “The chief value in studying the records of others is to become better acquainted with oneself and with one’s possibilities to live and to do in the present age”( pg. 139). In the classroom, the students are taught the history of America through the eyes of the dominant race. Therefore, the black students miss the opportunity to understand ~~themselves or their~~~~himself or his~~ race, and many significant people of our pasts go unnoticed. This unit will give students of all color the chance to become ~~familiar~~~~accainted~~ with the numerous African Americans who so boldly took up arms and risked their lives whenever given ~~thee~~ opportunity to fight for the country who saw them ~~as~~ inferior. By giving the ~~Negro~~~~African American~~ defenders the recognition they so deserve in our history textbooks, the future of America can be inspired by the courage of these heroic figures in battle.

**Comment [R1]:** This needs to somehow become gender neutral. Surely, not all black students are men...

**Comment [R2]:** Is African American a politically correct nomenclature?

**Comment [R3]:** Excellent Thesis.

## Unit Overview

The Concealed Heroism Unit will be most adaptable to a high school, United States history class. The focus will be on the involvement of African American men in four of our nations’ major wars from 1775-1945; The American Revolution, The Civil War, World War I, and World War II. The objective for the unit is that the students will be able to identify the major impact of African Americans in these four wars and that they will gain an appreciation for these men of great valor. Though there was much hostility and discrimination towards the ~~Negro~~~~African American~~ soldier during times of war, the focus will be instead on the great achievements that have gone untold. The

students will ultimately discover the paladins who have -been unfortunately left out of our textbooks.

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## Revolutionary War

In 1776, the Revolutionary War began when the thirteen colonies declared their independence from Great Britain. However, in 1770, the first patriotic martyr of the war was shot during the Boston Massacre. This inspirational figure was African American Crispus Attucks. Just five years later, black men began enlisting as Minutemen after the call of arms from Paul Revere. Several ~~Negro~~African Americans fought to hold off the British early in the war until July 1775 when American Adjutant General Horatio Gates, acting under orders from George Washington, issued a directive to refuse to enlist “... any stroller, ~~Negro~~African American, or vagabond”(Lindenmeyer, 1970, pg. 17).

However, this plan backfired on the Patriots. One British governor, Lord Dunmore realized that the Whig armies were not accepting black enlistees, he developed a plan to enable runaway slaves to win their freedom by joining the royal cause. An estimated 100,000 slaves on southern plantations joined the British voluntarily or were taken as

**Comment [R4]:** Where did you get this information?

enemy property. Though some did eventually reach freedom as promised by the British troops, many were given to the tories, sold to the West Indies, or moved to Canada (Weir, 2004).

In 1776, the Continental Army was in need of “able-bodied” men as enlistments for troops began to expire and the interest of white’s fighting in the war was on the declining. Already an obvious underdog, the Patriots needed more man power. It was then that the people of the colonies began to argue the idea of black men as soldiers. Regardless of the debate for or against the use of NegroAfrican Americans as soldiers in the Continental Army, they were put in uniform and armed. Thousands of black men volunteered to defend their home while others were enlisted in place of their white master. Washington’s army had an average of around fifty NegroAfrican Americans to each battalion; at least seven hundred NegroAfrican Americans fought on the colonists’ side at the Battle of Momouth, and the state of Maryland recruited seven hundred and fifty, who were incorporated with whites (Alt, 2002, pg. 23).—Whether they fought for the British or the Continental Army, the black man fought long, hard, and faithfully in the Revolutionary War- (Alt, 2002, pg. 23).

**Comment [R5]:** Is there only one source for this paragraph? If so, place the parenthetical citation after the last period of the paragraph.

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## Civil War

Almost a century later the newly formed nation faced its own problems from within. After eleven southern states seceded from the Union, the United States Civil War began in 1861. The institution of slavery in the South had a great bearing on the causes of this war. Immediately many black men rose up to fight for the Union but were refused service until years into the war. The Emancipation Proclamation was proclaimed in 1863 and not only did it free all slaves in rebelling states, but also created an active recruitment policy for black soldiers. The [Negro African American](#) fought mostly on the side of the Union Army but was also found assisting the rebels, mostly doing “dirty jobs”[\(Alt, 2002, pg. 34\).-](#)

Comment [R6]: Citation?

The Union Army called upon the black man to take up arms and fight for the cause. About 186,000 African Americans fought with the Union. This included 120 regiments, seven cavalry regiments, twelve heavy artillery regiments, and ten light artillery batteries[\(Weir, 2004\)](#). Though most had white officers, there were more than 7,000 black officers in the Union army which altogether was made of nine to ten percent black, including 25% of the Union navy (Edgerton, 2001, pg. 72). The most significant black regiment, the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment was formed with 1,000 volunteers under the command of abolitionist, Robert Gould Shaw. These men saw

Comment [R7]: Citation?

much action and ~~are~~ well known for their courageous fighting at Fort Wagner where Sergeant William Carney became the first African American to be nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor. Nearly forty thousand African Americans would be killed and individuals who had believed that blacks could not become ~~e~~ soldiers or would not fight as well as whites were proved wrong (~~Alt, 2002, pg. 42~~).

*So rally, boys, rally.*

*Let us never mind the past,*

*We had a hard road to travel*

*But our day is coming fast.*

*For God is for the right*

*And we have no need to fear.*

*The union must be saved*

*By the colored volunteer.* (~~Alt, 2002, pg. 42~~)

Comment [R8]: Citation!!!

### World War I

The United States entered the first World War in 1914 with hopes to make the world safe for democracy. African American leaders, including W.E.B. Du Bois encouraged black men to put aside any grievances they may have ~~with the white population~~ and fight for the ~~ire~~ nation, ~~and in hopes that this would end for to end both~~ discrimination and insult. Many blacks were refused at recruiting stations but in 1917,

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Congress passed the Selective Service Act and once again black men swarmed the recruiting stations. Approximately 2,291,000 blacks registered but unfortunately a total of 367,000 were taken. About 89% of the enlisted black men were assigned to labor,

supply, and service units. Only about 11% would ever see combat (Buckley, 2001, g. 165).

The United States sent two black divisions to Europe, the 92<sup>nd</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup> Division. Though the 92<sup>nd</sup> Division did not get to see as much battle, several regiments of the 93<sup>rd</sup> saw extensive action and even received awards from the French government. The 369<sup>th</sup> Regiment joined the French 4<sup>th</sup> Army in the Osie-Aisne offensive and remained in the trenches for 191 days, the longest front\_line service of any American regiment (Donaldson, 1991, pg. 94). One Frenchman proclaimed, "It is because these soldiers are just as brave and just as devoted as white soldiers that they receive exactly the same treatment, every man being equal before the death which all soldier face (Buckley, 2001, pg. 164). Though the black man began to see more action, black officers were gaining number, and the French saw the black man as a respectable, hardworking soldier, still discrimination and segregation continued after the conclusion of WWI.

### World War II

Over twenty years later, America joined in the second World War after a surprise bombing by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. At Pearl Harbor America saw one of the first heroes of WWII, African American mess\_man, Dorie Miller. Miller was awarded the Navy cross after he first pulled a wounded captain to safety then proceeded to shoot down as many as four Japanese planes. World War II had begun and once again African Americans jumped to take part in serving their country.

During this World War II, the need for men to take up arms dramatically accelerated the expansion of the roles for black men in the military. The father-son duo of Colonel Benjamin O. Davis Sr. and Captain Benjamin O. Davis Jr. set the tone for the

advancement of the black soldier as the only two black officers in the army at the start of the war. Over 1,154,720 black men served in WWII with over half of them seeing service overseas. Altogether black men constituted some 7.7 percent of the Armed Forces, including: 9 percent of the Army; 5.9 percent of the Navy; 2.2 percent of the Coast Guard; and even 3.7 percent of the Marines which were the only branch of U.S. military to be integrated. Also, about 4,000 women served in the WACs (Women's Army Corps) in the army and 60 in the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) in the navy (Lindemeyer, 1970, pg. 88). Black divisions fought overseas in the Ninety-ninth Pursuit Squadron – first all-black flying unit, the 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division in Italy, as well with General Patton in the 761<sup>st</sup>, all-black battalion. WWII brought great hope for African Americans in military though black and white soldier were still segregated. In 1948 President Harry Truman made an executive order to desegregate all armed forces (Donaldson, 1991, pg. 135).

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### Conclusion

African Americans played a role in every war fought for the United States of America. These brave soldiers put aside their differences to fight for the sake of their country, even when the white man did not. Though they were discriminated against and not given recognition, they took up arms in hopes to make a difference. These men and women were successful in assisting their country to victory and should be commended. After completing this unit students will understand the risks taken by the men of color African Americans and have an appreciation for their bravery in a country that once saw them as inferior.

### Activities:Activities:

#### Activity 1

- The students will analyze the participation of African Americans who fought with the Patriots during the Revolutionary War.
- o They will then write a letter to George Washington, leader of the Continental Army to urge him to allow African Americans to fight along with the Patriots.

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#### Activity 2

- The students will discuss the reasons African Americans fought for the Royal cause.
- o Imagine you are an African American who has been recruited to join the British Army and have decided you are going to go. Write a letter to your family explaining why you have chosen to do so.

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### Activity 3

- The students will identify the important significance the African American troops had on the Union army.
  - o Once the Union decided that they would allow African American troops to fight for them, they began to recruit the masses. Create a recruiting poster urging African Americans to take up arms with the Union Army. The poster should include how siding with the Union Army would benefit them.

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### Activity 4

- The students will analyze the movie Glory.
  - o While watching the movie the students will be required to answer the following questions then discuss them at the end of the movie.
    - How were African American troops treated? Give three examples from the movie to support your answer.
    - Do you think this is a fairly accurate portrayal of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts or has it also been written as the white man wants it to be perceived?

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### Activity 5

- The students will design a memorial for a U.S. African American troop.
  - o The students will have a choice of writing a poem, designing a tombstone, or create an award for their recognition.

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### Activity 6

- The students will discuss the involvement of African Americans in WWI.
  - o Despite the racial hatred and discrimination blacks faced daily in society, should they have fought for the U.S. in WWI? In *The Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois proclaims "First your country, then your Rights!" Do you agree with this statement? Explain your reasoning in a one page reaction. [http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=497](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=497)

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### Activity 7

- The students will analyze the 396<sup>th</sup> Regiment of WWI.
  - o This all-black regiment fought with the French for 191 days in the Champagne-Marne offensive. The students will research life in the trenches then act out what life would be like in one of these trenches.

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### Activity 8

- The students will discuss the impact that African Americans had in WWII.
  - o If possible, interview an African American relative or friend who lived during WWII. Ask of their involvement in the war or the involvement of their race. Also, how did they feel about segregated divisions in the military? Report your findings to the class

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### Activity 9

- The students will conclude the unit with a research paper.
  - o They students will be required to write a research paper on a black soldier who they believe is a hero. The paper must include extensive research on their background and the war they fought in, as well as an explanation as to why they are a hero to you.
    - These papers will be combined to form a new textbook for each of the students. The textbook will be called "Concealed Heroism: The heroes your teacher never told you about.

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### Activity 10

- The students will celebrate the lives of those African American soldiers who fought for our nation.
  - o In this final lesson the students will share their research with one another and have a memorial for these brave men and women. This will give African American soldiers the recognition they so deserve.

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Crispus Attucks, First African American Casualty of the American Revolution. Amid rising tensions between colonists and British soldiers, on March 5, 1770, a crowd of colonists confronted a sentry who had chastised a boy for complaining that an officer did not pay a barber bill. Both townspeople and a company of British soldiers of the 29th Regiment of Foot gathered. In 2011, her book *Zero to Breakthrough: The 7-Step, Battle-Tested Method for Accomplishing Goals that Matter* was published. Show Full Article. Related Topics: Black History Month Military History. African Americans made up more than 200,000 of the 2 million-strong American expeditionary force. But they got more respect from French commanders, who trained and put them on the front lines, than they did from their own. And they returned home to race riots and lynchings. The dashed hopes of black soldiers throughout much of our history makes their faithfulness all the more extraordinary. William Carney was born a slave in Virginia in 1840 and made it to freedom in Massachusetts. He joined the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment and participated in the harrowing attack on Fort Wagner in So... In the American Revolution, gaining freedom was the strongest motive for Black enslaved people who joined the Patriot or British armies. It is estimated that 20,000 African Americans joined the British cause, which promised freedom to enslaved people, as Black Loyalists. Around 9,000 African Americans became Black Patriots. As between 200,000 and 250,000 soldiers and militia served the American cause during the revolution in total, that would mean Black soldiers made up approximately four percent of... Most of the African Americans who made their way to Spain were members of the Communist party or an affiliated organization but their political views were tightly linked to their racial identity. Of all activist groups in America at that time, the Communist movement was the most explicitly opposed to race prejudice and discrimination. Consequently, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade was the first fully integrated military body in American history. In all previous wars, black soldiers served under the command of white officers, but in Spain African Americans met no prejudice and many individuals became... Although African Americans were earning higher positions in the Army, that did not necessarily mean they were getting equal treatment. Black draftees were treated with extreme hostility when they arrived for training. White men refused to salute black officers and black officers were often barred from the officers' clubs and quarters. The War Department rarely interceded, and discrimination was usually overlooked or sometimes condoned. Because many Southern civilians protested having blacks from other states inhabit nearby training camps, the War Department stipulated that no more than one-four...