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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2005 Volume I: Stories around the World in Film and Literature

From Slaves to Soldiers: African Americans in the Civil War

Guide for Curriculum Unit 05.01.03
by William J. Garraty

This unit uses film to help students connect with the Civil War. I have written it with the idea that urban students may find it interesting to learn three important areas of the Civil War. In addition to the films I have included a film viewing strategy. Asking students to watch a film and retain what they see is not always an easy task for all students. The viewing strategy is a modification of the KWL pre-reading strategy and the use of film note sheets. The concept engages students' interest by asking them what they already know about African Americans and the Civil War. It follows by allowing students to share what they would like to learn regarding the role of African Americans and the war. Then after viewing the sections of the films, students identify what they have learned.

Three films are used in this unit. Peter Batty's *The Divided Union* provides a broad but solid background for the development, engagement, and conclusion of the war. Harriet Beecher Stowe's story *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as directed in film by Stan Latham provides students with several examples of slavery in the Antebellum South. Edward Zwick's *Glory* is an excellent film about the Massachusetts 54th regiment. Students will learn about African American heroes who fought in the American Civil War. This unit is an effort to create an understanding of the role of African Americans in the Civil War and motivations of others involved as well.

(Recommended for U.S. History and Social Studies, grade 10.)

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