



54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry: Critical Thinking & Discussion Questions

What is a “volunteer” infantry? Why is that significant? What would be the opposite of a volunteer fighting force?

Why do you think that Lincoln allowed black men to fight in the Union’s armed forces?

What effect do you think that this had on the Union cause? On the Confederate cause?

There was considerable brutality, theft, and destruction of property during Civil War raids.

Why do you think the armies carried off personal property from towns they raided?

What do you know about guerrilla warfare? Can you think of any other examples of the use of this type of military tactic?

In what ways did the American Civil War differ from other wars fought by Americans?

What effect do you think the integration of the Union Army had on black-white relations after the war?

The presentation says that CSA President Jefferson Davis issued an “Anti-Emancipation Proclamation” threatening the black northern soldiers with death. Why do you think that the black soldiers were willing to serve, knowing that their fate would be worse than that of white soldiers if they were defeated and captured?

What was Frederick Douglass’s role in the formation of the 54th Infantry? Why did he think that such military service would be important for the black soldiers?

What do you know about proper treatment of the American flag? Why is it so significant that Sergeant William Harvey Carney never let it touch the ground?

Read and discuss the 9 reasons Douglass offered in [Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?](#)

Do you find these reasons compelling? Why or why not?