Lesson # 8: Black American Soldiers in the Civil War – Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient William H. Carney

(Grade 8/Social Studies, Grade 11/United States History)
Written by Kris McIntosh

Summary of Lesson: In this lesson, students will review and analyze documents pertinent to the Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to William Harvey Carney, Sergeant of Company C, 54th Massachusetts Volunteers (Colored). This lesson supplements a Social Studies unit on the Civil War, including President Lincoln’s decision to authorize Black men to join the military and the study of the Battle of Ft. Wagner.

Objective: By studying the life of William Carney, students will
- Examine the process of awarding a Congressional Medal of Honor,
- Consider the contribution and sacrifices made by Black American soldiers during the Civil War.

TEKS:
(8.8A) History. The student understands individuals, issues, and events of the Civil War.
(8.24D) Culture. The student is expected to analyze the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic and religious groups to our national identity.
(U.S. 21C) Culture. The student understands how people from various groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious groups, adapt to life in the United States and contribute to our national identity.
(U.S. 24C) Culture. The student is expected to explain and apply different methods that historians use to interpret the past, including the use of primary and secondary sources, points of view, frame of reference and historical context.

Time Required: One to two class periods

Materials Needed:
Projector to show the Sid Richardson Museum painting, The Riderless Horse by Frederic Remington
Copies or link to list of Black Soldiers awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor
Massachusetts”, and “Statement of Lewis H. Douglass, January 15, 1900, Washington, D.C.”.

Primary source documents “Document from the Record and Pension Office, War Department, January 24, 1900, Washington, D.C. to the Honorable Secretary of War,” “Document from the Assistant Secretary of War, War Department, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1900, to Mr. William H. Carney,” and “Acknowledgement Letter from Wm. H. Carney, New Bedford, May 25, 1900, to the Chief Record & Pension Office”, and “Acknowledgement Letter from Wm. H. Carney, New Bedford, May 26, 1900, to the Assistant Secretary of War.”

Magnifying glasses
NARA Document Analysis
NARA Photo Analysis Sheets

Procedure:
- Show students *The Riderless Horse*, a painting by Frederic Remington. Students may use the Photo Analysis Sheet to interpret the painting, or participate in an open discussion of, “What people, objects and activities do you see? What time period could this painting be depicting? Based on those facts and suppositions, what can be inferred? What questions does this painting raise in your mind?”

*The Riderless Horse*, by Frederic Remington, 1886, Pencil, Pen and Ink, and Watercolor on Paper
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas
Show the list of Black Soldiers awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, African American Medal of Honor Recipients (Civil War), Civil War: Sailors and Soldiers System, National Park Service, available online on November 2, 2006, at:

http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/history/aa_medals.htm

After reading the list, what questions come to mind? “What is a Congressional Medal of Honor? Who were these soldiers? How did soldiers earn the Congressional Medal of Honor? Did any Black sailors receive a medal?”

Teacher Information to share with students:
The Medal of Honor, established by joint resolution of Congress, 12 July 1862 (amended by Act of 9 July 1918 and Act of 25 July 1963) is awarded in the name of Congress to a person who, while a member of the Armed Services, distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against any enemy of The United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which The United States is not a belligerent party. The deed performed must have been one of personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades and must have involved risk of life. Incontestable proof of the performance of service is exacted and each recommendation for award of this decoration is considered on the standard of extraordinary merit.

The Medal of Honor was first issued during the Civil War. More than 1,500 medals were awarded, some posthumously.

Signed into law July 12, 1862, the measure provided for awarding a medal of honor “to such noncommissioned officers and privates as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action, and other soldier-like qualities, during the present insurrection.”

Medal of war information available online on November 2, 2006, at:

http://www.medalofhonor.com

Note to user: Site contains pop-ups that link to video games, commercial sites and an offer to set user’s home page to netstar.com.
Other sources with information about Medals of Honor include:


Congressional Medal of Honor Society, available online on November 2, 2006 at: http://www.cmohs.org/medal.htm

There was controversy in the Union. Many Northerners believed that Black men would not make worthy soldiers. What about Southerners’ views?

One example of courage that ended in the awarding of a Congressional Medal of Honor is William Harvey Carney.


- After students have finished the analysis sheets, have each document explained so that the students learn about Mr. Carney - his background, military service and courageous action.

For additional background information, you may wish to refer to these documents: “Document indicating furlough recommended to Wm. H. Carney, November 9, 1863, Boston, Massachusetts”, and “Statement of Lewis H. Douglass, January 15, 1900, Washington, D.C.”.

- Wrap up the discussion with a vote on the question, "Was this Medal of Honor justified?"
On May 23, 1900, Sergeant William H. Carney was issued the Congressional Medal of Honor, making him the first Black to win the coveted award. Note that other Black soldiers and sailors eventually received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their heroics during the Civil War.

- Share with the class the last four documents, “Document from the Record and Pension Office, War Department, January 24, 1900, Washington, D.C. to the Honorable Secretary of War,” “Document from the Assistant Secretary of War, War Department, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1900, to Mr. William H. Carney,” “Acknowledgement Letter from Wm. H. Carney, New Bedford, May 25, 1900, to the Chief Record & Pension Office,” and “Letter from Wm. H. Carney, New Bedford, May 26, 1900, to the Assistant Secretary of War.”
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Department.

Boston, Nov. 9th, 1863.

Hon. E. U. Stanton,
Secy. at War, Washington D.C.

Sir:

Sgt. William

Co. E, 5th U. States. Regt., was

born in Norfolk Va. in 1840 and at the
death of his master, Maj. Barney, he and
the other negroes were made free.

In his fourteenth year he attended a private
school lately kept by a minister in Norfolk.

In 1856 his father set out in search of a
home where he could live in peace and

enjoy his freedom. After several changes
he came to Massachusetts and settled in
New Bedford, where his family still resides.

Letter to Honorable E. U. Stanton from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Department, Boston, November 9, 1863, Page 1; Documents Relating to the Military and Naval Service of Blacks Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor from the Civil War to the Spanish American War, National Archives Microfilm Publication M929, Roll 1, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Draft having been after joined the regiment
under charge of the Jackson, who is now
chaplain of our 6th Regt.

At this time our Colored Regiment were being
made up he joined the 6th and the following
statement of his conduct at the assault on
Fort Wagner in July last must commend it
self to all.

Receiving the regimental colors the
sergeant proceeded forward to the front rank
near the Colonel, who was leading the assault.

He received a severe wound in the thigh
but fell only upon his knees. He planted
the flag on the parapet and for fifteen
minutes lay down upon the outer slope, where his bay
until the second Brigade came up. Having
the colors flying until the second Command was
ended. When our forces retired he followed
upright on his knees. Upon reaching the hospital
where lay his wounded companions, he said
Letter to Honorable E. U. Stanton from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Department, Boston, November 9, 1863, Page 3; Documents Relating to the Military and Naval Service of Blacks Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor from the Civil War to the Spanish American War, National Archives Microfilm Publication M929, Roll 1, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Document indicating furlough recommended to Wm. H. Carney, November 9, 1863, Boston, Massachusetts; Documents Relating to the Military and Naval Service of Blacks Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor from the Civil War to the Spanish American War, National Archives Microfilm Publication M929, Roll 1, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

CHANGESTOWE, December 26, 1899.

S.S.

State of West Virginia

County of Kanawha.

This day personally appeared before me,

a Notary Public in and for said County, Gen. J. W. H. Appleton,
who being by me first duly sworn, deposes and says: That on the
18th of July 1863 I was Captain commanding "A" Company of the
54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, and as such, in the line
of duty, was in the front line of the attack upon Fort Wagner,
Morris Island, Charleston Harbor, S.C. The regiment was formed
for one attack by wing, half the companies in the front line, and
the remainder a few paces behind them, the Color company was to
my left in the front line.

As we approached the Fort, we broke
through some picketing and ran over some rifle pits in which were
men of the enemy's forces and I heard afterwards the color bearer
fell at that time. Sergeant William H. Garney, a Duty Sergeant
of "C" Company, picked up the colors and carried them forward with
us in the charge. I was near the colors when they crossed the
moat and they were planted on the top of the parapet of the fort
between the two main bastions, some twenty yards to my left as I
stood on the parapet. There was severe fighting for me in my
front, but I could see that the colors kept rising and falling as
the men fought around them. Once I thought they were taken, but
Garney hung on to them and finally, to my great relief, I saw them
...
slowly go down the exterior slope of the rampart and cross the moat. Carney was wounded in three places in the fight about the colors. The State flag was torn from its staff and captured.

After our long fight in the Southeast bastion, which occurred after the time I speak of above, and in which I was wounded twice, I made my way down the beach and found a remnant of the Regiment, and Carney had brought the colors to the officer commanding. Carney’s action throughout was very heroic. It is my opinion that he well deserves a medal for his deed.

John W. Appleton

Said and sworn to before me at Charleston, W. Va., this day of December, 1899.

[Signature]

[Signature]

I, Charles H. Harrison, a member of Company "C", 54th Mass. Volunteers, was on the 18th of July, 1863, at the battle of Fort Wagner, and as such was in line of duty; was in the front line of the attack upon Fort Wagner, Morris Island, Charleston Harbor, S.C. The regiment was formed for the attack by wing, half the companies in the front line and the remainder a few paces behind them.

The color company was to my left in the front line. As we went up to the fort amid the sound of cheers and yells, we went through the palisades, and ran over some rifle-pits which were of the enemy. The regimental color-bearer fell, carrying the colors on to victory. Sargeant William H. Carney picked up the colors, and carried them with us through the charge.

I was a Private in Co. "C" of the 54th Mass. Vols. I saw Sargeant Carney carrying the colors across the ditch, and on he went across the curtain of the fort, and I saw him wounded with the Stars and Stripes in his hand. He said "The old flag never touched the ground."

I would request that a congressional medal of Honor should be awarded him under the joint resolutions of Congress of July 19th, 1862, and May 2nd, 1896.

[Signature]

Charles H. Harrison

[Signature]

W. B. [illegible]

[Signature]

Statement of Charles H. Harrison, January 8, 1900, New Bedford, Massachusetts, Page 1; Documents Relating to the Military and Naval Service of Blacks Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor from the Civil War to the Spanish American War, National Archives Microfilm Publication M929, Roll 1, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
The Secretary of War,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

I have the honor most respectfully to petition for the issue of
"The Congressional Medal of Honor" to William Harvey Carney, Sergeant
Co. C, 54th Regiment, Massachusetts Infantry Volun., under the Act of
Congress approved July 19, 1868, and in support thereof beg leave
to state:

That in the assault upon Fort Wagner, S. C., July 18, 1863,
while serving as a file-closer in Co. C, of said 54th Mass. Inf.
Volun., he saw the color sergeant of the regiment fall at the beginning
of the charge. Carney threw away his rifle, snatched the flag, and
springing to the front, led the way up to the parapet, planted the
staff in the top of the parapet, and lying down behind it, kept it
flying over the rebel works for over a half hour, when finding himself
left alone, he pulled up the staff and retreated under a storm of shot
and shell being wounded three times before reaching our lines. Weak
as he was from loss of blood, he positively refused to be carried
to the hospital or to have his wounds treated or bandaged until the
time to fly one until he could turn it over to the survivors of his
regiment. Accordingly he was sent over in an ambulance to find them
and when the boys cheered him, he simply said: "Boys I only did my

310 Spruce St., N.W.,
Washington, D.C., Jan. 15, 1900.
Letter from Christian A. Fleetwood to the Secretary of War, January 15, 1900, Washington, D.C. Page 2; Documents Relating to the Military and Naval Service of Blacks Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor from the Civil War to the Spanish American War, National Archives Microfilm Publication M929, Roll 1, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24.

The old flag never touched the ground.

A Medal of Honor was awarded to the late General Colon, who

These are the words that were spoken by the President of the United States at the ceremony of awarding the Medal of Honor to the late General Colon.

The ceremony took place in the presence of the President and the military leaders of the nation.

The flag was never taken down, as it was a symbol of the honor and courage of the fallen hero.
Letter from Christian A. Fleetwood to the Secretary of War, January 15, 1900, Washington, D.C. page 3; Documents Relating to the Military and Naval Service of Blacks Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor from the Civil War to the Spanish American War, National Archives Microfilm Publication M929, Roll 1, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Record and Pension Office,
WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, Jan. 24, 1900.

Respectfully submitted to
The Honorable
The Secretary of War,
with report enclosed.

Chief of Office.

Four inclosures.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
May 7, 1900.

By direction of the President and under
the provisions of the act of Congress ap-
proved March 3, 1863, a Congressional
medal of honor is hereby awarded to
William H. Carney, late a sergeant in
Company C, 54th Massachusetts Infantry
Volunteers, for most-distinguished gallan-
try in action at Fort Wagner, South Car-
olina, July 18, 1863.

On this occasion the soldier seized the
colors of the regiment and advanced with
them after the color sergeant was shot.

Assistant Secretary of War.
WAR DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON,

May 9, 1900,

Mr. William H. Carney,
128 Mill Street,
New Bedford, Massachusetts,

Sir:

I have the honor to advise you that, by direction of the President, and under the provisions of the act of Congress approved March 3, 1863, a Congressional medal of honor has this day been awarded you for most distinguished gallantry in action at Port Wagner, South Carolina, July 18, 1863, the following being a statement of the particular service rendered on that occasion:

"This soldier, then a sergeant, Company C, 54th Massachusetts Volunteers, held the colors of the regiment and advanced with them after the colors sergeant was shot."

The medal will be forwarded to you, by registered mail, as soon as it shall have been suitably engraved.

Very respectfully,

[Signature]

Assistant Secretary of War.

Document from the Assistant Secretary of War, War Department, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1900, to Mr. William H. Carney; Documents Relating to the Military and Naval Service of Blacks Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor from the Civil War to the Spanish American War, National Archives Microfilm Publication M929, Roll 1, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Acknowledgement letter from Wm. H. Carney, New Bedford, May 25, 1900, to the Chief Record & Pension Office; Documents Relating to the Military and Naval Service of Blacks Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor from the Civil War to the Spanish American War, National Archives Microfilm Publication M929, Roll 1, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
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During December of 1908, flags in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts were lowered to half-mast in tribute to Sgt. William H. Carney, who had died on December 8, 1908. This honor had never been paid to an ordinary citizen and Black American.
# Photo Analysis Worksheet

## Step 1. Observation

A. Study the photograph for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items. Next, divide the photo into quadrantes and study each section to see what new details become visible.

B. Use the chart below to list people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
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<th>Activities</th>
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## Step 2. Inference

Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph.

## Step 3. Questions

A. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

B. Where could you find answers to them?

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## Written Document Analysis Worksheet

### 1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):
- [ ] Newspaper
- [ ] Letter
- [ ] Patent
- [ ] Memorandum
- [ ] Map
- [ ] Telegram
- [ ] Press Release
- [ ] Report
- [ ] Advertisement
- [ ] Congressional Record
- [ ] Census Report
- [ ] Other

### 2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):
- [ ] Interesting Letterhead
- [ ] Handwritten
- [ ] Typed
- [ ] Seals
- [ ] Notations
- [ ] “RECEIVED” stamp
- [ ] Other

### 3. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:

### 4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:

**POSITION (TITLE):**

### 5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?

### 6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

B. Why do you think this document was written?

C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written.

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

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**Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration,**

**Washington, DC 20408**

Written Document Worksheet, Online version on November 2, 2006, at: