

Film Review: Glory

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Historical Background

The earliest American history of African-Americans began in Jamestown around the early 1600s, where they were brought to the US as slaves [CITATION McG17 \l 1033]. The south being an area known for its agricultural was in need of more labors to maintain the big business of cotton, tobacco and sugar cane. As slaves African-Americans endured poor working and living conditions, brutal treatment, and the loss of identity. Because of these conditions many African-Americans dreamed of freedom. However, there were others who believed that slavery was the best thing that could happen to Africans.

Those who supported slavery used the arguments of economics, religion, social good, and history to help this practice. Supporters believed that an end of slavery would bring about an economic crash. Bible scriptures and stories such as Abraham and his ownership of slaves were used as religious support. There were even those who believed that the slaves were biologically inferior to their masters. Some also thought that through slavery Whites brought civilization to the uncivilized African.

Whites in the North and few in the South were moved by the unfair treatment of African-Americans; known as abolitionists. However, for some in the north, it was more about economics. This debate caused a lot of infighting between the North and the South about legalizing slavery in the west. The fear in the North was that Great Britain would recognize the Confederacy as an independent nation, because of their dislike of slavery. Unable to settle this dispute and the other states' rights the tension increased which led to the civil war in 1861.

In 1862, President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared the slaves in the states that had rebelled against the Union freed. However, those states that maintained their loyalty to the Union were allowed to keep their slaves. [CITATION The17 \l

1033] Historians say that Lincoln feared that he would lose the support of states such as Maryland, Delaware, and Kentucky if slaves were released there. However, it allowed blacks to have other freedoms that had only been given to White Americans.

Through this proclamation abolitionist from the North, urged President Lincoln to allow African-Americans to join the armed forces to assist the Union fights in the war. Lincoln and others feared that African-Americans were made poor soldiers. Critics believed that these slaves turned soldiers didn't possess the courage needed for war, nor the discipline for the Army's fighting formation. Abolitionists worked relentlessly to assure the northern government to allow African-Americans to enlist. The abolitionist who led the charge in support of this crusade was none other than Fredrick Douglass. Douglass believed that by forming African-American units not only would help the Union reach victory but also would give ex-slaves and free men an opportunity to gain dignity and respect from the white soldiers around them.

General Ulysses S. Grant welcomed the idea of them serving in the armed forces. Even as advocates were making their attempts to persuade the enlisting of African-Americans into the U.S Army, they were already serving in the U.S. Navy. In the Navy, blacks held positions such as stewards, cooks, and teamsters. After Navy officials evaluated their general conduct, they discovered that African-Americans were an asset to the Navy. Thus they permitted them to become sailors.

On May 22, 1863, Congress handed down General Order number 143, that granted permission to allow African-Americans to enlistment into the U.S. Army. This order created the Bureau of Colored Troops they were designed to oversee the Army's black soldiers. Because of this law, before the completion of the war, there were more than 180,000 African-American soldiers. In spite of the many acts of bravery by the African- American soldiers, the government

still refused to give them the same equal treatment that their white counterparts received. Each black soldier received \$10 per month in pay, while white soldiers received \$13. It wasn't uncommon for black troops to be issued substandard weapons or supplies.

Not every African-American soldier was keen with enduring the unfair treatment of the U.S. Army. Most rejected their pay until the Union government granted them the same pay as white soldiers. In November 1863, a regiment of black soldiers laid their weapons down in front of the tent of the commander and refused to fight until they received the same pay as white soldiers. One of the protest leaders was executed for mutiny; William Walker. His sacrifice was not in vain because through protest like his; the U.S. government finally granted African-American soldiers same salary.

Plot Summary

The 1989 movie *Glory*, depicts the Massachusetts Infantry Regiment in the American Civil War as they fight against Confederate forces in the Battle of Antietam. The story chronicles letters from Captain Robert Shaw portrayed by Matthew Broderick. It begins with him being injured and presumed dead. However, he was found alive by gravedigger John Rawlins played by Morgan Freeman. During his medical recovery at home in Boston, he is introduced to none other than Frederick Douglass. After meeting Douglass Shaw is offered a promotion to Colonel and command the first all-black regiment the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. His first volunteer happens to be one of his friends a freeman named Thomas Searles. Some of the other recruits were Rawlins (Morgan Freeman), freeman Jupiter (Jihmi Kennedy), and a runaway Trip (Denzel Washington). The characters Trip and Thomas clash from the start due to their very different upbringing.

The 54th is advised of the Confederacy order which states all black soldiers found in Union uniform along with their white officers will be executed. Shaw gives all of his soldiers the opportunity to leave with an honorable discharge, however none of deciding to leave. Upon Shaw noticing that the black soldiers are not ready for combat, he enlists the services of Sgt. Mulcahy (John Finn) to train them. The soldiers endure Sgt. Mulcahy harsh training, which causes a major argument between Shaw and Major Forbes.

Denzel Washington's character (Trip) goes AWOL, and when caught, Shaw orders that he be punished in front of the troops. That punishment turns out to be a whipping. Trip's shirt is ripped to expose his back for the beating scars are revealed from previous beatings as a slave. This rocks Shaw, an abolitionist to his core. After talking to Rawlins, Shaw discovers that Trip was only trying to find shoes to replace the inadequate ones that he was wearing. Shaw is then determined to get uniforms and supplies for his men. Once he gets the supplies, he sees the spirits of the troops lifted.

Sometime later, a General informs Shaw that there was a major combat plan to secure the Charleston Harbor. The first regiment that attempted suffered great losses, with no hesitation Shaw volunteers the 54th. As they continue with their assault Shaw attempts to move forward, but was killed. The final scenes of the movie we find Trip lifting the flag to rally the soldiers to move forward, and he continues to hold the flag until he takes his last breath from being shot. Even after Shaw and Trip's deaths, they can surge forward and break through their outer defenses.

Historical Accuracy

Glory is an excellent historical depiction of the American Civil War. It is an epic take on one of the first all-black regiments. The movie accurately portrays the unequal treatment and

discrimination that African-American soldiers received. This film is based on the letters that Colonel Shaw sent back home during his time in the military. Soldiers in the movie were depicted as runaways were only a few freemen. However, most of the soldiers in the 54th were freemen from several northern states [CITATION Emi95 \l 1033]. An essential historical element that was left out of the movie was the fact that Frederick Douglass's three sons volunteered for the war.

Comments

The movie *Glory* is an epic portrayal of the story of the one of the first all-black regiments the 54th. This story is told from the perspective of Shaw played by Matthew Broderick. Shaw comes from a family of abolitionist which we find out after he returned home from war to recover from an injury. The point in the movie where Trip portrayed by Denzel Washington was whipped by the training officer is one of the most unforgettable moments. It is unforgettable because it shows that pain that Trip's past is also his present reality. One of the most remarkable things about the movie was the pride that the soldiers displayed and how honored they were to serve. Although I believe *Glory* was a great film, I wish that they should have shown the story from Shaw's perspective and the perspective of one of the soldiers.

Bibliography

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