

WOMEN IN THE CIVIL WAR



A Unit of Study for Grades 7–12

LAUREN ACKER

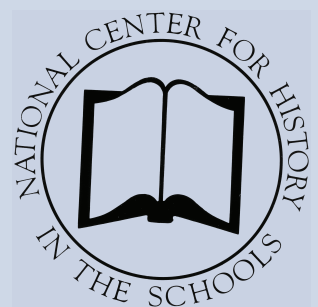
with

Robyn Lee, Martine Leplante, Greg Spielman, and Carissa Quan



Women in American
History Series

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS,
UCLA



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TEACHER BACKGROUND

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

The Civil War, fought from 1861–1865, is one of the central dramas of American History. Brother fought brother in an epic struggle to preserve the Union and expand the meaning of “We the People.” Yet some of the most striking tales of courage and patriotism during the war remain untold because traditional narratives have focused on political action and military strategy from the perspective of leaders and generals. However, more recent history has sought to include ordinary people, both on the home front and battlefield. By focusing on women of different backgrounds and considering their actions at home and even on the battlefield, this unit broadens the traditional view of the Civil War. Students will see how women’s actions were an integral part of the war effort and helped shape the course of the war and therefore American history.

Women’s lives in wartime were dynamic. When men went off to war women’s lives changed dramatically. Women searched for productive outlets for their patriotism and strived to stay connected with the loved ones they sent to battle. In addition, women of all race and class backgrounds had to find creative solutions to new domestic problems with men off at battle. They had to work to keep their families together, make do in hard economic times, and survive the loss of husbands, fathers and sons. In addition, women’s activities linked battlefield and home front, demonstrating that these two arenas of war were intimately connected.

This unit will explore how the Civil War provided women with opportunities to expand their roles in society and push the boundaries of “respectable” behavior for their gender. Gender ideology of the nineteenth century maintained that men and women inhabited separate and distinct spheres, yet the reality of women’s lives in wartime did not always match with this ideal. Sometimes women were forced to take on new duties in the absence of male family members, while others eagerly seized opportunities put before them. Overall, women’s activities during the Civil War helped lay the groundwork for some of the most influential reform movements of the late-nineteenth century.

Finally, while all women shared some common obstacles during the war, individual experiences varied according to one’s race, region, class, and personal background. This unit will provide students with different perspectives of women during the war, and will hopefully invite students to compare and contrast these accounts, as well as ask new questions about Civil War history.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit approaches the Civil War, a principal period in American History, through the experiences of women in different regions and from various backgrounds. Fought on American soil, women connected battlefield to home front by writing letters, giving material aid, serving on the front lines as nurses and aid workers, and even in a few rare cases, serving as soldiers and spies. Examining slave women’s unique experiences during the war lends an understanding to the context of emancipation, and provides insight into the racial attitudes

Teacher Background

of whites both in the North and South. In addition to expanding historical knowledge to the Civil War era, the lessons explore the changing roles of nineteenth-century women as they filled in for husbands and sons at home and supported the war effort.

III. UNIT OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Identify women's varied roles in the Civil War by examining primary sources
- ❖ Compare and contrast homefront and battlefield social experiences across race, class, and regional lines
- ❖ Through women's writings and actions, examine Northern and Southern politics and ideologies

IV. CORRELATION TO NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

Women in the Civil War provides teaching materials for **Era 5, Civil War and Reconstruction**, of the *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (1996), Standard 2 "The course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people." Activities compare women's home front and battlefield roles in the Union and the Confederacy, addressing Standard 2, 2B, "The student understands the social experience of the war on the battlefield and home front." Documents will also address learning how the resources of the Union and Confederacy affected the course of the war (Standard 2A). Parts of this unit also address Standard 3B, which explores the many obstacles to Reconstruction in the South.

Teachers will also have opportunities to use the activities and documents to address Standard 1, 1A, "The Causes of the Civil War: The student understands how the North and South differed and how politics and ideologies led to the Civil War."

V. LESSON PLANS

Unit Introduction

Lesson One: Union Women Experience the War

Lesson Two: Confederate Women Experience the War

Lesson Three: Slave Women Experience the War

Lesson Four: Women Challenging Expectations

VII. WORKSHEETS AND TIMELINES

Timeline One: Civil War Timeline

Timeline Two: Secession Timeline

Worksheet One: Image Analysis Worksheet

Worksheet Two: Written Document Analysis Worksheet

Worksheet Three: Daily Necessities

Worksheet Four: Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

Worksheet Five: Poster/Broadside Analysis Worksheet

UNIT INTRODUCTION

I. ACTIVITY APPROACHES

In addition to the activity suggestions included in each lesson plan, the following offers optional content connections and activity approaches.

A. Civil War Events

Though the lessons do not follow as a political or military chronology of the war, the documents can be integrated into a textbook presentation of the war by adding the following approaches:

1. Is the document written from a Northern or Southern point of view?
2. Have students highlight or circle mentions of battles, other events, and key Civil War figures.
3. Have students note the date of each document and place it in a timeline of the Civil War. You can have them start with the “Civil War Timeline” in the Appendix.
 - a. What was happening in the Civil War when this document/image was created?
 - b. What effect do events current to the document have on it? Cite evidence.

B. Online Activity Options

Many activities in this unit will have suggestions for completing the activities online. These will be marked *Online Option* and indented following the instructions for the “traditional” approach. To post these activities, start by creating a class space for the unit. The class space needs to be a website that allows multiple user contributions, with a site administrator to monitor content. Teachers will need to work with school administration to make sure that the school internet connection allows access to a site before using it. Some possibilities include:

Blog—This is loosely defined as an online journal and the format works best with a main single author (teacher). Others (students) can comment on the author’s posts. Students could also create individual blogs, but generally this format is not as collaborative. Most blog services do not allow uploading of documents. For the purposes of this unit, teachers may want to create a blog to post assignments, readings, and supplementary material. Students can each create their own blog. Here they will post their written assignments (short or long).

Wiki—This format allows the main author (teacher) to get more creative input from students. Like “Wikipedia” this format works well for content contribution by various participants. A wiki would work well for mini-research assignments or for students to contribute key terms and definitions.

Closed Social Networks— These usually can be limited access and offer a place for a forum (discussion), blog, photos, and member pages. A bonus with these is that the teacher can moderate postings. Options: <http://grou.ps> — <http://www.spruz.com> — <http://www.socialgo.com> — <http://buddypress.org> — <http://lovdbyless.com> — and: <http://elgg.org/>

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Voice Thread—Invited participants can comment on an uploaded image (or set of images). Comments can be spoken (by phone, microphone, or uploaded audio file) or typed. Use as an alternate for primary source image analysis <http://www.voicethread.com>

Poll Everywhere—Create a multiple choice or free text poll (responders can send comments). <http://www.polleverywhere.com>

“Facebook” template —Have students use a facebook template to create a mock-up of a facebook page. <http://historytech.wordpress.com/>

II. OPENING ACTIVITY

1. This activity will work the best if you have started to study the Civil War. Have students take out a paper and list all the names from the Civil War that they can think of (you may want to give a time limit). Create a class list of the names.

Online Option: Post on the class blog or social network: “What names do you know from the Civil War? Do NOT look anything up! This is not a quiz! We want to see what knowledge we are starting with.”

2. Have the class review the complete list: Ask the race, gender, and occupation of each of the people listed (if they know). Are they famous? If so, do you know what they are famous for? Then ask who might be missing from the list. (Ordinary people, soldiers, women, African Americans, etc.)

Online Option: (1) Post your comment on your own blog: “Review the list of contributed Civil War names. Email <teacher> your answer: What races, genders (male or female), and occupations (jobs) are represented on our class list? Who do you think we are missing?” (2) Create an online free text poll “Name a famous person from the Civil War.”

3. Paragraph assignment: Write a paragraph that answers the question: How do you think women during this period felt about the Civil War? Consider both sides of the war when you answer.

Online Option: Post your paragraph answer on your blog.

4. Prepare the class for the activities by discussing women’s place in American society during the mid-nineteenth century. Ask: What were women’s roles in the mid-1800s? What kind of work did they do? Could they vote? Was it different for black women? In the North? In the South?

Suggested resource: Dr. Catherine Lavender (City University of New York), “Cult of Domesticity and TrueWomanhood,” Available: <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/386/truewoman.html>

LESSON THREE

SLAVE WOMEN EXPERIENCE THE WAR

I. OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Explore the experiences of slaves during the Civil War, especially as “contraband”
- ❖ Using primary sources, identify Northern attitudes towards Southern blacks they encountered during the Civil War
- ❖ Evaluate new roles available to slave women who became contraband or were freed
- ❖ Identify ways that slaves shaped the war and supported the Union

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

NOTE: The material in this “Historical Background” reading is meant for your own preparation or, depending on the reading level of your class, as a student reading. You may use it for mini-lectures, read parts as background reading, or a summary reading or lecture after the activities.

There are also brief “Teacher Background” sections for many of the documents within the activity instructions. The documents follow the lessons and the analysis worksheets are in the Appendix.

Slave women and free women shared some common experiences during the Civil War. Despite race, class, or regional differences, most women worried about men at the battlefield, labored to their support families, and had to sort out their feelings about the cause and cost of the war. Yet slave women had experiences that differed greatly from those of free contemporaries, white or black.

As the war moved through the South, many slaves escaped from their masters in order to find freedom behind Union Army lines. Initially the Union army did not know what to do with slaves that arrived at their camps, and some were returned to their masters. However, slave men, women and children pushed the issue by continuing to flood to Union lines, and Union officials began to see that returning slaves to their masters undermined the war effort. Soon the army began declaring slaves “contraband” of war, but their freedom was not ensured until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 declared slaves in Confederate territory to be free.

Even though they were free, life as a contraband slave was incredibly difficult. Woman contrabands usually arrived at Union camps with dependent children, little or no property, and poor health because of a difficult journey and a life of enslavement. These women were in need of food, medical attention, clothes and shelter, and Union soldiers often viewed their presence with resentment because they were a drain on resources and a military encumbrance. Some aid was provided by Northern charities, but many women had to build their own shanty dwellings and search for ways to support their families. Although some

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contraband women were able to find work at Union camps, there were paid poorly and sometimes mistreated by white soldiers.

Even sympathetic Northern whites held deep prejudices towards African Americans and were worried they were not fit to handle freedom. They questioned whether black men and women could work without white direction, and sometimes tried to control black labor in ways that resembled slavery. However, black men and women resisted these attempts to control their labor and worked to implement their own vision of freedom. In particular, former slaves sought education, which they had been deprived under slavery. Schools popped up at Union camps or on liberated plantations, and black men and women of all ages gathered to learn. Emancipated men and women did not need anyone to tell them that literacy was necessary to experience true freedom.

Even though most former slaves embraced their freedom, they faced many obstacles. Women in particular often bore the greatest burdens of building a new life in freedom. Formerly someone else's property, they had no belongings of their own. In addition, because of slavery many families had been separated, meaning black women did not know where their children or loved ones might be. Once black men could enlist, both Northern black men and Southern ex-slaves joined the military, and many slave women endured further family separations as they had to say goodbye to male family members who went off to war.

Despite these incredible obstacles and the daily struggle for survival that dominated the lives of many slave women in the South, they were aware of the stakes of the war and knew that Union victory was necessary to secure their freedom. Most looked to the North with hope, and sought to aid the Union war effort in any way they could. Likewise, African Americans in the North also made their mark during the war. Once they were allowed to enlist, northern black men fought courageously in the war, and female family members supported their service and looked for ways to aid others who were still enslaved members. Some Northern black women went South to work as teachers at freedmen's schools, while others maintained households and supported male relatives that went off to war—as did many women during the war regardless of race or regional background. African Americans in the North did not have the same experiences of violence and deprivation as their enslaved counterparts. However, from the beginning of the war, Northern blacks insisted that destroying slavery should be a primary war aim for the Union. For newly freed slaves, freedom offered new hope, but also posed major challenges that were not easily resolved.

III. LESSON ACTIVITIES

Activity One: *Written Accounts from Slaves*

Part One—Background: The Slave Experience

1. Ideally, this lesson will follow a pre-Civil War unit on slavery, so that students come to the activity with some knowledge. If not, this activity still works, but you may need to fill in some knowledge gaps.

Individually or in groups, have students think of five words or concepts that describe the slave experience. Have the groups or individuals share one-three of their words/concepts. Discuss: “Were any aspects of the slave experience unique for women?”

Come up with a class version of the list and have students write the words/concepts on the left side of Worksheet Five, “Slaves Experiences in the Civil War.” On the right side have students note how each experience might change during the war or after the war. If they think there was no change, they should just write “no change” or “none.”

2. Distribute copies of **Document 3-A**, “Education Prohibited.” Have students (1) highlight the punishments listed for slaves or free blacks learning to read and write; (2) circle or underline the punishments for whites enabling or teaching slaves or free blacks to read and write.

Discuss: Under these laws, how likely was it at the time of the Civil War that a slave could read or write? Discuss with students what effect this might have on the evidence we have today about the slave experience during the Civil War.

Part Two—Written Accounts

1. Give students **Document 3-B**, the letter from Martha Glover to her husband. Have students read the letter and complete the “Document Analysis Worksheet” (Appendix, Worksheet Two). Locate Mexico, Missouri on a map. What side did the state of Missouri take in the War? How might it have been possible for Richard Glover to join the Union forces?
2. Have students compare Mrs. Glover’s letter to the letters in the Lesson One, Activity Two, which were also written by women with loved ones at war. What are the similarities? differences?
3. **Document 3-C**, “Letter from Charlotte Ann Jackson,” was written by an ex-slave. Have students read the document and answer the questions. According to the note with the letter, how did Miss Jackson learn to write?

Activity Two: Oral Histories: Female Slaves Recall Slavery and the Civil War

1. This activity will use Documents **3-D**, **3-E**, and **3-F**. Supply each student (or group) with one of the three documents. Explain the concept of recording an oral history as well as the dialect differences. Have students/groups “translate” their document into modern English.
2. Once they have their “modernized” versions, students should highlight or underline the women’s encounters with Union soldiers in each document. Discuss: ‘What did soldiers do and say to the women?’
3. Students or groups should then prepare a written newspaper report or an oral television or radio report on how soldiers are treating the female slaves they encounter in the South.

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4. Discuss: Did each group come to the same conclusion? Why or why not?

Web option: Create a video of the report and post it on the class Web page or create a “news alert” blog entry. If students are working in groups, one could post the item and others could post comments in the role of contemporary receivers of the report.

Activity Three: Slave Women as Contraband of War

Part One—Written Evidence

1. Have students find definitions for the word ‘contraband.’ Then explain to the class that wherever Union forces set up camps in the South, men and women stole away from the plantations to join them. At first generals returned the fugitives to their masters as had been mandated by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Then, in May of 1861, when slaves who had been building Confederate fortifications presented themselves at Fort Monroe, General Benjamin Butler was the first to declare them ‘contraband of war’ and put them to work in the bakehouse for his men. What did Butler mean by the use of the word contraband?
2. By the end of the first year of war, thousands of contrabands were in camps outside Washington, in tidewater Virginia and South Carolina, and in Union-held territory along the Mississippi. Given what students have learned so far about supplies and food for Union soldiers, what do they think conditions were in the contraband camps?
3. Give students copies of **Document 3-G**, a letter written by Union nurse Cornelia Hancock in which she discusses contraband conditions, **Document 3-H**, excerpts from Charlotte Forten’s account of her service teaching contrabands in St. Helena Island, and **Document 3-I**, an account by Harriet Tubman of her work among the contrabands.

Theme One: The Needs of the Contrabands

- a. Have students (individually or in groups) find and list the following information about the contrabands Miss Hancock, Miss Forten, and Miss Tubman see in their line of work. Divide up the topics as desired. The first two topics are physical needs and the second two are social needs.
 - ◆ Items they need
 - ◆ Physical problems they have
 - ◆ Ways others have treated them, especially the women (and who treated them that way)
 - ◆ Their family situations
- b. In her letter, Cornelia tells her sister that she hopes to “affect [her] to some action.” Ask students what they think Cornelia wants her sister to do. Students should choose one of the categories and create an advertisement to solicit help and donations for the contraband camps. Have students think of relief efforts they are familiar with (*war, natural disasters*). Should they ask for items? money?

Web option: Have students add an online element to their advertisement campaign.

Theme Two: Contrabands and the War Effort

- a. Have students (individually or in groups) find and list the following information about the different things Miss Hancock, Miss Forten, and Miss Tubman see in their line of work. This can include geographical or environmental changes, encounters with different types of people, etc. Divide up the topics as desired.
 - ◆ How do each woman feel about the war effort (and the Union)?
 - ◆ What are the contributions of contrabands and escaped/freed slaves to the war effort?
 - ◆ How do these women initially perceive contrabands and how does this shift?
 - ◆ What issues face women contrabands?
- b. Discuss with students whether they think ethnicity played any role in the differences among these three accounts.

Part Two—Visual Evidence

1. Give students copies (or project) the images in **Document 3-J** and **Document 3-K** and have them fill out the Image Analysis Worksheet (Appendix, Worksheet One) for each photograph. You can also use these questions:
 - Describe what you see in this photograph. Who is pictured? What are their ages? How are they dressed?
 - How does this image compare with the two previous accounts of contraband camps?
 - What do you find interesting about this photo? What can you learn from this image that was not discussed by Tubman or Hancock?
2. How do contraband conditions in the images compare to the written descriptions in Documents **3-G**, **3-H**, and **3-I**?
3. As an extension to this activity, have students research Matthew B. Brady and his photography. The first contraband photo was taken by James F. Gibson and the second by David Woodbury—both photographers from Brady’s studio. Why did Brady (and his photographers) take pictures during the war? Were they paid?

Summarizing Activities

1. Have students research the pre-war activities of Cornelia Hancock, Charlotte Forten, and Harriet Tubman and write mini-biographies emphasizing their influences. Compare their pre-war activities with their more ‘mainstream’ roles once the war began.
2. Have students research “ex-slave women post Civil War” and choose a subject for a post-Civil War mini-biography. They can base their biography on a slave narrative and/or other sources.

Lesson Three

3. *Web option. Have the class begin a “Civil War Women” wiki and create entries for Cornelia Hancock, Charlotte Forten, Harriet Tubman, or one of the ex-slave women. They can add other women from the unit as well.*