

## Art Story: The *Shaw Memorial* by Augustus Saint-Gaudens

Read by Julie Carmean

You are looking at a high resolution digital reproduction of a memorial sculpture made by American artist Augustus Saint-Gaudens in 1900 titled *The Shaw Memorial*.

### **Did you know that by the end of the American Civil War, African Americans made up almost 10% of the Union Army?**

That's almost 180,000 soldiers who fought on behalf of the North! The *Shaw Memorial* by Augustus Saint-Gaudens calls to our memory the brave actions of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment, the first African American troop from the North to fight on behalf of the Union in the American Civil War. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, a young white officer from a strongly abolitionist family in Boston, led the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment, which is why he is in the center on horseback.

### **Would you like to know more of the history behind the events in this sculpture?**

When President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, declaring enslaved people in the South to be free and allowing African Americans to join the Union Army, the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment was formed. It was made up of 1,000 men of all ages, including the two sons of Frederick Douglass, the grandson of Sojourner Truth, and Sergeant William Carney, who would become the first African American to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Look for a soldier who could be a sergeant. The man marching directly in front of the horse with chevrons on his sleeve might represent him.

Colonel Shaw and the enlisted men trained together through the spring of 1863. In the summer, the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment marched through Boston Common and boarded a ship to South Carolina to join the war in an effort to end slavery. They fought their first battle on James Island and won. Then they marched further to Fort Wagner, a Confederate stronghold.

Do you see the drummer boy in the front? Some researchers believe his name was Alex Johnson. Only 16 years old, the drummer set the marching tempo for the troop and sent signals to officers.

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In the fierce battle on July 18, 1863, Colonel Shaw died on the battlefield, and almost half of his men were killed, captured, or injured. Sergeant William Carney saved the American flag from touching the ground, when the flag bearer and Colonel Shaw were shot.

The soldiers' extraordinary courage spread and inspired many more African Americans to enlist in the army. President Lincoln said that if it weren't for the valor and service of the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment, setting an example that inspired many thousands of African Americans to enlist, the North may have lost the war.