

THE  
CIVIL WAR  
IN LITERATURE AND FILM

Regarding African Americans  
in the Civil War

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“I think that the proposition to make soldiers of the slaves is the most pernicious idea that has been suggested since the war began. You cannot make soldiers of slaves, or slaves of soldiers. The day you make a soldier of them is the beginning of the end of the revolution. And if slaves seem good soldiers, then our whole theory of slavery is wrong.”

*Former U.S. Senator and Confederate General  
Howell Cobb of Georgia*

“Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, ‘U.S.,’ let him get an eagle on his buttons and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States.”

*Frederick Douglass*

“*Resolved: More effective remedies ought now to be thoroughly tried, in the shape of warm lead and cold steel, duly administered by two hundred thousand black doctors.*”

*Poughkeepsie Convention of Free Blacks  
Summer 1862*

“I have had the question put to me often, ‘Is not a negro as good as a white man to stop a bullet?’ Yes: and a sand-bag is better; but can a negro do our skirmishing and picket duty? Can they improvise bridges, sorties, flank movements, etc., like the white man. *I say no.*”

*Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman*

“I have given the subject of arming the Negro my hearty support. This, with the emancipation of the Negro, is the heaviest blow yet given the Confederacy.... By arming the Negro we have added a powerful ally. They will make good soldiers and taking them from the enemy weakens him in the same proportion they strengthen us.”

*Gen. Ulysses S. Grant*

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“You say you will not fight to free Negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you. [When victory is won] there will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue and clenched teeth, and steady eye and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while, I fear, there will be some white ones, unable to forget that with malignant heart and deceitful speech, they strove to hinder it.”

*President Abraham Lincoln*

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“The arm of the slaves is the best defense against the arm of the slaveholder. Who would be free themselves must strike the blow.... I urge you to fly to arms and smite to death the power that would bury the Government and your liberty in the same hopeless grave. This is your golden opportunity.”

*Frederick Douglass*



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“Will the *slave* fight? If any man ask you, tell him No.  
But if anyone asks you will a *Negro* fight, tell him  
Yes!”

*Wendell Phillips*

