**Massachusetts 54**

The Massachusetts 54 was the first all black regiment established during the Civil War. These men, who consisted of mostly escaped or free slaves, volunteered for this unit with an eagerness to fight and represent the Union states of the North. A documentary and a movie depicted these brave men and their struggles to become key factors in the U.S. Army, at a time when many black Americans were looked down upon. The documentary told an amazing story of what these men went through. How they were able to overcome the mockery, taunting, and racial discriminations from many white civilians and soldiers. The movie on the other hand, allowed me to actually visualize how these men felt, and their determination to serve a meaningful purpose.

Colonel Robert Gould Shaw was a white Army officer put in charge to train the men of the Massachusetts 54. He was fully aware of the challenges these men had to overcome to be a part of a great fighting force, but he also considered these men as equal as everyone else. He treated them as fairly as he could, especially with the limited resources he had. They were not given proper clothing or pay for the simple reason that were black, and supplies were reserved for white Union soldiers. The South as well became so outraged at the notion of an all black regiment that they introduced a proclamation that stated: Any captured black soldier or white officer leading them, will immediately be put to death. The message was clear and Colonel Shaw granted discharges to anyone, including his fellow white officers, who didn’t want to be a part of the new regiment. No one left, and every single one stayed to complete the training.

As the Massachusetts 54 marched to their first assignment in Darien, GA, many free slaves who saw them marching were in awe and very proud of what they were witnessing. On the other hand, white soldiers from another Union Army passed by them and taunted them. Private Trip (a very outspoken man played by Denzel Washington) was quick to intervene; even going as far as saying that, “This war would be over if the 54 were fighting there”. As a fight between the two soldiers was about to take place, recently promoted Sergeant Major John Rawlins from the 54th stepped in to try and calm things down. The white soldiers laughed at the fact a black soldier was allowed to even wear the stripes of a Sergeant Major. When Colonel Shaw sought disciplinary action against the white soldier, Rawlins stepped in and said, “There is no need, for this is just an argument between two enlisted men”. The point he was making is that it didn’t matter the color of their skin, but the respect one deserves from the rank. Later on, that white soldier and his unit would change his outlook on the 54th.

Colonel Shaw’s childhood friend Thomas Searles, who was a black American and the first to volunteer to join the unit was not only ridiculed by whites, but also by other black members in training with him. Private Trip constantly harassed him and used racial slurs toward him. Trip was not impressed with his language skills and portrayed him as a “white man in a black man’s body”. But Searles never gave up, and Private Trip’s perspective of him would eventually change when Searles saved his life in their first battle at James Island, SC. After that battle, Private Trip and Colonel Shaw had a discussion where Trip said he refused to carry the flag. What he meant was that it didn’t mean that much to him, because after the war was over, he would go back to being a poor homeless black man.

In the dreadful and final assignment of the Massachusetts 54, they volunteered to lead the charge in the battle of Fort Wagner in South Carolina. Colonel Shaw was so proud of his men, that even though they had not slept for two days, he knew they still had the courage and fight left in them to lead that charge. White Union soldiers, who previously were in disgust at the all black regiment, now see them as brave soldiers. Cheering them on as they led the charge to try and capture Fort Wagner. Searless’s bravery and courage were accurately portrayed in both the movie and documentary as well. After becoming wounded at James Island and refusing to be sent home, he announced that he would be the one to carry the flag if Colonel Shaw were to be killed. Which is what happened, along with many men from the 54th.Those who weren’t killed were forced to retreat and Fort Wagner remained in Confederate control. The Confederates, who wanted to show their hatefulness toward Colonel Shaw, did so by burying him with his dead black soldiers and not giving him the proper burial of an Army officer.

The movie Glory was very accurate when comparing it to the documentary of the Massachusetts 54. I could think of a few reasons why they would choose to title the movie “Glory”, but there is one that I feel is correct. It is named Glory because of the glory these black soldiers brought to other Americans, white or black. They showed them that through dedication anything is possible, no matter someone’s race. That they were not “animals” as seen by some, but human beings capable of doing great things. Which set the tone for the many remarkable accomplishments we see today, by so many different people.