

Did USCT Veterans See the Benefits of Their Civil War Service?

Historical Thinking Skills Assessed: Sourcing, Corroboration, Claim, Evidence

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Course: United States History

Level: Middle/High

Task Question: Did African-American veterans of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) secure equal rights and treatment as a result of their military service?

Learning Outcome:

Students will be able to source, analyze, and corroborate multiple primary sources to develop an evidence-based argument.

Standards Alignment:

[Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies](#)

- RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g. in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

[National History Standards](#)

Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)

Standard 3: How various reconstruction plans succeeded or failed

[College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework for Social Studies Standards](#)

- D2.His.16.6-8 Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.
- D3.1.6-8 Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.
- D4.1.6-8 Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.

Materials:

- RS#01: Excerpt from a Recruiting Speech by Frederick Douglass
- RS#02: Source A – The First Vote
- RS#03: Source B – Samuel Johnson’s Pension Appeal
- RS#04: Source B Transcription – Samuel Johnson’s Pension Appeal
- RS#05: Source C – Colored Troops Get Good Marks
- RS#06: Source D – This is a White Man’s Government

- RS#07: Graphic Organizer – Sourcing
- RS#08: Graphic Organizer – Corroborating the Evidence
- RS#09: Thoughtful Application
- RS#10: ARCH Historical Thinking Skills Rubric

Background for the Teacher:

In 1860, a year before the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, 13% of Maryland's total population – almost 90,000 African Americans – was enslaved. The election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency of the United States on November 6, 1860 set into motion the events that would result in the emancipation of the slaves four years later. With Lincoln's inauguration, the South seceded from the Union, and the American Civil War began on April 12, 1861.

African Americans were first allowed to serve in the Federal Army, also known as the Union Army, as laborers in July 1862 and to engage in combat with the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863. The War Department's General Order No. 143, issued on May 22, 1863, created the Bureau of Colored Troops to facilitate the recruitment of African-American soldiers into the Union Army ranks. African-American enlistees joined the segregated United States Colored Troops, or USCT. At the conclusion of the Civil War in April 1865, approximately 10% of the Union Army was African American. In all, around 179,000 African-American men served in the Union Army, and 19,000 in the Navy.

When the war ended, African-American veterans re-entered a society that was changing dramatically. With the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, slavery was abolished. The Freedmen's Bureau was established, and the first of the Civil Rights Acts became law. It seemed that African Americans were taking important steps toward equality.

Despite the new constitutional freedoms and rights, economic, social, and true political equality for African Americans was a long way off. With little formal education and few opportunities, many African Americans were limited to performing manual labor to support their families. The sharecropping system, Jim Crow laws, and segregation were substantial barriers to racial equality for African Americans, including USCT veterans.

Over the course of their military service, large numbers of white and black veterans contracted debilitating rheumatic diseases, which resulted in joint inflammation and the disintegration of connective tissues. Often physically unable to perform manual labor, these men struggled to provide for themselves and their families. While rheumatism was cited frequently in Civil War pension records, many USCT veterans found it exceptionally difficult to obtain government benefits. As the result of the condition of slavery and/or illiteracy, these veterans many times could not provide the necessary documents to apply for pensions. Without documentation, any pensions they were awarded were likely to be reduced. Moreover, the pension applications of African-American veterans often received extra scrutiny from prejudiced government representatives.

Before beginning this performance task, prepare students for the use of the word "colored" to denote black Americans. Explain that "colored," like "Negro," was considered an acceptable and respectful way to refer to African Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Also, explain that those words are not generally acceptable today, and have been replaced by the terms "African American" and "black Americans."

Sources:

Maryland State Archives. "United States Colored Troops (USCT)." Accessed 4/8/14.

http://slavery.msa.maryland.gov/html/casestudies/usct_overview.html

Dobak, William A. *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862-1867*. Washington, D.C.:

Center of Military History, United States Army, 2011. Accessed 4/8/14.

http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/030/30-24/CMH_Pub_30-24.pdf

Procedure

Context Setting:

- Ask: What were the political, social, and economic conditions of African Americans prior to the Civil War? Briefly discuss the role that slavery played in causing the Civil War.
- Have students read RS#01: Excerpt from a Recruiting Speech by Frederick Douglass. In this speech, Douglass encouraged African Americans to enlist in the newly authorized United States Colored Troops (USCT).
- Have students source the document by answering the following questions:
 - What kind of document is this?
 - Who wrote it? When?
 - What is the purpose of this source?
 - Why does Frederick Douglass say that African Americans should serve in the Union Army? What does he suggest that African Americans will earn by helping the Union to win the war?
- Inform students that they will be exploring four primary sources created in the quarter century following the Civil War to evaluate whether Douglass' prediction was correct.
- Present the Task Question: Did African-American veterans of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) secure equal rights and treatment as a result of their military service?

Document Analysis:

- Direct students to read Sources A through D (RS#02-RS#06). Working in pairs, have students analyze the sources, using RS#07: Graphic Organizer – Sourcing.
- Re-convene the class. To more deeply analyze the sources, pose and discuss the following questions:
 - Source A: What is title of the source? What type of source is it? What is hanging above the men's heads? What is its significance?
 - Source B:
 - What was Samuel Johnson seeking in his initial claim? *A pension (monetary compensation for his service in the USCT during the war)*
 - Why was Johnson's claim first rejected and what was he hoping to accomplish in filing the appeal (review the meaning of the term "appeal")? *He was found by the reviewer to be "not disabled in any pensionable degree." He was asking for a reconsideration of his claim and a positive outcome (pension award).*
 - When did Johnson say his medical problem began? *During the term of his enlistment*
 - Does the rejection of his claim seem valid? (Say that the document does not state the result of the appeal, just that it was filed before Robert A. Thursby, Justice of the Peace.)

- Source C: African Americans represented how much of the United States army in 1888? How was their performance viewed by the Surgeon-General (the most senior medical officer in the U.S. army)? How does this report compare with the finding in Samuel Johnson's claim?
- Source D:
 - What is the title of this political cartoon?
 - What does each stereotyped figure in the political cartoon represent? (Teacher may need to explain the characters and review the position of the Democratic Party in the Reconstruction era.) *The man in the middle represents Confederate States of America (abbreviation CSA is on his belt buckle). On his knife is the "The Lost Cause," a reference to the Civil War used by Confederate sympathizers. The knife is pointing at the African-American man on the ground. He represents the resurgence of the Southern states after Reconstruction. The man on the left is a stereotyped Irishman, who were often depicted with ape-like features in racist cartoons of the time. He is wielding a club that reads, "A Vote," and represents the Northern, urban Democratic Party. The well-dressed man on the right is holding a wallet, implying that he can buy votes (has power).*
 - What is the black man reaching for? (Hint: Look for the object in Source A.)

Corroborating Evidence and Constructing Interpretations – Close Analysis:

- Distribute RS#08: Graphic Organizer – Corroborating the Evidence.
- Have students work in pairs to complete the graphic organizer and synthesize information from the sources.

Thoughtful Application:

- Individually, have students consider how they would answer the Task Question: Did African-American veterans of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) secure equal rights and treatment as a result of their military service?
- Distribute RS#09: Thoughtful Application. Tell students to imagine that they are a USCT veteran, like Samuel Johnson, in the year 1890. Have them write a speech to fellow members of their Grand Army of the Republic post in which they present an argument about whether their military service during the war has earned African American veterans equal treatment and rights.
- Instruct students to support their claims with evidence from the sources about the rights and treatment of African Americans in the period following the Civil War.
- Instruct student that their position does not have to be absolute (yes, black veterans received equal treatment, or no, they did not). Students could argue that black veterans' treatment was mixed or varied, as long as they adequately explain their position and support it with evidence.
- Assess student responses by using RS#10: ARCH Historical Thinking Skills Rubric.

Resource Sheet #01

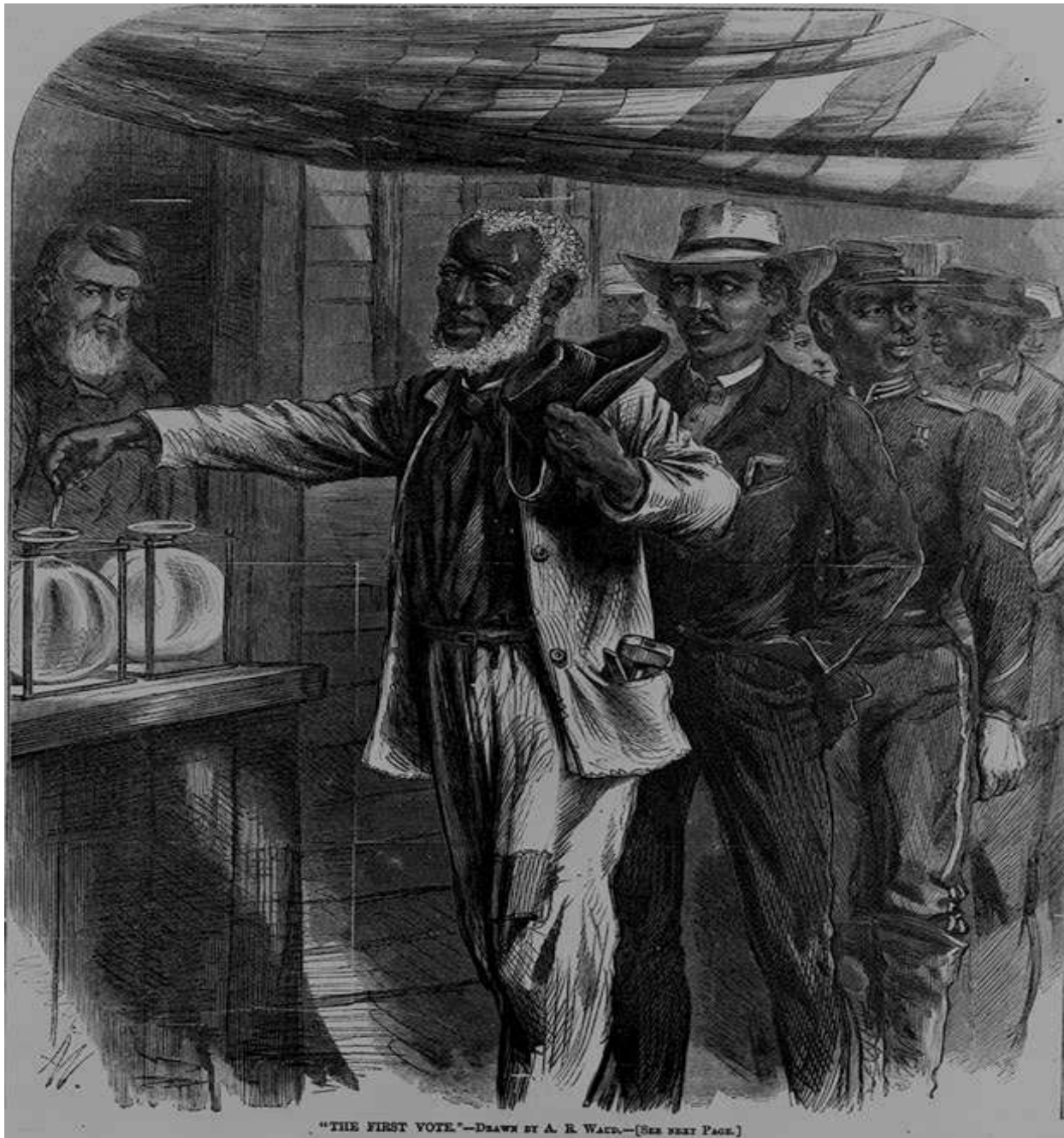
Excerpt from a Recruiting Speech by Frederick Douglass

“...In good earnest then, and after the best deliberation, I now for the first time during this war feel at liberty to call and counsel you to arms... The chance is now given you to end in a day the bondage of centuries, and to rise in one bound from social degradation to the place of common equality with all other varieties of men. . .”

Source: Douglass, Frederick. “Men of Color, To Arms!” Speech delivered March 21, 1863. Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division. Accessed 4/3/14.
<<http://www.loc.gov/resource/mfd.22005/#seq-1>>

Resource Sheet #02

Source A – The First Vote



Source: Waud, Alfred R. "The First Vote." From *Harper's Weekly*, November 16, 1867. Copyprint. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-19234 (5-21). Accessed 4/7/14. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/00651117/>

Resource Sheet #03

Source B – Samuel Johnson's Pension Appeal

CLAIMANT'S APPEAL TO THE SECRETARY OF THE
INTERIOR.

State of Maryland County of Baltimore, ss.

In the matter of Claim for Invalid's Pension No. 290,175
Samuel Johnson Claimant.

Personally came before me a Justice of the Peace in and for aforesaid County and State
Samuel Johnson claimant for Invalid's Pension
late Private Company (S.) 37th Regiment United States Colored Volunteers
a citizen of the town of Baltimore County of Baltimore
State of Maryland, well known to me to be reputable and entitled to credit, and who, being
duly sworn, declares in relation to the aforesaid case as follows:

That his Claim for Invalid's Pension No. 290,175 having been rejected for the following reasons:
By letter of Pension Commissioner Blackford dated Washington DC
Feb 25 1889 here with filed in this case as "not disabled in any General
degree"

and that the extent of his disability is at least one half as he is confined to his house
(State fully the extent to which the disability interferes with manual labor.)

for weeks at a time and he has tried to prove the facts & as he thinks
did prove them by competent witness, he is utterly useless to himself
and this state of his health has appeared in Rheumatism, this was
caused from exposure while in the Army as will be seen by the records.
Claimant was never affected with Rheumatism prior to his
enlistment nor was Rheumatism a disease common to his
family, nor did he act imprudently while in the Army or since
the Claimant appeals for a Reconsideration of his said Claim for the Reason that he was in the
(Here state fully the reason why a review of the claim should be made.)
Hospital during his service in the Army caused by Rheumatism
when he remained about six weeks he was released and again ordered
by the Drill the Regiment and was made out while the Claimant
was in the hospital so that he was a disabled man when he was
discharged and has never been free from Rheumatism since and
has to lose at least one half of his time by reason of his disability
that he has furnished the pension office with this evidence and can
prove his condition if allowed. This claimant has always been
a good character and has to depend upon his labor for his &
family's support. Claimant is at least one half disabled
and his disease is increasing.

© Maryland State Archives, msa_sc5839_1_4-0030

Source: Claimant's Appeal to the Secretary of the Interior. Samuel Johnson, Box 30, Folder 4, Page 30. U.S. Colored Troops Research Collection. MSA SC 3520. Maryland State Archives. Annapolis, MD. Accessed 4/7/14. http://mdhistory.net/msa_sc5839/msa_sc5839_30/html/msa_sc5839_1_4-0030.html

Resource Sheet #04

Source B Transcription – Samuel Johnson’s Pension Appeal

CLAIMANT’S APPEAL TO THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

State of Maryland City of Baltimore, SS.

In the matter of Claim for Invalid Pension No. 590, 178 Samuel Johnson Claimant.

Personally came before me a Justice of the Peace in and for aforesaid City and State Samuel Johnson claimant for Invalid Pension late private Company C, 29th Regiment United States Colored Volunteers a citizen of the town of Baltimore, City of Baltimore State of Maryland, well known to me to be reputable and entitled to credit, and who, being duly sworn, declares in relation to the aforesaid case as follows:

That his Claim for Invalid Pension No. 590178 having been rejected for the following reasons: “not disabled in any pensionable degree” and that the extent of his disability is “at least one half as he is confined to his house for weeks at a time and he has tried to prove the facts and as he thinks did prove them by competent witnesses, he is utterly useless to himself and this state of his health has appeared in Rheumatism, this was caused from exposure while in the Army as will be seen by the records. Claimant was never affected with Rheumatism prior to his enlistment nor was Rheumatism a disease common to his family, nor did he act imprudently while in the army or service. . .”

. . .the Claimant appeals for a Reconsideration of his said Claim “for the Reason that he was in the hospital during his service in the Army caused by Rheumatism where he remained about six weeks he was released and again ordered by by [sic] the Dr. of the Regiment and was made out while the Claimant was in the hospital so that he was a disabled man when he was discharged and has never been free from Rheumatism since and has to lose at least one half of his time by reason of his disability that he has furnished no pensions with this evidence and can prove his condition if allowed. This claimant has always been a good character and has to depend upon his labor for his and families support. Claim and is at least one half disabled and his disease is increasing.”

This fifteenth day of April A.D. 1889,
(signed) Robert A. Thursby, Justice of the Peace

Source: Claimant’s Appeal to the Secretary of the Interior. Samuel Johnson, Box 30, Folder 4, Page 30. U.S. Colored Troops Research Collection. MSA SC 3520. Maryland State Archives. Annapolis, MD. Accessed 4/7/14.
<http://mdhistory.net/msa_sc5839/msa_sc5839_30/html/msa_sc5839_1_4-0030.html>

Resource Sheet #05

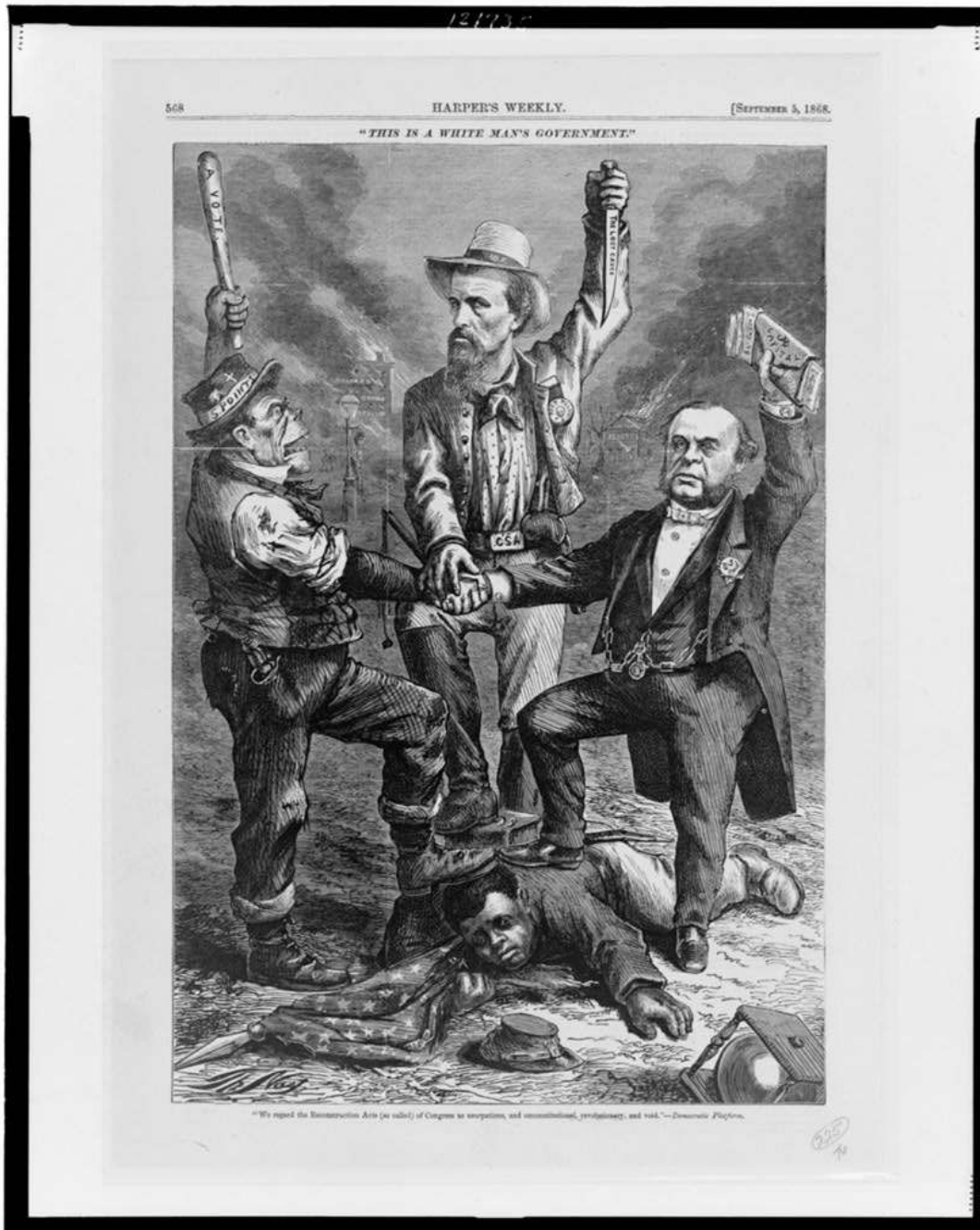
Source C – Colored Troops Get Good Marks

A good record for the colored troops in our regular army is given to the army in the annual report of the Surgeon-General. They constitute rather more than one-tenth of our whole military force, and, in regard to health and general effectiveness, they stand nearly on a level with the whites in the service. In some lines of duty they are found to be remarkably available. We have had colored regiments in our army for over a quarter of a century, and it is agreeable to learn the facts about them that are contained in the latest report.—*N. Y. Sun.*

Source: "Colored Troops Get Good Marks." *Cleveland Gazette*, November 24, 1888. Ohio Historical Center Archives. Accessed 4/7/14. <http://dbs.ohiohistory.org/africanam/det.cfm?ID=16058>

Resource Sheet #06

Source D – This is a White Man's Government



Source: Nast, Thomas. "This is a white man's government. We regard the Reconstruction Acts (so called) of Congress as usurpations, and unconstitutional, revolutionary, and void" – Democratic Platform. Print. 1868. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. Accessed 4/2/14.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98513794/>

Resource Sheet #07

Graphic Organizer – Sourcing

	Source A	Source B	Source C	Source D
Source Date				
What is the main idea in the source?				
What details support this main idea?				
The source refers to treatment of black veterans by whom?				
What is the purpose of the source? (Who was it intended to influence?)				
Does the source's purpose affect its reliability? If so, how?				

Resource Sheet #08

Graphic Organizer – Corroborating the Evidence

Evidence of Positive Treatment	Evidence of Negative Treatment

Did the treatment of African Americans in the 25 years after the Civil War seem to change over time? If so, how?

In what ways does the evidence show how specific groups in specific geographic regions treated African Americans?

Resource Sheet #10

ARCH Historical Thinking Skills Rubric – Secondary

	Close Reading Strategies	Strategies/ Procedural Concepts	Procedural Concepts	
Criteria	Sourcing	Corroboration	Claim	Evidence
4	<p>Identification: Fully understands the meaning and content of the source.</p> <p>Attribution: Cites all author(s) and identifies original dates of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>Perspective: Evaluates the reliability of the sources based on when and why the document was written and the author's perspective.</p>	<p>Constructs interpretation of events using conflicting information given about the same topic in multiple texts.</p>	<p>Formulates plausible interpretation, argument, or claim based on the evaluation of evidence found in a variety of primary and secondary sources.</p>	<p>Justifies claims using appropriate, direct evidence from a variety of reliable sources.</p>
3	<p>Identification: Mostly understands the meaning and content of the source.</p> <p>Attribution: Cites most author(s) and identifies most original dates of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>Perspective: Examines the reliability of the sources based on when and why the document was written and the author's perspective.</p>	<p>Explains similarities and differences by comparing information and perspectives of multiple documents.</p>	<p>Generates a reasonable interpretation, argument, or claim based on the evaluation of evidence found in selected primary and secondary sources.</p>	<p>Justifies claims using some appropriate, direct evidence from a variety of reliable sources.</p>
2	<p>Identification: Understands the meaning and content of the source with appropriate scaffolding and support.</p> <p>Attribution: Cites some author(s) and identifies some original dates of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>Perspective: Attempts to evaluate the reliability of the sources.</p>	<p>Identifies similarities and differences in information in multiple texts.</p>	<p>States an interpretation, argument, or claim that may or may not be based on evidence found in selected primary and secondary sources.</p>	<p>Justifies claims using generalizations, or using limited appropriate direct evidence.</p>
1	<p>Identification: Attempts to understand the meaning and content of the source with appropriate scaffolding and support.</p> <p>Attribution: Cites few author(s) and identifies few original dates of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>Perspective: Does not adequately examine reliability.</p>	<p>Demonstrates little to no attempt to examine documents for corroborating or conflicting evidence.</p>	<p>Does not state an original claim, argument, or interpretation</p>	<p>Does not justify or support claims using appropriate direct evidence.</p>