

# Augustus Saint-Gaudens



Augustus Saint-Gaudens,  
*Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw  
and the Massachusetts 54th  
Regiment*, 1900, patinated  
plaster, on loan from U.S.  
Department of the Interior,  
National Park Service, Saint-  
Gaudens National Historic Site,  
Cornish, New Hampshire



# 1 In Procession

This life-size sculpture commemorates members of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment, one of the first African American units to serve in the Civil War. A thousand African American men from across the country volunteered to join this regiment and fight for the Union. The American Civil War, which raged from 1861 to 1865, was a conflict between the North (Union) and South (Confederacy) of the United States. One of the central issues over which the two sides fought was slavery.

Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the leader of the 54th Regiment, rides gallantly on horseback alongside his men. He was a young white man from a family in Boston that strongly opposed slavery.

This powerful sculpture shows Colonel Shaw and his regiment as they marched off on May 28, 1863, to fight in the Civil War. A large crowd gathered in downtown Boston to send them off. Among the black soldiers marching that day were Frederick Douglass's two sons, Lewis and Charles; James Caldwell, the grandson of Sojourner Truth; and William Caleney, who would become the first African American to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.



Colonel Robert G. Shaw/Whipple (detail), 96 Washington Street, Boston. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

## 2 In Memory

In July 1863, the 54th Regiment led an attack against Fort Wagner, a fortress protecting the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina, deep in Confederate territory. Almost half of the soldiers who stormed the fort were killed, captured, or later died of their wounds, including Colonel Shaw.

The bravery and determination of the 54th Regiment earned great respect for black soldiers and inspired widespread enlistment of African Americans into the Union forces. By the end of the Civil War, nearly 180,000 black soldiers had fought for the Union. Their contributions and sacrifices, President Abraham Lincoln later said, gave the Union the advantage to win. In 1865 the South surrendered, and the United States remained one nation.

**Right in the van,  
On the red rampart's slippery swell,  
With heart that beat a charge, he fell  
Forward, as fits a man;  
But the high soul burns on to light men's feet  
Where death for noble ends makes dying sweet.  
"Memoriam Positum," John Russell Lowell, 1863,  
inscribed on the memorial**

## 3 In Relief

A relief is a type of sculpture that is raised from a flat surface rather than being sculpted "in the round." Coins and medals are examples of low relief, with images on them raised slightly from the surface. The Shaw Memorial was done in high relief, with the images projecting far from the surface. You can almost see all the way around Colonel Shaw and his horse.

The sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907) used a photograph of Colonel Shaw to show his facial features and uniform accurately. He wanted the monument to be as realistic as possible, and he even brought a horse into his studio to work from a live model.

Each soldier is unique. Some of the soldiers in the 54th Regiment were as young as sixteen years old. Others were fathers enlisting with their sons. To give each man a sense of individuality, Saint-Gaudens hired several African Americans to pose for him.

**How might these men have felt about fighting in the Civil War?**



## Civil War Sketchbook: A Soldier's Perspective

During the Civil War, many soldiers kept journals and sketchbooks as a way to record their memories of friends, daily life, new places, and military actions. These important documents of history not only help us understand what their experiences were like, but they also provide significant details about the time.

Civil War soldier Corporal J. E. Shadek, a member of Company A of the 8th Connecticut Volunteers, filled a small journal with ninety-three drawings—sketches of battlefields, encampments, soldiers' daily activities, and other events during his years as a soldier in the Union Army's Burnside Expedition in 1861 and 1862.

### Keep a visual journal

Try to carry a sketchbook with you one day a week and stop to record a person, place, activity, or event that you observe—in your home, neighborhood, school, or on a trip. It might be an everyday occurrence or something unique that you notice. It might be a quick five-minute sketch or a longer drawing. Write the date at the bottom of each sketch. If you wish, paste photographs into the sketchbook alongside your drawings. At the end of twelve months, you'll have a visual diary recording your memories of the year.



J. E. Shadek, *J. E. Shadek Sketchbook*, 1861/1862, bound volume with 93 drawings in mixed media on wove paper, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Mrs. Halleck Lefferts

top: Soldiers entertaining themselves around an evening campfire, Annapolis, Maryland 1861

middle: Sunset painted while camped at Bogues Banks, North Carolina

bottom: Troops marching in Washington, DC, September 5, 1862