



Winslow Homer

Title

A Shell in the Rebel Trenches

Medium

Wood engraving on paper

Date

1863

Dimensions

10 11/16 × 15 7/8 in. (27.1 × 40.3 cm)

Accession number

2003.2.23

Credit Line

Gift of Jane Collette Wilcox, 2003

Web Description

The Confederate Army vehemently opposed the use of African American slaves as soldiers. Instead they were forced to work as cooks, servants, and laborers, as seen in this print where they dug earthworks and trenches, sometimes under enemy fire. It was only in the month before the end of the war that a desperate Confederate Congress decreed the use of slaves near the front but prohibited their ability to bear arms. The addition of African Americans to Union forces was controversial. In 1863 their enlistment was approved but continued to be met with resistance and resentment. Some black soldiers experienced not only hostility but outright persecution. Nonetheless, black Yankee regiments, also known as Colored Troops, totaled over 170,000 men.