

Title:

The African-American Struggle for Equality in the World War II Era

Grade Level:

Grades 9 through 12

Authors:

David Harswick Preble High School, Green Bay

Brian Nast East High School, Green Bay

Pam Sylvester West High School, Green Bay

Abstract:

For many, the Second World War represents the epoch struggle of the 20th century – the ideals of the free world confronting the repression of dictatorial fascism. Americans rightfully reflect upon this era with great pride in our contributions to a multilateral effort to rid the world of the “evil-doers” of the mid-20th century. However, Native Americans, Japanese-Americans (most notably the Nisei), Hispanic-Americans, women, and African-Americans faced discrimination as they contributed to an effort to secure freedom for those in other countries. Although this contradiction was evident, disheartening, and infuriating, it also brought hope that the promise of freedom for the world ultimately would be kept here at home as well.

To facilitate student understanding of the complexities and differing viewpoints associated with any historic event/era, this 5-day lesson, designed for high school American History students, will engage students in researching primary and secondary sources pertaining to the experience of African-Americans in the World War II era.

(The activity could/would also extend to the afore mentioned minority groups and women. Classes may be divided into groups with each assigned a different racial/ethnic/gender group.)

State Standards:

B.12.1 Explain different points of view on the same historical event, using data gathered from various sources, such as letters, journals, diaries, newspapers, government documents, and speeches

B.12.2 Analyze primary and secondary sources related to a historical question to evaluate their relevance, make comparisons, integrate new information with prior knowledge, and come to a reasoned conclusion

B.12.4 Assess the validity of different interpretations of significant historical events

B.12.5 Gather various types of historical evidence, including visual and quantitative data, to analyze issues of freedom and equality, liberty and order, region and nation, individual

and community, law and conscience, diversity and civic duty; form a reasoned conclusion in the light of other possible conclusions; and develop a coherent argument in the light of other possible arguments

B.12.6 Select and analyze various documents that have influenced the legal, political, and constitutional heritage of the United States

B.12.8 Recall, select, and explain the significance of important people, their work, and their ideas in the areas of political and intellectual leadership, inventions, discoveries, and the arts, within each major era of Wisconsin, United States, and world history

B.12.15 Identify a historical or contemporary event in which a person was forced to take an ethical position, such as a decision to go to war, the impeachment of a president, or a presidential pardon, and explain the issues involved

B.12.17 Identify historical and current instances when national interests and global interests have seemed to be opposed and analyze the issues involved

B.12.18 Explain the history of slavery, racial and ethnic discrimination, and efforts to eliminate discrimination in the United States and elsewhere in the world

Essential Historical Question:

How did African Americans experience and confront racism in the World War II Era?

Perspectives on the Question:

African American men of combat age

Why should African Americans fight for a country that does not offer them equality?

African American workers

How were conditions and opportunities different for African Americans than for white workers?

African American women

What role did they play in the workforce and military? What were their experiences with racism in these settings?

African-American and white social and political leaders

What were the positions of black and white social and political leaders during World War II? How did they influence African American society on the home front and abroad?

Learning Targets:

Knowledge

Racism

Fascism

Equality

Communism

Democracy

Primary vs. secondary sources

Analysis of different perspectives of the same historical event/era

Skills and Processes

Reading and writing skills

Research and analysis of primary and secondary sources

Reasoning and Creative Thinking

Develop an understanding of differing historical perspectives.

Compare and contrast differing racial values.

Obtain historical data from a variety of sources.

Support interpretations with historical evidence.

Formulate a position or course of action on an issue.

Dispositions and Attitudes

Respect and appreciation for challenges people face.

Develop an understanding of different perspectives on race relations during World War II

Develop an understanding of that a nation's actions may not exemplify a nation's stated ideals.

Develop an understanding of that historical interpretation and focus change over time.

Instruction:

Preliminary Activities:

(Activating prior knowledge, identifying critical concepts, understanding the structure of sources)

1) Review of research methods: the difference between secondary and primary sources (with examples), propaganda techniques, how to conduct interviews (<http://www.studsterkel.org>.)

2) Review causes of World War II and U.S. justifications for entry into World War II (self-defense, defense of freedom, democracy, self-determination, liberty)

New Learning Activities:

(Content of new information, strategies for understanding, creation and development of product or performance)

Students will choose one of the following projects. All projects will be discussed and approved by the instructor.

1) After reading 3-5 oral history excerpts/interviews, conduct an interview with someone who lived during the World War II era who is well versed in race relations during that time. The student will transcribe the interview, as well as provide a written analysis of the interviewee's answers.

2) After reading 3-5 oral histories/interviews, the student will create a work of historical fiction based upon the information learned. This could be accomplished through a personal diary/journal, letters to home, letters to the front, or fictional narrative. Incorporate some historic photos, press clippings, or other primary sources.

3) Find 3-5 political cartoons from the World War II era dealing with racial issues in America. In a 2-3 page paper provide an analysis of each cartoon including a discussion of the propaganda techniques used. Then create your own political cartoon which provides insight on your views of race/racism in America today. Include a 2-3 paragraph analysis of your own work. (Another option is to have the student create a propaganda poster instead of a political cartoon.)

4) Create an exhibit displaying: examples of racism during World War II, examples of African-American resistance and confrontation to racism during World War II, a portrayal of African-American leaders (male and female) during World War II, through photos, painting, music of the day. (Any combination may be used with teacher approval.)

Post-Learning Activities:

(Personal connections, synthesis of new information into schema, re-thinking of past assumptions, Questions & Responses)

Connect the events of the World War II era to our current war on terrorism. How may individuals today face discrimination as a result of the events of 9/11 and our ensuing war on terror?

Is there still discrimination in the military?

Assessment:

Generalization/Question Connection:

Racial and ethnic minorities, as well as women, faced pervasive discrimination during the World War II era.

Goal of Performance or Product:

Facilitate an understanding of African-American experiences with and confrontation of racism during the World War II era.

Role of Student:

The student will act as a researcher, an investigator, an analyst, and an interpreter.

Audience of Performance or Product:

Peers and Teacher

Situation:

The student will conduct a short presentation of their product to the class. They will hold a “museum day,” where the students display their products and have the opportunity to observe the products created by their peers.

Criteria Used to Evaluate Performance or Product:

Student will successfully utilize both primary and secondary sources.

Student will successfully complete one of the projects described herein.

Resources:

Primary Sources:

The Call to Negro America to March on Washington – A. Philip Randolph

(<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAmarchW.htm> and

http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/america6_brief/resources/ch30.htm)

Executive Order 8802, Fair Employment Practice Commission – Franklin Delano

Roosevelt (<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=72>)

Executive Order 9808 – Harry S. Truman (<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/9981.htm>)

Political cartoons of Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss)

<http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/dspolitic/Frame.htm>

Photos of African-Americans during World War II

http://www.archives.gov/research_room/research_topics/african_americans_during_World_War_II/african_americans_during_world_war_2.html

Propaganda posters found at: Powers of Persuasion (NARA)

http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/powers_of_persuasion/united_we_win/united_we_win.html

History Matters – Making Sense of Evidence

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/browse/makesense/>

The Port Chicago Mutiny

<http://www.portchicagomutiny.com/>

PBS *The Perilous Fight*

http://www.pbs.org/perilousfight/social/african_americans/

The Tuskegee Airmen

<http://tuskegeeairmen.org/>

African-Americans in the Military

<http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/blackww2.html>

Abstract of Capra's film "The Negro Soldier" (also contains links)
<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/filmnotes/negrosoldier.html> and
<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/filmnotes/negrosoldier2.html>

A People at War (NARA)

http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/a_people_at_war/new_roles/general_benjamin_davis.html

African-Americans in World War II

<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/aframerwar/index.html> and
<http://www.coax.net/people/lwf/ww2.htm>

American Memory

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aointro.html>

Chronology of African-American military service

<http://www.redstone.army.mil/history/integrate/CHRON3.html> or
<http://www.africanamericans.com/MilitaryChronology4.htm>

Studs Terkel <http://www.studsterkel.org/gwar.php>

Washington Post article "Black Soldiers Battled Fascism and Racism" (May 2004)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A55650-2004May25.html>

World War II Propaganda, Cartoons, Film, Music, & Art

http://www.teacheroz.com/WORLD_WAR_IIpropaganda.htm

D-Day Museum

<http://www.ddaymuseum.org/pdf/historyscopeprintout.pdf>

Helpful secondary sources:

John H. Bracey, Jr. and Manisha Sinha, *African American Mosaic – A Documentary History from the Slave Trade to the Twenty-first Century – Volume 2* (2004)

Studs Terkel, *The Good War – An Oral History of World War Two* (1984)

Resources for understanding and creating rubrics:

We have included a rubric we use to evaluate student work. The following links provide information on rubrics and how to make them.

<http://pblchecklist.4teachers.org/checklist.shtml>

<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>

<http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/assess.html>

<http://learnweb.harvard.edu/alps/thinking/docs/rubricar.htm>

<http://www.theeducatorsnetwork.com/main/rubricfeature.htm>

<http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/profdev/rubrics.shtml>

<http://kancrn.kckps.k12.ks.us/Harmon/breighm/rubrics.html>

<http://www.rubrician.com/>

