

LESSON PLAN

A DOUBLE VICTORY?

THE LEGACY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN WORLD WAR II

INTRODUCTION

History is not simply what happened in the past but how people make sense of it. As a result, historians often disagree with each other or even change their own opinions about the meaning of particular historical events, such as World War II's impact upon African Americans and the Civil Rights Movement. Because primary and secondary sources—and the evidence contained within them—are the building blocks upon which historians construct their interpretations, students will examine multiple sources to determine which interpretation of the war's legacy for African Americans they find most convincing.

OBJECTIVES

By analyzing a range of primary and secondary source materials, students will develop an opinion on an interpretation about the war's impacts upon African Americans and provide evidence to support their conclusion.

TIME REQUIREMENT

1-2 Class Periods

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8

Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claim.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS' NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HISTORY

Content Era 8, Standard 3C – The student is able to evaluate how minorities organized to gain access to wartime jobs and how they confronted discrimination.

LOUISIANA STATE STANDARDS

8.6 Use a variety of primary and secondary sources to:

a. Analyze social studies content.

8.14 Describe the causes, course, and consequences of World War II.

l. Explain how life in the United States changed during and immediately after World War II, with an emphasis on wartime production and the workforce, rationing, conservation, victory gardens, financing through war bonds, propaganda campaigns, and the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill).

8.15 Analyze causes, major events, and key leaders of the Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to 1968.

a. Analyze events during and immediately after World War II leading to the civil rights movement, including Executive Order 8022 and Executive Order 9981.

US.5 Use a variety of primary and secondary sources to:

a. Analyze social studies content.

US.15 Explain the causes, course, and consequences of World War II.

f. Explain how the U.S. government managed the war effort on the home front, including campaigns to conserve food and fuel, sale of war bonds, and coordination of wartime production.

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PROCEDURE

1. Introduce the three interpretations below regarding World War II's impacts upon African Americans and the Civil Rights Movement, informing students that they will be examining multiple primary and secondary sources to determine which interpretation they find most convincing. As you introduce the interpretations, have students identify the similarities and differences between them and clarify difficult vocabulary.

Interpretation 1: “The war years witnessed the birth of the modern civil rights movement.”

- ♦ Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History*, 2nd Seagull ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), p. 828

Interpretation 2: “My research indicates that the Second World War delayed and stifled black protest activism, that it dampened black militancy.”

- ♦ Harvard Sitkoff, “American Blacks in World War II: Rethinking the Militancy-Watershed Hypothesis” in James Titus, ed. *The Home Front and War in the Twentieth Century: The American Experience in Comparative Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: United States Air Force Academy and Office of Air Force History Headquarters, 1984), p. 148

Interpretation 3: “What is immediately clear is that the impact and legacy of war was decidedly ambiguous, at times empowering black activists, at times constraining them, at times emboldening those seeking to preserve racial hierarchies, and at times making surprisingly little difference at all.”

- ♦ Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, “Introduction: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement,” in Kruse and Tuck, eds. *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 6

2. Distribute copies of each **Evidence Collection Worksheet** to students and explain that they will use the worksheets to gather and organize evidence according to the interpretation that the evidence best supports. Inform students that they will also be responsible for explaining how individual pieces of evidence support a particular interpretation.
3. Have students read the **Introductory Essay** silently or aloud as a whole class then record evidence and accompanying explanations on the appropriate **Evidence Collection Worksheet**. To model use of the worksheet, you may want to highlight evidence from the Introductory Essay that supports each interpretation and provide explanations for each of those pieces of evidence before students practice independently.
4. Divide the class into groups and distribute one set of the images and evidence strips below to each group. Alternatively, you may want to have students work in pairs, assigning each pair a single evidence strip or photo to examine and discuss before rotating to analyze additional sources. Before distributing, you should cut the evidence document into strips along the dotted line. You may want to laminate the sheets before cutting them to make them easier to reuse.
5. Instruct students to assign each image and evidence strip to at least one interpretation and to record that evidence and an explanation of how it supports the interpretation on the appropriate **Evidence Collection Worksheet**. Remind students to be attentive to the date, origin, and type of source that they are examining and to consider how those features affect the source's reliability.
6. After students have assigned each source to an interpretation, have them identify the interpretation for which they have compiled the most convincing supporting evidence and explanations.
7. Have students participate in a Socratic Seminar to voice their opinions about the interpretations they analyzed and how the primary and secondary sources helped form or refine their opinions about the war's impact on African Americans.

DIFFERENTIATION

- ◆ Depending on time constraints and length of class periods, teachers can break up this lesson over two days. Alternatively, teachers can select fewer oral histories and primary sources out of those provided for students to examine.
- ◆ Teachers can employ an “I Do, We Do, You Do” approach. The teacher will model analyzing one primary source and primary source for students before students complete their own analysis.

EXTENSION AND ENRICHMENT

- ◆ For homework, have students write an essay explaining which interpretation they find most convincing, citing the evidence they gathered to bolster their argument.
- ◆ Have students read a secondary source essay on World War II’s impact upon African Americans and the Civil Rights Movement to assess the author’s claims, reasoning, and evidence.

EVIDENCE STRIPS 1

“It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed service without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.”

President Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9981, 1948

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“[Coming home] was somewhat bittersweet. At that time the prejudice was everywhere, discrimination was everywhere, so when decisions were made about who was going to get this benefit or that benefit, this opportunity or that opportunity, the prejudice came in. As a consequence, we were the last to be brought home, and it was so bad I remember when I got off the ship in San Francisco someone yelled to me, ‘The war’s been over, don’t you know it. Take off the damn uniform.’”

**Edgar Cole, African American WWII Veteran (Marine Corps)
National WWII Museum Interview, 2012**

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“Now, therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes, and as a prerequisite to the successful conduct of our national defense production effort, I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin, and I do hereby declare that it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin.”

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802, 1941

EVIDENCE STRIPS 2

“World War II opened a quarter of a century of increasing hope and frustration for the black man. After a decade of depression, the ideological character of the war and the government’s need for the loyalty and manpower of all Americans led blacks to expect a better deal from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. With a near unanimity rare in the Negro community, civil rights groups joined with the Negro press and influential church, labor, and political leaders to demand ‘Democracy in Our Time!’ Individuals and organizations never before involved in a protest movement found it respectable, even expedient, to be part of the new militancy in the black community. The war stimulated racial militancy, which in turned to increased interracial violence that culminated in the bloody summer of 1943.”

**Harvard Sitkoff, “Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War,”
Journal of American History 58, no. 3 (December 1971), p. 661**

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“I think that some of the things about World War II, when we got overseas, in Italy, Black and white, we were all brothers. We all were a team. We relied on one another. Those guys forgot about their racist attitudes. And when the war ended, and we came back to the States—the most amazing thing, I remembered this for the rest of my life—we were coming down the gangplank, getting off the boat. Now, there were more Blacks on the boat coming back because they brought our group back together. And they had a sign, at the bottom of the gangplank, whites to one side, colored to the other. And I said to myself, ‘This is some country.’ I’m fighting for democracy, and this is the first time that I even thought about fighting for recognition as a first-class citizen in my own country. I was fighting for the democracy, and I had to fight for the right to fight. I thought America was a sick country.”

**William Holloman, African American WWII Veteran (Air Force)
National WWII Museum Interview, 2009**

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EVIDENCE STRIPS 2

“The V for victory sign is being displayed prominently in all so-called democratic countries which are fighting for victory over aggression, slavery and tyranny. If this V sign means that to those now engaged in this great conflict then let we color Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory. The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies from within. For surely those who perpetrate these ugly prejudices here are seeking to destroy our democratic form government just as surely as the Axis forces.”

James G. Thompson, Letter to the Editor, *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 31, 1942

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EVIDENCE STRIPS 3

“While there is no explicit, official documentation for racial prejudice in the awards process for the Medal of Honor, and while this study found no official documentation for a black nominee, the study concludes that the failure of an African-American soldier to win a Medal of Honor most definitely lay in the racial climate and practice within the Army in World War II.”

Elliott V. Converse et al., “The Medal of Honor and African Americans in the United States Army During World War II,” US Army-commissioned study, 1995

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“As previous scholarship has already demonstrated, black servicemen gained a reputation as militant opponents of Jim Crow. Numerous reports came from Birmingham of black soldiers attempting to move the color boards [on buses], sitting or standing in the white section, and fighting with operators as well as white passengers over any act of injustice.”

Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 64

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“Mr. Speaker, it is about the Negro soldier I wish to speak today. I wish to pay him respect and to express the gratitude of the American people for his contribution to the greatest battle of all time—the battle which decided whether or not we were to remain a free people.
“We should be especially mindful of the Negro soldier, remembering that he fought and shed his blood for a freedom which he has not as yet been permitted fully to share.”

“The Negro Soldier: A Partial Record of Negro Devotion and Heroism in the Cause of Freedom Gathered from the Files of the War and Navy Departments,” Remarks of Rep. Helen Gahagan Douglas of California in the House of Representatives, February 1, 1946

IMAGE 1



Source: Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-119522

PROTESTS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Black servicemen and women returned home to find treatment of African American citizens largely unchanged. After the war, many veterans became active in protests. Here, veterans and civilians protest the lynching of four men in Georgia in 1946.

IMAGE 2



Source: Library of Congress, LC-DIG-PPMSCA-09705

A MAN WAS LYNCHED YESTERDAY

The NAACP flew this flag at its headquarters in New York City to report lynchings until the building's owner threatened to evict the organization in 1938.

IMAGE 3



Source: *Pittsburgh Courier* Archives

DOUBLE VICTORY

Twenty-six-year-old James Thompson's 1942 letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier* calling for African Americans to fight for a “double victory” over racism at home and fascism abroad captivated the newspaper’s—and the nation’s—attention. The *Courier* introduced the Double Victory icon the week after receiving Thompson’s letter, and the paper displayed it prominently in its pages for months. Throughout much of 1942, the *Courier* also vigorously promoted a Double V campaign by running regular Double V-related photos and stories and encouraging its 140,000 subscribers to form Double V clubs.

IMAGE 4



Source: Library of Congress, LC-DIG-FSA-8d13572

WE WANT WHITE TENANTS IN OUR WHITE COMMUNITY

"Detroit, Michigan. Riot at the Sojourner Truth homes, a new U.S. federal housing project, caused by white neighbors' attempt to prevent Negro tenants from moving in. Sign with American flag 'We want white tenants in our white community,' directly opposite the housing project." Photo and original caption by Arthur S. Siegel, Office of War Information, February 1942.

WHY SHOULD WE MARCH?



What Are Our Immediate Goals?

1. To mobilize five million Negroes into one militant mass for pressure.
2. To assemble in Chicago the last week in May, 1943, for the celebration of

“WE ARE AMERICANS – TOO” WEEK

And to ponder the question of Non-Violent Civil Disobedience and Non-Cooperation, and a Mass March On Washington.

15,000 Negroes Assembled at St. Louis, Missouri
20,000 Negroes Assembled at Chicago, Illinois
23,500 Negroes Assembled at New York City
Millions of Negro Americans all Over This Great
Land Claim the Right to be Free!

FREE FROM WANT!
FREE FROM FEAR!
FREE FROM JIM CROW!

“Winning Democracy for the Negro is Winning the War for Democracy!” — A. Philip Randolph

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Source: *“Why Should We March?”*. 1941. Manuscript/Mixed Material.

WHY SHOULD WE MARCH?

A. Philip Randolph canceled a 50,000-man March on Washington, D.C., in 1941 after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed an executive order banning racial discrimination in war industries. But Randolph’s March on Washington Movement (MOWM) continued to press for additional civil rights reforms during the war. This flyer advertises the MOWM’s 1943 convention in Chicago, which few African Americans attended, other than a small number of Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters members.

IMAGE 6



Source: Library of Congress, LC-USW3-1186-D

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

"Negro, Mexican, and white girls are employed at the Pacific Parachute Company. San Diego, California." Original caption and photograph by Russell Lee, Office of War Information, April 1942. A Fair Employment Practices Committee placard is on the wall behind the table.

EVIDENCE COLLECTION: INTERPRETATION 1

Directions: For each primary or secondary source that you examine, record any evidence that you believe supports the interpretation below. For each piece of evidence you record, write a brief explanation of how or why it supports the interpretation. Ask for an additional copy of this sheet if you run out of space.

INTERPRETATION 1

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Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History*, 2nd Seagull ed.
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Evidence	Explanation

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EVIDENCE COLLECTION: INTERPRETATION 2

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INTERPRETATION 2

“My research indicates that the Second World War delayed and stifled black protest activism, that it dampened black militancy.”

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