

## LESSON PLAN

# FIGHTING IN THE JIM CROW ARMY

## AFRICAN AMERICAN MILITARY EXPERIENCES IN WORLD WAR II



### INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, students will analyze oral histories and propaganda posters to gain insight into African Americans' military experiences during World War II.

### OBJECTIVES

By analyzing oral histories and propaganda posters, students will structure a claim about what it was like for African Americans to serve in the military in World War II. Students will also describe the US government's perspective on African American military service.

### TIME REQUIREMENT

1-2 Class Periods

# STANDARDS

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2**

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9**

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

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

**Content Era 8, Standard 3B** – The student is able to describe military experiences and explain how they fostered American identity and interactions among people of diverse backgrounds.

**Historical Thinking Standard 2** – The student is able to appreciate historical perspectives and draw upon literary sources, including oral testimony.

## LOUISIANA STATE STANDARDS

8.6 / WH. 4 Use a variety of primary and secondary sources to:

- a. Analyze social studies content.
- b. Evaluate claims, counterclaims, and evidence.
- c. Compare and contrast multiple sources and accounts.

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

- j. Explain the sacrifices and contributions of U.S. soldiers during World War II such as the Tuskegee Airmen, the 442nd Regimental Combat team, the 101st Airborne, Cajun “Frenchies,” the Women’s Army Corps (WAC), and the Navajo Code Talkers.

WH.5 Construct and express claims that are supported with relevant evidence from primary and/or secondary sources, social studies content knowledge, and clear reasoning and explanations to:

- a. Demonstrate an understanding of social studies content.
- b. Compare and contrast content and viewpoints.

# PROCEDURE

1. As a warm-up activity, have students respond to the following prompt:  
Historian Stephen Ambrose wrote, “The world’s greatest democracy fought the world’s greatest racist with a segregated army. It was worse than that: the Army and the society conspired to degrade African-Americans in every way possible” (*Citizen Soldiers*).  
Based on this comment, what do you expect African American soldiers’ experiences were like during World War II?
2. As students share their responses, record key ideas/themes on the board.
3. Introduce the lesson by informing students that they will be gathering evidence from multiple oral histories to determine whether their initial ideas about African American soldiers’ wartime experiences are accurate. Based upon your students’ familiarity with the subject, you may want to share some of the background information from the **Introductory Essay** about racial inequality in the wartime United States.
4. Distribute the **Oral History Analysis** graphic organizer and review the instructions for taking notes on the interviews.
5. For each oral history interview, briefly introduce the interviewee, play the selected excerpt(s), then allow students to record their observations and analysis on their **Oral History Analysis** graphic organizer. To model use of the graphic organizer, you may want to fill it out for the first interview with the whole class before students practice independently.
6. After students share and discuss what they recorded on the observation and analysis portions of their **Oral History Analysis** graphic organizer, have them write a one- to two-sentence summary of African American soldiers’ WWII experiences based on the evidence they gathered and analyzed. Explain that this summary is the student’s unique interpretation of the past.
7. After students have finished analyzing the oral histories, students will analyze propaganda posters from the Office of War Information that featured African Americans. Students will record their observations and the main idea of each poster using the **Propaganda Poster Analysis** graphic organizer.
8. After students share and discuss what they recorded on the observation and analysis portions of their **Propaganda Poster Analysis** graphic organizer, have them write a one- to two-sentence summary of how the government portrayed African Americans’ experiences and contributions during World War II based on the evidence they gathered and analyzed. Students will then compare their analyses of the posters with their analyses of the oral histories.
9. Have students share their interpretations and discuss how the conclusions they reached after examining the oral histories and propaganda posters compare with those they reached in response to the warm-up prompt.
10. As an exit ticket, instruct students to consider their initial responses about African American military experiences in World War II and make any changes they think are necessary using the evidence they have gathered from the oral histories and propaganda posters. Students will submit their exit tickets with their edited responses before leaving class.

## 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 oral history testimony and primary source for students before students complete their own analysis.

## EXTENSION AND ENRICHMENT

- ◆ Have students listen to additional segments from the Lavenia Breaux, Edgar Cole, William Holloman, and Eugene Tarrant oral histories in order to write mini-biographies of these veterans. The oral histories can be found by searching the Museum's Digital Collections at [www.ww2online.org](http://www.ww2online.org).
- ◆ Have students follow the Museum's Oral History Guidelines available at [www.nationalww2museum.org/oral-history-resources](http://www.nationalww2museum.org/oral-history-resources) in order to conduct an oral history interview with an African American veteran from World War II or another war.
- ◆ Have students research other African Americans' experiences with segregation and their attitudes about joining the military by utilizing the Museum's resources on African Americans in World War II at [www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/african-americans-world-war-ii](http://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/african-americans-world-war-ii).

## PRIMARY SOURCE 1

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH LAVENIA BREAUX

### VIDEO

Lavenia Breaux: Serving in the Women's Army Corps ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMsRCqf9J04](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMsRCqf9J04))

### BACKGROUND

Lavenia Hickman Breaux was born in Slidell, Louisiana, in 1917, the daughter of a laborer and laundress. Her family moved to New Orleans when she was a young girl, and she found the city to be a safe and pleasant place to grow up. "My parents were poor people," she recalled. "[But] I'm glad and grateful that I had that upbringing because then I learned to appreciate people." Breaux attended church regularly, followed the brass bands that snaked through her neighborhood during "second-line" parades, and learned the value of hard work.

Shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Breaux joined an all-African American unit within the Women's Army Corps (WAC). She had always dreamed of traveling, and she figured the military would allow her to do so. Breaux's primary job in the Army was to establish camps for new recruits, and she was among the nearly 350,000 American women who served in uniform during World War II at home and abroad. In this excerpt from her oral history, Breaux describes life in the barracks following basic training.



Source: Lavenia Breaux Interview, The National WWII Museum, OH.321

## PRIMARY SOURCE 2

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH EDGAR COLE

### VIDEO

#### Oral History Interview with Edgar Cole

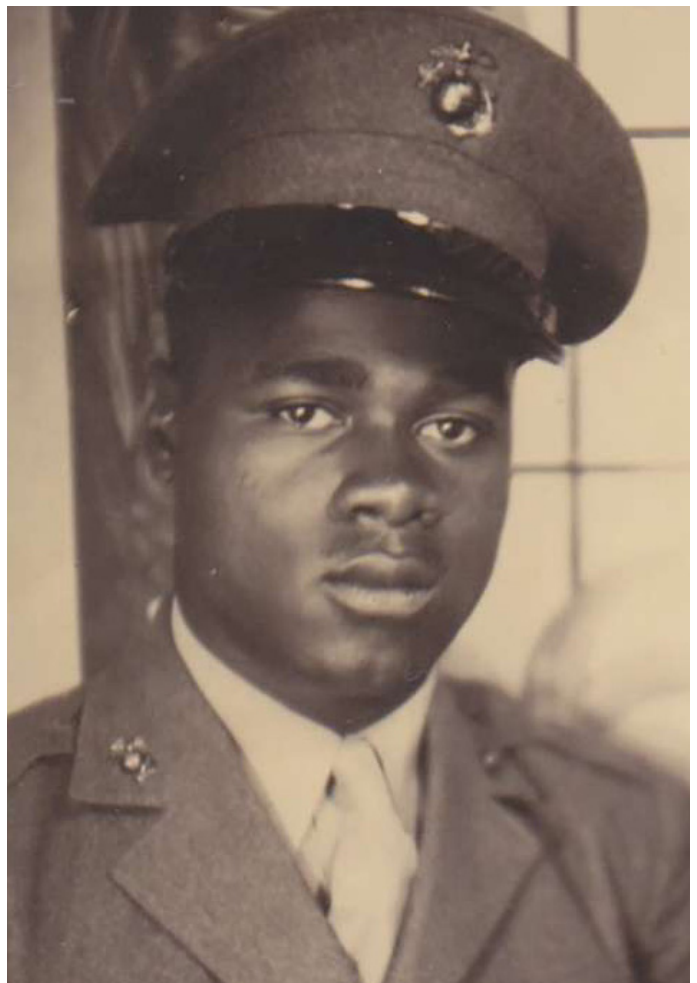
([www.youtube.com/watch?v=qo7WdKuK07Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qo7WdKuK07Q))

### BACKGROUND

Edgar Cole was born in Dallas, Texas, in 1925. He grew up poor and began helping his family financially at a young age with a newspaper route and a job at a grocery store. Their home did not have running hot water, so he and his six siblings bathed around a single wood stove.

Ambitious and eager to leave Dallas, Cole graduated from high school then completed an advanced training program in California through the National Youth Administration. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he fought to secure a job at a naval shipyard in order to contribute to the war effort. He was then drafted into the US Marine Corps, which had not accepted African Americans prior to 1942. The Marines sent Cole to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, where he went through basic training at a segregated facility at Montford Point. In this excerpt from his oral history, Cole describes his experience at the shipyard and a ceremony at Montford Point for the conclusion of basic training.

**Source:** Edgar Cole, The National WWII Museum, OH.0349.



**Source:** Edgar Cole in his Marine uniform, from the collection of The National WWII Museum

## PRIMARY SOURCE 3

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM HOLLOWAN

### VIDEO

Oral History Interview with William Holloman ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGPfdaKjB7o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGPfdaKjB7o))

### BACKGROUND

William Holloman was born in 1924 in St. Louis, Missouri, where his father worked for the US Postal Service. He grew up in an all-Black neighborhood and attended a segregated Black school. But he felt sheltered from discrimination since he never went to downtown St. Louis, where African Americans were not allowed to use the theaters and lunch counters.

Holloman started flying at 16 and joined the US Army Air Forces after being drafted in November 1942. He reported to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis in June 1943, then trained at Keesler Field in Mississippi and Tuskegee University, where he learned to fly Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk and Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighter planes. In 1944 Holloman deployed to Ramitelli Air Base in Italy, where he joined the 99th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group. The 332nd is better known as the Tuskegee Airmen or “Red Tails” on account of the deep red mark that its pilots painted on the tails of their airplanes. In Italy, Holloman quickly learned how to fly the newer, long-range P-51 Mustang. He piloted that plane on combat missions where his job was to protect American bombers from German fighter planes. In this excerpt from his oral history, Holloman discusses his experiences going into combat in a segregated unit.



**Source:** Source: Tuskegee Airman William Holloman, from the collection of The National WWII Museum

## PRIMARY SOURCE 4

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH EUGENE TARRANT

### VIDEO

#### Oral History Interview with Eugene Tarrant

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGPfdaKjB7o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGPfdaKjB7o))

### BACKGROUND

Born in a small Texas town in 1919, Eugene Tarrant moved to Dallas as a young boy. After his parents separated, he grew up with his mother, who worked as a live-in cook for a wealthy white family. Since Tarrant lived in a white neighborhood and the other students at his segregated Black school did not, he often felt isolated from his classmates. He also did not have many friends in his neighborhood since the nearby white children stopped playing with him around age 10.

In high school, Tarrant played four sports and excelled academically, graduating second in his class of 300 in 1938. With little money for college and few job prospects amid the Great Depression, Tarrant hoped to join the US Marine Corps. When he arrived at the recruiting station, however, he learned that the Marines did not accept African Americans. As a result, he joined the Navy instead. In this excerpt from his oral history, Tarrant describes his early experiences aboard the USS *San Francisco*, the cruiser he served on throughout World War II.

**Source:** Eugene Tarrant Interview, The National WWII Museum, OH.2528



**Source:** Officer's Cook First Class Eugene Tarrant, who served aboard USS *San Francisco*, and his wife Mary. Image from the collection of The National WWII Museum.



## VIDEO WORKSHEET

# ORAL HISTORY ANALYSIS

Directions: Record the most striking details from each interview in the left-hand column of the graphic organizer, then explain what those details reveal in the right-hand column. After analyzing all the interviews, develop an interpretation.

<b>Observations</b> What details stand out to you?	<b>Analysis</b> What do the details reveal/suggest? What main idea(s) do you take away from the interview?
<b>Lavenia Breaux Interview</b>	
<b>Edgar Cole Interview</b>	
<b>William Holloman Interview</b>	

<p><b>Observations</b> What details stand out to you?</p>	<p><b>Analysis</b> What do the details reveal/suggest? What main idea(s) do you take away from the interview?</p>
<p><b>Eugene Tarrant Interview</b></p>	

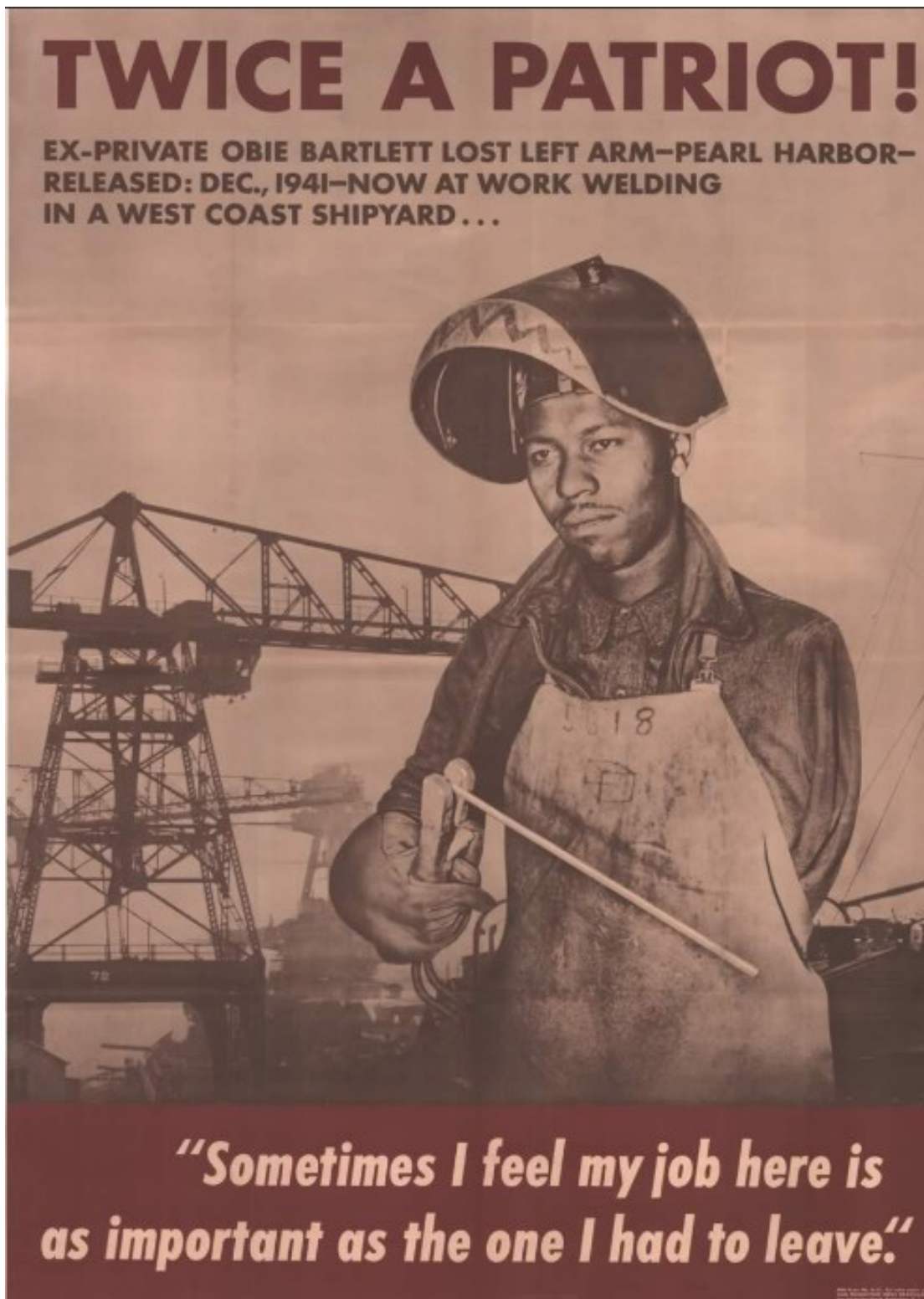
**Interpretation:** Based on your analysis of the evidence, what were African American soldiers' experiences like during World War II? What is a similarity between these four oral histories?

# PROPOGANDA POSTER 1



Source: The Library of Congress

## PROPOGANDA POSTER 2



Source: The National WWII Museum, Gift of Anne and Jack Kelsey, 2013.077:122.

**PROPOGANDA POSTER 3**



**Source:** Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

## PROPOGANDA POSTER 4



Source: The National WWII Museum, gift of Warren Gould

## POSTER WORKSHEET

# PROPAGANDA POSTER ANALYSIS

Directions: Record the most striking details from each poster in the left-hand column of the graphic organizer, then explain what those details reveal in the right-hand column. After analyzing all the posters, develop an interpretation.

<b>Observations</b> What details stand out to you?	<b>Analysis</b> What main idea do you take away from the poster?
"Above and Beyond the Call of Duty"	
"Twice a Patriot!"	
"Keep Us Flying"	

<b>Observations</b> What details stand out to you?	<b>Analysis</b> What main idea do you take away from the poster?
“United We Win”	

**Interpretation:** Based on your analysis of the evidence, how did the government portray African Americans’ experiences and contributions during World War II?