

LESSON PLAN

BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES DURING WORLD WAR II

Image: National Archives and Records Administration.

Introduction

Women who wanted to serve in the military during World War II faced many challenges, including opposition from many Americans who believed women should not be allowed to serve in the military. The path to service for minorities, especially Black women, was even more difficult. While persistent calls for women to serve stretched across the nation, many were left out. In the Women's Army Corps, Black women were limited by quotas, and it was not until late 1944 that the Navy and Coast Guard accepted Black women at all. The Marine Corps did not allow African American women to join. When allowed to serve, Black women served in segregated units. In this lesson, students will examine and analyze a range of primary sources to learn about Black women's experiences serving in a segregated military.

Objectives

By analyzing a range of primary sources including eyewitness testimony, students will be able to:

- Describe Black women's experiences serving in the military during World War II using evidence from a variety of primary sources
- Explain one common and shared experience of Black women serving in a segregated military
- Discuss the impact and legacy of Black women's service and contributions during World War II using evidence to support position

Grade level

9-12

Time Requirement

One 90-minute class period or two 45-minute class periods

Materials

- Copies of Race and Women’s Military Service during World War II Student Essay
- Copies of Document Analysis Handout
- Copies of Primary Source Documents
- Copies of Oral History Notecatcher
- Chart Paper (Optional)
- Clipboards (Optional)

Online resources

ww2classroom.org

- ▶ Lavenia Breaux Oral History Video
- ▶ Romay Davis Oral History Video
- ▶ Ora Pierce Hicks Oral History Video

STANDARDS

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

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

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7: Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

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

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

8th Grade Social Studies (LOUISIANA)

8.14 Describe the causes, course, and consequences of World War II. J. Explain the sacrifices and contributions of US 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.

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. B. Explain the origins and goals of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and how segregation (de jure and de facto) affected African Americans and influenced the movement.

High School US History (LOUISIANA)

US.15 Explain the causes, course, and consequences of World War II. D. Describe the sacrifices and contributions of American service members in the war effort including the Tuskegee Airmen, Military Intelligence Service, 442nd Central Postal Directory, the 101st Airborne, Women's Army Corps (WAC), Navajo Code Talkers, and the Army Signal Corps.

US.16 Analyze causes, major events, and key leaders of the civil rights movement. A. Analyze the origins and goals of the civil rights movement, the effects of segregations (de jure and de facto), and efforts to desegregate schools, transportation, and public places.

PROCEDURES

1. Before facilitating this lesson plan, the teacher can assign students the Race and Women's Military Service during World War II Overview Essay to read before class. Alternatively, students can read and annotate this essay together as a class. Read-aloud tools can be used for students who need accommodation. Middle school and high school reading levels of this essay can be found online at ww2classroom.org.
2. The lesson will begin with a "do now" (sometimes called a bellringer) activity. The teacher will ask students what they already know about World War II and about women's contributions to the war and then, what they wonder or would like to know about women's experiences during the war. The teacher will record students' responses on chart paper or a whiteboard in the format of a K-W-L (Know-Wonder-Learn) chart. The teacher should ensure students have the necessary background knowledge on Jim Crow laws and how these laws impacted people of color in the military.
3. After completing the "do now" activity with students, the teacher will share the lesson objectives, especially that today's goal will be to learn more about Black women's experiences during wartime through a range of primary sources.
4. The teacher will distribute copies of the Document Analysis Handouts to each student and post the primary source documents around the classroom for a gallery walk activity. Students should receive a Document Analysis sheet for each source in the gallery walk. Teachers should make five copies of the provided Document Analysis Handout.
5. The teacher will instruct students individually, in pairs, or in preselected groups to examine each primary source document posted around the classroom and fill out the Document Analysis Handouts accordingly. Each document in this gallery walk relates to the fight for the US Navy to accept Black nurses during World War II.
6. Once students have examined each primary source and completed their Primary Source Analysis Handout, the teacher will facilitate a whole-class discussion asking the following questions:
 - a. What did these documents tell us about Black women's experiences contributing to the war effort during World War II?
 - b. What challenges did Black women face in terms of racism, discrimination, and segregation during World War II?
 - c. How did Black women navigate and resist these challenges?



7. Following the whole-class discussion on the gallery walk activity, the teacher will introduce the next activity analyzing oral history testimony and distribute the Oral History Notecatcher. Listening to oral history testimony from Black women who served during World War II will build on what students learned in the primary source analysis gallery walk.
8. There are three oral histories included in this lesson plan ranging from five to eight minutes. In preselected small groups, students will select one of the oral history testimonies to listen to and will complete the Oral History Notecatcher for their selected individual together as they view the testimony.
 - a. Technology notes: Students can watch their oral history video clip together in a small group if technology is limited or students can watch on their own devices if the school is 1:1.
 - b. Accommodations/Accessibility: The oral history videos online include closed captioning and transcripts. Transcripts could be printed for students in advance if they have auditory or processing accommodations, or it could be translated into a student's home language to provide access.
9. Once each small group has listened to their selected oral history testimony, the teacher will facilitate a whole-class discussion asking students what they learned about Black women's experiences serving in the military during World War II from listening to these testimonies. As students discuss, the teacher will record their responses by filling in the last column of the K-W-L chart on the whiteboard or chart paper. Encourage students to include what they learned from the primary source documents as well.
10. Exit Ticket Options:
 - a. Option 1: The teacher will instruct students to choose a format for creative expression (e.g., written reflection, poem, short story, drawing) to capture the experiences of Black women during World War II. This can be done individually or in small groups.
 - b. Option 2: Students will write a short response to the following question: What were Black women's experiences serving in the military during World War II? Instruct students to cite specific evidence from the primary sources examined during class.
 - c. Option 3: Students will write a short response comparing and contrasting the primary sources examined during class (i.e., the written documents and the oral histories). Questions students can consider when writing their responses are listed below:
 - How are oral history interviews different from written primary sources?
 - What are the strengths and limitations of each type of source (oral histories and written documents) in telling the story of important history?
 - What information is missing from the sources you examined in class? What other sources would you like to research to gain a better understanding of this history?

DIFFERENTIATION AND EXTENSION

Differentiation

Depending on time constraints and length of class periods, teachers can break up this lesson over two days. Alternatively, teachers can select fewer primary sources out of those provided for students to examine or combine the primary source gallery walk and oral history analysis activities into one lesson.

For the Overview Essay, teachers can employ a reciprocal teaching strategy in which students are divided into groups of four and each student is assigned one of the following tasks for their section of the essay: summarize, question, clarify, and predict.

Teachers can employ an "I Do, We Do, You Do" approach. The teacher will model analyzing one primary source and oral history testimony for students before students complete these two activities.



Instead of doing a physical gallery walk, the documents and oral histories included in this lesson plan can be compiled into a slides presentation or a single document that would allow for students to do a virtual gallery walk. This option would be beneficial for students in a virtual setting or for classrooms where gallery walks are not possible.

Identify and define terms used in primary sources and oral histories that require direct vocabulary instruction. These may include:

Extensions

Teachers can assign a research project asking students to conduct additional research on individual Black women who made significant contributions to the war effort during World War II. Some individuals students can research include Charity Adams, Dovey Johnson Roundtree, and Rosa Parks. Students can present their findings in the form of a short essay, presentation, or creative project.

Teachers can guide students in preparing questions to ask WWII veteran, Romay Davis, who served in the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. Students can ask their questions through The National WWII Museum's interactive oral history with Romay Davis found at <https://ask.storyfile.com/?uid=4511&skin=web&topics=1&cid=33333>. Alternatively, teachers can assign students an oral history project where students interview a woman veteran (not necessarily from World War II). For guidance, teachers and students can refer to the Walking in Her Shoes: Conducting Oral History Interviews with Women Veterans Overview Essay found in the classroom guide or online at ww2classroom.org.

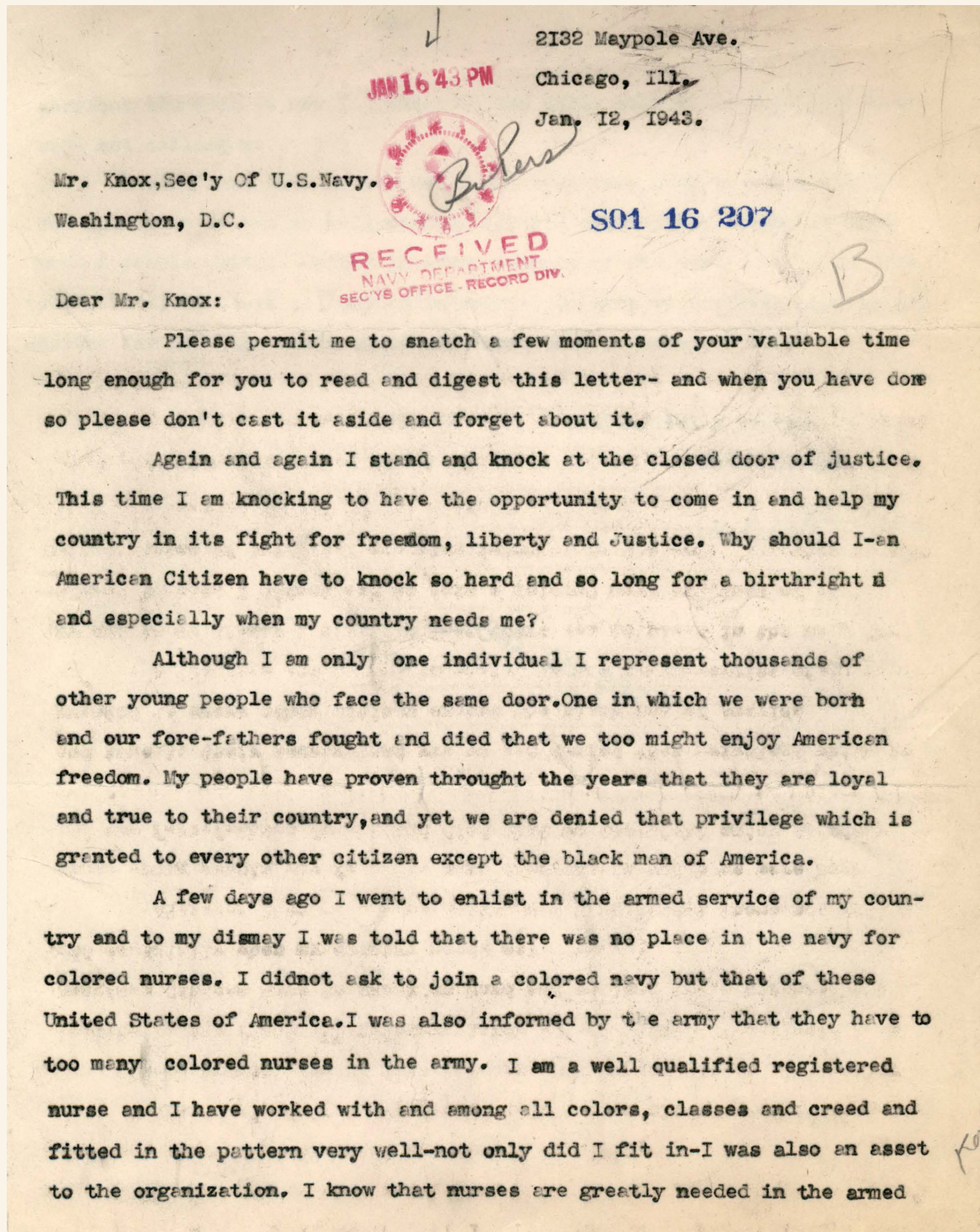
ABOUT THE LESSON AUTHORS

AMBROSIA GRANT is a high school English and social studies teacher in Louisiana. During her 20 years in education, Ambrosia has participated in the Teaching American History (TAH) program, We the People program, and The National WWII Museum's summer teacher programs. She has also served as a Louisiana Educator Voice Fellow helping to create college and career readiness courses for 8th–12th grade students.



DOCUMENT #1

ETHEL ROSS LETTER



services and that is why I answered the call- only to be told that they were not calling me.

, I know that this letter would not mean very much to a man who is not patriotic or has no well meaning for his country-but to you it must mean A people United. United in every respect of the word: UNITED in race color, creed, and above all united in spirit. So when we say "With Liberty and Justice for All" the whole world will know that we mean for all.

Respectfully yours,

Ethel S. Ross.

Ethel S. Ross, Rn.

S01 16 207



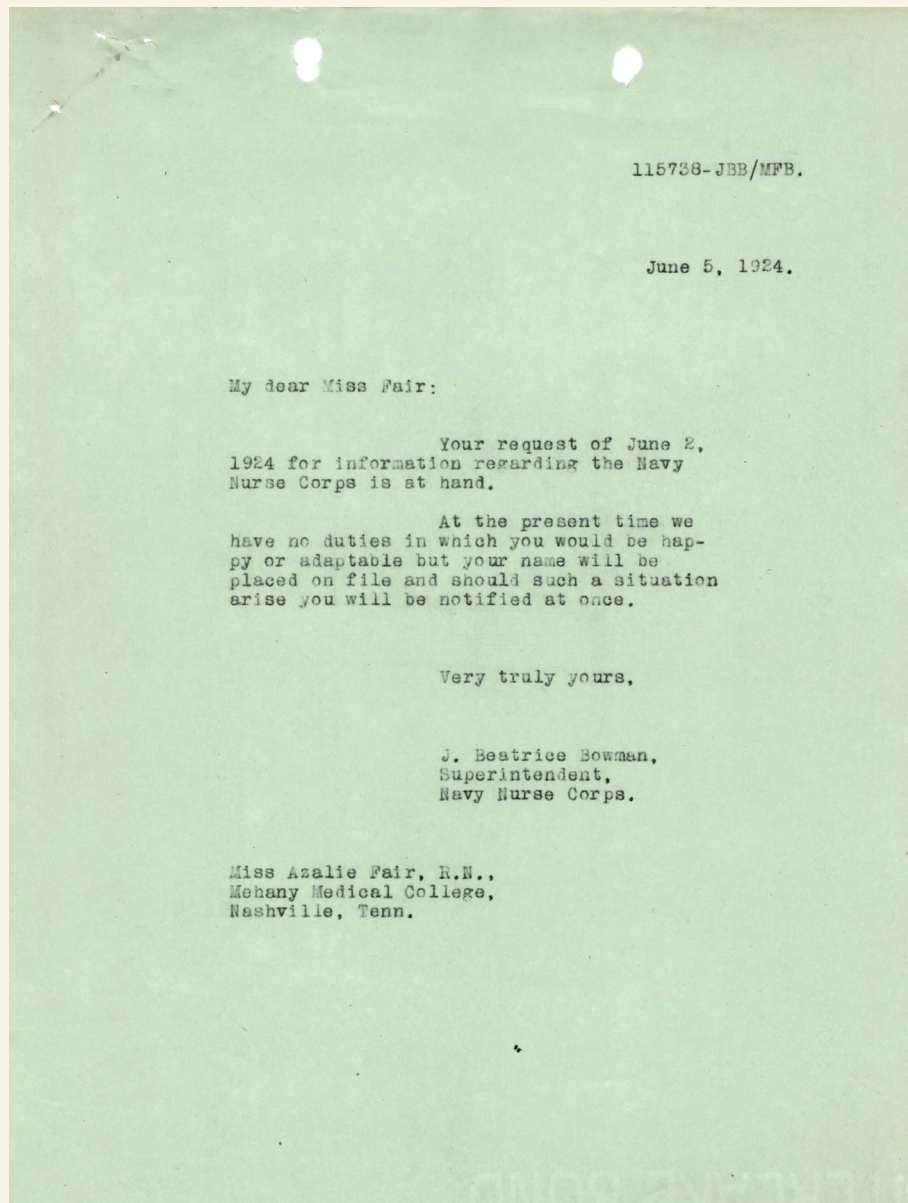
SOURCE

Letter from Ethel Ross to the Secretary of the US Navy, Frank Knox, National Archives and Records Administration.



DOCUMENT #2

STANDARD REJECTION LETTER FROM THE BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY



SOURCE

Example of a standard reply from the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. This letter is a response from Navy Nurse Corps Superintendent J. Beatrice Bowman to Azalie Fair, who had written requesting information about joining the Nurse Corps, National Archives and Records Administration.





DOCUMENT #3

PETITION IN SUPPORT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN NURSES

recent *Receivers*

Petition

RECEIVED
FEB 12 8 26 AM '45

RECEIVED OFFICE OF THE
NAVY DEPARTMENT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

Mr. John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War
Major General Norman T. Kirk, Surgeon General of U.S. Army

James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy
Vice Admiral Ross T. McIntire, Surgeon General of U.S. Navy

1945 FEB 13 PM 3

"One of the most urgent immediate requirements of the armed forces is for more nurses," stated President Roosevelt in his message to Congress. He, therefore, called for a national draft of nurses, since volunteering had not produced the number of nurses required. We, the undersigned, agree fully with the President in his call for a national draft of nurses, since the need is so desperate to adequately care for our mounting casualties, and to help bring about a speedy victory. The present need for nurses, until legislation is passed, cannot be filled in an all-out manner, unless every restriction upon the use of Negro women is instantly eliminated. There are 9,000 Negro graduate nurses at the present time, and only around 300 have been accepted by the Army and none by the Navy. They are assigned by the Army to care for Negro servicemen only. We call upon the above officials of the Army and Navy to immediately remove all discriminatory barriers preventing the full utilization of Negro nurses for the care of all wounded servicemen, regardless of race, so that all American women, without regard to race, creed or color can serve as free and equal citizens according to need.

NAME	ADDRESS
<i>Miniam Logan</i>	<i>266 W. 6th St - S.P.</i>
<i>Leona E. Renegshberg</i>	<i>1527 Natal Ct San Pedro</i>
<i>Joe Solomon</i>	<i>107 Harbor Hills Comita</i>
<i>Shirley Gordon</i>	<i>266 W. 6th St - San Pedro</i>
<i>Mamuel Britancourt</i>	<i>423 1/2 W 9th St San Pedro</i>
<i>John Burch</i>	<i>1794 Jackson St San Pedro</i>
<i>Gene L. Burch</i>	<i>1794 Jackson St. San Pedro</i>
<i>Juanita L. Padovan</i>	<i>273 Santa Cruz San Pedro</i>
<i>Frank Padovan</i>	<i>273 Santa Cruz San Pedro</i>
<i>Mrs. Dorothy Pettis</i>	<i>2033 Capitol Dr San Pedro</i>
<i>Robert D. Martin</i>	<i>Wilminington Calif</i>

PRINT

WOMEN'S AUXILIARY, NATIONAL MARITIME UNION
346 West 17th Street, New York 11, N. Y.

2445

SOURCE

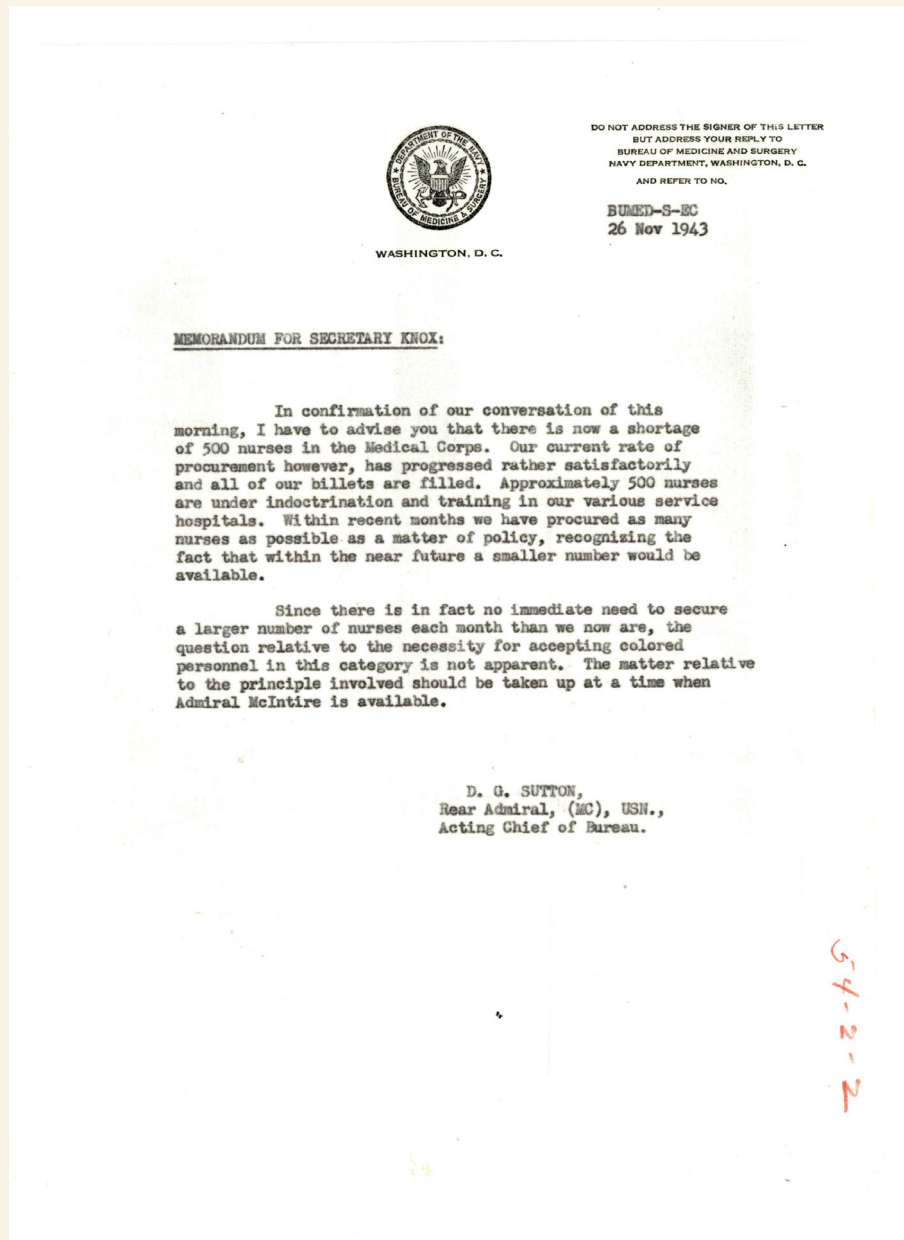
Petition to the US Navy from groups and individuals in favor of African American nurses, National Archives and Records Administration.





DOCUMENT #4

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY KNOX



SOURCE

Memorandum to Secretary of the US Navy, Frank Knox, from the Rear Admiral of the US Navy, D.G. Sutton, regarding the acceptance of African American nurses, National Archives and Records Administration.





DOCUMENT #5

LETTER FROM SURGEON GENERAL

ADDRESS YOUR REPLY TO
BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY
NAVY DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.
AND REFER TO
RTM:mlm

File

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.
19 March 1945.

FOR VICTORY
BUY
UNITED STATES
WAR
BONDS
AND
STAMPS

15

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. DUFFIELD:

This morning I had a conference with Miss Margaret Delehanty, National Director of the Sweethearts of Servicemen. In addition to a delegation of seven colored women, one a colored nurse, a Mr. Lesser representing the CIO Labor Unions of New York City was present.

The only complaint this group had was the fact that the Navy had not taken in colored nurses during the years, and they hope we will take colored nurses in and use them in active areas. I assured them that we were accepting applications from colored nurses and were prepared to take a reasonable number at this time, that there would be no discrimination against a well qualified colored nurse but she must meet our professional standards. I explained to them that we are very careful in our selection of white nurses on this basis.

I also discussed our experience with colored hospital corpsmen - which is good - and told them about the work we are doing now with colored hospital corps waves.

I also told them we were having a great deal of trouble securing colored doctors. This surprised them greatly.

If the draft bill for nurses becomes a law of course we will then have to accept a certain number of the draftees. This was explained to them. Under any circumstances we are prepared to take a reasonable number of colored nurses for we have plenty of places in the field where they could be of real use to us.

Ross T. McIntire
ROSS T. MCINTIRE
Vice Admiral (MC)
Surgeon General, U.S. Navy.

DECLASSIFIED
Authority *NAVJ 730042*

54-1-3
54-1-3



SOURCE

Letter from the Surgeon General for the US Navy, Ross T. McIntire, stating the US Navy would begin accepting African American nurses, National Archives and Records Administration.



STUDENT HANDOUT

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Instructions: Examine the artifacts. Use the word bank provided to guess the name of each item. Write your guess in the item column. Then, take the descriptions provided by your teacher and match them to the item you think they describe.

Document #	
Type of document (letter, memorandum, report, petition, etc.)	
Date and author	
What is the document talking about? Write a one-sentence summary.	
Why did the author write this document?	

Who is the intended audience for this document?	
What do you think is the purpose of this document?	
Using your background knowledge and source, answer the supporting question: What challenges did Black women face serving in the military during World War II and how did they resist these challenges?	



STUDENT HANDOUT

ORAL HISTORY NOTE CATCHER

Lavenia Breaux

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Lavenia Breaux was born in Slidell, Louisiana, in 1917. Her family moved to New Orleans when she was young, and she liked living in the city. “My parents were poor people,” she remembered, “but I’m glad and grateful I had that upbringing because then I learned to appreciate people.” Growing up, Lavenia attended church regularly, followed the brass bands that played through her neighborhood during second-line parades, and learned the value of hard work. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Lavenia decided to join an all-Black unit within the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). She had always dreamed of traveling and believed joining the military would give her the opportunity to do so. Lavenia’s primary job in the WAC was to establish camps for new recruits. She was among the nearly 350,000 American women who served in uniform during World War II at home and abroad.

Focusing Questions	Historical Evidence/Details	Your Observations/Wonders
What did this individual do in the military during World War II?		
What challenges did this individual face during their wartime service? How did she overcome these challenges?		
What does this oral history tell us about Black women’s experiences, contributions, and sacrifices during World War II?		

STUDENT HANDOUT

ORAL HISTORY NOTE CATCHER

Romay Davis

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Romay Davis was born on October 29, 1919, in Virginia. She was the only girl of six children. Since there were no African American high schools where she lived, Romay attended a number of schools in New Jersey, New York, and Washington, D.C. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States officially entered World War II, Romay was working for the Bureau of Engraving in D.C. Following the attack, the United States needed to rapidly mobilize for war, which included expanding its military. In 1942, the US military formed the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), later referred to as the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). In May 1943, Romay volunteered to serve in the Women’s Army Corps. After completing her basic training, she was assigned to the motor pool at Camp Breckinridge in Kentucky where she learned how to be a mechanic and a driver. At Camp Breckinridge, Romay volunteered for overseas duty and was selected to join the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. The 6888th was in charge of clearing the backlog of undelivered mail to soldiers as well as developing a new system of organizing and tracking mail. The 6888th Battalion processed about 65,000 pieces of mail per shift and cleared the backlog in three months. After World War II ended, Romay was discharged from the military and took advantage of the GI Bill to attend the Traphagen School of Fashion.

Focusing Questions	Historical Evidence/Details	Your Observations/Wonders
What did this individual do in the military during World War II?		
What challenges did this individual face during their wartime service? How did she overcome these challenges?		
What does this oral history tell us about Black women’s experiences, contributions, and sacrifices during World War II?		

STUDENT HANDOUT

ORAL HISTORY NOTE CATCHER

Ora Pierce Hicks

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Ora Pierce Hicks was born in February 1911 in Louisiana, one of 17 children. After she graduated from high school, Ora spent two years as a schoolteacher before moving to Kansas City to attend nursing school. She completed nursing school in 1936 and moved to New Orleans where she worked at Charity Hospital for almost five years. After World War II began, Ora heard on the radio that US soldiers were dying because there were not enough nurses, and she decided she would volunteer for the US Army Nurse Corps. Despite the great need for more nurses in the military, many branches of the military, including the Army, rejected applications from Black nurses. By the end of the war, only about 500 Black nurses had served in the Army Nurse Corps, even though thousands had applied; Ora was one of these few Black nurses allowed to serve. One of her first assignments was to a German prisoner-of-war (POW) camp in Florence, Arizona. Instead of being sent overseas to treat wounded American soldiers on the front lines, most Black nurses during World War II were assigned to POW camps in the United States or were stationed at segregated bases with Black soldiers on the Home Front. Once the war ended, Ora requested to stay in the Army Nurse Corps and rose to the rank of major before retiring in 1961.

Focusing Questions	Historical Evidence/Details	Your Observations/Wonders
What did this individual do in the military during World War II?		
What challenges did this individual face during their wartime service? How did she overcome these challenges?		
What does this oral history tell us about Black women’s experiences, contributions, and sacrifices during World War II?		