



# Activity: Two-Front War: African Americans' Fight for Victory at Home and Abroad



## Guiding question:

How did African Americans' experiences and accomplishments battling discrimination during World War II serve as a foundation for the Civil Rights Movement?

### DEVELOPED BY JASON BUTLER

**Grade Level(s):** 6-8, 9-12

**Subject(s):** Social Studies

**Cemetery Connection:** Luxembourg American Cemetery

**Fallen Hero Connection:** Technician Fifth Grade Willie J. Devore



## Overview

Working in groups, students will be exposed to various aspects of the African American wartime experience. Analyzing different types of sources, each group will draw conclusions, make connections and share its findings with the class, who ultimately will gain a multi-faceted understanding of the topic.

## Historical Context

Facing fierce opposition from the Axis Powers, immense logistical challenges in a two-ocean war, and relentless industrial demands as the self-styled arsenal of democracy, the United States needed all hands on deck to achieve its objectives. This meant calling upon African Americans in often unprecedented ways, both on the home front and in the theaters of war. African American civilians and soldiers were typically enthusiastic about doing their part, but were also deeply aware of the racism and discrimination that oftentimes made their service more difficult and dangerous.

African American newspapers popularized the "Double V Campaign" that helped articulate the idea of striving for two victories: defeating the enemy abroad and defeating racism at home. This laid the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. African Americans' efforts, contributions and sacrifices during the war motivated many to demand first-class citizenship, which was granted layer by layer during the war and in the two decades that followed. Although many trace the beginnings of the modern Civil Rights Movement to the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956, Greensboro sit-ins of the 1960s, or other singular events, the contributions of African Americans during World War II became a vital stepping stone on the path toward racial equality.

## Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Describe several roles that African Americans played on the battlefield and on the home front during World War II;
- Explain obstacles and adversity that African Americans faced during World War II; and
- Analyze the connections between the "Double V Campaign" and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

*"The Civil Rights Movement is often oversimplified and reduced to a handful of key events and heroic figures. However, there is abundant evidence to support the argument that the movement built upon African Americans' efforts and experiences during World War II."*  
—Jason Butler

Butler is a Professional Learning Facilitator in Social Studies with the DeKalb County (Georgia) School District.

## Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

### Primary Sources

A. Philip Randolph, "Call to Negro America to March on Washington for Jobs and Equal Participation in National Defense," *Black Worker*, May 1941 (excerpt)

Charity Adams Earley, *One Woman's Army*, 1995 (excerpt)

Letter, Lieutenant Jack Robinson to Assistant Secretary of War Truman K. Gibson, July 16, 1944  
National Archives and Records Administration (RG 107)

Medgar Evers, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 2005 (excerpt)

Oral History, William Holloman, 2015 (29:22 to 33:13)  
Digital Collections of the National World War II Museum  
[ww2online.org/view/william-holloman#segment-4](http://ww2online.org/view/william-holloman#segment-4)

Photograph, *Corporal Alyce Dixon (right) poses with other members of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion during World War II, c. 1943-1946*

U.S. Army

[army.mil/article/181382/sorting the mail blazing a trail african american women in wwii](http://army.mil/article/181382/sorting-the-mail-blazing-a-trail-african-american-women-in-wwii)

Photograph, *Easter morning, T/5 William E. Thomas...and Pfc. Joseph Jackson...will roll specially prepared eggs on Hitler's lawn, March 10, 1945*

National Archives and Records Administration (111-SC-202330)

Photograph, *John Vachon, The Negro Labor Relation League organized a boycott against "Jim Crow dairies" in Chicago, July 1941*

Library of Congress

Poster, "Why Should We March?," 1941

A. Philip Randolph Institute

Library of Congress (mssmisc ody0808)

W. E. B. DuBois, Letter to U.S. Selective Service System, June 23, 1942

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

## Secondary Sources

Film, *U.S. Air Force Tuskegee Airmen Double Victory*, 2016 [2:15]

U.S. Air Force

[youtube.com/watch?v=advPscvQ23Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=advPscvQ23Y)

## Materials

- Computers with internet capability and projector or smart board with speakers
- Birth Certificate of the Civil Rights Movement
- Birth Certificate of the Civil Rights Movement Rubric

## Lesson Preparation

- Divide the class into five groups of three or four students each. Make enough copies (or post electronically) of each document set for each group.
  - **Teacher Tip:** Assign stronger students to document sets three, four, and five because their texts are longer and more complex than document sets one and two.
- Print one copy of the Birth Certificate of the Civil Rights Movement (includes instruction page and blank certificate) and Birth Certificate of the Civil Rights Movement Rubric for each student.
- Set up classroom technology. Students will need Internet access.
- Cue oral history video to begin at 29:22 for group four.
- Test all online resources before class.

## Procedure

### Activity One (15 minutes)

- Show the short film, *U.S. Air Force Tuskegee Airmen Double Victory*, to the entire class.
- Ask students to explain main points or key ideas (including Double Victory) from the video. Clear up any misconceptions that might arise. Ensure students are aware of when World War II took place and when the heart of the Civil Rights Movement occurred.
  - **Teacher Tip:** Provide a brief historical context to the Tuskegee Airmen.
- Lead a whole-class debrief to discuss some of the students' responses from the previous step, ensuring that they understand the significance of each event or fact. Ask the students why contributing to the war effort would have carried special significance for African Americans as compared to doing a job or task unrelated to the war.

## Activity Two (15 minutes)

- Divide class into groups of three or four students each, using pairs only if the two students are particularly capable.
- Assign each group one document set. Ask each group to discuss how these primary sources help them connect the experience of African Americans in World War II to the origins of the Civil Rights Movement.
  - **Teacher Tip:** Please note that group four will need a device to watch a short oral history video. Remind students to just watch from 29:22 to 33:13.
- Circulate throughout the room to guide and support student understanding.
  - **Teacher Tip:** Avoid directly answering many of their questions; instead, answer their question with a question or a suggestion to lead them toward drawing their own conclusion. Ensure the students do as much of the thinking as possible.

## Assessment

- Shuffle the groups so that each group has one member from each document set. Ask students to share a summary of their primary sources with the group. Ask each group to connect the experience of African Americans in World War II to the origins of the Civil Rights Movement. Circulate around the room and check for understanding as needed. If preferred, the documents can be reviewed with the whole class.
- Review the instructions and the rubric for the Birth Certificate of the Civil Rights Movement and direct students to complete the blank certificate. The activity can be completed independently or in groups, at teacher discretion.
- Circulate throughout the room to guide and support successful student completion of the Birth Certificate of the Civil Rights Movement.
- The Birth Certificate of the Civil Rights Movement Rubric can be used to assess the final product.

## Methods for Extension:

- Students can write a letter from a person referenced in their source(s) to a person referenced in another group's source(s), making sure the letter conveys an understanding of both historical figures and the Double V Campaign.
- Students can research African American achievements during World War II, such as:
  - Dorie Miller, considered by some as the first hero of the Pearl Harbor attack;
  - The Montford Point Marines, the first African American Marines;
  - General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., a War Department adviser who trained and led African American soldiers;
  - General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., one of the Tuskegee Airmen's commanders;

- William Hastie, a prominent attorney and War Department official who helped develop policies on the use of African American manpower and recruit African American soldiers;
- Dr. Charles Drew, the pioneering scientist who led the Blood for Britain campaign and whose methods of preserving and transporting blood saved thousands of soldiers' lives; or
- The Port Chicago Mutiny, which led to a 1944 trial as Thurgood Marshall helped advocate for soldiers who refused to work in unsafe conditions after an explosion killed 320 people, including 202 African American sailors.
- Students with more interest in the origins of the Civil Rights Movement can research developments outside the context of World War II, including:
  - Supreme Court civil rights cases *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) *Morgan v. Virginia* (1946), *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954);
  - The NAACP-led anti-lynching campaign of the 1930s;
  - A. Philip Randolph's 1941 attempt to stage a March on Washington;
  - The 1947 Journey of Reconciliation that was a precursor to the Freedom Rides; and
  - Efforts by the U.S. government to counter a Soviet Union-led media campaign spotlighting U.S. racial injustice.
- The American Battle Monuments Commission maintains U.S. military cemeteries overseas. These cemeteries are permanent memorials to the fallen, but it is important that students know the stories of those who rest here. To learn more about the stories of Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice, visit [abmc.gov/education](http://abmc.gov/education) and [NHDSilentHeroes.org](http://NHDSilentHeroes.org).
- Teachers can enhance students' interest in African Americans who served in World War II by exploring these related lesson plans:
  - [Duty and Dignity: Black Americans and the 92nd Infantry Division Buffalo Soldiers](#)
  - [Equal Opportunities for Sacrifice in World War II](#)
  - [The Montford Point Marines: One Step Towards Civil Rights](#)
  - [Race and Tragedy on the Homefront: The Forgotten Port Chicago Disaster](#)

## Adaptations:

- If you form more than five groups, assign the same materials to more than one group. This is preferable to creating groups of five or more students because, in groups that are too large, some individuals tend to be less engaged or productive.
- Activity One also can be done in small groups, followed by a whole-class debrief and discussion.
- If you have additional time or if you feel your students need more scaffolding, you can create one birth certificate with the entire class before splitting off each group to complete its own. Or, you can create a model ahead of time that you share with the students before they do their own.



## Document Set One

Photograph, Corporal Alyce Dixon (right) poses with other members of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion during World War II, c. 1943-1946

U.S. Army



## Document Set One con't

Charity Adams Earley, *One Woman's Army*, 1995 (excerpt)

"...There had been so many 'working together in racial harmony' situations which were forbidden and eradicated when confronted with the Army reality of both segregation and discrimination.

Perhaps this harmony was in part responsible for the "separate but equal" plan proposed by WAC Headquarters and sponsored by the White House. The plan was also attributable in part to the recommendation made to the president by his Negro adviser. The plan was to create a Negro training regiment, parallel to the regular training regiment, in order to provide promotional opportunities for Negro officers.

A meeting of all Negro officers stationed at the TC was called, and the plan was explained. The whole thing sounded very good - at least to the most junior officers.

Lots of questions were asked, but the answers were not very satisfactory to a few of us. I remember that meeting very well for a number of reasons. I had been raised in the southern United States, and I knew that there was no such thing as separate but equal, so I objected to such an organization, pointing out that although it appeared to afford opportunity, there was an extremely low ceiling on where we could go.

The top would be reserved for whites; I had seen it happen too many times. When I asked who the commanding officer of this regiment would be, I was informed that as ranking Negro officer I would have that assignment. My response was that I wanted no part of it and was informed that I had no choice.

'I will not command such an outfit.'

'Would you disobey a direct order?' I was asked.

'I want to make it as a WAC officer and not as a Negro WAC officer. I guess this is the end because I will not be the regimental commander.'

The meeting was over. Each and every officer - including the ones who had been closest to me and those for whom I had done the most, walked out of that assembly without a word to me. I was hurt that none understood that I was thinking of all our futures..."



## Document Set Two

Photograph, *Easter morning, T/5 William E. Thomas...and Pfc. Joseph Jackson...will roll specially prepared eggs on Hitler's lawn, March 10, 1945*

National Archives and Records Administration (111-SC-202330)



## Document Set Two con't

Medgar Evers, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 2005 (excerpt)

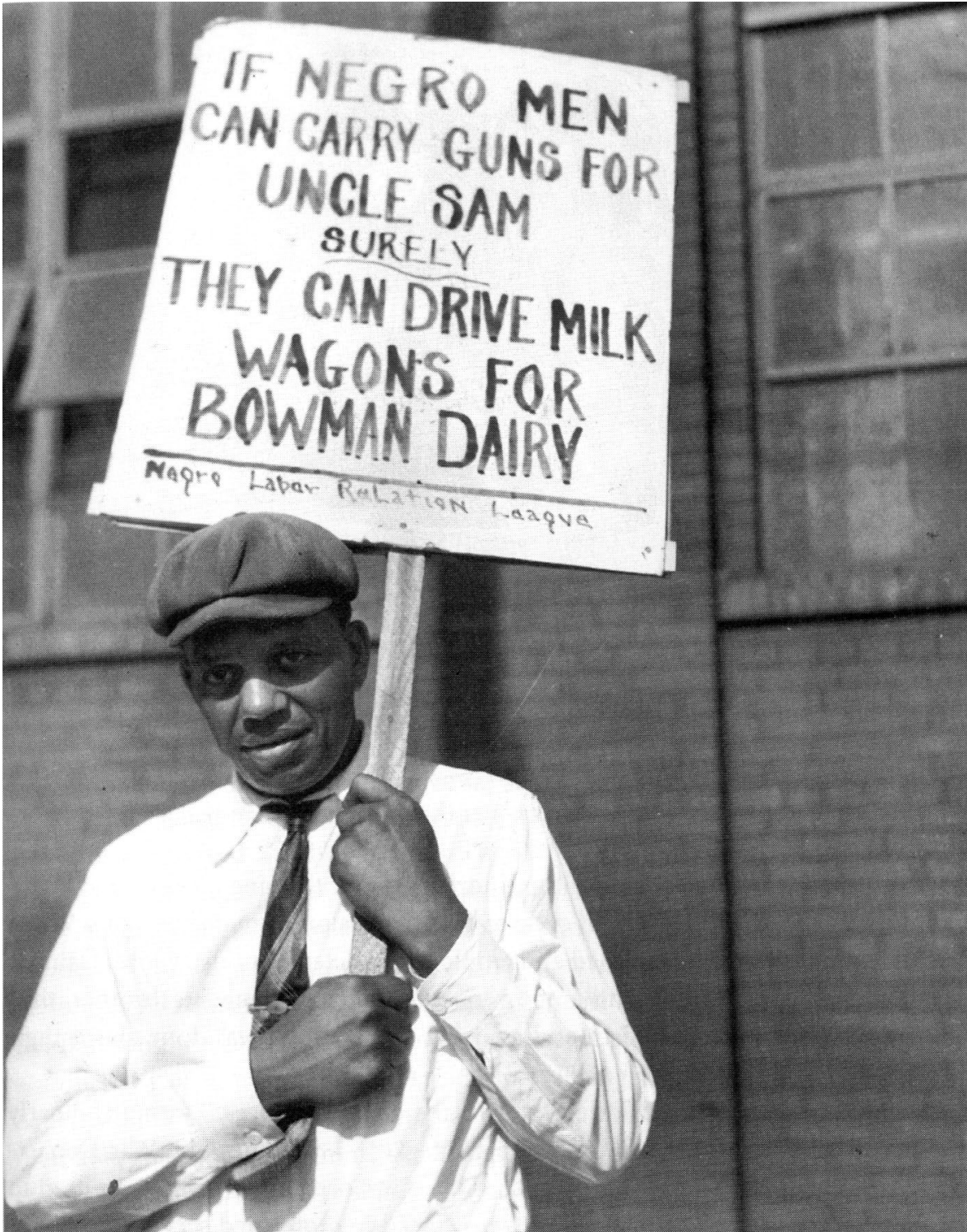
"...For two and one half years I endangered my life as many other Negro Americans, on the far-away battlefields, to safeguard America and Democracy, only to return to our native country and state and be denied the basic things for which we fought. Now if that is not forbearance, I do not know what it is. Even while serving Uncle Sam in Europe I would read in the Stars and Stripes, the U.S. Army publication, of the horror that my people were experiencing in the Southland, while we faced the merciless onslaught of the German Air Force and their eighty-eight field guns. However, I have been told that 'resistance to tyranny is obedience to God,' and for that reason if for no other we shall not cease to press forward, relentlessly, until every vestige of segregation and discrimination in America becomes annihilated."



## Document Set Three

Photograph, John Vachon, *The Negro Labor Relation League* organized a boycott against "Jim Crow dairies" in Chicago, July 1941

Library of Congress



## Document Set Three con't

A. Philip Randolph, "Call to Negro America to March on Washington for Jobs and Equal Participation in National Defense," *Black Worker*, May 1941 (excerpt)

Most important and vital of all, Negroes, by the mobilization and coordination of their mass power, can cause PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT TO ISSUE AN EXECUTIVE ORDER ABOLISHING DISCRIMINATIONS IN ALL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT, ARMY, NAVY, AIR CORPS AND NATIONAL DEFENSE JOBS.

Of course, the task is not easy. In very truth, it is big, tremendous and difficult.

It will cost money.

It will require sacrifice.

It will tax the Negroes' courage, determination and will to struggle. But we can, must and will triumph.

The Negroes' stake in national defense is big. It consists of jobs, thousands of jobs. It may represent millions, yes hundreds of millions of dollars in wages. It consists of new industrial opportunities and hope. This is worth fighting for.

But to win our stakes, it will require an "all-out, " bold and total effort and demonstration of colossal proportions.

Negroes can build a mammoth machine of mass action with a terrific and tremendous driving and striking power that can shatter and crush the evil fortress of race prejudice and hate, if they will only resolve to do so and never stop, until victory comes.

Dear fellow Negro Americans, be not dismayed by these terrible times. You possess power, great power. Our problem is to harness and hitch it up for action on the broadest, daring and most gigantic scale.

In this period of power politics, nothing counts but pressure, more pressure, and still more pressure, through the tactic and strategy of broad, organized, aggressive mass action behind the vital and important issues of the Negro. To this end, we propose that ten thousand Negroes MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS IN NATIONAL DEFENSE AND EQUAL INTEGRATION IN THE FIGHTING FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES.

An 'all-out' thundering march on Washington, ending in a monster and huge demonstration at Lincoln's Monument will shake up white America.

It will shake up official Washington.

It will give encouragement to our white friends to fight all the harder by our side, with us, for our righteous cause.

It will gain respect for the Negro people.

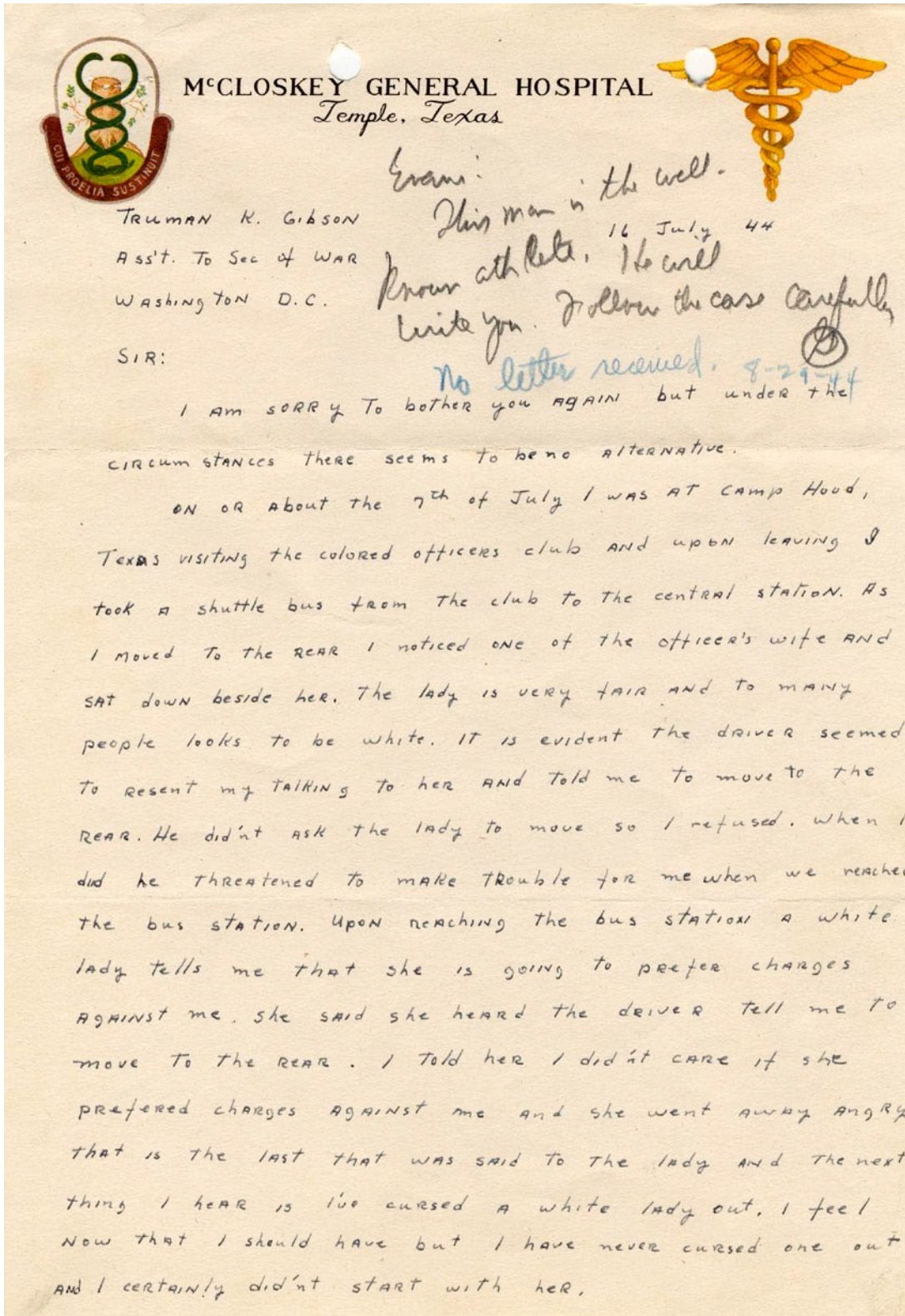
It will create a new sense of self-respect among Negroes.

But what of national unity?..."



## Document Set Four

Letter, Lieutenant Jack Robinson to Assistant Secretary of War Truman K. Gibson, July 16, 1944  
National Archives and Records Administration (RG 107)





## Document Set Four

Letter, Lieutenant Jack Robinson to Assistant Secretary of War Truman K. Gibson, July 16, 1944  
National Archives and Records Administration (RG 107)

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little advice. I WANT to know just how far I should go with  
the case, what I mean is should I appeal to the NAACP  
AND the Negro Press? I DON'T WANT ANY unfavorable publi-  
city for myself or the Army but I believe in fair  
play AND I feel I HAVE to let SOME ONE IN ON THE  
CASE. If I write the NAACP I hope to get statements  
from all the witnesses because a broad minded  
PERSON CAN see how the people framed me.

you CAN see sir that I need your advice. I DON'T CARE  
what the outcome of the TRIAL is because I know I am  
being framed AND the charges AREN'T too bad. I would like  
get your advice about the publicity. I have a lot of good  
publicity out AND I feel I have numerous friends ON the  
press but I first want to hear from you before I do  
ANY thing I will be sorry for later ON.

SIR AS I SAID I DON'T mind trouble but I do believe  
IN fair play AND justice. I feel that I'm being taken  
IN this case AND I will tell people about it unless  
the TRIAL is fair. Let me hear from you so I will  
know what steps to TAKE.

Jack Robinson  
LT. JACK ROBINSON  
WARD 11 B  
McClosky Gen. Hosp.  
Temple TEXAS

## Document Set Four con't

Oral History, William Holloman, 2015 (29:22-33:13)  
Digital Collections of the National World War II Museum  
[ww2online.org/view/william-holloman#segment-4](http://ww2online.org/view/william-holloman#segment-4)

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. And we for—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 gang plank, getting off the boat.

Now there were more blacks on the boat 'cause they brought our group back together. And they had a sign...at the bottom of the gang plank. Whites to one side, colored to the other side.

And I said...to myself, "This is some country. I'm fighting for democracy. And this is the first time I've 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. [laughs]"

One of the things, when the war ended, I thought I was going to be a commercial pilot. I found out with all my experience...Black—there was no job for me. I had to go back in the service to continue to fly. Was the military career my first choice? No, but...flying was in my blood. It was what I wanted to do. And I think every time I left the service...I left the service in '47, went to school. And after a year, my old commander, Colonel Davis, talked me into coming back into the Air Force. And so I went back again.

I helped integrate the Air Force in 1948. I was one of the first four Guinea pigs. You know [laughs] they had to send us out and they started...I think...there were three of them they sent to Scott Air Force base—right across the river from St. Louis.

You think they would send me there?

No.

No, they sent me to Mississippi. Back to where I first went into service. Biloxi, Mississippi. At Keesler. And there were four of us. Five of us--no four of us. The first four that went there. Some of the guys got lucky and were sent out to California. Some sent to Arizona.

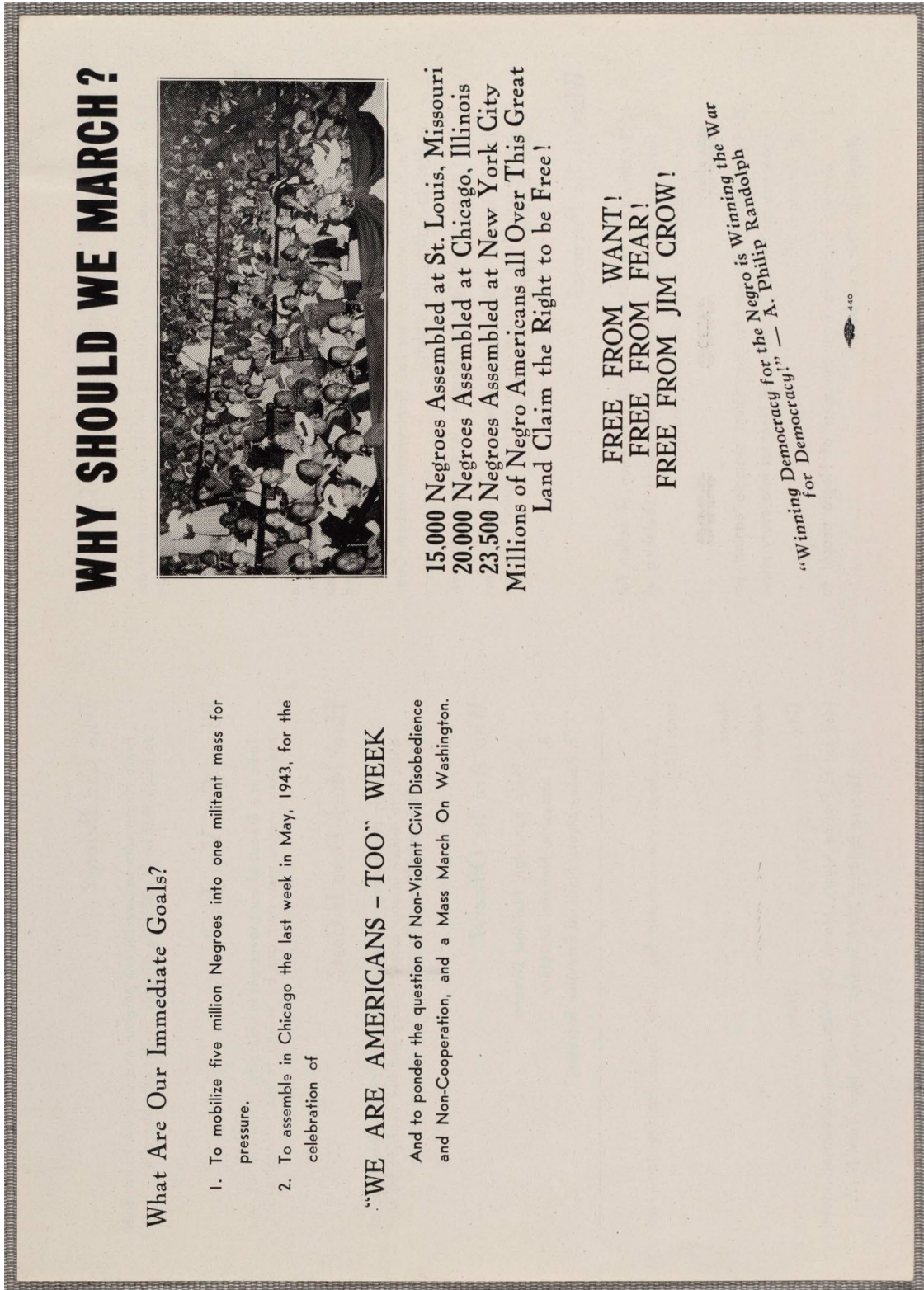
But, the four of us that were sent to Keesler—we had the biggest challenge.

Combat veterans with no privileges off the base.



# Document Set Five

Poster, "Why Should We March?," 1941. A. Philip Randolph Institute Library of Congress (mssmisc ody0808)





## Document Set Five con't

W. E. B. DuBois, Letter to U.S. Selective Service System, June 23, 1942

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

23 June 1942

My dear Mr. Berry:

18-46-46

Answering your letter of June 18, I beg to say that I would be glad to write for your office a statement on the following thesis: that despite the amount of discrimination and segregation which today faces the Negro American, he can by comparing his condition now and that at the time of the First World War take great courage. In the first World War there was a movement to keep him out of the draft on the ground that he was not really an American. There was not only no effort of the Federal Government to incorporate him into industry but on the contrary there was a series of riots unpunished to force him out of industry by brute force. These riots were caused not only by the strong opposition of unions but also by lack of housing and lack of effort to furnish housing. There was determination to train no Negro officers and especially to refuse to allow them to be trained with white officers. Finally a segregated camps was established and then hesitation at commissioning the graduates at this camp. The officers finally inducted into the army were treated with ~~white~~ discrimination and suffered great injustice especially in the A. E. F. in France. There was curious discrimination in the draft and Negroes were inducted, especially in the South, in considerably larger proportion than whites even though cantonments were not ready for them.

Finally, there was no official action of the Federal Government which could possibly be construed into a basic attack upon racial discrimination as an hindrance to war effort. The present situation is a great improvement upon that of 1917 to 1920. It leaves numbers of things undone and untouched but if we recognize that cultural change is slow and so long as change is evident we ought to be not satisfied but encouraged. Then certainly the recent meeting of the FEP in Birmingham should be an encouragement to all Americans.

# Birth Certificate of the Civil Rights Movement

## Instructions:

Use your primary sources, your knowledge of World War II and your understanding of the Civil Rights Movement to complete this birth certificate to explain how African Americans' wartime efforts helped lead to – or give birth to – breakthroughs for racial justice and equality in the 1950s and 1960s. While no one can say for certain that the Civil Rights Movement began on one particular day or had one specific trigger, you will make an argument here that the Civil Rights Movement started with the events referenced in your source(s). Guidance for completing each part of the certificate is below.

**Was Born On:** Provide a date, as specific as possible, that correlates to your source(s) and/or the World War II developments you are focusing on.

**In:** Provide a place, as specific as possible, that correlates to your source(s) and/or the World War II developments you are focusing on.

**To Parent(s):** Identify the key figure(s) involved in your source(s) and/or the World War II developments you are focusing on.

**Because:** Explain the cause-and-effect relationship between your source(s) and/or the World War II developments you are focusing on, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. How did these wartime developments help lead to the Civil Rights Movement? What were the issues surrounding racial justice and equality that African-Americans faced during World War II and then confronted in other ways during the 1950s and 1960s?

**Image:** Add a photo, image or illustration that helps us understand this “baby” and where it came from.

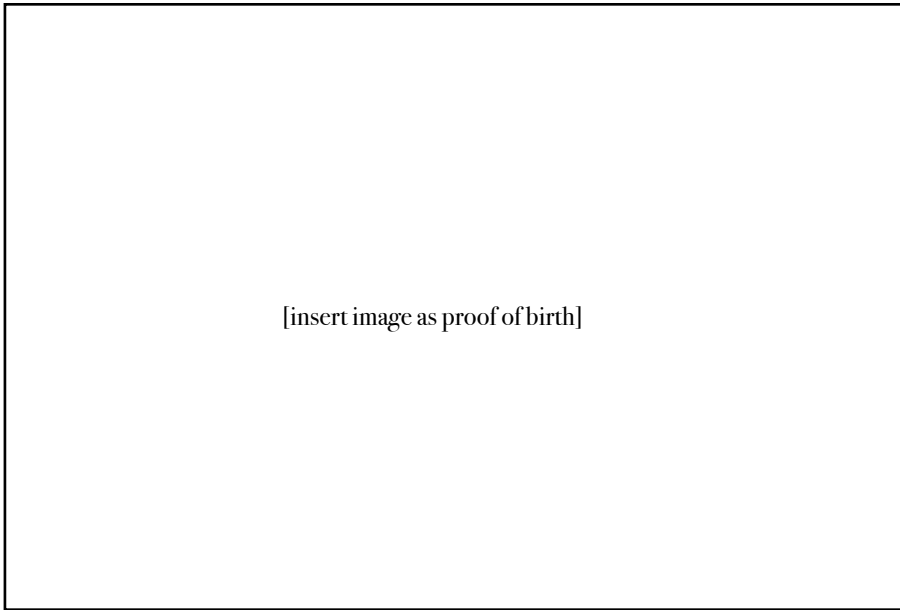


# Certificate of Birth

This is to Certify that the Civil Rights Movement, was born on \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date of birth)

in \_\_\_\_\_ to Parent(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
(Location of Birth) (Name(s) of Parent(s))

because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# Birth Certificate of the Civil Rights Movement Rubric

	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Emerging</b>
<b>Examples of adversity</b>	Includes four or more examples of race-related obstacles or adversity African Americans faced during World War II	Includes three examples of race-related obstacles or adversity African Americans faced during World War II	Includes two examples of race-related obstacles or adversity African Americans faced during World War II	Includes one example of race-related obstacles or adversity African Americans faced during World War II
<b>Examples of the fight against adversity</b>	Includes four or more steps African Americans took to overcome race-related obstacles or adversity during World War II	Includes three steps African Americans took to overcome race-related obstacles or adversity during World War II	Includes two steps African Americans took to overcome race-related obstacles or adversity during World War II	Includes one step African Americans took to overcome race-related obstacles or adversity during World War II
<b>Connecting World War II to the Civil Rights Movement</b>	Includes four or more connections between African Americans' wartime efforts to overcome race-related obstacles or adversity and their efforts during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s	Includes three connections between African Americans' wartime efforts to overcome race-related obstacles or adversity and their efforts during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s	Includes two connections between African Americans' wartime efforts to overcome race-related obstacles or adversity and their efforts during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s	Includes one connection between African Americans' wartime efforts to overcome race-related obstacles or adversity and their efforts during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s
<b>Mechanics</b>	Include zero to two errors related to spelling, grammar, punctuation or capitalization	Includes three to four errors related to spelling, grammar, punctuation or capitalization	Includes five to six errors related to spelling, grammar, punctuation or capitalization	Includes seven or more errors related to spelling, grammar, punctuation or capitalization