



UNDERSTANDING
SACRIFICE

Activity: The Montford Point Marines: One Step Towards Civil Rights



Guiding question:

Why do people who lack full civil rights at home fight for freedom abroad?

DEVELOPED BY GRETA L. BARTLEY-HAMILTON

Grade Level(s): 6-8

Subject(s): Social Studies

Cemetery Connection: National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific

Fallen Hero Connection: Private First Class Kenneth Jewell Tibbs

Overview

Using primary and secondary sources, students will examine the impact of Executive Order 8802 both during and after World War II.

Historical Context

In June 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802. The order signaled the end of legal racial discrimination in the defense industry and government agencies but not the armed forces. Executive Order 8802 resulted in the creation of several African American units that served with distinction during World War II, ultimately dispelling notions held by members of the military establishment regarding black Americans' fitness or willingness to serve. One of these units was the Montford Point Marines. Although they were not initially welcomed by the Marine Corps establishment, they served with distinction in some of the toughest combat zones in the Pacific Theater. They participated in campaigns on Saipan, Guam, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima. The Montford Point Marines' actions would serve as one of the catalysts for the Civil Rights Movement.

Objectives

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

- Explain how the service of African American service members during World War II paved the path for desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces; and
- Explain why men fought and died for a nation that denied them full civil rights.

Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

Primary Sources

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802, June 25, 1941 National Archives and Records Administration (Record Group 11)

[archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-8802](https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-8802)

Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9981, July 26, 1948

National Archives and Records Administration

[archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9981](https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9981)

Photograph, *Montford Point Marines in their dress uniforms*, May 1943

National Archives and Record Administration (208-NP-10NN-2)

[archives.gov/files/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures/images/african-americans-wwii-097.jpg](https://www.archives.gov/files/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures/images/african-americans-wwii-097.jpg)

Photograph, *African American Marines awaiting orders on the beaches of Saipan in the Mariana Islands*, June 1944

National Archives and Record Administration (127-N-83928)

[archives.gov/files/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures/images/african-americans-wwii-111.jpg](https://www.archives.gov/files/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures/images/african-americans-wwii-111.jpg)

Photograph, *A platoon of African-American Marines listening to their drill instructor, Sergeant Gilbert Hubert Johnson at Camp Montford Point, North Carolina*, c. April 1943

National Archives and Record Administration (208-NP-10FF-1)

[archives.gov/files/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures/images/african-americans-wwii-177.jpg](https://www.archives.gov/files/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures/images/african-americans-wwii-177.jpg)

Photograph, *With the din of battle only a half mile away, these Korean War soldiers pause to receive communion during mass*, c. 1950

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum (2007-738)

Photograph, *Wounded men receive treatment on a train enroute to hospitals during the Korean War*, c. 1950

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum (2007-733)

Secondary Sources

Kenneth J. Tibbs Fallen Hero Profile ★

National History Day

nhsilenthheroes.org/profiles/kenneth-jewell-tibbs/

Materials

- Timeline Worksheet
- Tibbs Letter Instructions and Rubric
- Computer with projector, speakers and capability to access Kenneth Tibbs Fallen Hero Profile.

Lesson Preparation

- Make one document packet for each group of three or four students (one copy of each of the sources listed on the Timeline Worksheet).
- Make one copy of the Timeline Worksheet and the Tibbs Letter Instructions and Rubric for each student.
- Test all online resources before class.
- Preview all materials for appropriateness.

Procedure

Activity One: Timeline (45 minutes)

- Divide students into groups of three or four students each.
- Explain that students will be reviewing a series of documents that cover World War II and the Korean Conflict. They will be examining the role of African Americans in both conflicts.
- Give each group one set of primary source documents and give each student a Timeline Worksheet.
 - **Teacher Tip:** The dates have been purposefully removed from the documents, but there are clues scattered throughout to help students.
- Ask students to review the sources and place them in chronological order. Students should work together and discuss their reasoning, but if they disagree, they may put the documents in a different order on their individual Timeline Worksheets.
- Direct students to complete the “source name,” “approximate date,” and “justification for date estimate” columns on their Timeline Worksheets.
- Monitor student groups and answer questions as needed.
- When students are finished, reveal the correct order. A Teacher Guide, including specific facts, and discussion questions is included to assist with this process.
- After reviewing the documents, ask students to complete the synthesis question at the bottom on the Timeline Worksheet.

Activity Two: Case Study (30 minutes)

- Introduce the students to the Montford Point Marines (details included in Teacher Guide). Explain where the Marines were fighting in the last two years of the war.
- Project the Fallen Hero Profile for Private First Class Kenneth J. Tibbs and read the profile with the class. Watch the video eulogy at the bottom of the page.
- Ask students,
 - *Why would Private First Class Tibbs fight for a nation that did not give him full civil rights at home?*
 - *What factors motivated the Montford Point Marines?*
 - *Do you think the actions of the Montford Point Marines had an impact on the military and political leaders of the late 1940s?*
 - *How do you think the experience was the same or different for service members who served in the Korean War?*

Assessment

- Distribute one copy of the Tibbs Letter Instructions and Rubric to each student.
- Review instructions with students.
- Student writing can be assessed using the Tibbs Letter Rubric.

Methods for Extension

- Students with more interest in the service of African Americans in World War II can research the Montford Point Marines, the 92nd Infantry Division (who served in Europe), or the 93rd Infantry Division (who served in the Pacific)
- Students can search the [Library of Congress Veterans History Project](#) for written, audio, and video interviews with African American servicemembers from World War II and Korea.
- 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 and 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](#)
 - [Race and Tragedy on the Homefront: The Forgotten Port Chicago Disaster](#)
 - [Two-Front War: African Americans' Fight for Victory at Home and Abroad](#)

Adaptations

- Teachers can adapt the project to English Language Learners by simplifying the language in the instructions and letter and by having the class read aloud each of the three steps of the activity.
- Teachers can adapt this lesson to younger students by providing coordinates and focusing purely on the skill of plotting points on a graph and drawing lines.

Photograph, *Montford Point Marines in their dress uniforms*

National Archives and Record Administration (208-NP-10NN-2)



Photograph, A platoon of African-American Marines listening to their drill instructor, Sergeant Gilbert Hubert Johnson at Camp Montford Point, North Carolina

National Archives and Record Administration (208-NP-10FF-1)



Photograph, *African American Marines awaiting orders on the beaches of Saipan in the Mariana Islands*

National Archives and Record Administration (127-N-83928)



Photograph, *With the din of battle only a half mile away, these Korean War soldiers pause to receive communion during mass*

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum (2007-738)



Photograph, *Wounded men receive treatment on a train enroute to hospitals...*

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Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9981, p.1

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EXECUTIVE ORDER

ESTABLISHING THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON EQUALITY OF TREATMENT AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE ARMED SERVICES

WHEREAS it is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country's defense:

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, and as Commander in Chief of the armed services, it is hereby ordered as follows:

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 services 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.

2. There shall be created in the National Military Establishment an advisory committee to be known as the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, which shall be composed of seven members to be designated by the President.

3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the armed services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. The Committee shall confer and advise with the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary

Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9981, p.2

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of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, and shall make such recommendations to the President and to said Secretaries as in the judgment of the Committee will effectuate the policy hereof.

4. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or the services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.

5. When requested by the Committee to do so, persons in the armed services or in any of the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall testify before the Committee and shall make available for the use of the Committee such documents and other information as the Committee may require.

6. The Committee shall continue to exist until such time as the President shall terminate its existence by Executive order.



THE WHITE HOUSE,

July 26, 1948.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802

National Archives and Records Administration (Record Group 11)

Executive Order 8802: Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry

Reaffirming Policy Of Full Participation In The Defense Program By All Persons, Regardless Of Race, Creed, Color, Or National Origin, And Directing Certain Action In Furtherance Of Said Policy

WHEREAS it is the policy of the United States to encourage full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders; and

WHEREAS there is evidence that available and needed workers have been barred from employment in industries engaged in defense production solely because of considerations of race, creed, color, or national origin, to the detriment of workers' morale and of national unity:

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, in furtherance of said policy and of this order, to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

And it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. All departments and agencies of the Government of the United States concerned with vocational and training programs for defense production shall take special measures appropriate to assure that such programs are administered without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;
2. All contracting agencies of the Government of the United States shall include in all defense contracts hereafter negotiated by them a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any worker because of race, creed, color, or national origin;
3. There is established in the Office of Production Management a Committee on Fair Employment Practice, which shall consist of a chairman and four other members to be appointed by the President. The Chairman and members of the Committee shall serve as such without compensation but shall be entitled to actual and necessary transportation, subsistence and other expenses incidental to performance of their duties. The Committee shall receive and investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provisions of this order and shall take appropriate steps to redress grievances which it finds to be valid. The Committee shall also recommend to the several departments and agencies of the Government of the United States and to the President all measures which may be deemed by it necessary or proper to effectuate the provisions of this order.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

The White House

Timeline Worksheet

Source Name	Approximate Date	Justification for Date Estimate	Actual Date

Timeline Worksheet Teacher Guide

Source Name	Actual Date	Questions for Student Discussion
Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802	June 25, 1941	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did this executive order ban? Why do you think President Roosevelt took this action? What opportunities would this act provide for African Americans and other minorities?
Photograph, A platoon of African-American Marines listening to their drill instructor	April 1943	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What challenges faced men in Marine Corps Boot Camp during World War II? What additional challenges would African American men face?
Photograph, Montford Point Marines in their dress uniforms	May 1943	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> African American men were not required to have a Marine dress uniform during World War II. They were required to purchase the uniform from their first paycheck. Why did you think these men purchased and wore the uniform?
Photograph, African American Marines awaiting orders on the beaches of Saipan in the Mariana Islands	June 1944	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What challenges did African American Marines confront when they faced combat? How do you think this experience influenced how they were seen by other members of the Armed Forces?
Song Lyrics, "The Blinding of Isaac Woodard"	1946	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What sort of reception did African American servicemen face when they returned to the United States?
Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9981	July 26, 1948	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is this executive order different from order 8802? What do you think would be the short-term impact of this executive order? What would be the long-term impacts?
Photograph, With the din of battle only a half mile away, these Korean War soldiers pause to receive communion during mass	1950	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did the military change from World War II to the Korean War? What were the impacts of Executive Order 9981?
Photograph, Wounded men receive treatment on a train enroute to hospitals	1950	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did the military change from World War II to the Korean War? What were the impacts of Executive Order 9981?

Timeline Worksheet Teacher Guide cont.

Introduction to the Montford Point Marines

African Americans have served in every conflict in U.S. history. African Americans who served in World War II were limited to support roles in the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy. Job opportunities were limited, largely to tasks that involved manual labor.

In response to demands led by A. Philip Randolph, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941. This order banned discrimination against African Americans and other minorities in any workplace receiving government contracts. As a result of this order, all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces were required to recruit and train African Americans.

Black men who enlisted in the Marines received their basic training at a segregated facility at Camp Montford Point in Jacksonville, North Carolina. Conditions were rough, and recruits faced discrimination both on and off duty. From 1942 to 1949, more than 20,000 black recruits trained at Montford Point and then served in World War II or the Korean War. The July 26, 1948 Executive Order 9981, signed by President Harry Truman, desegregated the military and segregated units were phased out.

In 2012, Montford Point Marines who served from 1942 to 1949 were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

Tibbs Letter Instructions

On June 15, 1944, Private First Class Kenneth Jewel Tibbs became the first African American Marine killed in combat. He was killed by a gunshot wound to the ear on Yellow Beach #2 on Saipan, a key island in the Western Pacific campaign. More than 3,000 Americans would die in the Battle for Saipan.

Imagine that you are Tibbs' fellow Marine. Write a letter to his family explaining

- The challenges he faced as a Montford Point Marine; and
- Why you believe that he fought despite the challenges he faced.

Use the documents from the Timeline Worksheet as well as the Fallen Hero Profile to provide evidence and specific facts to support your response.

Tibbs Letter Rubric

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Emerging
Content	Letter clearly addresses the prompt. Provides at least three pieces of evidence from documents to support ideas.	Letter addresses the prompt. Provides at least two pieces of evidence from documents to support ideas.	Letter somewhat addresses the prompt. Provides at least one piece of evidence from documents to support ideas.	Letter does not address the prompt. Does not provide evidence from documents to support ideas.
Organization	Note begins with an appropriate salutation. Paragraph length note includes a clear introduction sentence, well-organized body sentences, and a conclusion sentence. Note ends with a complimentary close.	Note begins with a salutation. Paragraph length note includes an introduction sentence, body sentences, and a conclusion sentence. Note ends with a complimentary close.	Note begins with a salutation. Paragraph length note is missing one of the following: an introductory sentence, body sentences, and a conclusion sentence. Note ends with a complimentary close.	Note lacks a salutation. Note is not paragraph length. No clear introduction sentence, body sentences, and/or conclusion sentence. Note lacks a complimentary close.
Mechanics	Clear control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Adequate control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Limited control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Minimal control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.