

## TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

### ***Lesson Title – Comparing/Contrasting the Treatment of African American Servicemen During the Civil War and World War II*** **From Cynthia Petrie**

Grade - 11

Length of class period – This lesson involves classes during two historical units of study (the Civil War and World War II) or may be done within one topical unit of study on attitudes towards African Americans in US History. The lesson will take approximately three 50 minute classes per unit.

Inquiry – How were African American volunteers for the US military treated during the Civil War and World War II? What similarities and what differences were there in their treatment? What does this tell you about Americans’ attitudes (the general public, members of the government, and people in the military) concerning equality for African Americans? Why do you think so little changes from the Civil War through World War II?

Objectives -

Content/Cognitive:

1. Students will gain knowledge about the first African American regiment (the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup>) during the Civil War and the first African American fighter pilots (the Tuskegee Airmen) during World War II.
2. Students will make use of films to gain historical knowledge.

Skills:

1. Students will improve their ability to analyze and interpret films to determine their historical accuracy.
2. Students will improve their ability to make inferences by predicting cause/effect relationships.
3. Students will improve their ability to see the historical impact of social/cultural attitudes during a given time period.
4. Students will improve their ability to support a point of view in writing.

Materials –

1. Two films: “Glory” and “The Tuskegee Airmen” (both are readily available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) for a reasonable price.
2. Three homework Assignments: “Glory” Telegram, “Glory” Letter and “Tuskegee Airmen” Editorial (see attached assignments at end of the lesson)

Activities –

1. During the study of the Civil War the class will watch the film, “Glory”. It will be used to show both the nature of fighting during the Civil War as well as the treatment of free African Americans during that time period, specifically those men who chose to join the Union Army once President Lincoln gave his approval for the recruitment of African American soldiers. Students will take notes while watching the film. The students will complete two written assignments using the film as the basis of their answers. Complete the telegram assignment after the first half of the film has been completed. Do the letter assignment after students have seen the entire film. We will also discuss and analyze the film in class.
2. During the study of World War II the class will watch the film, “The Tuskegee Airmen”. It will be used to show both the nature of fighting during World War II as well as the treatment of African Americans during that time period, specifically those men who chose to join the military to become the first African American fighter pilots. Students will take notes while watching the film. The students will complete a written assignment (newspaper editorial) that asks them to discuss the treatment of African Americans during World War II as well as compare/contrast this treatment with that of African American soldiers during the Civil War. This should be completed after viewing the entire film. We will also discuss and analyze the film in class.

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

The students will complete three written homework assignments on the films. These will be graded on the accuracy of the information as well as the students’ interpretation of the information on how it relates to attitudes towards and treatment of African American servicemen and how that translates to social/cultural perceptions of the times.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

- demonstrate an understanding of the ways race, gender, ethnicity and class issues have affected individuals and societies in the past
- display empathy for people who have lived in the past

United States History  
“Glory” Telegram Assignment

Pretend that you are Colonel Robert Shaw, commanding officer of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment. Write a telegram to President Lincoln describing the problems you have encountered in your position. Include:

1. At least five problems.
2. Why you believe these problems exist.
3. Why you feel people are wrong about their low opinion of your regiment.
4. Give specific reasons with details from the film.
5. What you would like President Lincoln to do to help solve these problems. Tell something specific for each problem.

United States History  
“Glory” Letter Assignment

Pretend that you are an African American member of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment. Write a letter home describing your experiences in the Union Army. Be sure you are writing from an African American enlisted man’s point of view and not just repeating what you wrote in your telegram assignment you wrote for Colonel Shaw. Include:

1. Why you joined the army.
2. What your training has been like. Describe actual scenes from the film.
3. What you think of your commanding officer (Colonel Robert Shaw) and why you feel this way.
4. Three problems you or your regiment has encountered since you joined up.
5. How other white soldiers treat your regiment. Give specific examples.
6. Why the US War Department was hesitant to let your regiment actually go into battle.
7. Why you believe your regiment is actually better prepared for battle than some other regiments.
8. What happened when you were finally allowed to fight.
9. How you felt about the war once you began to experience fighting first hand.
10. What the problems and prejudices you faced during the war tell you about what life will be like for people like you after the war. Give specific examples that foreshadow continued social inequality.

United States History  
Tuskegee Airmen Assignment

You are a reporter for the “Stars and Stripes,” the U.S. military newspaper during World War II. Your editor has given you an assignment to write an article about the Tuskegee Airmen and their experiences during the war. You have observed great prejudice against these flyers and have decided to make your article an editorial (opinion piece) to report on how life in the military for African Americans has not changed much since the Civil War.

Your article should include the following:

1. An interesting title.
2. Why the airmen decided to join the military.
3. At least three examples of prejudice they experienced while training in Alabama.
4. At least three examples of prejudice they experienced once they were at the war front.
5. How they dealt with the unfair treatment.
6. At least two ways their treatment was similar to the treatment of African American soldiers during the Civil War.
7. At least one way that their situation is different from the experiences of African Americans during the Civil War and why it is different.
8. Why you believe prejudice has no place during wartime.
9. Why these airmen deserve to be treated with respect.
10. The changes you believe need to be made in the U.S. military’s policies toward African American servicemen.