



Curriculum Guide

"Red Tailed Angels": The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum



"Red Tailed Angels": The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen *Teaching Activities and Assignments*



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Table of Contents

Curriculum Guide Objectives	2
What Does It Mean to Think Historically?	3
How are Historical Records Helpful in Teaching?	4
Overview: The Tuskegee Airmen	5
Overview: World War II	6
Suggested Readings	8
Related Documents	9
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1925 Army War College Report• Executive Order 8802• Intelligence Report• October 21, 1942 letter from Cecil Peterson• Command of Negro Troops• FDR letter dated October 14, 1944• Photo of ER and "Chief Anderson"	
Vocabulary	12
Teaching Activities and Assignments	14
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General Activities• Document Specific Activities• Photograph Analysis Worksheet• Document Analysis Worksheet	



Curriculum Guide

"Red Tailed Angels": The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen Vocabulary

Bigot—A person who is intolerant of people of races, religions, countries, or political groups other than his/her own.

Double V—During WWII the V stood for Victory over the Axis Powers. African-American groups initiated the idea of a second V which stood for Victory over racial prejudice in the United States.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1886-1962)—Wife of Franklin D. Roosevelt, she served as First Lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945 and was known as a reformer and humanitarian intent on advancing social justice, human rights, freedom and liberty. She was called “The First Lady of the World” by President Harry Truman and served on the first United States delegation to the United Nations, where she led the effort to ratify the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945)—As the thirty-second President of the United States, Roosevelt led the country through the two major crises of the 20th century, the Great Depression and World War II. Roosevelt believed that the government should take an active role in ensuring the economic well-being of the average citizen and brought relief, recovery and reform through his many New Deal programs. During World War II Roosevelt along with the leaders of England and the Soviet Union, crushed Hitler and the Axis powers. He is the only president ever elected to more than two terms and died just three months into his 4th term.

Integration—The breaking down of barriers to allow for people of different races, ethnic groups, or nationalities to live together openly and equally.

Jim Crow—Was the name of a stereo-typical African-American from a minstrel song from the late 1800s. It became a blanket term used to describe the segregation and discrimination laws of the South.

Negro—A term used to describe African-Americans in the early to mid part of the twentieth century.

Plessy v Ferguson—The 1896 Supreme Court decision establishing a Constitutional justification for segregation based on upholding a Louisiana law that called for “separate but equal” accommodations.



Curriculum Guide

"Red Tailed Angels": The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen

Prejudice—A bias for or against something without sufficient basis. It is often displayed as an irrational intolerance of or hostility towards people of another race, religion, nationality or group.

Racism—The belief that some races are inherently superior to others. This often leads to discrimination and in some cases persecution of one race by another.

Segregation—Isolating or separating ethnic groups or races. This was a policy, seen especially in the south, which kept blacks and whites from living near each other, going to school together or using the same public facilities.

Sortie—A combat mission carried out by aircraft.

Tuskegee Experiment—A program set up during WWII at the Tuskegee Institute to evaluate the feasibility of training African-Americans to fly military aircraft.

Tuskegee Institute—An educational institution for African-Americans founded in Tuskegee, Alabama by Booker T. Washington in 1881.



Curriculum Guide

"Red Tailed Angels": The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen Teaching Activities and Assignments

The following activities have been developed for teachers to use in the classroom or as homework assignments. They are grouped under the following topics: general activities and document specific activities. Each assignment has been designed in a way that allows students to utilize a variety of skills including: reading for understanding; interpreting audiovisual materials; analyzing photographs, letters, reports, correspondence, and speeches; writing with clarity; role-playing; and researching historic evidence. Each of the activities can be adapted to suit your students' needs and your own teaching style.

The educational impact of these activities will be greatly enhanced by a class visit to the Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum to view the *Freedom From Fear: FDR Commander in Chief* exhibit in person. We encourage you to contact our education department at 1 800 FDR-VISIT (prompt 4 for Education Department) to discuss fieldtrip arrangements.

This curriculum guide includes excerpts from period documents. Some of the historical documents contained in this curriculum guide reflect deep-seated and disturbing racial prejudices regarding African-Americans that were common among many white Americans in the early and middle years of the twentieth century. It is important to remember that these documents must be viewed in the context of their own time. While offensive to modern readers, they help us understand the intense opposition the Roosevelts and the Tuskegee Airmen faced over the issue of allowing black men to pilot military aircraft. The documents can be found in their entirety on our website www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu

General Activities

1. Ask students to imagine that they have managed to arrange a five minute meeting with President Roosevelt to discuss the importance of fully integrating African-Americans into the military. What evidence, arguments, and examples would they use to convince FDR? What response would the student have if FDR raised the following questions:
 - Why do we need to do this now? Why can't we wait?
 - How will I sell this politically to the Congress, and to the American people?
 - What impact will this have on the expectations of other minorities?
 - Haven't I already done enough?



Curriculum Guide

"Red Tailed Angels": The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen

2. Ask students to consider to what extent does discrimination still exist? Beyond race, what is the basis of that discrimination? (age, gender, religion, nationality) What progress has been made since the time of the Tuskegee Airmen? Why then, does discrimination still exist? What more needs to be done?
3. Ask students to consider if there are times when it is okay to allow for discrimination if it serves a greater good. (for example age limits for fire fighters)
If so, who gets to decide what level of discrimination is allowed? What criteria should be applied to make that determination? Now ask the students to consider if FDR might have considered his actions as serving the greater good? Was he justified in his thinking?
4. Ask students to examine the landmark events in the advancement of civil rights in the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s. (Truman's order to desegregate the military, *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights Legislation, *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California*) In what ways are these linked to the 'Tuskegee Experiment'?
5. Ask students to compare the treatment and advances made by African-Americans during World War II to the treatment and advances of women, Japanese-Americans and others. In what ways were their struggles similar, in what ways did they differ? Did some of these groups fare better than others? If so, why is that the case?
6. The Tuskegee Airmen faced danger in the skies over Europe, and discrimination in the streets of America. This took a great deal of personal courage and determination. Ask students to consider what it means to be courageous. What traits does one need to possess in order to be considered courageous? Ask them to describe something that they have done that required courage, and have them compare that to the men of Tuskegee.

Document Specific Activities

- 1) Ask students to review the excerpt from the 1925 *Army War College Report* and the *Command of Negro Troops* pamphlet. Have them compare and contrast the differences in the tone and conclusions of these two documents as they relate to the handling of African-American army personnel. In what ways are they the same? In what ways are they different? What factors or events might account for these similarities and differences?



Curriculum Guide

"Red Tailed Angels": The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen

- 2) Mrs. Roosevelt was very impressed with the quality of the airmen she met at the Tuskegee Institute. So much so that she took a flight with one pilot in 1941. Afterwards she maintained a correspondence with a young enlisted man named Cecil Peterson. Ask students to read the letter he sent her on October 21, 1942. What is the tone of his letter? What types of activities does he describe to Mrs.

Roosevelt? What are his hopes for the future? What do you think happened as a result of the incident he describes involving the train in Richmond? Would a similar situation have occurred in New York or Chicago?

- 3) Ask students to read the letter President Roosevelt sent dated October 14, 1944. What assurances is the President promising? What does the term 'equality of opportunity' mean? What is the President really saying in the final paragraph?
- 4) Ask students to review the intelligence report on white attitudes towards Negroes. Ask them to imagine what white attitudes towards blacks might have been in the summer of 1942. What do the results of the survey show about the attitudes of the whites? Did this surprise your students? What could account for those attitudes? According to the report, how does President Roosevelt weigh in on the matter?
- 5) Share with your students the photograph of Mrs. Roosevelt and "Chief" Anderson. What makes this a historic photo? Ask students to write a caption for the photo. Have them pretend they are journalists and ask them to write the story that would accompany the photo if it were to appear in their local newspaper.
- 6) Share with your students the copy of the June 25, 1941 Executive Order 8802 which reaffirmed a policy of "full participation in the National Defense Program by all citizens of the United States regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin..." What conditions precipitated this bold action on the part of FDR? What would have been the likely outcome if FDR had not issued the order when he did? In what way did Executive Order 8802 represent a model for future Civil Rights initiatives?