

VETERANS' STORIES STRUGGLES FOR PARTICIPATION

Dating back to the birth of the United States, women and people of color have always served the nation in times of conflict, whether by taking up arms or providing support for the war effort. However, over those same centuries, women, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans had to undergo long years of struggle to achieve full participation in, and receive full recognition from, the U.S. armed forces.



Bryan Keith Goldston
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.19929/>

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The materials in this primary source set, all of which were collected by the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress, reflect the experiences individual veterans had as they worked to serve their country in uniform.

The following are some landmark events in these groups' struggle for full and equal participation in the armed forces.

1777

Amidst numerous setbacks to the Continental Army, George Washington instructs recruiters to draft free African Americans. An estimated 5000 African Americans served in the Continental Army, including perhaps hundreds of slaves.

1778

Jorge Farragut, a native-born Spaniard, is appointed first lieutenant in the South Carolina navy. Farragut would go on to be captured by the British and later became a volunteer and a cavalry captain in future battles.

1782

Although women are forbidden from enlisting in the Continental Army, Massachusetts teacher Deborah Sampson joins while disguised as a man and served from 1782 to 1783.

1815

General Andrew Jackson notes that Filipinos fought alongside his forces during the famed Battle of New Orleans near the end of the War of 1812.

1861

John Tomney, a Chinese American, joins the New York Infantry. Tomney would go on to fight on the Union side at the Battle of Gettysburg, where he would die from his wounds. An estimated 50 Asian Americans served on both sides of the Civil War.

1861

Sarah Edmonds enlists in the Union Army disguised as a man, much as Deborah Sampson had during the Revolutionary War. She served until 1863 and participated in the Battle of Antietam, among other battles. The Cuban-born Loreta Velazquez used the same methods to fight in the Confederate Army.

1862

The issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation in September of this year opens the door for the enlistment of African American soldiers in the Union Army. Nearly 200,000 African Americans, including both former slaves and free people, served in the Union Army during the Civil War. While the Confederate government did not follow suit, it is estimated that a few hundred African Americans engaged in armed combat supporting the Confederacy.



African American soldier
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002719390/>

1863

The Chinese American William Ah Hang becomes one of the first Asian Americans to enlist in the U.S. Navy.

1864

Admiral David Farragut routes the Confederate Navy in the Battle of Mobile Bay, leading to his promotion to the new position of Vice Admiral. Farragut's father was the Spanish-born Revolutionary War hero Jorge Farragut. Hispanics served in both the Union and Confederate armies and navies.

1866

Congress approves the creation of all-black units in the armed forces. This institutionalized the role of those African Americans who had contributed to the victory of the Union Army, but it also institutionalized segregation. The Native Americans who encountered African American troops on the Western frontier during the Indian Wars nicknamed them "buffalo soldiers".

1898

On the eve of the Spanish-American war, famed sharpshooter Annie Oakley writes a letter to President William McKinley offering to form a company of 50 female sharpshooters like herself. Her offer was not accepted.

1898

African American troops serve alongside Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Puerto Rico and Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Their Spanish enemies derisively referred to these soldiers as "smoked Yankees."

1898

Japanese Americans serve on U.S. warships during the Battle of Manila Bay. The Philippines were also part of the Spanish Empire during its war with the United States.

1901

President William McKinley signs an executive order allowing 500 Filipinos to serve in the U.S. Navy, though they were not allowed to move above the rank of steward.

1917

The U.S. grants citizenship to the inhabitants of the territory of Puerto Rico. As a result, they are eligible to enlist and be drafted into the military. When the U.S. entered World War I that year, some 18,000 Puerto Ricans were among the 200,000 Hispanic Americans who served.



World War I soldier
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010651602/>

1918

By the conclusion of World War I, some 350,000 African Americans had served with American forces. Though the military remained segregated, all-black units such as the "Harlem Hellfighters" distinguished themselves in combat.

1940

The Selective Service Act is passed with a provision that prohibited racial discrimination in the selection and training of soldiers. African American leaders pressured the Roosevelt administration to promote integration within the armed forces, but would not be successful until years later. Segregation existed at every level of the military, even for officers.

1942

The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps is created after months of congressional debate. The Corps would recruit women into the uniformed services to promote support tasks such as switchboard operating. Women would, for the first time in U.S. history, receive military benefits and hold rank. The Corps was later integrated into the military and became the Women's Army Corps, with its members known affectionately as WACs.

1943

The United States government reverses its policy excluding Japanese Americans from the military. Japanese American volunteers from Hawaii and their mainland counterparts, many of whom were in U.S. Government internment camps, were combined to form the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which saw fighting in Italy and France and became one of the most heavily decorated units of its size. Japanese Americans also served in the Military Intelligence Service in the Pacific theater.

1945

An estimated 500,000 Hispanic Americans participate in World War II. Though most Hispanics were classified as “white” and did not serve in segregated units, many did experience discrimination for speaking Spanish or having Hispanic family names.

1948

President Harry Truman signs Executive Order 9981 eliminating racial segregation within the armed forces as well as federal employment. Truman also signed legislation allowing women to serve in integrated units during peacetime.

1950

The 65th Infantry Regiment, which consists of Puerto Rican volunteers, earns the nickname “Borinqueneers” after landing in Korea – the name being a combination of “Borinquen” (the pre-Columbian term for Puerto Rico) and “buccaneer.”



Puerto Rican soldier
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000028374/PP/>

1954

The final segregated military unit is disbanded.

1967

Lawrence Joel becomes the first African American since the Mexican-American War to receive the Medal of Honor.

1973

The U.S. military begins operating on an all-volunteer basis, which continues to this day.

1974

Six women become official Navy pilots – the first group of women to do so.

1989

General Colin Powell is appointed as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which made the African American Powell the highest ranking officer in the military.

1991

40,000 women are deployed as a part of Operation Desert Storm. Though still not permitted to engage in direct combat, women reportedly engage Iraqi ground forces.

1999

General Eric Shinseki becomes the highest ranking Asian American in U.S. military history when he is appointed Army Chief of Staff.

2008

General Ann E. Dunwoody, U.S. Army, becomes the first woman in the U.S. military to reach the rank of four-star general.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

These Library of Congress primary source materials support teaching about 20th-century U.S. history, social studies, or oral history. They may be of special interest near Veterans Day.

Research major historical events that the veteran describes and create a brief timeline that includes events that happened immediately before and after the events described. How do the veteran's experiences compare to the published accounts of the events? What does the veteran omit? What does the veteran include that the published account does not?

List the specific problems that the veteran faced. Which problems were longstanding? Which problems were created or worsened by the war?

Invite students to retell a portion of the veteran's story by paraphrasing, drawing, or acting it out.

Study the questions the interviewer asks and the veteran's answers.

- Which question(s) do you think prompted the most interesting responses?
- Which question(s) do you think prompted the least interesting responses?
- In each case, why do you think that is true?
- If you were the interviewer, what questions would you ask?



Afro-American soldier...
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/92510254/>

Many of the collections include photographs and drawings. What emotions are expressed in these images? Select a few that include titles and consider how the text changes what can be learned from the images alone.

Write a letter to a veteran you've studied. Consider including your thoughts on what touched you; what questions you would like to ask; and reflections on the veteran's service.

Choose two or more veterans from the same war and compare how they describe their experiences.

Choose two or more veterans from different eras. Compare their experiences. Consider the equipment available, descriptions of their service, and the technologies they used to communicate on the battlefield and back home.

Consider why it is important to collect and preserve these materials.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/themes.html>



Especially for Educators and Students

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/youth-resources.html>



Teacher's Guides and Analysis Tool

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>

PRIMARY SOURCES WITH CITATIONS



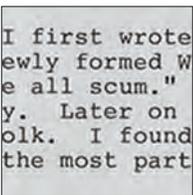
Bryan Keith Goldston. From Bryan Keith Goldston Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.19929/>



"Four African-American women from the Chicago area being inducted." Photograph. From Violet Gordon Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00146/enlarge?ID=ph0002001&page=1>



"Memoir Addendum." Memoir. From Mary Gill Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01476/pageturner?ID=pm0002001>



"Discrimination on the base." Video clip. From Walter Morris Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.02946/>

PRIMARY SOURCES WITH CITATIONS



"A Bradley Tank that was hit by an M1 tank." Photograph. From Joanne Palella Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.04558/enlarge?ID=ph0009001&page=1>



"An American knowing that Japanese is part of his emotional makeup." Video clip. From Warren Tsuneishi Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.02153/>



"Barred from an officers' club because of his race." Video clip. From Pearle Mack Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.05764/>



"Dealing with racist patients and prisoners of war." Video clip. From Oneida Stuart Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.04850/>



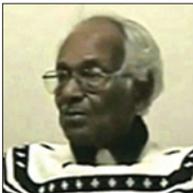
"Absence of racism on the battlefield." Video clip. From Daniel Burrell Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01811/>



"Equal pay for equal work for military women." Video clip. From Jeanne Holm Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.04293/>



"Training black troops at Huachuca." Video clip. From Roscoe Spann Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.54076/>



"Rigors of training at Walter Reed Army Institute of Nursing." Video clip. From Diane Henderson Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.11706/>



"Reactions to her position as Lt. Commander from the locals." Video clip. From Holly Harrison Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.46660/>



"Competing with the male training squads." Video clip. From Clara Johnson Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.42843/>



"The 442nd proving their loyalty to the U.S. in battle." Video clip. From Jimmie Kanaya Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.21666/>



"Segregated facilities, even for officers." Video clip. From Robert Madison Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.48858/>



"Joining the Navy when opportunities for minorities were expanding." Video clip. From Augustus Prince Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.23696/>