



# THE WAR



## A KEN BURNS FILM

DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY KEN BURNS AND LYNN NOVICK

# African Americans in World War II: Staging a Double V Campaign in the Classroom

### Subjects:

American History, Media Literacy, Civics, Language Arts

*You had a white water fountain, and a black water fountain.  
And a black would get into trouble if he went and drank at the  
white water fountain. My friend at Brookley Field had his head  
busted wide open because he drank at the white fountain.*

— John Gray, THE WAR

### Background:

During World War II, African Americans found themselves with conflicting feelings about supporting the war effort, since their own country did not offer them the freedom America was fighting for overseas. The Double Victory — Double V — campaign, begun by the Pittsburgh Courier newspaper in 1942, helped to address this issue. It encouraged African Americans to participate at every level in winning the war abroad, while simultaneously fighting for their civil rights at home.

### Opening Activity:

To understand the dilemmas facing African Americans on the eve of World War II, your students will need some historical context regarding the scope of America's unequal treatment of African Americans, including Jim Crow laws and de facto segregation, lack of access to well-paying industrial jobs at the beginning of the war and the complete segregation of the armed forces. You can provide it to them in a brief lecture, or you can divide students into four groups, with each assigned to answer the following questions using the resources provided and report back to the whole class.

- What was the legal status of segregation in 1941?  
([http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/building\\_01.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/building_01.html))
- What was Executive Order 8802? What were President Roosevelt's stated reasons for ending discrimination in the defense industry?  
(<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=72>)
- What contributions had African Americans made to previous wars in U.S. history?  
(<http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/2007/BlackHistoryMonth/Timeline.html>)

- What organizations existed in 1941 to fight discrimination against African Americans?  
([http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/building\\_01.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/building_01.html))

### Activity 1: Listening to the Voices of African Americans

How could individual African Americans best further their own quest for equal rights during World War II?

To help students answer this question, click on the link below to watch the “Double V” clip, which provides background on the African-American experience during World War II and several viewpoints from African Americans interviewed in THE WAR. The interviewees express a variety of opinions about whether or not African Americans should have participated in the war effort on the home front and battlefield. As they watch, have students create a chart with each speaker's name along with his or her personal information, role in the war and reasons for or against participation.

### GO TO CLIPS

- ([http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search\\_details.php?id=5381&ctype=3](http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_details.php?id=5381&ctype=3))
- ([http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search\\_details.php?id=5373&ctype=3](http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_details.php?id=5373&ctype=3))

After watching the clip, ask the class members to decide whose viewpoint comes closest to representing *their personal view*. For example, do students agree with John Hope Franklin who decided that his country did not deserve his service? Do students agree with Barbara Covington that it was best to “make the best of it” and work in a segregated army base? Do students think that participation in the war effort would help or hinder African Americans' quest for civil rights after the war?

Now raise the following question: Did African Americans have to make an absolute choice between fighting for their own rights or fighting to win the war? Were there any compromises that could be made to further both efforts? If so, what were they, and what were the best strategies to use in wartime?

### Activity 2: Learning About the Double V Campaign

Explain to students that they are going to learn about a campaign started by an African-American newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which helped African Americans to

address some of the dilemmas they faced during World War II. Distribute to each student (or group of students) one of the following two articles: “Pittsburgh Courier” and “Treason?” from *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords* (<http://www.pbs.org/blackpress>). Ask each student to answer the following questions after reading his or her assigned article, or ask students to work in small groups.

### Questions for “Pittsburgh Courier”

1. When was the *Pittsburgh Courier* founded? Who were its three main editors? Who were some of its famous writers?
2. List at least five things the *Courier* wanted to improve about black life in America in the 1930s and 1940s.
3. Which goal do you think deserved the most effort and attention, and why?
4. What was the Double V campaign?
5. List at least four tactics used by the *Pittsburgh Courier* to fight for the rights of African Americans.
6. In your opinion, which of these tactics was likely to be most effective, and why?

### Questions for “Treason?”

1. Who thought up the idea for the Double V campaign?
2. What did the symbol of the Double V stand for?
3. List at least four of the ways the campaign was publicized.
4. In your opinion, which of these approaches was likely to be most effective, and why?
5. What injustices did the Double V campaign bring to light during World War II?
6. What did the Double V campaign accomplish?
7. Why did J. Edgar Hoover call the Double V campaign an act of treason?
8. Do you think the Double V campaign was treasonous? Why or why not?

Now ask students to think about how the Double V campaign made African Americans (like those interviewed in the film) feel at the time. How did it help them to resolve the inherent conflict of fighting for a country that did not grant them the full rights of citizenship?

### Activity 3: Double V After the War

Read students the following quote from Daniel Inouye, one of the people interviewed in THE WAR.

*“One of the most important results of this war was to begin the process of integration. One must recall that in that war, you had the Japanese, like my regiment, the 92nd division, the Tuskegee Airmen, the Navajo code talkers. The Filipino Americans in Manila, the Puerto Rican regiment, the 65th Regiment. And all of them, in their way, fought bravely and made a heroic chapter of their lives... And so I think the war played a major role in civil rights. Not realizing that that was*

*the purpose, but, so after that, who will tell us, no, you're not worth to be considered Americans? No one can tell us that to our face.”*

Now ask students to think about the Double V campaign as a catalyst for the civil rights movement. As a class discuss:

- How did the experience of fighting, even in segregated units, empower African Americans and others to come home and fight for their civil rights?
- When did the armed forces finally become integrated? What was the effect?
- How long would it take from the end of the war to abolish segregation in the South? What were the next steps in the civil rights movement?

### Mounting a Double V Campaign in Your School

Tell the class that they are going to mount their own Double V campaign, through which they will inform their entire school community about how African Americans contributed to World War II while fighting for their civil rights. Note that you can adapt the plan below to include raising awareness of how prejudice affected other Americans during World War II, including Mexican Americans, Japanese Americans, Jewish Americans, American Indians and other ethnic and religious groups.

- Consider asking for space on bulletin boards to post news articles, display exhibitions and hang banners throughout your school. Ask for permission to broadcast radio programs on the school P.A. system and for students to wear items of clothing with the Double V insignia.
- Consider asking students to create a before-the-campaign questionnaire for the school community to test “What I Know About African Americans in World War II.” Students can compare answers on the questionnaire before and after they wage their Double V campaign.
- Consider holding an insignia design contest: Before your class breaks down into committee work for the campaign, either show them the Double V insignia or hold a Double V insignia contest of your own in which students submit their designs to a committee that judges which is the most effective in terms of boldly conveying the meaning of Double Victory.

For images of the Double V insignia:

“Black Wings” at the Smithsonian Institution (<http://www.nasm.si.edu/blackwings/hdetail/detailbw.cfm?bwID=BW0034>)

“Civil Rights of Minorities” from Wessels Living History Farm: ([http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life\\_18.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life_18.html))

The Pittsburgh Courier

([http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news\\_bios/courier.html](http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/courier.html))

Now divide the class into committees like those suggested below. Note the way in which the committees tap into

students' "multiple intelligences." Each student on a committee should be responsible for completing one (or more) of the assignments on the committee lists.

- Consider setting the mood of the war years while students work in their committees. Screen portions The War with the sound turned low, or play a selection of radio broadcasts from the war years as background music to committee work. Go to The Golden Age of Radio (<http://www.archive.org/details/worldwarInewsOTRKIBM>) from the Internet Archive.
- Consider adapting the following instructions by asking students to create 21st century media projects that use technology not yet available during World War II, such as creating video programs, podcasts and PowerPoint presentations.

**News Committee 1** writes articles about the home front from a black perspective.

- History and impact of Executive Order 8802.
- Segregation in the Alabama Dry Dock workforce and its outcome.
- The status of lynching in America and the anti-lynching bills submitted to congress.
- The role of black organizations in fighting for rights during the war: Urban League, the NAACP, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, etc.
- Race riots in East St. Louis, Illinois and elsewhere.
- Port Chicago Mutiny (1944): After a huge explosion at a munitions depot, black enlistees stand up for safety on the job.
- Contributions of African American women to the work of civilian defense, selling war bonds and other work on the home front.

These websites provide examples of articles written as part of the Double V campaign:

- Charlotta Bass and the California Eagle (<http://www.socallib.org/bass/index.html>)

For a list of downloadable articles written by Charlotta Bass at this site go to:  
(<http://www.socallib.org/bass/research/eagle/articles/index.html>)

- Newspapers: The Pittsburgh Courier ([http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news\\_bios/courier.html](http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/courier.html))

**News Article Committee 2** writes articles about the armed services in the European, North African, and Pacific theaters of war from a black perspective.

- Tuskegee airmen, the only black pilots trained to fly in the war.
- Black engineers and soldiers in the Pacific; their role in building landing strips, etc.

- Black men (1942) and black women (1944) admitted to the U.S. Navy, and black males to the Marines (1942).
- Black anti-aircraft battalion's a critical role in the D-Day invasion of France.
- Blacks fighting in integrated units during the Battle of the Bulge (1944) under General George Patton.

For an on-line sources of information go to:

African Americans in the U.S. Army During World War II (<https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/ES-Programs/Conservation/Legacy/AAME/aame4.html>), African American Navy, Marine Corps, Women's Reserves, and Coast Guard Service During World War II at (<https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/ES-Programs/Conservation/Legacy/AAME/aame3a.html>) both from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

**Radio Committee** produces a program including jingles for the Double V campaign, the latest jazz recordings, and profiles of famous African Americans of the day.

- Joe Louis undefeated heavyweight champion (1941).
- Dorie Miller honored for service at Pearl Harbor (1941).
- Dr. Robert C. Weaver, advisor to FDR.
- Singer Marion Anderson.
- Singer and activist Paul Robeson.
- Original songs and catchy jingles to publicize the Double V campaign
  - Students can listen to live radio broadcasts for ideas at The Golden Age of Radio (<http://www.archive.org/details/worldwarInewsOTRKIBM>) from the Internet Archive.

**Photography Exhibit Committee 1** creates an exhibition about African Americans on the Home Front

- Create and display a photography exhibit about African Americans on the home front. Accompany the displayed images with student-written captions and short essays that help the viewer interpret the photographs. Alternatively the committee members can become docents who give visitors a tour of the exhibit.
  - Sources of Information:
    - African American Odyssey of the Library of Congress at (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohhtml/exhibit/aopart8.html>)
    - Virginia Center for Digital History, World War II The Home Front (<http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/solguide/VUS11/essay11b.html>)
    - From Life on the Home Front, "A Matter of Color: African Americans Face Discrimination" from the Oregon State Archives (<http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/exhibits/ww2/life/minority.htm>)
- Source for Photographs: National Archives Pictures of African Americans During World War II at

(<http://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures>) sections on Rest and Relaxation and The Home Front.

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## Photography Exhibit Committee 2: African Americans at War

- Create and display a photography exhibit about the African American experience in the armed forces. Accompany the displayed images with student-written captions and short essays that help the viewer interpret the photographs. Alternatively the committee members can become docents who give visitors a tour of the exhibit.
  - Sources for written background information: African Americans in the U.S. Army During World War II (<https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/ES-Programs/Conservation/Legacy/AAME/aame4.html>), African American Navy, Marine Corps, Women's Reserves, and Coast Guard Service During World War II at (<https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/ES-Programs/Conservation/Legacy/AAME/aame3a.html>) both from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
  - Source for Photographs: National Archives Pictures of African Americans During World War II at (<http://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/vww2-pictures>) sections on Army Air Forces, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, Merchant Marines and Training.

**Visual Publicity Committee** produces banners, posters, stickers, buttons, and articles of fashion to publicize the campaign.

- Design two posters for the Double V campaign, one about African Americans on the home front and another to encourage blacks to enlist in the armed forces.
- Produce two banners that convey the patriotic message of the Double V campaign and what it means to America and African Americans.
- Manufacture buttons or stickers for people to wear that show the wearer's support for the Double V campaign and what it means.
- Design two items that someone can wear to demonstrate their support of the Double V campaign (caps, headbands, watchbands, bracelets, etc.)
  - For visual sources of information go to
    - Posters from the WPA 1936-1943 at the American Memory Website (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/wpahome.html>)
    - "Black Wings" at the Smithsonian Institution (<http://www.nasm.si.edu/blackwings/hdetail/detailbw.cfm?bwID=BW0034>)
    - "Civil Rights of Minorities" from Wessels Living History Farm : ([http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life\\_18.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life_18.html))

### Extension Activities:

- Have students write a research paper comparing the African-American experience with that of other minorities in American society during World War II. For example,

they might compare the race riots in Mobile, Alabama, to the Zoot Suit riots against imported Mexican labor in California in the 1940s

([www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/against](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/against)). Or they could compare the ways Puerto Rican workers gained work in war industries through Operation Bootstrap (1944) to the employment of African Americans.

- Ask students to mount a Double V campaign in your school with the goal of educating the school community about the contributions and struggles of African Americans (and other ethnic groups) during World War II. Divide the class into committees to publish advertisements and flyers, write news articles, videotape campaign commercials and build a campaign Web site.

Visit the "SEARCH AND EXPLORE"

([http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search\\_home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_home.htm))

section of THE WAR web site for more information about the Double V campaign.

## Resources

African American World, Building Democracy 1866-1953 at ([http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/building\\_01.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/building_01.html))

Brown V. Board: Timeline of School Integration at Teach Tolerance

(<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/magazine/features.jsp?cid=487>)

United States Department of Defense for a timeline of African Americans in the military:

(<http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/2007/BlackHistoryMonth/Timeline.html>) or

National Archives Digital Classroom: The Fight for Equal Rights: Black Soldiers in the Civil War:

(<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war>)

Photographs of the 369th Infantry and African Americans during World War I:

(<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry>)

Executive Order 8802

(<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=72>)

White House Historical Association, "President and Public Pressure: For a Redress of Grievances"

([http://www.whitehousehistory.org/04/subs/04\\_a03\\_d01.html](http://www.whitehousehistory.org/04/subs/04_a03_d01.html))

Articles by Charlotta Bass; Charlotta Bass and the California Eagle (<http://www.socallib.org/bass/index.html>)

The Zoot Suit Riots:

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot>)

"Black Wings" at the Smithsonian Institution

(<http://www.nasm.si.edu/blackwings/hdetail/detailbw.cfm?bwID=BW0034>)

"Civil Rights of Minorities" from Wessels Living History Farm:

([http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life\\_18.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life_18.html))

The Pittsburgh Courier:  
([http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news\\_bios/courier.html](http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/courier.html))

The Golden Age of Radio:  
(<http://www.archive.org/details/worldwarIInewsOTRKIBM>)  
from the Internet Archive.

African Americans in the U.S. Army During World War II  
(<https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/ESPrograms/Conservation/Legacy/AAME/aame4.html>)

African American Navy, Marine Corps, Women's Reserves,  
and Coast Guard Service During World War II:  
(<https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/ESPrograms/Conservation/Legacy/AAME/aame3a.html>)

African American Odyssey of the Library of Congress:  
(<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohhtml/exhibit/aopart8.html>)

Virginia Center for Digital History, World War II The  
Home Front:  
(<http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/solguide/VUS11/essay11b.html>)

From Life on the Home Front, "A Matter of Color:  
African Americans Face Discrimination" from the Oregon  
State Archives:  
(<http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/exhibits/ww2/life/minority.htm>)

Source for Photographs: National Archives Pictures of  
African Americans During World War II:  
(<http://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures>)

## Standards

National Standards for History, National Center for History  
in the School at (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs>)

**Era 8 Standard 2A** The student understands the New Deal  
and the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Analyze the  
involvement of minorities and women in the New Del and  
its impact upon them.

**Era 8 Standard 3C** The student understands the effects of  
World War II at home. Evaluate how minorities organized  
to gain access to wartime jobs and how they confronted  
discrimination.

Center for Civic Education, National Standards for Civics  
and Government. (<http://www.civiced.org>)

**Standard I.B. 3.** Civil Society and government. Explain how  
civil society makes it possible for people individually or in  
association with others to bring their influence to bear on  
government in ways other than voting and elections.

**Standard II.B. 4.** Diversity in American society. Describe  
conflicts that have arisen from diversity and explain the  
means by which some have been managed and explain why  
some conflicts have persisted unabated.

National Council for the Social Studies, Curriculum  
Standards for Social Studies.

**Standard II d.** Systematically employ processes of critical  
historical inquiry to reconstruct and reinterpret the past,  
such as using a variety of sources and checking their  
credibility, validating and weighing evidence for claims,  
and searching for causality.

**Standard IV Individual Development & Identity g.**  
compare and evaluate the impact of stereotyping, conformity,  
acts of altruism, and other behaviors on individuals and groups.

**Standard VI Power; Authority, & Governance h.**  
Explain and apply concepts such as power, role, status,  
justice, and influence to the examination of persistent issues  
and social problems.

Language Arts, Mid-continent Research for Education  
and Learning (McRel) at (<http://www.mcrel.org>)

## Standard 1 The Writing Process

- Uses prewriting strategies
- Drafts and revises; redrafts for readability, style, content and linguistic structures.
- Edits own and others' writing
- Uses strategies to address different audiences
- Writes expository compositions; synthesizes information from different sources
- Writes fictional, biographical, autobiographical and observational narrative compositions.
- Writes persuasive compositions; develops thesis statement; backs up assertions.
- Writes descriptive compositions; reflects on personal experience.
- Writes in response to literature; analyzes and interprets

## Standard 2: Uses Sylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

- Uses precise and descriptive language
- Develops effective paragraphs in logical sequence; uses supporting detail
- Varies sentences structures
- Uses a variety of transitional devises
- Develops personal styles and voice

From McRel (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards/index.asp>)

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**Music:**

Understands the relationship between music and history and culture.

**Art:**

Understands the relationship between music and history and culture. Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts.

Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

**Language Arts****Viewing****Standard 9 Grades 6-8**

- Understands the use of stereotypes and biases in visual media, e.g., distorted representations of society; imagery and stereotyping in advertising; elements of stereotypes such as physical characteristics, manner of speech, beliefs and attitudes.

**Standard 9 Grades 9-12**

- Uses strategies to analyze stereotypes in visual media, e.g., recognizes stereotypes that serve the interests of some groups in society at the expense of others; identifies techniques... that perpetuate stereotypes.

**Language Arts****Media Literacy****Standard 10 Grades 6-8**

- Understands the ways in which image-makers carefully construct meaning, e.g., idea and word choice by authors, images created by photographers, television programs created by groups of people, photos...

**Standard 10 Grades 9-12**

- Understands the influence of media on society as a whole, e.g., influence in shaping various governmental, social, and cultural norms; influence on the democratic process; influence on beliefs, lifestyles, and understanding of relationships and culture; how it shapes viewer's perceptions of reality; the various consequences in society of ideas and images in media.

*Joan Brodsky Schur is the Social Studies Coordinator at the Village Community School where she has taught English and American history for over twenty-five years. She has worked for the National Archives and PBS Online developing lessons for their websites and served on the TeacherSource Advisory Group for PBS Online. Her most recent publication is Eyewitness to the Past: Strategies for Teaching American History in Grades 5-12.*