

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND WORLD WAR II



African Americans and World War II

Around one million African Americans served in the US armed forces during World War II. Millions more were part of national mass mobilization, known as the home front, to support the war effort. As African American troops and civilians engaged in activities that helped the US and its allies fight the enemy on the frontlines all over the world, they also continued to face racial discrimination at home. Segregation, including in the military, was still a legal practice. African American soldiers wearing their uniforms were often insulted and attacked on the streets. Although the US military constantly faced shortages of nurses, African American nurses were not allowed to take care of white American soldiers. Historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argued that African Americans were forced to fight “a double war,” one against the enemy on the frontlines and one against racism in their homeland.

In this activity, you will explore various African American contributions to the World War II effort.

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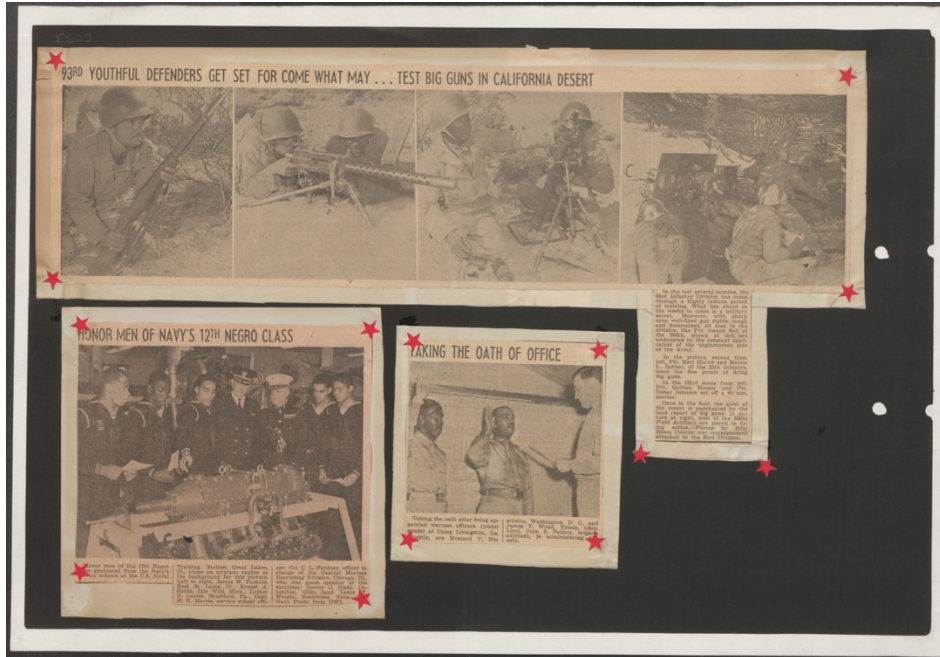


"Negro History Scrapbook," ca. 1944 (National Dunbar Alumni Association Historical Collection), p. 71



"Negro History Scrapbook," ca. 1944 (National Dunbar Alumni Association Historical Collection), p. 73

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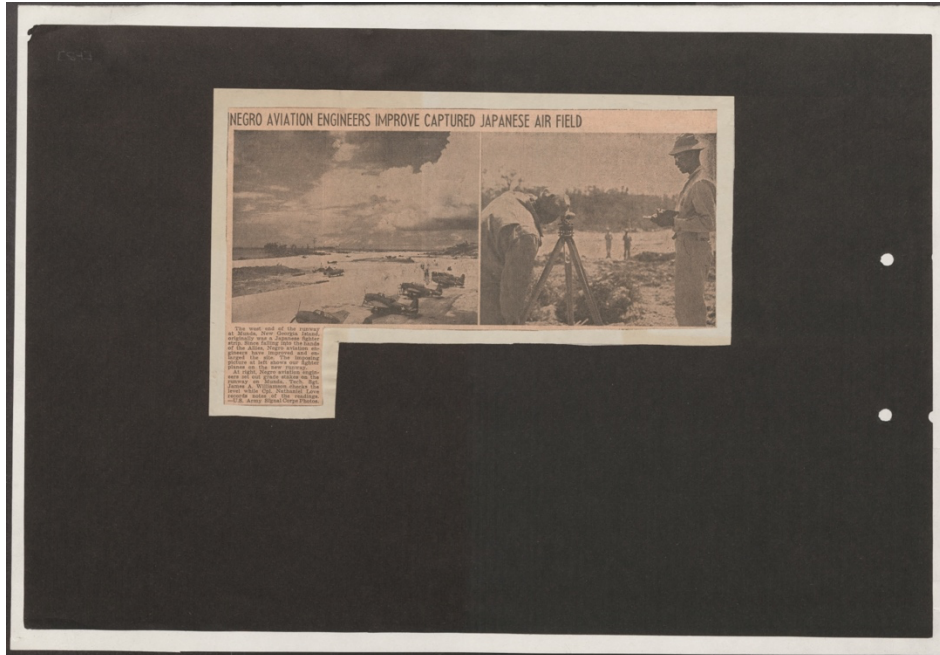


“Negro History Scrapbook,” ca. 1944 (National Dunbar Alumni Association Historical Collection), p. 74



“Negro History Scrapbook,” ca. 1944 (National Dunbar Alumni Association Historical Collection), p. 75

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“Negro History Scrapbook,” ca. 1944 (National Dunbar Alumni Association Historical Collection), p. 78



“Negro History Scrapbook,” ca. 1944 (National Dunbar Alumni Association Historical Collection), p. 77

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Questions:

1. Based on the images and short notes attached to them, how did African Americans contribute to the war effort in World War II?
2. This is only a small selection of African American contributions to the war effort. What other roles did African Americans play in World War II?
3. Notice that these sources are newspaper clippings that someone preserved in a scrapbook. Why do you think the person who created that scrapbook considered those newspaper notes so important that they included them in a scrapbook?
4. African American soldiers and civilians proudly served their country at the time when the United States did not grant them civil rights and when racial segregation was legal. Why do you think African Americans volunteered to devote their lives to a country that did not recognize their basic rights as citizens?