

## **African Americans and World War I**

World War I was a transformative moment in African-American history. What began as a seemingly distant European conflict soon became an event with revolutionary implications for the social, economic, and political future of black people. The war directly impacted all African Americans, male and female, northerner and southerner, soldier and civilian. Migration, military service, racial violence, and political protest combined to make the war years one of the most dynamic periods of the African-American experience. Black people contested the boundaries of American democracy, demanded their rights as American citizens, and asserted their very humanity in ways both subtle and dramatic. Recognizing the significance of World War I is essential to developing a full understanding of modern African-American history and the struggle for black freedom.

Source and Learn More: Africana Age, New York Public Library  
<http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-world-war-i.html>

## **African Americans in World War II**

African Americans served bravely and with distinction in every theater of World War II, while simultaneously struggling for their own civil rights from ‘the world’s greatest democracy.’ Although the United States Armed Forces were officially segregated until 1948, WWII laid the foundation for post-war integration of the military....

The Army Air Force also established several African American fighter and bomber groups. The famous “Tuskegee Airmen” of the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group became part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, flying group support missions over Anzio and escorting bombers over Southern Italy. The Tuskegee Airmen flew more than 15,000 sorties May 1943 and June 1945. Bomber crews often requested to be escorted by these ‘Redtails,’ a nickname acquired from the painted tails of Tuskegee fighter planes. Sixty-six Tuskegee Airmen died in combat.

Stephen Ambrose identified the lamentable American irony of WWII, writing, “The world’s greatest democracy fought the world’s greatest racist with a segregated army” (Ambrose, *Citizen Soldier*). During the global conflict, African American leaders and organizations established the ‘Double V’ campaign, calling for a victory against the enemy overseas and victory against racism at home. This new black consciousness and the defiant rejection of unjustifiable racism planted important seeds for the post-War civil rights movement

Source and to Learn more: National World War II Museum  
<http://www.nationalww2museum.org/assets/pdfs/african-americans-in-world.pdf>