A LEGACY OF SERVICE:

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE U.S. ARMY

Honoring African American Soldiers from the Colonial period through present day as well as African American pioneers, women and Medal of Honor recipients.
For more than two centuries, African American men and women have served in the military, defending and protecting our liberties both here and abroad. The U.S. Army takes special pride in acknowledging African Americans who have served this country with honor and distinction and those who continue to defend our nation. This lesson plan and the U.S. Army sponsored exhibit, “A Legacy of Service: African Americans in the U.S. Army,” enable the Army to recognize African American Soldiers and highlight our historic commitment to diversity.

We designed this lesson plan to educate young people about African American Soldiers and their extraordinary contributions to the military. The lesson plan covers the story of African American Soldiers from the Colonial period through the present day. As such, the lesson enables educators to teach young people about leadership and service and helps students improve their analytical, written, oral, and team building skills.

We would like to thank you for integrating this lesson plan into your classroom instruction. We hope you find this plan useful in helping your students learn about the accomplishments of African American Soldiers.

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6TH - 12TH

CONTENT AREAS: U.S. History > African American History

DESCRIPTION: Students will learn about brave African American men and women who valiantly served to protect our rights and freedoms in the U.S. and abroad. They will also learn about concepts of leadership and service.

TIME REQUIRED: ONE CLASS PERIOD, 45 MINUTES - 1 HOUR
GOALS:
Students will learn about what contributions African Americans have made to the military and to the nation. They will also gain a better understanding of the importance of leadership and service. Additionally, this lesson will enable students to practice and improve their oral presentation, critical thinking, written and team building skills.

ASSESSMENT:
Students should be assessed on the following:
➔ Quality of their individual and group oral presentations
➔ Critical thinking skills in answering questions about concepts of leadership and service
➔ Written skills as demonstrated during the writing exercise

LEARNING CONNECTIONS:
This lesson will focus on American History, particularly the history of African Americans and U.S. Soldiers. Students will learn about the concepts of leadership and service.

CORE SKILLS:
➔ Analytical—Students will need to summarize content and think critically about the concepts of leadership and service.
➔ Written—Students will write a short essay on what they have learned and who exemplifies leadership in their lives.
➔ Oral—Students will participate in group presentations.
➔ Collaboration—Students will work collaboratively in small groups to complete the assignment.

FIRST CORE ACTIVITY:
➔ Begin the class session with a discussion on leadership and service. (10 min.)
   • How do you define leadership? What qualities do leaders need?
   • Who are some of the great leaders in history?
   • Why are they considered great leaders?
➔ Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students. Give each student a student booklet or photocopies made from the student booklet. (5 min.)
➔ Assign each group two Soldiers or historical period to present to the class. Alternatively, student teams can randomly select two African American Soldiers or a time period from a hat or box.
➔ Give the groups 15 minutes to read about and discuss the Soldier or historical period. Then, the group presentations should begin.

SECOND CORE ACTIVITY:
Teachers should have students reflect on what they learned from the lesson and write short essays (1-2 paragraphs) in response to the following questions:
➔ What contributions did African Americans make while serving in the U.S. Army?
➔ What did you learn about U.S. history as you did this exercise?
➔ What does it mean to be a leader? What does it mean to serve your country?
➔ In your lives, who is an example of a leader and why?
Colonial America to the War of 1812
As early as the 1600s, African Americans participated in skirmishes between colonists, Europeans and Native American tribes. During the Revolutionary War, nearly 5,000 enslaved and free men fought with the Continental Army, mostly in integrated units. In 1775, General George Washington lifted the ban on African American enlistment and as a result, black units formed in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. During the War of 1812, African American Soldiers supported the American cause in both integrated and black units.

Battle of New Orleans, 1815
As the War of 1812 ends, enslaved blacks, units of “Free Men of Color” and an integrated Louisiana militia fight beside General Andrew Jackson to defend New Orleans. Nearly 50 African American Soldiers die while successfully driving back British troops. (Library of Congress)

Civil War
President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 allowed African Americans to formally enlist in the Union Army. Nearly 200,000 free men and runaway slaves took up arms to fight for the freedoms outlined in the Proclamation. African Americans fought in nearly every major battle between 1864 and 1865. By the end of the Civil War, a third of those men had given their lives for the cause. As Reconstruction began, African Americans struggled to benefit from the freedoms they fought so hard to secure.

Standing Soldier
An unidentified Soldier in full uniform poses in front of a painted background. Traveling photographers followed the Army and appeared at nearly every camp, charging Soldiers for portraits. (Library of Congress)

Buffalo Soldiers to the Harlem Hellfighters
Following the Civil War, Congress assigned black regiments, known as the “Buffalo Soldiers,” to protect settlers in the American West. Despite injustices including “Jim Crow” discrimination and racial violence, African Americans continued to serve honorably in the Army. During the Spanish-American War, four units fought in the Philippines and Cuba, where the all-black 10th Cavalry rescued Teddy Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders” at San Juan Hill, Cuba. Still lacking equality at home and serving in segregated units, more than 350,000 black troops fought for freedom abroad when the country entered World War I.

Buffalo Soldiers at Ft. Keogh, Montana, 1890
Buffalo Soldiers gather at Fort Keogh, Montana. Cheyenne warriors, impressed with African Americans’ fighting, referred to one regiment as “Wild Buffalo.” The term now applies to all black troops who served on the frontier in the late 1800s. (Library of Congress)
WORLD WAR II
During World War II, African Americans waged the “Double V” campaign to defeat racial discrimination on the battlefield in Europe and Asia and end discriminatory laws and policies in America. Beginning in 1944, black units commanded by African American officers fought in both theaters. Blacks also became the backbone of the service corps. The “Red Ball Express,” part of the Army Transportation Corps, played a critical role in supplying military supplies to all troops in Europe. By the end of the conflict, 695,000 African Americans were on active duty.

93RD INFANTRY, 1942
The reactivated 93rd Infantry Division is the first all-black division formed during World War II. Here, they are in training at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The 93rd Infantry heads overseas in 1944, serving in the Pacific theater. (National Archives and Records Administration)

THE COLD WAR
As World War II ended, the United States began to review its racial policies in response to increasing enlistment rates of African American Soldiers, the demands of Civil Rights groups, and the need to effectively utilize all available troops. On July 26, 1948, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, effectively integrating the Armed Forces. By 1954, the military had become the most integrated institution in the country, helping to set the foundation for future civil rights advancements.

24TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, 1950
On July 18, 1950, men of the 24th Infantry Regiment move up to the firing line in Korea. The 24th Infantry was the only black regiment left intact after World War II. (National Archives and Records Administration)

THE VIETNAM WAR
African Americans in the Army played a proportionately larger role in Vietnam than in any previous conflict. Blacks served in every specialty and rank. Despite civil rights struggles and opposition to the war in the United States, African Americans enlisted and reenlisted at high rates. The Army promoted more African American officers, 12 generals by 1973, and increased the number of West Point cadets from nine in 1968 to 45 in 1969. Soldiers who began their careers in Vietnam rose through the ranks to integrate the Army’s officer corps.

“OPERATION PERSHING”
Sergeant James Young and Special Fourth Class David Gorton listen to a captured Viet Cong portable radio during “Operation Pershing,” a search and seizure action in the village of Troung Lan, Binh Dinh Province. (National Archives and Records Administration)
AFTER THE COLD WAR

By the early 1990s, African Americans comprised more than 25 percent of American troops. Today, the U.S. Army continues to promote the diversity of its members and provide opportunities for Soldiers regardless of religious or ethnic background. African American men and women represent all ranks in the Army from private to command sergeant major to general officer. As it has for decades, the Army offers not just a job, but a career with opportunities for intellectual and personal growth. In an increasingly complex world, African American Soldiers continue a proud legacy of service through the important role they play in the War on Terrorism and defending democracy abroad.

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS BART WOMAK, 1993

Sergeant First Class Bart Womak, from Company E, Honor Guard, 3rd U.S. Infantry (Old Guard), inspects members of his platoon prior to proceeding down Pennsylvania Avenue on January 20, 1993 during the first inaugural parade for President Bill Clinton. (Department of Defense, Defense Imagery. Photo by SPC Mark N. Williams)
LEADERSHIP IN THE U.S. ARMY

PIONEERS
Since the earliest days of military service, African American men and women have broken through barriers to become the “first” on the road to full inclusion and advancement in the Army and other branches of the Armed Forces. These brave and inspiring individuals represent a few examples of African American men and women who have opened doors through their service. Their sacrifices serve as inspiration for generations of Soldiers succeeding them.

FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN FIELD OFFICER IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY
Delany worked to recruit thousands of troops to the newly formed United States Colored Troops in 1863. In 1865, he met with President Lincoln and proposed a corps of black men led by African American officers. Commissioned as a Major, Delany became the first black field officer in the Army. He remained with the Army following the war, serving with the 52nd Colored Troops and the Freedman’s Bureau in Hilton Head, South Carolina. (West Virginia University Library)

FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT
William Carney served as a member of the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry. After being wounded during the Battle of Fort Wagner, Carney noticed the color bearer had been shot down. Carney retrieved the fallen flag and kept it flying high despite being shot several more times. When he returned the flag to his regiment, he shouted, “The old flag never touched the ground!” (Library of Congress)
**FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO GRADUATE FROM THE U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY**

Henry Flipper became the first African American to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy in 1877, where he was commissioned a second lieutenant and assigned to the 10th Cavalry Unit. His career ended quickly when he was dismissed in 1882 following false embezzlement charges. He continued to maintain his innocence throughout his life, and in 1999 President Bill Clinton pardoned Lieutenant Flipper. (U.S. Army)

**FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN GENERAL OFFICER**

Benjamin Davis began his military career on July 13, 1898, as a temporary first lieutenant with the 8th U.S. Volunteer Infantry during the Spanish-American War. In 1940, he became the first African American general officer in the U.S. Armed Forces when he earned the rank of brigadier general. General Davis served as an inspector for the Inspector General of the Army and as a special investigator for the Secretary of War’s Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies. (National Archives and Records Administration)

**FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO SERVE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF**

Colin Powell is a retired four-star general, who began his military career in the ROTC program at the City College of New York. After 35 years in the service, General Powell became the 65th U.S. Secretary of State under President George W. Bush. Throughout his career, General Powell also served as National Security Advisor, as Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Army Forces Command and, during the Persian Gulf War, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (Department of Defense)
WOMEN IN THE ARMY
African American women serving our country often overcame both gender and racial discrimination. Though they served as nurses during the Civil War and Spanish-American War, black women could not formally enlist in the Army Nurses Corps until World War II. Even then, the Army restricted how many African Americans could enlist in the Nurses Corps and Women’s Army Corps. After the Army’s full integration, African American women began to rise through the military ranks. Their dedication carries forward today, as they help to defend and protect the nation in countless roles at home and abroad.

FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE TO ENLIST IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY
Disguised as a man named William Cathay, Cathay Williams enlisted in the Army on November 16, 1866, even though U.S. Army regulations did not allow the enlistment of women. She was assigned to the 38th Infantry and traveled throughout the west with her unit. She left the service on a disability discharge after two years of service, but little is known of the exact medical reasons. (U.S. Army)

CAPTAIN DELLA RANEY
Captain Raney, the head of the nursing staff, sits at her desk in the station hospital at Camp Beale, California. Raney became the first African American Chief Nurse of the Army Nurses Corps in 1942. (National Archives and Records Administration)
**BRIGADIER GENERAL HAZEL JOHNSON-BROWN**

Brigadier General Johnson-Brown became the first African American woman general in 1979. After beginning her career in 1955, General Johnson-Brown served in numerous positions within the Army, highlighted by her appointment as Chief of the Army Nurse Corps with the rank of brigadier general in 1979. (U.S. Army)

**FIRST FEMALE CSM OF THE U.S. ARMY RESERVE**

Throughout her 25-year Army career, Michele Jones served in numerous leadership roles. In 2002, she was appointed as the ninth command sergeant major of the Army Reserve. Michele Jones was the first woman to serve in this capacity. In this role, she traveled extensively, addressing issues and concerns of Soldiers and their families. (U.S. Army)

**SECOND LIEUTENANT MARCELLA A. HAYES**

Second Lieutenant Hayes, the fifty-fifth woman to complete training in the Army Helicopter Flight Program at Fort Rucker, Alabama, became the Army’s first African American woman aviator in 1979. (Contributed by U.S. Army Women’s Museum)
MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS
Congress passed a joint resolution on July 12, 1862, establishing the Congressional Medal of Honor to recognize members of the Armed Forces who distinguish themselves “conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States.” African American Soldiers have received the Medal of Honor since its inception during the Civil War. These honorees represent a few of the brave men who received this high honor.

SERGEANT MAJOR CHRISTIAN FLEETWOOD
Sergeant Major Fleetwood, 4th U.S. Colored Troops, seized the flag after two color bearers in his unit were shot down. He continued to carry the colors throughout the battle at Chapins Farm, Virginia, on September 29, 1864. He received the Medal of Honor on April 6, 1865. (Library of Congress)

FIRST SERGEANT ALEXANDER KELLY
First Sergeant Kelly of Company F, 6th U.S. Colored Troops received the Medal of Honor on April 6, 1865. He bravely took up the colors, which had fallen near enemy lines, during the Battle at Chapins Farm, Virginia on September 29, 1864. (Library of Congress)
FIRST SERGEANT POWHATAN BEATY
First Sergeant Beaty took command of Company G, 5th U.S. Colored Troops, during the Battle of Chapins Farm, Virginia on September 29, 1864, when all of the company officers had been killed or wounded. He received the Medal of Honor for his leadership and bravery on April 6, 1865. (Library of Congress)

STAFF SERGEANT CLIFFORD CHESTER SIMS
As a squad leader with Company D, near Hue, Republic of Vietnam, Staff Sergeant Sims provided extraordinary leadership and kept his troops safe from danger. Sims sacrificed his own life to protect his fellow Soldiers. Upon hearing the noise of a concealed booby trap being triggered, he threw himself upon the device as it exploded. As a result of his sacrifice, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. (National Archives and Records Administration)

FIRST LIEUTENANT VERNON J. BAKER
First Lieutenant Baker demonstrated outstanding courage and leadership on April 5 and 6, 1945, near Viareggio, Italy. He killed or wounded more than ten enemy Soldiers and destroyed two machine gun nests. Due to discrimination, no African American received the Medal of Honor during World War II. In 1997, President Bill Clinton awarded the medal to seven African American World War II veterans. Vernon Baker (seated, right) was the only living recipient. (www.medalofhonor.com)
The reactivated 93rd Infantry Division is the first all-black division formed during World War II. Here, they are in training at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The 93rd Infantry heads overseas in 1944, serving in the Pacific theater.

(National Archives and Records Administration)
To learn more about the Army, please visit [www.GoArmy.com](http://www.GoArmy.com) or contact your local Army representative.

**BAND OF THE 107TH INFANTRY**

The 107th Infantry Band poses for a picture at Fort Corcoran in Arlington, Virginia. The Union Army constructed Fort Corcoran, which overlooked the Potomac River in 1861. It served as one of the defenses of Washington, D.C. (Library of Congress)