



# Curriculum Guide

*"Red Tailed Angels": The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen*

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum



## ***"Red Tailed Angels": The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen***

*Suggested Readings  
Related Documents  
Vocabulary*



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## Suggested Readings

Davis, Benjamin O., Jr. *Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. American: An Autobiography*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

Rose, Robert A. *Lonely Eagles: The Story of America's Black Air Force in World War II*. Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., 1976.

McKissack, Patricia and Fredrick. *Red Tails: The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II*. Walker and Company: New York, 1995.

Harris, Jacqueline L. *The Tuskegee Airmen: Black Heroes of WWII*. Parsippany: Dillion Press, 1995.

Gropman, Alan L. *The Air Force Integrates, 1945-1964*. Washington, D.C.:Office of Air Force History, 1978.

Jakeman, Robert J. *Divided Skies: Establishing Segregated Flight Training at Tuskegee, Alabama, 1934-1942*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992



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## Tuskegee Airmen Curriculum Guide Documents

In July 1948, three years after the end of World War II, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 desegregating America's armed forces. This set of curriculum documents is designed to provide historical context on race relations before and during World War II.

The documents begin with a 1925 Army War College report that reflects the deep-seated prejudices against African-Americans that existed within the nation's military in the years following World War I.

Document #2 relates to prejudice and discrimination in American industry during World War II. With the outbreak of war, many African-Americans migrated north to seek work in factories, where the demands of wartime production brought new prosperity after years of unemployment during the Great Depression. But many of the best jobs in these factories were closed to blacks due to discrimination. In June 1941, at the urging of African American leaders, who had the strong support of Eleanor Roosevelt, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 prohibiting racial discrimination in the nation's defense industries. However, racial prejudice still prevented many African-Americans from receiving equal pay for equal work.

Despite measures like Executive Order 8802, most white Americans continued to harbor deep racial prejudices against African-Americans. A 1942 Office of War Information Intelligence survey (Document #3) of white attitudes towards blacks documented many of these attitudes.

In 1941, the Roosevelt administration established the Tuskegee Pilot Training program at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. During the course of the war nearly one thousand pilots were trained there and in 1943 they began to see combat service in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, protecting bomber squadrons in the European theater. The pilots trained at the Tuskegee Institute proved to the nation that African-American men could excel in dangerous and difficult military combat. Eleanor Roosevelt was a strong supporter of the Tuskegee Airmen, who appreciated her efforts as seen in the letter to her from Airman Cecil Peterson (Document #4).

The War Department pamphlet, "Command of Negro Troops," February 29, 1944 (Document #5) demonstrates how much official attitudes within the Army had improved since the 1925 Army War College report. The pamphlet sought to dispel racial stereotyping among white officers in command of African-Americans.



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The final document (Document #6) is a letter from President Roosevelt to Walter White, head of the NAACP, assuring White that black veterans would be treated equally and fairly under the G.I. Bill after the war.

1. Memorandum for the Chief of Staff regarding Employment of Negro Man Power in War, November 10, 1925. The United States military—like many American institutions—enforced systematic discriminatory policies against African-Americans. In 1925, the Army War College commissioned a study to examine the performance of African-American men as soldiers in prior wars to ascertain their fitness for service in a future war. The study reflects the deep-seated racial prejudice prevalent in the American military during the early twentieth century. *Archives of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. President's Official File 4245-G: Office of Production Management: Commission on Fair Employment Practices: War Department, 1943.*
2. Executive Order 8802, June 25, 1941. With the outbreak of World War II, the nation needed to rapidly mobilize its factories to produce war-related products. Women and minorities entered the industrial workforce in large numbers, but racial discrimination prevented African-Americans from obtaining many of the better-paying jobs in defense plants. After being pressed by black leaders—who had Eleanor Roosevelt's strong support—President Roosevelt confronted racial discrimination in the defense industries and issued Executive Order 8802, which barred racial discrimination in factories producing war materials. To enforce his executive order, FDR created the Fair Employment Practices Commission. *Archives of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. Printed Materials Collections, FDR-Executive Orders.*
3. Office of War Information Intelligence Report, "White Attitudes Toward Negroes", August 5, 1942: In 1942, the Office of War Information conducted a survey of white Americans' attitudes towards African-Americans and their social and economic situation. The survey revealed a white population that was largely ignorant of the frustrations of black Americans. The report noted that many white Americans—especially in the South—wrongly believed that blacks were generally satisfied with their lives under Jim Crow. It recommended measures such as improved opportunities for African-American advancement within the military to prepare white Americans for change and to improve the circumstances and morale of black Americans. *Archives of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. President's Secretary's Files: Office of War Information, Survey of Intelligence, August 1942.*
4. Letter, Cecil Peterson to Eleanor Roosevelt, October 21, 1942. On July 19, 1941, the Army Air Force began a program at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to train black





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Americans as military pilots. Mrs. Roosevelt had long been outspoken in her support for racial equality. She championed the Tuskegee Airmen by visiting the school, flying with its pilots, and publicizing it in her syndicated newspaper column, "My Day." This letter from Tuskegee Airman Cecil Peterson reflects the deep respect and friendship that the pilots felt for Mrs. Roosevelt. *Archives of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. Eleanor Roosevelt Papers: White House Correspondence: Letters from Servicemen, 1942.*

5. War Department Pamphlet, "Command of Negro Troops," February 29, 1944. In this 1944 pamphlet, the War Department mandated that all of its commanders treat African-American soldiers with the respect they deserved, recognizing that all races "have the right and duty to serve their country to the best of their abilities." The pamphlet discusses the difficult history of blacks in American history, the prejudices of many white Americans, and the best methods for assisting African-American soldiers to develop their potential as an effective part of the American fighting forces. *Archives of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. President's Official File 4245-G: Office of Production Management: Commission on Fair Employment Practices: War Department, 1944-45.*

6. Letter, Franklin D. Roosevelt to Walter White, October 14, 1944. By late 1944, it was clear that the Axis powers would eventually be defeated by the Allies and that plans were necessary to ensure a smooth transition of all military personnel back to civilian life once the war was over. An important part of this transition was the so-called G.I. Bill of Rights of 1944, a law which provided educational and other assistance to returning veterans. The African-American community was concerned that this new law might be administered in a racially discriminatory manner. Walter White, the leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), brought this concern to the President's attention. In this letter to Mr. White, President Roosevelt gave his assurances that the benefits provided by the GI Bill and the Veterans Administration would be administered on a non-discriminatory basis. *Archives the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. President's Official File 93: Colored Matter (Negroes), October-December 1944.*

7. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and "Chief" Charles Alfred Anderson, 1941. In 1941, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt flew with one of America's first black pilots, Charles Alfred Anderson, over Tuskegee, Alabama. Mrs. Roosevelt's flight was well-publicized, and it demonstrated to the public and the military that African Americans could be competent pilots. Shortly after the flight, the Tuskegee flight training program for black pilots was established. This photograph is in collections of the Smithsonian Institution and was provided to the Roosevelt Library by Maxwell Air Force Base. (Titled "C. Alfred Anderson" via National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, SI Neg. No 90-7010)