

## Class Activity for: *World War II* (2010 Student Projects)

### Lesson Information

Suggested Grade Level: 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade

Lesson Title: African-Americans in WWII: Nebraska's Role

Rationale: Using Nebraska as a backdrop, students will examine how African-Americans served their country on the home front during World War II.

Guided Questions: How did African-Americans serve their country during WWII? Did the U.S. put aside racism and discrimination during WWII to support the war effort, or did problems still persist? How might African-Americans service during WWII impact future movements for freedom and equality?

Lesson Goals: Students will be able to analyze the role African-Americans played on the home front during WWII, both as enlisted men and civilians. The readings, artifacts, and the oral history students will examine highlight the challenges discrimination posed for the men, while showing the importance of African-Americans service during WWII. Students should be able to predict how African-Americans service in WWII sparked future movements for freedom and equality.

Suggested Time: 25-35 minutes (full lesson; teacher can pair down to fit shorter time frame)

Required Materials: At least one computer with internet access for every two students

### Activity Instructions

Introduction/Anticipatory Set: Preparations for war.

1. Place students into small groups.
2. Give each group the following questions to discuss and record their answers to:
  - What does a country need to do to prepare for war?
  - Should people and the government put aside racist views and discrimination for the good of the cause?  
Why?
    - Do you think the U.S. put aside racism and discrimination during WWII to create a strong united military and home front? Why or why not?
3. When groups are done, come back together as a large group and have students take turns sharing and discussing their answers.
4. Use this last discussion question to transition into the lesson activity:
  - Given the racism and discrimination many African-Americans experienced prior to and during the WWII era, why would African-Americans want to serve their country? How might they serve their country during WWII?

Directions/Procedures for Instruction:

1. Working in pairs, instruct students to go to the Making Invisible Histories Visible website ([www.ops.org/invisiblehistory](http://www.ops.org/invisiblehistory))
2. Students will click on 2010 Student Projects and then on the World War II project.
3. Students will read the information, explore and analyze the artifacts, as well as watch the oral history video to find answers to the following questions:
  - a. What was the role of the Hastings Munitions Plant during WWII?
  - b. What was the racial make-up of the service men and civilians at the plant (how many of each)?
  - c. What did President Roosevelt sign to allow African-Americans a better job opportunity during WWII?

- d. How did racism and discrimination affect the African-American enlisted men and civilians working at the munitions plant?
4. Once the students have answered the questions, they will work to create a historical roadside marker for the Hastings Munitions Plant. The historical roadside marker should include:
  - a. A description of what the munitions plant did during WWII.
  - b. Facts about how many African-Americans, and in what capacity they served at the munitions plant during WWII.
  - c. A description about the challenges African-Americans faced in the surrounding community while serving or working at the plant.
  - d. Student's ideas about why a plant like this is important to our national and local history, and why it should be remembered.