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National History Day

Exhibit Process Paper

December 25th, 2024

Chasing Justice: Rights and Responsibilities of African American Women in WWII

I give credit to the trailer for WAC's 6888th Battalion— this video initially captured my attention and kindled my interest for rights and responsibilities in World War II. The movie, first premiered in December, retold the story of a group of trained black female soldiers who went abroad to sort mails for America. I expected inspirational comments below the video, but I was taken aback by the countless negative exclamations that border on "Why should we waste our time watching people sort mails". I was piqued by those comments and thus began my dive into the turbulent war history where Black women triumphed over the double discrimination and earned their respective recognitions.

It's not until I scrolled through the sparsely written biographies of WWII female heroes did I realize how much I was mistaken about black females' contributions in this war. I knew that women of all races contributed, but all the textbooks and supplementary videos did so much as blurry pictures with vague captions. Black females in WWII are a minority within a minority—but their effort and impact on America is immense. Despite facing double discrimination for their race and gender, African American women fought for equality, both militarily and domestically, during WWII—an action that laid the groundwork for future civil rights movements.

In my exhibit, I focus on the rights, responsibilities and contributions of various Black female groups in the War to prove that African American Females in WWII deserve to have their

story known and respected. I dug into government archives, National associations (I did not know that The National Association of Black Military Women is even a website), certified websites, and public libraries to find accurate descriptions and pictures to illustrate my claim. Not only did I acquire conspicuous evidence to prove my goal while digging into those sites, I also honed my research skills regarding credibility and citations.

White women were expected to be housewives, and black women maids. However, Black women left the servants' quarters to make a name for themselves during WWII. Had it not been for the Black Rosies, America would not have seen such economic prosperity; had it not been for the Black WACs, America would not have established such smooth communication. Yet, America today still does them injustice: very little is seen of them in textbooks and educational historical websites. Furthermore, Black hate is not yet past tense—anti-Black crimes continue to be the largest bias incident victim category, with more than two thousand incidents in 2020. All of their hard work and efforts should be common knowledge instead of latent facts–They should be living in the first pages of AP USHistory text-books; in the blockbuster movies; and in Best selling novels. Thus, our discussions of educational reforms should include the impact of Black females in WWII—a minority within a minority.

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NHD: Annotated Bibliography

January, 18th, 2025

Primary Sources

"Army Women's Museum - Fort Gregg-Adams, VA." *Army.mil.* 2018. https://awm.army.mil/

U.S. Women Army's Museum preserves primary photos that give insight to the life of American female soldiers in multiple periods, including those of African American female soldiers in WWII, notably the 6888th Battalion.

Collins, E. Sorting the Mail, Blazing the Trail: African American Women in WWII. *U.S. Army*. 2017.

https://www.army.mil/article/181382/sorting_the_mail_blazing_a_trail_african_american_women_in_wwii

The official U.S. Army websites provide the audience with true stories collected to preserve the history of those who served in the army, including the 6888th battalion. Within this article by Elizabeth Collins, primary quotations—pulled out of Charity Adam's memoir "One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC"-- are incorporated into this exhibition to give the defiance of the Black female soldiers an actual voice.

Darling, J.N. *Letting the genie out of the bottle* [Illustration]. University of Iowa, Special Collections Department. Iowa City, IA. 1943. Retrieved from http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ding/id/12344

This authentic illustration in *The Des Moines Register* of January 1943 by J.N. Darling shows the surprise of the white side, finally recognizing the impact that the Black

Rosies made during WWII.

"Determined to Serve: African American Women in WWII." Library of Congress. 2015. https://www.loc.gov/collections/veterans-history-project-collection/serving-our-voices/diverse-experiences-in-service/african-american-women-in-world-war-ii/?st=gallery This webpage by the Library of Congress contains recorded personal narratives and interviews, with primary photos of black women soldiers that served during WWII. The recorded narratives built the video part of this project, giving life to the words and visuals of this exhibit.

Henneberry, A. "The Closed Door of Justice: African American Nurses and the Fight for Naval Service." National Archives. February 4, 2020. https://text-message.blogs.archives.gov/2020/02/04/the-closed-door-of-justice-african-american-nurses-and-the-fight-for-naval-service/

In this National Archives article written by Alicia Henneberry, archive specialist of National Archives, the first hand images and records of Black nurses' applications and Commission Ceremonies aids the project in engaging the audience while presenting the contributions the nurses made during WWII for the United States.

Hymel, Kevin, and Tyler Perry."The Six Triple Eight." *IMDb.* December 20, 2024. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt24458622/

Hymel and Tyler's new film "The Six Triple Eight" retold the story of the 6888th battalion, and other than being a helpful comparison, the clear visuals from the movie gives a colored saturation to the experiences of the battalion, which better engulf the audience in the

scene.

Jeffres, E; Sportelli, N. “Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Class of 1930.” *Colgate at 200 Years.* https://200.colgate.edu/looking-back/people/adam-clayton-powell-jr-class-1930

Colgate University’s website provides clear, primary,and inspirational images of Congressman Adam C. Powell Jr, the first African American Congressman to represent and speak for harlem women during WWII, which gives the audience a visual of who spoke up for the Black Nurses in WWII.

Robbins, W. “Oregonhistoryproject.org.” *Oregon History Project.* 2014. https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/narratives/this-land-oregon/oregon-in-depression-and-war-1925-1945/african-american-and-women-workers-in-world-war-ii/#.YgZ6e5bMI2x

The Oregon History Project offers primary source pictures depicting the Oregon Black Roses. The images help create visuals to saturate the audience in the WII working environment and give insights as to the Rosies’ responsibilities.

Taylor, L. “The Courage to Deliver: The Women of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion.” *Library of Congress Blogs.* 2023. https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2023/02/the-courage-to-deliver-the-women-of-the-6888th-central-postal-directory-battalion/

The Library of Congress Gives Primary source images of black female soldiers of the 6888th Battalion, and Violet Hill Gordon being one of them, provides the exhibit Header with a serious visual that compels attention and respect.

The Chicago Defender, 1921, 4.

Before WWII, African American women, particularly in cities like Chicago, were largely restricted to lower-paying jobs, often as domestic workers or in industries where racial discrimination excluded them from advancement. These women often faced hostile working environments, where both racism and sexism limited their opportunities for economic mobility. The Chiacago Defender, a primary magazine source, displays quotes–such as displayed in the "Before the War" section of this exhibit—that illustrate the injustices done to Black female Amercians before the war

The Crisis, vol. 1, no. 4 (1910): 106.

The Crisis, a magazine published by the NAACP, often discussed the inequities faced by African American women, especially in labor. These women were often excluded from other employment opportunities and were forced to work in oppressive conditions, receiving minimal pay and enduring mistreatment. A quote from Volume one, published in 1910, is used to emphasize this unfairness in this exhibition.

"The Maker of Pilots: Willa B. Brown - National Archives Foundation." *2024. National Archives Foundation.* August 20, 2024.

https://archivesfoundation.org/documents/the-maker-of-pilots-willa-b-brown/

The National Archives Foundation is devoted to interpret the Archives' holding to the American people and the world, and in its article regarding Willa Brown, her accomplishments as a scholar, along with cited pictures aid the project to make the presentation of Willa's responsibilities and strife for rights.

"The Unsung Story of the Six Triple Eight" 2022. *George W. Bush Presidential Center.*

October 26, 2022.

https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/the-unsung-story-of-the-six-triple-eight The Bush center houses the George W. Bush presidential library (operated by National Archives), which provides official documents, artifacts, and images of historical events. This website not only provides rare images of the 6888th Battalion, but also gives insight to the battalion's fight for equality during the war.

Thompson, M. "Object 56: Life Magazine Story on the WAACs." *U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.* 2023.

https://department.va.gov/history/100-objects/object-56-waac/

This article from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs–focusing on educating the public of the connections between the nation and its veterans, display primary source images taken when the 6888th Battalion performed a close-order drill to provide this exhibit a stunning visual of the battalion/

Parham, N. "Chocolate phoenix: The story of pioneering aviator Willa Brown." *The New Pittsburg Center.* 2024

https://newpittsburghcourier.com/2024/03/10/chocolate-phoenix-the-story-of-pioneering-aviator-willa-brown/

The New Pittsburg Center, provides accurate, primary images, such as the one depicting Willa Brown in her aviator plane. This image provides more visuals to Willa's stories, and connects the audience with the exhibit narrative.

"Victory at Home and Abroad: African American Army Nurses in World War II." *National Museum of African American History and Culture.*

https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/nurses-WWII.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture, provides accurate history and primary images of WWII black nurses, including the anonymous black nurse (Ranney) that became the head of an army hospital, and the medals of Lt. Louise Lomax, another WWII Black nurse.

Weidenbruner, C. "Hospital Units in the China-Burma-India Theater of World War II." 2005-2025 https://cbi-theater.com/hospitals/_cbi_hospitals.html

"Hospital Units in the China-Burma-India Theater of World War II" contains primary source maps of American Hospitals in China, Burma, and India, in some of which the Black nurses served. It also provides crucial data tables of actual numbers and names of various nurse organizations, all of which aid this project to better give the audience a visual of where the black female nurses worked overseas.

White House. Executive Order 8802. *National Archive* 1941.

This document from National Archives provides the primary, word for word print out of Executive Order 8802, and gives the exact quotation this exhibit uses to demonstrate the work rights given to the discriminated races.

White House. Executive Order 9981, 1948. General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; *National Archives.* July 26, 1948.

This document provides the primary print out of Executive Order 9981, which gives the project's statement of military desegregation credibility.

Williams, Tiffany S. *We Are Not Such Things: The Struggle for Black Women's Rights in Early 20th-Century America*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Before WII, African American women who traveled for work or leisure were often denied service in white-only restaurants and hotels. Many establishments had separate entrances for Black patrons, often in the back, and forced Black women to use inferior facilities, even if the service was humiliatingly poor. A testimony of an African American Woman gives primary account of such discrimination in William's *We Are Not Such Things: The Struggle for Black Women's Rights in Early 20th-Century America*.

Secondary Sources

"6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion (U.S. National Park Service)." n.d. Www.nps.gov. https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/6888th.htm

U.S. The National Park Service has a mission to not only protect natural beauties of the Earth, but also to revitalize and preserve local history, such as the accomplishments of the 6888th Battalion. Without this website, this project would not have touched on the accolades for the six triple eights.

"African American Army Nurses in World War II (U.S. National Park Service)." n.d. Www.nps.gov. https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/ww2armynursecorps.htm

U.S. The National Park Service has a mission to not only protect natural beauties of the Earth, but also to revitalize and preserve local history, such as the article recording the ups and downs of black nurses in WWII. Images of the nurses from National archives, along with specific hospitals they served in helps this project give the scale of the nurses' contributions.

Duffield, Annie. 2020. “Christmas Post in WWII - the Postal Museum.” *The Postal Museum*. December 24, 2020. https://www.postalmuseum.org/blog/christmas-post-in-wwii/

In Britain, where the 6888th Battalion was sent, the aftermath of WWII made Sorting mails very difficult. By illustrating the quandaries that 6888th Battalion had to face, this exhibit highlights their miraculous achievements.

“Fighting for the Right to Fight: African American Experiences in World War II: Exhibit at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans.” n.d. *Righttofightexhibit.org.* https://righttofightexhibit.org/before-war/

“Fighting for the Right Fight” is a special section of the traveling WWII museum dedicated exclusively for unveiling WWII African American experiences. The website gives this project insight on the injustices African Americans suffered before the war, and
gives the audience context before they dive into the project’s details about African American women’s rights and responsibilities during the War.

Melissa. 2020. “The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion - the George C. Marshall Foundation.” *The George C. Marshall Foundation.* July 22, 2020. https://www.marshallfoundation.org/articles-and-features/the-6888th-central-postal-direct ory-battalion/

The Marshall foundation, created to celebrate George C. Marshall’s contributions to the US, offers valuable, precise stories that enriched this project’s understanding of the 6888th Battalion and clear images that provide the 6888th’s mail sorting in action.

National Park Service. 2023. “Executive Order 9981, Desegregating the Military (U.S. National Park Service).” *Www.nps.gov.* August 21, 2023. https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/executive-order-9981.htm

The Executive Order 9981 ensured desegregation and equal rights for all in the military, which is crucial for the Black nurses to keep serving their country. This article by the National Park Service clearly states the impact Executive Order 9981 has made, which supports and adds depth to the project’s emphasis on Black nurses’ service during WWII.

National Women's History Museum. 2019. “African American Nurses in World War II.” *National Women’s History Museum*. July 8, 2019. https://www.womenshistory.org/articles/african-american-nurses-world-war-ii

The National Women’s History Museum, founded in 1996, devotes itself to unveil, interpret and observe women’s varied services to The United States. The website gives detailed history of the African American nurses during WWI and WWII, along with primary images from National Archives, all of which aids this project to showcase the contributions of WWII Black nurses.

Jared Chamberlin. 2020. “African American Women in the Military during WWII.” *The Unwritten Record.* March 12, 2020. https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2020/03/12/african-american-women-in-the-military-during-wwii/

The Unwritten-record blog, a branch of national archives, excavates the underappreciated history of African American Military Women during WWII with

accurate photos, descriptions, and analysis, paving a foundation for this project's focus on the "six triple eights"s contribution in WWII.

Randle, A. " 'Black Rosies': The Forgotten African American Heroines of the WWII Homefront." HISTORY. https://www.history.com/news/black-rosie-the-riveters-wwii-homefront-great-migration

With more than hundreds of accurate archives of events, HISTORY is considered one of the most credible sources for historical events without any biases. The particular story gives critical information about the struggle, accomplishments, and recognitions of the Black Rosies.

Richmond Rosie Poster 2024. *Rosietheriveter.net*. 2024. https://rosietheriveter.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/WeDidIt.jpg

Rosietheriveter.net worked tirelessly to shed light on all working women's history, especially working women during WWII. The Black Rosie the Riveter Poster (Richmond) recognizes the abundance of black female workers in WWII, and also puts readers in the WWII workhouse environment.

Sheppard Air Force Base. "Tuskegee Airmen Key to AF History". *Official United Air Force Website.* 2007. https://www.sheppard.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/369479/tuskegee-airmen-key-to-af-history/

Sheppard Air Force Base is directly sourced from the official United Air Force Website, which includes accurate description and image of Tuskegee Airmen, who came from The Joffrey School of Aeronautics. The images and descriptions help highlight Willa

Brown as the teacher of many Tuskegee Airmen.

Southern Mysteries. 2022. "Episode 105 the Six Triple Eight - Southern Mysteries." *Southern Mysteries.* February 14, 2022. https://southernmysteries.com/2022/02/14/sixtripleeight/ Since 2017, Shannon's Southern Mysteries has been dedicated to bring alive accurate stories of the past, and provides podcast episodes with primary-sourced pictures. The website presenting episode 105 of Southern Mysteries provides accurate images of Charity Adams, leader of the 6888th battalion, and her trainees.

Spitizer, T. "Lieutenant Willa Brown – Aviatrix, Maker of Pilots." 2020. *The National WWII Museum | New Orleans.* August 11, 2020. https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/lieutenant-willa-brown The WWII museum offers the true history of the Second World War, both in exhibits and on the websites. In the article contributed by Spirizer, the life story of Willa Brown is detailedly accounted with accurate, first hand images.

The National WWII Museum. n.d. "African Americans in World War II." *The National WWII Museum | New Orleans.* 2020. https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/african-americans-world-war-ii The National WWII Museum provides primary-source photos from the War period, such as the one depicting President Roosevelt signing the Selective Service Training and Service Act on Sept. 16, 1940. Other than providing first-hand images, this website also shed light on treatments towards African Americans before, during and after WWII, which helped compare this minority's experience in this project.

The Rosies | United States. *National Association of Black Military Women.* 2019-24. https://www.nabmw.org/the-rosies

There is nowhere else for authentic infants about the Black Rosies than the National Association of Black Military Women. This official website, aimed to seek out and spread untold stories of Black Women, provides accurate statistics and narratives for this

project, including the quantitative effect of the Executive Order 8802 on Black working women.