

The Tuskegee Airmen: The Fight for Military Desegregation

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When choosing our topic for NHD, we were influenced by our family's history as many of our family members have served in the United States Military. We were specifically interested in pilots and aviation because some of our family lineage were pilots and engineers in recent wars. For example, we have family members who were fighter pilots in the Vietnam War, while others were involved in designing engines for airplanes in World War II. Ultimately, we were interested in choosing the Tuskegee Airmen because they were one of the most skilled fighter pilots in aviation history while serving as role models for the Civil Rights Movement.

We began our research by looking at broad databases and websites for basic information about the Tuskegee Airmen. After gaining this understanding, we started to dive deeper into more specific secondary sources. Many of these sources discussed the creation of the Tuskegee Airmen, their war success, as well as the awards they received after the war. We proceeded to take this information and make notecards for each source that we thought was useful. Our notecards would provide a summary and analysis of a passage from the source. We also discussed how we would use this information on our website. After this, we made different sections for each notecard, which would allow us to organize the notecards by theme. After completing and organizing our notecards, we began our work on curating a website that would display the information in a sleek but informative way.

Our decision to make a website stemmed from our desire to present our information in a creative manner that could be navigated in a rather chronological fashion. We found that embedding media onto our website would be most effective, as it would further cater to our audience. We enjoyed the ability to express our topic in a creative way that could be shared and easily accessible. Furthermore, our final decision was made rather quickly as we knew it would

be a challenge that was worth taking, and we could imagine the final product to exceed our expectations.

The Tuskegee Airmen were a turning point in American history because the group allowed for the desegregation of the United States Military. After World War II, the Tuskegee Airmen received numerous awards for the contributions that they made during combat. Their demonstrated success asserted to the military that African Americans were suitable for obtaining high military jobs because of how effective they were in combat. As a result, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which officially marked the desegregation of the United States Military. Their legacy was not just restricted to the military, but the general public as well. Their achievements helped advance the civil rights movement, proving that no race is superior to one another.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

"Benjamin Oliver Davis Jr." In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2024. Image. Accessed January 5, 2024.

<https://africanamerican.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1465027>.

This photograph portrays Benjamin Oliver Davis Jr., commander of the Tuskegee Airmen, in Rametti Italy in March of 1945. This is crucial for outlining the significant figures associated with this turning point.

Collins, Jeremy. "The Tuskegee Airmen: An Interview with the Leading Authority." The National WWII Museum: New Orleans. Last modified July 14, 2020. Accessed December 14, 2023.

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/tuskegee-airmen-interview-daniel-haulman>.

This interview with Daniel Haulman, an American military historian, dives deep into the different aspects of the Tuskegee Airmen. It also provides helpful primary visual aids depicting the Tuskegee Airmen. This will be used for primary quotes relating to the Tuskegee Airmen.

The color line still exists - in this case. 1879. Illustration.

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b29638/>.

The illustration is a form of propaganda that makes fun of the literacy tests that African Americans have to undergo for voting qualifications. We used this photo for propaganda in our website, which shows the discrimination and segregation that African Americans experienced.

The daily bulletin. [volume] (Dayton, Ohio), 06 Aug. 1945. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

<<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024221/1945-08-06/ed-1/seq-3/>>

This newspaper article from the Daily Bulletin in 1945, discusses the Tuskegee Airmen training at Tuskegee Institute and their growing knowledge of aviation safety. This will be used for first-hand accounts of the creation of the squadron during that time.

The Dayton forum. (Dayton, OH), Jan. 24 1941.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84024234/1941-01-24/ed-1/>.

This newspaper from The Dayton Forum in 1941, discusses the creation of the Tuskegee Airmen at Tuskegee Institute and adds commentary into their significance in the history of the American military. This is important in outlining the publication of the Tuskegee Airmen.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum: National Archives. *The Week in Roosevelt History: February 15-21*. February 15, 2011. Photograph. Accessed January 3, 2024. <https://fdr.blogs.archives.gov/tag/tuskegee-airmen/>.

This photograph of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt flying with one of America's first African American pilots and member of the Tuskegee Airmen in 1941, demonstrated how

African Americans were well suitable to be pilots. This will be used to demonstrate the growing recognition of the Tuskegee Airmen.

Lopez, C. Todd. "Tuskegee Airman Recalls WWII Service, Calls Freedom Key to Opportunity." U.S. Department of Defense. Last modified November 10, 2021. Accessed January 3, 2024.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2825067/tuskegee-airman-recalls-wwii-service-calls-freedom-key-to-opportunity/>.

This assortment of quotes is from Charles McGee, a decorated Tuskegee Airmen, who shared his experience with the military after receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1951. This is important since it is a first-hand account of an actual Tuskegee Airmen who shared his view on this turning point in history.

Minneapolis spokesman. [volume] (Minneapolis, Minn.), 05 Oct. 1945. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

<<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025247/1945-10-05/ed-1/seq-1/>>

This newspaper from the Minneapolis Spokesman in 1945, mentions the NAACP's fight for military desegregation and somewhat opposition to the Tuskegee Airmen as they further segregation efforts. This is critical in outlining the creation and furthered impact of the Tuskegee Airmen.

National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution. "Smithsonian Learning Lab Resource: Congressional Gold Medal, Tuskegee Airmen." Smithsonian Learning Lab. October 30, 2015. Accessed January 3, 2024.

This is a photograph of a Tuskegee Airmen Congressional Gold Medal, representing their success and recognition. This will be used to outline the overall impact that the airmen had and how they were recognized.

National Archives. "Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces." Milestone Documents. Accessed January 12, 2024.

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9981>.

This source contains images of the signed Executive Order 9981, which put an end to segregation in the United States military. This is important to outline the change and continuity following the Tuskegee Airmen.

National Park Service. "Building a University: Booker T. Washington and Tuskegee Institute." National Park Service Museum Exhibits. Accessed January 12, 2023.

https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/tuskegee/btwashington/building_university.html

This is an assortment of images of the Tuskegee University, including photos from 1906 and 1918. This university would be the home to the Tuskegee Airmen and their training. These photographs will be used when discussing the creation of the Tuskegee Institute and later the Tuskegee Airmen.

Reyneau, Betsy Graves. *Keep us Flying: Poster for war bonds depicting Tuskegee airmen Robert W. Diez*. 1943. Photograph. Accessed January 3, 2024.

https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2011.168.

This image from the National Museum of African American History and Culture was created in 1943 depicting a Tuskegee Airmen asking Americans to buy war bonds. This will be used to demonstrate the growing respect for African Americans in the military.

Tuskegee Airmen. 1943. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/charles-dryden-1920-2008/m-9866/>. (Accessed January 3, 2024.)

This is an image of the Tuskegee Airmen, including Charles Dryden, in 1943 lined up for a photo. This will be used for primary photographs of the airmen during the war.

"Tuskegee Airmen Gather in Italy." In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2024. Image. Accessed January 5, 2024.

<https://africanamerican.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1539405>.

This is a photograph of the Tuskegee Airmen gathering in Ramitelli, Italy, in 1945. This will be used to outline the important impact the airmen had and their overall participation in World War II.

"Tuskegee Airmen Kneel in Front of Plane." In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2024. Image. Accessed January 5, 2024.

<https://africanamerican.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1539407>.

This is a photograph of the 332nd Fighter Group of the Tuskegee Airmen kneeling in front of a plane in Ramitelli, Italy. This image will be used to show the airmen and their participation.

Tuskegee Airmen Pilot Listing. Photograph. Accessed January 5, 2024.

<https://www.tuskegee.edu/support-tu/tuskegee-airmen>.

This is an assortment of primary images related to the Tuskegee Airmen. Specifically, one in which the Tuskegee Airmen are gathered standing in front of one of their planes. This image will be used to depict the all-black fighter squadron.

Untitled photo shows: Tuskegee airmen training, Tuskegee, Alabama. , 1942. Photograph.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/2017767766/>.

This is a photograph of Tuskegee Airmen cadets lined up returning the salute of Major James A. Ellison. This image will be used as it does a spectacular job of outlining the racial differences, as a white Major is reviewing a full African American squadron.

Wings For This Man (1945, Tuskegee Airmen)." Internet Archive. Accessed January 21, 2024.

https://archive.org/details/Wings_For_This_Man_1945_Tuskegee_Airmen

This propaganda film, created by the U.S. Army Air Forces in 1945, follows the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African American Pilots in the military. This provides exemplary primary footage of the Tuskegee Airmen and how even prominent figures such as Ronald Reagan took part in their admiration since he narrated the video.

Yancey Williams, "Tuskegee Airman," Commemorative Air Force Red Tail Squadron. Accessed January 21, 2024. <https://cafriseabove.org/yancey-williams/>

This is a photograph of Yancey Williams, a Tuskegee Airmen, who sued the U.S. War Department for not accepting his application to the U.S. Army Air Corps pilot cadet

program due to his race. This primary image will be used to outline the creation of the Tuskegee Airmen.

Secondary Sources

"African Americans in World War II." *Gale in Context: U.S. History*.

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/RWQMNU885952308/UHIC?u=bullischl&sid=bookmark-UHIC&xid=1044b157>.

This source talks about how President Roosevelt issued the Fair Employment Act, which prohibited racial discrimination in aspects of the defense industry. We used this information to relate to the state of African Americans in the United States before the Tuskegee Airmen's eventual success and impact on segregation in the military.

Bar, Rosann. "Desegregation Of The U.S. Military." Edited by Thomas Tandy Lewis. *The 1940s in America*. Hackensack: Salem Press, 2010. Accessed January 04, 2024.

online.salempress.com/articleDetails.do?articleName=1940_116440701164.

The article speaks about how in the 1940s, segregationist attitudes marked race relations in the U.S., especially in the military's maintenance of segregated units. We used this information when addressing military issues with segregation. This is also valuable information to demonstrate the eventual success of the Tuskegee Airmen in influencing the desegregation of the United States military.

Brown, Nikki, and Barry M. Stentiford. "Jim Crow in American History." *American Government*. Last modified 2024. <https://americangovernment.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/2234977>.

The source discusses the beginning of harsh segregation in America after the abolition of slavery, which began with the Jim Crow laws. We used the Jim Crow laws to support and acknowledge the beginning of American segregation as a whole.

"Commentary on 1941." In *The African-American Experience*. American Journey. Woodbridge, CT: Primary Source Media, 1999. *Gale In Context: U.S. History* (accessed December 14, 2023).

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/EJ2152001291/UHIC?u=bullischl&sid=bookmark-UHIC&xid=0851c980>.

The source talks about Yancey Williams, a student at Howard University, who sued the United States government on January 15, 1941, since they refused to accept this application to the Army Air Corps. We used this information to outline the creation of the Tuskegee Airmen. This moment sparked the beginning of a major turning point, so it is crucial to acknowledge its impact on history and its overall existence.

Evans, Farrell. "How Tuskegee Airmen Fought Military Segregation with Nonviolent Action." In *HISTORY*. A&E Television Networks. Last modified January 20, 2021. Accessed December 9, 2023.

<https://www.history.com/news/tuskegee-airmen-impact-civil-rights-movement>.

The article talks about how on April 5, 1945, the Black officers of the 477th orchestrated an attempt to integrate the white officers' club at Freeman Field. We used this source to

reinforce the argument surrounding the eventual success of the airmen and how they made strong efforts to desegregate the military.

Handleman, Philip. "Triumphs of a Tuskegee Airman." *American Heritage* 68, no. 4 (2023): 1-16. MAS Ultra - School Edition.

The article speaks about how many Tuskegee Airmen gained popularity in America. Specifically, many newspapers publicized the achievements of the Tuskegee Airmen in the War, helping spread the effects throughout various parts of the country. This information was used to discuss how the Tuskegee Airmen gained popularity, which established their long-standing legacy in America

Haulman, Daniel. "Comparing and Contrasting Two White Leaders of the Tuskegee Airmen: Colonels Noel Parrish and Robert Selway." *Alabama Review* 75, no. 3 (2022): 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ala.2022.0021>.

The article discusses how after WWII, the Tuskegee Airmen were accepted into the higher ranks of the military due to their success in the war. This passage is significant because we used it to outline the legacy that the Tuskegee airmen had on the military.

Haulman, Daniel L. "Nine Myths about the Tuskegee Airmen." In *Tuskegee University*. Last modified October 21, 2011. Accessed January 5, 2024. https://www.tuskegee.edu/Content/Uploads/Tuskegee/files/Nine_Myths_About_the_Tuskegee_Airmen.pdf.

The article talks about the initial misconception that the Tuskegee Airmen were inferior to other white fighter squadrons. We used this information when detailing the state of segregation in the military. This also outlines the success of the Fighter Squadron and its contribution to the military and the future of African Americans in the military.

Haynes, Madisson. "Who are the Tuskegee Airman?" *PBS.org*. Last modified January 28, 2022. Accessed November 30, 2023.

<https://www.pbs.org/articles/who-are-the-tuskegee-airmen>.

The passage talks about the tests and qualifications that black people need to have in order to become pilots. The passage allowed us to talk about the various steps that the airmen needed to become pilots.

History.com. "Tuskegee Airmen." In *HISTORY*. A&E Television Networks. Last modified November 9, 2009. Accessed December 9, 2023.

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/tuskegee-airmen>.

The article talks about how some of the original Tuskegee Airmen would move on to larger roles in the newly desegregated military. We used this source to understand how members of the Tuskegee Airmen continued their efforts in the military and how they took up highly powerful positions, further proving their worth and overall impact.

The National WWII Museum. "African Americans in World War II: Fighting on Two Fronts." In *Nationalww2museum.org*. Digital file.

When Franklin Roosevelt was running for president, he wanted Black Pilots to serve in the military. In Roosevelt's policy, the War Department declared that they would start

training black pilots for the Air Force. As a result, black people started training to be pilots in March 1941. We used this source to discuss how if it weren't for Roosevelt's policy, the Tuskegee Airmen group would never have formed, meaning there still would've been segregation in the U.S. Air Force.

Pencak, William A. "African Americans in the Military." *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*. Last modified 2024.

<https://africanamerican.abc-clio.com/Topics/Display/1500080?cid=41&sid=1500080>.

The information talks about the need for the Tuskegee Airmen. The 332nd fighter group was heavily requested by the military in Germany as air cover for bombers. We used this information to further support our claim that the Tuskegee airmen were heavily needed during the war.

Salamone, Frank A. "Race and the Military." In 1946-Present, edited by John P. Resch, 171-172. Vol. 4 of *Americans at War*. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. *Gale In Context: U.S. History* (accessed December 9, 2023).

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3427300419/UHIC?u=bullischl&sid=bookmark-UHIC&xid=6a9322b6>.

The source talks about how Harry S. Truman issued an executive order, which prohibited racial discrimination in the American military. We used this information to outline the shift in the American military and how the Tuskegee Airmen played a major role in bringing about change.

Stentiford, Barry M. "332nd Fighter Group." In *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2024. Accessed January 5, 2024.

<https://africanamerican.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1823169>.

The source explains that the 332nd was created by the U.S. Army Air Forces to be the first group manned by African American fighters. It was highly controversial since many believed African Americans to be highly inferior. This information regarding the creation and organization of the Tuskegee Airmen helped us understand their historical influence.

"Tuskegee Airmen." *The American Mosaic: The African American Experience*. Last modified 2023. <https://africanamerican.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1462114>.

The source explains how the Tuskegee Airmen were greatly limited in what they could do in the military. They were not utilized solely because of their race and they weren't given equal opportunities. We used this to demonstrate how large of a difference they were able to make even with the small number of opportunities they had.

"Tuskegee Airmen Squadron Conducts Successful Missions during World War II." In *Historic U.S. Events*. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2017. *Gale In Context: U.S. History* (accessed December 9, 2023).

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BT2359030543/UHIC?u=bullischl&sid=bookmark-UHIC&xid=1b726785>.

The source talks about the number of men who graduated from the Tuskegee Institute, almost half of these men going overseas. The passage helped give evidence of the types of successful endeavors that the Tuskegee Airmen underwent. The success will

eventually persuade and inform the general American public that Black pilots are critical and essential for the U.S. Military

"Tuskegee Institute." In *Gale U.S. History Online Collection*. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2022. *Gale In Context: U.S. History* (accessed January 4, 2024).
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/MDNSCG191713428/UHIC?u=bullischl&sid=bookmark-UHIC&xid=d5f3f7f6>.

The article describes the creation of the Tuskegee Institute. Booker T. Washington created the institute as his first desire was to train individuals to become teachers, so they could educate children throughout the South. Booker T. Washington is essential to our project as he indirectly started the Tuskegee Airman Group because he created the university where these pilots were trained.

White, George, Jr. "African Americans, World War II." In 1901-1945, edited by John P. Resch, 5-7. Vol. 3 of *Americans at War*. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. *Gale In Context: U.S. History* (accessed January 4, 2024).
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3427300223/UHIC?u=bullischl&sid=bookmark-UHIC&xid=fa49d7cd>.

The article describes how many white officers stated that the Tuskegee Airmen were not as good as white pilots, which resulted in commanders planning to remove them from fighting in the war. We used this source to explore the segregated values that the Tuskegee airmen experienced, even during the heart of the war when they were most needed.