African Americans in the Time of War

celebrating Black History Month
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Monday - Thursday  8am - 9pm
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Exceptions
CLOSED March 1-2 for Staff Development Day
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LEARNING RESOURCE CENTERS

Reference materials and course reserves are available at these locations:

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The Importance of BHM
by Dr. Yolanda Columbus

“I am an invisible man. No I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe: Nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, simply because people refuse to see me.” — Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man

Black History Month is a celebration of blacks in the United States of America. It is a recognition of our achievements, our sacrifices, and, yes often, our suffering. Remembering the suffering and oppression is not an expression of “Woe is me”; it is a celebration of our resilience, of our affinity and care for those within and outside our community, and, most of all, a celebration of our determination.

Black history and black culture is intricately interwoven into the fabric of the U.S. In this melting pot that is the U.S., it is often difficult for us, blacks, to define who we are; and it is equally hard for others to see us for who we are. So, we fall prey to believing that we are purely a reflection of the society in which we live. Some outside of our community then believe that the U.S. saved us and then accredit our strengths, our values, and our accomplishments to the U.S. alone.

Black History Month is an opportunity to step back and remind ourselves and others that we shaped this nation. We’ve been making America great since 1619. Twenty Africans arrived in Jamestown Colony in 1619, a year before the Mayflower. Their arrival marked the beginning of slavery in the US. Since then, through the sacrifice of our bodies, our families, and our resources, we have made America great.

This trend has continued throughout blacks’ experience in the US. This year’s theme is particularly poignant, “African-American in Times of War”. In previous times and still today, our government and institutions consider the struggles in our community to be insignificant when compared to the economy, power, and/or global interests. Yet, many of us still choose to commit our lives and our families to fighting for the interests of these governments and institutions.

That decision is an example of the strength and love that resonate within our communities. We recognize the injustices. We demand change. We fight for change. Yet, when government or institutions in which our communities are submerged need us, we fight for them. We never forget the injustices, but we are shrewd. We know there is a place and time to fight for our personal and community priorities. We’ve danced this dance since 1619. With this year’s theme, we revel in our forte to fight for values and others even when we ourselves suffer injustices. We are consummate fighters.
"Rosie, the Riveter"

Alfred T. Palmer worked with the Office of War Information to take photographs of American culture in the 1930's and 40's. Our cover photo is just one of the many Riveters he took in the early days of World War II. The Riveter is a symbol of women helping in the war effort showcasing that whatever a man can do, women can do as well. That symbolism is more pronounced by the African American woman in our photo, which transcends the familiar Rosie, the Riveter poster. Many African American women took time to help the war in many different positions while facing racism and sexism in a segregated nation.
"Rosie, the Riveter" (cont.)


This is a collection of women who participated in World War II. These are poems and stories of welders, nurses, clerks and military personnel. Maureen Honey has compiled each one with significant historical and cultural context.


During World War II, women were encouraged to take on roles and volunteer efforts to support the men in the war. It was seen as their moral and civic duty as women for "securing democracy and world peace". However, how can that be when the homefront did not ensure that for African Americans? Caryl Cooper studies the rhetoric of Rebecca Stiles Taylor in her articles for The Chicago Defender to understand the African American woman's perspective on the war.


Taking a cue from the previous article, we now take a look at Maya Angelou. Like many young woman in the 40s, Maya Angelou wanted to contribute her time and effort by becoming a street car driver. Here in this video, we see her life as an activist and a true "Rosie, the Riveter" whose words and actions grasp the strength and resilience of that imagery.
"Rosie, the Riveter" (cont.)


The stories you will read are about the ladies in the photo below. They served in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in Europe as mechanics, switchboard operators and drivers. The WAC was an auxiliary of the Army where women did not get equivalent status or pay as men. The women here will describe the hardships of gender and race discrimination, but also the pride they had for serving their country and people.


Image Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 111-SC-200791

For more resources on African Americans in the Time of War, visit: http://libguides.northlakecollege.edu/aahm
The Griot: Beyond Storytelling

Some stories have a life of their own especially as told by the Griot, a storyteller who brings West African tradition. They present stories conveying history, lessons, or praise. Often times they do it to the accompaniment of music. They can be likened to minstrels or troubadours (Encyclopedaeia Britannica).


Traditionally the Griot learned his skills as part of the family's trade.


Learn about the evolution of the Griot from the time of slavery to modern day music. What aspects of the Griot's musicality were adapted to blues music? How has it influenced the dissemination of information of family history, religion, or culture? See how Griots are "living archives of the people" (p. 93) in this text.


The Griot shares oral histories, but can these oral histories be translated in the written word? Can the rhythm of music be set to pages? The essays in *Black Orpheus* show how themes of music are represented in the writings of many popular writers and artists including Langston Hughes, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.