



Curriculum Guide

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

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum



Red Tailed Angels

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Curriculum Guide

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Curriculum Guide Objectives | 2 |
| What Does It Mean to Think Historically? | 3 |
| How are Historical Records Helpful in Teaching? | 4 |
| Overview: The Tuskegee Airmen | 5 |
| Overview: World War II | 6 |
| Suggested Readings | 8 |
| Related Documents | 9 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1925 Army War College Report• Executive Order 8802• Intelligence Report• October 21, 1942 letter from Cecil Peterson• Command of Negro Troops• FDR letter dated October 14, 1944• Photo of ER and "Chief Anderson" | |
| Vocabulary | 12 |
| Teaching Activities and Assignments | 14 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• General Activities• Document Specific Activities• Photograph Analysis Worksheet• Document Analysis Worksheet | |



Curriculum Guide

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

Curriculum Guide Objectives

The purpose of this DVD curriculum package is to provide material that is aimed at meeting two goals. The first is to help students gain an understanding of the struggles faced by African-Americans serving in the United States military during World War II, as witnessed in the inspiring story of the Tuskegee Airmen. The second is to familiarize students with the use of primary sources, and to train them in using document-based historical research techniques. Interpreting historical documents and reviewing historic film footage helps students gain a better understanding of history as the rich tapestry that it is, rather than as a series of loosely connected facts, dates and events. It also helps them to develop and refine their critical thinking skills.

This package includes a twenty-two minute DVD suitable for classroom viewing, a set of topical documents, and a series of teaching activities for you to adapt to your classroom and curriculum needs. More information on this, and other Roosevelt-related topics can be found on our website at www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu or by contacting our education department at (845) 486-7751.

General Objectives: Document Based Questions

When students have successfully completed the exercises included in this packet they should be able to examine a primary source and

- identify factual information;
- identify points of view;
- gather, arrange and evaluate information;
- compare and contrast information;
- draw conclusions;
- prepare, present and defend arguments.

Specific Objectives: "Red Tailed Angels"

Students should also be able to

- identify specific challenges faced by African-American soldiers during WWII;
- describe segregated living conditions endured by African-Americans;
- empathize with people facing major social and institutional difficulties and obstacles;
- explain the attitudes and values of people living under duress;
- compare and contrast conditions in the various regions of the United States.



Curriculum Guide

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

What Does It Mean to Think Historically?

In order to really understand history, students need to *think historically*. They have to be taught the mental skills needed to not just ingest and regurgitate “facts,” but to *examine*, *evaluate*, and *understand* history. Thinking historically requires a complex set of skills similar to those used by a detective trying to solve a mystery.

These skills include:

- **Finding Evidence:** The first step to understanding history is to know where to find the photographs, documents, and artifacts that tell the story of the time, place, people, and events under examination.
- **Classifying and Categorizing:** Organizing bits of information from both primary and secondary sources in a manner that reveals a broader story is an important skill.
- **Checking and Cross Checking:** Information must be checked and then rechecked in order to build a contextual understanding. This is called corroboration. Special attention must be paid to make sure that information is both valid and reliable.
- **Identifying Sub-texts:** Are there political, social, economic, cultural or other sub-texts at play?
- **Constructing a Viable Interpretation of Events:** What “story” does the information seem to tell? Is this a plausible account of what may have happened?
- **Filling in the Blanks:** Sometimes historians must fill in the gaps when specific evidence does not exist. Great care must be taken to do so in a way that does not introduce excessive bias or contemporary beliefs and attitudes. Historic events must be viewed within the context and attitudes of their own time. However, no matter how pure the intentions, interpretation is always tainted by the assumptions and prejudices of the interpreter.
- **Promoting and Arguing your Point:** Once a plausible story has developed, it needs to be told so that it can be examined and scrutinized by outside, objective sources.



Curriculum Guide

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

How are Historical Records Helpful in Teaching?

Historical records are useful to teachers in a variety of ways. They help students learn to:

- interpret
- explain
- apply
- clarify
- analyze
- evaluate
- assess
- describe
- form opinions
- empathize
- identify
- compare and contrast
- develop self-knowledge
- establish perspective
- identify contradictions
- determine what is accepted as fact and what is rejected as fiction
- draw conclusions
- weigh generalizations
- recognize multiple interpretations
- examine evidence
- analyze raw data
- develop confidence in their ability to gather information
- draw upon visual, literary and musical sources
- develop a sense of excitement about learning about history

These skills can be developed or enhanced by those who participate in document-based learning programs. In addition to skill development, students find working with objects and documents to be fun and exciting. Teachers often have the same reaction.



Curriculum Guide

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

Overview: The Tuskegee Airmen

The Struggle to Get America's First Black Airmen Off the Ground

African-Americans had been struggling to gain entrance into the Army Air Corps since the first planes were used in warfare in World War I. On the eve of the Second World War, in April of 1939, Public Law 18 calling for the expansion of the Air Corps was passed. One section of the law authorized the creation of training programs in black colleges to prepare black military personnel for various support services.

Two years later on January 16, 1941, the War Department announced the formation of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, a black flying unit to be trained at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. The training of black pilots had an added element of difficulty as there were no black instructors in the military at the time. Eleven white officers were assigned to instruct the 429 enlisted men and 47 officers thus introducing one of the first examples of an 'integrated' military unit. The "Red Tailed Angels" as the black pilots came to be known were born.

The 99th Pursuit Squadron was later renamed the 99th Fighter Squadron and flew missions in the Mediterranean and Europe. The group flew with distinction serving as a bomber escort group protecting American bombers on missions deep into enemy airspace without ever losing an aircraft to enemy fire. Many of the pilots went on to serve in other black Air Corps units, including fighter, bomber, and composite squadrons and groups. From 1941 to 1946 nearly 1000 black combat flyers completed their training at the Tuskegee Institute. They flew more than 15,500 sorties, and destroyed 261 enemy aircraft.

The courage and dedication of these brave men helped to defeat our enemies overseas and served as an inspiration for the fight against prejudice here at home.



Curriculum Guide

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

Overview: FDR and World War II

The Second World War was the most devastating war in the history of mankind. Between 1939 and 1945, an estimated 60 million people were killed in fighting that literally spanned the globe. Democracy was threatened in every corner of the world and its survival hung in the balance.

Franklin Roosevelt understood the importance of this immense challenge and possessed an instinct for power and a willingness to exercise it. With America's entry into the war after the December 7, 1941 surprise attack at Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt moved aggressively to centralize strategy and high command in the White House. He organized the work of war mobilization and military information gathering so that he could closely monitor and direct events himself. He set priorities and focused attention on the goal of total victory. Under his direction, the government assumed unprecedented powers over the economy. Federal defense spending skyrocketed and the public was mobilized to pay the bill. Millions of Americans began paying federal taxes for the first time. War bond sales raised billions of additional dollars. To control inflation, the government put limits on wages, prices, and rents. And to conserve scarce goods for military use, products ranging from gasoline to sugar were rationed.

Roosevelt's military advisers ranged from the anonymous Admiral King to the flamboyant General MacArthur. The President employed his formidable political skills to manage relationships with, and among, them. Together, he and his generals virtually created the modern American military. The armed services grew from an unprepared force of 334,473 active duty personnel in 1939 to 12,123,455 in 1945. The army and navy expanded and modernized and, with FDR's endorsement, American air power increased dramatically. The President also supported new agencies like the Office of Strategic Services (precursor to the CIA) and the Office of Scientific Research and Development.

In addition, Roosevelt held the key position in a wartime coalition of 26 nations he called the "United Nations." He, Josef Stalin, and Winston Churchill comprised the "Big Three" at the heart of this coalition. But, as the war progressed, FDR increasingly acted as the group's ultimate broker and decision-maker. Throughout the war, the President emphasized the importance of coalition building. Diplomacy, as much as military strategy, became a hallmark of his wartime leadership.

To fight a global war, the United States needed to mobilize its entire population along what became known as the "Home Front." Children organized scrap drives to salvage rubber and metal for war industries, while their parents joined civil defense units, planted



Curriculum Guide

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

Victory Gardens, and purchased war bonds. Government propaganda reminded people to report suspicious activity and Americans joined the Red Cross, the USO, and other service organizations. This enormous national effort touched nearly every aspect of American life and set in motion economic and social forces that would reverberate for decades.

During the war, Eleanor Roosevelt continued the ceaseless activism that had long marked her as America's most public First Lady. However, her activism sometimes led to controversy. Mrs. Roosevelt was outspoken in her support for racial and gender equality. She championed the Tuskegee Airmen, women's entrance into the armed services, and the right of workers to organize.

In 1942, she flew to England to offer support to America's allies and returned with detailed reports for FDR. But her most ambitious foreign trip was a 25,000 mile tour of the South Pacific in 1943 as a representative of the American Red Cross. Although she had long wanted to visit the troops in the combat zones of the South Pacific, FDR only permitted the dangerous trip when press criticism of Mrs. Roosevelt's civil rights work increased. During her tour, the First Lady traveled in military transports, putting herself at risk to visit hospitals, military camps, and Red Cross clubs. She saw an estimated 400,000 American servicemen and women.

The First Lady continued to advocate progressive goals like racial integration in the military and defense industries, day care for the children of women war workers, and planning for the postwar economy. She argued that America could not fight for democracy and equality abroad without also ensuring it at home.

Though he died before final victory was achieved in World War II, Franklin Roosevelt lived long enough to know that victory was assured. World War II profoundly changed global economics, politics, and social relationships and continues to influence the world we live in today.



Curriculum Guide

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

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



Curriculum Guide

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

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.



Curriculum Guide

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

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



Curriculum Guide

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

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 of 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)



Curriculum Guide

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

Vocabulary

Bigot—A person who is intolerant of people of races, religions, countries, or political groups other than his/her own.

Double V—During WWII the V stood for Victory over the Axis Powers. African-American groups initiated the idea of a second V which stood for Victory over racial prejudice in the United States.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1886-1962)—Wife of Franklin D. Roosevelt, she served as First Lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945 and was known as a reformer and humanitarian intent on advancing social justice, human rights, freedom and liberty. She was called "The First Lady of the World" by President Harry Truman and served on the first United States delegation to the United Nations, where she led the effort to ratify the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945)—As the thirty-second President of the United States, Roosevelt led the country through the two major crises of the 20th century, the Great Depression and World War II. Roosevelt believed that the government should take an active role in ensuring the economic well-being of the average citizen and brought relief, recovery and reform through his many New Deal programs. During World War II Roosevelt along with the leaders of England and the Soviet Union, crushed Hitler and the Axis powers. He is the only president ever elected to more than two terms and died just three months into his 4th term.

Integration—The breaking down of barriers to allow for people of different races, ethnic groups, or nationalities to live together openly and equally.

Jim Crow—Was the name of a stereo-typical African-American from a minstrel song from the late 1800s. It became a blanket term used to describe the segregation and discrimination laws of the South.

Negro—A term used to describe African-Americans in the early to mid part of the twentieth century.

Plessy v Ferguson—The 1896 Supreme Court decision establishing a Constitutional justification for segregation based on upholding a Louisiana law that called for "separate but equal" accommodations.



Curriculum Guide

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

Prejudice—A bias for or against something without sufficient basis. It is often displayed as an irrational intolerance of or hostility towards people of another race, religion, nationality or group.

Racism—The belief that some races are inherently superior to others. This often leads to discrimination and in some cases persecution of one race by another.

Segregation—Isolating or separating ethnic groups or races. This was a policy, seen especially in the south, which kept blacks and whites from living near each other, going to school together or using the same public facilities.

Sortie—A combat mission carried out by aircraft.

Tuskegee Experiment—A program set up during WWII at the Tuskegee Institute to evaluate the feasibility of training African-Americans to fly military aircraft.

Tuskegee Institute—An educational institution for African-Americans founded in Tuskegee, Alabama by Booker T. Washington in 1881.



Curriculum Guide

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

Teaching Activities and Assignments

The following activities have been developed for teachers to use in the classroom or as homework assignments. They are grouped under the following topics: general activities and document specific activities. Each assignment has been designed in a way that allows students to utilize a variety of skills including: reading for understanding; interpreting audiovisual materials; analyzing photographs, letters, reports, correspondence, and speeches; writing with clarity; role-playing; and researching historic evidence. Each of the activities can be adapted to suit your students' needs and your own teaching style.

The educational impact of these activities will be greatly enhanced by a class visit to the Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum to view the *Freedom From Fear: FDR Commander in Chief* exhibit in person. We encourage you to contact our education department at 1 800 FDR-VISIT (prompt 4 for Education Department) to discuss fieldtrip arrangements.

This curriculum guide includes excerpts from period documents. Some of the historical documents contained in this curriculum guide reflect deep-seated and disturbing racial prejudices regarding African-Americans that were common among many white Americans in the early and middle years of the twentieth century. It is important to remember that these documents must be viewed in the context of their own time. While offensive to modern readers, they help us understand the intense opposition the Roosevelts and the Tuskegee Airmen faced over the issue of allowing black men to pilot military aircraft. The documents can be found in their entirety on our website www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu

General Activities

1. Ask students to imagine that they have managed to arrange a five minute meeting with President Roosevelt to discuss the importance of fully integrating African-Americans into the military. What evidence, arguments, and examples would they use to convince FDR? What response would the student have if FDR raised the following questions:
 - Why do we need to do this now? Why can't we wait?
 - How will I sell this politically to the Congress, and to the American people?
 - What impact will this have on the expectations of other minorities?
 - Haven't I already done enough?



Curriculum Guide

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

2. Ask students to consider to what extent does discrimination still exist? Beyond race, what is the basis of that discrimination? (age, gender, religion, nationality) What progress has been made since the time of the Tuskegee Airmen? Why then, does discrimination still exist? What more needs to be done?
3. Ask students to consider if there are times when it is okay to allow for discrimination if it serves a greater good. (for example age limits for fire fighters) If so, who gets to decide what level of discrimination is allowed? What criteria should be applied to make that determination? Now ask the students to consider if FDR might have considered his actions as serving the greater good? Was he justified in his thinking?
4. Ask students to examine the landmark events in the advancement of civil rights in the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s. (Truman's order to desegregate the military, *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights Legislation, *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California*) In what ways are these linked to the 'Tuskegee Experiment'?
5. Ask students to compare the treatment and advances made by African-Americans during World War II to the treatment and advances of women, Japanese-Americans and others. In what ways were their struggles similar, in what ways did they differ? Did some of these groups fare better than others? If so, why is that the case?
6. The Tuskegee Airmen faced danger in the skies over Europe, and discrimination in the streets of America. This took a great deal of personal courage and determination. Ask students to consider what it means to be courageous. What traits does one need to possess in order to be considered courageous? Ask them to describe something that they have done that required courage, and have them compare that to the men of Tuskegee.

Document Specific Activities

- 1) Ask students to review the excerpt from the 1925 *Army War College Report* and the *Command of Negro Troops* pamphlet. Have them compare and contrast the differences in the tone and conclusions of these two documents as they relate to the handling of African-American army personnel. In what ways are they the same? In what ways are they different? What factors or events might account for these similarities and differences?



Curriculum Guide

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

- 2) Mrs. Roosevelt was very impressed with the quality of the airmen she met at the Tuskegee Institute. So much so that she took a flight with one pilot in 1941. Afterwards she maintained a correspondence with a young enlisted man named Cecil Peterson. Ask students to read the letter he sent her on October 21, 1942. What is the tone of his letter? What types of activities does he describe to Mrs. Roosevelt? What are his hopes for the future? What do you think happened as a result of the incident he describes involving the train in Richmond? Would a similar situation have occurred in New York or Chicago?
- 3) Ask students to read the letter President Roosevelt sent dated October 14, 1944. What assurances is the President promising? What does the term 'equality of opportunity' mean? What is the President really saying in the final paragraph?
- 4) Ask students to review the intelligence report on white attitudes towards Negroes. Ask them to imagine what white attitudes towards blacks might have been in the summer of 1942. What do the results of the survey show about the attitudes of the whites? Did this surprise your students? What could account for those attitudes? According to the report, how does President Roosevelt weigh in on the matter?
- 5) Share with your students the photograph of Mrs. Roosevelt and "Chief" Anderson. What makes this a historic photo? Ask students to write a caption for the photo. Have them pretend they are journalists and ask them to write the story that would accompany the photo if it were to appear in their local newspaper.
- 6) Share with your students the copy of the June 25, 1941 Executive Order 8802 which reaffirmed a policy of "full participation in the National Defense Program by all citizens of the United States regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin..." What conditions precipitated this bold action on the part of FDR? What would have been the likely outcome if FDR had not issued the order when he did? In what way did Executive Order 8802 represent a model for future Civil Rights initiatives?