

### Set 3: World War II. MINORITIES AND MILITARY SERVICE:

**Document 1. James G. Thompson, letter to the editor, *Pittsburgh Courier*, originally printed January 31, 1942**

Like all true Americans, my greatest desire at this time, this crucial point of our history; is a desire for a complete victory over the forces of evil, which threaten our existence today. Behind that desire is also a desire to serve, this, my country, in the most advantageous way. Most of our leaders are suggesting that we sacrifice every other ambition to the paramount one, victory. With this I agree; but I also wonder if another victory could not be achieved at the same time...

Being an American of dark complexion and some 26 years, these questions flash through my mind: "Should I sacrifice my life to live half American?" "Will things be better for the next generation in the peace to follow?" "Would it be demanding too much to demand full citizenship rights in exchange for the sacrificing of my life." "Is the kind of America I know worth defending?" "Will America be a true and pure democracy after this war?" "Will colored Americans suffer still the indignities that have been heaped upon them in the past?"

...The "V for Victory" sign is being displayed prominently in all so-called democratic countries which are fighting for victory over aggression, slavery and tyranny. If this V sign means that to those now engaged in this great conflict then let colored Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory: The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies within. For surely those who perpetrate these ugly prejudices here are seeing to destroy our democratic form of government just as surely as the Axis forces.

--Online Annenberg Learner, America's History in the Making, Accessed June 11, 2017.  
[https://www.learner.org/courses/amerhistory/resource\\_archive/resource.php?unitChoice=19&ThemeNum=3&resourceType=2&resourceID=10106](https://www.learner.org/courses/amerhistory/resource_archive/resource.php?unitChoice=19&ThemeNum=3&resourceType=2&resourceID=10106)

## Document 2. Corporal Rupert Trimmingham Letter to *Yank* Magazine, April 1944

We could not purchase a cup of coffee at any of the lunchrooms around there. As you know, Old Man Jim Crow rules. The only place where we could be served was at the lunchroom at the railroad station but, of course we had to go into the kitchen. But that's not all; 11:30 a.m. about a two dozen German prisoners of war, with two American guards, came into the station. They entered the lunchroom, sat at the tables, had their meals served, talked, smoked, in fact had quite a swell time. I stood on the outside looking on, and I could not help but ask myself these questions: Are these men sworn enemies of this country? Are they not taught to hate and destroy all democratic governments? Are we not American soldiers, sworn to fight for and die if need be for this country? Then why are they treated better than we are? Why are we pushed around like cattle? If we are fighting for the same thing, if we are to die for our country, then why does the Government allow such things to go on? Some of the boys are saying that you will not print this letter. I'm saying that you will.

--Carl M. Cannon, *The Pursuit of Happiness in Times of War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004) 163

### Questions to Answer

1. Identify three specific aspects of the historical context for these documents (How did the context change from WW I to WWII?).

1.

2.

3.

2. What arguments were these sources making about African American participation in World War II?

3. Evaluate the extent of similarity between the arguments in the two documents.

4. What views of American and National Identity were expressed in these documents?

**Document 3. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, February 19, 1942 To the Secretary of War**

Now, therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, and Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War, and the Military Commanders whom he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated Commander deems such action necessary or desirable, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion. The Secretary of War is hereby authorized to provide for residents of any such area who are excluded therefrom, such transportation, food, shelter, and other accommodations as may be necessary, in the judgment of the Secretary of War or the said Military Commander, and until other arrangements are made, to accomplish the purpose of this order. The designation of military areas in any region or locality shall supersede designations of prohibited and restricted areas by the Attorney General under the Proclamations of December 7 and 8, 1941, and shall supersede the responsibility and authority of the Attorney General under the said Proclamations in respect of such prohibited and restricted areas....

--Online <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=74>

**Document 4. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, February 1, 1943 To the Secretary of War**

The proposal of the War Department to organize a combat team consisting of loyal American citizens of Japanese descent has my full approval. No loyal citizen of the United States should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of his citizenship, regardless of his ancestry. The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry. A good American is one who is loyal to this country and to our creed of liberty and democracy. Every loyal American citizen should be given an opportunity to serve this country wherever his skills will make the greatest contribution--whether it be in the ranks of our armed forces, war production, agriculture, government service, or other work essential to the war effort.

--Online <http://www.the442.org/activation.html>

**Document 5. Daniel Inouye, recalling how he volunteered for the army in World War II**

I considered myself a good American, patriotic like any other young man of my age...I was a senior then. And then I was told that we were to be designated 4-C: enemy alien. It's either 1-A or 4-F or 4-C: Enemy alien—that's us. And that meant we could not be drafted. Our neighbors and friends were sensitive, and they understood, but I wanted, like

thousands of my fellow Japanese-Americans, to demonstrate that we were just as good. So somebody started a petition movement, and I joined up and signed petitions to the President of the United States to give us an opportunity. And I remember the petition because it did not specify that. We said, 'We'll do anything you want us to do. Fight? You want us to do ditch digging? Labor battalion? We'll do anything you want.' Then, around January of forty-three, we got word that the President of the United States had issued an executive order establishing a twelve-hundred-man battalion, the 100th, made up mostly of men who had been drafted before December seventh of forty-one. Within a few months, the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team consisting of four battalions, was formed,

--Larry Smith, *Beyond Glory: Medal of Honor Heroes in Their Own Words* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003) 39-40

**Document 6. Keith Little, Navajo Code Talker, 24<sup>th</sup> Marines, Interview, 2004**

Well the Pearl Harbor attack on Sunday, December the 7th -- I was... at Ganado Mission School in... Arizona.... When we got back to the dormitory there was radio broadcasts, and... President Roosevelt... was talking on the radio. And he mentioned the sneak attack that the Japanese have made that Sunday morning and also the fact that this was "a day of infamy for the United States." ...Some of the buddies that I was running around with that were in the group was 18 years old... and I was a 15 year old kid at the time, and we all swore that we will join the Army or the Navy.... So we were going to all go into the service and make an effort to go to fight the war in the Pacific for retaliation for what Japan had done that day. So that kind of a feeling, that kind of a mental attitude kind of sticks with you... I don't know what you'd call it. Maybe it's love for your country or patriotism....

[At]...Iwo Jima....the...messages... were coded because we knew that... the Japanese are listening all the time.... I don't think no Japanese spoke Navajo or understand it....

--Little, Keith. Interview with Keith Little by Ann Ramsey. July 19, 2004. Library of Congress. Veterans History Project. Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project.

***Questions to Answer***

1. Identify three specific aspects of the historical context for these documents.

1.

2.

3.

2. What arguments were made in these documents about participation in World War II?

3. What views of American and National Identity were expressed in these documents?

4. Evaluate the extent of similarity between the arguments about the war made in Documents 1-2 with the arguments made in Documents 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Similarities:

Differences:

Are the arguments more similar or more different?

5. Thematic Review Question: After analyzing these documents about participation in these three wars, what patterns do you see in the debates over American values and American identity during wartime?