

STANDING UP AGAINST HATE

How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII

Mary Cronk Farrell



OVERVIEW

Standing Up Against Hate: How Black Women in the Army Helped Change the Course of WWII honors the African American women of the Women's Army Corps (WAC). This guide is intended to help students understand historical events and the ways African American women's contributions to the war have been erased, especially in conversations about "The Greatest Generation." Reading this book with students, as well as making it available for independent reading, invites opportunities to discuss historical omission, historical facts, and the impacts of segregation in the military. Most importantly, this book enables educators and students to work towards an accurate retelling and understanding of how African American women were instrumental to the United States Army and of the recognition they deserve, demonstrating that "Black WACs were among the bravest and most adventurous women in 1940s America" (p. 156).

Supporting the national Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in reading informational text for middle school curriculums, *Standing Up Against Hate* is an appropriate selection for grades six through nine in language arts, social studies, or humanities classes.

The following prompts provide for a critical analysis of *Standing Up Against Hate* using the CCSS for Informational Text. In addition, classroom activities are provided that will enhance analysis of the text.

Key Ideas and Details

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9

Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

For a complete listing of the Standards, go to corestandards.org.

PRE-READING IDEAS

These pre-reading ideas are intended to help educators create an environment that enables students to engage with the text deeply. Through activating students' prior knowledge, educators prepare young people to understand this complex text on multiple levels.

Mary Cronk Farrell includes a timeline and a glossary. Both of these tools are suitable starting points for educators to assess students' background knowledge of World War II and about racism that limited African Americans' access to opportunities in the United States. Strategies such as a K-W-L (Know, Want to Know, Learned) chart can support students' developing knowledge as they build on what they read and connect to their interests about further reading and extension activities. Additionally, supporting these inquiries with technology such as Padlet enables students to track their questions and develop understandings, ideas for further research, etc.

Farrell follows individual women throughout the book. Educators might select several of them (e.g. Major Charity Adams, Captain Dovey Johnson, etc.) and introduce them to students to help them make a personal connection. Educators might also have students track those soldiers throughout the text as a way of anchoring their understanding of events and the timeline, using a strategy like structured note-taking for support.

The book also benefits from robust primary-source photography, and educators could select from the many pictures to highlight. Drawing on Facing History's lesson plan to Analyze Images (link also found in the supplemental reading) will help students develop their critical literacy skills as they analyze primary source documents. These images also make powerful writing prompts to support instruction.

Addressing race and racism is imperative when teaching this text, particularly given that African American women were faced with discrimination and racism from the moment they attempted to join the Army. Students might be inclined to regard the racism African Americans faced as the problem of a few racist individuals; here, educators can be instrumental in helping them to understand institutional racism and the levels of racism that have operated in the United States military, among other places. Also, understanding that the United States military was segregated until after WWII (1954) is critical to establishing a context for thinking about African Americans' experiences within the armed services and the persistent inequality they endured while fighting for their country. Please see the supplemental reading section for additional resources to support these discussions.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

CHAPTER 1 • *Reporting for War Duty*

Describe the setting that greeted the WACs. What were they expected to do? What was happening around them? What was the significance of “no mail, low morale” to the work Charity Adams and her troops were required to complete?

CHAPTER 2 • *Second-Class Citizens*

Describe and analyze the reasons women wanted to join the Army and the resistance they encountered as a result of that desire. What was the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAACS) and how did it come into creation? Why was Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune such an important advocate for African American women? How did Bethune make her case with Eleanor Roosevelt? What was the significance of Bethune’s advocacy? Consider the political and racial climate for African Americans at the time the WAAC was founded. Explore why a career in the military offered the potential for different opportunities for African American women.

CHAPTER 3 • *Becoming Officers Together*

How were the experiences of Black and white women similar and different at Fort Des Moines, Iowa? Explain the ways the army created uniformity and the limits to that uniformity. Study examples of how women learned to complete their responsibilities, and the challenges they encountered. How were women regarded by army men? What did this treatment indicate about how women were regarded in the military overall?

First-Person Perspective Writing Prompt

Focusing on one of the following situations in this chapter, imagine yourself as a Black WAAC and create a descriptive short scene or snapshot that draws on details from the chapter (drills at night; a white woman’s refusal to put on a gas mask after a Black woman wore it first; putting on gold bars after completing training, etc.)

CHAPTER 4 • *Black Women Persist*

Describe the obstacles African American women experienced in recruitment, application, and enlistment. What did these instances of racism suggest about how African Americans were treated in the United States at the time?

How did African Americans resist and overcome those obstacles? What does their resistance and resilience suggest about how they viewed military service and their responsibility to the United States? Explore the different backgrounds of the recruits, especially Mary Daniels Williams, Bernice Thomas, and Ruby Lee Seals Carvin. Compare and contrast their experiences.

Once enlisted, African Americans faced continued racism. List the instances and cite specific examples of how Black WAACs responded and demonstrated their commitments to serve in the U.S. army.

CHAPTER 5 • *Every Victory Counts*

Charity Adams said, “Step sideways if you must, but never retreat” (p. 60). Select examples of the ways African American WAACs demonstrated this motto throughout the chapter, especially Martha Putney and Charity Adams’s organized resistance against segregated swimming pools and marching bands. Then, draw conclusions about the significance of these decisions.

CHAPTER 6 • *Black Soldiers Get the Dirty Work*

How did Jim Crow segregation impact WACs who often were highly educated and experienced? List the examples of African American women who were qualified for positions and the jobs the Army assigned them to do. Analyze the ways institutional racism limited their full participation in the U.S. Army. Consulting outside sources about Jim Crow (see supplemental reading section) will enhance this discussion.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 7 • *Black WACs Strike for Fair Jobs*

Assess what happened to Alice E. Young as a case study about how the Army operated as an institution. Consider Young's qualifications, the Army's response and actions, and Young's response. Then, reenact the trial, drawing on evidence from the chapter (including images) and write an entirely new trial that puts Colonel Crandall on trial for his actions. Evaluate the place of justice, power, racism, and other pertinent factors in the case as you decide on a verdict. Consult other sources as necessary to craft a historically accurate account.

CHAPTER 8 • *Violence Targets Black WACs*

Drawing on the language of Facing History's "Perpetrators, Bystanders, Upstanders, and Rescuers" (link also found in the supplemental reading), trace the violent attacks Black WACs experienced, paying particular attention to the beatings of Helen Smith, Tommie Smith, and Georgia Boson. Identify and evaluate the perpetrators, bystanders, upstanders and rescuers in these instances.

What was the role of African American newspapers in helping Black women make sure their treatment in the Army reached a broader audience?

CHAPTER 9 • *Called for Overseas Duty*

Why did the U.S. Army refuse to send Black WACs overseas? What events finally changed that decision, and what happened to Black WACs as a result? Describe Charity Adams's role in mobilizing overseas troops.

CHAPTER 10 • *The 6888th Goes to Europe*

Why was the 6888th's task of sorting and redirecting the mail so daunting? How did Major Charity Adams lead the 6888th? What qualities of leadership did she display? Which of these qualities are ones you admire and would like to emulate?

First-Person Perspective Writing Prompt

Write a letter home describing your first week in Glasgow, Scotland, being sure to include specific details from the excerpts of the women soldiers in this chapter.

CHAPTER 11 • *Welcomed as Equals*

How did the European racial climate differ from the United States, especially in the treatment of African Americans? The 6888th was led entirely by Black women from all ranks, including Major Adams, who was well respected by the Black WACs she commanded. Describe examples of Adams's efforts to keep her battalion's morale high and explain the importance of those actions. More specifically, why was the creation of a beauty parlor so significant to morale, especially during wartime?

CHAPTER 12 • *A Challenge to Leadership*

Major Adams faced a challenge from a white general who attempted to court-martial her. In return, Adams drew up court-martial charges on him. Why were these actions significant, both for Adams as a leader and for her continued relationship with the general? Interpret the significance of the general's words to Adams: "You outsmarted me, and I am proud that I know you."

CHAPTER 13 • *Mission Accomplished*

As the war wound down, Black WACs were deployed to France. How was the war different for them since it was nearing its end? What freedoms and obstacles did the soldiers experience?

First-Person Perspective Writing Prompt

Farrell writes about the 6888th's return to New York harbor on a ship as they see the Statue of Liberty. Imagine yourself as one of the soldiers and write about that moment from all of your senses (sight, sound, taste, touch).

CHAPTER 14 • *Black WACs Carry On*

What is the legacy of the Black WACs? What benefits did soldiers describe? What challenges? Do you think the United States has done enough to recognize, acknowledge, and celebrate their service? Propose an action that honors the Black WACs and present your idea to your peers. If you are able, attempt to carry out your action for a relevant audience.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Student-Led Research Inquiry

Standing Up Against Hate is a powerful launch for students' further inquiries about history. The topics listed below are ones that students could use for their own research topics. Educators could work with students to determine the best way to share their knowledge.

- Navajo Code Talkers
- Tuskegee Airmen
- The Double Victory Campaign
- Mary McLeod Bethune
- African American Newspapers
- LGBTQ soldiers in the military

Critical Photo Analysis

Guide students as they look through the photographs from the *New York Times* article, "Black Soldiers: Fighting America's Enemies Abroad and Racism at Home." Compare and contrast the article with *Standing Up Against Hate*. Students should make and defend a claim about their observations, using specific textual evidence from both texts for support.

Women in the Military: Then and Now

Use the forward from Major General Marcia M. Anderson to research the experiences of current African American women in the military. Draw on the *New York Times* article "Army Lifts Ban on Dreadlocks, and Black Servicewomen Rejoice" and the *Vogue* article "New Order." How has the military changed since the Black WACs? What are some current challenges and successes? Have students conduct a Socratic Seminar to discuss their findings and analysis.

SUPPLEMENTAL READING

African Americans in the U.S. Army

army.mil/africanamericans/timeline.html

Analyzing Images

facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/analyzing-images

Army Lifts Ban on Dreadlocks, and Black Servicewomen Rejoice

nytimes.com/2017/02/10/us/army-ban-on-dreadlocks-black-servicewomen.html

Black Soldiers: Fighting America's Enemies Abroad and Racism at Home

lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2017/06/05/black-soldiers-double-war-fighting-for-freedom/

History of African American Newspapers

www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/afam/reflector/newspaper.html

Jim Crow Stories: U.S. in World War II

thirteen.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_ww2.html

Let's Talk: Discussing Race, Racism and Other Difficult Topics with Students

tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/TT%20Difficult%20Conversations%20web.pdf

Moving the Race Conversation Forward

youtube.com/watch?v=LjGQaz1u3V4

New Order: A Trailblazing Generation of Black Military Servicewomen is Embracing the Natural Hair Movement

vogue.com/projects/13535484/army-ban-on-dreadlocks-black-servicewomen-military-natural-hair-portraits-twists-braids-afros/

Perpetrators, Bystanders, Upstanders, and Rescuers

facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/Perpetrators_Bystanders.pdf

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Foreword by Major General Marcia M. Anderson, U.S. Army (Ret.)



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Ages 10 to 14

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

★ *“The book is a gem for the nonfiction shelves that profiles an underrepresented narrative in American history.”*

—School Library Connection

“An adventurous ride through the history of black women pioneers.”

—Booklist

“The importance of this story is amplified by the inspiring foreword by Maj. Gen. Marcia M. Anderson, Army (Ret.), who makes a direct link between the determined struggles of those described and the achievements of African American women in today’s U.S. military. The stories in this valuable volume are well worth knowing.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary C. Farrell is an award-winning journalist and the author of *Fannie Never Flinched* and *Pure Grit*. She lives in Spokane, Washington. Visit her online at marycronkfarrell.net.