

# Uncovering Black British History

## The Second World War 1939-1945

### History KS2



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### History

### Key Stage 2

### Learning aims

- To learn about the contribution of Black people to the British war effort during The Second World War
- To find out how and where Black people from Britain and Black British subjects from its Empire, served in the British forces in World War Two
- To understand that the movement of people around the world during the war, also brought more Black people to Britain from other countries

### Curriculum links

- To understand the connections between national and international history and between military and social history
- To understand the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups
- To think critically, weigh evidence and develop perspective and judgement when engaging with historical sources

The lessons within Uncovering Black British History, are most suitable for KS2, with some for upper KS2. Please adapt these to your class and pupils.

### Keywords

**British Subjects** – people who lived in the colonies of the British Empire were citizens of the empire and were British subjects

**Colour bar** – a set of rules within an organisation designed to prevent people of colour joining and/or being promoted to leadership roles within that organisation

**The Merchant Navy** – Britain's commercial shipping fleet (as opposed to the Royal Navy which is Britain's military fleet)

**Regiment** – a unit of the army. They are often divided into two battalions of between 300 to 1,000 soldiers.



**Vichy France** – the name given to the French government during France's occupation by Germany during World War Two

**Auxiliary** – the name given to a military unit that provides support or help to the main fighting forces

**Navigator** – the person who uses radar, radio and other equipment to navigate a vessel, determining its position and course and locating key targets

**Lumberjack** – a person who fells trees, processes and then transports them for use

**G.I.s** – the nickname given to American soldiers

**Segregation** – a system that aims to keep groups of people separate, based on enforcing barriers to social mixing

**Negro** – a term (that is no longer generally used) to describe someone of Black African heritage

These can also be found at the end of this PDF and can be placed on a learning wall as they are discussed during the presentation.

### PowerPoint presentation

The accompanying PowerPoint presentation has 42 slides with the following learning points:

- Slides 1 and 2 establish the lesson focus: including the contribution of Black people from Britain and its colonies during World War Two, and how the movement of people around the world during the war also brought more Black people to Britain from other countries, especially America.
- Slide 3 explains that it was not only a European War: World War Two like World War One, involved fighting away from Europe and that East Africa, North Africa and Asia became key battlefields.

#### Activity 1 (slide 4)

- Slides 4 and 5, Quick Question: Ask the children if they have ever heard of a 'colour bar'? What do they think it might be? Answer: A colour bar is a set of rules within an organisation designed to prevent people of colour joining and/or being promoted to leadership roles within that organisation. We are used to thinking that they happen in other countries like America or South Africa under Apartheid, but they have a history in Britain too.
- Slide 6 looks at The British Forces and the Colour Bar: introducing the concept of the colour bar and how this was used to keep Black people out of the armed forces. Slides 7, 8 and 9 tell the story of Lilian Bader, a British born daughter of a West Indian sailor, and how she experienced, but overcame, the colour bar during World War Two.



- Slide 10 focuses on joining the War effort: discussing how Black men and women wanted, and were encouraged, to join the war effort.

### **Activity 2 (slide 11)**

- Slides 11 and 12, Quick Question: Britain was often referred to as 'the mother country'? Ask the children if they have heard that phrase before and what do they think it means? If children have access to the internet, get them to search for this term. Answer: Britain was at the centre of a global Empire and had colonies all across the world. Children in schools in Britain and its colonies were taught that Britain was the mother country, and its colonies were her daughters. Slides 13 and 14 explain who the Black British forces were, where they came from and where they served.
- Slides 15 and 16 look at The African Regiments: identifying the African regiments and explaining where they served. The King's African Rifles are especially significant as they became the first African regiment to fight outside of Africa, when they took part in the campaign in the Asian country of Burma (which is now called Myanmar), and fought against Japanese forces.
- Slide 17: introduces the West Indian Regiments, which men and women from the Caribbean joined during World War Two.

### **Activity 3 (slide 18)**

- Slides 18 and 19, Quick Question: Ask the children if they know what the term 'auxiliary' means? What kind of work do they think people in the auxiliary services do? Answer: Auxiliary is the name given to a military unit that provides support or help to the main fighting forces. Many Black people felt frustrated that when they signed up to fight in the war, they found themselves sent to join auxiliary units, doing supply and support work, and not getting to be part of fighting troops in actual battle. Slides 20 to 22 tell the story of Ulric Cross from Trinidad who joined the No. 139 (Jamaica) Squadron of the Royal Air Force, and who was awarded medals for his vital work on bombing missions over Europe.
- Slide 23 Black Civilian Workers: explains how Black civilians were recruited to work in essential industries in Britain during the war. They worked as skilled electricians, engineers and lumberjacks to support the war effort.
- Slides 24 and 25 tell the story of the Black G.I.s: who came to Britain as part of the American forces.

### **Activity 4 (slide 26)**

- Slides 26 and 27, Quick Question: Ask the children if they have ever heard of the term segregation? Do they know what it is and how it relates to the US Army during World War Two?



- Slides 28 to 32 explain that the army, like many of the southern states of America, was segregated, with Black troops kept in separate units, led by white officers. The US Army was able to maintain segregation on its British Army bases, but was not supported by the government or British people to maintain it off the bases.
- Slides 33 to 36 explain the story of once the G.I.s left: We look at the Black G.I.s who fell in love with white British women, and the 'brown babies' that were born during and after the war. It explains that American and British authorities put obstacles in their way to stop them marrying and from bringing their babies back to the USA after the war.

#### **Activity 4 (slides 37 and 38)**

- Slides 37 and 38: read these news stories about the Black G.I.s and their relationships. Ask the children what they think about how they were treated? Imagine that it is 1945. Can they write a news article that tells the story of the Black G.I.s and their families, and that tries to persuade the US and British governments to let them be together? Ask them to record their answers on the worksheet provided in this PDF.
- Slides 39 to 42 conclude with a reflection of how the contribution of Black people to the British war effort was quickly forgotten, and how poorly the Black G.I.s and their families were treated. We go on to state that historians today, like Professor Lucy Bland, are trying to put some of this right by telling their stories. Useful links and resources are provided on slide 41 for further information.



# Black American GIs and white British women

Read these news stories from 1947 and 2021 about the Black G.I.s and their relationships. What do you think about how they were treated? Imagine that it is 1945. Can you write a news article that tells the story of the Black G.I.s and their families, and that tries to persuade the US and British governments to let them be together?



## She Loved Negro G.I., Gaoled

Miss Margaret Goosey, former boot factory worker of Wellingborough, Northants, serving a six-months' prison sentence in Goochland, Virginia, because of her love for the negro G.I. she met in England during the war, was to-day awaiting transport to return home.

Of the sentence imposed on her, under Virginian law, for living with the negro, Miss Goosey has served three weeks - at the Goochland Industrial Farm because there is no county gaol in Goochland.

She will have the rest of her sentence waived as soon as the necessary travel facilities can be arranged.

**Derby Daily Telegraph**, 18th December 1947



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### **The children born to Black American GIs and white British women during Second World War**

British authorities tried to implement segregation at dance halls, cinemas and pubs but to the dismay of white American GIs, these became meeting spots for Black Americans and British women which later resulted in the birth of around 2,000 mixed race babies in Britain. Following victory in Europe, American servicemen returned home, unable to continue relationships with their British sweethearts, not least because 30 of the 50 US states had anti-miscegenation laws forbidding interracial relations.

Professor Bland documented the experience of 60 of these children in her 2019 publication Britain's 'Brown Babies': the stories of children born to black GIs and white women in the Second World War... The children, who came to be known by the British press as the nation's "Brown Babies", grew up in post-war Britain in the South West, East Anglia, Lancashire and South Wales, and had varying experiences of life in predominantly white societies...

Home Secretary Herbert Morrison... encouraged many mothers to send their babies to the children's home, Holnicote House, in Somerset. Professor Bland explained: "Somerset County Council requisitioned this beautiful house originally for children who were evacuated during the war, but increasingly they got more children on their books from married women having mixed race children who they weren't able to keep. "Some of these babies arrived just a week old", she added. Holnicote House was staffed by young nurses who were very loving towards the children, and according to Professor Bland, many of those who she interviewed recalled having happy childhoods there. But it was when the children got older and started attending school in predominately white communities that they began to experience racial discrimination.

While undertaking her research, Professor Bland spoke with a number of individuals who struggled to find their fathers due to the lack of cooperation from the American military in the decades following the war. Some were successful in eventually connecting with their fathers or extended family in America, if only much later in their lives. Of all the 2,000 mixed-race children born, only Leon Lomax was adopted and raised by his biological father in America before the UK government stopped adoption requests, not wanting to appear to owe the US any more following WWII.

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**Hannah Simpson, The Bristol Post, 8 October 2021**



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# Uncovering Black British History

## The Second World War 1939-1945: Keywords Flashcards



**British  
Subjects**

**Colour bar**

**The  
Merchant  
Navy**

**Regiment**

**Vichy  
France**

**Auxiliary**





**Navigator**

**Lumberjack**

**G.I.s**

**Segregation**

**Negro**



# British Subjects



# Colour bar



# The Merchant Navy



# Regiment



# **Vichy France**



# Auxiliary



# Navigator



# Lumberjack



# G.I.S



# Segregation



# Negro

