African Americans in WWII

Grade Level: 8

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED:

1) San Diego Union article, “New American Racial Frontier Looms as War Workers Flock to San Diego,” March 18, 1945
2) Photographs of Pacific Parachute Company, 1943
3) San Diego Informer article, “San Diego Citizen Makes History,” March 27th, 1942
4) San Diego Union Tribune article*, “For first black Marines, a proud record in a divided Corps,” February 24, 1993
   *ADVISORY: This document briefly refers to the rape of a Naval Academy nurse.
5) Excerpt from San Diego Informer article, “Negro Women’s Stake in the War Effort,” March 27th, 1942

HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS:
8th Grade
8.3 (7) Understand the functions and responsibilities of a free press.
8.11 Students analyze the character and lasting consequences of Reconstruction
8.11 (5) Understand the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution and analyze their connection to Reconstruction.

COMMON CORE READING STANDARDS FOR LITERACY IN HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES
8th Grade
1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
6. Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g. loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
7. Integrate visual information (e.g. in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
8. Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Historical Context:
During times of war many changes occur rapidly, regardless of whether or not we are prepared to face them. World War II was no exception. Changes ranged from economic highs and lows to revisions in military policy. Shifting views on racial segregation/integration were a national concern. However, despite these feelings of racial division, more than 2.5 million African-American men registered for the draft and a significantly large number of African American women volunteered in the labor force. They served their country with distinction and made valuable contributions to the war effort in both the private and public sector.

Students’ Task:
Your students’ task is based on the accompanying documents and is designed to assess their ability to work with and interpret historical documents. As they analyze each document, remind them to take into account the source of each, the author/organization’s point of view(s), and their knowledge of the historical era. Let them know that their answers are based on their own interpretation of the documents and as long as their answers are logical and their interpretations are supported by the contents of the document, they will be considered correct.
*Small group, whole-class, or jigsaw (recommended)
8th Grade Questions and Essay Prompts

Part A: Analyze the documents and answer the questions that follow.

Document 1: San Diego Union article, “New American Racial Frontier Looms as War Workers Flock to San Diego,” March 18, 1945

1. According to the article, what was the migration pattern of African-Americans before World War II?
2. What does “Racial Frontier” mean in this article?
3. Does the title of this article suggest that this new migration is good or bad? Explain your answer.

Document 2: Photographs of Pacific Parachute Company, 1943

1. Do you see evidence of diversity in these photographs?
2. If there is diversity, do you think this is significant for 1943?
3. If you did not know the date of these photographs, what clues would help you determine the time period?

Document 3: San Diego Informer article, “San Diego Citizen Makes History,” March 27th, 1942

1. Why is this event cause for celebration?
2. What does the author mean when writing that the factory is in “no sense, a Negro factory”?
3. This pivotal event occurred during World War II. What is another war in American history that furthered civil rights for African Americans?

Document 4: San Diego Union Tribune article, “For first black Marines, a proud record in a divided Corps,” February 24, 1993

1. When was Executive Order 8802 issued and what did it mandate?
2. Walt Travis said, “I felt we had something to prove.” What do you think he meant by that?
3. This article was written in 1993. Do you think an article like this would have been published during the 1940’s? Why or why not?

Document 5: San Diego Informer article, “Negro Women’s Stake in the War Effort,” March 27th, 1942

1. Why are so many women needed in the labor force?
2. According to this article, why do “Negro women” share “handi-caps…in the war production program”?
3. Do you view this article as an advertisement calling for women of all races to work? Why or why not?

Part B: Essays

Using both your knowledge of US History and the documents provided, answer one of the following prompts in a well organized essay that includes an introduction, body, and conclusion.

1. Describe how wars effect migration in US history. Use examples from at least two wars.
2. Describe the challenges that African Americans faced after the abolishment of slavery.
NEW AMERICAN RACIAL FRONTIER LOOMS AS WAR WORKERS FLOCK TO SAN DIEGO

BY RICHARD F. FOURAS

The Union's Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON, March 17 (Special)—The Joads and the Negros are on the march. Abandoned cabins and half-completed villages along the main highways of the deep south give mute evidence of the drift of population to northern and west coast industrial areas.

For nearly three-quarters of a century, the census bureau reports, Negro migration was mostly north to north, but World War II developed a new shift—west, where, some observers believe, a new American racial frontier was opened.

The census bureau says that in the five congested urban production areas in the west—Los Angeles, San Diego, Portland-Vancouver, Puget Sound, and San Francisco—total Negro population grew from 177,000 in 1940 to about 220,000 in 1944—an increase of more than 50 percent.

The president's committee on congested production areas estimated San Diego's Negro population increased 45 percent, to about 5500.

JUST BEGINNING TO ROLL

And the population tide may just be beginning to roll. Experts who have studied conditions in the south believe that after the war 800,000 to 2,500,000 whites and Negros may swim away from the land they and their people have tilled for generations and seek to find new opportunities in the north and west.

One of the biggest factors in this coming migration, which may produce the greatest population movement since the westward surge across the Alleghenies, is the development of the robot cotton picker which is expected to come into its own after the war. There also is the specter of syndicalizing the cotton fields and the King Cotton.

The displacement of human labor eventually may cut loose 400,000 Negroes and a half million whites, according to Dr. T. Lynn Smith, authority on population migration at Louisiana State university, and Dr. Charles S. Johnson, nationally known Negro sociologist at Fisk in Nashville, Tenn.

The only hope of stemming this population tide is believed to lie in a greater industrialization of the south and the expansion of diversified farming.

What has happened during the war?

The bureau of census, in a report on wartime Negro migration, showed that the rate of Negro population growth in the Portland-Vancouver and San Francisco areas, 47 percent and 27 percent, respectively, were exceptionally high. The largest absolute increase, of 58,000, occurred in Los Angeles, where the Negro population grew from 73,000 in 1940 to 131,000 in 1944.

In the five congested areas alone the Negro population increased by 121,000, from 107,000 to 228,000. In some cases, Negro settlement in the south practically transferred to California.

MILLION INCREASE REPORTED

As a whole, wartime migration has increased California's population by a million persons. In a report on wartime population migration, the president's committee pointed out that the west coast areas, generally considered to be outside the great industrial belt that stretches from New England south to the Panama Canal, transferred 1,536,000 people to the state, the largest bloc from the west north central region and the west south central states.

States in the first group include Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas. In the second group are Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas—which may prove the source of the potential new population shifts following the war.

"Ten years ago," the president's committee said, "many of the production areas that today are feeling the impact of too many employed workers were appealing for federal aid to stop the overrunning of their areas by the migratory unemployed—the 'invaders' of the post-depression. The 'Joads' it would seem, are a problem at both extremes of the business cycle."

MATERIAL OFFERED FOR STUDY

What about after the war?

"The large proportion in medium and long distance migrants, particularly the latter," the report said, "should serve as additional material for close study when the post-war problems of readjustment are considered. The swelling up of population on the west coast was a cause for alarm that led to many protests, hearings and much editorializing in the 1930s. Border patrols and blockades were established to turn back unwanted migrants on the move west."

"The war has changed all that; but only for the present. Unless a new surge of people out of the south, answered—the question whether this new wartime Negro population will remain."

"Past experience suggests that the Negro is more likely to have made a permanent move than the white migrant."

"The urban-industrial centers of the north central and west coast regions may be somewhat short of the promised land for this minority group. It remains true that these same areas are, by comparison with those left, superior in terms of economic opportunity, and a return of any considerable proportions is hardly to be expected."

MANY TO REMAIN ON COAST

As for the new white worker, the committee reported that in the Portland-Vancouver area, the Kaiser Co. found that about 70 percent of its shipyard workers either had decided to stay or intended to stay as long as jobs were available. In Seattle, a chamber of commerce survey showed that up to 60 percent of the city's war workers wanted to work in Seattle after the war. The San Diego chamber of commerce, in a similar survey, produced figures showing 75 percent of the in-migrants wanted to remain.

The committee admitted that circumstances will determine the amount of the population that actually will remain on the west coast. The resulting problems the president's committee believes, will be national—problems which many believe may be complicated by a new surge of people out of the south.
On Thursday afternoon and evening, March 26, the citizenry of San Diego, without regard to race, color or creed, climax one of the greatest historical events in not only the history of San Diego and California, but of the entire nation. In two gigantic dedication services, signifying the culmination of the dreams and aspirations of young Howard (Skippy) Smith, the financial backer of the organization. Mr. Anderson was greeted, as he alighted from the train, by thousands of eager, awaiting admirers and by a citizens committee, members of the 7th Regiment of the State Guard, government and city officials, representatives of organized labor and a unit of the Women's Ambulance and Transport Corps, paratroopers. Representatives of the daily press, including official photographers, covered both meetings.

From the train, the convoy proceeded to the plant of the newly organized firm, The Pacific Parachute Company, at 627 8th avenue, where a formal dedication service was held. This service was closed to the public.

The Pacific Parachute Company, the brain-child of Skippy Smith and the Fairy God child of Rochester Anderson, marks a most unusual forward step in the history of the Negro in America, as well as in the history of America itself. This is the first and only instance of Negroes owning and operating an exclusively war implement factory in the annals of our existence as a nation. While the Pacific Parachute factory is owned and operated by a Negro, it is, in no sense, a Negro factory.

One glance at the personnel of the plant will convince the most skeptical that it is essentially, an American institution engaged in the business of furnishing the munitions of war to Americans on the far-flying battlefields.

Speakers at the afternoon meeting included the Rev. R. C. Pleasner, W. E. Moore, representative of Gov. Olson, Vice Mayor Harley Knox, Frank P. Davis of the Civil Aeronautics Board, W. W. Brown, A. E. Fauntleroy, head of the Standard Parachute Company and other of Skippy's staunch supporters.

The evening meeting, held at the Memorial Junior High School auditorium, was attended by representatives of the Royal Eagles, social club, was one of the largest attended meetings held in that auditorium. Practically the same program as the afternoon, was presented with a few additions, including Mrs. A. Howard, the mother of the former friend and partner of Skippy. Mac (Skip) Graevly, to whom the plant was dedicated.
of his pockets."  
"I was cool," Marbre recalled.

The Marines at the front gate didn’t think so. "Don’t he sweet," one remarked sarcastically before hustling over Marbre’s first military lesson.

"They gave me a bucket to put over my head and they made me jump up and down," Marbre said. "Every now and then they’d bang it on the head. Then they made me do the duck walk. I started wondering if I was in the right place."

For the entire eight to 12 weeks of training, the Montford Point recruits were never allowed to walk on base. They ran everywhere until the completion of basic training.

Not all memories brutal

Charles S. Grant, 73, remembers being treated harshly by white and black GI instructors, who were equally insistent on calling recruits "trigger finger." Once when Grant was running from the mess hall to the barracks, a black superior officer ordered him to "hit it — bend over and grab his ass."

The officer then kicked him in the ass. "It left a mark."

Grant went on to serve 30 years, doing three tours each in the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Not all of the memories are of brutality. Several of the veterans recall going to dances on base at which musical greats Duke Ellington and Count Basie played for them. Former heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis also fought exhibitions there.

Walt Travis, now 67, was drafted in 1944 after dropping out of high school. The second-oldest of 11 children from Lexington, Miss., Travis welcomed military service as being better than picking cotton and performing the other grueling work on his parents’ farm.

He was gung-ho, ready to prove his mettle in World War II battle.

"I felt we had something to prove," said Travis, who served 22 years before retiring as a gunnery sergeant. "I felt we were as good as the white guys, but they didn’t look that way toward us."

Throughout World War II, black Marines participated in nearly every operation, from Guadalcanal to the occupation of Japan. Black units engaged in heavy battle on Saipan and the Philippines, and depot and ammunition companies received the Presidential Unit Citation.

At two Jims, the 8th Ammunition Company won the Navy Unit Commendation.

Coudn’t get served

But many black Marines did not get to face the enemy in battle.

Marvin Cherry was living in Americus, Ga., when he was drafted in 1944. One of his most enduring memories is riding in a troop caravan from Montford Point to Norfolk, Va., where his unit was shipping out to the Pacific.

He remembers passing through small towns and stopping for food. None of the restaurants would let them sit down and eat.

"There I was, in uniform, going off to fight for my country, and couldn’t sit down and have a meal," said Cherry, 67. "I was just a damn kid, but that really hurt me. I’ll never forget that."

He also recalls an incident on a small island in the Pacific where the black troops were camped on one side, far from a small crow of nurses.

One night his commanding officer woke up the entire unit with news that one of the nurses had been raped, allegedly by a black Marine. The officer had a cap in his hand that supposedly belonged to the rapist, and he told each man to take a look at it. Cherry refused.

"I just did not believe a black guy raped a white woman out there," said Cherry, who served in the Marines for 19 years, retiring as a staff sergeant. "I thought it was a setup. I still don’t believe it."

As punishment, Cherry had to march around the island, all 150 pounds of him, with a sign that read: "Negroes are not welcome here."
NEGRO WOMEN'S
STAKE IN THE
WAR EFFORT

The work skills of women
of all races, young and older
women, will be needed by
the Nation to meet the de-
mands of maximum war pro-
duction, according to Miss
Mary Anderson, Director of
the Women's Bureau, U. S.
Department of Labor. She
holds that Negro women are
an important part of the total
women labor supply, to
which industry and agricul-
ture must turn for workers
in this emergency.

Negro women workers as
a group share the handicap
common to women workers
in the war production pro-
gram, Miss Anderson point-
ed out. "Women have not
had adequate opportunities
to secure the training neces-
sary to qualify themselves
for many types of industrial
jobs which they could do
very well," she said. "The
number of highly skilled
women workers available
for war industries is relatively
small. As unskilled or

(Continued on Page Four)