

**Hero Abroad, Second Class Citizen at Home:
John Seagraves, African-Americans & World War II**

“The world’s greatest democracy fought the world’s greatest racist with a segregated army” – Stephen Ambrose

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the various contributions and difficulties faced by African Americans during World War II. Students will study various primary source documents, participate in a PowerPoint centered discussion, and read excerpts from *Uncommon Hero: The John Seagraves Story*, which shares the story of John Seagraves, an African American man who served in the US Navy aboard the *USS North Carolina* (the most decorated battleship of WWII.) The lesson culminates with a project where students are responsible for creating a book cover about a topic for an anthology of African Americans and World War II.

Special thanks to John Seagraves for his service during World War II and to David Seagraves, the author of Uncommon Hero, for sharing his father’s story.

Grade

11

NC Essential Standards for US History II

- **AH2.H.4.1:** Analyze the political issues and conflicts that impacted the United States since Reconstruction and the compromises that resulted
- **AH2.H.7.3:** Explain the impact of wars on American society and culture since Reconstruction
- **AH2.H.8.2:** Explain how opportunity and mobility impacted various groups within American society since Reconstruction
- **AH2.H.8.3:** Evaluate the extent to which a variety of groups and individuals have had opportunity to attain their perception of the “American Dream” since Reconstruction

Materials

- “Heroes Abroad, Second Class Citizens at Home” PowerPoint. Available in the Database of K-12 Resources:
 - http://civics.sites.unc.edu/files/2014/04/AfAmWWII_PPT.pdf
- “Should I Sacrifice to Live Half American?” editorial letter, attached (p. 9)
- Excerpts from *Uncommon Hero: The John Seagraves Story*, attached (pp. 10 - 23)
 - Excerpt #1: Graham Jackson (p. 10 – 11)
 - Excerpt #2: Boot Camp (p. 12 - 14)
 - Excerpt #3: St. Simons Island (p. 15 – 16)
 - Excerpt #4: Shore Leave (p. 17 – 19)
 - Excerpt #5: The Showboat, Life on Board, & Gunner Shot (p. 20 – 23)
 - All excerpts edited for length by the NC Civic Education Consortium.
 - To purchase copies of the complete *Uncommon Hero*, visit the official website: <http://uncommonherobook.com/>
- “Anthology of African Americans and World War II” assignment, attached (p. 24)

- “Anthology Review” handout, attached, (p. 25)
 - “African Americans and World War II Links” handout, attached (p. 26)
 - Poster board or art paper and art supplies (colored pencils, crayons, etc.)
 - “Executive Order 9981” handout, attached (p. 27)
- **Note:** All links contained in this lesson were active as of February 2014. For any links that become inactive, teachers should enter the topic into a search engine to find alternate sites.

Essential Questions:

- Why did many African Americans fight for a country that denied them equal rights?
- What types of discrimination did African Americans face during World War II?
- How did many African Americans respond to discrimination during World War II?
- What changes did African Americans fight for during World War II?
- How did the African American experience in World War II influence the Civil Rights Movement?

Duration

- 2 block periods

Student Preparation

- Students should complete this lesson after learning about the United States and World War II.

Teacher Preparation

- It is recommended that students have access to the internet for the anthology activity, but if internet access isn’t available in the classroom, coordinate with the school’s media center about borrowing resources focused on World War II and/or African American history.
- As an alternative, the *Uncommon Hero* reading activity can be assigned for homework the night before in order to leave more class time for the culminating anthology activity.

Procedure

Warm Up: Quote Discussion

1. As a warm up, project the following quote, on slide 2 of the “Heroes Abroad” PowerPoint, from historian Stephen Ambrose: “The world’s greatest democracy fought the world’s greatest racist with a segregated army.” Allow students time to contemplate the quote before discussing:
 - Who do you think Stephen Ambrose is referring to in this passage?
 - Who do you think is “the world’s greatest racist” according to Ambrose?
 - What war do you think Ambrose is referring to?
 - What is segregation and what do you already know about it? Why do you think the army was segregated?
 - What do you know about segregation and the armed forces?
 - How do you think African Americans felt about risking their lives for a country that denied them equal rights?

Double V Campaign

2. Move to slide 3 of the PowerPoint and without revealing any information, ask students to quietly view the image for a few minutes. After students have had time to consider the image, pose the following questions to the class:
 - What do you think this poster is advertising?

- When do you think this poster was created and why?
 - Are there any words, symbols, images, etc. that help you determine the origin of the poster?
 - What do you think “Double Victory” refers to?
3. Next, project or distribute the attached “Should I Sacrifice to Live as Half American?” letter to the editor and instruct students to silently read the letter. Once students have had ample time to read, move to slide 4, instruct them to turn to a partner and discuss the following questions together:
- What do you think the author means by “living half American?”
 - What past indignities against “colored Americans” is Mr. Thompson referring to?
 - What is “Jim Crow” or what are Jim Crow Laws? What were conditions for African Americans like under Jim Crow?
 - Where are does Mr. Thompson we fighting for a “double victory”?
 - *Without and within, at home and abroad, etc.*
 - Who or what do you think “enemies from without” is referring to?
 - *Answers will vary, but can include: Europe, the Pacific, Germany, Japan, etc.*
 - Who or what do you think “enemies from within” is referring to?
 - *Answers will vary, but can include: fighting against racism, segregation at home & in the military, Jim Crow, etc. Fighting for equal rights, civil rights, fair treatment, anyone who oppresses African-Americans, etc.*

After a few minutes, reconvene as a class and discuss student thoughts.

4. Share the following information from slide 5 with students: “Mr. Thompson’s suggestion for a “Double V” campaign was quickly put into action by the newspaper that published Mr. Thompson’s letter, the *Pittsburgh Courier*. At the time, *The Courier* was the nation’s most widely read African-American newspaper. In support of the campaign, the *Courier* encouraged its readers to buy war bonds, ran editorials, ads and urged African American members of the military to share their stories of their wartime experiences.” (*Additional information about the Double V campaign can be found here: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/what-was-black-americas-double-war/>*)

Discuss:

- What do you think were the goals of the Double V campaign? Do you think the Double V campaign accomplished those goals?
- How do you think the Double V campaign encouraged African Americans to fight for victory abroad? At home?
- Do you think the poster you viewed is an effective way to inform people about the Double V campaign? Why or why not?
- The slogan for the Double V campaign was “Victory at Home - Abroad”. If you were in charge of the Double V campaign, what slogan would you use? Why?

Heroes Abroad, Second Class Citizens at Home

5. Share the information on slides 6-19, about the African American experience during World War II. The PowerPoint is intended to foster a class discussion, rather than just lecture. Use the following discussion questions with the class.

Optional: Provide students with a copy of the attached “Heroes Abroad, Second Class Citizens at Home” notes for students to complete during the PowerPoint and discussion.

- Slide 6: Great Migration
 - How do you think African Americans were treated once they moved north?
 - Why do you think more African Americans didn’t leave the South before the 1940s to escape Jim Crow?
 - What hardships do you think African Americans faced once they left the South?
 - What might have improved for African Americans upon leaving the South?
- Slides 7 - 8: Executive Order 8802
 - Why do you think that A. Philip Randolph threatened to march on Washington?
 - How might this march be perceived by Americans, especially in light of World War II?
 - Why do you think Roosevelt agreed to issue Executive Order 8802?
 - What lessons, if any, can you learn from A. Philip Randolph’s actions?
 - How did A. Philip Randolph’s actions influence future Civil Rights leaders?
- Slides 9 – 10: Patriotism Crosses the Color Line
 - How would you feel if someone assumed this about you?
 - How might this view of African Americans as “careless, shiftless, etc.” have affected African Americans in the armed forces?
 - How do you think African Americans in the armed forces responded to this view?
 - Why do you think only 4,000 African Americans were serving in the armed forces in 1941?
- Slides 11 – 12: African American Recruitment & Graham Jackson
 - Why do you think that the armed forces began thinking about African American recruitment after EO 8802?
 - Do you think that the armed forces reached their goal of 10% African American recruitment? Why or why not?
- Slides 13-14: African Americans in the Marines
 - What does Thomas Holcomb’s quote tell you about the Marines’ attitude towards African Americans? Why do you think African Americans would want to serve in the Marines if that was the attitude they faced?
- Slides 15 – 16: African Americans in the Army

Note: Originally, the Air Force was part of the US Army before becoming a separate branch in 1947.

 - The Red Ball Express was a truck convoy that supplied the troops fighting on the front in Europe. Why do you think they were a vital part of the war effort?
 - Why do you think that the Army began to allow African American soldiers to fight instead of serve in support positions?
 - Why do you think that the Tuskegee Airmen were also called the “Red Tail Angels”? What does that nickname imply?
 - *They were called the Red Tail Angels because they flew planes with red tails and they had a rate of successfully escorting bombers to their targets without getting shot down.*

- Slide 17: African Americans in the Navy
 - Why do you think African Americans were barred from joining the navy starting in 1919? What does this imply about African Americans in the Navy before 1919?
 - Why do you think African Americans were allowed to serve, but weren't recruited by the Navy from 1932 – 1941?
- Slide 18: Dorie Miller
 - Do you think Dorie Miller helped to change many white Americans' perception of African Americans? If so, how?
 - How do you think African Americans felt about Dorie Miller?
 - Why do you think Dorie Miller chose to fight for a country that treated him as a second class citizen?
- Slide 19: African American Women in the War
 - What important contributions did African American women make to the war effort?
 - How might working for the war effort provided women with more freedom than before?

Uncommon Hero: The John Seagraves Story

6. Inform students that although each person's experience is unique, many African Americans held conflicted feelings about fighting for the United States in World War II; wondering how could they fight for "freedom" abroad, when they were denied it at home? Move to Slide 20, which is the cover for the book, *Uncommon Hero: The John Seagraves Story*, and without revealing any information, instruct students to silently contemplate the cover. After a minute or two, discuss the following questions with the class:
- Based upon the cover, what do you think this book is about?
 - Do you think this book is fiction or non-fiction and why?
 - What time period do you think this book focuses on? What evidence makes you think this?
 - What do you think the title means?
 - When you hear the word "hero", who or what comes to mind? In your opinion, what makes a person a hero?
 - Why might John Seagraves be considered an "uncommon hero"?

Tell students that they will examine the inspiring story of John Seagraves, an African American man who served in the US Navy aboard the *USS North Carolina* (the most decorated battleship of WWII), by reading excerpts from his biography, *Uncommon Hero: The John Seagraves Story*. First, review the background information on slide 21.

7. Next, provide each student with one of the following excerpts from *Uncommon Hero: The John Seagraves Story*. Inform students that the excerpts have been edited for length, so there might be some small gaps in the story, but it will not impact their ability to answer the questions:
- Excerpt #1: Graham Jackson
 - Excerpt #2: Boot Camp
 - Excerpt #3: St. Simons Island
 - Excerpt #4: Shore Leave
 - Excerpt #5: The Showboat, Life on Board, & Gunner Shot

- **Teacher Notes:** If possible, print each of the excerpts on five different colors of paper – this will make the excerpts easier to decipher as well as make the transition to the second group easier.

Instruct students to read their assigned excerpt and answer the attached questions.

- **Teacher Note:** If the reading excerpts were assigned for homework the night before completing this lesson, move to step 9, below.

8. Allow students to use the remaining class time to read their excerpts and to answer the attached questions. Instruct students to finish the readings and questions for homework.

Day Two

9. As a warm up, project [slide 22](#) – “United We Win” poster - and discuss the following questions with students:
 - Why do you think the federal government commissioned this poster?
 - What message is the poster trying to convey?
 - Who do you think is the intended audience for this poster?

Share the following information about the poster from the Amistad Digital Resource website (<http://www.amistadresource.org/>)

In an effort to counter the demoralizing effect of racial segregation and discrimination, the U.S. government launched several campaigns that highlighted the contributions of African Americans to the war effort.

- Do you think this campaign was effective? Why or why not?
10. Instruct students to “jigsaw,” so that new groups are re-formed with one student representing each excerpt in every group. (If the five excerpts were copied on different colors of paper, each new group will have at least one pair with each color of paper.) Once students are settled in their new groups, give each group 15-20 minutes (around 4 minutes per topic) to summarize their excerpts. As groups begin to finish, project [slide 23](#) and instruct students to discuss the debrief questions with their groups. Once all the groups have finished, discuss the debrief questions as a class:
 - What words would you use to describe John Seagraves?
 - How might John Seagraves’ experience have been different from other African Americans?
 - What forms of discrimination did John Seagraves experience? How did he react to discrimination?
 - If you could talk to John Seagraves, what questions would you ask him about his life?
 - Would you lie about your age to join the military? Why or why not?
 - If you had to rename the book, *Uncommon Hero*, what title would you use? Why?

The Anthology of African Americans and World War II

11. As a culminating activity, students will pair up and together design a book cover for part of a fictional series, “Anthology of African Americans and World War II”. (Teachers can also have

students work individually if preferred.) Provide students with the attached assignment sheet, as well as the “African Americans and World War II Links” and “Anthology Review” handouts. Go over the instructions with students and then assign each pair one of the topics below. (The list below is a list of suggested topics. Teachers can elect to assign all items in the list, or edit the list by omitting topics or adding alternate topics.)

Topics

- The Great Migration
- Double V Campaign (or Double Victory Campaign)
- A. Philip Randolph
- Executive Order 8802
- African Americans in the Marines (51st Defense Battalion or 52nd Defense Battalion or Montford Point)
- African Americans in the Army (Red Ball Express or 92nd Infantry Division or 761st Tank Battalion)
- The Tuskegee Airmen
- African Americans in the Navy
- Dorie Miller
- African American Women and World War II
- John Seagraves

12. Teachers should determine how much class time to provide for research, brainstorming and design. Teachers may also want to provide poster board or art paper of a particular size so that all finished student work is comparable. After the allotted time, ask students to hang their book covers around the room and instruct students to do a “gallery walk.” Students should circulate around the room viewing the various covers and taking notes on what they see using the “Anthology Review” handout provided. (Teachers can provide multiple copies of the handout based on how many book covers they want students to review. Alternatively, teachers can have student create a similar chart on notebook paper rather than providing the handout.) After students have had time to examine the book covers, have each pair of students briefly discuss their cover with the class, explaining why they chose the title & images. Allow the class to discuss the similarities and differences between each group’s titles.
13. After all covers have been discussed, teachers can allow the class to discuss which book they would most like to read based on the covers created and why. Culminate with a discussion:
 - What were some similarities between the African American experiences you learned about? What were some differences?
 - Do you think many Americans changed their views about African Americans after World War II? Why or why not?
 - Why do you think some African Americans did not elect to register for the draft?
 - Besides military service, what were some other ways African Americans contributed to the war effort?
 - How do you think the African American experience during World War II impacted the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s & 60s?

Executive Order 9981

14. In July 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981, formally ending segregation in the armed forces. Project or copy and distribute the attached, Executive Order 9981, and ask students to read the handout aloud in their partners. Project slide 24 and discuss the EO 9981 questions as a class.
- What is the purpose of EO 9981?
 - What reason(s) does President Truman give for issuing EO 9981?
 - How long will it take for EO9981 to be implemented?
 - How do you think Americans felt about EO 9981?
 - Why do you think President Truman decided to issue EO9981?
15. Inform students that there were multiple reasons why Truman issued Executive Order 9981. Some of those reasons included Truman’s sympathy for the plight of African Americans, pressure from A. Philip Randolph and other civil rights leaders, a political move to secure the African American vote in an election year, and the fact that an Executive Order wasn’t subject to review by Congress, so congressmen hostile to African American civil rights couldn’t block the law. To debrief, discuss:
- How do you think most Americans felt about desegregating the armed forces?
 - *Polls showed that most were opposed to it.*
 - What political backlash might Truman have faced by issuing EO 9981?
 - How long do you think it took for the military to be completely desegregated?
 - *Segregation in the military was completely abolished in 1954.*
16. As a culmination to the lesson, ask students to relate what they have learned to the military today.
- In what ways do you think this history impacts today’s armed forces?
 - How has the military improved? What improvements are still needed?

Should I Sacrifice to Live “Half American”?

DEAR EDITOR:

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.

After all, the things that beset the world now are basically the same things which upset the equilibrium of nations internally, states, counties, cities, homes and even the individual.

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?"

These and other questions need answering; I want to know, and I believe every colored American, who is thinking, wants to know.

This may be the wrong time to broach such subjects, but haven't all good things obtained by men been secured through sacrifice during just such times of strife?

I suggest that while we keep defense and victory in the forefront that we don't loose [sic] sight of our fight for true democracy at home.

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.

This should not and would not lessen our efforts to bring this conflict to a successful conclusion; but should and would make us stronger to resist these evil forces which threaten us. America could become united as never before and become truly the home of democracy.

In way of an answer to the foregoing questions in a preceding paragraph, I might say that there is no doubt that this country is worth defending; things will be different for the next generation; colored Americans will come into their own, and America will eventually become the true democracy it was designed to be. These things will become a reality in time; but not through any relaxation of the efforts to secure them.

In conclusion let me say that though these questions often permeate my mind, I love American and am willing to die for the America I know will someday become a reality.

JAMES G. THOMPSON.

**Excerpt #1 from *Uncommon Hero:*
Graham Jackson**

Graham Jackson had asked John to pay him a visit at the Federal Building to discuss joining the Navy. John accepted the invitation, thinking why not? John had never been recruited before and felt privileged. The potential for heroic adventure fueled his curiosity and excitement. Besides, Sam had thanked him for getting a job at the theater and signed up with the Army. The Army had already shipped George to a northern suburb of Chicago to train as a Seabee, John's assignment choice. Little by little, the US military fit into his bigger vision.

"The Navy needs black sailors," Graham blurted out. John told him, "If I go, I want to go to Great Lakes." Jackson reacted, "No problem." Jackson's response came out so clearly that John never doubted his request had been granted. What really swayed John was Graham Jackson's confident deliberation. He told John how the Navy would pay for his education when he completed his obligations in case he still wanted to finish school, a hot button that Jackson recalled.

Times had changed considerably since Jackson had first observed that entrepreneurial kid one afternoon when John took a break from pulling his lawn care equipment to watch George Washington High School students at football practice. Jackson continued to explain the benefits of getting the GI Bill, medical coverage, and other perks of military service. The list of bonuses sounded more like winning a prize. No one had ever made anything sound so good before.

One thing concerned John. He asked, "How old do I have to be?" When Jackson answered, "17", John tried to contain his disappointment, worried that he was too young to receive the best thing ever offered to him. He painfully confessed, "But, I'm not 17."

A straight shooter, John confronted his only barrier to seeing the world. Without hesitation Jackson dismissed his concern. "Put the date of your age back to June 5 rather than July 5," he said with a smile. John balked. His first impression of the idea struck him as dishonest.

Every fiber of his being wanted to utter the word that would change everything. He hesitated, taking inventory of his journey and his readiness for the next step. The moment he heard himself say, "Okay," his mind went blank. He just made the biggest decision of his life.

Graham Jackson sold John on joining the United States Navy and they both knew it. Jackson did his job. John wanted to go. But John could not lie to himself; he respected the uniform, the purpose, and dignity exclusive to enlistment. And he could not resist. All he had to do was sign on the dotted line, no need for a birth certificate or identification. [...]

The day after John's enrollment into the US Navy, he boarded a train and shipped out for Naval Boot Camp. On his way to Florida, John had plenty of time to think about what happened. Even though everything materialized so quickly, he had no regrets except one. It didn't bother him that he signed up and left his family the next day. Deep down John dreamed that something like this would happen. What bothered him was why Jackson insisted on him signing up in such a hurry. Why the rush?

Talk of depression and war had not reached John. From the late '20s to the early '40s, he grew up knowing nothing else but the Great Depression. The 12-year-old boy who emerged from Griffin [Georgia] promising to make the most of his life if he got the chance struggled like anyone else, yet he found work in Atlanta when others didn't. For blacks and whites alike, employment opportunities were understandably scarce. Millions of Americans nationwide searched hopelessly for work. The service offered starving, displaced Americans hot meals, new clothing, and the chance to fight for their country.

No one told him the U.S. Navy had labor issues in the midst of the war effort and they needed black enlisted men to replace Filipinos in their steward's ranks. Another omission indicated "[t]he Chief of Naval Personnel, Rear Adm. Randall Jacobs, was surprised at the small number of volunteers, a figure far below the planners' expectations, and his surprise turned to concern in the next months as the 17-year-old volunteer inductees, the primary target of the armed forces recruiters, continued to choose the Army over the Navy at a ratio of 10 to 1. The Navy's personnel officials agreed that they had to attract their proper share of intelligent and able Negroes but seemed unable to isolate the cause of the disinterest. ..

Only when the Navy began assigning black recruiting specialists to the numerous naval districts and using black chief petty officers, reservists from World War I general service, at recruiting centers to explain the new opportunities for Negroes in the Navy was the bureau able to overcome some of the young men's natural reluctance to volunteer. By 1 February 1943 the Navy had 26,909 Negroes (still 2 percent of the total enlisted):

6,662 in the general service; 2,020 in the Seabees, and 19,227, over two-thirds of the total, in the Steward's Branch."

John would have been equally blind to Graham Jackson's driving motivation to meet the opportunity and obligations to his friend President Roosevelt to recruit as many men as he could find who were capable of serving the nation's agendas abroad. No doubt, Jackson did his job effectively as a black recruiter persuading black men to join the service. He was not obligated to explain initiative details, war status updates, the dangers of defending their country, or proving their worth to their white counterparts. To serve a man's country was an honor and a privilege. In the end, the U.S. Navy cared little about Jackson's methods.

Jackson was not the enemy; he was a pawn being brokered to use his influence. War and a volatile culture struggled to put divisive values aside for a cause. America's war machine anticipated needs in Europe and in the Pacific, citing black personnel as challenged but convenient. Little did the collective body of military wisdom realize the importance of courage, bravery, and sacrifice in this same class of men many Navy blue-bloods deemed below them.

John's complaint amounted to being recruited on a need-to-know basis. How his services would be allocated was not optional. Many black volunteers added significant meaning to their aimless forgettable pasts and conditional futures...futures determined by their willingness to endure a two-class system at home and abroad. The Navy needed bodies to win a war against tyranny and fascism. Any differences between blacks and whites would have to wait. Social resolutions were always secondary.

The chain of command demanded that all enlisted men follow orders. For any man willing to fight and die for his country, accurate or fictitious birth records did not matter. Special requests, thoughts, or feelings did not matter. Messmen or Seabee did not matter. At all cost, winning the war mattered.

Answer the following questions after finishing your assigned excerpt from *Uncommon Hero*.

- Summarize what happened to John Seagraves.
- What difficulties did John face? How did he respond to those difficulties?
- Did John's actions make him a hero? Why or why not?
- How do you think you would react if you were in John's situation?
- After reading the excerpt, would you keep the book's title the same or would you change it? If you change it, what would you call it?

Excerpt #2 from *Uncommon Hero*: Naval Boot Camp

As soon as the young men disembarked the bus and fell into some semblance of order, they followed orders and walked to the disbursement building to get their gear. From there they proceeded to their sleeping quarters to get organized. The barracks was a two-story building located in a segregated part of the base. Separate lodging in boot camp was no different than anywhere in America, one of the few characteristics shared between civilian and military life. The implication was that black volunteers should be right at home with segregation despite the military culture. About 40 black sailors received bunk assignments, including John who landed on the second floor.

As soon as the recruits dropped their gear, the chief came into the barracks and began to bark orders. This man behaved as if someone had stolen something from him and he was mad as hell about it. He was a southerner with a rotten attitude, mostly toward black people. The chief told his latest group of misfits he was accustomed to commanding young white sailors but he was given the task of being the drill instructor to an entire barracks of black enlistees. He wasn't sure which he hated more, black people in general or his assignment to whip them into shape. The opinionated trainer didn't like it one bit and spoke his mind openly.

The chief told the recruits to form two lines and then he started pacing, yelling at them one by one. After getting the attention of each man individually, he stepped back in front of them, eyeballed them and griped, "I don't like working with negrahs! You men are here to do Basic Training. For six weeks, I will tell you when to move and each and every move you must make. [...]"

Both black sailors and white sailors ate three meals a day. White officers and sailors ate first. A rumor circulated that German prisoners of war dined with the white sailors. Black sailors had separate chow lines and their own eating area. Sometimes there wasn't enough food or the food they got was cold and hard. For example, the morning oatmeal was frequently cold and lumpy. They were tired and hungry like any other sailor driven to the point of near-collapse. Factor in having to wait until everyone else ate - including German POWs - being fed the remains, and not getting enough to eat due to a miscalculation or an act of cruelty by the staff, and one could set a timer as to how quickly patience ran thin. Youth, hunger, and angry emotions instigated several heated disputes among the crew, most times focused on the mess hall staff or snickering white sailors.

Regardless of how long subjugation of their personal rights persisted, most black sailors could never grow accustomed to the same treatment they experienced in civilian life. In the service, black sailors could not sidestep acts of malice as if they occurred on city streets due to sheer proximity and being severely outnumbered. Most everyone traveled in packs. Black sailors had no choice but to use reason and restraint in every social interaction where their rivals obviously did not. Thus, the pervading attitude became "us versus them." Rarely did a black man fight another black man because they were out of control. They fought each other because they couldn't withhold retaliation against their oppressors one more second.

While segregation in civilian life divided and diminished blacks individually, in boot camp, it bonded them. Of course, many black sailors would invite the chance to return the intentional cruelty of the white gangs forever flaunting their numbers, power, and standing in society. None of the white sailors, officers, or staffers knew or cared how much discipline black sailors needed. Ultimately, rigorous drilling galvanized the small circle into a tight one. They were not just preparing for military warfare. Without knowing what challenges they faced at any given moment, they trained for each other.

All recruits were required to attend a formal meeting being held in a segregated auditorium. The commanding officer wanted to speak to everyone new to boot camp. The black group sat in the top rows at the rear of the auditorium. When "The Star-Spangled Banner" played, all the white sailors

stood up. Nearly all of the blacks had never heard their national anthem and did not know why the white officers were standing.

John looked around the auditorium and saw the black sailors still in their seats. They didn't know any better. The white sailors had been trained to respect the national anthem and saluted their nation's flag. Few blacks recalled who to salute based on their rank. The plain truth was they had to salute everyone because no one else was ranked below them. But the chief had said nothing about what to do when the national anthem sounded. Maybe he assumed everyone knew what to do and never expected otherwise. Maybe he preferred the black recruits to experience everything the hard way.

The difference between innocence and ignorance was a judgment call the chief had to make. Innocence meant training; ignorance elicited another interpretation - defiance. In this man's military, an act of defiance required immediate punishment. Dishonorable behavior would not be tolerated. Any time the chief became embarrassed by his black apprentices, he took it personally and dealt with it harshly. He ordered the volunteers to march around the barracks with their sea bags full of gear on their shoulders for one hour before bedtime. [...]

Five weeks in, John took his turn on night watch at the front security gate. His group filled a duty rotation, and his number had come up. Six white sailors coming from town casually strolled through the gate without acknowledging him. Military protocol required that they show the security guard their passes to enter the base. Instead they waltzed past John as if protocol excluded black security guards. John yelled, "Halt!" His arrogant counterparts kept walking. For all the compliance requirements the military demanded of subordinates, this situation surpassed civil rights according to Navy regulations and John went by the book. Pulling out his .45 caliber sidearm, he fired a round in the air. That got their attention.

Startled, the insubordinate sailors stopped walking. John told them to show their badges. They still refused to answer his demand. To them, this was a social issue, and they would not answer to a black man. As citizens, they would not hesitate to do what they did. As military personnel, they were willing to take the risk that they were right. By their logic, John should be put on report for "inappropriately" firing his weapon. John did not appreciate their disrespect and stood his ground.

The smirking sailors located the chief, John's superior, and appealed to him as though the sanctity of their race was at stake. Through all the commotion they caused, the noncompliant malcontents succeeded in getting John put on report for firing his weapon, but they were required to march right back to the guard station and show John their badges or they too would be put on report for violating security protocols.

While John pondered whether segregation applied to military security, the chief stormed toward the security gate, annoyed by such nonsense during his down time. Would the chief take disciplinary action against him for not permitting the white sailors to walk through the gate without showing their passes to a black security guard? Details caught up by circumstance forced the hand of authority.

How would the chief decide to handle the proper action of a black sailor who performed his security duties to the letter, exposing a clear violation committed by white sailors in a white man's Navy?

Without hesitation, the chief jumped in John's face and asked him, "Sailor, what right did you have to fire your weapon?" John knew the Navy manual because the chief threatened them all if they didn't. John even tutored some of his colleagues who struggled to read. In response to the chief's demand, he recited a summarized version of a clear directive against a specific violation, "Correct action was if anyone passing through the gate did not identify themselves, I should fire in the air. If they don't stop, shoot them. I was doing my job, sir."

John knew he wouldn't have shot them, but they didn't know that. He wasn't surprised when the chief simply turned and walked away without saying another word. Striding back to his favorite chair, the chief masked his satisfaction that one of his recruits performed well under pressure. John wasn't

positive he was off the hook, not knowing procedure for a "racial policy" question. In time he received his answer.

He never heard a thing about the matter again and got no extra duty. It was, however, part of his permanent record that he fired his weapon. John began to figure out the nuances of regulation enforcement between the lines in the Navy. He said to his friends, "If you do it by the book and white sailors are involved, they'll write you up, and then let it go. So make damned sure you do it by the book." [...]

Word came down that before graduation from boot camp they had the opportunity to perform before the base commander. They got to compete against their white adversaries for top honors as the best recruiting class. All forty black recruits attended a meeting before the event. They decided no one could take their dignity from them after six weeks in hell. Add up all the disrespect, the lack of food, brutal drills just for them, especially the torment from their white rivals, everything prepared them for this moment. By the meeting's end, they agreed excellence would be their best weapon, and they would have their revenge.

Demonstration drills proved to be competitive as the battle of the best raged on. White sailors glared with the entitlement that the honor was theirs from the beginning. The black sailors' rebuttal was to excel in everything: double-time marching, drills, endurance, cadence, timing, and precision, every phase. John and the others knew they had to do everything possible to prove they were the superior sailors to their counterparts, and nothing would stand in the way of them making their point clear.

They made their point. The awkward second-class citizens who entered Basic Training on June 28 emerged as the top recruiting group in their head-to-head competition August 8. When it was all said and done, they could graduate with the last word.

The chief derived great pleasure from the event. He tipped his hat to his fellow drill instructor, then stood at attention and saluted the base commander. When the demonstration ended, he congratulated his recruits for an outstanding performance, the first kind words he spoke to them during their entire six-week stay. The base commander followed that with his own complimentary remarks to support a perfect score. In his final words to his men, the chief made no apologies for his methods, assuring them that their commitment and hard work changed his opinion of their kind.

Those few heartfelt words challenged the men to draw a new conclusion about their drill instructor. He was a decent man. And they did the impossible. They earned his respect.

John left boot camp on Wednesday, August 11, 1943, with orders to go up the coast to St. Simons Island.

Answer the following questions after finishing your assigned excerpt from *Uncommon Hero*.

- Summarize what happened to John Seagraves.
- What difficulties did John face? How did he respond to those difficulties?
- Did John's actions make him a hero? Why or why not?
- How do you think you would react if you were in John's situation?
- After reading the excerpt, would you keep the book's title the same or would you change it? If you change it, what would you call it?

Excerpt #3 from Uncommon Hero: St. Simon's Island

The sunny coastal breeze offered a dramatic contrast to the swamp-like conditions in Jacksonville. As far as John could tell, the officers lived a luxurious life at St. Simons. After settling in, he and the others briefly toured a portion of the facility under supervision, if for no other reason than to learn the limits of their station in the U.S. Navy. He was still very much in the South.

John didn't know about the Virginia and Maryland facilities or St. Simons Island, Georgia, for that matter. He had been focused on North Chicago, Illinois, since before boot camp. He was only aware of the construction battalion because his buddy George told him. That's why he wanted to be a Seabee.

Now trained Navy personnel, the group of black sailors was told to get to know the new officer graduates and get acquainted with the work ethics of some of the officers who they might encounter in the near future on whatever ship they would be assigned. To John, his responsibilities seemed unspecified.

Once the newest influx of black sailors settled in, they assembled to meet their immediate boss, a black chief petty officer dressed just like Jackson. He handed out their apprenticeship assignments. John received his orders to report to one of the officers. When he reported to the officer's quarters, the officer told him what his duties would be. The list included shining his shoes, making his bed, ironing his uniforms, and delivering fresh water every day, everything a servant would do. John looked around the room, looked at the officer, and found himself speechless.

In that moment, John had the presence of mind to know that whatever he said next could and likely would get him thrown into the brig. Fresh out of boot camp, he knew the drill. If he stuck to the book, and it involved a white sailor or in this case an officer, he should do what he was supposed to do and he would be left alone. Without speaking, he left the officer's quarters.

Walking away from the officer's room, John feverishly organized what he knew. Southerners, servants, white officers, black sailors... wait a minute. Bracing himself for an epiphany, he stopped walking and collected himself, thinking, "Am I recruited to be a servant for the U.S. government? Was that what I signed up for? Oh no, no, no!"

Seizing up like someone had kicked him in the gut, John agonized over the possible ramifications of his discovery. He heard himself saying, "I can't believe this." Memories of the day he signed with Graham Jackson flooded into his heart with heavy regret. Now he really knew how it felt to be captured and sold into slavery, modern-day slavery. He revisited the promise he made to himself, swearing he would do something with his life if he had a chance. Had he fallen into the same pit? Fired up about the servant conspiracy he uncovered, John frantically needed to share his findings with his colleagues.

Looking into the eyes of three or four recent boot camp graduates who had all gone through hell to get here, he asked them, "Were we deliberately recruited to be servants?" They stared back at him. This was not what he had in mind when he visualized a bright future. All he saw was the-same-old-sweat-box-nowhere-job back home like some busboy bussing tables at the local restaurant as if he cannot do anything else. In pure frustration he blurted out, "Are you kidding me?"

To be honest, John didn't know "general service" from a "steward's branch." Now that he was going to be trained in a steward's school, what did that mean? John knew not everyone from the South went into the steward's branch because his friend became a Seabee, but did everyone in the steward's branch come from the South? In other words, did the Navy presume that southern black men most readily accepted subservient roles to whites, making them the logical choice to fill the role of personal servants? Most of the black recruits accepted their fate, preferring a meal ticket over the scraps of the lowly economy; a few never would.

Reality sunk in. It all came together as if he woke up from a nightmare, one in which he felt the shackles around his ankles like before a slave auction. The steward's branch of the Navy consisted of all black sailors serving white officers. If any other race of people performed the same duties for the so called steward's branch, he didn't see any. Then again, how exactly could the Navy publicly articulate the specifics of his steward school apprenticeship when black civilians used unflattering terms to describe it?

He learned his new professional title was "Steward's Mate," a recent differentiation from the previously- exclusive title "Mess Attendant," changed earlier in 1943. As far as he was concerned, there was no training. The full extent of his job description stipulated that he obey white officers, starting with a laundry list of domestic chores.

Having a meltdown for a minute, John made one final observation about his experience to date. The military thought it took a drill instructor to teach him how to defend America. Then, rather than handing him a gun, the military handed him cleaning rags and an iron. Forget it. With all the bad press the Navy was taking over the racial issue, John was not only up in arms, he was not alone. He just didn't know it.

Equally outspoken and pessimistic about the government's "opportunity" for blacks to serve their country was the powerful black press. The Pittsburgh Courier and The Chicago Defender, among other newspapers, along with the National Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People pressured the Navy publicly, using their circulations or leverage as much as they could to influence policy decisions and cultural change. Black officials in higher-ranking civilian posts encountering pressure to do something could do nothing for fear that their positions and safeties were in jeopardy. Their best defense was telling everyone to be patient. But the .reality of most civilian black businessmen showed they had limited influence outside their communities and would not force the hand of the American government.

Thus, sailors resorted to guerilla warfare, seeking a voice in the press to tell the truth behind the veil of patriotism. The story of the "Philadelphia Fifteen" made the black press and national news, advising black volunteers to choose another branch of service over the Navy.

John's discord with Navy racial policy positioned him against a network of black chiefs who had already achieved the highest rank possible in the Navy for a black officer, telling other black sailors whose room to clean. There was nowhere else to go. In response to the question of why Negro sailors were restricted to the position of mess attendants, the [N]avy said that Negro seamen who were elevated in rank superior to that of white men could not maintain discipline. Therefore it was in the interest of efficiency that the policy of restricting Negroes to the mess attendant's position be maintained."

Angered and determined, John went back and told the black chief that he did not join the Navy to be a flunky for white officers and he didn't go to boot camp to shine anyone's shoes. Wearing the hat of both chief and head steward, his immediate superior answered, "You will do as you are told or you will be sent to the brig for five days of bread and water." John dug in and refused. The chief, having not yet incurred such adamant insubordination, said to John, "For today, you will be assigned to working in the scullery washing dishes." Sensing a moral victory, John agreed to the compromise, knowing he had done that before.

Answer the following questions after finishing your assigned excerpt from Uncommon Hero.

- Summarize what happened to John Seagraves.
- What difficulties did John face? How did he respond to those difficulties?
- Did John's actions make him a hero? Why or why not?
- How do you think you would react if you were in John's situation?
- After reading the excerpt, would you keep the book's title the same or would you change it? If you change it, what would you call it?

Excerpt #4 from *Uncommon Hero:* Shore Leave

Seeking recommendations, they got directions to check out a diner a couple of blocks away. So they walked to the diner, went inside, and sat down. The young men found a booth and waited for service. They were so content to be off the ship, each visualized ideas of finding a place to have some fun, maybe see some girls. About ten minutes passed and the waitress still had not greeted them. Getting irritated, John began to watch her and realized she was ignoring them. He had enough of waiting and called to her, "Are you going to wait on us?" At least she addressed the question, "We do not serve colored people here." Being up to his eyeballs with this segregation crap, first in the South, then on the ship, and now Washington, John lost his cool and said to her, "We are United States Navy sailors. We are not colored people."

The cook who owned the place came out of the kitchen and told them to leave. The insulted seamen looked at each other and got up to leave, but not before giving the diner staff a few choice words. They finally went outside. This was not the South, and John did not see any signs out front about segregated service. In fact, he had envisioned that Washington would be as open-minded as California. He thought Californians respected the uniform and men that wore them. This outrage was the last thing he expected. They loitered outside the diner, still angry about not getting served, not to mention starved.

Debating their next move, three of them wanted to retaliate; the other three just wanted a hot meal. One of the guys standing next to John looked around for something to throw and noticed a row of brick trimming the flower garden in front of the restaurant. He bent over to pick one up, joined by John and another buddy. All at once they threw bricks through the diner's two large front windows. John's friend shouted, "We've been out here fighting the Japs for our country and we come home to be treated like dogs? To hell with you!"

John's heart raced out of control, as he'd never been blatantly destructive before. All six soldiers just stood there as surprised as the restaurant owner, waitresses, and patrons, looking through the window at each other. The main offenders gloated while the other unwilling participants argued about the next course of action. Caught up in the error of their ways, they ignored how much time passed by or the possibility of police nearby. They began to run away, but did not get very far before the Navy's Shore Patrol cut them off and arrested them. The SP did more than just put them in handcuffs; all six of them were shackled together in irons like chain gang convicts and transported back to the ship. On the ferry from Seattle to Bremerton, people looked at them as if they were common criminals. The injustice gnawed at John the entire way.

The minute they boarded the ship, Marine escorts walked them straight to the brig. Thinking of a legitimate excuse to avoid lock up, John told ship security he had to report to the wardroom to prepare the officers' meals. In reality, if John were still on shore he wouldn't be thinking about officers' meals since he had expected to visit the USO, but the chief to a Marine guard to let him out because he had to cook.

Deep down, the chief understood very well how John felt. The chief didn't have John released because he owed him anything, or even because he liked him for that matter. He did it because black servicemen had the right to a hot meal after risking their lives to defend their country. The people who refused the young men table service were to blame. He could not say it, but he respected what they did. These sailors were really just kids, with nothing to lose. The chief had too much to lose to do something like that. Duty in the officers' mess was John's "get out of jail" pass. Rather than a home-cooked meal, the other guys received rations of bread and water.

When the time came to face their disorderly conduct and destruction to private property charges, they all stood in front of the Captain's Mast side by side to determine whether their commanding officer would impose non-judicial punishment. Each of them was given an opportunity to

justify their actions. One by one on down the line the guys would not say anything to defend themselves or incriminate one another. John was the last one. When his turn came, he told the officer how difficult it was being at sea and all they wanted was a home-cooked meal. After fighting for their country, they were angry because the restaurant refused to serve them. They shouldn't have been treated that way. They knew what they did was wrong, but what those people did was not right either. Commander Stryker attended the hearing. After listening to their side of the story, he whispered something in the captain's ear. The captain, a Michigan man, said he was changing his sentence. Instead of sending them to the brig, he put them on probation, gave them 25 hours of extra duty, and told them they would have to pay for damages.

To anyone's knowledge, none of them had ever received a bill or noticed a reduction in pay. In fact they never heard about it again.

After their run-in with the law, John decided to take advantage of shore leave and go see his family. He was tired of being an outsider. The thought of getting some home-cooking and special treatment appealed to him. [...]

The outside world was a sobering experience. John wondered how it would be different if Americans abided by the Navy manual. The official bible of the United States Navy, best known by Navy men as "The Bluejackets' Manuel," was first printed for the United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, M.D., in 1902. A little Navy knowhow might straighten out a few things in civilian life. Everyone got a copy following completion of Basic Training. A multi-generation Naval Academy Class of 1935 graduate named Frank B. Herold once told his family "there were three ways of doing things: the right way, the wrong way and 'the Navy way.'" More precisely, "...Honor, integrity, reputation, chivalry and acceptance of responsibility that calls for leadership — this was the old Navy way." Despite integration issues, the Navy still lived by a code, a higher standard than civilian populations.

The Bluejackets' manual documented procedures for everything a sailor needed to know on a broad range of topics. A rebellion by several black sailors in Seattle could be ascribed to violation of civil rights they did not yet have, by the manual gave them guidelines for being proud American leaders, led by men like Stryker who believed in what the manual stood for, people who fought for principles. To Commander Stryker, principles were above differences between blacks and whites. Principles were black and white—clear as a bell—whether they fit the outside world or not.

The brick thrown through the window in Bremerton resulted from the evolution of a few young men. They stuck together, even though all six of them did not agree to throw bricks. Specific names of actual culprits didn't matter. No finger pointing took place. Mutually they remained silent until John spoke up to challenge the dark side of American morality. He was a kid when he left home, but he had a sense of responsibility most kids didn't have. His mother Rhunette and grandmother Lizzy had a lot to do with his values going into the service. Now he saw the world from a whole new perspective.

Most times people respected the uniform. But as much as John was surprised and angered by what happened in Seattle, he had no delusions about the South. The uniform said everything anyone needed to know about the man. Sailors were willing to give their lives for their country. Like him, many of the black sailors saw the Navy as an adventure, despite the fact that there were no jobs, no opportunities, no money, and no food. The adventure quickly turned serious when John first saw the *NORTH CAROLINA*. With so many guns, a battleship was the emblem of a nation's might, the symbol of a nation's power. As best as John could tell, America was flexing its muscles for the entire world to see the moment his fast battleship arrived in Hawaii and in every operation since."

Answer the following questions after finishing your assigned excerpt from *Uncommon Hero*.

- Summarize what happened to John Seagraves.
- What difficulties did John face? How did he respond to those difficulties?
- Did John's actions make him a hero? Why or why not?

- How do you think you would react if you were in John's situation?
- After reading the excerpt, would you keep the book's title the same or would you change it? If you change it, what would you call it?

**Excerpt #5 from *Uncommon Hero:*
The Showboat & Life on Board & Gunner Shot**

The Battleship USS NORTH CAROLINA was nearly 729 feet long, almost 109 feet wide, and carried a feast of fire power. "The first commissioned of the Navy's fast, heavily- armed battleships with 16" (410 mm) guns, NORTH CAROLINA received so much attention during her fitting- out and trials that she won the enduring nickname 'Showboat'... As the first newly designed American battleship constructed in 20 years, NORTH CAROLINA [was] built using the latest in shipbuilding technology."

Despite the challenges awaiting him, John increasingly became excited to be on the ship. The Navy showed him the world in exchange for his time, effort, maybe even his life. If he had to go to war, at least the Navy put him on the ship most likely to survive. The vessel, overpowering armaments, a diverse crew, and its efficient chain of command had somehow developed a successful system. But how?

Social norms that separated black and white men in civilian life did the same, magnified 100-fold on a ship. White officers expected black sailors to do what they were told, and it was never that simple. Entitlements that passed from civilian into military life complicated the situation when an order resembled a social-class demand. Southern officers in particular shared a taste for entitlement, which struck a very personal chord with black sailors. But it was not just white-on-black control issues that sparked passionate differences. Black sailors resisted the dual role of black chief petty officers with equal fervor. Black or white, officers expected sailors to do what they were told.

Black chief petty officers directly supervised black stewards, who worked for the officers individually in most cases, and messmen, who served in the dining areas. No matter how smart or how well educated they were, black chiefs could only command black stewards and black mess attendants and could not give a command to a white sailor even if the white sailor was below them in rank. Herein defined the "glass ceiling" for every black chief petty officer, and they each must have felt squeezed by black sailors below them who despised them and white officers above them who only tolerated them. A black chief had no choice but to show respect for men who had no respect for him. If he had special requests or disciplinary problems, his orders were to report to the executive officer. Overall, black chief petty officers in the Navy were powerless, so naturally they took their anger out on the few below them. Bad blood may have rolled down hill, but not without a surprising amount of backlash.

John's biggest complaint was directed at any black chief who traded in his dignity for acceptance. The common trend involved a black chief talking to a white officer like a plantation slave with his subordinates standing by, then turning to his subordinates and expecting them to march to his orders. Few followed a man who had no dignity. The black sailors all knew their chief had his job to do. They just hated how so many chiefs acted one way around officers and another way entirely around them.

The thorn in John's side specifically involved domestic work. He would rather peel a thousand potatoes a day than shine one shoe. Everyone had to eat, yet there was so much more he could do. He expressed his willingness to do anything asked of him as long as it was something worth doing. In this controversial regard, he expected more from the Navy. [...]

[One morning], Mess Officer Slaborda walked through the dining area and asked, "How are all the new men doing?" John said, "Sir, I have a lot of experience cooking and I would love to be a breakfast cook. I know they need help in breakfast prep and cooking." The lieutenant said that he would tell the chief to transfer John to kitchen duty and to assign someone else to take his current duties.

During his down time, John got a visit from the chief. He indignantly accused John of going over his head again. So he had to get up at 0500 hours every morning for one month. His regular wake up time was 0600. He was to be in the kitchen at 0650 hours to start breakfast.

The following morning when he arrived to cook breakfast, the chief was there. The chief informed John, "You will be washing pots in the galley." John didn't argue with him and went to the galley to wash pots and pans.

When John finished, he decided to ask the first cook if he needed help. Getting overdue, unexpected support, the cook reacted, "Sure, kid!" After three or four days passed, the mess officer came to the kitchen and said to John, "Tomorrow you report to the breakfast kitchen." The mess officer said to the chief, "I like the way this kid works." From then on the chief left John alone.

Finally! And once again he landed on his feet doing what he enjoyed doing most. John became friendly with the officers who wanted their food cooked a certain way. In fact, that was how he got to know Commander Joe W. Stryker.

Commander Stryker was the Executive Officer, the XO responsible for the crew and, in John's opinion, the most respected officer on the ship. Stryker didn't see color. He saw Navy personnel and he led with an even keel. As the liaison between captain and crew, he was straight with everybody. Typically, captains were assigned to a ship for four to six months, then reassigned. Stryker continued to hold his post throughout every new captain's tenure. He knew the temperament of the men and how to handle situations when men came apart under pressure. Stryker's recommendations got done, no questions asked. [...]

Little wonder that John and nearly every black sailor questioned how well the Navy though integration through. Living on a battleship, one could obviously see why the Navy resisted integration and why a recruiter said whatever necessary to recruit black citizens into the service. The circumstances were what they were. The situation was not great, but the ship was no different than life outside the Navy. Finding out blacks were not wanted by white sailors in close or popular areas was part of life onboard. Sometimes white sailors would bump a black sailor along tight corridors deliberately to instigate a fight.

Friction continued between black and white sailors in segregated areas, leaving common areas to be utilized in shifts. "Unofficially," there were many segregated places. [...]

The more the black sailors looked for things to do, the more they encountered boundaries. On one extremely hot day when a few black sailors attempted to buy ice cream, white sailors prevented them from entering. Later, the guy running the ice cream stand told them that black sailors could not come down whenever they wanted to. That did not bother John much because he had access to ice cream in the officers' mess, which made John very popular. However, they also learned that only one black sailor could visit the post office at a time. For dental work, the special day chosen for black seamen to come in was on Mondays. After falling down the stairs, John was taken to sick bay and they put him on a bunk against the back wall in case a white sailor came in needing medical assistance. [...]

A few days later, when the gunnery officer complimented John on a well-done omelet, John saw his opportunity and replied, "Thank you, sir. By the way, I would like to do more to serve the ship. Is there a chance that some of us could get on a 20-millimeter gun?" The gunnery officer responded, "I have no objections. But I would have to look into the possibility."

The answer seemed positive, neither a yes nor a no. But John was no more confident of the outcome with the gunnery officer than with the chief. So he decided to continue working his way up the chain of command. Hoping for better results, he singled out Commander Stryker and requested gun duty.

All the black sailors knew about Dorie Miller, who John believed to be responsible for changing the perception among white officers that black sailors could not fire anti-aircraft guns successfully.

Who knew where these crazy ideas came from in the first place? Did Navy generals sit around smoking cigars, sipping brandy, and concocting wild stories to tell the press, or did the thought of black men with guns make them uncomfortable?

Rumors swirled, but none of the black sailors knew for sure. Speculation pointed to decision makers not letting blacks fire weapons on a ship because they feared that blacks with knowledge of weapons in a segregated war might lead to an untimely rebellion. Fear of insurrection complicated matters. It was much easier to put a lid on the discussion by declaring black sailors incapable of firing weapons accurately.

Stryker must have spoken to the gunnery officer to get them on the 20-millimeter guns. Somewhere along the line the gunnery officer passed on to the mess officer that he had a spot for eight black sailors on two 20-millimeter guns forward starboard. The mess officer complied and set out to assemble a short list of interested messmen and stewards to take part in armament exercises. With CIC testing underway, the crew incurred a myriad of drills when they left Bremerton heading to Pearl Harbor, with more prospects for practice from Pearl Harbor to Eniwetok Atoll and Eniwetok Atoll to the Admiralty Islands over the next three weeks.

Given the gunner shot he strongly desired, John learned another important lesson about the Navy and life: Nothing he wanted would come easily. Had he not spoken up for kitchen duty and now the gun opportunity, he'd be shining shoes and doing someone's laundry. John harbored no ill will against other black sailors for doing what they were told. It was just the thought of doing domestic work genuinely made him angry, and he looked forward to cooking. Putting up with the aggravation of positioning himself for what he wanted was, to him, impossible to avoid and definitely worth the effort. Feeding the officers held a level of dignity that made his experience of the Navy palatable, maybe even sustainable after the war. [...]

No one expected them to do well. Judging from some of the grumblings John and the others heard, they were all pretty sure a few onboard, both black and white, did not want them to succeed. Sticking together made their team better under pressure. To some, perhaps, they were just drilling. However, make no mistake about it, they were under pressure.

They were not being shot at by the Japanese, but they were being tested by Navy brass. As far as John was concerned, every eye on that ship was on them. The bad things politicians and the higher-ups said about black sailors either were true or they were false. John took it personally to prove them wrong. He and his team never spoke of it on deck. However, an unmistakable opportunity had presented itself for them to join forces and silence their critics.

In the final analysis, the young sailors impressed. The word was that, for first-timers, they scored high enough marks during drone practice to create a buzz on the ship. Working together, they took their results to higher limits, supplanting doubt with evidence that they would soon be an asset under fire. John and his crew were so pumped up they could hardly wait for another chance. [...]

Moments like these didn't go unnoticed. Sixty-six black sailors served on the NORTH CAROLINA out of roughly 2,600 men. John's request led to the first black sailors to ever fire any kind of armament in the ship's history. His actions broke the color line and convinced key USS NORTH CAROLINA decision makers to abandon popular fabrications and propaganda distributed about black sailors.

John contained his exuberance, satisfied he'd won a critical victory toward demonstrating his worth. Indeed, he craved the taste of live action. But neither that nor changing the record books meant a thing to him. What compelled him daily was the chance to dispel the infuriating untruths about black people.

Deep inside, the search for validation had become his private war. This drove him, motivated him, and consumed him. He saw how far the Navy would allow him to go.

John began to detest indifference, and he fought anyone who defended the status quo with the vengeance of opposing his oppressor. Once the chief learned of the achievement, he said to John, "You

can't keep your mouth shut!" John responded, "Chief, I asked you and you did nothing about it. Why are you so afraid to speak up for us? You have been in the Navy for ten years and you treat us like we are your slaves. I am sick of the way you treat us. You can't hurt me because I do not care how you feel about me. I am not your slave. I'm not anybody's slave!"

They broke new ground on a United States Navy vessel that day in 1944 and returned to their battle stations knowing they would be brought up for wartime experience. No one knew exactly when but Stryker told them they would get their chance during battle. A long, difficult confrontation with the Japanese ensured that.

Answer the following questions after finishing your assigned excerpt from *Uncommon Hero*.

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- What difficulties did John face? How did he respond to those difficulties?
- Did John's actions make him a hero? Why or why not?
- How do you think you would react if you were in John's situation?
- After reading the excerpt, would you keep the book's title the same or would you change it? If you change it, what would you call it?

GroupMembers: _____

Topic: _____

African Americans and World War II Anthology

Directions: Congratulations! Your group has been chosen to design the book covers for a new anthology. Follow the steps below before you begin designing your assigned cover.

1. An anthology is usually a collection of individual books that focus on a particular theme. The theme for your anthology is “African Americans and World War II”. As a group, brainstorm some potential titles for your anthology. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:
 - What are some common experiences that African Americans shared during World War II?
 - Are there any quotes or phrases that you’re familiar with that describe African American experiences during World War II?
2. Next, discuss the purpose of book covers using the following questions to guide your discussion:
 - What is the purpose of a book’s cover?
 - What is an example of an effective book cover, or, what is your favorite book cover? Why? (You might also think about your favorite movie poster or album cover and what traits make it effective):
 - What do you like about the cover?
 - What makes it memorable?
 - Does it contain pictures, abstract symbols, or just words?
3. Individually research your assigned topic using the resources provided by your teacher. As you research think of the following questions:
 - What do you think people should know about your topic?
 - What do you think people would find interesting about your topic?
 - What images, themes, words, feelings, etc. jump out at you as you research? How can you translate these feelings onto your cover?
 - Are there any quotes or phrases that you have discovered during your research that would make a good book title?
4. Your book cover must contain the following information:
 - Book’s title & subtitle; for example:
 - “Uncommon Hero” is the title and “The John Seagraves Story” is the subtitle.
 - “The Warmth of Other Suns” is the title and “The Epic Story of America's Great Migration” is the subtitle.
 - Pictures, drawings (concrete or abstract) that relate to your topic and make someone interested to read the book
 - On the back of your cover include a short, one to two paragraph summary explaining your topic.
5. After completing your cover, reconvene as a group and share your work. Take notes about each topic on the “Anthology Bingo” handout.

Title of book/topic:

How does the illustration represent the topic?

Notes:

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African Americans and World War II Links

Although your search isn't limited to the sites listed below, begin your online research at one of the following sites.

General Links:

- <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/world-war-ii/essays/patriotism-crosses-color-line-african-americans-world-war-ii>
- <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/assets/pdfs/african-americans-in-world.pdf>

The Great Migration

- <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration>
- <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129827444>

Double V Campaign (or Double Victory Campaign)

- <http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu/centapp/oh/story.do?shortName=elliott1939vv>
- <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/what-was-black-americas-double-war/>

A. Philip Randolph

- <http://www.apri.org/ht/d/sp/i/225/pid/225>
- http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/garvey/peoplevents/p_randolph.html

Executive Order 8802

- <http://people.ehe.osu.edu/bgordon/files/2012/06/Anne-Schumaun.pdf>
- <https://lcrn.lib.unc.edu/blog/index.php/2012/06/25/on-this-day-executive-order-8802/>

African Americans in the Marines (51st Defense Battalion or 52nd Defense Battalion or Montford Point):

- <http://www.geocities.com/nubiansong/montford.htm>
- http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/npswapa/extContent/usmc/pcn-190-003132-00/sec3.htm

African Americans in the Army (Red Ball Express or 92nd Infantry Division or 761st Tank Battalion):

- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/alaska-WWII/>
- http://www.history.com/images/media/pdf/AfricanAmericanWWII_Study_Guide.pdf

The Tuskegee Airmen:

- <http://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/tuskegee/airoverview.htm>
- <http://tuskegeeairmen.org/>

African Americans in the Navy (Dorie Miller)

- <http://www.history.navy.mil/Special%20Highlights/AfricanAmerican/timeline.htm>
- <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq57-4.htm>

African American Women and World War II

- <http://invisiblewarriorsfilm.com/>
- <http://www.womensmemorial.org/Education/BBH1998.html>

John Seagraves

- <http://www.newsobserver.com/2012/05/18/2071442/battleship-reunion-brings-back.html>
- <http://uncommonherobook.com/>

EXECUTIVE ORDER 9981

Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity In the Armed Forces.

WHEREAS it is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country's defense:

NOW THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, and as Commander in Chief of the armed services, it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.
2. There shall be created in the National Military Establishment an advisory committee to be known as the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, which shall be composed of seven members to be designated by the President.
3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the Armed Services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. The Committee shall confer and advise the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, and shall make such recommendations to the President and to said Secretaries as in the judgment of the Committee will effectuate the policy hereof.
4. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or the services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.
5. When requested by the Committee to do so, persons in the armed services or in any of the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall testify before the Committee and shall make available for use of the Committee such documents and other information as the Committee may require.
6. The Committee shall continue to exist until such time as the President shall terminate its existence by Executive order.

President Harry Truman
The White House
July 26, 1948