



THE NATIONAL
WWII MUSEUM

Executive Orders

Primary Documents:

The President and African Americans

A Lesson Plan from
the Education Department of the
The National World War II Museum

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Executive Orders

Primary Documents: The President and African Americans

Primary sources can be documents, pictures, or artifacts that were produced during a certain time. Instead of merely reading second-hand descriptions (secondary sources) of how a president felt about an issue, a good historian will also want to read the official papers of that president. Executive orders are directives that the president may make without approval of the Congress, and thereby often show his will more clearly than bills he signs into law.

OBJECTIVE: By reading two presidential executive orders and answering questions about them, students will learn about the efforts of the federal government to address discrimination in the United States before and after WWII. Students will gain a broader understanding between the theory and practice of the law.

BENCHMARKS: **Grades 5-8:** H-1A-M2; H-1A-M3; H-1A-M4; H-1A-M5; H-1A-M15; H-1B-M17; H-1B-M18
Grades 9-12: C-1A-H3; C-1B-H3; C-1B-H4; H-1A-H2; H-1A-H3; H-1A-H4; H-1B-H17

DIRECTIONS:

1. Present a brief lesson on the African American experience during WWII.
2. Pass out copies of the executive orders by Roosevelt and Truman to students to read or have students read them out loud, along with their descriptions.
3. Hold a short discussion about the legal language used in these orders—it may be an unfamiliar style to many students. Discuss any unfamiliar words and have students look them up in a dictionary.
4. Pass out worksheet questions for students to complete.
5. Discuss in class students' answers. Spend extra time with questions 5, 9, and 10.

ASSESSMENT: Components for assessment include the worksheet and the class discussion.

ENRICHMENT: Have students outline their own executive orders as if they were the president. These orders should focus on a national issue that they care about. Remind students that the president can only issue executive orders regarding matters within the executive branch of government. This will require some research into the president's powers.

Executive Order 8802 Establishing the Committee on Fair Employment Practice
Franklin D. Roosevelt, The White House, June 25, 1941

More than a year before the United States entered WWII, the country began building up its defense capabilities. Many factories refused to hire black workers. African American civil rights leaders like A. Philip Randolph pressured President Roosevelt to address this racial discrimination. Bowing to this pressure, the president issued this executive order.

Whereas it is the policy of the United States to encourage full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders; and

Whereas there is evidence that available and needed workers have been barred from employment in industries engaged in defense production solely because of consideration of race, creed, color, or national origin, to the detriment of workers' morale and of national unity:

Now, Therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes, and as a prerequisite to the successful conduct of our national defense production effort, I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin, and I do hereby declare that it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

And it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. All departments and agencies of the Government of the United States concerned with vocational and training programs for defense production shall take special measures appropriate to assure that such programs are administered without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

2. All contracting agencies of the Government of the United States shall include in all defense contracts hereafter negotiated by them a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any worker because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

3. There is established in the Office of Production Management a Committee on Fair Employment Practice, which shall consist of a Chairman and four other members to be appointed by the President. The Committee shall receive and investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provisions of this Order and shall take appropriate steps to redress grievances which it finds to be valid. The Committee shall also recommend to the several departments and agencies of the Government of the United States and to the President all measures which may be deemed by it necessary or proper to effectuate the provisions of this Order.

Executive Order 9981 Desegregating the Armed Forces of the United States
Harry S Truman, The White House, 1948

Only three years after the end of WWII, President Truman issued this executive order integrating the country's military. With pressure from African American civil rights leaders and with recognition of the contribution that African American service men and women made during the war, Truman used his powers to reverse more than 170 years of discrimination in military.

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 served in our country's defense:

Now, therefore, by virtue of the authority invested in me as President 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 with the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and 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.

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Student Worksheet

Directions: After reading the two executive orders along with their descriptions, answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper. Some answers are found within the text; other answers require you to analyze the text and use your knowledge of the time. If you use quotes, be sure to put quotation marks around them.

1. True or false: according to *Executive Order 8802*, in 1941 it was the policy of the United States to encourage everyone in the country to help win the war no matter who they were or where they came from.
2. Who is President Roosevelt referring to when he speaks of *the detriment* (negative impact) of *workers' morale*—whose morale is suffering?
3. What gives President Roosevelt the authority to establish the Committee on Fair Employment Practice?
4. In what areas does *Executive Order 8802* bar discrimination?
5. Was *Executive Order 8802* successful? What other primary sources from the early 1940s could you use to defend your answer?
6. Why does President Truman declare that it is important to desegregate the armed forces?
7. When does Truman's policy go into effect?
8. Who will oversee the desegregation of the armed forces and how will they do it?
9. Was *Executive Order 9981* successful? What other primary sources could you use to defend your answer?
10. What are the pros and cons of using this type of primary source for historical research?