

Recognition Delayed

GRADES 3-8



Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 3-8. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 45 minutes.

During World War II, over 100,000 Black sailors were serving in the U.S. Navy at any given time. By 1942, they were serving at a variety of ratings, and in 1944 there were two combat ships with all-Black crews. Black sailors fought valiantly and contributed to many of the Navy's victories.

However, the Navy rarely recognized Black sailors for their valor, and Black sailors did not receive recognition at the highest levels.

In this lesson, participants will explore two stories of heroic Black sailors who were denied recognition and had to wait almost fifty years to get the medals they deserved.



Objective

Participants will evaluate how structural barriers delayed recognition of contributions to the Navy and our Nation for underrepresented sailors.



Materials

- Images of or physical Navy decorations
- An Award for Someone Special* worksheet
- Coloring supplies
- Oral history compilation of Horace Banks and Alonzo Swann



Inquiry

Provide participants with photos of Navy medals and ribbons. You may also use decorations in your physical collection, and vary on the list below depending on what is available to you. Ask participants to place the medals in order of importance. Review awards and what is required to receive each medal or ribbon.

- **Medal of Honor** - For gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty, in action involving actual conflict with an opposing armed force.
- **Navy Cross** - For extraordinary heroism in connection with military operation against an opposing armed force.
- **Silver Star Medal** - For gallantry in action against an opposing armed force.
- **Bronze Star** - For heroic or meritorious achievement of service, not involving aerial flight in connection with operations against an opposing armed force.
- **Purple Heart** - Awarded for wounds or death as result of an act of any opposing armed force, as a result of an international terrorist attack or as a result of military operations while serving as part of a peacekeeping force.
- **Meritorious Service Medal** - For outstanding non-combat meritorious achievement or service to the United States.

Suggested questions for grades 3-5:

- What is the difference between these medals?
- Why are certain medals ranked higher than others?
- What do you think it feels like to receive some of these medals?

Suggested questions for grades 6-8:

- What kinds of people do you imagine receiving these awards?
- What actions might merit the presentation of the Navy Cross? The Bronze Star?



Investigation

Listen to or read selected [oral histories](#) from two Navy veterans who served during World War II. Provide participants with background information on each man's accomplishments during the war and show images of Gun Tub 10 and USS *Mason*. Alonzo Swann served on USS *Intrepid* and was a member of Gun Tub 10, a group of anti-aircraft guns manned by a group of Black gunners.

Horace Banks served on USS *Mason*, one of the two ships with all-Black crews that served during World War II. Discuss the following questions:

Suggested questions for grades 3-5:

- What did Alonzo and Horace accomplish? Why did they receive medals?
- In Alonzo's story, what was the significance of one medal over another? Why did Alonzo fight so long when he had already received a medal?
- Why did it take so long for Horace's ship to be recognized?

Suggested questions for grades 6-8:

- Why did it take so long for Alonzo and Horace to receive their rightful recognition?
- What changed? Why did Alonzo eventually receive the Navy Cross? Why was *Mason* finally recognized by the US Government?
- How did it affect Alonzo and Horace emotionally and mentally to not receive their rightful awards after the war ended?



Stories of Delayed Recognition

Listen to or read selected oral histories from two Navy veterans who served during World War II. Provide participants with background information on each man's accomplishments during the war and show images of Gun Tub 10 and USS *Mason*. Alonzo Swann served on USS *Intrepid* and was a member of Gun Tub 10, a group of anti-aircraft guns manned by a group of Black gunners. Horace Banks served on USS *Mason*, one of the two ships with all-Black crews that served during World War II. Discuss the following questions:

Suggested questions for grades 3-5:

- What did Alonzo and Horace accomplish? Why did they receive medals?
- In Alonzo's story, what was the significance of one medal over another? Why did Alonzo fight so long when he had already received a medal?
- Why did it take so long for Horace's ship to be recognized?

Suggested questions for grades 6-8:

- Why did it take so long for Alonzo and Horace to receive their rightful recognition?
- What changed? Why did Alonzo eventually receive the Navy Cross? Why was *Mason* finally recognized by the US Government?
- How did it affect Alonzo and Horace emotionally and mentally to not receive their rightful awards after the war ended?



Lesson Connection

Have participants listen to the oral histories of Black sailors serving during World War II, such as John Seagraves, Henry Mouzon and Theodore Jackson. Please see our lesson: **Limits on Black Sailors in World War II**.



Background

Alonzo Swann

Alonzo Swann served on USS *Intrepid* and was a member of Gun Tub 10, a group of anti-aircraft guns manned by a group of Black gunners. In October 1944, a kamikaze airplane was coming toward *Intrepid*. The men in Gun Tub 10 stayed at their positions and shot down a wing of the kamikaze. The damaged plane crashed into the gun tub and killed 10 men, injuring many others. Swann, along with five other surviving sailors, were going to be given the Navy Cross, but it was taken away and replaced with the Bronze Star without warning from the Navy administration. After fifty years of fighting, Swann received the Navy Cross that he had initially been awarded.

Horace Banks

Horace Banks served on USS *Mason*, one of the two ships with all-Black crews that served during World War II. *Mason* was a destroyer escort that had an all-Black crew but primarily white officers. In September 1944, *Mason* was part of a convoy of slow-moving craft in treacherous, stormy weather. The convoy took four weeks to cross the Atlantic. The ship and crew survived a 70 degree roll and proved themselves more than capable of handling their ship. For their tremendous contribution to the war effort, the commanding officer put *Mason* up for a commendation. However, the commendation was lost and it was not until the 1990s that the Secretary of the Navy John Dalton and President Bill Clinton honored the ship's surviving veterans. In 1994, the crew of *Mason* was finally awarded a commendation for meritorious service during the severe storm.

Recognition Delayed

Over one million Black soldiers, sailors, and marines served in World War II. Not one received the medal of honor during the war. Decision makers downplayed or overlooked evidence of courage and sacrifice on the part of Black servicemen. In 1993, the U.S. Army commissioned a study to investigate a possible "racial disparity" in the awarding of medals of honor during World War II. As

a result of the study, in 1997, President Bill Clinton awarded the Medal of Honor to seven Black veterans of World War II. Only one honoree, Vernon Baker, was still alive to receive his medal.

This disparity was true for other racial and ethnic groups as well. In the army, the 442nd Infantry Regiment during World War II was made up of almost entirely second generation Japanese Americans. The regiment is now known as the most decorated unit of its size in United States military history. However, 20 of the medals of honor awarded to the regiment were presented in 2000, after a similar exhaustive study of “racial disparity” in medals among Asian Americans. In total, President Clinton presented 22 medals of honor to Asian American veterans after the study was finished.

In 2002, Congress authorized another study, this time to review the war records of Jewish and Hispanic veterans. Similar to the previous two, this study reviewed World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. In 2014, President Barack Obama presented the medal of honor to 24 veterans of these three wars. Many of the awards were presented posthumously, but all of the recipients were of Hispanic, Jewish or African American descent. All of the awards were upgraded from the Distinguished Service Cross. Today, the military continues to review past conflicts and service members in an attempt to present veterans with the awards they deserve.

U.S. Navy Medal of Honor Symbolism

The Navy Medal of Honor has a light blue ribbon embroidered with 13 stars. Light blue is a color of valor and 13 represents the first 13 colonies. The shape of the medal is a five-pointed star, and on each point are clusters of laurel and oak leaves. Laurel and oak represent victory and strength. In the center of the star is the Roman goddess of wisdom and war, Minerva, holding a shield that represents the union of states and an axe blade that represents authority. She is warding off a man holding snakes in his hands, meant to represent discord. The owl on her head symbolizes wisdom. Around Minerva are 34 stars, which represent each of the 34 states when the Medal of Honor was created. These include the Union states and Confederate states at the time.



Additional Resources/References

Navy Awards Precedence:

<https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/References/US-Navy-Uniforms/Uniform-Regulations/Navy-Awards-Precedence/>

Navy Medal of Honor Design:

<https://www.cmoahs.org/medal/design>

President Obama Awarding 24 Belated Medals of Honor:

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/21/president-obama-award-medal>

[-honor#:~:text=In%202002%2C%20Congress%2C%20through%20the.not%20denied%20because%20of%20prejudice.](#)



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Documents and Images





Credit: All medals via Navy History and Heritage Command

ACTIVITY: AN AWARD FOR SOMEONE SPECIAL

Directions: Design your own award for someone in your life. Give it a name and description, too!


