

## Telling our Stories, Finding our Roots, Exeter's Multi-Coloured History Black GIs and wartime segregation in Exeter

### Teachers' notes

#### Introduction

The activities contained in this pack are most suitable for KS3 but may also be appropriate for upper KS2. It is suggested that the activities are completed over several sessions; session 1 provides the core activity with a further three sessions as optional extras.

#### Curriculum links (2014)

This pack addresses various areas of the curriculum

#### English:

**KS2: Reading comprehension:** explain and discuss their understanding of what they have read, including through formal presentations and debates; provide reasoned justifications for their views

**Writing composition**, identifying the audience for and purpose of the writing  
Spoken English: [Pupils] should have opportunities to improvise, devise and script drama for one another and a range of audiences.

**KS3: Writing:** writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences...including arguments, and personal and formal letters.

**Spoken English:** participating in formal debates and structured discussions, summarising and/or building on what has been said; improvising, rehearsing and performing play scripts... using role, intonation, tone, volume, mood, silence, stillness and action to add impact.

#### History

**KS2: a local history study:** a study of an aspect of history or a site... that is significant in the locality

**KS3: challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day:** the Second World War...

#### Citizenship

**KS3: Purpose of study:** explore political and social issues critically to weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments.

**Key resources for this pack:**

Telling Our Stories website: Black American GIs arrive in Exeter

[http://www.tellingourstoriesexeter.org.uk/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail\\_0&cntnt01articleid=29&cntnt01origid=57&cntnt01returnid=80](http://www.tellingourstoriesexeter.org.uk/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail_0&cntnt01articleid=29&cntnt01origid=57&cntnt01returnid=80)

Video: Black GIs in Exeter with Crystal Carter

<http://www.tellingourstoriesexeter.org.uk/index.php?page=videos>

African American Soldiers in WW2 Britain – an audio from a BBC Radio 4 programme on GIs called 'GI Britain', narrated by Martha Kearney. Provides good background information on the implications of segregation in wartime Britain.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbR8qDLAAk8>

**Note:** The term GI itself has an interesting history and differing interpretations. See this Wikipedia article for details: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G.I.\\_\(military\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G.I._(military))

**Student resource sheets:**

Introductory texts: *Background information to segregation in the US; Black GIs and wartime segregation in Exeter*

Can do; Can't do resource cards

Letter writing sheet: The incident of the Black GI and the white St Thomas resident in wartime Exeter

## Session 1: Can do; Can't do

### Suggested procedure

1. Warm up the topic by asking students what they know about Exeter during World War II. They may have some knowledge about the Blitz, about evacuees.
2. Divide the class into groups of 3-4 pupils
3. Read the information sheet on Black GIs and wartime segregation in Exeter with the whole class, either using the introductory text below or through the relevant section of the Telling Our Stories website. Alternatively, for older or more able pupils, they may be able to read the information for themselves – a copy of the text below or looking at the on-line information; the African American Soldiers in WW2 Britain audio may also be useful, particularly for KS3 pupils.
4. Inform some groups they are to take on the role of Black GIs based in St Thomas and others they will be representing White GIs based in the city centre. Make sure students are clear that the River Exe and a single bridge crossing divides them. You can use something to represent the river and the bridge if you like - a strip of cloth perhaps.
5. Photocopy and hand out the 'Can do; Can't do' worksheets (different versions for Black and White soldiers). Ask each group to look at the activities and discuss and decide which they can and cannot do. They can also add extra activities.
6. Explore group responses; compare the responses of the groups representing the White GIs and Black GIs. Allow brief discussion of issues raised.
7. Show the video of an interview with Crystal Carter, who researched the story of the Black American soldiers stationed in Exeter for Telling Our Stories
8. Ask if, having seen this film, groups would like to change their minds about what they can and cannot do.
9. Invite the students to talk about their feelings as Black and White GIs. "How would it feel to be a Black GI in Exeter then? How would it feel to be a White GI in Exeter then?"
10. Provide the class with some background information on segregation in the US so they understand why black and white soldiers were segregated in Exeter. The information sheet 'Background information on segregation in the US' provides a basic summary. For further information see references.
11. Discuss any issues that students may have been prompted to raise as a result of the discussion such as unfairness, inequality, racism, prejudice etc
12. Conclude by asking them how life in Exeter is different now. How are rules different today? Is everyone treated equally in today's Exeter? Does racism still exist in the city?

#### Note to teachers:

Sadly, racism is still in evidence in Exeter and across the UK, though is much less widespread and prevalent than years ago and certainly much less acceptable. People from many different backgrounds live in Exeter and most people are happy with and welcoming of Exeter's diversity. Equality is now enshrined in law; it is illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, colour or other cultural differences, though such discrimination does still happen.

## Background information on segregation in the US

From the 1880s through to the 1960s, a majority of American states operated laws of **segregation**. This meant people could be punished for breaking rules that prevented people of different races mixing with one another. The most common types of laws prevented marriage between people of different races but there were a host of other rules too. The rules varied between different states but some examples included:

**Buses:** Black and white passengers at bus stations had separate waiting rooms and separate ticket windows.

**Restaurants:** White and black people were served in different rooms or were separated by a solid partition.

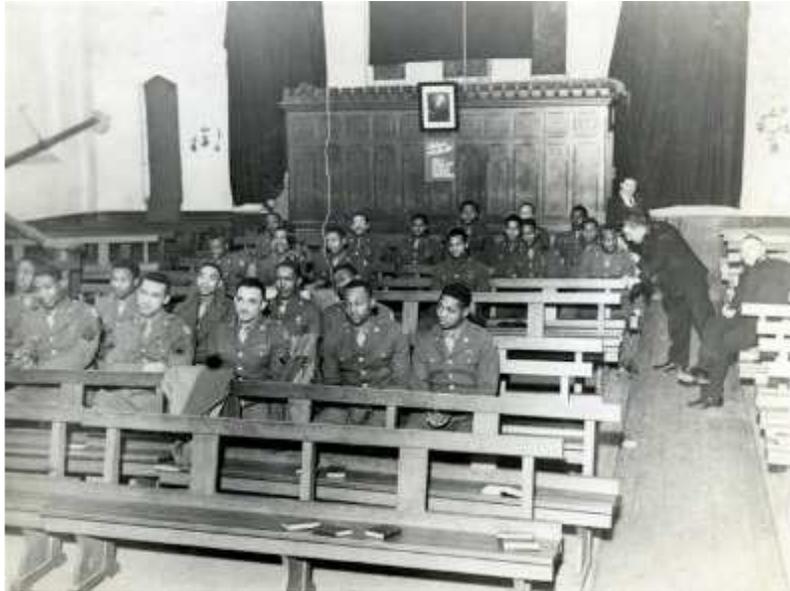
**Education:** There were separate schools for white and black children.

**Burial:** Black people were not allowed to be buried at the same sites as white people.

In many ways these rules were similar to those enforced by the South African government under the system known as **apartheid**, a system that was eventually successfully challenged by Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) Party. In the USA, the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s eventually forced changes to these racist laws. Martin Luther King became one of the most famous Civil Rights leaders.

## Introductory text for students

### Black GIs and wartime segregation in Exeter



A photo of Black GIs taken at Christmas 1944, in the Salvation Army Temple in St Thomas, which is now a karate club

During World War II American troops were based in Exeter. In 1943 and 1944 African-American US troops (black soldiers) were based in St Thomas, living in tents pitched at the former County Ground, which has since been replaced with housing. Their white colleagues were often housed in homes in Exeter.

During this time the United States Army had a policy of **segregating** black and white troops. **Segregation** is the separation of people by force because of their race, culture, religion or other factors. This segregation of US troops happened not only in Exeter but across the whole of England. This policy of segregation meant that the US Army kept black and white soldiers separated, both at army bases and when they were off duty and socialising.

In Exeter, the city was essentially divided in two, with the River Exe forming a boundary. Black soldiers were allowed in St Thomas and West Exe. White soldiers were allowed in the city centre. The US Army placed Military Police, one black and one white, on either side of the old Exe Bridge to make sure that black and white soldiers did not cross to the other side. They also coordinated patrols around the city to collect anyone who had strayed to the 'wrong' area.

**You are a group of Black American GIs – stationed at County Ground in St Thomas**

Which of the following activities do you think you would be allowed to do? Put a tick next to the activities that you 'Can do', and a cross next to the activities you 'Can't do'. Add any other activities that you think are relevant.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Can do</b>	<b>Can't do</b>
Go to a pub in the city centre		
Go to the house of a local white resident who has invited you for tea		
Take a walk on the bridge over the River Exe		
Date a white woman		
Marry a white woman from Exeter and return to America together		
Attend a special dance organised for soldiers at the Civic Centre on Queen Street in the city centre		
Cross the bridge to go to Wonford hospital if you become ill		
Become friends with a white GI		

**You are a group of White American GIs – stationed in Topsham and around the city centre**

Which of the following activities do you think you would be allowed to do? Put a tick next to the activities that you 'Can do', and a cross next to the activities you 'Can't do'.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Can do</b>	<b>Can't do</b>
Go to a pub in St Thomas		
Go to the house of a local white resident who has invited you for tea		
Take a walk on the bridge over the River Exe		
Date a white woman		
Marry a white woman from Exeter and return to America together		
Become friends with a black GI		
Attend a special dance organised for soldiers at the Civic Centre on Queen Street in the city centre		

## Notes on Can do; Can't do worksheet

The following is based on information from the Telling Our Stories website, from the interview with Crystal Carter and from the book: *Exeter Remembers the War: Life on the Home Front*, Chapter on *Strangers – Foreigners*

### White GIs - Can do

**Attend a special dance organised for soldiers at the Civic Centre on Queen St (city centre)** – dances in the city centre would be reserved for white GIs only as Black GIs had to stay on the opposite side of the river in St Thomas.

**Go to the house of a local white resident who has invited you for tea** – this would have been considered acceptable and friendships did develop between local people and American GIs.

**Date a white woman** – many romantic relationships between local women and American GIs did develop.

**Marry a white woman from Exeter and return to America together** – many White GIs took back their girlfriends to the USA as 'GI brides'.

### White GIs - Can't do

**Go to a pub in St Thomas** – White GIs were not allowed across the bridge to St Thomas

**Take a walk on the bridge over the River Exe** – Military Police stationed at either end of the bridge made sure that White and Black soldiers did not cross; this would have included walking on the bridge itself.

**Have a Black GI as a friend** – this was not considered acceptable; occasionally when each did manage to get across the bridge somehow, there were reported fights between white and black soldiers. However, it is important to note both fought together in the war.

## **Black GIs - Can do**

**Go to the house of a local white resident who has invited you for tea** – such an event would not have been officially sanctioned by the US Military. However, many local people in Exeter did not understand or even accept the idea of segregation and Black GIs did befriend local people and visit them in their homes.

**Date a white woman** – This also would not have been sanctioned by the US military. However, local women did become friendly with the Black GIs and relationships did form. An estimated 83 babies in Devon resulted from these liaisons.

## **Black GIs – Can't do**

**Go to a pub in the city centre** – Black GIs were not allowed across the bridge to the city centre.

**Attend a special dance organised for soldiers at the Civic Centre on Queen St (city centre)** – dances in the city centre would be reserved for white GIs only as Black GIs had to stay on the opposite side of the river in St Thomas. There were separate dances for the Black GIs.

**Take a walk on the bridge over the River Exe** - Military Police stationed at either end of the bridge made sure that White and Black soldiers did not cross; this would have included walking on the bridge itself.

**Cross the bridge to go to hospital if you became ill** – Wonford hospital was generally used only by White GIs only. A makeshift hospital was set up in St Thomas for Black GIs but it lacked the resources available to White GIs the other side of the city. However, there were reports of Black GIs being admitted to Wonford hospital. So on occasion, if serious medical treatment was required, Black GIs would have been sent there. However, they certainly would have been in a different ward to White GIs and there were reports of them being treated unkindly there.

**Have a White GI as a friend** - this was not considered acceptable; occasionally when Black GIs did somehow manage to get across the bridge, there were reported fights between White and Black soldiers. However, it is important to note both fought together in the war.

**Marry a white woman from Exeter and return to America together** – this was really only an option for White GIs. In many American states mixed marriages were still illegal.

## Session 2: Game and role play to demonstrate unfairness and segregation

### Suggested procedure

1. Divide the class into two groups, randomly, ensuring a clear dividing line down the classroom.
2. Ask pupils on each side of the dividing line to do the same task, the only rules being that they must try to complete the task using only the resources they have been given and that they are not allowed to cross the dividing line.
3. Explain the task which both groups must do. Each group must attempt to create a template (or series of templates), in the first instance, and then draw round these templates on paper, cut them out and colour them. Ideas for templates could be flowers or miniature T shirts (to which they add designs). Explain the team which has produced the best template and most colourful designs will be considered the winning team. Provide team 1 with card, plain paper, pencils, scissors and a variety of colours. Provide team 2 with card and a few pencils only; no scissors or colours.
4. Ask groups to begin the task. Clearly team 2 is likely to struggle and complain about the task being unfair. Help them by showing the template could be carefully torn out and then drawn around. If students become very vocal and annoyed by the unfairness of the activity, stop the activity for a moment and explain that these are the rules and that by the end of the session they will understand why these rules have been instigated.
5. After about 15 minutes stop the activity and see which team has produced the best templates and most colourful designs.
6. Discuss the outcomes and in particular the idea of fairness. Was this a fair activity? What would have made it fairer? Did Team 2 ever have an equal chance? Etc
7. Ask students to explore their feelings of being in each team. E.g. How aware were the well-resourced students of the other team's lack of resources? What does it feel like to know you are unfairly advantaged/disadvantaged? How did it feel to be in the winning team? How did it feel to be in the losing team? Did the winning team feel sympathy for the losing team? Did both groups complete the task as well as they would have liked? Did anyone feel angry? How was such anger expressed? Did you feel like taking some of the resources that the winning team had?
8. Now recap on session 1, asking students what they remember about Black GIs (soldiers) in wartime Exeter.
9. Now recall any details they remember from the video of an interview with Crystal Carter, who researched the story of the Black American soldiers stationed in Exeter for *Telling Our Stories*. Show the film again or continue with the session.
10. Ask students to identify the similarities between the game they have just played and the lives of Black and White GIs in Exeter; explain that the game was deliberately designed to be unfair so as to demonstrate the feelings associated with unfairness, injustice and segregation.

### Session 3: Letter writing activity

#### Suggested procedure

1. Recap on session 1, asking students what they remember about Black GIs (soldiers) in wartime Exeter and the segregation that they experienced.
2. Ask students to recall any details they remember from the video of an interview with Crystal Carter, who researched the story of the Black American soldiers stationed in Exeter for Telling Our Stories.
3. Show the film again or continue with the session.
4. Make sure that students understand clearly the issue of segregation and the rules that applied to Black and White American GI soldiers.
5. Now read the fictional case study (based on real life cases) of an interaction between a Black GI and white woman in St Thomas and the subsequent events.
6. Ask pupils to imagine that they are wartime Exeter residents and have witnessed the incident. Ask them to write a letter to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, Commander Eisenhower, defending the particular GI you observed. See pupil's worksheet: Use the opportunity to express your feelings about the treatment of Black GIs in St Thomas. Do you think they are treated unjustly? How would you like them to be treated? What changes to the rules would you like to see?
7. Conclude the lesson by hearing some of the letters and discussing some of the issues about unfairness, injustice and racism expressed in the letters; list any ideas pupils have on how the rules could be changed to make life fairer for all Exeter residents and particularly for Black GIs.

#### Note for teachers

Although this activity is based on a fictional case study, a very similar real life incident happened in Portsmouth.

A black American soldier, Joseph Ballot, stationed in Portsmouth, was arrested because a girl said she had been molested. There was no evidence to prove this, for at the trial neither the girl nor the policeman recognized the young man. Yet a death sentence was passed, and undoubtedly colour had a part to play in the severity of the sentence.

The people of Portsmouth were horrified at the sentence and suggested something be done. 276 signatures were collected on a petition and people in all walks of life talked about the injustice of the sentence.

A woman wrote to General Eisenhower about the unfairness of the whole affair, concluding her letter: "Crime should be punished, but let there be justice for all. We are asking ourselves why we stood up to the nights of terror in 1940 and 1941 if it was not for the freedom, justice, and rights of all men?"

**The incident of the Black GI and the white St Thomas resident in wartime Exeter**

You are walking home one night in St Thomas. It is very dark but you notice a Black GI soldier holding the arm of a young white woman. The woman appears to be struggling. The GI keeps saying “But I’m only trying to help you”.

“Get off me; get off me” shouts the woman.

Suddenly, out of the shadows jump two military police who violently arrest the Black GI, hitting him to the ground. They take him away.

You later find out that the Black GI was accused of assaulting the woman and he was sentenced to three years imprisonment and hard labour.

You know what you saw, and it wasn’t assault. You have also seen the way that Black GIs are unfairly treated in St Thomas; the way they are prevented from crossing the bridge and taking part in activities that White soldiers are allowed to. Yet you know that they are still an important part of the ‘war effort’ and fight alongside their white colleagues. You have spoken to them sometimes and they always seem very friendly.

**Write a letter** to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, General Eisenhower, defending the particular GI you observed. Explain what you saw that night and use the opportunity to express your feelings about the treatment of Black GIs in St Thomas. Do you think they are treated unjustly? How would you like them to be treated? What changes to the rules would you like to see? Why would you like to see these changes?

## **Session 4: Philosophical or 'big question' discussion**

### **Suggested procedure**

If you are familiar with Philosophy for Children (P4C) you will be aware that students use a stimulus as a starting point to raising their own questions. Clearly, the issues raised in this pack provide plenty of rich material for a discussion on some key themes and issues such as fairness, injustice, racism, segregation, inequality etc.

If you are not familiar with the processes used in P4C you might like to consider the following question for discussion. The discussion is best carried out in a circle with clear ground rules established beforehand such as the importance of taking turns to speak, listening to others, valuing everyone's contribution, being polite when referring to someone else's ideas and providing reasons for opinions etc.

### **Big Question (P4C type question)**

Is segregation (forcibly separating people according to race, culture, religion or other factors) ever right?

More information on Philosophy for Children on the sapere website

<http://www.sapere.org.uk/>

**Further information and references for a more in-depth study into GIs and general 20<sup>th</sup> century black history in Exeter and Devon**

Easterly, Hilda M. "War-time at the Shop and around the Farmstead Home Dairy Farm." An interview for *BBC - WW2 People's War* 06 June 2005  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/55/a4160855.shtml>

George 'Stil' Stillings - 1907 to 1967 *Exeter Memories*  
[http://www.exetermemories.co.uk/em/\\_people/stil.php](http://www.exetermemories.co.uk/em/_people/stil.php)

Lashmar, Paul. "C4 Delays Film on US Army Hangings." *The Guardian*. 29 Mar 2003.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2003/mar/29/broadcasting.channel4>

MacKeith, Lucy. "Local Black History: A Beginning in Devon." *Black Networking Group*. 2003  
[http://www.blacknetworkinggroup.co.uk/local\\_black\\_history.htm](http://www.blacknetworkinggroup.co.uk/local_black_history.htm)

Racial segregation in the US  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Segregation\\_in\\_the\\_US](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Segregation_in_the_US)

African-American Civil Rights Movement (1955–68)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American\\_Civil\\_Rights\\_Movement\\_%281955-1968%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_Civil_Rights_Movement_%281955-1968%29)

*Exeter Remembers the War*, Todd Gray ISBN 1903356415  
[http://stevensbooks.co.uk/todd\\_grey\\_books/ERW.html](http://stevensbooks.co.uk/todd_grey_books/ERW.html)