

# Wilmington, North Carolina, WWII Heritage City

A series of lessons from the [World War II Heritage Cities Lesson Collection](#)



Figure 1: The Launching of the SS Charles Pinckney on May 10, 1942 by the North Carolina Shipbuilding Co. in Wilmington, North Carolina. (Credit: Courtesy of New Hanover County Public Library)

## Introduction

All three lessons, and the culminating lesson, support the development of understanding the significance of Wilmington, NC as a WWII heritage city: its contributions to home front efforts such as defense manufacturing, civilian involvement, and Armed Forces presence. The lessons highlight specific Wilmington area landmarks and contributions but connect to larger themes and understandings of the U.S. home front during wartime.

A collection of standards covered in the lesson collection is listed beneath the lesson links. Objectives for each lesson, materials, and resources are listed within the lesson. Each lesson also integrates information and encourages understanding of the impact of

segregation in the South during wartime and the contribution of African Americans. Women's home front roles are also highlighted.

## Lessons (with World War II home front topics):

The first three lessons listed can be taught individually or collectively, in any order. The final lesson is to support students in combining learning across the three lessons, and/or comparison to other World War II home front cities in a culminating activity.

1. [N. C. Shipbuilding Co: Impacts on the WWII Home Front in Wilmington, NC \(p. 4\)](#)
  - Defense manufacturing
2. [The Armed Forces Presence on the WWII Home Front in Wilmington, NC \(p. 14\)](#)
  - Camps
  - Airfields
  - Civil defense preparedness
3. [The USO Serving on the WWII Home Front in Wilmington, NC \(p. 26\)](#)
  - Wartime recreation
  - Volunteer participation
4. [Wilmington, NC: Comparing and Connecting WWII Home Fronts \(p. 35\)](#)

## Positioning these Lessons in the Curriculum:

Time period: World War II

Topics: World War II, women's history, workforce migration, science and technology

## United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following [National Standards for History](#) from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:

### Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)

Standard 3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs

### Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following [Curriculum Standards themes for Social Studies](#) from the National Council for the Social Studies:

- Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society
- Theme 9: Global Connections

### Relevant Common Core Standards

These lessons relate to the following [Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies](#) for middle and high school students:

#### Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.2

#### Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.4

#### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.9

#### Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.10

*The lesson series was written by Sarah Nestor Lane, an educator and consultant funded by a National Council on Public History's cooperative agreement with the National Park Service.*

# Lesson 1: N. C. Shipbuilding Co: Impacts on the WWII Home Front in Wilmington, NC

## About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series teaching about the WWII home front, highlighting Wilmington, North Carolina, as a designated [WWII Heritage City](#). The lesson contains photographs, reading, and a primary source, with an optional extension activity, to contribute to learners' understandings of defense manufacturing, using N.C. Shipbuilding Co. in Wilmington, NC.

## Objectives:

1. Describe the N.C. Shipbuilding Co.'s importance to the city of Wilmington, NC and its contributions to defense manufacturing in WWII
2. Describe shipyard employee roles and their working and living conditions

## Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 2-7 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, & optional extension
3. *Map: It is recommended that lessons are taught with a map of the Wilmington area, or North Carolina to plot historical locations.*



## Getting Started: Essential Question

How did the North Carolina (N.C.) Shipbuilding Co. impact the economy and contribute to defense manufacturing in WWII?

## Photos



Figure 2: The SS Zebulon Baird Vance launched into Cape Fear, December 6, 1941. (Credit: Image courtesy of the State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History.)



Figure 3: Aerial of the shipyard, December 29, 1941; 23 days following the launch of the first vessel (Credit: Courtesy of New Hanover County Public Library)



### By the numbers:

- 243 ships built from 1941-1946
- 1 of 10 U.S. shipyards specializing in constructing Liberty cargo vessels
- 160 acres covered by the shipyard
- Shipyard employment was over 20,000 in 1943; 1,628 were African Americans
- 7 housing projects completed: By end of 1943, 3,800 war housing units had been added to 1,800 in 1942.



### Quotation to consider:

"We have accomplished our tasks and may forget the hardships and headaches in connection with it and enjoy the feeling that it has been a job well done. The combination of a few Newport News shipbuilders and a good supply of intelligent, willing North Carolina men and women has accomplished the task. We shall never have to apologize for the way it was done."

- President of N.C. Shipbuilding Co., May 1, 1946



## Read to Connect

### Reading 1: Background of N.C. Shipbuilding Co.

The North Carolina Shipbuilding Co. was founded in 1941 in Wilmington, North Carolina (under the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Co). It was part of the US Government's World War II Emergency Shipbuilding Program. The yard, located on the east bank of the Cape Fear River, began to be constructed in February 1941. The first Liberty ship launched just before the attack on Pearl Harbor, on December 6, 1941. The Liberty ship was built via a U.S. Maritime Commission contract. Liberty cargo vessels transported vehicles, tanks, ammunition, and other supplies. As demand increased, so did the number of ships and acreage of the shipyard.

The opening of the Shipbuilding Co. revived the region's economy and led to Wilmington's title of "The Defense Capital of the State." The population of Wilmington increased from about 33,000 to 50,000 due to internal migration. Migrants came for jobs at the shipyard and other defense industries in the area. The shipyard became the state's largest employer.

(Other industries included Block's Shirt factory, an Ethyl-Dow Chemical plant for aviation gasoline, pulpwood, fertilizer plants, and dairies.)

Population increases caused housing and food shortages. An empty lot next to the shipyard became a trailer camp for employees. Workers who were unable to secure housing often used tents or old railroad cars for shelter. Private homeowners would rent rooms to workers as well. The Wilmington Housing Authority built housing in Maffitt Village for shipyard workers. Due to segregation laws, the Housing Authority also built separate housing for African American shipyard workers. This neighborhood was called Hillcrest Extension. Wilmington's infrastructure was stretched to its limits. Transportation and lines to participate in local activities, like dining and entertainment, were long, and schools were crowded.

The N.C. Shipbuilding Co. employed female and African American workers. Women started as entry-level tool checkers but eventually filled roles in more skilled jobs (welding, woodworking, and drill pressing efforts). Employees worked in integrated crews, but the plant enforced segregation in facilities such as cafeterias. The hiring of so many African Americans for skilled positions at the shipyard was unheard of at the time in the South. They worked in various jobs such as shipwrights, drillers, and riveters. Shipyard employees contributed to wartime campaigns. These included war bond drives, March of Dimes, clothing collections, and Community War Chest efforts.

The shipyard and its employees were recognized with multiple awards by the United States Maritime Commission for contributions in advanced techniques and number of ships produced. The yard was first held in reserve on stand-by, in case of need in future conflicts, but today is part of a North Carolina state port.

### Questions for Reading 1

1. What were the impacts of the Shipbuilding Co. on Wilmington's local economy?  
Consider both pros and cons.
2. What was the significance of shipyard employment for African Americans and women?
3. What unfair practices did African American shipyard workers encounter?
4. How did the shipyard contribute to the WWII home front efforts?

# Photos

## CAMPAIGNS



*March of Dimes*



*Clothing Collection*

*War Bonds*



*Community War Chest*

Figure 4: "Campaigns," with captions including War bonds, March of Dimes, Clothing Collection, and Community War Chest. Page 34 of the booklet titled, "Five Years of North Carolina Shipbuilding"

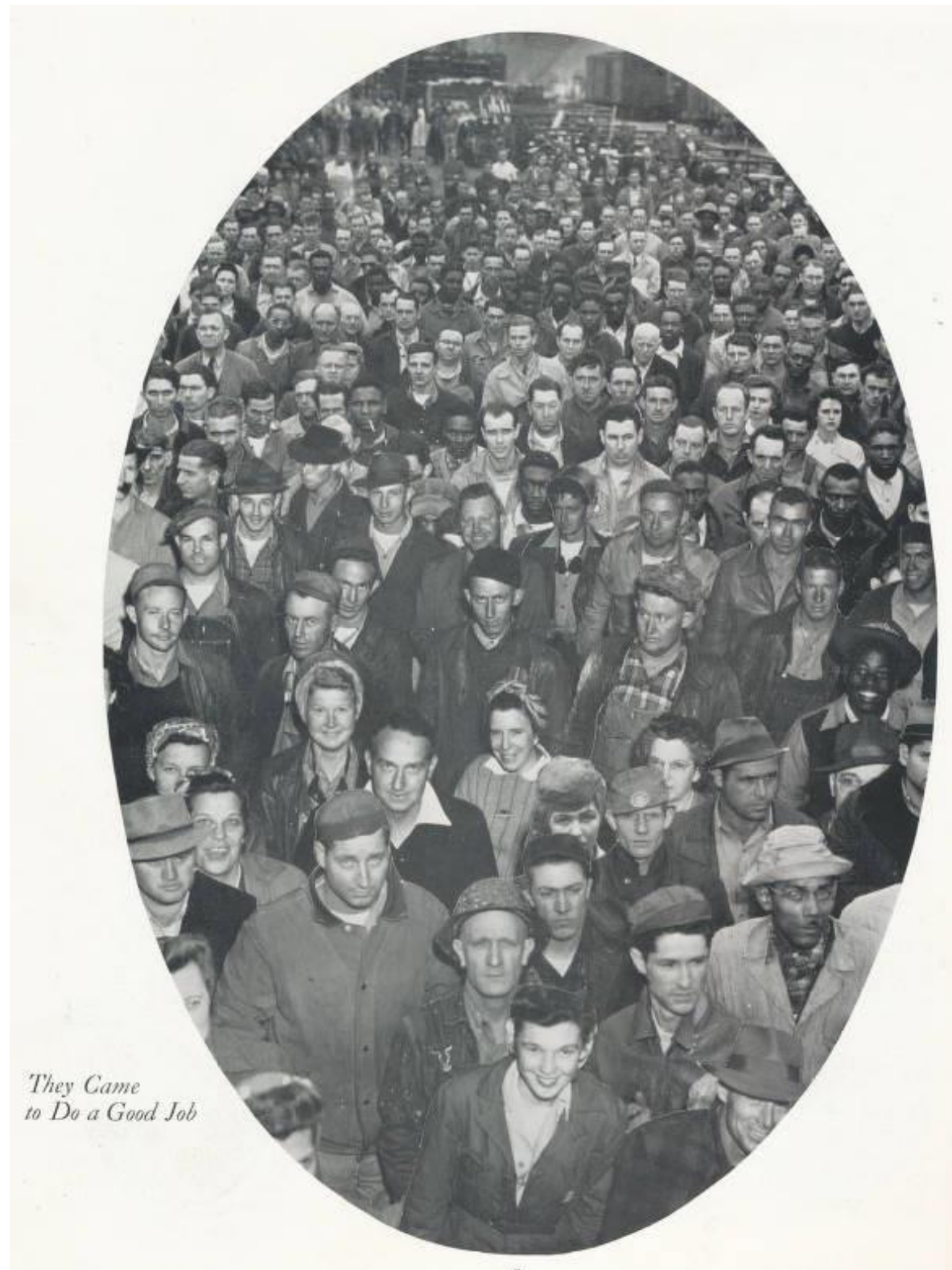


Figure 5: Page 6 of the booklet titled "Five Years of North Carolina Shipbuilding" features a button photograph of the employees. The photograph has a caption reading, "They came to do a good job." (Credit: Courtesy of New Hanover County Public Library)

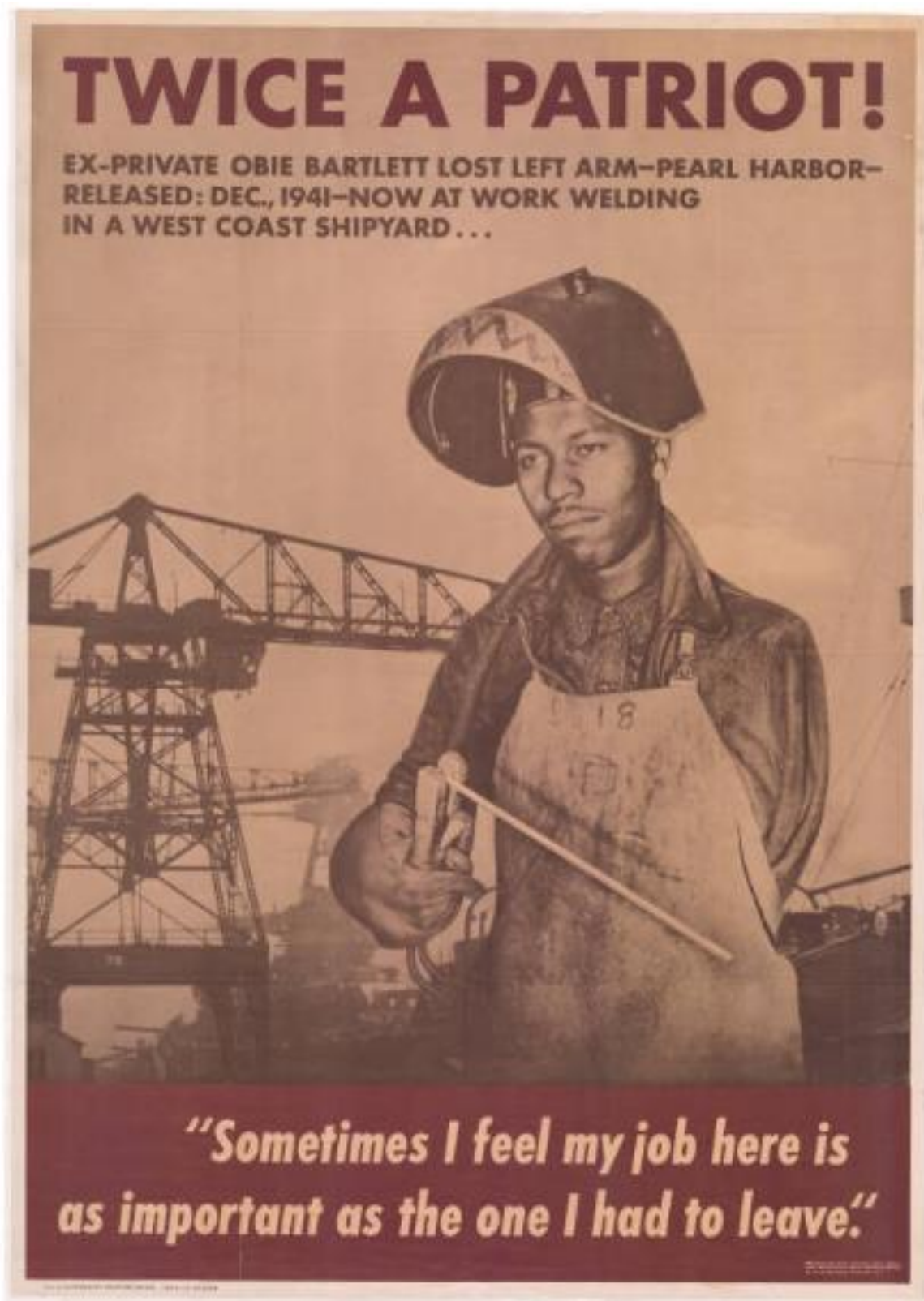


Figure 6: "Twice a Patriot" poster, featuring a West Coast, disabled veteran who was an African American Shipyard worker. (Credit: North Carolina Digital Collections)

## Reading 2: Excerpts from: “Five Years of North Carolina Shipbuilding”

*Published May 1, 1946, by the North Carolina Shipbuilding Co.*

“This is the story of one of North Carolina’s largest industrial enterprises and its contribution in ships to victory in war and a greater American Merchant Marine in peace.

It is the story of these ships – 243 in all from the sturdy Liberty freighter, S.S. Zebulon B. Vance, to the fast passenger-cargo C-2-type, S.S. Santa Isabel.

But more than anything else, it is the story of men and women—about 400 from Newport News, Virginia, and the thousands and thousands from throughout North Carolina and the south—who came here to do a job and did it well. The fact that they have collectively won every United States Maritime Commission award attests to the accomplishment of their purpose. . . .

More important, however, are the people who did the work and made the Company’s outstanding record possible. As has been noted, Wilmington was chosen with the good labor supply in mind. Experience has demonstrated that the class of men and women living in a community of this type constitutes splendid material, especially for training in the special skills of an industry. The great majority of employees came from a radius of 200 miles of the shipyard and a surprisingly large number continued to live at home and commuted, thus easing the housing situation.

In converging on Wilmington, they, together with military personnel of the several Army and Marine installations in southeastern North Carolina, gave the city the name of “Defense Capital” of the state during the height of the war. As employment figures climbed – the roll reached a peak of 21,000 on March 11, 1943—many new problems developed in the operations of the Company. Included among them were housing, access roads, transportation, Selective Service demands, rationing and anti-sabotage measures. The fine manner in which employees, both singularly and collectively, met these problems and solved them, through the assistance of the Company, community and state and federal governments, was an important factor in the success of the shipyard.”

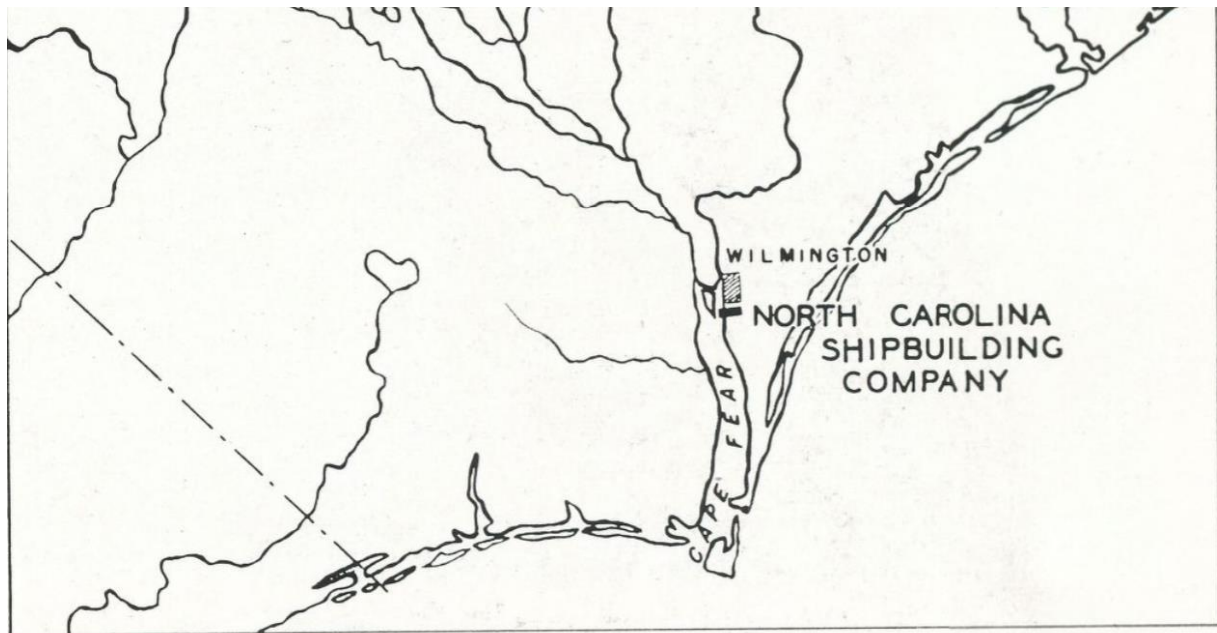
### Questions for Reading 2

1. What details do you notice in the photos (both image and text)? How could you describe the shipyard workforce?
2. Why is the tone of the text positive toward the employees’ contributions?
3. Consider the information from both Readings 1 and 2. Describe North Carolina Shipbuilding Co.’s importance to the city of Wilmington, NC and its contributions to defense manufacturing in WWII.

## Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: How did the North Carolina (N.C.) Shipbuilding Co. impact the economy and contribute to defense manufacturing in WWII?

## Optional Extension: Comparing Shipyards



*Location of Shipyard*

Figure 7: Map from booklet titled "Five Years of North Carolina Shipbuilding" (Credit: New Hanover County Public Library)

In Wilmington, NC a famous National Historic Landmark is the *USS North Carolina*, Battleship North Carolina (1941). This Battleship earned the most Pacific Battle campaign stars in the war and now serves as the state's memorial museum. Although a key landmark and memorial in NC, the battleship was built in New York.

The NC Shipbuilding Co. built Liberty cargo vessels and ships for the US Navy. As mentioned in Reading 1, the shipyard was 1 of 10 that built Liberty cargo vessels. Shipyards had different focuses and contributions to defense manufacturing. The [Battleship North Carolina](#) was produced in the New York Navy Yard in Brooklyn, New York.

1. Read more about the history of the [Brooklyn Navy Yard](#) where Battleship North Carolina was constructed. How/why do you think that particular shipyard built this battleship?

2. How does N.C. Shipbuilding Co. shipyard compare to the Brooklyn Navy Yard?  
(Consider home front employment, employees, defense manufacturing impacts, resources at locations)
3. What can you conclude about the impact of shipyards, both at the home front, and abroad, during WWII? (You may choose to research more of the U.S. Maritime Commission's work and long-term impacts from the war.)

## Resources

[Battleship North Carolina.](#)

[Brooklyn Navy Yard](#)

[Contributions to the War Effort \(Wilmington, North Carolina\)](#)

[North Carolina Shipbuilding Co. \(New Hanover County Public Library Collection\)](#)

[Wilmington, NC, Heritage City \(NPS\)](#)

[World War II Heritage Guide Map of Wilmington and Southeastern North Carolina](#)

# Lesson 2: The Armed Forces Presence on the WWII Home Front in Wilmington, NC

## About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series teaching about the WWII home front, with Wilmington, North Carolina, as a WWII Heritage City. The lesson contains photographs, reading, and a primary source to contribute to learners' understandings of stateside armed forces training and civilian defense support, using Montford Point as a focused example.

## Objectives:

1. Identify and describe the Armed Forces presence in the Wilmington, NC area
2. Identify examples of contributions of civilians, particularly women, to the Armed Forces' efforts
3. Describe the challenges faced, both in the workforce and greater community, by the Montford Point Marines

## Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 8-12 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1 & 2
3. *Map: It is recommended that lessons are taught with a map of the Wilmington area, or North Carolina to plot historical locations.*



## Getting Started: Essential Question

How did the presence of the Armed Forces, and civilian support of the Armed Forces, in Wilmington, NC contribute to the success of the Allied Forces?

## Photos



Figure 8: A postcard showing the demonstration of a 50-caliber anti-aircraft machine gun at Camp Davis. (Credit: Hall Photographs and Postcards Collection, MMP 12, Miscellaneous Military Papers, Military Collection, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C.; Postcard by: W. R. Thompson and Company, Richmond, Virginia.)



Figure 9: 10 women employees of Camp Davis telegraph office (Credit: UNCW)



Figure 10: Inter-branch athletics and social events helped to improve morale. Program for "Camp Lejeune vs. Camp Davis" football game, illustrated color cover, official football program of US Marine Corps, Camp Lejeune (Credit: UNCW).



### By the numbers:

- 46,000 acres bought and leased, including Topsail Island, for Camp Davis
- Camp Davis population: less than 30 in 1940; over 100,000 in 1943
- \$11 million invested in Bluethenthal Field by the Federal Government during WWII
- 11,000-acre tract of amphibious training land (at Camp Lejeune and Montford Point)



### Quotation to consider:

... As the men went their separate ways, they took with them the knowledge that they had served in a unique, a pioneering unit, and had shared its ups and downs. Possessed of an almost cocky belief in themselves as Marines and a special pride in their battalion besides, they had not needed combat to develop self-respect. As a black correspondent who visited the 51st at Eniwetok in October 1945 noted about its men: "They are a grand bunch! And

because of their ability to come through the kind of experience they have had, with its attendant racial irritants, they undoubtedly will be better men and better citizens."

- "Blacks in the Marines," by Shaw & Donnelly, the History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps (2002)



## Read to Connect

### Reading 1: Armed Forces In and Surrounding Wilmington, NC

All Armed Forces had presence in and around Wilmington, NC during WWII. The construction and enhancement of these military bases drew workers. Construction contracts would draw civilian workers in mass. These contracts provided training and a paycheck, which brought hope, especially to those overcoming the Great Depression. Workers traveled in by foot, bus, truck, or carpools. There was not enough housing to accommodate all workers; tents, trailers, and other temporary shelters were built along roads. These workers built the military buildings for thousands of service members' needs and training. Male workers were drafted, so women began filling roles in construction projects and defense work. Civilians supported data collection. They reported air and sea activity to filtering stations (such as a US Post Office), where volunteers, often women, charted information.

---

*"Basement of Front Street Post Office; you go in on the left hand side. Large offices are located underneath the ground that you don't see, you don't see daylight, and the volunteer shifts they had were from seven in the morning to seven in the evening, seven in the evening to seven in the morning. They kept us busy.*

*We could pick up foreign, I call them foreign planes, but planes that were not identified, and then we had to get to work, and find out where they came from and where they were going, and the intentions. If we thought it was crucial with other air bases, of course I wasn't the air base, we had to notify all the air bases of any unidentified airplane. No plane could come in our area without being identified.*

*We all were volunteers, no money involved. It was strictly the love of the country, the love of the people, and the protection of the town. Well I felt like, since really, I was not doing anything else with my time, I was young, I*

*was active, and I wanted to get out there and do something. Why sit around?"*

*-Kathleen Somerset, a volunteer at the filter station at the Wilmington Post Office*

---

Camp Davis was the first Army anti-aircraft artillery training base in the country. Fort Fisher served as an advanced training base for Camp Davis, and the population grew quickly. Fort Fisher was built on a Confederate earthen fort and was the primary firing range. Segregated African American units trained at Camp Gibbins. Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) towed targets in flights for anti-aircraft artillery practice. Women also served in roles such as in engineering and telegraph offices. These installations served as important camps for anti-aircraft gunnery training and coastal defense.

The Army Air Forces trained at Bluethenthal Field Army Air Base (now Wilmington International Airport) and Wilmington Army Airfield. The field at Bluethenthal was a grass flying field and civilian airport before Pearl Harbor. It was then converted to military use with modern concrete runways and buildings. Chief of Staff Gen. George Marshall inspected the base during its transformation. P-47 Thunderbolt fighter pilots trained here, and anti-submarine patrols originated from the base.

---

*"We knew when a unit was going off to war. We knew we'd never see them again."*

*-Clerk Muriel Williamson, reflecting on units leaving Bluethenthal Field Army Air Base*

---

The Navy had anti-submarine warfare patrol craft along the Cape Fear River and at Southport. Fort Caswell was constructed between 1826 and 1836 and was used as a submarine tracking station and patrol base in 1942. The Coast Guard was patrolling with bases at Wrightsville Beach, Southport, and Wilmington.

The Marine Corps was stationed at Camp Lejeune and Montford Point (Jacksonville/New River). The bases founded in 1941 to take advantage of geographical features like forests and beach access. Infantrymen practiced going ashore on Onslow Beach in rehearsals. Montford Point was the first training camp for segregated African American Marine troops. It was renamed in 1974 as Camp Gilbert H. Johnson, after Gilbert "Hashmark" Johnson, a

drill instructor who served at Montford Point. This is currently the only military installation to be named after an African American Marine.

The complex Armed Forces operations occurring in and around Wilmington contributed to the Allied victory. Many of these historical bases and military installations can be visited for their remains, memorials, and museums.

### Questions for Reading 1

1. Which branches were present in the Wilmington area? How did the geographic features of Northeastern North Carolina and Wilmington lend itself to these branches?
2. How did civilians contribute to the Armed Forces' defense efforts?
3. What challenges did civilians face in supporting and/or working with the Armed Forces?

### Photos



Figure 11: Lineup of new recruits for the Marines at Montford Point, 1943. Photographer: Pat Terry. (Credit: National Archives)

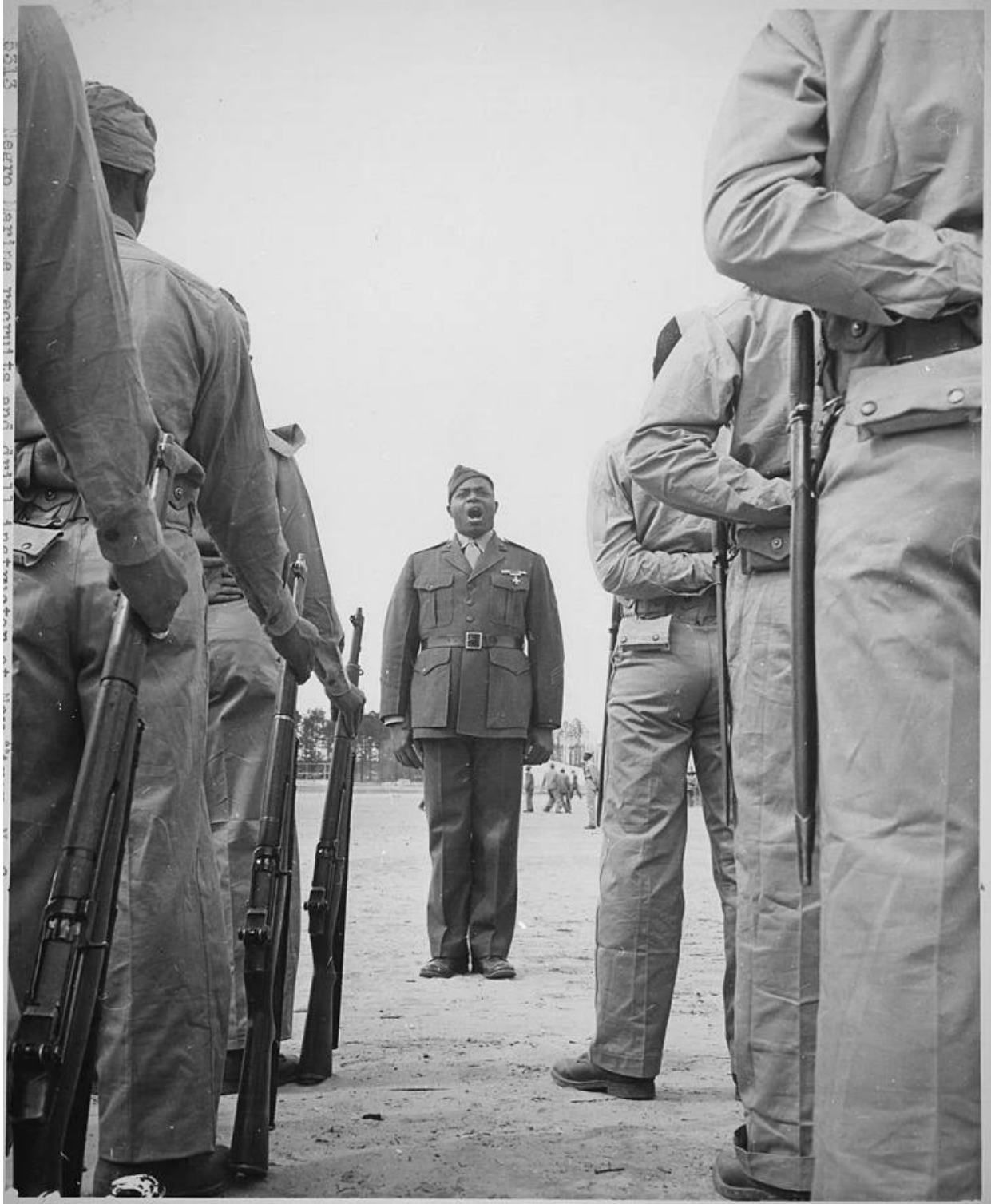


Figure 12: "Boot recruits" listen to their drill instructor [Sgt. Gilbert Hubert Johnson], 04/1943 (Credit: National Archives)

## Reading 2: Montford Point

Excerpts from the interview of Alvin J. Banker, Montford Point Marine Veteran  
[Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear--Voices \(uncw.edu\)](https://www.uncw.edu/through-the-eyes-of-the-cape-fear-voices)

This interview was a part of the oral histories collected in “World War II: Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear,” a joint project by the William M. Randall Library and Cape Fear Museum.

**BANKER:** Our boot camp was two months because we trained on unforeseen circumstances. As you know, prior to 1942, there were no blacks in the Marine Corps and we were segregated in a camp set aside from the white camp which was in North Carolina. The white Marines were trained in Parris Island. We were trained at Montford Point Camp, Camp LeJeune, North Carolina which is part of Camp LeJeune, just outside of Jacksonville, North Carolina and all of our instructors were white. We trained there. The battalion was formed. The troops began to come in. . . .

**INTERVIEWER:** Were you the first black unit to be inducted into the Marine Corps?

**BANKER:** I was one of the first. I was in what was known as the special duty platoon. This platoon consisted of cooks, butchers, barbers and bakers. This is what I was told when I went to the recruiting office, that's what they needed first. In the beginning, since it was a new organization, they never before had anything like this, so first of all, it needed this to start the camp off. We were told where we would be going and that's how it started.

**INTERVIEWER:** And you slept in barracks on the base only with fellow black Marines.

**BANKER:** There were 124 fiberboard huts for our barracks. That was our building area and of course, wood buildings for mess hall, administration buildings, quartermaster and things like that.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how many men trained with you for basic training in Camp LeJeune?

**BANKER:** In my platoon, there were about 25 of us. We were in a special duty platoon. We trained in the mess hall and we also trained out in the field. We cooked in the morning and after the noon meal was served, we went to the barracks, showered, changed, put our utilities on, put our rifles, belts and bayonets and go out in the parade field and our drill instructors drilled us until supper time which was around 5:00.

After that time, after chow, we went back to the barracks, picked up our weapons and went back onto the parade field and drilled until it was dark, after which we would go in, shower

and go to bed, hit the sack. Reveille would be early, 5:00 a.m., and we'd roll out, do our physical exercise, go to the mess hall for breakfast. Right after breakfast, we'd go back out on the field and drill until around 10:30, shower, put our other uniform on and go to the mess hall and cook and the other watch would go out and they'd do the same thing.

...

INTERVIEWER: Were you subjected to any discrimination during this period of time that you can recall on the base?

BANKER: We were segregated from the main base and segregation was all around us, on the base and off the base. And even with the drill instructors. They trained us, but still they had a separate area where they slept. We had our area where we slept. . . .

INTERVIEWER: That was your first assignment as a cook at Camp LeJeune for the recruits that came in?

BANKER: Right, right, and I worked my way up through the ranks after that, PFC, then made corporal and sergeant and so forth and so on, but I could not outrank my white Marines. I had to be one rank below them.

INTERVIEWER: You mean the fellow cooks? There were white cooks too.

BANKER: Right and if he was a sergeant and he was ready to be promoted, and they wanted to promote me, they would promote him to staff sergeant and then promote me to corporal or sergeant whatever, but I could not be on equal ranks with him. . . .

BANKER: On liberty, at the end of work hours, I would go on liberty perhaps to Kingston, overnight liberty in Kingston, North Carolina and sometimes come down to Wilmington. There again we ran into segregation there with the bus company, Jacksonville, they...we were segregated on the bus. A lot of times we were left standing, put the white Marines on the bus and then if there was any standing room left, we could get on the bus. And things were so bad, our colonel, base commander, Colonel Samuel Woods, who was the base commander for the 51st Defense Battalion, he knew what problems we were faced with so what he did, he had trucks, military trucks to take us into Jacksonville or Wilmington. They would put up a list on the bulletin board and you would sign the list of whether you wanted to go to Kingston or Wilmington and the trucks would take you. You'd put your name on a list and the truck would take you and bring you back to the base.

INTERVIEWER: This was when you were on liberty?

BANKER: When we were on liberty, right.

INTERVIEWER: And when you got into the town, did you go to the movies or the pool hall or whatever. . .

BANKER: Whatever was available. There wasn't much in Kingston. There was a pool hall there on Queen Street and of course there were other places around we visited. That was it and the movies.

INTERVIEWER: Whatever amusements were there.

BANKER: There wasn't much there at the time, no.

INTERVIEWER: What about socializing?

BANKER: It was all right. The USO was there. We'd go to the USO.

INTERVIEWER: On the base or off the base?

BANKER: Off the base. There was a USO in Kingston and also one in Wilmington.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to them?

BANKER: Once or twice.

INTERVIEWER: Get donuts and coffee.

BANKER: (Laughter) Well I don't drink coffee believe it or not. I like milk and donuts (laughter). At that time, I wasn't drinking anything. . . . /

BANKER: Yes, all white, naturally, all white. We could not, see during that time, if we had white cooks working with us and they could be the best cooks in the world and they wanted to get promoted and I would be just as good as they are, they want to promote me, but in order for them to promote me, they'd have to promote my counterpart, the white Marine. Say for an example, he's a technical sergeant, they want to make him a master sergeant and I'm a staff sergeant. They want to make me a technical sergeant. They're going to promote the white Marine to a master sergeant and then promote me to technical

sergeant so I would not be of equal rank. At no time could I have the same rank that he had.

INTERVIEWER: This was a form of discrimination in the Marine Corps.

BANKER: Yes it was and I had an incident where the mess officer from Mississippi, the mess sergeant was from New Bedford, Massachusetts and I was from Louisiana, and I was a technical sergeant and the mess sergeant, I was his assistant. He told me one day, he said, "Joe, you know I don't want you to learn how to do the books because as a rule when a white person teaches colored people how to do something, they do the job better." I said okay. He said, "I want you to stay out in the galley and supervise the cooking and take care of the storage areas." I said "Okay, fine". Well one day, he received orders to go overseas into combat. Now he was going to give me a crash course on how to keep the books. For national standards, you have to keep the financial status of the mess. We had to run it just like it was a business. You have to stay within your budget and also order supplies and everything. You have to do the whole nine yards like you're in the restaurant business. I had completed a business course before coming into the Marine Corps. So when he told me I had to learn, I went to my barracks, I opened up my foot locker and I got my certificate out and I took it back and threw it on the desk and said, "Here you are Frenchie. This is my credentials here." I said, "You don't have to teach me the books. I don't want to take your job away from you." He looked at me. His face got as red as that book over there and the lieutenant was sitting behind his desk. He looked at me and smiled and winked at me. So out he went. A couple months later, I was promoted to master sergeant.

INTERVIEWER: Was this near the end of ...

BANKER: Toward the end of World War II, I mean things were beginning to change. The whites were being moved out and the blacks were taking over the troops, drill instructors and things like that. Drill instructors were all white also and the black drill instructors were called acting jacks. They were being trained. You know whites trained us and as they trained us, some of them were moved out and some of them stayed there until they went overseas with the units that the black units were in.

...

INTERVIEWER: So your experience in the Marine Corps during World War II and thereafter was good?

BANKER: It was very good. It prepared me for the work that I was doing in civilian life in some aspects, particularly when it comes to inspections and dealing with people. . . .

## Questions for Reading 2

1. How does Banker describe basic training?
2. What was Banker's role, and what skills did he use / practice to be successful?
3. Banker describes his time on "liberty," and precautions that the base commander had in place for visiting places like the city of Wilmington on liberty. What were the precautions and their purpose?
4. What examples of segregation and discrimination does Banker describe?
5. What was the significance of Montford Point, and what was/is its lasting impact?
6. Overall, do you believe Banker's tone is positive, neutral, or negative toward his experiences as an African American Marine? Why do you think this? Use specific details from the interview.

## Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: How did the presence of the Armed Forces, and civilian support of the Armed Forces, in Wilmington, NC contribute to the success of the Allied Forces?

## Resources

[Camp Davis Photos \(Holly Ridge\)](#)

[Contributions to the War Effort \(Wilmington, North Carolina\)](#)

[DVIDS: Montford Point Marines](#)

[Greetings from Camp Davis](#)

[Montford Point Marines \(UNCW\)](#)

[World War II at Fort Fisher](#)

[World War II Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear](#)

[Wilmington, NC, Heritage City \(NPS\)](#)

[World War II Heritage Guide Map of Wilmington and Southeastern North Carolina](#)

[World War II in North Carolina: Installations Map](#)

[Blacks in the Marine Corps \(marines.mil\)](#)

# Lesson 3: The USO Serving on the WWII Home Front in Wilmington, NC

## About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series teaching about the WWII home front, with Wilmington, North Carolina, as a WWII Heritage City. The lesson contains photographs, reading, and a primary source to contribute to learners' understandings of community connections to the Armed Forces, such as through civilian volunteer efforts and recreation.

## Objectives:

1. Describe the purpose of the USO to the Wilmington, NC community
2. Identify ways that civilians and home front workers contributed to the USO
3. Share examples of segregation and its impact on the home front during WWII

## Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 13-17 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1 & 2
3. *Map: It is recommended that lessons are taught with a map of the Wilmington area, or North Carolina to plot historical locations.*



## Getting Started: Essential Question

How did the USO engage with and support the service members and greater Wilmington community during wartime?

## Photos

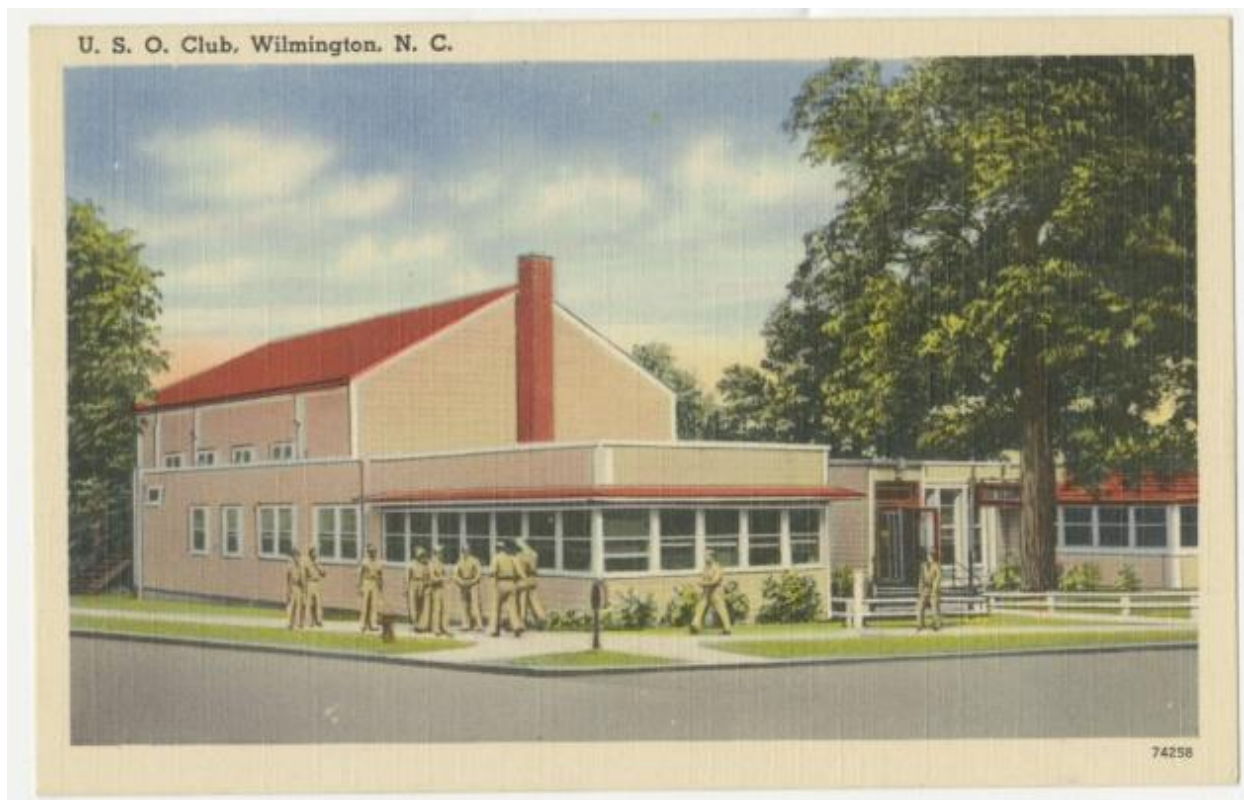


Figure 13: Postcard of the U.S.O. Club (Credit: Cape Fear Museum)



Figure 14: Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center today; National Register of Historic Places. The namesake is to honor Hannah Block, once a World War II USO organizer herself. She was also the first woman elected to Wilmington's City Council and first female mayor pro tempore. (Credit: Wilmington, NC River District and Island Beaches)



Figure 15: "The USO's For the U.S.A." cartoon by Walt Disney studios (Credit: National Archives)



Figure 16: War Bond from Wilmington; July 5, 1945 (Credit: UNCW Library)



Figure 17: African American USO, early 1940s (Credit: USO)



### By the numbers:

- Nine full-time clubs, five smaller facilities
- Approx. 35,000 servicepeople engaged per week in USO activities at the Hannah Block; From 1941 – 1946, the Hannah Block hosted more than 2.3 million white service members
- The main USO building at Hannah Block could house up to 600 service members in the converted dormitory basement.
- A USO in neighboring Jacksonville (Newberry St.) served about 3,000 African American patrons each month
- Seven New Hanover County Bond drives resulted in about \$40 million raised
- Legion Stadium, built in 138 as WPA project, seated 3500



### Quotation to consider:

“Interracial Service USO has consistently adhered to its primary purpose of serving men and women in uniform irrespective of creed or race. Its service to minority groups, and particularly to Negroes has steadily improved. Our insistence upon equivalent services for all has resulted in better relationships, not only with the men and women in service but with communities as well.”

- p. 15, in [“USO, five years of service: report of the president.”](#) (1945)



## Read to Connect

### Reading 1: Wilmington’s USO

By Sarah Nestor Lane

The United Service Organizations, Inc., (USO) was formed as a project of several organizations. The organizations included the YMCA, National Catholic Community Service, Salvation Army, YWCA, National Jewish Welfare Board, and National Travelers Aid Association. The USO served military personnel, their families, and defense workers. It provided welfare and recreation activities like dances, radio broadcasts, art exhibits, theater, counseling, and childcare.

The main USO building opened in 1941 in downtown Wilmington at Second and Orange. This site was segregated. An African American USO building was constructed 15 blocks north (at Ninth and Nixon Street). Thousands of Wilmington residents volunteered for the USO operations.

The National Catholic Community Service operated a women’s center (H.B. Eilers House at 5th and Orange) as another local USO effort. It provided accommodations and kitchen facilities for war workers and servicemen’s families. They used a carriage house for sports, crafts, and theater.

At a US Post Office (N. Front St, Filter Center), women volunteers charted air movements in the basement, 24 hours a day. Volunteers charted and called in the information they tracked. The main post office also had activities such as war bond drives and patriotic rallies.

Events held at Legion Stadium included football, baseball, and boxing. Events were in the daylight due to dim-out restrictions. (Dim-out restrictions were city rules, efforts to minimize outdoor lights and reflection at night as a defense.)

Segregation laws and practices limited African Americans' participation in USO activities. White authorities also blocked their access to housing, education, and recreation. Black servicemembers and workers and their families experienced segregation in war bond drives, performances and activities, and access to basic needs and living support.

The main USO building at Second and Orange now houses a museum and community arts events. It is on the National Register of Historic Places. Unfortunately, the African American USO building was demolished after the war. The H.B. Eilers House and US Post Office are still standing.

### Questions for Reading 1

1. What services did the USO provide in Wilmington, NC?
2. How did home front volunteers and donors provide support for USO efforts?
3. In photo 3, it says "The USO's for the USA!" Why did cartoonists such as Disney create pieces such as these during wartime?
4. How does the notable quotation from the USO report reflect the wrongful attitudes of discrimination at the time? Consider other areas where wrongful "separate but equal" practices were in place.
5. Consider the reading and photos. Do you agree with the wartime message "The USO's for the USA!" Why, or why not?

### Reading 2: A Veteran's USO Experiences and Beliefs

Excerpts from: Excerpts from the interview of Pete Harden, U.S. Army Medical Corp Veteran

Interview Location: Wilmington, NC; Date: July 30, 1998

This interview was a part of the oral histories collected in "World War II: Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear," a joint project by the William M. Randall Library and Cape Fear Museum.

...

HARDEN: Well, at any rate, what I want to say about that USO, that was the best place I ever saw where they treated people real nice, service people. You'd go into the building and this, I'm not sure it was USO, it might have been, but it was maintained by the local people as I guess the other USOs were too. You'd go into the place and they'd tell you to go take a

shower. When you take your uniform off, somebody would take your trousers down and a man downstairs, one of the local tailors brought his own pressing machine and he'd press your pants for you.

When you were through with your shower, you'd come down, they'd bring your trousers up to you and you'd get dressed and you'd go to the dining room and Joe, I'm telling you, the food there was...these were farm wives cooking the old fashioned way. Nothing frozen, nothing dried, a big change from what we'd had, were getting in the service and then the one thing I remember was it was like going into a New York bakery.

They had shelves loaded with all kinds of desserts, the cakes and things, much like the one I had in Germany, the butter crême torte. You didn't know what you wanted there so they would encourage you to take one of these and one of those and I took one of these and one of those and I'm talking about a good dinner to begin with, you know.

I know what the USO meant to me and that's one thing I'm trying to do now, is trying to do something for the people who are in the service. We have them here. We have people from Fort Jackson, there's the Coast Guard. We have young men and young women who are away from home and it bothers me that they're not made a home, that people don't do much for them. There used to be a USO downtown and I can't even get them to call it the USO building. To me, it's still the USO building. It's used by community arts and I think the biggest sign should be USO.

If somebody is looking for the community arts building, people in town aren't going to know where the community arts building is, but they're going to know, especially old-timers, where the USO building is. And it's fine if they have things and as a matter of fact, I encourage them and I think it's great that they have theater goings on there now and they can do pretty much what they did at the Stage Door Canteen, invite these young people to come in on a Friday night, Saturday night, put on a little show for them, let them watch rehearsals, treat them a little bit.

I'd like to see people like the World War II group that you and I are engaged in. The fellas there I'm sure would lend a hand.

INTERVIEWER: I know they would.

HARDEN: They would man that place and have a coffee pot there and some donuts or something. As a matter of fact, I know a gal who was a Red Cross gal. I'm sure she'd come

out and be only too glad to serve. But I think it's a shame that we don't treat these people who are in the service today the way you and I were treated. People treated them differently. Here as a matter of fact, I've talked to some servicemen down here and it's no secret. There are many times they weren't allowed to, they would (be) banned from restaurants and bars because they expected trouble from them.

. . . and if we can't get the USO sign on there, then we'll call it the former USO building or whatever we want to name it. I'm sure that the boys at the World War II Remembered group and the civilians there...as you know, we've got civilians come in there and they would certainly lend a hand. Much as we do when we have our meetings there. We've got coffee and goodies and things. No reason why we can't do it for the people.

You know as long as there are wars, I think there should be a USO or something along the same lines. Treat these people nicely. They're away from home, make them feel at home. Don't wait until the war starts and then start putting flags and ribbons up and that sort of stuff. That's fine, but . . . At any rate, that's my present project. That's what I'm working on especially.

## Questions for Reading 2

1. How does Harden describe his experiences with the USO? Why do you think these experiences are important to his memories of his times of service? (*Harden describes his USO experiences in general, but later in the interview he specifies he is talking about the USO building (Hannah Block) in Wilmington, NC.*)
2. In the experiences Harden describes, what were some roles of USO home front volunteers? What other ways (from Reading 1, or prior knowledge) did volunteers support the work of the USO?
3. What are Harden's opinions on the uses of the former USO building? Why do you think he holds these views?

## Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: How did the USO engage with and support the service members and greater Wilmington community during wartime?

## Resources

[Contributions to the War Effort \(Wilmington, North Carolina\)](#)

[Hannah Block Picture Gallery \(Then and Now\)](#)

*WWII Heritage Cities Lesson Collection*  
*Wilmington, North Carolina*

[World War II Heritage Guide Map of Wilmington and Southeastern North Carolina](#)

[World War II Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear](#)

[Wilmington, NC, Heritage City \(NPS\)](#)

[USO, five years of service: report of the president \(1945\)](#)

[USO Museum \(Hannah Block\) - Wilmington](#)

# Lesson 4: Wilmington, NC: Comparing and Connecting WWII Home Fronts

## About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series teaching about the WWII home front, with Wilmington, North Carolina, as a WWII Heritage City. The lesson contains photographs, reading, and a primary source, with an optional activity, to contribute to learners' understandings of Wilmington, NC as a WWII Heritage City. It combines lesson themes from the three other lessons in the collection to summarize the city's contributions and encourage connections to the overall U.S. home front efforts.

## Objectives:

In a culminating product:

- a. Identify important WWII location(s) in Wilmington, NC and describe their historical significance
- b. Summarize the contributions of Wilmington, North Carolina service members and civilians to home front wartime efforts
- c. Evaluate the struggles, and contributions, of African Americans in Wilmington and Northeastern North Carolina.
- d. *Optional:* Describe similarities and differences of Wilmington, NC and other WWII home front(s)

## Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 18-20 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1 & 2
3. Maps, project materials (as needed)
4. Student graphic organizers (See Figure 21 at end of lesson, for reference)
  - Create Comparison Matrices for your students to use. To compare two cities, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows. Label the left column Theme/Topic and the other columns City 1 and City 2. For a Comparison Matrix for three cities simply add an additional column.

- Create two Single-Point Rubrics to assist students' self-assessment. One is for assessing proficiency in meeting teacher-selected standards. One is for assessing proficiency in meeting objectives.
- For the rubric on standards, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows of content. Label the first column "Areas for Improvement," the second column, "Proficient (Meeting Standard)," and the third column, "Areas of Exceeding Standard." Leave the first and third columns blank. In each row of the second column identify a Standard and indicate a space for noting the evidence for meeting the standard. Include a space at the bottom of the page for assigning points for each column.
- For the rubric on objectives, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows of content. Label the first column "Areas for Improving toward Objective," the second column, "Proficient (Meeting Objective)," and the third column, "Areas of Exceeding Objective." Leave the first and third columns blank. In the four rows of the second column identify these four objectives:
  - a. Identify important WWII location(s) in Wilmington, NC and describe their historical significance
  - b. Summarize the contributions of Wilmington, North Carolina service members and civilians to home front wartime efforts
  - c. Evaluate the struggles, and contributions, of African Americans in Wilmington and Northeastern North Carolina.
  - d. *Optional:* Describe similarities and differences of Wilmington, NC and other WWII home front(s)

Include a space at the bottom of the page for assigning points for each column. See the last photo of this lesson for reference.



## Getting Started: Essential Question

Why was Wilmington chosen as a World War II Heritage city, and what are its similarities and differences to other Heritage cities?

## Photos



Figure 18: Sign in upper left corner designating Wilmington as an All-America City, awarded by the National Civic League (1967) (Credit: New Hanover County Public Library)



Figure 19: Sign designating Wilmington as America's 1st WWII Heritage City. (Credit: Star News)



### Quotation to consider:

“Growing up in Wilmington during World War II was fascinating, although at times very scary and the memories remain with you forever. It's not something that you think about once in a blue moon. It's something that stays with you.”

- Margaret Rogers, December 2, 1998 in [interview](#)

## Reading 1: Heritage City Designation

**Excerpt from:** “[House Report 115-998](#), “To Direct the Secretary of the Interior to Annually Designate at Least One City in The United States as An ‘American World War II Heritage City,’ and for other purposes” (October 30, 2018)

“ . . .PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of H.R. 6118 is to direct the Secretary of the Interior to annually designate at least one city in the United States as an “American World War II Heritage City”.

#### BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

On December 7, 1941, military forces of the Empire of Japan attacked the U.S. Naval Fleet and ground bases at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. On December 8, 1941, one day after what President Roosevelt referred to as, “a date which will live in infamy,” the United States declared war against the Empire of Japan. Three days later, on December 11, 1941, Japan's ally, Germany, declared war on the United States. Sixteen million Americans, mostly young working-age men, served in the military during World War II, out of an overall United States population of 113 million.

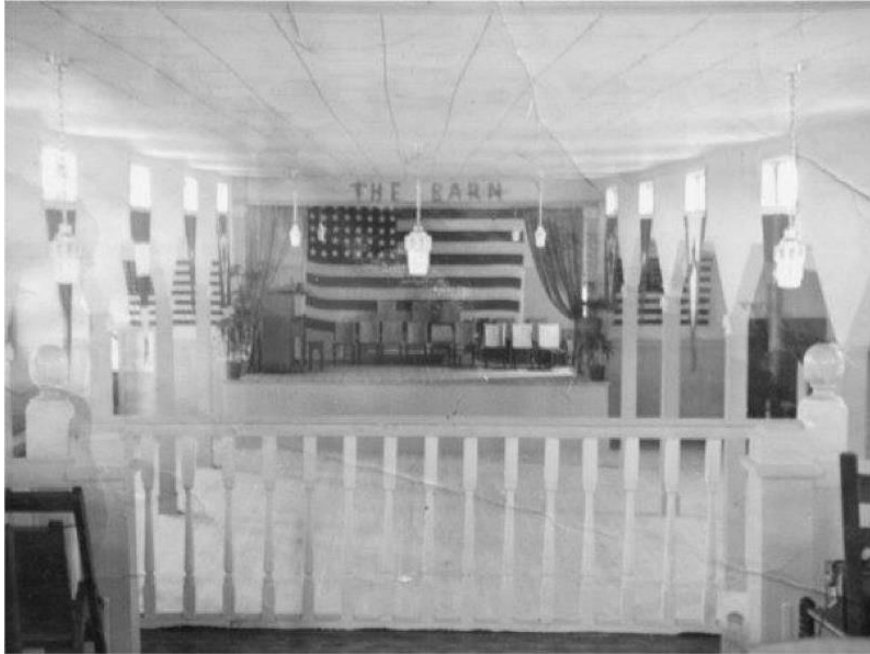
While an unprecedented number of Americans served in World War II, the country drastically increased its war production on the home front, serving not only the needs of the armed forces of the United States but her allies as well--in what President Franklin Roosevelt called “The Arsenal of Democracy.” The combination of millions serving in the military, during a period of necessary and drastic increases in production, led to significant social changes on the American home front.

The World War II period resulted in the largest number of people migrating within the United States in the history of the country. Individuals and families relocated to industrial centers for good paying jobs out of a sense of patriotic duty. Many industrial centers became “boomtowns,” growing at phenomenal rates. One example, the City of Richmond, California, grew from a population of under 24,000 to over 100,000 during the war. . . .”

#### Questions for Reading 1

1. What was the purpose of the bill (H.R. 6118) according to the report?
2. Why is Wilmington described as a boomtown in the report?
3. Are there other cities you think of when considering home front contributions during wartime? Which, and why?
4. Extension: Research the importance of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad and the site of the headquarters in Wilmington.

## Photos



*Figure 20: Jazz bands and giants like Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, and Dizzy Gillespie performed at this jazz club and ballroom, which was located on South 11th St. The Barn was considered one of the earliest examples of integration in Wilmington; community members of all races would come to dance on the same floor. (Credit: Come Hear North Carolina)*

## Reading 2: Excerpts from the Interview of Margaret Rogers, Who Grew Up in Wilmington During Wartime

[[Interview](#): December 2, 1998; Wilmington North Carolina]

This interview was a part of the oral histories collected in “World War II: Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear,” a joint project by the William M. Randall Library and Cape Fear Museum.

So as we were outside as small children at school, we often saw the prisoners. The teachers devised a game to help us when we were outside and we learned to climb trees and that was a way to protect ourselves when there were prison breaks. There weren't very many prison breaks, but the prisoners did escape and they would run through the schoolyard, through Community Hospital area over onto 13th Street usually, then down Church Street. . . .

So we would see the prison guards as they chased them. So we were very familiar with them. We often were allowed to go across the street and give candy and gum to the prisoners and then sometimes being children, we would go across the street without the teacher's permission.

Even at home when we were not in school and they would have prison breaks, I had a chance to watch them chase them. I was an only child, but I was a tomboy I guess you would call it and I learned to climb easily. I just had a problem getting down. I could always get up. My problem was getting down. But when I would discover the prisoners running through the neighborhood, I would climb the garage door, jump on top of the garage, then hop on top of the house and sit next to the chimney and I could watch the guards chase the prisoners through the neighborhood.

One of the things we did during that time on weekends was to go across what is now Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. It wasn't there at that time. You went across the northeast Cape Fear River Bridge and we'd go out on Highway 74/76 and park on the side of the highway because you could see those liberty ships. There were so many stockpiled there that they ran from the river, from the highway all the way back to the state port and you could literally step from one ship to the other without touching the water for miles. I guess it would not be a form of entertainment for the children today, but it was fascinating to us. . . .

It wasn't all grim. There were wonderful memories of entertainment and outings, although you had to be careful about going around the beaches. We had the colored USO which is now the Community Boys Club. It was one of the two USOs in Wilmington, larger USOs at 9th and Nixon. You had a nightclub at 11th and Meares known as The Barn and all of the big name entertainers - you had Cab Calloway come. You had Lionel Hampton.

Big band music for blacks and whites was your choice of music because we didn't have rock and roll at that time and in a way, it was a good thing because you learned to appreciate different types of music. I had a small radio, one of the earlier versions of a portable and my mother would only allow me to listen to that radio at certain times and I used to take it at night and put it under my pillow so she couldn't hear it when I went to bed and listen to a radio station from Nashville called Randy's Record Mart and they played all of this type of music so I began an appreciation for music at an early age.

With the military bases so close to Wilmington, with Camp Davis up at Holly Ridge and Camp LeJeune, Moffett Point which is Camp Johnson now. You had a lot of military people who came into town on the weekends so The Barn was very important to them. As a small child, I was not allowed to go to The Barn of course. In fact, I was never allowed to go to The Barn even as a teenager before it finally closed, but children have a way of getting to see what they want to see.

I was allowed to go and visit a classmate who lived at 11th and Dawson whose name was Ruth Mosby and The Barn was a couple of blocks from her house so as we played outside of course, we skipped down the street and go around the back, sneak in the back and we

could watch these performers as they were rehearsing and it was a beautiful place. To me it seemed too huge to understand. I just could not imagine a dance hall that large, but it was a wonderful place and it did give the black community some place to go to forget their problems for a little while.

Most of the women who were domestics continued their domestic jobs during that time and that in itself helped a lot of them, a lot of the families to survive because as I mentioned earlier, in a lot of cases, they were allowed to bring home food that was left over when they finished dinner. So this helped to supplement the diet. We think Wilmington is crowded now and it is and it's so much larger than I ever could have imagined it would be because when I was growing up, the city limits stopped at 17th Street.

So to think as much traffic as we have now, imagine what the traffic was like when you had all these convoys coming down the highway. All of the ships coming in, the sailors and they were everywhere. The soldiers were everywhere. So you became so accustomed to seeing a person in uniform, all of the little children when they played their games wanted to play war games because we really had no idea of the severity of it.

It was as you grew older that you really began to understand what this was all about. But at that time we played games when we saw the planes flying over very low and we ran and hid behind whatever because a child does not think that that plane if it were an enemy plane could have fired a gun and killed you on the spot.

### Questions for Reading 2 and Photos

1. What are examples of people and places Ms. Rogers describes as observing as a child?
2. Connect Photo 3 to Ms. Rogers' description of The Barn. What was significant about The Barn? Why does it stand out in Ms. Rogers' memories?
3. Ms. Rogers shares about women who were domestics continuing domestic jobs. Based on what you have read across the other Wilmington lessons, what are other ways women contributed to the home front efforts (both paid and volunteer work)?
4. How does Ms. Rogers compare her childhood perspectives to what she knows today?
5. Consider both readings: two very different pieces! How do they both embody Wilmington as a Heritage city?
6. Extension: Research the location and history of the Prisoner of War camps in Wilmington.

## Culminating Activity/Mastery Product

To demonstrate student understanding, support students in creating a final product that meets the following objectives:

- a. Identify important WWII location(s) in Wilmington, NC and describe their historical significance
- b. Summarize the contributions of Wilmington, North Carolina service members and civilians to home front wartime efforts
- c. Evaluate the struggles, and contributions, of African Americans in Wilmington and Northeastern North Carolina.
- d. *Optional:* Describe similarities and differences of Wilmington, NC and other WWII Heritage city(s)

### Mastery products should be:

- . . . **student-led**; Students work as individuals or in collaborative groups.
- . . . **student-directed**: Students are offered a variety of choices for product type.
- . . . **student-organized**; Teacher facilitates by providing students with the comparison matrices and/or resource links from throughout the series of lessons.
- . . . **student-assessed**; Teacher supports student self-assessment and reflection by providing students single-point rubrics to assess for meeting standards and/or lesson objectives.

Note: Depending on time and scope, the comparison of Wilmington to another WWII Heritage city(s) within the mastery product (objective d) may be omitted. However, comparing cities is recommended, as it connects students to a deeper understanding of the WWII home front.

### Examples of mastery product choices include, but are not limited to:

- **Written**: Letter (opinion or informative), essay, poem, narratives, biography, articles, class book or children's book, speech or debate (then presented orally), blog / website, plaque or historical displays, pamphlets or rack cards
- **Graphic Organizers**: timeline, flowcharts, mind or concept content maps, Venn diagrams, comparison matrices, posters
- **Artistic Expression**: song, dance, theater (ex. skits), 3-D models, dioramas, photo journal, stamp and coin designs, visual art, architecture/building or monument, museum design

- **Media design and creation:** podcast, historical markers, social media content, interactive virtual maps or tours, infographics, video, comic strips or graphics, game design, slideshows, digital scrapbook

Please view the [NPS Heritage cities lesson collection](#) for information and resources on other cities.

### Single-Point Rubric

Areas for Improvement	Proficient (Meeting Standard)	Areas of Exceeding Standard
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
Points		

Figure 21: Single-Point Rubric (Standards; Blank) [Teacher selects priority standards for assessment.] Courtesy of Sarah Nestor Lane

## Acknowledgment

The lesson series was written by Sarah Nestor Lane, an educator and consultant funded by a National Council on Public History's cooperative agreement with the National Park Service.