

— THE STORY OF —
AMERICA

SPIRIT OF THE CORN



by Shantel Gobin



1650—New York

Orenda is the oldest woman of our people. We are the Wolf clan of the Keepers of the Western Door. Many know Orenda as the wisest of all Haudenosaunee clan mothers. I know her as Grandmother.



1650

My grandmother is a powerful woman. She decides who becomes chief and if there will be war. Those are only two of her many jobs. Grandmother loves bossing the men around. But that is not what brings her the most joy.

“My favorite thing is naming all the people in our clan.” I have heard this more times than I can count.

Grandmother named me Onatah after the Spirit of the Corn.

“You were born on the last day of the Corn Ceremony,” she says. “That was 15 years ago. I knew you would bring a bountiful harvest like the great Spirit of the Corn. That is why I gave you her name. Some of her lives within you.”

Grandmother tells me this story every August.
Then she shares the tale of the Three Sisters,
always ending with the same joke.

“If your mother has any more daughters, I will
name them Squash and Bean!”

Grandmother, my mother, and my aunts teach
me the great balance of the Three Sisters.
Corn, squash, and beans keep our family
alive. The women are in charge of farming
these gifts from the Creator. Women have
many jobs, except the one I really want.

“Grandmother, may I learn to hunt?”

Farm.

“My child, women gather. Men hunt. This is how we keep balance.”

Cook.

Balance keeps me stuck in the same old routine.

Repeat.

At This Time in History

This story takes place in what is now New York state. The Seneca were one of five Native American nations that formed the Iroquois Confederacy more than 500 years ago. By the mid-1600s, this group of Indigenous clans was a powerful force. They had defeated weaker tribes and controlled a large territory. The Iroquois were skilled in growing crops, hunting, and fighting.



1650

Seneca Culture

For the Seneca, daily life was based around a division of labor. Men hunted and fought in battle. They were skilled warriors. Women tended to matters of the village. They grew crops and made household goods. But women also made key decisions for the clan. This included electing leaders. When a man married, he became a part of his wife's family.

Artist F. O. C. Darley illustrated this scene from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* during the mid-1800s. Like the Seneca hunters, this Ojibwe warrior uses a bow and arrows to kill a deer.

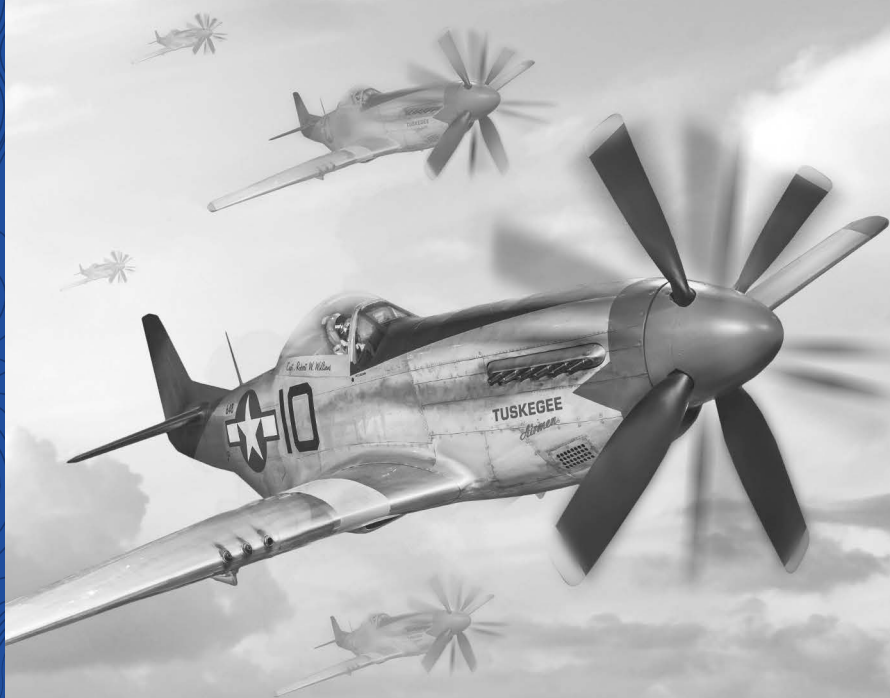


This image from an electron microscope shows the smallpox virus. The highly contagious disease sickened and killed many Indigenous people.

Then European explorers arrived. This led to enormous change for the Seneca. The explorers brought an invisible enemy: diseases. Smallpox, bubonic plague, and scarlet fever were some of the worst. Indigenous people had no natural immunity to these illnesses. That let the diseases spread quickly. So many villagers died that the culture had to change. Survivors had to learn skills that they had not previously known. Some ceramics from that time show uneven work. This is likely because many of the skilled crafters had died.

— THE STORY OF —
AMERICA

FLYING HIGH



by Nico Waters



1945—Indiana

John gazed up at the bright blue sky. “It’s a great day to fly.”

His copilot, William, nodded in agreement.



1945

It was 1945. Both pilots were part of the Tuskegee Airmen. This was the first group of Black aviators in the U.S. military.

John and William flew planes in Indiana for the U.S. Army Air Forces. Today, they hopped into a B-25 Mitchell bomber. It was time for another practice drill.

“I’m tired of practicing,” William said. “I can’t wait to fly overseas. That’s where the action is.”

John couldn’t wait either. Both men wanted to serve their country by fighting in World War II. But the commanders in charge didn’t believe Black pilots could handle the pressure. These officers would not let them fly combat missions.

“I hope our day will come soon,” John said.

He flipped switches on the control panel. Then he got permission for takeoff. John pulled the throttle. The plane picked up speed. Soon, the aircraft soared into the Indiana sky.

John spoke into his headset as the engine rumbled in the background. “I love flying. Up here, everything is equal. A plane doesn’t care if the pilot is Black or white. The sky doesn’t discriminate like people do.”



1945

1939 ····· 1942 ····· 1946 ····· 1948 ····· 1950 ····· 1952 ····· 1954 ····· 1956 ····· 1959 ·····

The engine roared as the pilots practiced. After they finished, the men landed the plane on the runway.

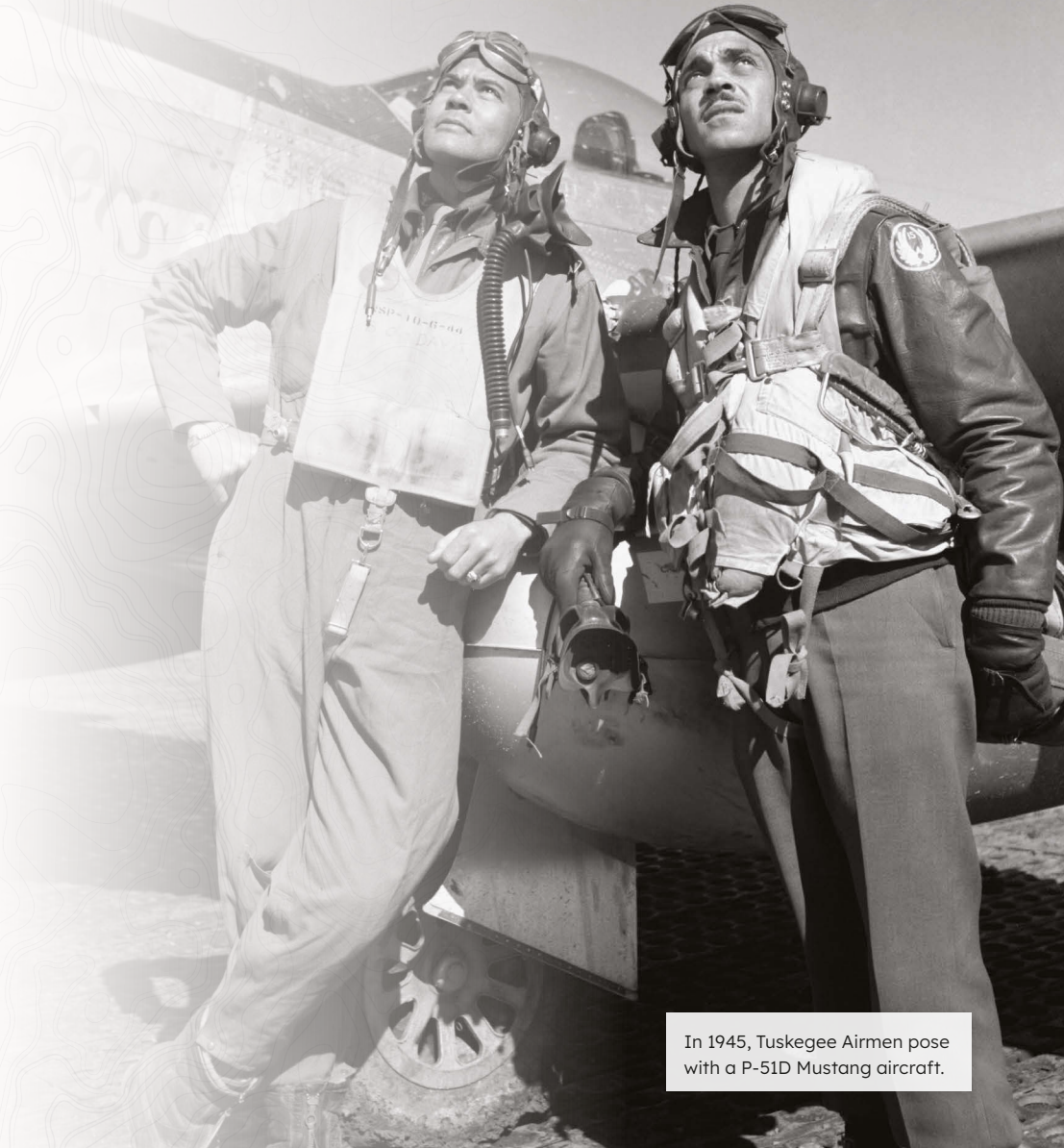
Back on the ground, John and William joined a group of other Black pilots. They were all eager to do their part in the war.

“We’re smart, capable, and ready to fight for our country,” one man said. “But the commanders are holding us back. We aren’t being treated fairly.”

A second pilot chimed in. “As Black men, we have to deal with two enemies: bad guys in the war and racism here at home.”

At This Time in History

This story takes place in 1945. It focuses on the Tuskegee Airmen. They were the first Black military pilots in the United States. The Tuskegee program began in 1940. Before then, Black soldiers were not allowed to fly in the military.



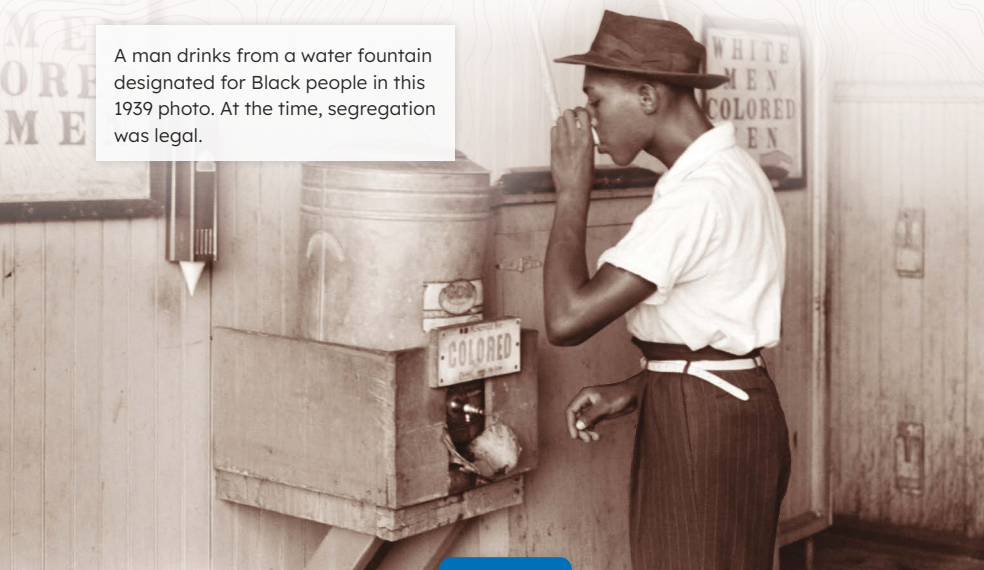
In 1945, Tuskegee Airmen pose with a P-51D Mustang aircraft.

1945

Separate But Not Equal

In the U.S., inequality was widespread. Black people did not have the same rights as white people. That was especially true in the South. The two groups used separate facilities. Black people could not eat in some restaurants. They were not allowed to shop in certain stores either. This forced separation was called segregation. State and local laws made this legal. These were called Jim Crow laws.

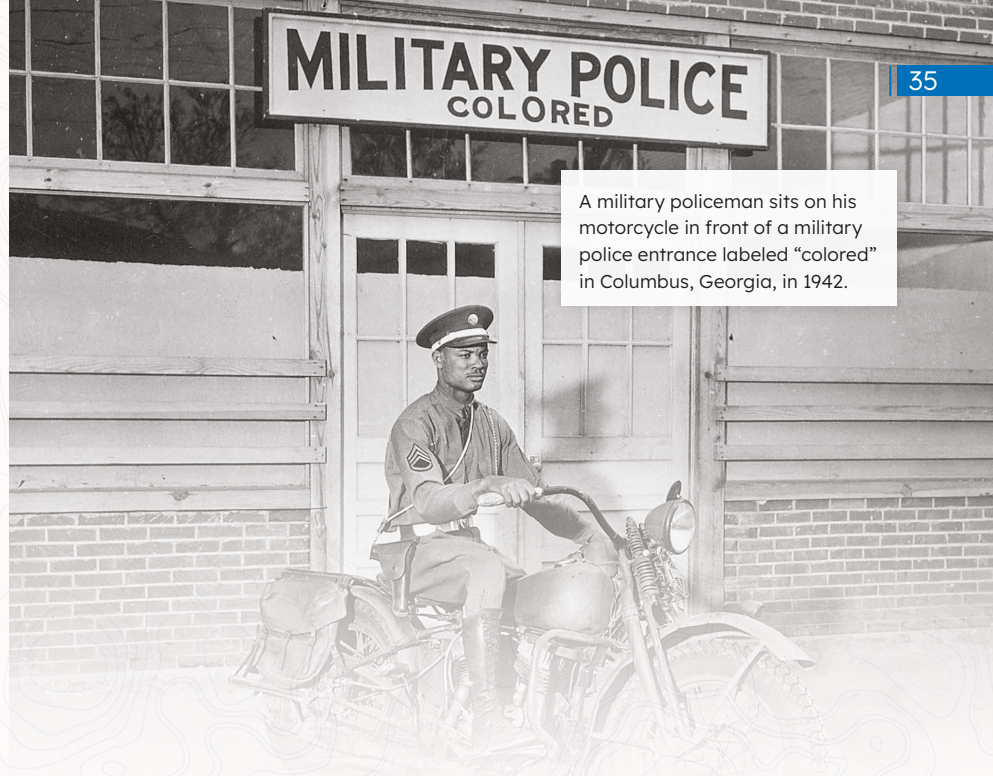
A man drinks from a water fountain designated for Black people in this 1939 photo. At the time, segregation was legal.



1945

MILITARY POLICE
COLORED

A military policeman sits on his motorcycle in front of a military police entrance labeled "colored" in Columbus, Georgia, in 1942.



Inequality was also common in the military. White soldiers were seen as superior. A Black soldier could have a higher rank than a white soldier. But that did not matter. The white soldier would receive better treatment. Special privileges were given to white soldiers. Their barracks were better. They also got to fly in battle.