Red Tails

0. Red Tails - Story Preface

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A restored P-51 "Red Tail" in flight, flown by a member of the "Red Tail Project." Photo by Max Haynes, online via Wikimedia Commons. Image license: CC BY-SA 3.0

> *...we have overcome*
> *that which was much worse than racial barrier.*
> *We have overcome*
> *the barriers within ourselves and dared to dream.*
>
> Lt. William J. Powell
> Black Wings, 1934

No one expected Eleanor Roosevelt - America's First Lady - to get into a small plane with an African-American pilot. Such events didn't happen in the early spring of 1941.

Mrs. Roosevelt, however, had a mind of her own. She understood the concerns of her staff personnel and bodyguards, but she disagreed with their conclusions.

How did they know it would be unsafe for her to fly with a black man? White people - who wrote military reports adopted by the government - believed that African-Americans were unqualified to fly military planes, but what was the source of that belief?

When Charles Anderson - known as the "Chief" because he had so much flying experience - invited the President's wife to fly with him, she agreed. On (or about) the 29th of March, 1941, she stepped into the Chief's plane and changed history.

Soon after, while visiting Greensboro, Mrs. Roosevelt wrote about her flight with Anderson. Her "My Day" column - for the 1st of April, 1941 - says:

> *...These boys are good pilots. I had the fun of going up in one of the tiny training planes with the head instructor, and seeing this interesting countryside from the air.*
>
> *The days at Tuskegee have given me much to think about.*

Eleanor's days at Tuskegee also gave the President "much to think about." As the result of that thinking, a new opportunity - referred to, by the federal government, as an "experiment" - began for black pilots who would someday be known as "Red Tails."

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Red-Tails

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Red-Tails

Questions 2 Ponder

Are Personal Experiences More Reliable than Personal Expectations?

First-Lady Eleanor Roosevelt boarded a small plane, in the spring of 1941, so she could take a flight with an African-American pilot. The event took place at Tuskegee, Alabama.

On the 1st of April, 1941, Mrs. Roosevelt wrote about her personal flight experience in her “My Day” column. She also talked about it with her husband, President Roosevelt, who decided to start an “experiment” allowing

African-Americans to become pilots who could then fly for the U.S. military.

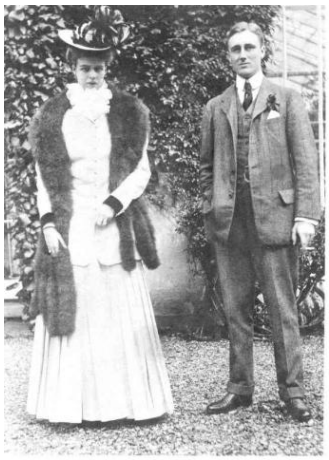
What do you think Mrs. Roosevelt was “thinking about” following her “days at Tuskegee?”

When we experience things differently than we expect, or have been told to expect—like Mrs. Roosevelt's flight with the Chief at Tuskegee—which is more reliable: what we *expect* (or have been *told* to expect) or what we actually *experience*? Explain your answer.

If we experience events differently from the way others predict, is it easy or hard to report the reality of our own experience? What makes it hard? What makes it easy?

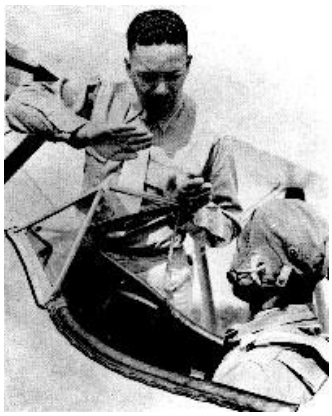
How easy is it to rid ourselves of prejudice after consistently hearing that things are a certain way, even when they’re not? Describe how Eleanor Roosevelt's personal experiences changed the world for African-American pilots.

Media Stream



Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt

Photo of FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt, online courtesy FDR Presidential Library and Museum.
Quoted passages, above, from the FDR Library.
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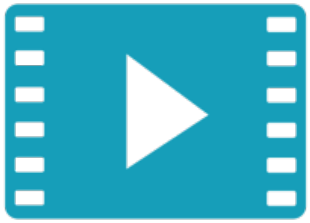
Charles "Chief" Anderson - Tuskegee Flight Instructor

Image of Charles "Chief" Anderson, with student pilot, online courtesy Tuskegee Institute.
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Eleanor Roosevelt - Plane Ride at Tuskegee Changes History

Photo of Eleanor Roosevelt with Charles "Chief" Anderson, online courtesy FDR Presidential Library and Museum.
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"Red Tails" - Trailer

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