



## Study Guide for the movie **PROUD**



*PROUD* is the World War II story of the men of the *USS Mason DE-529*, the only African-American sailors to take a US Navy warship into combat.

In a segregated military which reflected a segregated nation, 110,000 African-Americans served in the Navy, but only 160 went to sea doing the jobs they were trained to do. They escorted convoys of troops and supply ships to England and North Africa, across an Atlantic Ocean full of Nazi U-Boats (submarines.)

In September 1944 they helped save Convoy NY119 in a terrible storm and were recommended for letters of commendation, which were not awarded until 50 years later.



The story is told by Ossie Davis in one of his last roles. He plays Lorenzo DuFau, a New Orleans native, whose true story forms the basis of the film.

As he tells the story to his college-student grandson and friends, the three young men become the WWII sailors and the action unfolds.



A highlight is Northern Ireland, the ship's first port of call where, as the men say, "We were treated as Americans for the first time."

## Study Questions



1. Why was the story of the *USS Mason* forgotten?
2. Why did African-Americans want to go into combat during World War II rather than stay ashore in safe but menial jobs?
3. What reasons do the sailors give for enlisting to fight the war?
4. What challenges to them are shown in the movie, from other sailors and from civilians, and what does that reveal about the US racial attitudes during WWII?
5. When asked, “How could you fight for a government that allowed segregation?” DuFau replies, “I wasn’t fighting for the government. My country had been attacked, and a man will defend his home!” What does he mean?
6. How did the experience in Ireland affect the men? The Irish? How was the welcome warmer there than in the US?
7. What was the purpose of convoys? Why was protecting the ships important?
8. What would have happened if the U-Boats had cut off supplies?
9. How do you explain the delay in awarding the commendations to the *USS Mason* crew?
10. In the movie, the characters speak of the changes that will come after WWII in the African-American community. What did change? What didn’t?
11. What was the role of the African-American press in reporting World War II?
12. The *USS Mason* has been called a “test case for the integration of the military.” What does that mean?
13. In July 1948, President Harry Truman ordered the military desegregated. What were the effects of that on the military and the nation?
14. Ossie Davis, as Lorenzo DuFau says, “I am a part of American history. This is my land. I defended it. The 160 black sailors of the *USS Mason* defended it too. Proudly We Served, and I want that acknowledged!” What does that mean in the context of today?



## Topics for further research

- ◆ What was life like for African-Americans in various parts of the country in 1941?
  - ◆ African-Americans have served in all US wars. Look at that history.
  - ◆ What roles do African-Americans fulfill in the US military now?
  - ◆ How did World War II change the US in general?
  - ◆ How did the effects of the benefits offered WWII veterans (education, low-cost mortgages, employment) differ for white and African-American families?
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## Video and DVD

*PROUD* on DVD

*PROUDLY WE SERVED: The Men of the USS Mason*, documentary broadcast on PBS (1996)

*The Negro Sailor*, produced by US Navy, 1944, National Archives

*The Tuskegee Airmen*, HBO, available on DVD



## Books on the topic



*PROUDLY WE SERVED: The Men of the USS Mason*, Naval Institute Press

*The Golden Thirteen*, Naval Institute Press

There are thousands of books, movies and videos on World War II, but most do not include the role of African-Americans. However, new books are in the works on this topic.

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