



LESSON PLAN:

THE BORINQUENEERS

High School (9-12)

OVERVIEW:

Students learn about the 65th Infantry Regiment, or the “Borinqueneers” (Korean War), and make connections to their prior knowledge in order to explore the significance of this celebrated military unit in historical and cultural context.

Resources include a PowerPoint slide deck and handout. Students use the handout to answer questions before, during, and after the PowerPoint presentation.

Estimated time: 1 class period, 30 minutes total

BORINQUENEERS BACKGROUND:

Nicknamed “The Borinqueneers” after the Taino (indigenous people of the Caribbean) name for Puerto Rico (“Borinquen”), this unit originated in 1899 as the Battalion of Porto Rican Volunteers, shortly after the United States gained control of Puerto Rico as a result of the Spanish-American War. In 1908, it officially became part of the U.S. Army as the 65th Infantry Regiment. Due to racist ideologies, the Puerto Rican unit received non-combat assignments during World War I and World War II, as did most segregated African American units. However, the Borinqueneers soon had the opportunity to prove themselves in combat. On July 26, 1948, President Harry S Truman issued Executive Order 9981, which prohibited racial discrimination in the U.S. armed forces and led to the desegregation of military units. In Korea two years later, the United States entered its first war with an integrated military.

In August 1950, the 65th Infantry Regiment arrived in Pusan, South Korea and went into action almost immediately. In years of fierce fighting with North Korean and Chinese forces, the unit was credited with a total of 15,787 enemy killed-in-action and 2,169 enemy prisoners of war; it suffered 1,510 battlefield casualties. According to General Douglas MacArthur, “the Puerto Ricans forming the ranks of the gallant 65th Infantry give daily proof on the battlefields of Korea of their courage, determination and resolute will to victory.” Members of the 65th Infantry Regiment received four Distinguished Service Crosses and 125 Silver Stars, among many other decorations. In 2016, Congress awarded the unit the Congressional Gold Medal.

See the end of the lesson plan for a Cold War background.



STANDARDS:

- NCSS.D2.His.1.9-12: Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.3.9-12: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
- NCSS.D2.His.1.6-8: Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.3.9-12: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will describe challenges faced by the Borinqueneers and evaluate their legacy.
2. Students will explain connections between the story of the Borinqueneers and other topics discussed in class.

RESOURCES NEEDED:

- PowerPoint presentation
- Student handout



LESSON ACTIVITIES:

- Introduction/Anticipatory Set: 2 mins
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 1
 - Instruct students to make a guess and write an answer for first question on their worksheet “Who were the Borinqueneers?” Encourage students to write anything they can think of – do they recognize any words on the screen? Does the American flag picture make them think of anything?
It is likely most students will only be able to guess there is some relationship to the military and a possibly Hispanic connection given the word “borinqueneer”. Encourage students to write what they can, based on the limited information on the screen at this time.
- PowerPoint Presentation: 20-25 mins
Students should answer the questions on their worksheet while the teacher presents the information in the PowerPoint.

Slide	Notes for Presentation
Slide 1: Borinqueneers	<p>Make a guess: Who were the Borinqueneers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What can you infer about the Borinqueneers and the topic of this lesson from this slide? <p>Answers may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Military, possibly Hispanic based on the name
Slide 2: Who Were the Borinqueneers?	<p>The Borinqueneers were an all-Puerto Rican regiment that served in WWI, WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. They were nicknamed “The Borinqueneers,” after the Taino name for Puerto Rico (“Borinquen”).</p> <p>The unit first formed as a volunteer infantry in 1899, after Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory. It was later incorporated into the Army. Due to discrimination, the 65th Infantry did not see combat until the Korean War, in which approximately 65,000 Puerto Rican soldiers fought, most of whom were assigned to the 65th. 743 Puerto Rican soldiers died in the war.</p> <p>The Borinqueneers proved their mettle and bravery in the Korean War and played instrumental roles in many maneuvers and battles. They are</p>



	<p>widely celebrated in Puerto Rico and have gained recognition for their contributions and sacrifices in the United States.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask: Why do you think Puerto Ricans were in their own, separate unit? • Answer: Racial discrimination — the military was segregated until 1948. Because of this, the military had many “minority” units. Most, but not all, were African American.
<p>Slide 3: Definitions</p>	<p>Let’s go over a few important definitions for understanding this unit’s history and the Korean War.</p> <p>Totalitarian: A form of government that prohibits all opposition and attempts to maintain total control of citizens’ public and private life through the economy, communication, military, and police.</p> <p>Proxy war: “Proxy” means that someone else is representing a different person/thing. For example, John must go to a meeting, but he is sick, so he sends his friend Matt as his proxy. Matt represents John’s interests and acts in his stead. Therefore, a proxy war is a war in which the fighting nations represent other nations. In the Korean War, South Korea served as a proxy for the United States and North Korea/China served as proxies for the Soviet Union.</p> <p>Borinqueneers: pronounced <i>Boh rin keh neers</i>. This nickname comes from the indigenous Taino word for Puerto Rico, “Borinquen.”</p>
<p>Slide 4: Puerto Rico and the U.S.</p>	<p>Puerto Rico and the mainland United States have a complicated history.</p> <p>On April 25, 1898, the United States declared war on Spain, which held several colonies in the Americas—including Puerto Rico and Cuba.¹ The</p>

¹ In 1898, rebels in Cuba, then a colony of Spain, were fighting for independence from Spanish rule. During the conflict, President William McKinley ordered warships to Cuba to protect U.S. political and economic interests on the nearby island. On February 15, 1898, an explosion in Havana Harbor blasted through the USS Maine, killing more than 260 sailors on board. Historians are still unsure what caused the explosion, but popular sentiment at the time, encouraged by sensational journalism, blamed the disaster on the Spanish. Fueled by public outrage over the Maine's destruction, as well as concern for



	<p>war lasted only a few months. On August 12, 1898, Spain effectively surrendered, and the U.S. and Spain signed a peace treaty on December 10, 1898. The treaty ended Spanish rule in Cuba, but made the island, while nominally independent, a U.S. protectorate. Spain also ceded Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States. Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory ever since.</p> <p>After the war, the U.S. military and a governor appointed by the U.S. president ruled over the territory. Immediately following the war, the U.S. military governed the territory. In 1900, Congress passed the Foraker Act, which established a local civilian government; however, the U.S. president continued to appoint Puerto Rico's governor and other major officials. The Jones Act of 1917 granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship and a bicameral legislature. Yet Puerto Rico did not have an elected governor until 1949.</p> <p>Over the years, Puerto Rico has gained partial sovereignty but remains a U.S. territory. Puerto Rico is part of the United States, and its people are U.S. citizens; however, because it is not a state, Puerto Ricans are not afforded all of the same rights as other U.S. citizens. These include the right to vote in presidential elections and the right to full congressional representation. (The House of Representatives has a Puerto Rican delegate, but he/she does not have a vote.)</p> <p>Thus, Puerto Ricans exist in a gray area of being part of the United States. Nevertheless, Puerto Ricans have a rich and celebrated history of U.S. military service.</p>
<p>Slide 5: The Cold War</p>	<p>Before we jump into the how the Borinqueneers participated in the Korean War, let's briefly review the Cold War and the Korean War.</p>

the Cuban rebels and opposition to European colonization of the Americas, on April 25, 1898, the United States declared war against Spain.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask: Can anyone give me a short description of the Cold War? How about how the Korean War fits into the larger Cold War? <p>The Korean War was one of the many proxy wars fought during the Cold War. It was also the United States' first major military effort to contain the global spread of communism.</p> <p>During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States struggled for international supremacy. Although the Soviet Union and the United States never directly fought each other, many nations, including both superpowers, did engage in wars as part of the Cold War. The most prominent examples are the Korean War and the Vietnam War.</p> <p>The Borinqueneers fought in the Korean War as a segregated unit. During the Vietnam War, former Borinqueneers served in various integrated units.</p>
<p>Slide 6: Korean War</p>	<p>The United States fought in the Korean War from 1950 to 1953. The Korean peninsula had been occupied by Japan from 1910 to August 1945. Following World War II, it was divided into two sections along the 38th parallel (the popular name given to latitude 38° north) in an arrangement meant to be temporary. The Soviet Union occupied the northern half of the peninsula and installed a communist government headed by Kim Il-Sung. The United States occupied the southern half of the peninsula and backed the pro-capitalist yet authoritarian regime of President Syngman Rhee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask: What are capitalism and communism? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Capitalism: Economic system which values private property, private ownership of industry, and competition in the market. ○ Communism: Economic system in which government owns key industries, income is (in theory) distributed according to people's



	<p>needs, and property is communally owned.</p> <p>On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces invaded South Korea across the 38th parallel. The United Nations (UN) swiftly condemned the attack. The Truman administration—without seeking a Congressional declaration of war—proceeded to commit U.S. naval and air power to South Korea’s defense. On July 1, 1950, the first U.S. ground forces entered the conflict. Although technically a UN “police action,” the Korean War resulted in three years of brutal combat, especially after communist China intervened in November 1950.</p> <p>Although an armistice ended the hostilities on July 23, 1953, the Korean peninsula remained divided. More than 36,000 American service members died in the Korean War, with 4,817 designated as missing in action. Estimates of total war deaths vary greatly, but reach as high as three to four million—with civilians accounting for as many as 70% of Korean deaths.</p> <p>The 1953 armistice established a demilitarized zone as a buffer between North and South Korea. Although the armistice ceased the fighting, it did not officially end the war, and the two countries are technically still at war.</p>
<p>Slide 7: Racism and Segregation</p>	<p>Borinqueneers gained numerous honors for their service in the Korean War.</p> <p>When the Borinqueneers formed in 1899, the U.S. military was racially segregated. Black and Brown service members could not serve alongside white service members. Instead, they had separate units, assignments, and accommodations.²</p> <p>Segregation in the military explains why the 65th Infantry Regiment was comprised of only Puerto Rican soldiers. (Puerto Rican soldiers also served in other segregated units.) While the Borinqueneers</p>

² Minority units were commanded by White commanders since the U.S. military did not permit people of color to serve in leadership positions.



and other non-white service members often wanted to fight, the military tended to prohibit them from serving in combat roles.

- **Ask:** Why do you think the Borinqueneers did not fight during WWI and WWII?
 - **Answer:** Racism – Many white military leaders incorrectly believed that non-white soldiers were less capable than white soldiers.
 - **Answer:** Racism – Many Americans had anxieties about Black and other minority service members carrying weapons.
- **Ask:** Why do you think it matters that they were never assigned combat duty?
 - **Answer:** Combat service has historically been tied to citizenship. If Puerto Rican soldiers fought in combat, it would be harder for the United States to deny Puerto Ricans citizenship and equality because Puerto Ricans, like other U.S. citizens, willingly put their lives on the line to defend the United States.

Then, in 1948, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which formally abolished segregation in the military and made way for the 65th Infantry to join combat.³ When the Korean War began, the Borinqueneers deployed to Korea to face combat for the first time in their history as a U.S. Army unit. However, they still experienced racism and discrimination in the military. Despite this, they proved themselves on the battlefield and gained respect from some military officers.

³ Military desegregation was a gradual process. The executive order enabled units such as the 65th Infantry to take on an active combat role, however integration was met with some resistance. Six years later in 1954, the last segregated units were disbanded, and the U.S. military was fully integrated. The Korean War was one of the largest factors for the actual transition to an integrated military. The Army had insufficient white troops and was forced to integrate units to effectively fight the war. Use the following sources to learn more about Executive Order 9981 and the desegregation process:

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9981>,
<https://armyhistory.org/executive-order-9981-integration-of-the-armed-forces/>, and
https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/topic_display.cfm?tcid=100.



<p>Slide 8: Borinqueneers and the Korean War</p>	<p>Because the Borinqueneers did not deploy to combat zones during the World War I and World War II, the Korean War offered the first opportunity for the unit to prove its skills on the battlefield.</p> <p>When the Korean War broke out in 1950, the U.S. military was unprepared. It had largely demobilized since the end of World War II in 1945. Because of the deficit of experienced soldiers, the U.S. Army mobilized the 65th and deployed the men to Korea.</p> <p>In August 1950, the 65th Infantry Regiment arrived in Pusan, South Korea, and went into action almost immediately. In years of fierce fighting with North Korean and Chinese forces, the unit was credited with a total of 15,787 enemy killed-in-action and 2,169 enemy prisoners of war; it suffered 1,510 battlefield casualties. According to General Douglas MacArthur, “the Puerto Ricans forming the ranks of the gallant 65th Infantry give daily proof on the battlefields of Korea of their courage, determination and resolute will to victory.”</p> <p>In the Battle of Chosin Reservoir (November-December 1950), U.S. forces pushed across the 38th parallel line on the North Korean side. Yet the Chinese military counterattacked and threatened to surround and crush U.S. forces. The 65th Infantry Regiment provided the protection that allowed U.S. soldiers and marines to reach safety.</p> <p>During Operation Thunderbolt (January-February 1951), the 65th Infantry Regiment seized several strategic hills from the Chinese military. This battle allowed South Korea and NATO to recapture Seoul in 1951.</p>
<p>Slide 9: Court Martials</p>	<p>In the second half of the Korean War, circumstances changed for the 65th Infantry. After the Borinqueneers lost a battle, the U.S. Army replaced their Puerto Rican commanding officer with a white, non-Spanish speaking officer: Brigadier General Chester B. DeGavre.</p>



	<p>For their defeat, Gen. DeGavre punished the members of the 65th. He forced the men to shave their mustaches (in Puerto Rican culture, an important marker of manhood) and took away the unit's special rations of rice and beans (traditional Puerto Rican food).⁴</p> <p>With morale low and the 65th Infantry assigned to fight what seemed to them an unwinnable battle, many members refused to fight. The Army arrested 123 members of the 65th Infantry for refusing to fight and found 91 guilty.</p>
<p>Slide 10: Puerto Ricans at Home</p>	<p>Puerto Ricans, however, widely honored the Borinqueneers' military service. Every day, local newspapers in Puerto Rico covered their actions in the Korean War. The unit inspired pride and patriotism in the territory, and the Borinqueneers soon became icons.</p> <p>The unit's accomplishments also gave hope to Puerto Ricans that they would no longer be viewed as second-class American citizens. Specifically, many Puerto Ricans believed that the Borinqueneers' service in the Korean War would result in either statehood or increased independence.</p> <p>When the news of the mass court martials came out, Puerto Ricans rallied together and petitioned to have the men returned to battle. Due to this pressure, the U.S. Army revisited the court martials, and in 1954, Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens pardoned the soldiers. During the investigation, the government determined that racial bias had influenced the sentencing, as many white soldiers who acted similarly had received no punishments.</p>
<p>Slide 11: Legacy</p>	<p>Like other segregated units, the 65th Infantry disbanded after the Korean War to integrate into</p>

⁴ Reflecting on the incident, Borinqueneer Maj. Silvestre E. Ortiz wrote, "[My mustache] had to go also, after 22 years with me. ... All that the mustache means to a Puerto Rican, it is part of his personality, in many cases the product of a religious vow, so much so that the three chaplains went to visit [General DeGavre] and apprised him of its importance, unsuccessfully." From: Matt Fratus, "The Borinqueneers: The US Army's Only All-Hispanic Unit," *Coffee or Die Magazine*, September 21, 2020, accessed November 7, 2022, <https://www.coffeordie.com/borinqueneers>.



	<p>the Army. Many Americans forgot their contributions to the war effort.</p> <p>Although the U.S. government remitted most of the Borinqueneers' court martials, many former members still felt that their unit's reputation had been damaged. In 1999, descendants of soldiers who had fought at Jackson Heights advocated for a formal exoneration of the Borinqueneers. Their efforts led to a reinvestigation of the court martials by the U.S. Army Center for Military History. In their 2001 report, investigators confirmed the 65th Infantry's innocence.</p> <p>In 2016, the United States government awarded a Congressional Gold Medal to the regiment. Additionally, at Arlington National Cemetery, a plaque and memorial tree commemorate the unit's service in the Korean War.</p>
<p>Slide 12: Connections</p>	<p>Now that you've been introduced to the Borinqueneers, what lessons can you take away from their history?</p> <p>Can you think of any ways that the Korean War may have impacted (or not impacted) relations between Puerto Rico and the United States?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential answers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Borinqueneers (and Puerto Ricans) had the chance to prove their skills in combat and therefore proved their legitimacy as American citizens ○ Created a sense of pride in Puerto Rico for the Borinqueneers military service ○ Did not lead to Puerto Rican statehood or increased independence as some hoped

- Conclusion: 3 mins
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 12
 - Encourage students to consider the importance of diversity in the U.S. military.



- Instruct students to complete their worksheet by writing a few sentences about connections they can make between the history of the Borinqueneers and other topics you have covered in class. Encourage students to share as time allows.

COLD WAR BACKGROUND:

While the United States and the Soviet Union were allies during World War II, the end of that war made it clear that conflict between the two emerging superpowers was brewing. What followed would be a 45-year geopolitical struggle in which the two superpowers never directly engaged in military conflict. Instead, the conflict played out through espionage, economic sanctions, proxy wars in other nations, and technological competition (in particular, the nuclear race and the space race).

The Cold War began in the aftermath of World War II (1939-1948) and ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s — marked, most dramatically, by the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989.

The United States and the Soviet Union, the two dominant postwar superpowers, never directly went to war with one another. Yet numerous proxy wars around the globe, involving U.S. and Soviet support, destroyed millions of lives. Mostly fought in the so-called “Third World” of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, these wars included, most prominently for the United States, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Yet the Cold War’s “hot” wars also involved superpower-backed coups and military interventions in such nations as Guatemala, Iran, Chile, Angola, and Afghanistan (to name just a few).

Although the United States and the Soviet Union emerged, after World War II, as “super-states”, the Cold War was truly global in scope. It led to the creation of new international alliances, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact (the alliance of communist, Soviet-backed states in Eastern Europe). Beyond the “iron curtain” divide of western Europe, other geopolitical powers also emerged—most significantly, China, which tested its first nuclear weapon in 1949 and played a key role in both the Korean and the Vietnam Wars.

Within the United States, the Cold War shaped everyday life. The nuclear threat prompted an idealization of the nuclear family — suburban, middle-class households with traditional gender roles — as an escape from a world in peril. Children participated in “duck and cover” nuclear attack drills at school; many families built fallout shelters in their backyards; and a notion of the “American way of life” emerged, which valorized material consumption and conformity to mainstream cultural norms. Meanwhile, fears of communism escalated into a wide-ranging “red scare” — exemplified, most notably, in Senator Joseph McCarthy’s 1953-1954 hearings, which accused members of the State Department, the U.S. Army, and other government offices of being influenced by communism.

Additional background information can be found at:

- https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/TrumanCIA_Timeline.pdf
- <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cold-War>



PLANNING A VISIT TO ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY?

While this lesson plan focuses on the experiences of the Borinqueneers in the Korean War, this story is only one of many that shaped and were shaped by the Cold War. Explore some of these stories in our Cold War School Walking Tour. The tour tells the stories of policy makers like President John F. Kennedy and John Foster Dulles as well as those of lesser-known individuals, including a female journalist who reported from the frontlines of the Korean War, a soldier who was designated Missing in Action from 1953 to 2017 when his remains were identified using DNA testing, a victim of a nuclear accident, and more. The tour is available on the ANC Education website at

<https://education.arlingtoncemetery.mil/ColdWar>.

For additional Cold War lessons, visit the ANC Education website for a timeline lesson and a Cold War memorial lesson:

- In the timeline lesson, students organize events related to the Cold War on a timeline and explain the relationships between events leading up to, during, and/or after the period of the Cold War, including causes, effects, and the possibility of different outcomes.
- In the memorial lesson, students analyze what and how we memorialize. They discuss why no national Cold War memorial exists and design their own Cold War memorial based on their knowledge of the Cold War.

We love to see how our materials are being used in the classroom! Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. @ArlingtonNatI #ANCEducation

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P H O T O S :

Slide 2: Borinqueneers, National Archives, September 1950,
<https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Photos/igphoto/2002059081/>.

Slide 3: Frederic Guimont, 1984-Big-Brother, Wikimedia Commons, May 22, 2010,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1984-Big-Brother.jpg>.



Slide 3: Impact Publications, The Red Iceberg, Wikimedia Commons, 1960,
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Red_Iceberg_\(1960\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Red_Iceberg_(1960).jpg).

Slide 3: 65th Infantry Regiment Insignia, undated, U.S. Army,
<https://tioh.army.mil/Catalog/Heraldry.aspx?HeraldryId=12687&CategoryId=7612>.

Slide 4: Map of United States and Puerto Rico, Google Maps, March 3, 2023.

Slide 5: Han River, South Korea - Some of the members of the Puerto Rican infantry unit who distinguished themselves during heroic combat during the Korean War, U.S. National Guard, 1952,
<https://www.nationalguard.mil/Resources/Image-Gallery/News-Images/igphoto/2000801011/>.

Slide 6: Rishabh Tatiraju, Korean Demilitarized Zone, Wikimedia Commons, September 19, 2012,
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Slide 7: Borinqueneers with bullet-ridden flag, National Archives, 1952, <https://armyhistory.org/65th-infantry-regiment/>.

Slide 8: Domenic D'Andrea, Arlington, VA - National Guard Heritage Series painting depicts unit members driving back Chinese troops during the Korean War, U.S. National Guard, undated,
<https://www.nationalguard.mil/Resources/Image-Gallery/News-Images/igphoto/2000801013/>.

Slide 9: Marcelino Cruz Rodriguez. 65th soldiers display the Puerto Rican flag in Korea, U.S. Army, 1952,
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Slide 10: Sfc. Modesto Cartagena comic, Periódico El Mundo, November 13, 1952, <https://centropr-archive.hunter.cuny.edu/centrovoices/chronicles/borinqueneers-day-and-korean-war-puerto-rican-history-and-memory>.

Slide 11: Amanda Lucidon, President Obama with Borinqueneers, White House, June 10, 2014,
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/06/11/overcoming-discrimination-and-adversity-nation-honors-puerto-rico-s-veterans>.

Slide 12: The Congressional Gold Medal, U.S. House of Representatives, 2016,
<https://www.house.gov/feature-stories/2016-4-14-congressional-gold-medal-ceremony-for-the-borinqueneers>.

Slide 12: Borinqueneers on the way to Korea, National Guard Bureau, December 1950,
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Slide 12: Mario Caiafa, PFC Gilberto Torres Rosario with sign, U.S. Army Signal Corps, September 7, 1952, <https://centropr-archive.hunter.cuny.edu/centrovoices/chronicles/honor-and-dignity-restoring-borinqueneers-historical-record>.