

MEET THE MUSEUM Discovery Theater & The National Air & Space Museum!

Flyin' Free – Flight Path 2

Black Wings

The first panel of the Black Wings exhibit honors the first African-American man and woman to earn pilot's licenses. At the bottom you see **Bessie Coleman's** license. At the top, you see a picture of **Eugene Bullard**, who

- was the **son of an ex-slave**
- was a **jockey, prize fighter, and performer** before he learned to fly
- **went to France**—like Bessie—because there was more opportunity there for blacks than in America
- was the **first black combat aviator—flying for the French** in World War I. He had applied to fly for the U.S. military but was ignored because of his race.
- as a fighter pilot, earned the **nickname *The Black Swallow of Death***
- was awarded a total of **15 medals** for his French service
- flew with a **pet monkey** named Jimmie



Q. Look at the picture of Eugene. What do you notice? What kind of person do you think he was?

Next, move to the final panel of the exhibit, which honors the **Tuskegee Airmen**. They

- were **trained as pilots by the U.S. Army Air Corps** because of a shortage of pilots to fly in World War II
- became part of the **all-black 332nd Fighter Group**. The group was all-black because the **U.S. military was still segregated**. White and black soldiers fought, but not together.
- were **known for their effectiveness**
- **called “Red Tails”** because of the red markings on their planes' tails
- **proved** that blacks were able to master the technical details of combat flying

Take a minute or two to watch the video.

Because of the achievements of the Tuskegee Airmen and other blacks in combat, **President Truman signed an executive order in 1948 to end segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces**. The first legal call for desegregation in the US, it paved the way for desegregation in civilian life.

Look for the gold medal in the case behind you. This is the Tuskegee Airmen's Congressional Medal of Honor, awarded in 2007 by President Bush—62 years after the end of World War II.

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Patty Wagstaff's Extra 260

Head toward the far back corner of the gallery and find the modern red, white, and blue plane. This is the Extra 260, flown by champion stunt flyer Patty Wagstaff.



Take a few minutes to watch the video.

Q. Patty Wagstaff was the **United States Aerobatic Champion** from 1991-1993. What do you think “aerobatic” means?

A. “Aerobatics” are **acrobatics in the air** – in other words, stunt flying!

The Extra 260 is specially designed to be unstable so it rolls over easily. This makes it an excellent aerobatic plane. (For safety, most planes today are made to be stable so they resist rolling over.)

Q. Check out the cockpit, where the pilot sits. **What do you notice there that would protect the pilot?**

Q. How would it feel to do a **loop the loop** in this plane?

The Curtiss “Jenny”

Head out to the railings and turn left. Walk along until you see a biplane just below you with brown wings and “4983” on its side. This is the Curtiss JN-4D, nicknamed “Jenny,” which



- is the kind of plane **Bessie Coleman** flew
- is the kind of plane used by the military **to train pilots during World War I**. After the War, the government sold them cheaply to get rid of them.

Q. Is this a biplane or a monoplane?

A. A biplane, because it has 2 sets of wings.

Q. What is it made of?

A. **Wood** framework; wings covered with **cloth**.

Q. Find where the pilot and the passenger sat. What do you see that would **protect** them while they were flying?

Q. How would it feel to do a **loop the loop** in this plane? to walk on the wings?

Q. Look across at the nose cone of the **Boeing 747** (huge plane with red top). Where does the pilot sit? Which of the 3 planes would you rather fly? **Why?**