



In 1932 James Herman Banning (above) and Thomas C. Allen became the first black aviators to complete a transcontinental flight. Time: 41 hours and 27 minutes. Affectionately called the "Flying Hobos," the pair bought a used aircraft and set off with less than \$100 for expenses. (Thomas C. Allen, courtesy National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution) Right: Opportunities for African American aviators expanded dramatically in 1939, when blacks gained entrance to the Civilian Pilot Training Program. Pictured: Linkwood Williams, civilian flight instructor at Tuskegee Army Air Field. (James O. Plinton, Jr., courtesy NASM, SI)



WHEN WAR BROKE OUT in Europe in 1939, President Roosevelt asked Congress to create a federally funded Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) as a preparedness measure. The program was to be administered by the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA), which, operating through colleges and universities, promoted interest in military service during national emergencies. African Americans such as Dr. Ormande Walker of Wilberforce University and Arthur Howe of Hampton Institute began pressing members of Congress and President

Roosevelt to include black colleges and universities in the new aviation classes. The Senate Military Affairs Committee debated the question of black participation in the Army Air Corps during the early months of 1939 and, eventually, a compromise was struck, stipulating that one of the civilian pilot training schools would be earmarked as a training site for African Americans. Tuskegee Institute in Alabama was selected as the site, but Public Law 18, signed by President Roosevelt on April 3, made no explicit statement about admitting black civilian pilots to the air corps. Thus, the Army Air Corps continued its exclusion of black pilots.