American aviation was from the beginning marked by sexist and racist assumptions. It was taken for granted that women were generally inferior to men and that white men were superior to all others. Flying, he told himself, required a level of skill and courage that women and blacks lacked. However, despite these prevailing prejudices, the dream and desire to fly remained alive among women and African-Americans.

The history of women in aviation actually dates back to the time of hot air balloons. Several women in Europe and America gained fame for their skill and audacity. Sophie Blanchard made her first balloon flight in 1805. She grew in fame and was named the official aeronaut of the empire by Napoleon. By 1834, at least twenty women in Europe were piloting their own balloons. Although she was not flying, Katherine Wright was a great defender of the efforts of her brothers. Orville was so grateful for his sister's help that he said, "When the world talks about the Wrights, it must include my sister ... She inspired a lot of our effort."

Although Raymonde de la Roche of France was the first woman in the world to obtain her pilot's license, Harriet Quimby had the distinction of being the first American woman to become a licensed pilot.

On August 1, 1911, Quimby, who was described as a "true beauty "with" disquieting blue-green eyes, "he left the field after passing the pilot test with ease.

He flooded her with questions, Quimby answered the answers with self-confidence. As he passed by a group of women who had attended the historic event, Quimby was heard to say a smile and a wink: "Flying is easier than voting." (The Amendment of Women's Suffrage was not approved until 2020).

As difficult as it was for women to become pilots in significant numbers, it was doubly difficult for African-Americans, especially black women. That's why Bessie Coleman, the first African-American to obtain her pilot's license, is such an exciting and important figure in aviation.

Bessie Coleman was born in 1893 in Atlanta, Texas, the twelfth of thirteen children. Her mother, who had been a slave, valued education and encouraged all her children to attend school to improve their situation. The stimulus paid off, because Coleman graduated from high school, a feat that not many black women could achieve at the beginning of the 20th century.

Bessie Coleman refused to accept the limitations that others tried to impose on her. She attended an Oklahoma university for a semester, but ran out of money. By accepting the offer of one of his brothers to come and live with him and his
family in Chicago, Coleman found a job as a manicurist. She intended to return to school after saving enough money. But she never did it. While in Chicago, she learned to fly and made a new set of goals for herself. She wanted to be a pilot.

Coleman learned to fly by reading stories of aerial battles in newspapers during the First World War. She tried to find a school that would accept her as an apprentice. But no American instructor or flight school was willing to teach him. As difficult as it was for women to become pilots in significant numbers, it was doubly difficult for African-Americans, especially black women. That's why Bessie Coleman, the first African-American to obtain her pilot's license, is such an exciting and important figure in aviation.

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Coleman learned to fly by reading stories of aerial battles in newspapers during the First World War. She tried to find a school that would accept her as an apprentice. But no American instructor or flight school was willing to teach him. When the war ended, a friend, Robert S. Abbott, founder of the Defender of Chicago, one of the most popular black-owned newspapers in the country, suggested that Coleman go to France, where racial prejudice was not so restrictive. As it was in America although the United States was the birthplace of flights, it was slower than other countries to develop an organized aviation program. European leaders immediately saw the commercial and military advantages of a strong national aviation program. Bessie knew from her reading that both French and German planes were among the best in the world.

Coleman also read about Eugene Jacques Bullard, the well decorated and native of Georgia who became the first African-American to fly a plane in combat as a member of the Lafayette Flight Corps during the First World War. Other blacks had also gone to Europe to train. Coleman realized that if she ever had the chance to fly, she would also have to go to France. But she had no money to get there, and besides, she could not speak a word of French. For almost two years, Coleman worked part-time as a manicurist and as a waitress in a Chicago chili room
and saved every one cent to finance her trip to France. Meanwhile, he learned to speak French, so that when the time came, he could understand his instructors.

In 1921, Coleman arrived in France, where he found an instructor who was one of Tony Fokker’s main pilots. Fokker, the famous aircraft manufacturer, said that Coleman was a "natural talent". On June 15, 1921, Coleman made history by becoming the first black woman to win her wings, so she joined the ranks of the few American pilots.

Upon returning to the United States with the determination to start a flight school where other African American pilots could receive training, Coleman looked for ways to finance his dream. There were very few jobs in the aviation industry for women or blacks. He soon learned that there was little or no help for a black woman who wanted to start a flight school. Calling attention to aviation and encouraging other women and African-Americans to participate in the new and growing field, Coleman gave flight exhibitions and gave lectures on aviation. He thrilled the audience with reckless maneuvers, as Quimby had done before her.

Along with racism, Coleman encountered the burden of sexism, but she made believers of those who doubted her ability. "The color of my skin," he said, "[was] inconvenient at first. . . . It was a curiosity, but soon the public discovered that it could really fly. Then they came to see Brave Bessie, as they called me.

The strict rules and regulations that govern aviation today did not exist during the first three decades of flight. For example, it was not uncommon for aviators to ignore seat belts and fly without a parachute. One of these simple safety precautions could have saved the life of Harriet Quimby and Bessie Coleman.

On a morning in July 1912, Quimby and a passenger named William P. Willard set out to break a speed record on water. When Quimby climbed to five thousand feet, the French-made Blériot monoplane [2] suddenly collapsed. Both Quimby and Willard were thrown from the plane and shot to death in Boston Harbor.

The New York Sun took the opportunity to speak against women flyers:

*Miss Quimby is the fifth woman in the world to die while operating an airplane (three were students) and so far her number is five. Sport is not one for which women are physically qualified. As a rule, they lack strength and mental presence and the courage to excel as aviators. It is essentially the sport and the pastime of a man.*

Fourteen years later, Bessie Coleman died in a similar accident. With almost enough savings to start his school, Coleman agreed to hold an air show in Florida on May Day for the Jacksonville Black Welfare League. At 7:30 p.m. The night before, Coleman, accompanied by his advertising agent, William Wills, took his plane for a test flight. When it reached a height of about five thousand feet, its plane overturned. Coleman was ejected from the plane and sank until his death on April 30, 1926. Wills
died seconds later when the plane crashed. Once again, critics used the tragedy to affirm that neither women nor blacks were mentally or physically capable of being good pilots. "Women are often penalized for publicizing all their setbacks," said Amelia Earhart, the most famous female pilot in aviation history. "The result is that such emphasis sometimes directly affects a woman's chances for a flying job," Earhart continued. "A manufacturer told me that I could not risk hiring pilot women because of the way accidents, even minors, became headlines." Although Bessie Coleman died tragically, her plans to open a flight training school for blacks were continued by those she had inspired.

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“Women in Aviation” Guided Notes

Párrafo 1
1. En sus propias palabras, explique por qué (de acuerdo con el texto) solo a los hombres blancos se les permitió ser aviadores.

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Párrafos 2-3
2. Cita una pieza de evidencia para demostrar que las aviadoras tempranas fueron valientes y logradas.

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Párrafos 4-5


3. ¿Por qué Quimby afirma que "volar es más fácil que votar?"

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4. ¿Qué estrategia utilizó Quimby para tratar con los reporteros que la acosaron inundándola con preguntas?

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Párrafo 6
5. En sus propias palabras, explique POR QUÉ fue "doblemente difícil para los afroamericanos, especialmente para las mujeres negras" convertirse en pilotos.

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Párrafos 7-8
6. Cita una pieza de evidencia que crees que revela un detalle importante sobre el personaje de Coleman.

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7. En sus propias palabras, explique qué revela la cita que eligió para la pregunta 6 sobre Coleman.

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Párrafos 9-11
8. Explique por qué Coleman creía que tenía que ir a Francia para convertirse en piloto.

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Párrafos 12-13
9. Cita una pieza de evidencia para demostrar que Coleman es una figura histórica significativa.

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Párrafos 14-15
10. Resuma cómo el racismo y el sexismo que enfrentó Coleman la motivaron a triunfar.

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Párrafo 16-18
11. ¿Es justo lo que dice este periódico acerca de Coleman? Explica por qué o por qué no.

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Párrafos 19-21
12. ¿Qué tienen en común las citas del periódico sobre la muerte de Coleman con las de la muerte de Quimby?

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13. ¿Cómo son estos comentarios sobre Coleman después de su muerte un reflejo del prejuicio que recibió mientras estaba vivo?

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