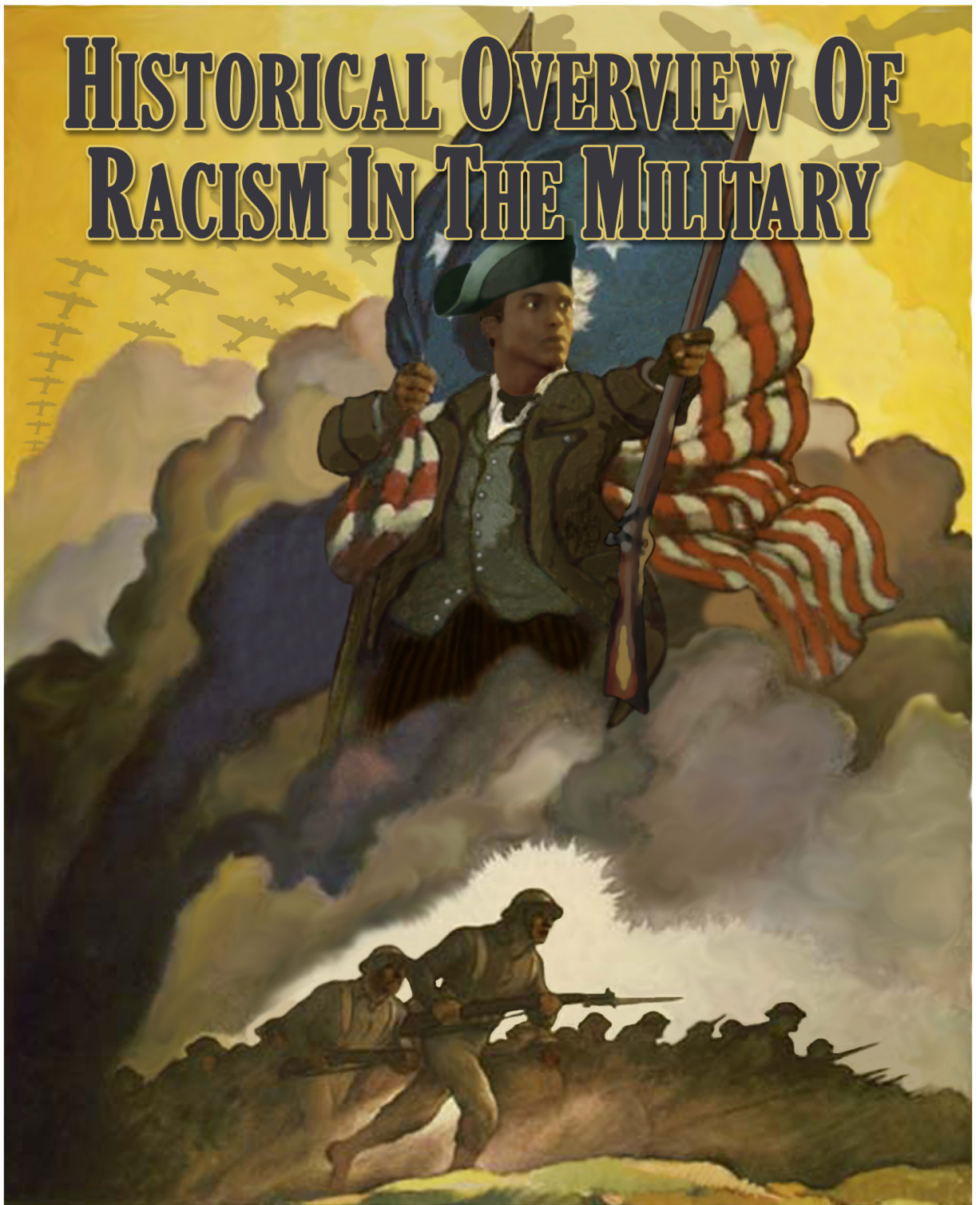


# HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RACISM IN THE MILITARY



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## **Preface**

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**February 2002**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This overview is designed to assist the reader in acknowledging and understanding the historical context of overt racist and discriminatory policies and practices in our military and how these dynamics and policies were perpetuated within the Armed Services. In this study of racism in our military, the reader may gain insight into how military leadership has been involved in racism and discrimination, and its effect on racial minority members throughout American history. The examples presented in this text do not include all racial and ethnic minority groups. However, it generally reflects the different types of racist policies and practices that have been researched and documented.

*“The presence of racial minorities in every battle fought in the name of the United States of America can be documented throughout history. They have always been recognized to the utmost, but they have been committed from the earliest beginnings (pre-Revolutionary War) to the present.” (23)*

### **Colonial Period (1528-1774)**

Years before the Revolution, the colonies required that every male, fit to carry a weapon, be a member of the local militia. During this period, race was not a criterion for membership or non-membership in the professional militia. Local militias welcomed free and enslaved Africans<sup>1</sup> to enlist and fight against Native Americans, and later the French. (17:6; 32:192)

In 1639, as the enslaved population increased, reports of slave uprisings began to spread. In reaction to these reports, Virginia and other colonies enacted a law excluding Blacks from being provided arms and/or ammunition. (17:6) The basis of this issue was the notion that slave revolts would not only upset the White colonists’ economic security and way of life, but also reverse the roles of Blacks and Whites. As one lawmaker stated, “There must be a great caution used, lest our slaves, when arm’d, become our master.” (20:17)

When their financial interests were threatened, people in power enforced policy changes within the militia regarding who could serve. They rewrote the militia laws to allow those who declined service to pay a modest fine. When a colonial militia was needed, recruiters turned to those groups of men who fell outside the class of people who normally served. These included Native Americans, Mulattos, and people of African descent. (22:11)

### **American Revolution (1775-1783)**

When General George Washington assumed command of the Continental Army in July 1775, his Adjutant General, Horatio Gates, reminded recruiters, “not to accept any deserter from the Ministerial army, nor any stroller, negro, or vagabond.” In response, the British offered enslaved Blacks freedom if they would fight for the Crown, and many joined the British. (22:72) Benjamin Quales explained the dilemma of the Black soldier in this war:

... can best be understood by realizing that his major loyalty was not to a place nor a people, but to a principle... He was likely to join the side that made him the quickest and best offer in terms of those “unalienable rights” of which Mr. Jefferson had spoken. (24)

Historians have noted that the Revolutionary War was not universally supported among colonists. It has been estimated that only one third of the colonial population supported it, one third was against it, and the other third was neutral. Consequently, it was not easy to enlist

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The terms Blacks, Negroes, Colored and Africans are used interchangeably. People of African decent were not regarded as Americans until the passage of the 14<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment (13 June 1866).

soldiers to fight the British. By the end of 1775, numerous issues including personnel shortages forced General George Washington to reverse the ban on the use of Black soldiers.

During the American Revolutionary War, the typical Black soldier was a private, often lacking a name or official identity. He was carried on the rolls as A Negro man, or Negro by name, or a Negro name not Known. (20:19) Some Black soldiers were identified by the classic Negro surnames of the times like Cuffe, Jack, Jupiter, or Cato. However, an unspecified number may have adopted European names, which makes it difficult to determine the actual number of African Americans who served during this war. (22:73-74)

As the war continued, enslaved Blacks substituted for White masters who chose not to fight. Pressured by Congress to increase enlistment, some states compensated slave owners up to 120 pounds for enslaved Africans who served. By 1778, Massachusetts and Rhode Island allowed enslaved Africans to enroll in the service. Subsequently, a Negro commander led the Bucks of America, an all-Negro company from Massachusetts. Except for the four all-Negro units from these states and Connecticut, most Negroes were integrated into the combat units with Whites. (22:75-77) In the Continental Navy, many Black sailors served on Revolutionary gunboats. A Negro, Captain Mark Starlin of the Virginia Navy, was commander of the *Patriot*. Despite his battle record, Starlin was re-enslaved by his old master at the end of the war. (15:56)

The Continental Congress and General Washington courted Indian allies to join the colonial war effort only when treaties of neutrality broke down. It took three years to sign a treaty with the Delaware Indians who were used as scouts and light Calvary troops. However, most Indian tribes supported the British, since they desired English trade goods and resented the aggressive expansionism of Americans. Unfortunately, the victors of this war viewed the Indians as defeated allies of the British and believed they had a claim to all Indian lands. (22:95-107)

By the end of the American Revolution, over 300,000 men would fight, including approximately 5,000 Blacks, and participate in over 50 battles. However, the new U.S. Constitution re-emphasized Black inferiority by deeming that, for political representation, each enslaved Black would only count as three-fifths of a human being. A few years later, Congress enacted the *Militia Act of 1792* thereby restricting militia enrollment to every free and able White male citizen of the respective states...of the age [from] 18 to 45. In 1798, the Marine Corps adopted a policy forbidding the enlistment of Negroes, Mulattos, and Indians. This policy was effective until 1942. (17:18-19)

### **War of 1812 (1812-1815)**

As in previous wars, the War of 1812 required the states to field a large military force. Blacks were enlisted only when a shortage of Whites rendered it a necessity and as a last resort. Enslaved and free Blacks were allowed to serve as soldiers and sailors. They often served in all Black regiments and *de facto* integrated units aboard ships. General Andrew Jackson<sup>2</sup> called for

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Jackson was the seventh president of the United States (1829-1837). Jackson may have been benevolent toward blacks and Native Americans in his personal life, but they clearly were not included in the “common people” he sought to aid in his public life. His Native American policy deprived America’s original peoples of millions of

enslaved Blacks and recruits to fight at the Battle of New Orleans with the promise of freedom. Free Blacks were offered the same pay, bounties, and a 160-acre land grant, which Jackson had guaranteed his White soldiers. The day following the battle, Jackson ordered the confiscation of weapons from all his Black troops and secretly ordered their ammunition removed. Two days after the battle (January 8, 1815), General Jackson revoked all of his promises to Blacks serving under his command. (1:143-144)

Both American and British military leadership offered a promise of freedom to enslaved Blacks who served during this war. However, most were returned to their owners once the war ended. Moreover, the *Treaty of Ghent* provided for the mutual restoration of properties, which included enslaved Blacks. (29:4)

Once the war was over, Blacks were told their service was no longer needed. On February 18, 1820, the U.S. Army issued an order stating, "No Negro or mulatto will be received as a recruit of the Army." Years later, in 1839, Navy officials expressed concern about the large number of Blacks in the Navy by implementing a five-percent quota. (17:26-28)

### **The Civil War (1861-1865)**

At the beginning of the Civil War, Blacks were not accepted by the Union Army. However, heavy casualties and shortages in support personnel soon changed the Union's attitude about Black enlistment. In 1862, Congress authorized President Lincoln to use Blacks and other non-White men in separate, organized units as laborers. The Union military was directed to organize segregated units for non-Whites and to ensure that White officers commanded those units. Due to heavy casualties in 1863, the Bureau of Colored Troops was established to handle recruitment and training of Black troops. (31:195-196) Segregated in all-Black regiments, Blacks were, until 1864, paid a little over half the amount received by White soldiers (e.g., \$7.00 per month compared to \$13.00 per month for the lowest ranking White soldier). (20:23) On June 15, 1864, Congress granted equal pay for all troops after protest by Black troops, abolitionist groups, politicians, and newspapers. However, the equal pay policy only authorized those Black soldiers who were free before April 19, 1861, when the war began. (17:50) In combat, there was no equality. The mortality rate for Blacks was almost 40 percent higher than Whites due to poor equipment, conditions, and non-existent medical facilities. (29:5)

Black troops who were captured by the Confederacy received much harsher treatment than their White counterparts. The Confederacy considered Negro soldiers as captured property, not prisoners of war. The Confederate Secretary of War condoned the killing of Negro prisoners. For example, when Fort Pillow, Tennessee, was captured on April 12, 1864 by Confederate forces, over 300 Negro Union troops were massacred after they surrendered. According to one account, some Black soldiers were buried alive. (1:151)

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acres despite prior treaties and the disapproval of the Supreme Court of the United States. His part promoted the interest of slaveholders and thereby helped to delay a solution to the slavery question until it erupted into the Civil War in 1861 (See Encarta.msn.com).



Ironically, the Confederacy actually recognized the military value of Blacks before the Union. Faced with personnel shortages from the start, the South was quick to use enslaved Blacks in noncombatant roles in order to free able-bodied Whites. They provided the backbone and muscle of the Confederate Army by building forts, repairing railroads, and serving as cooks and general laborers. Some volunteered to serve in any capacity to include fighting the Union. By 1864, the Confederacy was considering arming enslaved Blacks officially. Such a policy, entitled the *Negro Soldier Law*, was authorized in 1865. However, in the same year the war would end with the surrender of the Confederacy. (29:4) Approximately 90,000 Blacks served with the Confederate Army. They served because of their loyalty to master, family, and state. Many felt that by fighting for the South, they would display their loyalty and patriotism, and they would be rewarded with their freedom. Some 450 African Americans were receiving Confederate veteran's benefits as late as 1920.<sup>3</sup>

During the first year of the war, the Union Navy experienced a massive personnel shortage with an increase of ships from 76 vessels to 671. This forced the Secretary of the Navy to lift the five-percent quota on Black enlistment, which was established in 1839. However, he only offered Blacks restricted positions of servants, cooks, and assistant gunners, or powder boys. In the following years of the war the Union fleet would increase to 1,059 ships, creating an increase of billets for Blacks. In 1862, the Navy Secretary opened all enlisted positions to Blacks, but continued to exclude them from the ranks of petty or commissioned officer. (17:57)

Mostly serving in Texas, Hispanics were also part of the war effort and fought on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. Approximately 2,550 fought in the ranks of the Confederacy, while 1,000, including some Mexican nationals, fought for the Union (13:14)

Some 20,000 Indians joined both sides of the conflict as well, serving as generals, infantrymen, sharpshooters, guides, guerrillas, and spies. Many who served found their land taken after the war and the newly militarized/industrialized government turning its war machine against them in the West. (11)

### **The Indian Campaigns (1866-1892)**

The history of Native Americans is fraught with conflict, continuing friction, and misunderstanding. Some historians consider the so-called Indian Wars or Campaign as the first Civil War pitting American against American. After the Civil War, Congress authorized the retention of Black soldiers in four segregated regiments -- 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry. (The *Army Reorganization Act of 1866* incorporated six regiments into the regular Army, and, in 1869, consolidated the 38<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, and 41<sup>st</sup> into the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry). (17:64; 18:6) These four Black units served from the Mexican border to the Canadian border. They performed a variety of tasks. They built roads, repaired telegraph wires, escorted cattle herds, fought Indians and bandits, guarded wagon trains, and protected settlers and miners. As a combination army-police force, they were involved in every major campaign on the frontier. White officers, who freely expressed their reservations about Blacks in the military, commanded them. Some sacrificed higher rank because they refused to command Black men. For example,

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<sup>3</sup> This information is from Florida Today newspaper dated February 23, 1998.

George A. Custer, who refused a promotion to lieutenant colonel with the 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, is the best known of the officers who allowed race to directly affect their careers. (12:45; 18:8-9) A young officer at Fort Monroe may have best expressed the officers' attitude at that time, when he stated, "rather be a second lieutenant of artillery than a captain of niggers." (17:66)

Although regulations did not prohibit the commissioning of Black enlisted personnel, none received a commission during this period. (17:66) Therefore, the only route for Blacks to become an officer was through the U.S. Military Academy. In 1879, after pressure from some civilian leaders, the Academy allowed Blacks to attend. Between 1879 and 1890, 25 Blacks received appointments and only three Blacks graduated holding a Regular Army commission. It would be another 46 years before a Black man would receive a commission from West Point. (17:67; 19:4)

The Black 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry regiments won the respect of their foe. Their Indian adversaries were not only intrigued by their dark skin and short, curled hair, but by the courage they displayed while fighting. Indians named them after an animal they considered sacred -- hence, the name Buffalo Soldiers. While Black soldiers assigned to the frontier risked their lives every day in defense of others, they also had to contend with the hostility of those they were protecting as described in the following examples from Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's *Black Profiles in Courage*.

In 1870, a white settler named John Jackson murdered 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry soldier PVT Boston Henry, for sport. When two black cavalry soldiers came to arrest Jackson, he killed them too. He was tried and found not guilty on all counts by an all white male jury. (155)

On 31 January 1881, PVT William Watkins of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry sang and danced for drinks in a San Angela saloon. When he started to leave, a white gambler named Tom McCarthy insisted he continue. Watkins said politely, "I'm too tired," and McCarthy shot him in the head. The sheriff declared it was "only a minor crime to kill a nigger." (156)

Within three decades after the Civil War, the Navy mustered, on average, 5,000 to 6,000 sailors, of whom 500 to 800 were Black. Regulations carried over from the war did not exclude Blacks from serving as regular seaman or gunners. In 1870, 29 percent of Black sailors held positions as cooks and stewards; this would increase to 49 percent by 1890. There was no change to Navy policy that caused this, but rather a choice made by many captains who placed Blacks in kitchens and dining rooms. Some Navy officials believed that Blacks did not have the intelligence to work with the steam boilers and mechanization that replaced the old sailing ships. (17:79)

The *Army Reorganization Act of 1866* also provided the establishment of an Indian Scouting Corps later known as the Indian Scouting Service (disbanded in 1943). Scouts were enlisted personnel only. (14:95) In March 1891, the War Department authorized one Indian troop for each cavalry regiment and one company for each infantry regiment in units stationed west of the

Mississippi River, with the exception of the Black regiments. However, this policy of utilizing Indians as soldiers proved decidedly unpopular with many officers. They believed that there were qualified recruits (i.e., Whites) in the country without resorting to “enlisting savages” to defend the flag. One officer asked, “Is the enlistment of barbarians to do our duty, the beginning of the end?” By the end of 1893, the Adjutant General’s Office declared the use of Indians as soldiers a complete failure. (9:130) Although Indians served in the Army, after the campaigns, most received the same treatment as the enemy. They too were forced to live on Indian reservations with scarce resources.

### **Spanish American War (1898)**

At the end of the Spanish American War, the Philippine Islands along with Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guam belonged to the United States. All four regular Army Black regiments served in both the Cuban and Philippine campaigns. Subject to segregated facilities en route, they were some of the first units to arrive. The War Department thought Black troops were especially suitable for Caribbean service since they were more immune to tropical diseases than Whites. In the Battle of San Juan Hill (a.k.a. Kettle Hill), the Black regiments came to the rescue of Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders, but their achievement is ignored in most history books. Voicing the racial climate and attitude of the time, the most famous Rough Rider, Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt, openly criticized Black troops for being peculiarly dependent on their White officers and called them laggards who tended to drift to the rear. (17:83,94)

Among the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry, more commonly known as the Rough Riders, were 14 Hispanic soldiers (officers and enlisted) who served in Cuba, under the close scrutiny of White commanders who were suspicious of their Spanish heritage. (13:22)

### **World War I (1914-1918)**

It is uncertain how many Hispanics (or Latinos) served in U.S. Forces during World War I. Their skin color would determine which unit they would serve in, whether it was a so-called Colored or White unit. During this time, the military began categorizing military members as White, Black, or other (this policy would continue until 1972). Many were found to have insufficient skill in English to complete basic training. Once identified, the men were separated into language groups and the training then progressed in the native tongue of the draftees. This training, then known as the Camp Gordon Plan, did not start until the war was nearing the end. Because of a lengthy training schedule, few Hispanics experienced combat. However, information from scattered records revealed Hispanic Americans did fight in World War I. Marcelino Serna’s record showed he enlisted in the Army and fought in the front-line trenches of France. After distinguishing himself repeatedly and on one occasion that made him seemingly eligible for the Medal of Honor, a White officer told him that to be so honored one had to be of a higher rank than a buck private. In addition, Serna was told he could not be advanced to a higher grade because he could not read or write English well enough to sign reports. (13:24-25)

Filipinos, who enlisted in the Navy during this time, found that their enlistment made them exclusively stewards. The steward mate rating took in cooks, waiters, pantryman, dishwashers, custodians, bedmakers, and valets. They did this without the benefit of American citizenship. They were required to serve three years in the Navy to earn U.S. citizenship. This requirement would be established as law in 1925. (7:82-87)

Although they were still not considered American citizens and were not subject to conscription, more than 17,000 Native Americans fought in this war. However, 6,509 were drafted even without conscription. They would not receive any veteran benefits until 1924, when they were declared citizens. The ruling on citizenship was in large measure a reaction of gratitude to the large number of Native Americans who fought during World War I, yet paternalism, discrimination, and exploitation were still commonplace in the military. (12:48)

Common stereotypes of this period depicted Native Americans as instinctive soldiers possessing inherent martial qualities, as having a good sense of direction and orientation, stealth of movement, and as bloodthirsty warriors eager to fight. In addition, it was believed that Native Americans liked the excitement of patrols and raids, and their skin did not reflect moonlight or the glare of flares at night. In this war and wars to come, Native Americans were often placed in inordinately dangerous positions and resulted in fatal consequences. (5:104-105)

Blacks were among those who rushed to the recruiting station in April 1917, seeking to volunteer their services, but they were not accepted. A month later, *The Selective Service Act* did not exclude Blacks and almost 3 million were registered.

As the United States moved into World War I, a war to make the world safe for democracy, the Navy became increasingly restrictive in its use of Black sailors. Blacks still worked only as messmen, cooks, or coal heavers. When questioned about the limited positions available to Blacks on ships, the Secretary of the Navy replied: "You are informed that there is no legal discrimination shown against colored men in the navy. As a matter of policy, however, and to avoid friction between the two races, it has been customary to enlist colored men in the various ratings of the messman branch; that is cooks, stewards, and mess attendants, and in the lower ratings of the fireroom; thus permitting colored men to sleep and eat by themselves." (17:147)

Blacks were barred from the Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Army Aviation Corps. Although, in theory, all branches of the Army were open to them, in practice, some 380,000 of the 400,000 Black soldiers were members of service or supply regiments, serving as stevedores, drivers, engineers, and laborers. Even in these limited roles, Blacks were subjected to a barrage of indignities and insults. (29:6-7)

Those who experienced combat were assigned to the all-Black 92<sup>nd</sup> or 93<sup>rd</sup> Divisions. The 92<sup>nd</sup> Division served under White American officers in France. They were humiliated and often treated worse than the captured enemy. On several occasions, the division commander would refer to his troops as the Rapist Division (possibly based on the new D.W. Griffith movie, *Birth of a Nation* (1915), which, by depicting Blacks as beast-like buffoons or as depraved animals in constant pursuit of fragile White females, did much to popularize and spread such racist

stereotypes). Reports indicate that morale was very low and the division's combat record in France was mixed at best. (17:133-143; 20:26)

General Pershing assigned four regiments from the 92<sup>nd</sup> to the French, which later became the 93<sup>rd</sup> Division, which fought under the French. These were the 369<sup>th</sup>, 370<sup>th</sup>, 371<sup>st</sup>, and 372<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiments, all highly regarded, and praised by the French. The 369<sup>th</sup> received more citations than any other regiment in the Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF). They were the first American unit to reach the Rhine River and held a sector under fire for 181 consecutive days for a record-breaking period. France's highest military award, the *Croix de Guerre* was awarded to 170 individual soldiers as well as the unit itself. The 370<sup>th</sup> and 271<sup>st</sup> also received the *Croix*. However, the AEF leaders were concerned about the French commending the Black American troops too highly, and urged them not to spoil the Negroes, which, they thought, might cause them to have high expectations when they returned to the United States. (17:133-143)

Even though they would be allowed to participate in homecoming parades in New York City and other large cities, Black soldiers found little had changed when they returned from the war. *Jim Crow* laws were still rampant. The *Ku Klux Klan*<sup>4</sup> was revived in 1915. A White speaker in New Orleans stated, "You niggers were wondering how you were going to be treated after the war, same as before the war, this is a White-man's country and we intend to rule it." The following year (1919) would be known as one of the worse years of race relations in the United States. During the Red Summer, there were more than 26 race riots in different cities across the country. Lynching had increased in number from 38 in 1917 to 64 in 1918 and 83 in 1919. Among the victims of such attacks were a number of Black soldiers, some who were still in uniform. (29:9-10) Many Blacks believed what W.E.B. DuBois, pioneering African-American activist and historian, simply stated in his article *Returning Soldiers* (May 1919):

*We return.*

*We return from fighting.*

*We return fighting.*

Race riots also occurred in the military. Two incidents involving Black soldiers and White townspeople occurred in Brownsville, Texas, in 1906, and Houston, Texas in 1917. In both instances, there was evidence that the townspeople had provoked or fabricated an incident leading to the riots. However, the Black soldiers were held responsible and severely punished. The Brownsville incident, which involved shots being fired from the direction of the garrison, into the town, resulted in the dishonorable discharges for 167 Black soldiers. (17:110) This remains the only example in U.S. military history of mass punishment without a trial. In Houston, the beating of two Black soldiers led to a riot in which 16 Whites and four Black soldiers died. Eighty Black soldiers were tried for the incident. All but five were convicted, and 29 were sentenced to death. (9:95)

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<sup>4</sup> *Ku Klux Klan*, secret terrorist organization that originated in the southern states during the Reconstruction following the Civil War and was reactivated on a wider geographic basis in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The original Klan was organized in Pulaski, Tennessee from 1865 to 1866 by six former Confederate army officers who gave their society a name adapted from the Greek word *kuklos* ("circle"). Although the Ku Klux Klan began as a prankish social organization, its activities soon were directed against the Republican Reconstruction governments, and their leaders, both white and black, which came into power in the southern states in 1867. (See Encarta.msn.com)

## Between the Wars (1918-1939)

After World War I, the American military began transforming the Army from war to peace status. The Army demobilized its units as rapidly as possible and Black units were among the first to be demobilized. The future of Blacks in the American military was a major concern to military officials as they prepared to reorganize the Army. Most officials in policy-making positions believed that placing Blacks in combat and/or allowing Blacks to become commissioned officers were mistakes. These thoughts were reinforced by the results of the intelligence tests given to recruits enlisting in the Services. The tests were supposed to measure native intellectual ability, which in turn was to be a major determination of rank and assignment in the Army. Blacks were found to score much lower than Whites. The conclusion drawn was that Blacks were of less military value than Whites. Whites believed Blacks were less intelligent, were cheerful and willing, but naturally subservient, lacking in initiative and leadership qualities, and unable to accept responsibility. In some of the tests, Blacks were even subdivided by color, and correlations drawn between test scores and skin pigmentation. Lighter-skinned Blacks, it was found, scored higher than darker-skinned Blacks (although not as high as Whites). It was concluded that the lightness of skin color in Blacks automatically meant the infusion of White blood and thus, higher intelligence. As a result of these tests, many psychologists concluded that intelligence was influenced little by one's environment and that Blacks had restricted mental capacities that could not be changed through education. (23:117-118)

In March 1920, the Central Staff College continued the study of Blacks in the military. Questionnaires were mailed to officers who had served in leadership positions with the 92<sup>nd</sup> Division or in some other capacity with Black soldiers and officers in France. The purpose of the survey was to establish the use of Negroes in the U.S. military. The officers were asked to provide confidential responses to two sets of questions. One set requested them to evaluate the officering, organization, training, and performance of Blacks, and the other set asked for recommendations for the future utilization of Blacks and how, if used, they should be led and trained. Without exception, those who responded believed that the wartime decision to use Blacks in combat and/or as officers was not wise. This study and many others like it would be the main source for shaping the Army's policy toward future utilization of Black officers and soldiers. (23:119-124)

In October 1925, the Army War College issued a report entitled *The Use of Negro Manpower in War*, which was written by Major General H.E. Ely, Commandant, which included the following comments:

In the process of evolution, the American Negro has not progressed as far as other sub species of the human family.... The cranial cavity of the Negro is smaller than Whites.... The psychology of the Negro, based on heredity derived from mediocre African ancestors, cultivated by generations of slavery, is one from which we cannot expect to draw leadership material... In general the Negro is jolly, docile, tractable, and lively but with harsh or

unkind treatment can become stubborn, sullen and unruly. In physical courage (he) falls well back of Whites.... He is most susceptible to 'Crowd Psychology'. He cannot control himself in fear of danger.... He is a rank coward in the dark. The report went on, the Negro officer was a failure in combat. "Negro troops are efficient and dependable only so long as led by capable White officers. Under Negro officers they have displayed entire inaptitude for modern battle. Their natural racial characteristics, lack of initiative, and tendency to become panic stricken, can only be overcome when they have confidence in their leaders."

As the report proceeded, it reflected almost every prevailing racial stereotype, caricature, and rationale for keeping Blacks in the lowest subordinate positions. This report was submitted to the Army Chief of Staff on October 30, 1925 and would have a continuing impact on military recruitment and treatment of Blacks and other minority groups in subsequent years. (23:124-129) By 1932 and after military demobilization, the Navy had 441 Black sailors (serving mostly in servant and laborer positions) of its 81,000 men. This total is the lowest in American history. Also, at this time, the Marine Corps continued to exclude Blacks from service but allowed their employment as civilian messengers at Naval Headquarters. (17:157-158) In January 1933, the Armed Services began enlisting Blacks as messmen, this time with the rationale that a war in the Pacific might eliminate the opportunity to enlist Asian servants. The Navy preferred to enlist Blacks from the South because of the belief that Northern Blacks were more likely to be educated and independent. Repeating a phrase that appeared in the official correspondence of the time, an officer indicated that recruiting in the South was likely to bring in the unspoiled young Negro.

The Navy did not allow Black sailors any rating other than messman, believing that if a Black advanced to petty-officer status (i.e., E4-6) they would not be able to exercise effective leadership over White sailors in their chain of command. Even when Blacks earned the level of chief steward, they had no authority over lower rated enlisted men.

## **World War II (1939-1945)**

*De facto* racism was an entrenched way of life in the United States during this period. The War Department directives forbade discrimination, but the Services virtually ignored them. The Army was overwhelmingly Southern in its orientation and its officers were intent on maintaining a two-category system (i.e., one White and one Colored). Before Pearl Harbor, Blacks constituted less than six percent of the Army and had only five Black officers three of which were chaplains. (21:51) There were no Black officers in the Navy until the end of World War II as most Blacks were relegated to the Steward Mate Corps.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In February 1944, the Navy commissioned its first African-American officers. This action represented a major step forward in the status of African-Americans in the Navy and in American society. The twelve commissioned officers, and a warrant officer who received his rank at the same time, came to be known as the "Golden Thirteen." In November 1944, Harriet I. Pickens and Frances E. Wills graduated from the Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (Women's Reserve) at Northampton, Massachusetts. Commissioned as WAVES officers, they were the first female African-American U.S. Navy officers.

Many field commanders did not want Blacks in their command. At one point Black officers were told to take orders from White sergeants. Even German prisoners were treated with more respect than Black Americans in uniform. Blacks who had earned college degrees were judged as not having the qualifications or aptitude for specialized training in various technical fields. Many Black Americans, along with other minority groups, were placed in segregated units.

Black troops experienced little combat in World War II; however, there were notable exceptions. The 761<sup>st</sup> Black Panther Tank Battalion (Colored) was placed under the command of General George Patton. Although the average lifespan of a separate tank battalion on the frontlines in Europe was only 10 to 15 days, the 761<sup>st</sup> fought more than 183 consecutive days from France to Austria. They played an integral part in the rescue of American units surrounded by hostile German forces at the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. The unit was nominated for the Presidential Unit Citation on six different occasions and finally received the award in 1978. (17:180-181)

On July 17, 1944, two transport vessels loading ammunition suddenly exploded at the Port Chicago Naval Base in California. All personnel aboard the ships and on the pier were killed; 320 men, 202 of whom were Black enlisted men. (3:vii) Another 390 military and civilian personnel were injured including 233 Black enlisted men. This single disaster accounted for almost 15 percent of all Black naval casualties during World War II. (3:64) Over 200 Black enlisted who had survived the explosion volunteered to remain at the base and assist in the clean-up operation, while others were evacuated. (3:66) Several days later, the Officer-in-Charge of Port Chicago issued a statement praising the Black enlisted men for their behavior during the disaster. (3:64)

The Black enlisted survivors expressed their opposition to returning to loading ammunition, citing the possibility of another explosion. On August 9, these men were ordered to load a ship with ammunition and many of them balked. Ultimately, 258 were arrested and confined for three days on a barge moored to the pier. Later, 50 men were identified as the ringleaders and charged with mutiny. (3:xiv) On October 24, 1944, after 80 minutes of deliberation by a special convened military court, they were found guilty of mutiny. The sentences ranged from eight to 15 years and all received dishonorable discharges from the Navy. (3:126)

The Navy still maintained its racially segregated Steward's Branch, which included nearly 72 percent of all Blacks in the Navy. Stewards were assigned segregated quarters and were required to wear a distinctive uniform similar to a hotel waiter's uniform. Few recruits were permitted to pursue other fields. The Navy was the last of the Armed Services to open up large numbers of ranks and occupations to minorities. The Navy assumed that Whites could not be asked to live and work in close contact with Blacks; and they argued that segregation would be difficult to maintain in the confined spaces of ships. However, the Navy had to contend with a growing tension emerging from both sides. Whites resented that Blacks were confined to shore stations and therefore not doing their share of the fighting. Blacks were resentful of being prohibited from serving on warships. Additionally, the few Blacks that served on tugs, running boats, minesweepers, and eventually the USS *Mason* disproved racial stereotypes that Blacks could not function at sea. (19:65)



By the start of World War II, African Americans were being admitted into the Army and Navy in segregated units. On June 25, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 8802, which established the Fair Employment Practices Commission and created a policy of non-discrimination in all branches of the Armed Services.

In 1942, after virtually being ordered by President Roosevelt, the Marine Corps began recruiting Blacks for the first time since 1798. The Marine Corps Commandant was opposed to accepting a large number of Blacks in the Corps. In April 1941, he told the Navy General Board: "If it were a question of having a Marine Corps of 5,000 whites or 250,000 Negroes, I would rather have the whites." (19:47) The intent was to create several all-Black defense battalions but with the increase in the racial quota and the draft, additional segregated units were required. An all-Black Messman's Branch was created (resembling the Navy) as well as other service units, primarily depot and ammunition companies that managed supplies. (19:65-66) Enlisted Black Marines received their basic and field training in strictly segregated locations away from other Marine training units. On April 7, 1942, the Secretary of the Navy announced that the Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps would soon allow Blacks to enlist and later specified that the Marine Corps would form a battalion of 900 Blacks. These Marines were to be trained at Mumford Point (later renamed Montford Point) at the Marine Barracks in New Point, North Carolina. Montford Point and Camp Lejeune (as the barracks would be called) were to become synonymous with Black Marines in World War II, as Tuskegee, Alabama, would be with Black air pilots. During World War II, there were no Black officers in the Marine Corps. (19:69) The post-war era brought the commissioning of the first Black Marine Corps officer, Fredrick C. Branch, on November 10, 1945. In the fall of 1949, the first Black woman, Annie Graham, enlisted in the Corps.

On April 5, 1945, four groups of Black officers, (members of the 477<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group (M) (Colored), who were in training) stationed at Freeman Field, were arrested for entering Officers' Club Number Two. They were protesting an order, issued by their commander, banning them from the club. The Black officers cited *Army Regulation 210-10*, which outlawed segregated clubs, as their justification for protesting and entering the club. Several days later, the Freeman Field Command issued a statement to the effect that in the case of recreational facilities, it had been a long standing policy that it is unwise to have personnel in training utilizing the same recreational facilities with those who train them. What this meant was that race was supposedly not involved as one club was for supervisors and the other for trainees. However, all supervisors were White and all trainees were Black. (10:14-31)

The command drafted an order for Black officers to sign outlining what facilities personnel could use on the base. The directive also included a place for the Black officers' signatures indicating that they had read and fully understood the order. A total of 101 Blacks (who became known as the 101 Club) refused to sign and were placed under arrest until their court-marital hearing. Organizations throughout the U.S. initiated legal action on the Black officers' behalf. These efforts were successful and by mid-April charges against the 101 Black officers were dropped and the men were freed. However, they would receive a written reprimand that stained their military records until 1995, when the Air Force admitted that its former leadership had committed a grievous wrong. (10:14-31)

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Japanese Americans were placed in a precarious dilemma, which further strained race relations. Soon after the attack, Japanese Americans serving in the Hawaiian Territorial Guard were discharged from service. Members of the 298<sup>th</sup> and 299<sup>th</sup> Regiments were disarmed and assigned menial labor tasks. (25:11) The Navy and Marine Corps quickly changed the draft classification of Japanese Americans to 4C (i.e., aliens not subject to military service) thus, imposing a blanket exemption from the draft. Many already in uniform were discharged from active service for the convenience of the government. No explanation for this action was ever given. (12:47) The western defense commander was quoted as saying, "A Jap's a Jap. It makes no difference whether the Jap is a citizen or not." (25:7)

Japanese families living on the West Coast were moved and assigned to internment camps. On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed *Executive Order 9066*. The order authorized the Secretary of War and his appointed officers to exclude all persons, citizens, and aliens alike, from specially designated areas in order to provide security against sabotage and espionage. The Army took charge of implementing the order by removing all Japanese Americans from the West Coast of the United States and placing them into internment camps in desolate areas of the country. Although the American government claimed that the confinement was necessary to prevent subversive actions, it would eventually be revealed that not the military necessity, but primarily racial prejudice, provoked such unprecedented drastic measures, which were indiscriminately applied to the whole national group.

Japanese Americans were not permitted to serve their country in combat until it became a military necessity. (12:47) In 1943, units composed entirely of *Nisei*, the second generation of Japanese in America, formed the 442<sup>nd</sup> Combat Team and the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion. However, their service was restricted to the European Theater (as a group) due to the leadership's allegations of disloyalty of all Japanese Americans and belief that they could not be trusted to fight the Japanese in the Pacific Theater. Some Japanese Americans served in the Pacific Theater behind the lines. (25:12-14)

Filipino Americans were required to register as aliens and were not allowed to serve. In 1941, they protested and petitioned Congress to retain the right to serve. As a result, more than 7,000 Filipinos and Filipino Americans began serving in the Army in a segregated all-Filipino regiment (either the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Filipino Infantry Regiment). (12:48) An estimated 200,000 Filipino soldiers fought under General Douglas MacArthur to defend the Philippine Commonwealth and the United States. In 1946, one year after the war ended, the Philippines became politically independent. In the same year, the United States passed the *Recessions Act of 1946*, which stripped Filipino veterans of all benefits. This action has since been overturned. World War II veterans, who served in the organized military forces of the Philippines in service to the U.S. Armed Forces, are now provided special benefits per *Public Law 106-169*. (30)

As in previous wars, the number of Hispanic Americans serving in this war is estimated because data on Hispanics as a separate group were not maintained. However, records indicate that over 53,000 Puerto Ricans served. With the exception of the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment from Puerto Rico, Hispanics were not assigned to separate units. However, National Guard units from

Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California had a high representation of Mexican Americans. (13:27) After the war, Hispanics found that discrimination back home was still intact, even for the many whom did not return alive, as in the case of a Mexican American soldier's remains being returned to his wife in 1948. After arranging for his wake at a local mortuary, she was advised to change her plans by the funeral home owner. He was fearful that local Whites would disapprove. News of the incident reached the national press and members of Congress. To diffuse the issue, U.S. Senator Lyndon Johnson arranged to have the soldier buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery. (6:80-81)

Minority troops were, with only a handful of exceptions, assigned to segregated units throughout the U.S. military history until President Harry S. Truman ordered the desegregation of the Armed Services after World War II by signing *Executive Order 9981*. The order declared that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the Armed Services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin. President Truman was responding to appeals from civil rights leaders, to political advisors, and to arguments advanced by Army social and behavioral scientists that minority troops would be more effective in integrated units and that White troops would accept the assignment of minorities in their units without deterioration of morale or unit standards.

At the end of the war came the largest demobilization in the nation's history. Many minorities wanted to remain on active duty despite disparate treatment. Nevertheless, most were discharged from the Armed Services after serving honorably.

### **Korean War (1950-1953)**

On June 25, 1950, trained and equipped by the Soviet Union, 100,000 North Korean troops crossed over the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel border and invaded the Republic of Korea. The following day, President Truman authorized the U.S. Navy and Air Force to assist the South Koreans. (17:225) By June 30, U.S. troops were deployed to Korea, and the Chinese entered the picture with one million troops on November 1. On December 16, President Truman declared a national emergency and called for an Army buildup to 3.5 million personnel. At training centers like Fort Jackson, recruits began reporting at a rate exceeding 1,000 a day. Draftees were usually formed into platoons as they arrived without regard to race or color. However, segregated units still existed in the Army even after *Executive Order 9981* was issued.

There was one all-Puerto Rican unit that served in the Korean War, the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. They overcame the derogatory nickname "Rum & Coke" by distinguished service, earning four Distinguished Service Crosses and 24 Silver Stars. The unit also received a Presidential Unit Citation, a Meritorious Unit Commendation, and two Republic of Korea Unit Citations. (13:34)

During the war, the military had initiated a study on the effects of segregation and integration in the Armed Services. Conducted by the Operations Research Office of Johns Hopkins University, *Project Clear* (formally entitled *The Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army*) studied the situation both in Korea and in the United States. Their study, released in 1954,

concluded that racially segregated units limited overall military effectiveness, while integration enhanced effectiveness. Further, the study noted that integration throughout the Armed Services as feasible and that a quota on Black participation was unnecessary. This study, as well as others studies, set the empirical evidence foundation as desegregation in the military progressed. In 1954, the Department of Defense announced that the Army had disbanded all segregated units. (8:210-219)

The Korean War was an experiment in race relations. It was the first war influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and fought after desegregation in the United States. As the record of minority soldiers in integrated units' shows, this experiment proved successful. Although, how equally and fairly Black soldiers in integrated units were treated is still not completely known. There is evidence of injustices. For example, in 1951, Thurgood Marshall investigated the proceedings of the courts martial of 32 Black soldiers. Half of the men had been sentenced to death or life imprisonment and those remaining were sentenced to no less than 10 to 50 years. Marshall found several deliberations regarding life sentences had lasted less than an hour; four life sentences had been issued in a space ranging from 42 to 50 minutes. One soldier sentenced was in the hospital at the time he was accused of being absent without leave (AWOL). One man falsified his age in order to enlist and was not yet 18 at the time of the sentencing, and four other soldiers were assigned to mess duty when they were accused of cowardice. (17:233-234)

### **Vietnam War (1959-1975)**

During this war, new programs were instituted such as Project 100,000 (or better known as *McNamara's 100,000*). Beginning in 1966, the program was designed to admit 100,000 men each year that previously failed the qualifying examination. The intent was to adjust the standards, thereby offering poor individuals, valuable training and opportunity in the military. In anticipation, once returned to civilian life with some skills and aptitudes, these individuals would help reverse the so-called downward spiral of decay. However, promised training was seldom implemented and there was little effort to raise reading skills to a fifth grade level. This resulted in many poor and uneducated men being deployed to Vietnam to risk their lives. It is estimated that under this program, only 40 percent of the men were actually trained for combat. Approximately 40,000 Blacks under the project were deployed to Vietnam. This ultimately contributed to the disproportionate 20 percent casualty figures Blacks sustained during the onset of the war. (17:260)

Native Americans made up more than two percent of all troops who served in Vietnam, while comprising less than one percent of the U.S. Census. Essentially, Native Americans performed the same kinds of duties as their fellow troops, except that they were often selected by the leadership for hazardous duty jobs simply because they were Native Americans. The White stereotypes of Native Americans (Indian scout) rendered them a degree of status within the military, but it also endangered their lives. Native Americans walked point (i.e., lead soldier in dangerous environments) more often than their peers and were assigned to long-range reconnaissance patrols and killer teams with greater frequency. (14:11; 137-138)

During the late 60s and early 70s, there were numerous riots in the military. The racial explosions and problems from the civilian sector also plagued the military. Military leaders believed that desegregation would solve the problems. It did not since the policy changes that began with *Executive Order 9981* did not create equal treatment. The Department of Defense (DoD) launched investigations as to the cause of the problems and discontent. Their investigators confirmed the situation as serious at installations both overseas and in the United States. A number of military installations reported racial confrontations. At Travis Air Force Base (AFB), California, a riot was triggered by the concentration of service members returning from Southeast Asia for trial and subsequent punishment. This group interacted with the base populations who were affected by the off-base racial climate. The collaboration of these groups and the hostile conditions that existed escalated into a riot. Other military installations erupted into racial conflicts such as Sheppard AFB, Texas; Osan AFB, Korea; USS *Kitty Hawk* and USS *Constellation*; Bamberg and Mannheim, Germany; Fort Knox, Kentucky; and Fort Dix, New Jersey. (10:214-215; 12:53-55) The investigating team further reported acute frustration and volatile anger among Black troops. They believed that a major cause for this was the failure, in too many instances, of command leadership to exercise the authority and responsibility in accordance with already established military regulations. A later task force would recommend a mandatory program in education for all military personnel and the creation of a race relations institute to train the instructors. The belief was that the next step to *Executive Order 9981* was to educate all military members on race relations.

In general, minority service members significantly influenced by the social transformation in American society at the time were protesting against discrimination. Protests centered on promotions, job assignments, career development, and on- and off-post housing. Other individuals protested against bias in the administration of justice and against the reality and perception of unequal treatment in the Army and Armed Services in general. The level of dysfunction had never been experienced by the Armed Services before, and most commanders were untrained, unskilled, and unprepared to cope with the conflict. There was a wide range of suggestions proposed from “shooting the rioters” to “permissive understanding” of the problems faced by minorities in the military.

In 1971, the Defense Race Relations Institute (DRRI) was established to prepare Department of Defense personnel as instructors to teach race relations at the base level to all Armed Services personnel, collect data on programs, conduct equal opportunity and related research,<sup>6</sup> and conduct classes throughout the DoD. To reflect its growing and demanding mission, the Institute’s name was changed to the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) in 1979.

### **Contemporary Period**

Most would agree that overt racism and racial discrimination generally do not exist in the Armed Services given the current regulations, instructions, guidelines, and *zero tolerance*

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<sup>6</sup> See Mickey Dansby, James Stewart and Schuyler Webb (Eds.). *Managing Diversity in the Military: Research Perspectives from the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001.

policies. However, this does not mean that there is no evidence of racism. There are some cases that suggest racism is still found in the military ranks. Moreover, the acknowledgement of past racial prejudice is evident in several public events. While these examples depict perceived racial discrimination, events are sometimes not clear-cut as to the type of discrimination that has occurred.

In 1992, the senior enlisted member of an explosive ordnance detachment directed a mock lynching of the only African-American soldier in the unit. One soldier portrayed a Ku Klux Klansman by wearing a white hood and holding a noose. Later, the African-American soldier was told the mock lynching was his punishment for being late for a unit meeting. The soldier filed a complaint that resulted in the courts-martial of the senior enlisted member and two others. Two weeks after the complaint was filed, the African-American soldier was accidentally shot in the arm with a smoke grenade by a White sergeant from his unit. The motive for the shooting was unclear. (4)

Many military members and officials questioned why a disproportionate number of men accused of sexual harassment by the military were African American. In 1997, 14 drill sergeants accused of sexually exploiting their recruits at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland were African American and most of the women complaining of mistreatment were White. (27)

A group of three Army soldiers with White supremacist connections from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division murdered an African-American couple in Fayetteville, North Carolina. According to officials, the 1995 murders appeared to be racially motivated. Military officials immediately condemned the execution-like murders and investigated the background of the alleged murderers. (26)

In 1995, an African-American Navy captain slated to be head of the elite Navy SEALs was accused of making improper overtures to two White, female subordinates while he directed the Navy's Equal Opportunity and Sexual Harassment Prevention Office. He was later acquitted by a court-martial; however, he was denied the chance for promotion to admiral. (27)

In January 1997, President Bill Clinton distinguished seven African Americans with Medals of Honor for their actions during World War II. The awards were approved after an almost three year review by the Army into the citations of African-American World War II soldiers. The decision to award Medals of Honor to the seven soldiers resulted from a study in 1993 by a panel of experts. While the panel could find no direct evidence that racial prejudice kept Blacks from receiving the Medal of Honor for action during World War II, they attributed the lack of such awards to the racial climate of the era. In 1991, only one African American was honored with a Medal of Honor for his service in World War I. (17:143) In other words, racial discrimination during the world wars could well have extended to individual decisions leading to the awarding of medals in recognition of heroic action. (2)

The Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (MEOCS) data analyzed at DEOMI indicates that race, more than gender, is a significant factor in the EO climate. In addition, a recent Army study including installations in the United States, Europe and Asia suggested that racial bias is still evident. A task force found soldiers:

- Felt there were disparities in the types of awards given in similar situations,
- Thought Blacks were less qualified than Whites,
- Viewed groups of young Blacks or other minorities as troublemakers, and
- Thought there were unequal performance standards based on race.

Some soldiers reported that issues involving racial tensions were not being addressed and the military was moving backward in the area of equal opportunity. The report went on to conclude that the survey proved that, in spite of the progress in integration and affirmative action, the military would always struggle with the stereotypes and perceptions that plagued the Army in the 1970s. (28)

## CONCLUSION

The historical events provided above have produced several propositions:

1. That all minority groups at one time or another experienced the “Three R Syndrome”:
  - (a) REJECT - Initial rejection during the outset of periods of hostility (not allowed to enlist).
  - (b) RECRUIT - Subsequent recruitment when personnel requirements became heavy or when personnel were scarce. After their induction, most minorities were segregated, either poorly trained intentionally, or relegated to lower level or hazardous jobs.
  - (c) REJECT - Finally, rejected again. Once the hostilities were over, the units were disbanded and the racial minorities were released from any requirements to serve (despite their desire to continue service). In some cases, minorities were denied veteran benefits.

2. Although minorities have been involved in all stated conflicts, their experiences in the military did not vary significantly from the disparate treatment and segregation characteristic of American society.

3. Continued monitoring of the racial climate in the military and in society in general must be maintained. The military is a mirror of society and must be understood in this context. According to the historical accounts, the military constantly needs a leadership corps that is willing and able to devise bold, new policies and strategies for a definitive assault on racism within the ranks, thus ensuring equal opportunity and participation for all racial and ethnic groups. Where discrimination is a part of the organizational structure, but not intentionally perpetuated, it must be intentionally eliminated. The definitive message is that the military must not be nondiscriminatory; it must be actively anti-discriminatory to protect the constitutional rights of all citizens.

Although racism and racial discrimination in the military have been declared to constitute human right abuses and violations, they persist. Despite the overt and subtle disparate treatment in the military ranks, racial minorities continue to be dedicated personnel who took the oath of service to their country and deserve to be treated like any other member with the same opportunity to succeed and receive recognition for outstanding performance. To hinder minorities from developing their full potentials and growth is compromising the mission of the military in general and the command or installation in particular. Military policies to eliminate discrimination in the ranks are crucial. To do anything less is not in keeping with our democratic principles.



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