Betrayed. The Legacy of the African American Soldier

Timothy Hampton

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The title of the paper is:

"Betrayed: The Legacy of the African American Soldier"

Dr. Benjamin Wilson
Black American Studies

Dr. Linwood Cousins
Social Work
America has called upon its citizens on many occasions to defend its interests. Once called upon, American citizens usually respond with enthusiasm, courage, and great composure. They become American soldiers. The citizen/soldier’s obligation is to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic,” and to “bear true faith and allegiance to the same....” (Department of Defense Form No. 4, 1992). With this affirmation, military campaigns are launched. Missions are undertaken. Battles are fought. Ultimately, people die fighting for this nation.

One would think that individuals willing to sacrifice their lives defending this country might be considered heroes, showered with praise and admiration. In some cases they are. But citizen/soldiers are not always shown the respect or given the appreciation they deserve. This has been the tragic reality for African American soldiers for hundreds of years. During the colonial era, for example, African American slaves were armed and used in combat against the Native American Yamasee and Creek in 1715 (Nalty, 1986, p. 8). A law adopted by the General Assembly of the Province of South Carolina in December of 1703 promised freedom to those slaves who could prove (to a reputable white witness) that they had killed or captured at least one enemy soldier in combat (p. 6). Owners received monetary compensation.

In 1719 this law was amended. Monetary compensation could not replace lost skills, cover the cost of acquiring another slave, or train a replacement. Hence, slaves were no longer offered freedom in exchange for battlefield heroics. Instead, they were given a cash award. At least half of which was usually surrendered to their master (p. 8). African Americans were subsequently returned to slavery after protecting the lives, liberty, and property of white colonial citizens.
This is an illustration of what Jesse J. Johnson (1969) calls the three R practice: “during peace, reject; during war, recruit; after war, reject” (p. 4). African Americans were not allowed to participate in colonial wars unless there was a shortage of white soldiers. When a shortage occurred, they were recruited to fight alongside whites. After accomplishing their military objectives, African Americans were returned to slavery. Unfortunately, the three R practice is another sad but recurring and incontrovertible fact of American military history.

To truly understand the significance of the rejection process, one must consider the reasons African Americans wanted to fight. It seems illogical that a people oppressed by a society would take up arms to support or defend it. Harriet Beecher Stowe puzzled over the fact that black soldiers served “a nation which did not acknowledge them as citizens and equals…and whose laws, even in freedom, oftener oppressed than protected” (qtd. in Nell, 1968, p. 5). Benjamin Quarles wrote that the African American soldier was not motivated by loyalty to a nation or a people, but by principle (Kaplan, 1989, p.3). He supports his position by pointing to a number of black soldiers who fought alongside the British during the American War for Independence.

Wendell Phillips writes that African Americans fought “to prove themselves men, in a land whose laws refuse to recognize their manhood” (qtd. in Nell, 1968, p.8). Philip S. Foner agrees. He contends that African Americans of the colonial era considered military service “an avenue of freedom and expanded civil rights” (Foner, 1975, p. 43). Bernard C. Nalty (1986) states that the black soldiers’ objective is “not medals and parades, but full citizenship…” (p. 1). In essence, black soldiers fighting for America always fought on two fronts: one for their own freedom, one for the freedom of the nation.
Due to the concept of race and all its social trappings, freedom was nonexistent for African Americans for over two centuries. While African American freedom was legally established after the Civil War, the concept and social ramifications of race persisted. African American soldiers were forced to continue fighting on both fronts.

The post war rejection in particular is an unconscionable betrayal of the African American soldier. It illustrates much larger problems in American society. These include racism and the general disregard for the patriotism, sacrifices, heroism, and humanity, of African Americans in relation to military service. An exploration of America’s War for Independence, the American Civil War, and the first and second European Wars will demonstrate a distinct and very disturbing pattern in America’s use and treatment of the African American soldier. Since the history and social ramifications of the concept of race are central to understanding the betrayal process, they will be covered first.

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In terms of human history, race and racism are relatively modern conceptions. "Prior to the sixteenth century there was virtually nothing in the life and thought of the West that can be described as racist" (Smedley, 1993, p. 15). With the onset of Imperialism in Europe, the Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, French, Germans, Dutch, and English developed the concept of race as a means of classifying human beings they sought to exploit and dominate. Completely arbitrary meanings were applied to the phenotypic variations of human populations. These phenotypic variations were ultimately thought of as “surface manifestations of inner realities....” (p. 27). Europeans simply misinterpreted and then misrepresented the outer physical characteristics of non-European populations.
Carlos Linnaeus is considered the founder of scientific taxonomy. Linnaeus is also credited with originating the binomial nomenclature that denotes all living forms by genus and species (p. 156). In 1735, Linnaeus published *Systemae Naturae* in which he grouped and classified human beings with the higher primates under the order *Anthropomorpha*. Linnaeus then divided humans (genus Homo) into four varieties – Europaeus, Americus, Asiaticus, and Africanus (p. 163). Like his predecessors and contemporaries, Linnaeus linked physical features with alleged traits of character, disposition, and behavior.

According to Linnaeus, the Africanus variety were classified as follows: “black, phlegmatic, relaxed; hair black, frizzled; skin silky; nose flat; lips tumid; women without shame, they lactate profusely; crafty, indolent, negligent; anoints himself with grease; governed by caprice” (p. 164). The Europeaus variety were “white, sanguine, muscular; hair long, flowing; eyes blue; gentle, acute, inventive, covers himself with close vestments; governed by laws” (p. 164). These classifications would cloud logic for centuries to come.

Linking physical characteristics with behavioral and cultural features facilitated the notion that human differences were permanent and rigid. Since highly reputable and highly renowned scientist were responsible for these classifications, “they tended to provide the scientific sanctions and scholarly credibility for prevailing popular images and stereotypes of non-Europeans” (p. 168). But Linnaeus and his contemporaries did have their detractors.

Writing with overt sarcasm in 1777, Montesquieu attempted to summarize the only arguments a misguided individual might use to justify slavery:

These creatures are all over black, and with such a flat nose that they can scarcely be pitied. It is hardly to be believed that God, who is a wise Being, should place a soul, especially a good soul, in such a black ugly body…. The Negroes prefer a glass necklace to that gold which polite nations so highly value. Can there be a greater proof of their wanting common sense? It is impossible for us to suppose these creatures to be men,
because, allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not
Christians (qtd in Foner, 1975, p. 23).

In spite of his true intent, Montesquieu’s sarcasm was often misunderstood. According to
Marquis de Condorcet, these rationalizations “were accepted by an assembly in Jamaica as a
serious defense of slavery” (p. 23). These types of misrepresentations eventually resulted in the
construction and maintenance of social barriers and economic inequality (Smedley, 1993, p. 22).

Put simply, the concept of race is a cultural construct invented by Europeans to justify
expansionism and greed. It is a "cosmological ordering system that divides the worlds peoples
into biologically discrete and exclusive groups" which are "by nature unequal and can be ranked
along a gradient of superiority - inferiority" (p. 18). The Europeans of North America developed
one of the most rigid and exclusionist forms of race ideology.

It is important to note that the people conquered and colonized during the age of
European expansion did not take part in the invention of race or "the compilation of racial
classifications imposed upon them...." (p. 16). Europeans based the inception and
implementation of racial categorization on the "culturally specific and thus limited knowledge
systems" of European society (p. 153). According to Europeans, world civilizations were
arranged "in a neat hierarchy with Western Europe at the top and Africa at the bottom" (Harris,
1993, p. 99). Europeans then asserted that race and culture could only be organized along the
same hierarchy: from top to bottom, from white to black (p. 99).

Europe was, therefore, the pinnacle of civilized humanity. Civility, as defined by
Europeans, was also thought to be the original state of human kind (Fredrickson, 1981, p. 10).
But the progeny of Noah, "having been dispersed after the flood," had lost their awareness of
God and "degenerated into an uncivil state" (p. 10). This degeneration was then linked to the
curse of Ham; the founder of the darker skinned peoples (Smedley, 1993, p. 157). The curse
theory became a precursor to the racist doctrine that would be used to justify both colonialism and slavery (Fredrickson, 1981, p. 10). The curse theory, colonialism, and slavery were all based on a very thinly defined Christian ideology of European origin.

On the basis of the "alleged natural superiority of the white race, Westerners argued that it was 'the white man's burden' to bring the benefits of superior Western civilization - its technology, its religion, its institutions - to the inferior nonwhites of the world...." (Goff, 1990, p. 24). After committing themselves to these paramount intellectual fallacies, Europeans set out to bring their version of civilization to the rest of the world.

In North America, the end result of the great civilizing mission was chattel slavery. Chattel slavery was the most repugnant, debilitating, and dehumanizing existence in history. For approximately 225 years (1640 to 1865), psychological, social, economic, political, judicial, and military techniques were employed to dehumanize and relegate the enslaved African to the bottom of American society (Thompson, 1987, p. 135). Never completely eradicated, these techniques became permanent threads in the fabric of American culture. The Dred Scott decision of 1857 is a prime example.

This decision solidified the notion that the rights of white men superseded the rights of non-whites. Writing the majority opinion for the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney decreed that people of African descent were "far below [whites] on the scale of created beings" and therefore "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect...." (qtd. in Smedley, 1993, p. 248). This was a statement about all African Americans that would have sweeping repercussions. Taney's words made race the single criteria for determining the human and civil rights of non-whites by giving legal stature to a culturally created and fundamentally flawed concept. It also "introduced and institutionalized the idea of race in the law" (p. 249). As a
result, racism and white supremacy gained and have maintained the ability to transcend law in the United States.

But the Dred Scott case simply represented the judicial culmination of social trends hundreds of years old. Since the colonial era, the concepts of race and white supremacy were facilitating a general disregard not only for the basic humanity of African Americans, but for their loyalty and patriotism as well. As an illustration, consider the American War for Independence.

On July 4, 1775, a slave owner who was thoroughly convinced of African American inferiority took command of America’s Revolutionary forces in the fight against the British (Foner, 1975, p.42). On July 9, 1775, just five days later, George Washington issued additional orders stating that recruiters were not to enlist any African Americans, slave or free. Those African Americans in the army before July 9 would not be affected by the new orders.

African Americans fought in the War for Independence as early as April of 1775 at the battles of Lexington and Concord. By June, African Americans such as Peter Salem and Salem Poor had distinguished themselves in combat (Franklin, 1994, p. 72). An American Brigade commander, General John Thomas, wrote that his African American soldiers were “equally serviceable with other men, for fatigue [labor details] and in action” and that many of them had “proved themselves brave” (Nalty, 1986, p. 10). But their service and sacrifices would have little meaning in the months to come.

As early as May of 1775, Massachusetts was taking steps to prohibit the enlistment of slaves in its armies. The Massachusetts Committee of Safety felt that enlisting slaves would dishonor their colony. They also believed that military service would eventually lead to freedom for their slaves (Foner, 1975, p. 44).
In September of 1775, Edward Rutledge of South Carolina "moved in the Continental Congress to discharge all blacks in the Army" (Franklin, 1994, p. 74). Many southern delegates supported Rutledge. Nalty (1986) writes that soldiers from southern colonies, where slavery was entrenched, objected to the presence of African Americans (p. 10). Southerners also felt that arming African Americans would ultimately threaten plantation society. Though it had substantial support, the motion was defeated and those African Americans already enlisted were allowed to finish their terms.

On October 8, 1775, General Washington and “his principal officers...agreed unanimously to reject all slaves, and by great majority to reject negroes altogether” (p. 11). Jay David (1971) writes that Washington was motivated "partially by prejudice and partially by fear of arming the blacks...." (p. 11). According to Foner, (1975) colonial officials assumed that blacks were “too cowardly and servile by nature to make good soldiers....” (p. 44). Colonial officials also feared an armed insurrection would take place. One cannot help but recognize the logical inconsistency here. How could a group, cowardly and servile by nature, present a serious threat of armed insurrection?

There may have been an economic concern as well. It was a common colonial practice to reimburse whites whose slaves were killed or crippled in combat. Moreover, there was a general consensus that a war for independence was a fight for free men. Colonial officials felt that arming slaves would be “inconsistent with the principles to be supported” (Franklin, 1994, p. 72). As a result, General George Washington issued additional orders on November 12, 1775, instructing recruiters not to enlist African Americans for service during the War for Independence.
It took a matter of strict military necessity to force colonial officials to reverse their position. On November 7, 1775, John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore and royal governor of Virginia, promised freedom to “all indentured servants, Negroes, or others” who were willing to fight alongside the British (Foner, 1975, p. 45). In spite of swift preventive measures by authorities in Virginia and Maryland, there were almost three hundred slaves in British uniforms by December of 1775. They were officially designated “Lord Dunmore’s Ethiopian Regiment” (p. 45). The colonies were swept into a state of panic.

On December 26, 1775, Washington wrote a letter to Colonel Henry Lee conceding that winning the war would “depend on which side [could] arm the Negroes the faster” (p. 46). By December 30, Washington instructed his men to reenlist free blacks who had already served in the army. He was afraid the black soldiers recently discharged from colonial forces would approach the Ministerial Army for employment. On January 16, 1776, Washington recommended that Congress agree to the reenlistment of free blacks who had served “faithfully in the army at Cambridge…but no others” (p. 46). Congress agreed.

Later in 1776, New York lawmakers permitted the substitution of slaves for whites who had been drafted. Virginia began enlisting free mulattoes for services as drummers, fifers, and pioneers (Franklin, 1994, p. 76). But most states still found it difficult to meet recruiting quotas established by Congress for the Continental Army.

It is important to note that African Americans, though barred from enlisting in militia units, were often required to work alongside Continental troops building or repairing fortifications. In South Carolina, slaves were "leased from their masters for 10 shillings per day" and "employed, without arms, for the defense of several batteries" around Charleston (Nalty,
Slave owners received monetary compensation if their property was killed or wounded.

In 1777, General James M. Varnum - a former officer of the Rhode Island militia who assumed responsibility for recruiting Continental troops – began to doubt that Rhode Island could meet its quota (two battalions) without recruiting slaves (Nalty, 1986, p. 13). Varnum recommended forming one of the battalions from the slave population.

Pressed for soldiers, George Washington agreed to the plan and the Rhode Island Assembly passed legislation guaranteeing slave owners compensation for their property. Recruiting began in March of 1778. So many slaves enlisted that some state lawmakers felt that slavery in Rhode Island would be destroyed. In a panic, state lawmakers stopped recruiting for the black battalion in June of 1778. In spite of the ban, the unit maintained an average strength of about 150 men throughout five years of service (Nalty, 1986, p. 15).

These African American soldiers would eventually fight in Rhode Island, New Jersey, and New York (p. 15). In their first combat action, the Battle of Rhode Island, the black battalion covered a four-hour retreat of six American brigades. While covering the retreat, they engaged elite Hessian regiments - reinforced by British regulars - inflicting casualties at a rate of 6 to 1 (Abdul-Jabbar, 1996, p. 29).

Many more African Americans were ready, willing, and able to fight but were rejected outright. The vast majority of potential African American soldiers resided in the deep southern states. But the economic and social structure of southern society was based on the institution of slavery. As far as southerners were concerned, arming slaves would only lead to insurrections. Southerners refused to even consider the idea.
Meanwhile, the British began conducting a major military offensive in the south. Georgia and South Carolina were designated key targets (Foner, 1975, p. 60). By January of 1779, Georgia was in British hands. The British then prepared to invade South Carolina. On March 16, Henry Laurens, a South Carolina plantation owner and ex-slave trader, wrote General Washington. In his letter, Laurens stated that if he had "arms for three thousand...black men as [he] could select in Carolina, [he] should have no doubt of success in driving the British out of Georgia and subduing East Florida, before the end of July" (qtd. in Foner, 1795, p. 62). A committee was hastily appointed to examine the situation.

In its report to the Continental Congress on March 29, 1779, the committee concluded that “only the arming of the blacks could save South Carolina and Georgia for the American cause” (p. 62). The Revolutionary army in the north did not have enough soldiers to defend the south. South Carolina and Georgia did not have enough soldiers to defend themselves. The rest of the citizens of the two states believed they had to remain at home to prevent slave revolts and desertions. Congress quickly adopted the committee's recommendations and formulated a plan to enlist slaves in defense of South Carolina and Georgia.

But both the South Carolina and Georgia legislatures rejected the plan. They would not enlist slaves under any circumstances. The British army began marching toward Charleston in March of 1780. General Benjamin Lincoln, commander of the southern Continental forces, "pleaded again and again" with the Governor of South Carolina and the legislature for permission to enlist African Americans (p. 63). But South Carolina slave owners were determined to protect their way of life.

Charleston fell to the British in August of 1780. The British then threatened to begin exporting slaves from South Carolina unless Carolinians took an oath of allegiance to the King.
The "majority of South Carolina planters, including prominent former leaders of the revolution, foreswore their allegiance to the Patriot cause and solemnly pledged loyalty to the British crown" (p. 64). They obviously preferred to see their land in British hands over entrusting its defense to African Americans.

As many as five thousand African Americans eventually fought in America’s War for Independence. Most served in mixed regiments and fought side by side with white soldiers. Many were slaves who served in place of the men who owned them. While the free African Americans who served usually hoped to gain dignity and advanced social standing, the slaves who served hoped to gain their freedom. Many did. But a tidal wave of betrayal swept over African American veterans at the end of the war.

Peter Salem was a slave. He was granted his freedom so he could fight in the War for Independence. Salem served in the war for seven years. He fought at Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Stony Point and Saratoga. Salem is also credited with killing Major John Pitcairn at a pivotal moment during the Battle of Bunker Hill, one of the most important battles of the American Revolution. But he died completely anonymous on August 16th, 1816, in a Framingham poorhouse. Salem was then buried in an unmarked grave (Foner, 1975, p. 43).

In December of 1775, Salem Poor's commanding officers actually petitioned Congress seeking a reward for him because of his bravery and exceptional service during the Battle of Bunker Hill. There is no record that any reward was ever given (p.43). According to Abdul-Jabbar (1996), Poor’s only reward is that history forgot him (p. 22).

The men of Rhode Island’s black battalion fought until the unit was disbanded at Saratoga on June 13th, 1783. Their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Jeremiah Olney, commended them for “faithfully preserving in the best of causes, in every service, with
unexampled fortitude and patience through all the dangers and toils of a long and severe war” (qt. in Foner, 1975, p. 57). The men of the black battalion had indeed served valiantly considering they were never equally paid. In fact, white soldiers were given an allowance to compensate for the depreciation of their currency (p. 57). The men of the black battalion never received any such allowance. Congress never paid the men their lost wages. Many “had to devote most of their time to preventing their former masters from reenslaving them” (p. 57).

This brief treatment of the African American soldier’s experience during the American War for Independence provides pointed examples of multi-faceted betrayal. First, the loyalty and patriotism of African American soldiers were questioned before engaged in combat. Second, the majority of African Americans who fought were recruited and armed only as a last resort. America had to arm blacks before the British gained a decisive military advantage.

Third, after African Americans served, their efforts were minimized and they were unceremoniously discharged and forgotten (Franklin, 1994, p. 75). Their names do not appear on America’s historical war documents. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (1996) calls the absence of African American soldier’s names on the United States governments historical war documents one of America’s first cover ups (p. 16). As many as five thousand African Americans fought in the War for Independence, yet only handfuls were identified. Those identified were listed only by common slave names or "demeaning, anonymous categories like 'A Negro man,' 'Negro name unknown' and 'Mulatto waiting boy'" (p. 16). According to Abdul-Jabbar, denying African Americans credit for their participation in the war further legitimized the legacy of white supremacy.

Fourth, although some were promised freedom as a reward for their service, these promises were ignored and they were sent back to slavery at the end of the war. John Hope
Franklin (1994) writes that...some slave owners tried to repossess slaves who fought. "General Washington...authorize[d] several courts of inquiry to establish the validity of such claims" (p. 80). Given that the legal status of African Americans had been eroding since the 1600's, one is forced to question the objectivity of these courts (Wright, 1990, p. 57). But there were some documented victories.

Ned Griffin, an honorably discharged African American from North Carolina was re-enslaved after he served. Griffin was later set free by the North Carolina legislature (Quarles, 1961, p. 183). Jack Arabas was re-enslaved in Connecticut after serving three years in the war. Arabus had to take his case to the Connecticut Superior Court before gaining his freedom (p. 184).

Though the American War for Independence ended in 1783, African Americans would continue to fight for their freedom in a number of ways. Of course African Americans participated in the War of 1812. But the period between 1783 and 1860 saw some of America’s most remarkable and most creative resistance to slavery. Gabriel’s Revolt (1800), the Vesey Conspiracy (1822), David Walker’s Appeal (1829), and the Nat Turner Rebellion (1831) are four very noteworthy examples. These and other types of creative resistance to slavery eventually contributed to one of the worst wars ever fought on American soil.

When the United States plunged into civil war in 1861 (just four years after the Dred Scott decision), African Americans once again attempted to offer their services. One of the earliest examples of an organized African American commitment to Union forces came in April of 1861 when the commander of the Western Pennsylvania militia, General James S. Negley, received a letter from a group of free blacks calling themselves the Hannibal Guards. "Although deprived of our political rights, we yet wish the government of the United States to be sustained
against the tyranny of slavery, and are willing to assist in any honorable way or manner to sustain the present administration” (qt. in Lanning, 1997, p. 33).

In Boston, African Americans wanting to serve the Union drafted the following resolution to articulate what they felt: “Our feelings urge us to say to our countrymen that we are ready to stand by and defend our government; to do so with our lives, our fortunes, our sacred honor’, for the sake of freedom and as good citizens; and we ask you to modify your laws, that we may enlist, - that full scope may be given to the patriotic feelings burning in the colored man's breast” (qt. in Franklin, 1994, p. 199). These pleas brought no results.

Once again, African Americans were being rejected outright. Union officials either forgot, disregarded, or had no knowledge of previous African American contributions to the American war effort. In any case, there was limited support for arming blacks.

President Lincoln opposed it for several reasons. First of all, he feared that it would increase hostility in the South and drive the Border States out of the Union (Davis, 1968, p. 9). Lincoln also thought that the war would be short. His initial call for volunteers sought only seventy-five thousand men for a period of ninety days (p. 34). But just before the end of their ninety-day enlistment, Lincoln’s all-white army was soundly defeated by Confederates at the Battle of Bull Run, Virginia, on July 21, 1861 (p.35).

Some soldiers and officers did not want to appear to be serving with blacks. David Tod, the Governor of Ohio, had no doubt that whites would not serve with blacks. “Do you know this is a white man’s government; that the white men are able to defend and protect it; and that to enlist a Negro soldier would be to drive every white man out of the service?” (qt. in Lanning, 1997, p. 35). Others thought that military service should be restricted to those whose citizenship was not in question (Franklin, 1994, p. 203). Ultimately, Union leaders would continue to repress black volunteers.

In addition to the Hannibal Guards and the petitioners in Boston, there were free African Americans in Washington, D.C., Cleveland, New York, Grand Rapids, and Cincinnati who
offered their services to the Union (Lanning, 1997, p.34). But during this period, militia service was considered a privilege reserved for white males. Among militia members were some of the most respectable members of society (Berry, 1977, p. 34). African Americans, no matter how patriotic, could never meet the requirements.

Berry (1977) writes that Union officials believed allowing blacks to serve would degrade the notion of military service (p.19). Federal officials in Washington, D.C. declared that they had "no intention…to call into service of the Government any colored soldiers" (qtd. in Lanning, 1997, p. 34). The Cincinnati police chief told blacks in his city that "We want you damn niggers to keep out of this; this is a white man's war" (p.34).

Meanwhile, the Confederates were registering victories and the Union was counting its casualties. On July 2, 1862, Lincoln called for an additional 300,000 troops to suppress the rebellion. White men responded so slowly that talk of conscription and drafts began to surface. "The unfavorable outcomes of the Seven Days Battle and McClellan's March on Richmond undoubtedly had a depressing effect on Northern sentiments and dampened the enthusiasm of prospective militiamen" (Berry, 1977, p. 41). Desperate for manpower, Congress and Union officials began eyeing African Americans as a possible solution to their problem. The Militia Act of July 17, 1862 and the Second Confiscation Act were direct results.

The Militia Act gave the President the power to accept blacks into military service for labor details "or any other military or naval service for which they might be found competent" (p. 41). This act also gave the President the power to emancipate soldiers and their families if their former masters were rebels. But all African American soldiers, regardless of rank, would be paid three dollars per month less than a white private (p.42). This particular Militia Act was obviously one of necessity, not equality.

Not wanting to alienate Border States by arming African Americans under the new law, Lincoln issued yet another call for 300,000 white volunteers on August 4, 1862. He also ordered the states which failed to meet their quotas under the previous call (July 2) to do so by August 15. A draft would be implemented in states not meeting their quotas. The August 4 call brought
only 87,588 men. According to Berry (1977), many of these deserted before they could be inducted (p.44).

In fact, so many white men were attempting to escape military service that the State Department actually ordered, on August 8, 1862, that no passports would be issued to men subject to the draft until their state quotas were filled. On August 13, travel from state to state and district to district was also restricted. Berry cites the "increasing prominence of abolition as a war aim" as one of the chief causes of Union disenchantment (p.44). Other causes ranged from better opportunities as civilian employees to dissatisfaction with Union military leaders.

Military officials began taking matters into their own hands. Senator James Lane of Kansas did not care whether whites or blacks killed Confederate soldiers. To solve his manpower problem, he set up a recruiting office in August of 1862 at Leavenworth. Lane openly enlisted blacks and whites under the Militia Act of July 17, 1862 (p.45). The State Department quickly informed him that it would not recognize his regiments. Lane ignored the State Department and by October of 1862 he established the First Regiment of Kansas Colored Volunteers (p. 45).

General Benjamin Butler also began to enlist blacks by August of 1862. For Butler, this was a drastic revision of policy. His troops had once enforced and expanded features of the antebellum slave codes. But a crippling manpower shortage brought about a change of heart. Butler began by enlisting the Louisiana Native Guards; a regiment of free African Americans organized, but never used by the Confederates. By November, Butler had organized three black regiments and was still recruiting. His regiments were composed of free African Americans as well as slaves (p 46). Butler reported his success to the War department. But they did not immediately approve.

The first officially sanctioned order for recruiting African Americans came in August of 1862. But this was not because the Union Army had become totally convinced of African American patriotism. Quite the contrary, the Union wanted African Americans to perform guard duty or construct Union fortifications. "Slaves were assisting the Confederate army in preparing
defenses, taking care of livestock, and serving as general laborers” (Lanning, 1997, p.54). This gave the Confederates an obvious military advantage. Enlisting blacks in the Union Army for these purposes would, in turn, free more white soldiers to engage Confederates on the battlefield.

Meanwhile, Union congressmen were discussing manpower issues. They had recently witnessed the failure of the latest state militia drafts and were extremely concerned. Republican representative Abram B. Olin of New York, a member of the House Military Affairs Committee, took the position that the national government had to “exercise its power as a sovereign nation rather than depend on state governors to fill quotas upon the petition of the president” (Berry, 1997, p.53). In December of 1862, Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, chairman of the Military Affairs and Militia Committee, introduced a bill declaring that all male citizens between the ages of eighteen and forty-five constituted the national defense forces (p. 50). Wilson maintained that these men should be available for duty when called upon by the president.

Wilson’s National Conscription Bill was designed to intensify “sentiment for drafting blacks along with other able-bodied males....” (p. 51). The Militia Act of 1862 had removed the racial restrictions from federal militia law. But there was still no general push to arm African Americans. Some states still excluded them altogether.

Facing a severe manpower problem, Congress passed the National Conscription Bill on February 28, 1863 (p. 61). This was the birth of America’s first national draft system. Although blacks were not excluded from the draft, many Northern whites were feverishly opposed to being drafted into a "War for the Nigger" (p. 55). Many Northern working-class whites also felt that to fight a war for blacks in the South would mean greater economic competition in the North from a despised class of people. On July 11, 1863, draft resisters, individuals who hated blacks, and Southern Sympathizers rioted in New York City. Draft headquarters were raided, "a number of blacks were lynched in the streets," and individuals who employed blacks were attacked (p. 59).

Eventually, the Union Army realized that if enough blacks could be enlisted, fewer whites would have to fight and die. Moreover, they could be used for a wide range of military purposes (p. 62). By July of 1863, thirty black regiments were either being organized or already
in use. The War Department systematized the recruiting of African Americans and established training camps in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and other northern states. During the summer of 1863, black soldiers made significant combat contributions at Fort Wagner and Milliken's Bend. "On August 31, 1863, [President Lincoln] told a correspondent in Ohio that the use of colored troops 'constitutes the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion'" (p. 63). Lincoln became convinced that black troops had to be used extensively in combat to defeat the Confederacy.

Once African American soldiers were enlisted, trained, deployed, and dying in combat, the war slowly began to tip in favor of the Union Army. But most whites were still not ready to fully support abolition or citizenship for blacks. In fact, every issue that pertained to equality for African American soldiers "was extensively debated" before any resolution took place (p. 84). The equal pay question is a prime example.

Originally, there were no racial clauses in any of the statutes concerning the regular army, including those covering pay and clothing allowance (p. 64). In 1862, entry level white soldiers received thirteen dollars per month, including a three-dollar clothing allowance and one ration per day. As black soldiers began to be recruited more heavily, Congress passed the Militia Act in 1863. It stated that all black troops were to receive ten dollars per month and one ration per day. The three-dollar clothing allowance was to be deducted from the original ten, leaving net pay of seven dollars. No matter what his rank, whether he was a chaplain or hospital steward, the black soldier was paid ten dollars per month, six dollars per month less than the lowest ranking white soldier was paid.

The Militia Act of 1863 was instituted specifically to maintain the white over black hierarchy. The War Department paid African Americans according to the new act's special provisions. African American soldiers did not receive equal pay until July of 1864. (p. 64).

Aside from pay issues, black soldiers had poor equipment, bad medical care, and were sent into battle hastily and recklessly without regard for sound military strategy. Quartermasters refused to issue black soldiers proper supplies. They were also given excessive fatigue details (building fortifications, transporting supplies, etc) while white soldiers "lay in the shade and
watch them work” (p. 73). When captured by Confederates, blacks were not considered soldiers under the accepted rules of war. Some were held as prisoners, some were shot, some were burned alive as if they were slaves in a state of rebellion (Franklin, 1994, p. 216).

Almost 800,000 men served the Union army. Of that number, 200,000 were African American. Over 38,000 African Americans were killed or died as a result of military wounds. According to John Hope Franklin (1994), this represents a mortality rate almost 40 percent higher than the mortality rate of white troops even though blacks entered the war much later (p. 217). African American soldiers served in 120 infantry regiments, twelve heavy artillery regiments, seven cavalry regiments, and five regiments of engineers (Lanning, 1997, p. 55). Blacks fought in 449 battles against Confederates; 39 of which were designated major battles (Berry, 1977, p 84). At the end of the war, the War Department was supposed to pay each Union soldier a discharge bounty. Most black soldiers were paid less than whites. Some received no bounty at all (Berry, 1977, p. 84).

The African American soldiers’ experience in the Civil War is another example of multifaceted betrayal. Black soldiers were initially denied the right to enlist. Upon enlisting, they were denied equal pay and the right to fight. In fact, Congress took special steps to ensure that African American soldiers would be paid less money than whites. Having to prove themselves in combat, African Americans died at higher rates, for less pay, and were forced to do twice the manual labor in the process. African Americans were then paid one final insult by being refused an equal discharge bounty at the end of the war.

Expressions of racial hatred actually intensified after the Civil War. Rayford W. Logan (1965) calls this period “The Nadir” of American history (p. 11). According to Logan, the period between 1877 and 1901 produced the American color line and the separate but equal philosophy. Ku Klux Klan activity increased while the social, economic, and political status of African Americans spiraled. In 1883, the Supreme Court actually nullified the Civil Rights Act of 1866. This action institutionalized the segregation of the races in the south (Mullane, 1993, p.
Mirroring the sentiment of its parent nation, the United States military embraced and institutionalized racial segregation in the armed forces.

On 28 July 1914, the First European War began. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy formed the Triple Alliance. This made Germany the strongest power in Europe (Hobley, 1971, p. 10). Britain, Japan, Russia, and France formed the Triple Entente (p. 11). The United States did not enter the war until 1917.

When American citizens were called upon to fight, African Americans returned to recruiting stations to enlist. Once again, most were rejected because of their African ancestry. There were already ten thousand African Americans in the regular army. There was another ten thousand in black National Guard units. Once the vacancies in these units were filled, the army felt it simply had no place to send its black recruits (p. 118).

On May 18, 1917, the Selective Service Act was passed. It ordered the registration of every able-bodied male from twenty-one to thirty-one. "Before the end of the Selective Service registration deadline, 2,290,525 blacks had registered, 367,000 of whom were called into the service" (Franklin, 1994, p. 326). But the United States still had no confidence in African American soldiers as combat troops. Military officials still doubted the combat abilities of black soldiers even after they had proven themselves during the Native American Wars, the American War for Independence, the Civil War, and the Spanish American War. The majority of African Americans were therefore assigned to service units where they worked as longshoremen, laborers, drivers, or gravediggers. Even in these more menial capacities, Black soldiers "set records for moving vast quantities of supplies and the rapid loading and unloading of ships" (Johnson, 1971, p. 122).

Influential blacks and sympathetic whites had to press for full use of black men in the armed forces. An African American teacher wrote that his people were soldiers "of freedom...When we have proved ourselves men, worthy to work and fight and die for our country, a grateful nation may gladly give us the recognition of real men, and the rights and privileges of true and loyal citizens of these United States" (Panayi, 1993, p. 170).
But this is not what African Americans found.

They found a collective army that was just as racist and segregated as its parent nation. African Americans in the military were segregated and discriminated against with impunity. At Camp Lee, Virginia, for example, white soldiers patrolled the grounds of a white prayer meeting so that no blacks could attend (Franklin, 1993, p. 329). Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young -- the third black man to graduate from West Point and the only black West Pointer in the military at the beginning of the war -- was forced to retire in order to avoid having white officers placed under his command (Johnson, 1971, p. 121).

White civilians were also hostile toward black soldiers. Blacks were denied service in northern restaurants and denied admission to theaters. In fact, when African Americans of the all-black 92nd Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, insisted on attending the base theater, their white commanding officer "issued an order commanding his men not to go where their presence was not wanted" (p. 329). He then reminded them that "white men had made the Division, and they [could] break it just as easily if it becomes a trouble maker" (p. 329).

Racial tensions between black soldiers and white civilians in Houston, Texas, were extremely high. The all-black Twenty-fourth Infantry became involved in a riot with civilians in Houston. Black soldiers were eventually "disarmed when it was feared that they would use their weapons in defending themselves" (p. 329). As the riot ensued, black soldiers seized their weapons and killed seventeen whites. Thirteen African American soldiers were hung. Forty-one were imprisoned for life.

Black soldiers were referred to as coons, niggers, and darkies while they were forced to work under difficult and unhealthy conditions. Many also claimed that they were indiscriminately assigned to labor or service battalions even though they were qualified for posts requiring higher skills and intelligence (Franklin, 1994, p. 329). As complaints from black soldiers increased, the War Department issued orders calling for "fair and impartial treatment of black soldiers" (p. 329). There was little improvement.
According to Nathan Huggings (1971) the army was so reluctant to command black troops in combat that the all-black 369th Regiment was attached to the French Army. But along with its African American soldiers, the United States sent a document entitled Secret Information Concerning Black Troops. Uncovered by W.E.B. Du Bois, this document warned the "French that fraternization with black troops would likely lead to sexual assault on French women...." (p. 54).

Even in the face of this ignorance, the 369th distinguished itself in combat. "It was the first Allied unit to reach the Rhine. It was the first American regiment in the French Army during the war....The entire unit was awarded the Coix de Guerre for its action at Maison-en-Champagne...." (p. 55). But in the end this all-black regiment was harassed by American military police while awaiting transport ships to the United States (p. 55).

It is interesting to note that the Germans launched a propaganda attack aimed at black soldiers. They fired shells packed with leaflets into American positions occupied by blacks questioning why black soldiers were fighting for the United States and Democracy (p.55). Unmoved, African Americans fought on.

The first European War ended November 11, 1918, at 11 AM. African American soldiers returned from the war amid great fanfare in Harlem. But the glamour didn't last. Ironically, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) had become more powerful during the war. It had support in the North and South and was determined to neutralize the threat it perceived in the "New Negro" of the post war period (p. 55).

Between June and December of 1919, seventy-six African Americans were lynched and there were twenty-six race riots. Ten of the seventy-six lynched were black soldiers. Some of them were still wearing their uniforms. "In Omaha, Nebraska, a mob not only lynched and burned a black man, but hanged the white mayor who tried to prevent the lynching, and burned down the courthouse" (Johnson, 1971, p. 148). Men, women, and unborn children became victims of lynch mobs. Men were burned alive and crowds actually fought "over scraps of
clothing or pieces of the body as souvenirs" (p. 118). The summer of 1919 eventually became
know as The Red Summer.

The African American soldiers' experience during and after the First European War
exemplifies fierce and brutal betrayal. Each element of Johnson's 3 R concept is obvious. Like
the Civil War, the First European War experience contains a cruel irony in that violent racial
activity actually increased after African Americans helped make the world safe for Democracy.
W.E.B. Du Bois, an African American and a leading supporter of black participation in the war,
wrote the following words in protest:

This country of ours, despite all its better souls have done,
is yet a shameful land. It lynchest...it disfranchises its own
citizens...it encourages ignorance's...it insults us....We return.
We return from fighting. We return fighting. Make way for
Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah,
we will save it in the U.S.A., or know the reason why (p. 147).

December 7, 1941, marked America's entrance into the Second European War. One of
its first heroes was twenty-two year old Navy messmate Dorie Miller; an African American
restricted to mess duty by official navy policy. As the Japanese dropped bombs on Pearl Harbor,
Miller removed his badly wounded ship's captain from the bridge and then returned to the ship to
man a machine gun. Miller had no weapons training, but still managed to shoot down two
Japanese warplanes (Potter, 1992, p. 51). Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander of the pacific
fleet (p. 52), awarded him the Navy Cross. The War Department then brought Miller back to the
mainland for a national personal appearance tour.

But Miller's heroics did not accomplish much in the way of changing the official military
position concerning the average African American soldier. The Secretary of the Army, Henry L.
Stimson, wrote that the army "must not place too much responsibility on a race which is not
showing initiative" (p. 66). Stimson served as a colonel in the First European war, as a Secretary
of War under President Taft, and as a Secretary of State in the Hoover administration. His written opinion simply reflected a long-standing army policy.

Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, for example, had a strict "white-over-black command structure" (p. 61). Brigadier General R.W. Crawford declared that this policy was necessary because most African Americans had questionable leadership skills. Moreover, the General stated that African American enlisted men generally functioned more efficiently under white officers. General Crawford's postulations boil down to simple arrogant presumption. The fact is, army policy decreed "that white men from the South, by virtue of their life experiences, best knew how to handle" African Americans (p. 61). The army, therefore, handled its African Americans by accepting and adopting the traditional white supremacist ethos of the South as a basis of policy and practice in all matters relating to race (p. 72).

True to form, when the body of Private Felix Hall was discovered - hands tied behind his back, hanging from a tree - at Fort Benning, Georgia, military authorities implied that Hall had killed himself. This was Southern justice: swift, absurd, and insulting. But it was the absolute best the army had to offer its African American soldiers. Though the original ruling of suicide was later retracted, no one was ever charged with Hall's murder. Another soldier was lynched in Louisiana by being "dragged up and down the street until he died" (p. 69). The military responded to these and other attacks by either moving black troops or reminding them that they were in the South and that they should behave accordingly.

American military forces again carried their prejudices into combat zones. The United States high command - still driven by the myth of black inferiority - was once again reluctant to use black soldiers in combat. Thus, African Americans fully trained for combat were relegated "to the menial, though not unimportant, role of uninformed laborers" (p. 80). Concerning African American participation in the American War for Independence, the Civil War, and the First European War, the American military seemed to have amnesia.

As late as June of 1944, 134,000 African American soldiers were serving in Europe. Only one unit, the 99th Pursuit Squadron, (The Tuskegee Airmen) were serving in combat (p.
While serving in a completely segregated environment, they earned two Distinguished Unit Citations. But all other black soldiers were working as laborers, including the 2nd Cavalry Division, the 24th Infantry Division, and several artillery battalions -- all fully trained for combat (p. 112).

Interestingly enough, the army's official reason for excluding African Americans from combat duty was their low test scores, in relation to whites, on the Army General Classification Test (p. 115). This test did not exist until after the First European War and would later be used to force blacks into combat positions during Vietnam. In any case, the test was given more credibility than the actual history of African American soldiers. General George S. Patton wrote that blacks could not "think fast enough to fight in armor" (p. 115). Most African American soldiers, therefore, doubted they would ever see combat.

It wasn't until August of 1944 that black troops would be dispatched for combat. Their journey across the ocean was segregated, just as their training and stateside accommodations had been segregated. Once in combat, however, they performed with distinction again. After only six months in battle, members of the 92nd Infantry Division had won 7 Legion of Merit Awards, 65 Silver Stars, and 162 Bronze Stars (p. 138). "Altogether 7,000 of its members had been decorated, and 1,377 had received the Purple Heart for injuries sustained in battle" (p. 138). Other all-black units also performed with distinction. Members of the 761st Tank Battalion would eventually liberate the Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps.

More than one million African Americans returned to civilian life at the end of the war. Though the majority of African Americans were still poor, the Second European War did a number of things to improve the economic status of many others. It was the social status of African Americans that had remained unchanged. Blacks had learned to live without prejudice in France, Austria, Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg. But they came back to the United States only to experience the same race hatred and subjugation they left behind.

Though the North had its problems with racism and white supremacy, Southern racism caught the nation's attention outright. Sergeant Isaac Woodard Jr., a veteran of fifteen months of
service in the Pacific Theater, was honorably discharged at Fort Gordon in February of 1946. Woodard then boarded a bus for his home in North Carolina. At a rest stop in South Carolina, Woodard went to the colored only rest room. The bus driver became angry that Woodard had taken too long and at the next town, Batesburg, demanded that the local sheriff arrest Woodard.

Even though he did not drink, Woodard was charged with drunkenness, arrested, and beaten with a blackjack. At some time during the beating, the end of a nightstick was thrust into his eyes. "Denied medical care, locked overnight in a cell...his corneas were so badly damaged that he was permanently blind...." (p. 272). Woodard was still wearing his uniform when he was told he was blind for life.

The arresting officer, Sheriff Linwood L. Shull, was charged in US District Court. He went to trial and claimed self-defense. When an all-white jury acquitted Sheriff Shull, courthouse spectators cheered the verdict.

From 1775 to the end of the Second European War, the United States military maintained a consistent pattern of betrayal concerning its African American soldiers. Though the military had a better record against segregation and discrimination than any other segment of society, by 1968, racism and racial violence had returned. In its typical posture of denial, the Department of Defense Annual Report for 1968 "stated categorically that equal treatment and opportunity [was being] afforded to all servicemen without regard to race, color, creed, or national origin. The application of this principle, established in 1948, [had] officially eliminated racial discrimination in the armed forces" (Westheider, 1997, p. 3). Nothing could have been further from the truth.

The American military had been subject to racist doctrine and policy since its creation. The Marine Corps, for example, had absolutely no blacks in its ranks at all from 1798 until 1942. (Potter, 1992, p. 6). Career whites serving prior to 1942 could not possibly eliminate racist feelings or indoctrination so quickly. Thus they continued to apply prejudicial policies and practices. Racism, therefore, became personal and institutionalized. It became covert, more subtle, and led to built-in disadvantages for African Americans. Cultural biases in Armed Forces Qualification Tests are a prime example. The same tests once used to keep blacks out of combat
positions during the first and second European wars were eventually used to keep them in combat positions during Vietnam. In other words, in the past, blacks had been too stupid to fight. During Vietnam, they were too stupid not to fight.

In July of 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued his Executive Orders banning segregation in the US Armed Forces. The Supreme Court's desegregation decision of 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 followed thereafter. The equality of the African American soldier was established clearly by executive, legislative, and judicial policy (p. 2). While this represented progress, a much more complicated problem was left to solve. Policy can regulate professional conduct. But it certainly cannot penetrate an unwilling heart or mind. Moreover, a lifetime of racist / supremacist socialization (intentional or otherwise) cannot be erased by instituting a policy. In other words, with or without Truman's Executive Orders, the Armed Forces continued to have a race problem because our society has a race problem (p. 2).

If Americans consider the United States the greatest country in the world based on its history, then Americans must also be able to look at that history objectively, without rose-colored glasses, and without over-rationalizing the ugly details. African American soldiers have been suffering betrayal after betrayal, while serving in the United States and abroad, since the colonial era. African Americans, veterans in particular, should look upon this history with disappointment and then voice that disappointment. Betrayal is betrayal. Wrong is wrong. Americans must have the courage to admit their mistakes, learn from them, and move forward into a more positive future.

Americans must also realize that the concept of race has been entrenched in the political, social, and judicial system in this country for over two hundred years. It cannot be eliminated over night. People must, therefore, learn to function within the confines of their racial prejudices before they can function outside them. The popular solution has been to ignore or deny the racial elements of our history. Americans try not to talk about race and racism hoping that the
problems will simply go away. As one can plainly see in the experiences of the African American soldier, any country that ignores the flaws in its history is doomed to repeat them.
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