

Contributions and History of African-Americans in Times of War

African-Americans in World War II

From their struggle for sovereignty to their experiences with discriminations, African-Americans have been spiritually threatened, physically and verbally abused, and looked down on for decades on end by society. In the early years of our country, white Americans viewed African-Americans as minorities. But during World War II, African-Americans served nobly and with distinction in every theater of the war; they paved the way for integration in the United States military.

For many African-Americans, this blood-filled time period was viewed as a way to escape the pattern of demoralizing rural poverty. They joined the military in immense numbers, eagerly aspiring to abandon another decade of depression and tenant farming in the South and the Midwest. Yet, like everything else in 1940's America, the armed forces were segregated.

During the brutal war period of World War II, the draft was divided, and fairly often African-Americans were taunted by the all-white enlistment boards, but this was not consistently the case. Sometimes there would be separate African-American infantry regiments, but they would be assigned white commanders as an experiment, to figure out how well African-Americans fought compared to white Americans. Pressure from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or NAACP led President Roosevelt to vow that African-Americans would be recruited more often if their percentage of enlistment within the military population grew. Although this proportion was never actually achieved in the

various branches of service during the war, African-American numbers grew dramatically in the Army, Navy, Airforce, Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard. Although most African-Americans were assigned to non-combat units and downgraded to service duties like supply, maintenance, and transportation, their unnoticed work behind front lines was as equally vital to the war effort as that of the soldiers in battle.

As well as being crucial to the war effort, African-Americans also helped pave the way for integration in the U.S. military. The separation of African-American infantry regiments became more frequent in the late 1940's. The government, which agreed to set up the regiments, wanted to compare how well African-Americans performed compared to white Americans. After the initial observation, it was not called an assessment anymore. This practice continued during the Vietnam War and the Korean War. African-Americans were said to have done it all. "They were the generals; they were the leaders; they flew the airplanes; they drove the tanks; they were in combat units; they led troops in battle. They did it all, and they did it well, so there was nothing left to prove"- Mr. De Shields, a retired U.S. Army Colonel. There was nothing left to be authenticated, because African-Americans fought valiantly, causing an increase in the African-American population in the military. Today, there are more than two and a half million African-American military veterans. African-Americans, who make up more than thirteen percent of the U.S. population, now account for twenty percent of those serving in the military. African-Americans have always had a significant impact in American history, and they will continue to do so.

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