

BLACK STUDIES 4650
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THE BLACK SOLDIER IN WAR AND PEACE

I. SYNOPSIS

The black military experience in America dates from early in the seventeenth century when the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1639 passed legislation to deny African Americans the opportunity to enlist and bear arms for fear that they might use their military skills against those who held them in bondage. Since then, as Bernard C. Nalty observes in his *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military*, that early action has set a pattern both of "legal exclusion and actual acceptance, for using blacks in times of crisis and ignoring them in times of peace." This course, then, is about the exclusion and acceptance from King William's War in 1689 to the current conflict in Iraq. In covering this time span we will be concerned with both the behavior of the black troop and the treatment received by them in combat and in the rear area; we will examine reasons for joining the military, the use of black troops by the military, promotion and awards policies and practices, and opportunities to learn skills that are transferable to the civilian world. And finally, we will inquire into the consequences of military service for Blacks once their tour of duty is done. In short, has military service in and among US forces brought the economic, social and political advancement that many Blacks have believed it to provide as their rationale for joining up?

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

A. Course reading (required)

Gail Buckley, *American Patriots*.

B. Supplementary readings. A list of materials will be made available in the Ethnic Studies department office shortly after the beginning of the semester that you might peruse and copy to assist you in the preparation of required writing assignments due throughout the course. They are intended to supplement the required text and amplify several of the course topics.

C. Methods of instruction.

1. Structurally, this course is a double helix. One branch provides context while the other traces the actual experiences of the black militiaman from the seventeenth century forward. You are invited to pay close attention to the topical outline of the course as it is intended as a timeline that can be employed by you to ascertain whether there has been change in the

treatment of black military personnel and if there has been how that might be contrasted with the larger world of which the military is but a microcosm.

2. Operationally, the course is designed more as forum than lecture. This means you must prepare for each class session in that it is probable that you may be called upon to offer information or opinion. Accordingly, you are required to take responsibility for the quality of your own education because it is a participatory process—the instructor helps those who help themselves. To learn you must question: what you know, what you believe and, what you have previously taken on faith. There is no other way to secure a critical consciousness. Too, learning without making mistakes is not realistic. Thus worry not about making mistakes; instead, worry more about not learning from the mistakes you make. Also remember that both you and your experiences are a resource. Do not devalue these items in the quest for authoritative support of your opinions. Finally, you are asked to do two additional things. The first is secure self-discipline the only way you can master whatever talents you have. Regardless of how much talent you may believe you possess, when you have little or no discipline, you have little or no talent that is useful in your own development. And second make a commitment to the pursuit of excellence however you choose to define that word.

III. TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

A. NEGROES WITH GUNS: TO ARM OR NOT TO ARM

In 1639, a short twenty years after the arrival of black people in the English colonies, the Virginia House of Burgesses was the first public agency to adopt legislation excluding Aframericans from military service. While at least one colony, Massachusetts, opted for the military training of Blacks and Indians in 1652, white fears about potential insurrections by these groups forced a reversal of this policy in 1656. As the end of the seventeenth century approached this latter restriction was in place in the remaining thirteen colonies.

Given that military service is fundamentally about the management of force and the projection of power to advance the interests of the group that sponsors and legitimizes the same, what does the action described above suggest to you about the image of black people in the white mind? In what ways might that image influence the construction of social policies not only with respect to the military but with respect to other societal endeavors as well? Finally, what do you suppose might happened to these types of policies in the event that changed circumstances in the world call for additional resources for their reconciliation whose consequences might significantly alter the operational rules of the society itself? This last question will serve as the locus of our discussion of the black military experience in war and peace in the remaining sections of this outline.

B. COLONIAL AMERICA

It is during this period, ending with the Treaty of Paris in 1783 that brought an end to the war of succession from the British Empire, that the exclusionist /grudging acceptance policies respecting the arming of Blacks was developed and promulgated. It was also a period when the powers that be had to face some unsavory truths about themselves and their beliefs that they were all powerful and destined to become masters of the universe. For in the war for independence Whites were often very reluctant to leave their homes to become members of the Continental Army not knowing where they would be sent, and not knowing who might be left behind to protect, preserve and defend their property. Accordingly, it is here that we first find Blacks being substituted for Whites in combat arms a practice that is still with us today.

C. EARLY NATIONAL PERIOD

Under this rubric we will be concerned with the period from 1783 through the ending of the War of 1812 in 1815 our second conflict with the British as they sought to regain what they believed was theirs. With the exception of the US Navy that accepted Blacks because of reluctance of Whites to accommodate to the discomfort and harsh traditionalism of sea going vessels, this was a fairly barren period for the black serviceman. There were a few exceptions, however, mainly at the local level with the formation of "colored" militia units that were disbanded whenever the local authority adopted national legislation that had begun to exclude Blacks as early as 1792.

D. OPERATIONALIZING MANIFEST DESTINY

This period, from 1815 to the outbreak of the Civil War coincident with the firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor on 12 April 1861 was concerned primarily with regularizing and nationalizing the "Peculiar Institution." And while there were a number of military endeavors—e.g., The Mexican War of 1846-1848—there is some debate as to whether there was a black presence in the ranks other than as servants, cooks, and laborers.

E. THE CIVIL WAR

Between 1861 and 1865 a terrible conflict was raised in the United States. While most of the action transpired east of the Mississippi River, there were a number of small encounters west of that boundary as well. The roles played by Blacks in this conflict changed markedly after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863. Now it was both practice and policy to enlist Blacks and arm them albeit white officers

would command their units. By war's end some 186,000 Blacks would serve in the Union army and some 30,000 Blacks would serve in the Union navy. The Confederacy would see them as slaves in rebellion and if captured would treat them accordingly. The Federals, on the other hand, had their share of problems beginning with the purpose of the war and its transformation to a campaign to end slavery after its second year.

F. POST CIVIL WAR IMPERIAL ADVENTURISM

Following the surrender of the Confederates at Appomattox Court House, Virginia on 9 April 1865, the re-United States formed first six black regiments that were then reduced to four—two of infantry and two of cavalry—under the title of United States Colored Troops that fought Indians, bandits, and made the frontier safe for Whites until well into the Twentieth century. These units would see service in the Western United States, Mexico, Cuba, the Philippines, and elsewhere. They would also be subjected to some of the worst excesses of military injustice effected by a segregated military. Henry Ossian Flipper, the first black graduate of the US Military Academy at West Point, is one case. Brownsville and Houston, TX are two other examples.

G. WORLD WAR I

With US entry into the war in 1917 there went also the Ninety-Second and Ninety-Third Infantry divisions comprised of some 380,000 Blacks only 11 percent of who were engaged in combat as part of the American Expeditionary Force. The conduct of army brass with respect to these troops was shameful. Their prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behavior, given that many of the officers were from the South and believed they knew how to treat the "Darkies", was instrumental in reifying segregation above and beyond the purpose of the war effort. This also included propaganda campaigns among the French to steer clear of the Negroes because they were an inferior species and any exposure to humane treatment might fill their minds with ideas that would cause trouble when they returned to the states.

H. INTERREGNUM

From 1918 until the outbreak of World War II it was the practice and policy of the United States to reduce the black presence in its military forces. Those few who remained were denied opportunities to pursue emerging specialties including aviation because it was believed that the Blacks were incapable of learning the new skills and because their future in the military like too much of their past would be as laborers rather than warriors. This did not preclude their seeing some military service in other countries, however, as was the case with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade that fought in the Spanish Civil War of 1937-39 a rehearsal for what was just over the horizon.

I. WORLD WAR II

Official US entry into this conflict of global proportions dates from the Japanese attack on the naval base at Pearl Harbor 7 December 1941. At the time of this attack the US rostered a segregated military that had some 13,200 Blacks in the army and 4,000 Blacks in the navy. Blacks would see substantial increases in their numbers by war's end in 1945. There would be increases in the number of black officers, the exploits of the Tuskegee Airmen, the enlistment of the first marines since the late 18th century and several persons whose heroism was not recognized until the 1990s when they were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for their sacrifices above and beyond the call of duty. Near its end, there would even be several experiments with desegregated units as situational needs exceeded available white military personnel. This conflict would also see the emergence of the "Double V" campaign for victory at home and victory abroad because you could not have democracy in one place and not the other a topic that has been revisited in every conflict since. Black America came out of this war with a new vision—a vision that has forced a reconsideration of the meaning of democracy in America. Whether the nation will in fact realize that new vision remains yet to be seen.

J. OPERATIONALIZING THE *PAX AMERICANA*

The end of World War II and the emergence of an anti-communist containment policy on the part of the United States brought a number of changes in its wake. On 26 July 1948, Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981 desegregated the US military although it would be some years before its initial objectives were realized—the last segregated unit was deactivated on 30 October 1954. One catalyst in this process was the Korean War that began with the invasion of the southern portion of the peninsula by the northern part on 25 June 1950. Again writes Nalty, "Combat ships and frontline units could not wait for the sluggish functioning of a personnel system that made race, rather than the needs of the service, the principal criterion for training and assignment." Even though this conflict was fought with a mainly segregated military, the Vietnam Conflict that actually lasted from 1941 to 1975 was the first to see a force selected for need rather than the preservation of a myth. Still, however, the policy changes were bogged down by practices and procedures that were more slow to change and that appeared in the disproportional death rates, cultural insensitivities in the rear areas, skewed incarcerations followed by "bad paper" and the continuance of disparities seen all too frequently before.

K. AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON

30 April 1975. Where Korea had been a stalemate effected by a cease-fire, the conflict in Vietnam was a loss. Several brushfire wars would follow as the United States sought to regain its position of dominance in planetary affairs. Included among them was the assault on Grenada, the fracas in

Panama to unseat Noriega, Desert Shield and Desert Storm in Iraq, the chase to find Bin Laden in Afghanistan, and our return to Iraq in 2003 for whatever reason and there are many that have been proffered for our consideration. The primary concern here has been the role of Blacks in the volunteer military and whether it still is (if it ever was) an institution for enhanced social economic and political mobility. Indeed, looking at the photos of those killed in the Mid-east to date one sees a lot of black and brown faces among the dead. As was the case in Southeast Asia with its disproportionate number of "Bloods" in the bush—there are slightly over 7,000 black names out of 58,000 total dead on the Wall—one has to wonder how racist the military still is. Is it as racist as the nation that hosts it, more, less, whatever? Perhaps only time will tell.

L. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

IV. MEASURES AND METHODS OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

There will be three measures of performance evaluation used in this course this term. All three are written.

The first (counting for 25 percent of your final grade), is a three (3) to five (5) page, double-spaced, typewritten response to the following: In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois wrote, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." In what ways does the black American military experience, generally speaking, illustrate his comment? The quote comes from "Of the Dawn of Freedom," which is chapter II in his, *The Souls of Black Folk*. **THIS ITEM IS DUE IN MY BOX IN KETCHUM 30G NOT LATER THAN 1600, FRIDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2005.**

Your second written measure (worth 35 percent of your final grade), also three (3) to five (5) double-spaced, typewritten pages, requires you to take some specific event covered in the course that allows you to amplify what you wrote in the above assignment. You will describe that event and offer a rationale for your selection. Then, using as an interpretative frame the statement made by Gene Hackman in the movie, *Crimson Tide*, "our job is to protect democracy not practice it," explain what meaning the statement and the event have for you respecting military service as one of the obligations of citizenship. As you do this keep in mind my earlier comment that the military as a social institution reflects the values, norms and mores of the society that hosts it. **THIS ITEM IS DUE IN MY BOX IN KETCHUM 30G NOT LATER THAN 1600, FRIDAY, 11 MARCH 2005.**

The third measure (worth 40 percent of your final grade), also three (3) to five (5) double-spaced, typewritten pages requires to summarize what you have learned this semester and its meaning for you in terms of what you expected to find in the course at its beginning and what your experience has been; the insights you have gained as a result of your reading, listening,

watching, and reflecting; and finally, whether what you have been told about the society in which you live is as true as the rhetoric offered by the wide range of story tellers comprised of teachers, preachers, social workers, politicians et al. **THIS ITEM IS DUE IN MY BOX IN KETCHUM 30G NOT LATER THAN 1600, FRIDAY, 22 APRIL 2005.**

NOTE WELL, LATE SUBMISSIONS REQUIRE LATE FEES. The late fee in this case is automatic reduction of the highest possible grade respecting the quality of your work by ONE FULL LETTER.

V. CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF WRITTEN WORK.

A. THE DAY MY EVALUATION OF YOUR WORK TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER THE PROCESSES OF ITS CREATION IN IMPORTANCE, YOU HAVE A PROBLEM. NOT ONLY IS GRADING NOT FAIR AND NOT OBJECTIVE, IT HAS VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH EDUCATION. PURELY AND SIMPLY IT IS THE EXERCISE OF POWER THROUGH THE AUTHORITY OF THE TEACHER. ITS END IS PURPOSELY POLITICAL: TO LIMIT ACCESS TO SMALLER AND MORE ELITE GROUPS AS A MEANS OF PRESERVING THE STATUS QUO.

B. ALL WORK MUST BE SUBMITTED ON OR BEFORE THE PUBLISHED DUE DATE.

C. All work submitted must be an original copy. Reproductions (xerox, mimeo, ditto, etc) submitted in lieu of original copies will be penalized. MAKE SURE THAT YOU KEEP A COPY OF YOUR WORK FOR YOUR FILES.

D. Because each of us has a different image of what a specific grade means, I offer herewith what they mean for me. DO NOT, WHEN YOU WRITE YOUR PAPERS, ATTEMPT TO WRITE TO THESE CRITERIA. THEY ARE ILLUSTRATIVE ONLY. WRITE FIRST TO EXPRESS YOURSELF, EXPLAIN YOURSELF AND THE POSITIONS YOU TAKE AND, TO PLEASE YOURSELF WITH WHAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN.

1. "A." Demonstrates that you have mastered the subject and its supporting materials. A neat, solid, tightly organized presentation in which you make your case with authority.

2. "B." A solid work but unimaginative in character. Covers all the bases but rarely transcends them to express new insights or understandings.

3. "C." Competent. Follows the letter not the spirit of the assignment. Lacks substance, effort, care and concern.

4. "D." A weak and ineffectual presentation emblematic of a lick and promise approach to one's work. There is no evidence here of care, concern or commitment to crafting.

E. GRADES SHALL BE ASSIGNED ON THE BASIS OF HOW EFFECTIVELY YOU ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN YOUR WORK.

1. Appropriate evidence of a thorough review of the pertinent resources. You can show this by the identification, assembly and organization of those materials that help to establish context for your presentation. 15 percent of grade.
2. Demonstrated understanding of your project, its supporting materials and its relations to the larger subject of which it is a part. The emphasis here is on analysis, synthesis and interpretation of those materials. This will be reflected in the thought, detail, and examination of issues (indicators of rigor, discipline and skill) that appear in your paper. In short, how completely you have developed the character of your presentation. 35 percent of grade.
3. Effective transmission of the meanings you have made of your labors. This will be reflected in the organization of the work (form) and the manner (style) with which they are communicated. To achieve maximum impact and effectiveness, purpose, direction, focus and objective must be clear. Coherence is your main goal here. 35 percent of grade.
4. Errors in composition. Here I am concerned with neatness of your final copy, spelling, syntax, grammar, typing and verb/subject agreements. 15 percent of grade.