

Buffalo Soldiers of 25th Infantry, some wearing buffalo robes, Fort Keogh, Montana, 1890 (Library of Congress)



A More Perfect Union

Black Soldiers and the Promise of America

By John Nagl and Charles D. Allen

Well into the third decade of the 21st century, the U.S. military is reassessing its

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connection to the society that it is chartered to protect and serve. While it is easy to declare and embrace the mission to fight and win the Nation's wars, it is more challenging to forge and sustain an institution that lives its espoused values and holds its members accountable for the principles put forth in its founding documents. In 1775, American colonists protested that

their rights as British citizens were not protected and subsequently established the fledgling Continental Army. A year later, the Declaration of Independence proclaimed, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Out of necessity the Continental Army would seek manpower from the diverse populations of the colonies—to include enslaved and freed Blacks as well as Indigenous peoples. The Nation began with gathering Soldiers from different races, ethnic groups, and nationalities. They joined in the hope of being members of a free and just society.

This century began with a unifying call to arms following the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Army ranks were subsequently filled with volunteers from across the national landscape of race, ethnicity, and creed. We imagined a post-racial society with the election of the first African American President in 2008 and sought evidence in the photos of “Brothers at War” with the slate of Black general officers at the helm of theater operations in the war on terror. Three Black Army officers assumed the prestigious four-star rank, in charge of unified and subunified combatant commands and a major Army command.¹ However, although the Army may boast and showcase minority individuals as leaders within the force, diversity, equity, and inclusion achievements cannot be taken for granted.

Accordingly, the Service identified diversity as a strategic outcome in its *Army People Strategy*, noting that “the Army is committed to equality of opportunity, providing all of our talented people with fulfilling and rewarding professional careers. As an inclusive and representative American institution, we ensure that our people possess a diversity of *talent*—knowledge, skills, behaviors, and preferences—drawn from all corners of our country and its vibrant, diverse population.”²

The path for African American Soldiers—officer and enlisted—has been a long and arduous one. This article chronicles elements of that journey from its beginning with the American Revolutionary War through to the present day. It highlights the challenges, progress, and ever-present threats of regression encountered along the path of service. The aspirations of current diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts will require awareness, intentionality, and

commitment to bring to fruition. While the Army boasts of its “tradition as a global leader in DEI,”³ the focus must be on “Deeds, Not Words.”⁴

The Army’s record on this issue, in both deeds and words, is mixed. In times of national crisis, the Army is among the first institutions to seek greater service and sacrifice from African Americans and in return to promise greater equality. But once the crisis passes, the Army has often been slow to serve as an engine of racial equality. This cycle nevertheless offers a kind of halting advance. Following each crisis, the retrenchment phase never fully returns the repression to the status quo ante; like waves on the beach during a rising tide, each makes incremental progress. Today’s Army leaders should become familiar with the role of the Service both in creating opportunity and—too often—in denying its full fruits to all Soldiers. Only by understanding this history can today’s Army leaders build a climate and a culture of true equality of opportunity.

Building on and updating the work of Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, this article surveys the Army’s mixed history as a provider of opportunity for racial integration and equal opportunity, beginning with General George Washington’s decision to forbid the recruitment of Black Soldiers into the Continental Army and following through to today’s disproportionately limited number of Black combat arms officers.⁵ Throughout American history, as David Halberstam notes in his foreword to Gail Buckley’s invaluable *American Patriots*, African Americans “remained loyal to concepts of freedom and democracy even when they were the most marginal beneficiaries of the very ideals they were defending.”⁶ Their experience should inspire today’s military leaders to build on their achievements and institutionalize the Army’s role as a leader in forming a more perfect union for all of America’s citizens.

The Birth of the Army and the Birth of America

Racism is America’s original sin.⁷ Long before independence, colonial legis-

latures passed laws governing every aspect of the slave trade. Colonial militias formed patrols to capture escaped slaves and suppress slave insurrection. In the face of such repression, the role of African Americans in the American Revolution is indeed remarkable. Crispus Attucks was the first American to die by British gunfire in the Revolution, cut down by Redcoat muskets at the Boston Massacre of 1770. As tensions continued to rise and the colonists decided to fight back, Prince Estabrook was wounded at the Battle of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. Following “the shot heard round the world,” Massachusetts was desperate to create a force capable of resisting the British Empire. The colonial legislature opened the way to recruit free Black men to the state militia, and many of these recruits served at the Battle of Bunker Hill. On June 14, 1775, the Continental Congress authorized the raising of six companies of riflemen to join the Massachusetts militiamen around Boston, thereby creating the Army. Out of necessity, the colonial Army was created as a racially integrated institution in a racially segregated society. Black Americans volunteered to serve in this institution with their eyes open, fully aware of the injustices of their society yet hopeful that military service would create a more perfect union for themselves and their posterity.

African American Soldiers in the Revolution

Washington read two reports every day.⁸ One was the intelligence report derived from his carefully cultivated network of spies. The second was the strength report, showing the size and effectiveness of the Continental Army. When Washington took command, in June 1775, both reports gave cause for optimism. On the heels of Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts militiamen flocked to the hills overlooking Boston. The newly formed Continental Army would fight the British to a standstill at Bunker Hill and ultimately compel the British to evacuate Boston. Soon after

taking command, Washington bowed to political pressure and issued a decree forbidding the recruitment of Blacks into the Continental Army.

By January 1777, however, the reports Washington read were bleak. Injuries, illness, and diminishing patriotic zeal had thinned the ranks of the Continental Army. The British commanded the seas and occupied every major population center in the United States. At the outset of the war, the royal governor of Virginia issued a decree promising freedom to any African American held in slavery who would flee bondage and fight for the Royalist cause.⁹ Facing military defeat and constrained by necessity, Washington reversed his earlier decree and permitted Black Soldiers to serve.¹⁰ Ultimately, Black Americans would constitute 5,000 of the roughly 230,000 Soldiers to fight for independence, even though that independence would not extend to Americans of African descent.¹¹ The colonial Army was likely the most integrated the Army would be until the Korean War, according to Glenn Williams of the U.S. Army Center for Military History.¹² Nonetheless, in 1787, the U.S. Constitution codified slavery and forbade any legislation regulating the slave trade for another 20 years.

The Constitution and the Institutionalization of Repression

The first half of the 19th century witnessed the expansion and reinforcement of slavery throughout the United States. The Constitution institutionalized slavery with the infamous Three-Fifths Compromise and prohibited any restriction of the slave trade until 1808. For much of the first half of the 19th century, the Army remained a small constabulary force with little impact on national policy. The sole exception to this pattern was during the War of 1812, when, as in the Revolution, the United States turned to Black residents for support. Black Soldiers served in both integrated and all-Black regiments, while Black laborers served in construction and logistics roles. Once

the crisis had passed, Black Soldiers were largely mustered out of the Army.

The Haitian Revolution of 1791¹³ and Nat Turner's slave rebellion of 1831¹⁴ created enormous fear of slave rebellion, fueling the demand for slave patrols to prevent insurrection. State militias continued their practice of providing leaders and manpower for slave patrols, particularly in Virginia and South Carolina. Indeed, both the Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute were founded for the express purpose of providing a command structure for slave patrols.¹⁵ The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 strengthened the legal standing of slave patrols for hunting escaped slaves and crushing any incipient slave rebellions.

African American Soldiers in the Civil War

As in previous conflicts, the U.S. Government initially minimized service opportunities for Black Soldiers in the Civil War.¹⁶ President Abraham Lincoln only grudgingly admitted Black Soldiers to manual labor and other service and support roles. This concession was hardly an act of enlightenment; the Confederacy employed enslaved men in the same roles.¹⁷ Union General George McClellan went so far as returning fugitive slaves to their Confederate masters.

The exigencies of war and the agency of individual Black men and women, however, forced the Union to reverse these policies. The Union's battlefield ineptitude and heavy losses forced the steady, bottom-up incremental expansion of the roles Black Soldiers played on the battlefield. Individual commanders, pressed for manpower, began using Black troops in combat roles. Some even issued decrees of emancipation far ahead of Lincoln's famous proclamation. This trend culminated in the formation of Black regiments, perhaps most notably the 54th Massachusetts. Led by White officers and paid less than their Union compatriots, these regiments nevertheless performed heroically in combat. Black leaders had long understood the importance of military service in achieving full citizenship. Frederick Douglass was

a leading advocate of the formation of Black regiments, and his son would serve as the command sergeant major of the 54th Massachusetts.¹⁸

Beyond the battlefield, individual Black men and women escaping slavery compelled a change in Union policy. As Union armies moved south, slaves escaped to seek their protection and serve in their ranks. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation merely codified in policy what was already evident on the battlefield: Black men and women were not the property of their purported masters but were individual human beings with autonomy and agency. They played an invaluable role in the ultimate outcome of the conflict, constituting about 10 percent of Union forces, with some 190,000 in the Army and 19,000 in the Navy. Nearly 40,000 perished in their fight for freedom.¹⁹ There is no support—none whatsoever—for the trope that *any* served willingly for the Confederacy.

Black Citizens and Soldiers During Reconstruction

The issue of Black enfranchisement was central to Reconstruction in the postwar South. In the last speech before his assassination, Lincoln advocated granting the franchise to those Black men who were "very intelligent, and on those who serve our cause as Soldiers."²⁰ With the ratification of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, Black men gained full citizenship in law. Some 2,000 Black men served in political office from 1867 to 1876, from the local level up to the Senate.²¹ Black citizens made substantial gains in education, health, and literacy, aided by the Freedmen's Bureau.

While Black citizens' economic, social, and political gains were never equal to their numbers or their contributions, the pace of progress in this brief era was nevertheless remarkable. The achievement of full citizenship varied greatly depending on local conditions, and no condition was more important than the presence of Black Soldiers. Simply put, where Black Soldiers served, Black citizens thrived. Black Soldiers safeguarded their fellow citizens from voter suppression, enabling



On USS *Stockholm*, nine Soldiers of 369th Infantry Regiment, awarded French government's Croix de Guerre for gallantry in action, pose for photo while awaiting disembarkation in New York City, February 12, 1919; left to right, front row, Private Ed Williams, Private Herbert Taylor, Private Leon E. Fraiter, Private Ralph Hawkins; back row, Sergeant Henry David Primas, Sr., Sergeant Daniel W. Storms, Jr., Private Joe Williams, Private Alfred S. Manley, and Corporal Tyler W. Taylor (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration)

the full exercise of the franchise. Black Soldiers guaranteed their fellow citizens' liberty and property, enabling educational and economic advancement. However, even this halting and limited progress proved too much for many Whites. Following a close and disputed election in 1876, Rutherford B. Hayes secured the White House through a "corrupt bargain." In exchange for the support of Southern Democrats, Hayes would effectively end Reconstruction in the South.

Jim Crow and the Black Codes

Even before the 1876 corrupt bargain, the halting progress Blacks achieved during Reconstruction was fomenting a White backlash. Often led by former Confederate officers, terrorist groups such as the Red Shirts and the Ku Klux Klan emerged to intimidate Black citizens attempting to exercise their rights in the South. With the end of Reconstruction and the withdrawal of the Union Army from the South, these

efforts accelerated with a vengeance. Every former Confederate state passed "Black codes," creating an apartheid system that regulated virtually every aspect of public life along racial terms—voting, jury duty, property sales, and every public accommodation from restaurants to toilets. Local law officials enforced these codes with the assistance of the same terrorist groups attacking Black citizens in the exercise of their rights.



Pilots of elite, all-Black 332nd Fighter Group, “Tuskegee Airmen,” at Ramitelli, Italy; left to right, Lieutenant Dempsey W. Morgan, Lieutenant Carroll S. Woods, Lieutenant Robert H. Nelson, Jr., Captain Andrew D. Turner, and Lieutenant Clarence P. Lester, August 1944 (U.S. Air Force)

Black Soldiers and veterans were targeted with vehemence in these terror campaigns. Vigilante groups would murder these men in grisly public spectacles with total impunity, with either tacit or overt support from local county sheriffs. These terror campaigns extended beyond the South and were particularly intense wherever large concentrations of Black Soldiers or veterans were found. Although forming “colored” regiments and admitting Black cadets to West Point, the Army turned a blind eye to the hazing and harassment that too many Black Soldiers suffered.²² Despite this sustained campaign of societal terror, Black Americans sowed the institutional seeds that would flower in times of later national crises, including Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute.

Buffalo Soldiers and the Rise of the African American Professional Soldier

Paradoxically, the terror campaign waged against Blacks in American society coincided with the emergence of the Black professional Soldier. An 1866 act of Congress established two regiments of Black infantry (the 24th and 25th) and two regiments of Black cavalry (the 9th and 10th). Previous eras had seen Black Soldiers enlisted in moments of crisis and mustered out the moment the crisis passed. These Soldiers, however, would be long-serving professionals. The cavalrymen would earn the moniker “Buffalo Soldiers” from their Native American adversaries, with the comparison to the sacred animal a mark of high respect.

Both the Black infantry and cavalry regiments served with distinction on the American frontier and in the Spanish-American War. Members of the regiments distinguished themselves when detailed to instructor duty. Black infantrymen were renowned for their marksmanship ability, and the cavalrymen served as riding instructors at West Point. Whether in the field or on instructional assignments, they often served alongside White Soldiers in close quarters. While far from achieving full integration and social equality, Black Soldiers nevertheless earned a degree of social status unthinkable not only in former Confederate states but also anywhere else in American society. This relative equality frequently rankled local White communities, resulting in conflicts

ranging from small disputes over public accommodations to crises such as the infamous Brownsville Affair in 1906, when Buffalo Soldiers were falsely accused of murder and assault.²³

Black Doughboys, More at Home “Over There” Than Here

As in previous conflicts, America’s racism and its manpower needs collided in World War I, and the latter eventually overwhelmed the former. President Woodrow Wilson was a virulent racist²⁴ who did not believe Black men possessed soldierly qualities. In the curious logic of racism acquired in his native Virginia, Wilson viewed Black men as both dangerous and cowardly. However, when the United States entered World War I, the manpower needs of the Allied Expeditionary Force demanded a massive conscription program without regard to race. Indeed, Black conscripts were more likely than their White counterparts to be found fit for service.²⁵ Whenever possible, Black Soldiers were consigned to service and support roles rather than assigned direct combat duties. Nevertheless, the Army fielded two Black infantry divisions, the 92nd and 93rd, both of which were led in part by Black officers. While the 92nd was embroiled in controversies not completely of its own making, the 93rd Infantry Division won broad acclaim. The division’s first regiment, the 369th, earned the nickname “Harlem Hellfighters.” At least 71 members of the regiment received the French Croix de Guerre. In August 1917, Wilson pressured General John Pershing to issue a directive to the French military warning against decorating Black Soldiers to too great an extent for fear of “spoiling the Negroes.” The French largely ignored this directive, valuing Black Soldiers not only for their battlefield heroism but also for a gift that would continue long after the war ended: American jazz.

The Invisible Empire Strikes Back

When Black Doughboys returned home, their service was not forgotten but instead was actively resented by

White America. Wasting no time, a White mob attacked returning Black Soldiers during a homecoming ceremony in Norfolk, Virginia, in the summer of 1919. The Doughboys’ return saw White mobs murder more than a dozen Black veterans. These incidents occurred in the context of the so-called Red Summer of 1919, with White mobs terrorizing Black communities on the smallest pretext or no pretext at all. The massacre in Elaine, Arkansas, alone accounted for as many as 100 deaths among African Americans. And throughout the 1920s, membership in the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist organizations exploded.

Beyond the campaign of violence and intimidation, White supremacists during this era waged a psychological campaign of “Lost Cause” mythology to glorify the Confederacy and White supremacy more generally. This campaign was waged on film, with D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* released in 1915. It occurred in literature, with Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* published in 1936 (and subsequently made into a box office smash movie in 1939). This psychological campaign relied heavily on iconography, as the period from 1890 to 1920 saw large numbers of memorials to Confederate officers erected throughout the South. The Army played its part as well during this time, naming several military installations after Confederate generals: Camp Beauregard (1917), Fort Benning (1917), Fort Bragg (1918), Fort Gordon (1917), and Fort Lee (1917).²⁶

African American Soldiers in World War II

As war clouds gathered in the late 1930s, African American leaders saw a familiar pattern recurring. As Washington, Lincoln, Wilson, and others had done before, President Franklin D. Roosevelt would call upon Black Americans to serve and sacrifice in the name of freedom, with only the smallest sense of irony. Black leaders met these demands with a level of preparation and organization heretofore not achieved. They demanded greater integration of

the Armed Forces and greater inclusion in the burgeoning defense industry.

When the United States entered World War II, in 1941, African Americans were not content merely to fill the service and support roles to which they had long been relegated. Forced to choose between maintaining its racial caste system and winning the war, the Army reluctantly chose the latter. The 92nd Infantry Division, known as the Buffalo Soldier Division, was part of a segregated Army where Black Soldiers were assigned to formations under the command of White officers. Whereas several accounts disparage the performance of African American units in World War II, future general officer Frederic Davison commented, “We [the 366th Regiment] had two enemies to fight. We had to fight the Germans in the Apennines, and we had to fight the 92nd Division hierarchy.”²⁷ In his judgment, “it almost seemed as though there was a design for failure” as units of the division were ill trained and under poor senior leadership.²⁸

Other Black Army units, however, distinguished themselves and were grudgingly acknowledged for their significant performance in the European theater of war. The Tuskegee Airmen flew 1,600 combat missions over Europe, and the 761st Tank Battalion fought in General George Patton’s dash across France and daring counterattack during the Battle of the Bulge. Black Soldiers also continued their service in support roles; Patton’s success at the Bulge would not have been possible but for the mostly Black truck drivers hauling fuel in the convoy system called Red Ball Express. These heroics notwithstanding, the Army maintained as much racial segregation as it could, going so far as maintaining separate blood banks. The war produced at least two generations of Black leaders who would alter the shape not only of the Army but of American society as well. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., commanded the Tuskegee Airmen during the war and became the first Black general in the newly formed Air Force following the war. He followed in the footsteps of

his father, Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., the Army's first Black brigadier general. In the waning days of the war, the Army court-martialed a Black lieutenant for refusing to sit in the colored section in the back of the bus. His name was Jack Roosevelt Robinson.

The Desegregation of the Armed Forces

Many Black World War II veterans were confronted with violence on the trains and buses that carried them home from the war. Civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People took up the cause of defending Black veterans. Throughout the war, civil rights groups had adopted the "Double V" campaign, fighting for democracy abroad and equal rights at home.²⁹ With the former goal achieved, the latter came to the forefront.

In the wake of victory in Europe and Japan, civil rights groups pressured President Harry Truman to defend returning Black veterans against violence and discrimination. Truman was no natural ally of civil rights, having absorbed long and deeply held racist sentiment from his native Missouri. Nevertheless, due both to the injustice of the treatment Black veterans suffered at the hands of their own countrymen and to a desperate need for Black votes in the 1948 election, Truman formed a Presidential commission on civil rights in 1946. This commission recommended an end to racial segregation in the Armed Forces. On July 26, 1948, over the objections of "Dixiecrats" within his own party, Truman signed Executive Order 9981, officially ending racial segregation in the U.S. military. Truman's political calculus proved correct, if narrowly so: the Black vote was instrumental in his razor-thin victory over Wendell Willkie. But the Services slow-rolled the implementation of the order. Truman's Secretary of the Army Kenneth Royall stated, "The Army is not an instrument for social evolution."³⁰ The last segregated unit in the Armed Forces was the Army's 94th Engineer Battalion, which finally complied with Truman's order in 1954.

The Korean and Vietnam Wars

The U.S. Army in both Korea and Vietnam simultaneously reflected and challenged the racism so ubiquitous in American society. In defiance of Truman's executive order, the Army at the outset of the Korean War was largely segregated along racial lines. Army units were ill prepared at the outset of the Korean War, and most performed poorly. However, Army commanders singled out the all-Black 24th Infantry Regiment for special opprobrium, disbanding the unit and reassigning its Soldiers to majority-White units. Juxtaposed with such casual racism, the Army saw Black commanders leading White Soldiers in combat, including Distinguished Service Cross recipient First Lieutenant Ellison C. Wynn. Pressed by necessity, the Army began integrating combat units and assigning Soldiers without consideration to race.

The Army continued this practice in Vietnam, well ahead of an American society struggling to defend deeply held segregationist laws and customs. Nevertheless, during the Vietnam War, Blacks were more likely to be drafted, assigned to combat units, and court-martialed than were their White counterparts, and they were significantly underrepresented in the officer ranks. Black Soldiers and officers who fought with distinction included Captain Riley Leroy Pitts, the first Black officer to be awarded the Medal of Honor, and Lieutenant Colonel Charles Calvin Rogers, also awarded the Medal of Honor, who retired as a major general.³¹ As had been the case in Korea, integrated units performed well. Paradoxically but perhaps not surprisingly, racial tensions were more common in rear areas than among front-line combat forces. Perhaps no incident reflects this tension more clearly than the uprising in Long Binh Jail, where racial tensions exploded in 1968, leaving 1 dead and more than 100 injured.³²

The All-Volunteer Force and the Triumph of Market Forces

The Army emerged from Vietnam determined to purge itself of every aspect of the war's legacy, from doctrine

to manpower policy. No measure was more important in this process than the abandonment of conscription in favor of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF). Stung by the indiscipline and poor motivation of conscripts, the Army sought to recruit young people who saw the Service as offering a path to a better life. This appeal proved especially effective for African Americans, who were disproportionately represented in the enlisted ranks of the AVF. To its credit, the Army created a meritocracy less affected by racism than that of any other comparably sized institution in American society. Millions of African Americans served honorably and with distinction, with a few, most notably Colin Powell, wearing general's stars. Twenty years after the establishment of the AVF, sociologist Charles Moskos offered his observation that "only in America do Blacks routinely boss Whites" as evidence of the progress of affirmative action in the U.S. Army.³³

Nevertheless, the AVF proved at best a mixed success in racial relations. Powell and a few others notwithstanding, African Americans to this day remain underrepresented in the senior ranks of the Army. Decades after the abolition of formal racial barriers to combat duty, African Americans remain overrepresented in service and support roles and underrepresented in combat units. This trend is especially prevalent in elite special operations forces, which remain predominantly White. The AVF relied on market forces to fill its ranks, allowing recruits to fill the roles where they felt most welcome. Ironically, the admirable degree of autonomy in the AVF produces some of the very same outcomes as formal policies of racial segregation.

Operations Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom, and Enduring Freedom

In 1991, the AVF went to war, and it has remained at war continuously ever since. The Army viewed the 1991 Gulf War as an affirmation of its purging the ghosts of Vietnam. In the Army's telling, a well-led, well-trained volunteer force destroyed the



Men of 24th Infantry Regiment move up to firing line in Korea, July 18, 1950 (U.S. Army Signal Corps/U.S. National Archives and Records Administration)



Private First Class Milton L. Cook, from Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Mechanized Infantry, 25th Infantry Division, fires M60 machine gun while on search and destroy mission as part of Operation Cedar Falls, conducted in and around Filhol Plantation near Cu Chi, Republic of Vietnam, January 8, 1967 (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration)

Iraqi army in 100 hours of ground combat, affirming its post-Vietnam reforms. Similarly, the Army views the performance of the AVF in Iraq and Afghanistan as exceeding all expectations. The AVF was never designed for sustained combat over the course of decades; its designers assumed that such conflict would necessitate the return of conscription. While there is much to recommend this perspective, it is nevertheless incomplete. As was the case in the segregated Army, African Americans are less likely to serve as officers, more likely to serve in support roles, and far more likely to be court-martialed than their White counterparts.³⁴ African Americans take great pride in being overrepresented in

the ranks of the military, but even this point of pride comes with a caveat. Americans rightly worry that the Army is becoming isolated from the society that it serves.

Toward a More Perfect Union: The Army as an Anti-Racist Institution

The history of racial integration in the Army is mixed; it adopted policies of racial equality when it needed combat readiness the most, only to retreat at least in part from those commitments once the crisis passed. The Army can and should be both proud of the role it has played in creating equality of opportunity for Soldiers of all colors, races, and creeds and simultaneously con-

scious of the fact that it has not done all that it can in the pursuit of that goal.

The Army can do more to accomplish its avowed goal of “providing all of our talented people with fulfilling and rewarding professional careers.”³⁵ It can begin by acknowledging its role in the often racist policies and practices of the past. Positive next steps would include redefining recruitment policies with the explicit goals of achieving racial equality in the highest ranks and highest-profile missions of the Army, redesigning the Army’s organizational culture to purge the institution of Confederate base names that celebrate slave-holding traitors in military history, reexamining the heroes it celebrates, and recognizing the agency of individual Black citizens and Soldiers

acting from a burning desire for freedom and marked by a willingness to pay for that freedom with their blood.

America would likely not exist today as a free and united country were it not for the courage and service of Black Soldiers throughout its history. They deserve more recognition and more gratitude for the role they have played in helping form a more perfect union—a fight that continues today. JFQ

Notes

¹ Lloyd Austin, Commanding General, U.S. Central Command, and now Secretary of Defense; Dennis Via, Commanding General, Army Materiel Command; and Vincent K. Brooks, Commanding General, U.S. Forces Korea.

² *Army People Strategy* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, October 2019), 5–6, available at <https://issuu.com/usarmypeople/docs/army_people_strategy_2020_7fac48d631b9c0?fr=sZmU4YzIwNjE1Mg>.

³ *Army People Strategy: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annex* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, September 1, 2020), 3, available at <https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/the_army_people_strategy_diversity_equity_and_inclusion_annex_2020_09_01_signed_final.pdf>.

⁴ “Deeds, Not Words” is the motto of the 22nd Infantry Regiment—an Army unit that was integrated with Black Seminole scouts.

⁵ Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

⁶ David Halberstam, “Foreword,” in Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military From the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2002), ix.

⁷ Nikole Hannah-Jones et al., eds., *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York: One World, 2021).

⁸ See Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

⁹ See the November 7, 1775, Proclamation of John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, in “Africans in America,” PBS, available at <<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h42t.html>>.

¹⁰ Elizabeth M. Collins, “Black Soldiers in the Revolutionary War,” *Army.mil*, March 4, 2013, available at <https://www.army.mil/article/97705/black_soldiers_in_the_revolutionary_war>.

¹¹ See “The Revolutionary War” in “Africans in America,” PBS, available at <<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/>

part2/2narr4.html>.

¹² Collins, “Black Soldiers in the Revolutionary War.”

¹³ “1784–1800: The Diplomacy of the Early Republic,” Office of the Historian, Department of State, available at <<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/foreword>>.

¹⁴ Jennifer L. Larson, “A Rebellion to Remember: The Legacy of Nat Turner,” in *Documenting the American South: Primary Resources for the Study of Southern History, Literature, and Culture*, University of North Carolina Library, available at <<https://docsouth.unc.edu/highlights/turner.html>>.

¹⁵ Robert Behre, “The Citadel’s Early Story,” *Post and Courier*, March 25, 2018, updated September 14, 2020, available at <https://www.postandcourier.com/news/the-citadels-early-story/article_21ae8ca2-1bfb-11e8-b533-2f6d6042759a.html>.

¹⁶ Good sources include Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), and George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861–1865* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1888).

¹⁷ Buckley, *American Patriots*, 81. This book, written by the daughter of civil rights activist Lena Horne, is an invaluable source on this topic. A shorter argument that parallels the one in this book can be found in Paul-Thomas Ferguson, “African American Service and Racial Integration in the U.S. Military,” *Army.mil*, February 23, 2021, available at <https://www.army.mil/article/243604/african_american_service_and_racial_integration_in_the_u_s_military>.

¹⁸ “Lewis Henry Douglass,” Library of Congress, available at <<https://loc.gov/exhibits/civil-war-in-america/biographies/lewis-henry-douglass.html>>.

¹⁹ “Black Soldiers in the U.S. Military During the Civil War,” National Archives and Records Administration, September 1, 2017, available at <<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war>>.

²⁰ Sarah Pruitt, “What Lincoln Said in His Final Speech,” *History*, April 10, 2015, available at <<https://www.history.com/news/what-lincoln-said-in-his-final-speech>>.

²¹ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014).

²² For the tragic but inspiring story of the first Black graduate of West Point, see Charles Allen, “The Legacy of Henry O. Flipper in the U.S. Army,” *Army.mil*, June 14, 2010, available at <https://www.army.mil/article/40763/the_legacy_of_henry_o_flipper_in_the_u_s_army>.

²³ Richard Wormser, “The Brownsville Affair,” Thirteen Media With Impact, available at <https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_browns.html>.

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