

Blacks in the military

[Government](#), [Army](#)



Behind the American dream lies a series of rebels and insurrections on the part of black Americans in order to mark their presence equal to that of the white citizens of the country. Just like the rise of a black man in the society did not happen over night, his status and entrance into the military services also took decades to create a non-segregated military of the contemporary America.

The participation of blacks in the U. S. military is a path with its commencement right after the exemption of prohibitive years when the U. S. army permitted the black men to serve the military as cooks and stewards. In the wake of centuries, these African Americans achieved their current status as equal members of the unified U. S. army. This paper succinctly recounts the history of blacks' entrance into the military and their gradual rise of status over the period of time. The paper also elucidates the importance of the blacks for the U. S. during the times of different wars and the impact of such military activities on the black men in the armed forces of America today. Introduction:

" We must tell stories of black successes to every child in our country because we need heroes. We need them as much as we need our dreams, and black Americans have always provided both_ George H. W. Bush (Rosenthal: 1991). " In the contemporary world, the word ' black' refers to a multifaceted concept. Generally the term signifies the people with dark skin involving the human population from Africa, Oceania and Southeast Asia etc. In a more peculiar sense, the word refers to a black-white segregation with its origins profoundly rooted in the American history.

More formally, the term Afro-Americans is also employed for the people who had been brought to the U. S. as slaves and had been allocated to different colonies within the country. Although initially allocated as the servants of whites, the blacks gained power with the passage of time resulting in an insurrection against the whites due to the inhuman attitude towards them. Once prohibited to cross the premises of educational institutes or dine in the whites' restaurants, blacks of the contemporary U. S.

society not only enjoy equal rights but have proved to be a significant contribution to the country in every walk of life and form one of the chief minorities of America. According to the statistics of 2006 by U. S. Census Bureau about 13.1 percent of total U. S. population comprises of this minority with a numeric figure around 39, 151, 870. Today, to more than any area of national strength, these black men and women provide a tenacious contribution to the military of the United States. History of Blacks' Entrance in the Military: " Although African Americans have participated in every major U.

S. war, the battle for integration and for recognition of the accomplishments of black soldiers has been a slow process (Haney: 2007). " Since the arrival of blacks, no war having U. S. as a participant went without the presence of blacks in the country's military. During the time of French and Indian wars in the 18th century, the American army heavily depended on black people working as labourers, scouts and drivers etc. Even during the time of World War I, about 404, 348 black men and women worked in the Services of Supply-in quartermaster, stevedore, and pioneer infantry units (Lee: 1966, p.

5). As a result of their active contribution, the United Press reported that the ' American Negro troops proved their value as fighters' (Lee: 1966, p. 6). though appreciated in printed media, the reality possessed extreme racism running between the blacks and whites. After the commencement of the Second World War, the number of blacks enlisted to the military services increased from 3, 640 men on 31 August 1939 to 97, 725 on 30 November 1941. the following years marked a further increase of black enlistees (Lee: 1966, p. 88). Revolutionary War:

According to the statistics provided by Albrecht and Davis based on U. S. Census Bureau, U. S. Army and U. S. Department of Defence, the eighteenth century holds the history of the Revolutionary War that marked a presence of 5000 black soldiers in the continental army and far more with the British forces as a result of Lord Dunmore's proclamation in November 1775 promising the freedom of negroes if they support the British. As a result more and more African Americans joined forces against the Patriots since freedom was something they cherished most.

So, this war was unique in a sense that blacks served both the continental army and the British colonizers as a part of their military to be used against Americans however the majority of black men and women served the British in road building and other such meagre tasks since they were promised emancipation from years of slavery (PBS). Civil War: Since the year 1861, Civil war has never lost its debate for one reason that its undercurrents still flow in the roots of modern American society. Owing to the great impact of war between whites and blacks, Higham believes that

“ No other subject in U. S. history, perhaps no other subject in the history of the world, has elicited the tremendous outpouring of writing that has been lavished on the American Civil War (1996). ” Although the blacks served in the Revolutionary War, it was till 1792 that the federal law of the United States prohibited the entrance of blacks as arms bearing soldiers. As a consequence of this law, the aspiring blacks raised the issue in Boston requesting the government to bring alternation in the rule. Resulting from the proclamation of emancipation made by Gen.

John C. Fremont in Missouri and Gen. David Hunter in South Carolina, an increasing number of slaves were emancipated on one hand when on the other hand the whites' spirit of voluntary services in military declined. In such a scenario, the need of military personnel in Union army was overwhelming thereby making the Government reconsider the ban on blacks. This led to the exemption of ban resulting in gradual recruitment of black volunteers to serve in the army. Formally, it was in the form of Union Army that emerged as a result of acts passed by the Congress in 1862.

According to the Second Confiscation and Militia Act, all the slaves with their masters serving in the Confederate Army were freed. In about 2 days, slavery was abolished in all the states of the country. Seeing the aggrandizing number of black men willing to join military the government established a separate Bureau of Colored Troops by 1863. The active participation of blacks in U. S. not only marked a significant chapter of history but also left an impact on literature as the influence can be witnessed in the works of Rudyard Kipling and Kate Chopin.

Similarly, movies like ' Glory' are constant reminders of blacks' military role in war times. The U. S. Coast guard being one of the smallest yet effective of the seven uniformed services and military branches of t he U. S with a purpose of patrolling the maritime region also marked an informal entrance of blacks in about 1831 when Captain W. W. Polk, USRCS, commanding the Revenue cutter Florida requested to the Treasury Secretary Samuel D. Ingham to employ his black slave of 21 years on board.

After a month of permission, the free blacks were employed as stewards and cooks. The year 1887 marked a heyday for the African Americans military status in the coast guard when Captain Michael A. Healy was commissioned as the commander of the cutter Bear till 1895 (U. S. Coast Guard). Korean War By 1930s the prejudices of whites against blacks started to debilitate. It was in 1937 that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A passed a resolution which said, " We accept completely the ideal of the brotherhood of all races, as all are the children of God.

We therefore call upon Christians everywhere to practice mutual good-will and cooperation among all racial groups, to eliminate every form of discrimination, and to work actively for the recognition of civil and religious rights of all minority groups(Sternsher: 1969. p. 105). " Although a part of military comprising of nearly one million soldiers, the blacks were still considered unfit for military services by the white military men till 1941 when black leaders proposed a constitution of all-black combat units on experimental basis.

The outstanding performance of these black units led to their participation on permanent basis thereby disentangling the military from the shackles of <https://assignbuster.com/blacks-in-the-military/>

prejudices against the minority. In the words of Retired U. S. Army Colonel Bill De Shields, “ The symbol of black participation at that time was 'the Double V'. in other words, 'Double V' meant two victories: victory against the enemy abroad, and victory against the enemy at home. The enemy at home of course being racism (VOA: 2005). ” By the late 1950s that marked the end of Korean War, the black units were kept separate.

Although some blacks worked in white units too, their presence was only in the capacity of lower staff members. Vietnam War: The era of Vietnam War was the time when U. S. Army had fully integrated with whites and blacks serving in the same combat units and absence of racism. The blacks by this time had appraisal in their ranks and served even as generals (VOA: 2005). Of all the races participating in the Vietnam War, blacks are often considered to have suffered the most in terms of the casualty rate. Comprising of 11 percent of the total participating population, blacks served the U.

S. in Vietnam in disproportionate number comprising of about 20 percent of early combat deaths. Later the proportion of casualties declined to about 12.5 percent (Albrecht and Davis). The figure points out the increasing role of blacks in the military. There lie several reasons behind the greater black demise in comparison with other races. Firstly, as the fight between South and North escalated, the U. S. needed more soldiers because of the heavy rate of casualty at the front thereby resulting conscription of people for military services.

According to the studies of Defence department of Sam Houston University, a considerable number of blacks entered the U. S. military in this way that formed 16 percent of its total population. Secondly, it is often reckoned that <https://assignbuster.com/blacks-in-the-military/>

the high casualty rate was not just because of increasing number but partly due to the higher morale and willingness of blacks to offer their voluntary services causing their casualty rate supersede other races in terms of their participating population. It was the consequence of extraordinary morale of African American military men that about 20 medals of bravery were awarded to these black soldiers.

Persian Gulf War: Continued for a time p of almost a year from 1990 to 1991, the statistics of Persian Gulf War as reported by the U. S. Defence Department suggest the presence of black men and women to have made up to 25percent of the American troops when their total share in the U. S. population was about 12percent. This according to Pentagon officials was a result of their willingness rather than their conscription into the military services. The era of Persian Gulf War marked an augmentation of blacks in the military when their joining superseded the whites by three times.

This according to many analysts was a way for blacks to improved quality of life. According to Martin Binkin a military analyst, the percentage of black young men and women serving in military forces by 1991 was 30-33percent in comparison with that of 16 to 17percent for the white youngsters (Wilkerson: 1991). It was such participation and morale of black Americans in the Persian Gulf War that President H. W. Bush exalted their chivalry with the following words, " For two centuries, black soldiers have established a record of pride in the face of incredible obstacles (Rosenthal: 1991). " Iraq War:

In the words of Gregory Black, founder of web portal of black military, " The first reason for the drop is the black community's overall objection to the war (Foley: 2007). " The growing unpopularity of Bush Administration after the

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invasion in Iraq and continual spending on the war to cause a deficit in the year 2008 is not only confined to the international community but has greatly affected the numeric strength of the U. S. military. Although, the U. S. army has suffered an enormous decline in terms of the number of people applying for the military services, the fall of military participation is highest for the black community.

According to the analysis of Williams and Baron in *The Boston Globe*, the blacks' percentage in the U. S. military has declined by 58 percent since 11 September 2000 but Iraq War seemed to have greatly catalyzed the process as suggested by other military analysts, Pentagon surveys, and interviews with young African-Americans. The analysis of James Foley made in the fall of the last year suggests that the whites who formed 61 percent of the recruits in the year 2000 now make up around 67 percent of the U. S. military force (2007).

Michael O'Hanlon, a military analyst for the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution, witnesses this trend to be a loss for the American army since he believes that the 'African-Americans have been such a key part of the modern military (whose decline) portends the possibility of a longer-term loss of interest. It can be tough to get it back' (Williams and Baron: 2007). For the blacks, the threat of Iraq War is double edged. It does not only mean a loss of a few lives but poses a threat of the loss of a whole generation since the blacks are in minority as approved by the fact that 3, 540 U. S.

troops have died in Iraq's bloodshed till the last year (Baldor: 2007). Also, the discouraging attitude from the military has dissuaded many blacks. Lieutenant Colonel Irving Smith, a sociologist at the US Military Academy at <https://assignbuster.com/blacks-in-the-military/>

West Point, the basic goal behind excessive blacks' participation was to reach equal status of citizenship and leadership roles in the mainstream but 'The fewer African-Americans that enlist, the fewer African-Americans there are that can tell their stories in the future. The fewer that get commissioned as officers, the smaller the leadership pool will be in the future' (Williams and Baron: 2007).

At the top of everything James Foley in his article 'Black interest in military service decreasing' also believes that the decline is also because the key influencers in the black community are against the war. As a result of their ascendance on their followers, more and more blacks are being dissuaded from their participation in the U. S. military (2007). It was the foresight of blacks regarding their decline as a result of Iraq invasion that in the year 2003, different polls investigating the attitude of people towards Iraq invasion suggested that the blacks opposed Iraq War much more than the whites.

Pew Research Centre's poll suggested the support of 44 percent of African-Americans in comparison with 73percent whites, According to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution/Zogby America poll, only 23percent blacks supported the war whereas according to the findings of the Joint Centre for Political and Economic Studies, the percentage of these black votaries declined to 19 percent (Jackson: 2003). The reason behind such opposition is that the blacks make up far more percentage in the U. S. military as compared to their share in the country's population.

Conclusion: Due to a record of excessive invasions and interventions of the U. S. in the past few decades, what stays most wounded is the military wing

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of the country. Since the operations of the U. S. military in Afghanistan and Iraq, the country's army has lost its charm for many U. S. citizens to a considerable deal. Of these Americans, the reaction is most severe from the black community as proved by the fact that the participation level of blacks in the U. S army has enormously declined over the last few years.

With a history of intrepid contribution as warriors and soldiers of the Spanish American War in 1898, the Korean war in early 1950s, the Vietnam war of 1960s and 1970s and the Persian Gulf war of early 1990s, the blacks of the contemporary U. S. seem less inclined to the military services thereby causing a serious threat to the over all strength of the U. S. With their contribution in all the capacities of armed forces, the black military men of today play a key role for the unified army at one hand whereas their very presence poses a risk of losing entire generations of African Americans on the other hand.

Keeping in mind the nature of risks for black Americans, it is likely that the recent trend of declining participation would continue for the years to come thereby debilitating the military strength of the world's super power. References African Americans in the United States Coast Guard. U. S. Coast Guard. Jan. 1999. Retrieved on 24 Feb. 2008 < http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-cp/history/h_Africanamericans.html> African-American Soldiers in World War II Helped Pave Way for Integration of US Military. Voice of America. 10 May 2005.

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