

Contemporary america essay

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Joven Isamer Bilog 12 Apr 2011 History 162 Section 8 America's role in World War II was fueled by the desire to fight oppression abroad. However, America's own oppressive behavior contradicts this desire. Segregation and discrimination were still prominent in WWII. Full citizenship rights were denied to African-Americans. The Jim Crow laws kept the separation of black and white soldiers. Black and white soldiers shared different bathrooms and were trained in different military units. African-American soldiers fought two wars: one over the Axis Powers and one with domestic racial prejudice.

There is no sense for America to fight for democracy if America could not have even exemplified it. There was no motive to guide an African-American soldier to shed blood for hypocrisy. In January 1942, a cafeteria worker named James G. Thompson sent a letter to the Pittsburgh Courier that decided to confront the contradiction of a Jim Crow army defending democracy and proposed the Double Victory sign. The first "V" stood for victory over America's enemies abroad and the second V stood for victory over African-American's enemies at home.

The Pittsburgh Courier's "Double V" campaign was a profound movement that provided incentive for African-American war efforts and effectively revealed the disparity between America's ideals abroad and the reality at home. The Double V campaign instantly grabbed the attention of the Pittsburgh Courier which started publishing the Double V insignia in its February 7th edition. Thompson's letter made an immediate impact due to its simple yet memorable slogan with the words. His Double V idea was great enough for a very popular black press to quickly support.

The slogan “ gave voice to a democratic dream that would be widely shared across the country. ” African-Americans could quickly relate to the cause because of its positive message. The Pittsburgh Courier used great tactics such as photographs to charge the “ Double V” Campaign. The photographs in the paper had a woman with a “ VV” on the back of her dress, a class of six graders flashing the Double V sign and a soldier forming a Double V with his hands and two military flags. The campaign did not discourage patriotism or influence a turn against America.

It called for the democratic truth America tried to embody. Private Charles F. Wilson wrote to President Roosevelt, “ Are the Chinese to believe that we are fighting to bring them ‘ freedom, equality, and justice,’ when they can see that in our Armed Forces we are not even practicing what we preaching? ” This illustrates the powerful effect the campaign had in motivating people to stand up for the double victory cause. Democratic America was a fraud in World War II and Thompson’s letters called America out to be a true model for democracy.

White America only had to worry about the victory over the Axis powers. The Double V showed the greater challenges colored Americans had to face. An African-American soldier named E. G. McConnell of the 76ist Tank Battalion said, “ I was in a unit I was damn proud of, and I knew that the things we did would shape the future for my children and grandchildren. ” The soldiers who felt unsure about the war now had a certain answer which was that the ideal would be one day reached with enough sacrifices. The maintenance of patriotism is vital to unifying the country.

Black and White Americans live in America. Love for one's country is something that can be undeniably shared. The Courier's introduction of the Double V Campaign had a brilliant statement which was " WE HAVE A STAKE IN THIS FIGHT.... WE ARE AMERICANS TOO! " This statement shows that all Americans no matter what race share the loyalty and pride for the country. Black and White Americans share the same goal in defeating the Axis Powers in the name of democracy. African-Americans have just as much to lose as White Americans. Support for the campaign also came from famous whites.

Politician Thomas Dewey supported the campaign stating, " All Americans must participate in the terrible struggle ahead - in our munitions factories at home - and in every branch of our armed forces on the battle fronts. " This shows how the Double V campaign was able to make the problems on the home front evident. The Pittsburgh Courier showed a picture of a black and white man showing the Double V sign in its Feb 28, 1942 edition. This showed that the fight for democracy was not limited to that of a colored American. The Double V ideal was available to all American people.

The Courier gracefully executed a fight not against the whites but to fight with them. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) denounced the army's segregationist policy: " A Jim Crow army cannot fight for a free world. " The mutual effort between colored and white Americans was necessary to defeat the evils of discrimination. There can be no peace and justice without cooperation because a change in a nation requires everyone. The editor of the Pittsburgh Courier wrote: " We call upon the President and Congress to declare war on Japan and against racial prejudice in our country.

Certainly we should be strong enough to whip both of them. " This statement illustrated America's great potential to win both victories and amplified America's greatness. If America is fighting for democracy abroad it should be easily able to fight for democracy at home. There was a calling for America to prove it is a truly marvelous country that conquers any problem. The two victories coexist well because the fight is the same but just in different areas. Just as much as democratic principles were being eradicated in Europe by the Axis Powers; democratic equality was being ignored in America.

Black columnist George Schuyler said " Our war is not against Hitler in Europe, but against Hitler in America. Our war is to get a democracy we never had. " Schuyler points out that only in America there is a problem with World War II and the fight against Germany, but that there is a segregation and discrimination problem on United States soil. The victory at home is necessary for the victory abroad because there is no justification in fighting for a contradiction. Black soldiers' presence made a huge difference for America. African-Americans were allowed into the Air Corps on January 16, 1941 and the War Department office was flooded with applications.

Although black soldiers were able to fight in the sky they still faced racial prejudice. " Promotions of blacks were nonexistent; it was obvious when young whites were promoted over blacks with years of exemplary military service. " These black soldiers personally felt the harsh discrimination. Their hard work was overlooked and there was nothing to be done about it. The War Department was stern on its traditional treatment of colored soldiers. These soldiers could not protest the discrimination. The " Double V"

campaign gave them the ability to protest by instilling the idea that fighting in the war will later result in a better future.

The soldiers were fighting for the second victory at home. A Tuskegee administrator said, " When Negroes do not have to be continuously on their guard against such unnecessary strains during the period of their flying training they will do better as flyers. " This illustrated a contradiction because segregating training camps is a definite example of racial discrimination. The segregation cultivated strains of doubt and hopelessness in the minds of the black soldiers. The Double V helped link black soldiers' urge for victory in WWII with the hope for an end to discrimination and segregation.

A black airman in the 99th, and an eventual Tuskegee Airman, " every man in the 99th was aware that the success of the 99th would impact the status of blacks in the Army Air Force and the army as a whole and that each man performed his job as if the race depended on him. " The " Double V" Campaign gave black America the opportunity to feel like they were a part of a greater struggle for freedom everywhere. One soldier said, " Just carve on my tombstone, ' Here lies a black man killed fighting a yellow man for the protection of a white man'. This showed the paradox that they are expected to do the same dangerous and life risking things as the white man but do not reap the same benefits. Black soldiers were willing to protect country even though the relationship was not reciprocal. These black soldiers needed to risk their life for a worthy cause which is what the " Double V" Campaign did by providing them with the motive of victory on the home front. Considering U. S. involvement in WWII " government officials began stressing the need of

a united home front to ensure victory, and many blacks realized that whites could no longer ignore the issue of discrimination. With the increasing participation of colored Americans in the war, the issue of discrimination became a bigger concern. The issue could no longer be avoided. The Double V stepped in at the perfect time and confronted the issue of discrimination. As can be seen throughout the whole of this analysis, The “ Double V” campaign was a profound movement that provided incentive for African-American war efforts and effectively revealed the disparity between America’s ideals abroad and the reality at home. Thompson’s words were very inspiring because he showed the perseverance to overlook all the unjust treatment and still have optimism in America.

The positive assertion contributed greatly to the success of the campaign. The “ Double V” campaign was one of the most extensive patriotic drives in the country during the war because it kept black America apprised of the struggle for victory overseas and victory at home through numerous publications. World War II gave African-Americans the perfect opportunity to change the ways of America. It was impeccable timing for the “ Double V” campaign to start. Many African-Americans participated in the war and were willing to sacrifice their lives.

There were also many African-Americans such as men in the military who questioned if was worth defending a nation representing hypocrisy. The “ Double V” Campaign was started for these people who represented the common theme of discrimination. It was during World War II in which the possibility of African-Americans being heard. The connection of the two victories was clever because it demonstrated that African-Americans are

fighting for everyone else and raises the question of why it is not reciprocated which shows that African-Americans are entitled to equal rights.

There is a request for cooperation among all Americans to truly represent democracy. To be constantly brought down by discrimination and prejudices and still persevere is mind blowing showed the amazing patience African-Americans had. The " Double V" campaign showed the public that there is a potential existence of an America practicing what it preaches where all men are created equal and no innate social, cultural or human right is withheld from you. ----- [1]. Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 2000), 25 [2].

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