"THE NEGRO'S HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ROLE IN NATIONAL DEFENSE"

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In common with all other elements of the population, the Negro in America brings to the present national defense assets, a background of many many generations having the experience of having utilized forces as a means of self-preservation.

Primitive man was compelled to combat some of the forces of nature as well as those of unfriendly neighbors if he was to survive. Tribal organization and war-fare developed leadership and courage which perhaps characterize succeeding generations many years removed.

Our ancestors brought with them to these shores a physical development and a mental outlook which passed on to their offspring, have served them well in surviving in a strange environment. Blended in many cases with the bloods of many races, the American Negro, a tenth of the population, is a segment which, by and large, possesses all of the attributes which should go to make up ideal citizens capable of assuming and discharging its duties whether in a state of total peace or total war.

Participation in American Campaigns

The Negro's part in all of those struggles which have occurred since American settlement began is an old story. It is traditional, and except for the more or less cursory references to it in histories, I would not mention it here. However, contemporary American Negro youth needs to be reminded again and again of the fine heritage passed on to them, lest they forget the fine background of their racial group and thereby lose the stimulus of being able to proudly sing "My Country, 'tis of Thee" with all of its fine implications.

The records show that a sizable number of Negroes participated in the conflicts during the French and Indian Wars preceding the Revolutionary War. In many cases these men, to be sure, did not have the status of citizens but loyally helped to defend the land-holdings of their masters and thereby contributed to the ever-widening extension of the frontiers, thus paving the way for the great Republic that was to be.

The Revolutionary War even from the prologue of the Boston Massacre down to Yorktown was characterized by the participation of a goodly number of Negroes. Even during those early years, the colonial records showed the participation as first class soldiers of many Negroes who were free men.

We pass on to the War of 1812 which found Negroes seizing such opportunities as they were offered to participate in this "second war for freedom". Familiar incidents deal with these men in Jackson's Army at
New Orleans or in the naval engagement with Perry on Lake Erie. The
significance of the revolutionary war having been consolidated, a relatively
long period of formal peace ensued until the Mexican War round the
nation engaged in another contest of a brief duration but during which
again the Negro whether as slave or freedman participated.

During these first sixty-seven years of the Republic, the military
establishment was inevitably small, consisting mainly of coast and
harbor defense installations and only such mobile forces as were
necessary to guard the southern and eastern frontiers. Thus from the
early beginnings, America has never been in for a large standing army
or military establishment. In major emergencies reliance has always
been placed in the availability and potential power of the militia,
organized and unorganized in the several states. It is worthy of note
that the national military defense of our nation has assumed this pattern
throughout the life of the nation and down to the present time. In other
words, the United States of America has wisely or necessarily always depended
upon meeting an emergency as the emergency appeared, rather than by
anticipating the emergency.

Came the Civil War of 1861 to 1865 with the titanic struggle to pre-
serve the Union and destroy once and for all the institution of slavery.
Again it was necessary to call up large numbers of the citizenry to
augment the pitifully small regular army. Thus the Civil War was largely
fought by Volunteers or citizens called up for the emergency. The
gallant part played by Negroes in this epic fight for the preservation of
the Union and the abolition of human slavery is a glorious story.

From the beginning of this struggle, Negroes took part --- on the
Union side thousands of run-away slaves joined the Army and Navy. Like-
wise thousands took part on the Confederate side actuated by a type of
loyalty unsurpassed in human annals.

Later in the war, large scale use of Negro troops was authorized and
encouraged. Their gallant exploits on a hundred battle fields attest their
bravery and courage as soldiers, their stature as men. During the Civil
War, upwards of a hundred thousand Negro troops were employed. That their
use in the hard fought later years of the War, did much to influence the
turn of events toward a Union Victory is undisputed. This participation by
these Negroes only serves to emphasize the phrase ---"who would be free,
himself must strike the blow".

With the close of the Civil War and its consequent demobilization of the
Army passed the large scale participation of Negroes in the Army. Let it
be again stated that the regular army began again a small garrisoning force
comparable, taking the growth of the country in consideration, to the army
of the post revolutionary and post-Mexican War era. However, authorization
for two regiments of foot troops, the 56th and 57th Infantry and two
regiments of horse - the 9th and 10th Cavalries was granted. For the next
forty years, this was the extent of Negro participation in the United States
Army. During these days, humdrum garrison duties were occasionally inter-
rupted by frontier Indian fighting. In these campaigns, notably the Frontier
campaign these men took an outstanding part.

Civilian Negro military efforts during these four decades were negli-
gible. Late in the 80's a militia or National Guard unit was organized.
in the District of Columbia, likewise in Illinois and Ohio. Apparently no serious effort was made or interest manifested in the matter of having the Negro kept militarily minded by the formation of militia or state
and national guard units in any of the states except the instances mentioned.

To be sure, quasi-military organizations such as drill teams, uniform
benevolent orders, and military and non-military organizations for parade purposes were
popular in many sections. This period saw the organization of black regiments
from the United States Military Academy, namely Lieut. Alexander, Flipper
and Young.

While it is true that the country as a whole was emphasizing the growth,
and the maintenance of a standing army commensurate with the growth, power
and needs of the nation, it would seem that the Negro segment apparently
felt that serious participation in at least the potential national defense was a thing apart.

It may be said in all fairness that there was neither encouragement from
without nor interest within for any larger effort in preparation for the
ensuing, or the discharge of the full duties of citizenship.

1898 and the Spanish-American War found us true to from in a great state
of inadequate national defense. Stating a small but effective navy, we had
only a very small army. Again the unfolding of the traditional
American pattern with no training and no military training or qualifications for
leadership. The same was true of many of the other volunteer regiments.

At this time, in raising quite a large volunteer army, many Negro units
were organized by the states, in many instances officered entirely by
colored men with limited or no military training or qualifications for
leadership. The same was true of many of the other volunteer regiments.
However, these regiments were raised in the face of the emergency and it was never necessary to try out
in a large way the effectiveness of our hastily improvised emergency army.

During the brief period of hostilities, the four Negro regiments-
described in the civil war days—namely the 5th, 10th, 25th and 37th,
did acquire endowments magnificently during the Cuban campaign. Following
this campaign as so-called "immunity regiments" immune to yellow fever,
which took a frightful toll of soldier lives during the Cuban campaign,
the 25th, several Negro regiments among them the 3rd and 49th Volunteers took
part in the Philippine campaign and later during the Philippine Insurrection
Campaign.

Come peace, and again our military machine was for the most part frozen.
However, a larger regular army and an increasing realization on the part of the American people that peace time was the time to at least
plan if not to prepare. With the turn of the century came to organization
for the first time of a War Department General Staff. Thus came into
being. Three or four one company units were formed, namely in Massachusetts,
Conn., Maryland and Tennessee.
The Government gave more serious thought to the national defense; the regular army was expanded; additional aid and funds given the National Guard and in 1915 came the enactment of the National Defense Act which went a long way toward setting up at least the machinery for assembling in time of emergency or threatened emergency an adequate army. During these days, no appreciable change took place in a larger participation of the Negro.

The nation, including the Negroes, was content to remain insensible on this matter. We continued to have our full share of "uniformed ranks" street parades and "brass band" funerals grew in popularity. Two bright spots in it all—two young men, Benjamin O. Davis and John H. Greene, enlisted in the regular army for officer careers and won commissions from the ranks by competitive examination and took their places in the regular army.

1916 witnessed the mobilization for the Mexican punitive expedition and the border patrol. The few existing units of the National Guard participated. This was a pretty good pre-view of the events of the next year. A creditable performance of this duty by the units concerned is noteworthy.

During the years from 1915 to our entrance into the war in 1917, there was a rising feeling of insecurity not alone among our military experts, but among the laity and citizens generally. Movements indicating that the people themselves were growing more national defense conscious such as the so-called Plattsburg Idea, sponsored by the late General Leonard Wood came into being. This idea of having eligible citizens of potential value for military leadership take some steps toward preparing themselves for this duty was taking root. It was to form the germ for the idea which had to be adopted when war came for providing the necessary 150,000 officers far as is known, little or no attention was given to the idea of having appropriate steps taken to provide a reservoir of Negro leaders was taken by anybody concerned. Except for sporadic complaints or abortive efforts, nothing was done toward extending or enlarging Negro participation in the armed forces.

The World War was upon us. The events of those days are recent enough for the majority of us to remember what happened. Largely through divine providence and fortuitous circumstances, America was able to make her might felt.

More than 4 million of its manpower were called up. The Negro provided his share certainly as to quantity or numbers. Our participation in the struggle is a fine story consistent with the traditional story of Negro participation in all the Wars of our country. Improvising the Plattsburg Idea, officers' camps were established. In three short months, through intensive training thousands of officers were qualified. Among this number were more than one thousand Negro officers, mostly infantry, with a few artillerymen, a sizable number of medical men and chaplains and only a sprinkling in the other branches of the service. It is probably true that prolongation of the war would have tended to increase our representation.

With the close of the war and the liquidation of our war machine, the familiar story was resumed. Our military machine was largely "scraped".
We reverted to only a medium sized army and the Negro representation reverted to its post-civil war status of four regiments. During the war, there were more than four hundred thousand Negroes in the Army, or about a tenth of the whole. These men formed various units in the combat as well as the service units of the army. Due to the leniency of America's major participation in the battles in France, Negro combat units as a whole saw limited service. Their records fill a fine page in the rolls of America's fighting men. The contributions of the thousands of Negroes in the Service of Supply in France was a major factor in the successful fighting at the front. Prodigious feats of physical effort were recorded by those black storerooms and service or labor units.

One of the inescapable developments of the war and the period immediately following it was the increase of friction as between Negroes and whites both in and out of the army, culminating in the unfortunate and tragic riots of 1919 to say nothing of such IWW feeling between people who should have been and must be stronger than blood brothers-brothers in arms. Who knows what these hard to believe and hard to understand relationships and actions were the result of what we would call in 1940 - "Pilgrim's Progress:" "Sixth Column" efforts! Out of the war came an unfortunate disillusionment that this war was the "war to end all wars" and that no such catastrophe would occur again. From this reasoning came a desire to our traditional disinterest in things particularly military. Disaffection, non-aggression, non-aggression pact, renunciation of war as a national policy, wide spread pacifism, ridicule of the honest advice of trained military leaders and a nagging discord and satisfaction that the millennium was well on the way and that there was to be a general "beating of swords into plowshares".

With such national psychology in post-war days, it is not surprising that most of the efforts to profit by the lessons of 1917-1919 were rejected. One of the most important ones was an overwhelming reaction of proposed universal service in which the manpower of the nation beginning at a given age in young men would undergo a year or more military training. It would provide us at this time with a vast reservoir of trained manpower which would undoubtedly discourage aggression against us and probably prevent war. The machinery for reassembling a war machine was provided but for twenty years the United States faced the world with an army suitable and comparable in size to that boasted by any number of second and third rate world powers. National policy reflected its pattern in Negro participation. Up to 1920 nominal representation in the regular army of the four regiments and school detachments, aggregating about 6,000 men was the Negro's total. Two national guard regiments and the equivalent of a third in a scattered separate units accounted for our part in the second line of defense. Two senior ROTC units graduating around 30 officers in all each year, all in the infantry area, was our participation in that phase. At long last three small CHTC's were authorized with a total enrollment of less than 500. All in all, up to the present crisis, national defense, certainly in peacetime has not seen the Negro segment of the population either receiving or asking for much more than nominal consideration and participation.

Undoubtedly the War Department has had for many years plans for the adequate participation of the Negro in a national emergency. That the participation of the Negro in peace time or preparedness programs had reached the vanishing point is a responsibility that must be shared by the American people for after all, government's reflect but the national pattern or will
of the people. It may be pointed out that the military establishment
is not alone in not offering that equality of opportunity which it would
 seem in the keynote in any democracy. Nor can Negroes themselves escape
responsibility for this state of affairs. By and large, indifference as
to one's citizenship status, the overemphasis on materialism, provincialism
and a general attitude of "every man for himself and let the devil take the
hindmost" are responsible for many of the failures of the Negro as a group
to "cash in" on opportunities.

I am not unmindful of the fact that conducting national defense on a
dual plan and attempting to offer equalities of opportunities with limited
funds and facilities is a real one. I think you will agree that it is a
problem of great magnitude in whatever field of endeavor one might look.
It is not therefore, a problem peculiar to national defense as such. The
approach to the solution of many of the social problems which confront us
is being made; progress is being made; much remains to be done.

Any steps which may be taken to hasten the solution of these problems
will per se hasten the solution of problems having to do solely with
national defense. In the taking of these steps, Full teamwork and coopera-
tion must be offered by all elements, otherwise, we do lack that national
unity so essential in times like these. I am reminded of a few lines by
J. Mason Knox in Cooperation:

If We Don't All Hang Together....
It isn't the guns or armament, or the money they can pay,
It's the close cooperation that makes them win the day;
It isn't the individual, nor the army as a whole,
But the everlasting teamwork of every bloomin' soul.

Come we now to Nineteen hundred and Forty, facing as Americans a great
 crisis in our national history. Comically mixed by potential dangers,
the extent of which is not known to any living man at this time.

What shall be done to contribute to the maximum national effort?

What shall be done to enhance the contribution to be made by the Negroes
of America?

What steps are best calculated to offset the failures of by-gone years
so far as a real effective integration of the Negro into the armed forces
of America?

I submit that we face now a condition and not a theory. We, every one
of us owe it to America and to himself to use his best effort to the end
that out of this crisis may come a new day in the interpretation of the
ideals of true Americanism and democracy - in the army, in the navy, in
fact in every phase of national endeavor so far as the rights and duties of
every citizen to participate are involved.

Conceding that over our national history of more than a century and a
half, the national pattern so far, has failed in the main to extend that
equality of opportunity; conceding what all of us have been guilty of many
sins of omission in failing to appreciate the duty of seeking those opport-
unities in the Full American program and at the same time qualifying our-
selves for that integration, I say here and now, that the time has now come,
for as St. Paul said for "putting those things which are behind and press- ing forward to the mark of the high calling".

Let us, as it were, take stock to see where we are. Then let us use every single ounce of our energies in correcting the failures and omissions of the past and doing these things best calculated to seeing that they shall not happen again.

In our visit to this in November 1919, we find a racial segment of the population amounting to a tenth of the whole about whose loyalty there is not now, nor ever has been any question; that we have a glorious heritage of achievement, not only in building this nation, but a record of glorious individual and group achievements in every armed conflict.

Further, we do have a small but fine representation in the armed forces, particularly the army. Likewise we have small but fine representation in the other two components of the army, namely the national guard and the organized reserves.

Finally we have a fine upstanding reservoir of man-power in the form of Negro youth, willing and anxious to serve.

It is my considered judgment that we should join hands in exploiting and utilizing to the utmost limit what we have in the way of army personnel and leadership, trained and potentially that we should hasten in every way possible the development of militarily-minded intelligent young men ready to accept such training as will enable them to accept the responsibilities when offered and to discharge them with honor and credit. For example, we have all too few reserve officers, not-sufficient-at-all to officer any large number of Negroes that may be raised for the army. The answer to this is to hasten the training and commissioning of more such men by taking the capacities of existing training facilities as well as to seek authority for the establishment of more such training units in Negro schools of collegiate level. Paradoxically as it may seem these units do not enjoy the popularity which it would seem they should enjoy either with the students or faculties. In some instances units have been discontinued. Efforts could be made to have authorized cadet units in schools of secondary level under the provisions of section 35c of the National Defense Act. Small difficulties it would seem to me would be experienced in securing this type of training. It would be of small expense to the government, its part consisting in the loan of the arms and equipment. The teaching personnel would come from the faculties of the schools. It is rare that one finds a high school which does not have at least one member of the faculty who has had some military training. Such a program would result in the establishment of many units in secondary schools comparable to the high school cadet organization in Washington, D.C. This type of preliminary training would pay big dividends so far as creating an interest in things military and the national defense.

With the expansion of ROCO facilities, perhaps facilities would be provided for training Negroes of college grade as officers in other branches of the combat service, such as artillery, engineers, cavalry, etc., etc. Applicants for commissions with proper qualifications in such branches as the Quartermaster Corps, Finance Corps, Chemical War Fares, Medical Corps, etc., etc., should not be difficult, once the urge can be created. This
sounds like a long program or one requiring years. One of two years is not
much time, considering that it will require perhaps that long to gear our
national effort into high for a total war effort. If we start now, we shall
be ready. If we substitute hard work in getting our own house in order by
preparing ourselves for accepting opportunities present and to come, for a
certain type of constructive criticism, I believe we will go far. I
want to make my self clear. I concede to no man or group any more zeal than
I in contending for all of the rights and duties inherent in American
citizenship. At the same time, I am mindful of certain very practical
realities in the solution and achievement of these ideals and rights which
must be faced.

Let us be prepared to accept opportunities when offered and available.
Let us temper our demands with our own productive capacity. Let us join
hands with all who would in this hour of peril hasten the making up of
the deficiencies of the past; let us remove purely academic argument from
the very practical matter of meeting America's peril.

America must not and will not fall her humblest citizen. I offer the
challenge to the government, I offer it to the Negroes of America. United,
we stand, divided, we fall.

Finally, I conclude with these historic words from the lips of Daniel
Webster, and I quote:

"I was born an American; I live and an American; I shall die an
American; and I intend to perform the duties incumbent upon
me in that capacity to the end of my career. I mean to do
this with absolute disregard of personal consequences. What
are the personal consequences? What is the individual man,
with all the good or evil that may betide him, in comparison
with the good or evil which may befall a great country, and
in the midst of great transactions which concern that country's
fate? Let the consequences be what they will, I am careless.
So man can suffer too much and no man can fall too soon, if
he suffer or if he fall, in the defense of the liberties and
constitution of his country."