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"THE NEGROES' 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 crisis, a background of many many generations having the experience of having utilized force 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 characterises 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 with the colonist 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 landholdings 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 independence".
New Orleans or in the naval engagement with Perry on Lake Erie. The gains of the revolutionary war having been consolidated, a relatively long period of formal peace ensued until the Mexican War found the nation engaged in another contest of a brief duration but during which again the Negro whether as slave or freedom participated.

During these first sixty-seven years of the Republic, the military establishment was inevitably small, consisting mainly of coastal and harbor defense installations and only such mobile forces as were necessary to guard the southern and western frontiers. Thus from the early beginnings, America has never gone 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 unwisely always depended upon meeting an emergency when the emergency appeared, rather than by anticipating the emergency.

Came the Civil War of 1861 to 1865 with the titanic struggle to preserve 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. Likewise 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 hardfought latter 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 eras. However, authorization for two regiments of foot troops, the 24th and 25th 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 interrupted by frontier Indian fighting. In these campaigns, notably the Geronimo campaign these men took an outstanding part.

Civilian Negro military efforts during these four decades were negligible. Late in the 80's a militia or National Guard unit was organized...
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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 national guard units in any of the states except the instances mentioned.

To be sure, quasi-military organizations such as drill teams, uniform banks of many fraternal orders, all designed for parade purposes were popular in many sections. This period saw the graduation of three Negroes from the United States Military Academy, namely Lieuts, Alexander, Flipper and Young.

While it is true that the country as a whole deemphasized militarism 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 from within for any larger effort in preparation for 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. Barring a small but effective navy, we had only an army of nominal size. Again came the unfolding of the traditional American pattern--an immediate and hurried call to the unorganized and untrained citizenry to augment our pitifully small regular army and our partly trained National Guard. The response for the needs at the time was generous and so the Spanish-American War was chalked up as another American victory, although, it cannot be said that we were compelled to utilize but a very limited military force.

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 the emergency was seen over 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--descendants of civil war days--namely the 9th and 10th, 24th and 25th, did acquit themselves magnificently during the Cuban campaign. Following this campaign as so-called "immune regiments" immune to yellow fever, which took a frightful toll of soldier lives during the Cuban campaign. Too, several Negro regiments among them the 48th and 49th Volunteers took part in the Phillipines campaign and later during the Phillipines Insurrection Campaign.

Come peace, and again our military machine was for the most part junked. However out of it came a larger regular army and an increasing realization on the part of the American people that peacetime 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 1916 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 inarticulate 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 E. 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 needed to command the large levies of men needed for a real emergency. So 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 defense.

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 four 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 artilleryman, a sizable number of medican 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 reenacted. Our military machine was largely "scrapped".
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 lateness 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 contribution 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 stevedors and service or labor units.

One of the anomalous 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 much ill feeling between people who should have been and must be stronger than blood brothers—brothers in arms. Who knows but what these hard to believe and hard to understand relationships and actions were not the result of what we would call in 1940—"Fifth 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 relapse to our traditional disinterest in things particularly military. Disarmament, non-aggression pacts, renunciation of war as a national policy, widespread pacifism, ridicule of the honest advice of trained military leaders and a snug comfort 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 a 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 rejection of proposed universal service in which the manpower of the nation beginning at a given age in young manhood 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 1940 nominal representation in the regular army of the four regiments and school detachments, aggregating about 6,000 men was the Negroes' total. Two national guard regiments and the equivalent of a third in 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 arm was our participation in that phase. At long last three small CWTC'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, governments reflect but the national pattern or will
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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 is the keystone 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 cooperation 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 ain't the guns or armanent, or the money they can pay,
   It's the close cooperation that makes them win the day;
It ain'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. Concededly menaced 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 owes 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 that all of us have been guilty of many sins of omission in failing to appreciate the duty of seeking those opportunities in the full American program and at the same time qualifying ourselves 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 stick taking here in November 1940, 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 heri-
tage 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 per-
sonnel and leadership, trained and potential; that we should hasten in 
every way possible the development of militarMy-minded intelligent young 
men ready to accept such training as will enable them to accept the re-
 sponsibilities 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, it seems to me is to hasten the training and commis-
 sioning 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 
55c of the National Defense Act. Small difficulty 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 creat-
ing an interest in things military and the national defense.

With the expansion of ROTC facilities, perhaps facilities would be pro-
vided 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 Fare, 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 non-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 fail 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 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. No man can suffer too much and no man can fall too soon, if he suffer or if he fail, in the defense of the liberties and constitution of his country".