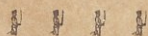


THE NEGRO SOLDIER HIS PART IN THE WORLD WAR



By FRED D. PATTERSON

In appraising the splendid American achievements in the late World War, it is of two-fold interest to ponder over those of the American Colored Soldier. True to an unbroken tradition extending through every conflict in which the United States had been a part, and further still, into the unsettled period of Colonial Days and Indian warfare, the colored soldier has responded freely to the best sentiment and the best aspiration of the best people of the land, and in every instance has aligned himself with those who fought for the right, and who struggled that more and more justice should prevail in the affairs of men.

The English speaking colonists exercised self-determination when they rebelled against French domination, and the ranks of the struggling colonists were in a very material measure recruited from their Negro slaves.

The despotism and oppression of the English Mother Country fired the heart of the faithful slave, and side with his master the colored soldier fought all through the Revolutionary War, and never a Benedict Arnold was found among them. Deaf to the siren call of treason, they heard only the cry of distress at Valley Forge, and the story of the War of Independence records also the lavish sacrifice of the colored soldier that this nation might be born.

Young, weak and small as a Nation, our rights were unregarded in the major affairs of Europe. Stinging from insult, and smarting from the contemptuous indifference on the part of other nations, in desperation we appealed to the final arbitrament of war. Again the colored soldier is true to himself and his destiny. And his record in the War of 1812 is a tribute of unstained loyalty and unexcelled bravery from Lake Erie with Perry to New Orleans with Jackson.

In the coming on of time, when under the sinister influence of a bad cause, the plains of Montezumas resounded to the tread of American armies, the Negro soldier was there doing a soldier's part. But great is the relief to record that what was won for slavery has, in the Providence of God, been held for freedom. The close of the Mexican war found the United States the marvel of the civilized world, so remarkable had been its tremendous development in all things material. A government founded in a wilderness, on principles of the Brotherhood of man, had excited the envy of the world, and the spectacle of a nation that made a peasant boy its chieftan struck terror to the hearts of the hereditary rulers, and the thrones of Europe looked with dismay on a practice that relegated to the scrapheap the privileges and pomp of class.

When the terrible conflict of the Civil War brought our country to the brink of ruin, it is not to be wondered at then that the chorus of titled Europe sang, "Ah, your Republican

Bubble has burst!" Dark days—defeat—discouragement—treason ran riot in the land. A ninety day skirmish became a death conflict. Save the Nation! was the cry, and the colored soldier answered to the call—Oh, how nobly—let Fort Pillow—Port Hudson—and the hellish mines of Petersburg give the answer. Emerged from a baptism of fire—cleansed from ocean to ocean and from Lakes to Gulf, from the cancerous blot of slavery, with new heart, new hopes, new strength, our Nation leaped into the very forefront of civilization.

The self-elected champion of freedom which had fruited so bountifully in her own career, it was our own United States that called the hand of despotic Spain and halted the further exploitation of the Cuban Isle. Not without a struggle, however, was this accomplished. But when the story of the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill was told, the entire nation thrilled with Roosevelt's recital of how the colored soldiers saved the day.

Graves yet are new where lies our dead in foreign fields, eyes yet undried from grief. Ink still is wet that records the solemn pact of peace that marks the closing chapter of this greatest conflict of the ages. Even now our country trembles with the unrest and excitement of tremendous effort and from the burden of preparation and the desperate, invincible onslaught of battle. Lofty in aim, single in purpose, we plunged into the maelstrom of a World War, ignorant and unmindful of age-old interests to which we were a thing apart. Committed to democracy, democracy for Jew, Pole, Irish, Belgian; where freedom was not, there was our concern. Under such an inspiration, of our wealth we gave freely, of our strength we gave without limit. And in every act of war the colored soldier was there. In the trenches, in the serried battle line, in the artillery corps, in the air, he followed your lead. He shared your long marches, your privations, your defeats and your victories, your wounds and your deaths. True to the genius of the Flag and the traditions of his race, he spent the might of his strength against the oppressor of every kind. "No better, truer soldier ever lived," writes Oobb, "than the American Negro Soldier."

It is not conceivable that this soldier shall not be accorded every just acclaim in the land of his birth. I do not believe that his silent, modest claim for fair play shall not be granted. It is not possible that a nation and a Flag dedicated to the glorious purposes—that all men shall be free and justice supreme—shall long continue a single blot upon its escutcheon.

With pride we record the fact that Greenfield and vicinity has given its quota of colored soldiers. Your duty done we welcome you home to a citizenship of larger usefulness and to a devotion to institution, the most beneficent in the history of man.