

BOOKS

Mullen, Robert W., BLACKS IN AMERICA'S WARS, New York: Monad Press, 1973, 96 pp., \$5.00. Reviewed by Carol Babcock, SAFAAR.
(74-7)

(Note: Dr. Mullen is Assistant Professor of Speech at Northern Kentucky State College.)

Dr. Mullen combines in one volume a much needed chronology of Black American participation in America's wars from the Revolution to Vietnam and an in-depth examination of Black attitudes toward these wars. He demonstrates how the Blacks viewed their involvement, often severely curtailed by their white counterparts until an emergency situation dictated Black participation, as a measurement of their loyalty to the country and their worthiness to achieve full citizens' rights. Up until Vietnam, Blacks generally felt that a good war record would help them achieve freedom and equality at home. Though their high expectations were rarely realized, the Blacks continued to believe, until Vietnam, the adage, "country first, rights later." But, Mullen notes, throughout American history a minority of Blacks felt that it was inconsistent to fight for the US and "democracy" while the country continued its undemocratic and constrictive practices. It was not until Vietnam that a solid majority of Afro-Americans significantly changed their views on military participation, seeing the war as a waster of Black youth and as a racist war by whites against the "colored" people of Vietnam who, like the Blacks, were struggling for freedom and self-determination.

Black participation in US wars began with the first casualty of the American Revolution--a Black seaman. The whites, at that time, fearful that arming Blacks would encourage a revolt by the slaves, were loath to allow Blacks in the Continental Army, until the

British started promising Blacks their freedom if they would serve with the Royalists. Thus out-manuevered, the Continental Army was forced to make similar concessions. The Blacks participated admirably in all of the major battles of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, linking the cause of American freedom with their own.

Blacks had a special stake in the Civil War, although Mullen notes that the original issues of the war involved the authority of the Federal government and control over the development of the West, rather than the abolition of slavery. In fact, Blacks were initially prohibited from fighting with the Union Army for fear that some border states would join the South if the war were defined in terms of abolition of slavery. However, the Blacks were needed as replacements and Lincoln, in 1863, abolished slavery both to keep the British from openly supporting the South and as a fighting incentive for the North. The Black goal in the war was obvious, but to achieve it, those who served suffered a mortality rate 40% higher than the white soldiers--because of poor conditions, equipment, medical care, and the fact that they were often used as shock troops in the more hopeless battles. Nevertheless, the Blacks served well, though the desired rewards of the war were not immediately forthcoming.

Many Blacks in the military remained in the West after the Civil War and responded well in the Spanish American War and the Cuban campaign, although some refused to fight until Blacks were commissioned as officers. However, the US campaign against the Philippines aroused more Black dissidence, since many related the goal of Black liberation with the Philippino cause. At the time, all the services were heavily segregated and remained so through WW II. During WW I, Black sentiment favored the Allied cause as the lesser of two evils, despite the poor US record on bettering their conditions. Upon returning to the US, however, after "making the world safe for democracy," Black Americans found that democracy was not secured at home; the KKK was on the rampage again.

The struggle for equal rights continued through WW II, when Blacks were not as enthusiastic as in previous wars. By that time, few believed that fighting honorably for their country would improve the situation at home. In fact, during the war Blacks threatened to strike if the war-time industries and the services were not desegregated; FDR met the first demand and the threat dissipated. Mullen feels that WW II was the turning point in race relations in the US because Blacks were better treated abroad than at home and were no longer content to endure the conditions at home. After the war, the military was desegregated and Black performance improved perceptibly in Korea. The military became known as the most integrated institution in the US, though Mullen contends that this says little for the rest of the country, since unequal treatment still persists in the military.

Blacks in general opposed the Vietnam war for several reasons, says Mullen, quoting numerous Black activists on the subject; primarily, they felt that the US aims in Vietnam were hypocritical, implying that Asian freedom was more valuable than Black freedom and yet was to be achieved violently. Secondly, the Blacks felt a bond of color with the Asians who were similarly oppressed. In addition, the conduct of the war in Vietnam encouraged Afro-Americans to believe the US capable of genocide and to wonder whether Blacks might not be the next target, especially as they suffered proportionately higher casualties in Vietnam. Finally, the Blacks decried the war's waste of resources which could have aided the domestic poor. All these reasons combined to produce the discontent of the Black GI today. Mullen's well-documented volume is an invaluable aid for understanding this discontent, which must be dealt with fairly if the US is to insure its ability to defend itself.