

BOOK REVIEW

Blacks in America's Wars

The Shift in Attitudes from the Revolutionary War to Vietnam

BY ROBERT W. MULLEN

Reviewed by: Larry Dornell, Madison County Mississippi Welfare Department

Professor Mullen unquestionably has done thorough research in the planning and writing of this book. He provides an excellent historical account of black participation in American wars beginning with the Revolutionary War and proceeding through the War in Vietnam. His analysis of the economic and political implications surrounding each war period is unsurpassed and, hence, cannot be dismissed by the reader as being coincidental causation factors. For by deleting or simply omitting those elements would only distort rather than clarify the essential truths that have had such a significant bearing on the interpretations and conceptualizations of these war events.

The book, in addition, details key issues that have, in the past, received minute observation. A case in point here is the high visibility of white racism that has persisted at every level of each branch of the armed forces, which, in turn, has worked toward the disadvantage and impediment of black military advancement. Mullen unequivocally points out that:

The tenacity with which the armed forces maintained segregation, and the contortions it sometimes had to go through to coordinate the efforts of two separate armies—one white and one Black—suggested to many Blacks that the maintenance of segregation seemed more important to the army and the country as a whole than victory over the enemy.

Thus, as one examines the preceding quote by Professor Mullen, it is not difficult to perceive the ‘two-ness’ that W. E. B. DuBois has so skillfully expounded upon in his work, *The Souls of Black Folks*. Even though the way of life and experiences of black Americans are distinctly different from that of whites from a cultural perspective, this cultural differentiation cannot be dispelled or offered as justification for the unrelenting cruelty that blacks have encountered during war as well as during peace time.

While the book is relatively succinct, it answers the demand for a short supplementary text. It also provides the reader with a concise understanding of the relationship that the United States has invariably maintained with its black military personnel. However, for a more detailed analysis of the role of blacks in America's wars, the reader might consult Jack D. Foner's *Blacks and the Military in American History*.

One other outstanding feature of Professor Mullen's book which makes it quite invaluable can be accredited to the amount of attention that he accords to the positive achievements and contributions that black Americans have made toward each United States war victory. History books in general, seldom, if at all, provide the kind of data that will give an adequate overview of the role that blacks have played in American-involved wars. Apart from the usual derogatory discussion of the black

American in slavery and from a framework of a comparison with the European immigrant, the history of America has been one focused primarily on the expansion of white Anglo-Saxon culture. To illustrate this point, for instance, it is unusual to note that Dorie Miller, Navy mess attendant, manned a machine gun and shot down four enemy planes during the attack on Pearl Harbor or that Martin Delany, a former black physician and staunch abolitionist, served as a major during the Civil War.

It is information such as this that makes this book not only a superb book for reading but an excellent reference source as well. The style with which the book was written coupled with meticulous documentation and an exceptional bibliography add a scholarly trait that exceeds that of the mediocre caliber research done on this subject. I would suggest and highly recommend that his book be read by all Americans, particularly black American, for it accomplishes yet another important chapter in the history of Afro-Americans.