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Patriotism: The Price Paid by the African American Soldier

SPECIAL COLLECTION: PATRIOTISM

RESEARCH

TINA B. CRADDOCK

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ABSTRACT

General George S. Patton Jr. noted that the highest obligation and privilege of citizenship is that of bearing arms for one's country. From William Carney of the 54th Massachusetts, who carried the regimental colors during the Battle of Ft. Wagoner, to the Harlem Hellfighters of WWI, the Buffalo soldiers of WWII, and to the eventual desegregation of the military, servicemen and women of color have fought for the right to serve their country. The ideology of patriotism, especially in the contemporary Black soldier, is deeply rooted on the foundational principles of those who served before them: the love of a country that has not always loved them, a willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice, and a desire to serve something greater than themselves. For soldiers of color, something as seemingly simple as serving their country has been anything but simple and has often come at a greater personal sacrifice than their White counterpart. This work will examine patriotism in servicemen and women of color, through the lens of veteran studies, by utilizing a qualitative approach that will allow the voices of those who served and sacrificed to be heard. Veterans who served in the various branches of the military during 20th and 21st century, including serving in combat and war zones, participated in interviews to preserve their stories. Topics included what the term patriotism meant to them; whether they thought that definition has changed over time and why; who or what most impacted their decision to serve their country; how their family and loved ones were impacted by their decisions to serve; their perception of how they were treated, as soldiers, by fellow servicemembers and society; and their perception of the current political climate of our country and how that may shape the next generation of Black soldiers.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Tina B. Craddock
Elizabeth City State University, US
tbcraddock@ecsu.edu

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Upon being granted a meeting with President Abraham Lincoln at the White House in August 1863, Frederick Douglass, for the purpose of recruiting support for the inclusion of Black men to enlist in the US Army stated,

> Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, US, let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship. (Brown, 2018, n.p.)

American Black men and women have been volunteering to support and defend this country since before they were legally entitled to do so; yet nearly every attempt to do so chronicled throughout history has been met with denial, obstacles, and threats of physical harm (Baker, 2016; Reidy, 2001; Webb & Hermann, 2002). The culture of the US military has been one that has covertly, and at times overtly, stated that Black men could not be trusted with a weapon and were not intelligent enough to understand and follow strategic commands in battle (Wintermute, 2012). With very little to gain and everything to lose, Black men and women still wanted to serve. They wanted to contribute to their country through hard work and sacrifice. They felt that by volunteering and working hard their fellow countrymen would find them to be worthy of equality. What they found, however, was resistance from within the military ranks in every branch and at every level. Yet still, they have continued to serve (Baker, 2016; Clark, 2020; Reidy, 2001; & Wintermute, 2012).

This work examines the concept of patriotism through the secondary lens of the African American soldier, including either in their own words or published accounts of what they endured, experienced, and sacrificed in many major conflicts that included the United States, from the colonial period through contemporary conflicts (including Vietnam and Operation Enduring Freedom, which includes both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars). This qualitative case study focuses on the lived experiences of a group of Black veteran soldiers, both men and women, who served in World War II, Vietnam, and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. While the original intent was to bring these multigenerational veterans together to participate in a roundtable discussion on their definition of patriotism and the driving force behind their individual decisions to serve their country, this became an impossible task due, primarily, to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, existing recorded interviews were utilized for the World War II veterans, and telephone and Zoom interviews were utilized for the veterans of Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars. This article provides a brief historical overview of the attempts Black men and women have made to serve in the various branches of the military, what other academics have written about these attempts, the method by which volunteer participants were sought for this study, their individual perspectives and finally a discussion on patriotism—how the definition and narratives shared by the African American veteran participants in this work add to the ever-growing oral histories of the African American veteran's experiences in the United States Armed Forces.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this work focus primarily on the amount of the case study participants. With the number of surviving veterans of World War II substantially waning due to the eight decades since the war ended, one recording consisting of four Black World War II veterans (residing in North Carolina at the time the recorded interviews) was utilized. As part of a grant, faculty and staff from Elizabeth City State University conducted and recorded the interview (Whelan, 2021). Additionally, only one state Veteran's Administration office, located in Raleigh, North Carolina, was contacted regarding potential participants. This was the only office utilized because it was indicated, by other local Veteran's Administrative offices contacted, to be the appropriate contact on a state-wide level. The implications of the limitations are that the sample size is not large enough to make generalized assumptions that the individual experiences conveyed by these participants are representative of what most Black veterans experienced while serving in the military. Additionally, there were only two Black women soldiers interviewed: one from the World War II era and one from the more contemporary conflicts. Again, generalizations or assumptions that what these two women experienced was representative of what most female soldiers experienced would not be appropriate. The sample size, however, is appropriate for a case study approach, which speaks directly to the individuals' experiences while serving in the US military.

BACKGROUND

EARLY CONFLICTS

Since the colonial period, Black men and women have taken up arms in defense of their country. They viewed their service, especially in a time of crises, as proof of their loyalty as well as hoping that in doing so it would secure them more equitable treatment. During this period, it was noted that race was not a criterion for inclusion or exclusion and that local militias welcomed both enslaved and freed Blacks (Webb & Hermann, 2002). In 1639, however, Virginia

and other colonies enacted laws that specifically excluded Blacks from bearing arms due to fear of slave uprisings. During the Revolutionary War, when the Continental Army specifically excluded Blacks, the British offered them freedom in exchange for fighting for the Crown. This however, according to Webb and Hermann (2002), was rarely honored; those who could serve the Continental Army were considered to be low-level personnel, without a rank reference, and were simply carried on the roll as "A Negro man" (p. 2) to remain a nameless commodity.

As with all the early conflicts of the US, Blacks were only allowed to serve as a last resort, when there was a shortage of White soldiers and sailors. They were then contained in all Black regiments. The exception was the US Navy, which was racially integrated, although far from equal. Reidy (2001) noted that nearly one-fourth of those who enlisted in the Navy during the Civil War, nearly 18,000 men and 11 women, were Black. Those men and women, however, were relegated to the lowest-level tasks and pay scales and were referred to as "contrabands."

In January 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which paved the way for Blacks to be allowed to serve in the US military. The next month, Massachusetts Governor John Andrew, issued the call for Black soldiers. More than 1,000 responded and the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, under the leadership of Robert Gould Shaw was formed (Brown, 2018; *History.com*, 2021). By the time the Civil War ended, nearly 180,000 Black men had served with approximately 10,000 dying in battle and another 30,000 from illness or infection. Black soldiers who served in the 54th and 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantries during the Civil War, wrote letters to their loved ones about their daily lives including their health, views on death, unequal pay, and for a continued love of the country they were fighting for (Brown, 2016).

WORLD WAR I

In April 1917, World War I saw Blacks rushing to recruiting stations to, again, volunteer their services, yet they were initially denied acceptance. The Selective Service Act was implemented the next month and did not exclude Blacks. Nearly three million were registered. However, it was noted they were only accepted into the Navy and only allowed to serve as coal heavers, cooks, or messmen. They were barred completely from the Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Army Aviation Corps (Webb & Hermann, 2002). Wintermute (2012) found that from the onset of World War I there was a concerted effort to deny, or at the very least restrict, the participation by Black men and women. Yet despite these efforts, the segregated Black regiments continued to serve with distinction. At the conclusion of World War I, when returning soldiers were welcomed home as heroes that included ticker tape parades, Blacks were not afforded the same level of welcome and, in fact, returned home to the continued racism they faced before honorably serving their country, which included a lack of viable opportunities to earn a living. Wintermute (2012) quoting Slotkin, stated:

> These men had to fight for the right to fight for their country: overcoming the reluctance of White politicians to authorize a Negro regiment, the violent antagonism of the Jim Crow town in which they had to train, the War Department's unwillingness to accept them for federal service, and finally the refusal of AEF commanders to use them as anything but labor troops. (p. 277)

This same treatment of Black troops continued into the second World War.

WORLD WAR II

Clark (2020, August 5) noted that over one million Black men served in the US military during World War II and despite their courage under fire and a willingness to defend their country alongside their fellow White servicemen, they continued to be treated like second-class citizens. Baker et al. (2016, November 27) described instances where Black veterans, returning home after the war, were attacked by fellow White passengers on the buses and trains transporting them home. World War II would see the reemergence of the Buffalo Soldiers, initially consisting of the Black ninth and 10th Cavalry regiments, named by their Native Indian adversaries during the Indian Campaigns in the later part of the 1800s. The Indians, according to Webb and Hermann (2002), named them after an animal they considered to be sacred. They were also one of the few Black troops to see combat (Callard, 2009, November 6). World War II would also see the first Black Marines who would be trained and later referred to as the Montford Point Marines as well as a significant number of Black females volunteering for military service. Whelan (2021) recently recorded the oral histories of four such World War II veterans to ensure their narratives could be preserved. They will be discussed further in the case study section.

VIETNAM

The Vietnam War ushered in a new generation of soldiers, and for many poor and uneducated Black men, this meant being conscripted into a fully integrated Army. For many, this was yet another opportunity to prove their patriotism (Raynor, 2015). To others, it was a familial tradition; the expectation was for sons to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers who had fought in previous wars

defending their country. According to Raynor (2015) military service was an opportunity for a young man to develop his masculine identity. As with previous generations, many Black men felt that it was one of the few options open to them due to the color of their skin (Raynor, 2015). She further noted,

> "Establishing a strong, trustworthy work ethic helped him defy racist stereotypes while, at the same time, allowing him to be fully aware of the intentions of his comrades" (p. 5)

While Webb and Hermann (2002) noted the military hierarchy broadly declared that racism and racial discrimination did not exist in the military, due to what they described as a "zero tolerance policy" (p. 16), they also acknowledged that some cases reported seemed to indicate the contrary. Hampton (2013) noted that while Black soldiers fought a war in Southeast Asia, they were simultaneously fighting personal battles for equality, which they sought through both diligence and excellence in their military performances. Even with these additional attempts to prove themselves as equals on both the battlefront and home front, Chow and Bates (2020, June 12) found that Blacks were disproportionately jailed or more severely disciplined compared their White counterparts and were promoted less often. And while neither Black nor White soldiers were welcomed home after the highly unpopular Vietnam War, Black soldiers, again, returned to what Fendrich (1972) referred to as second-class citizenship, where service and sacrifice for their country was neither appreciated nor celebrated. Additionally, when they turned to civilian or government agencies specifically designed to assist veterans in securing employment after their military service, they discovered there was very little opportunity for a Black man who had been trained in combat.

CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS

Finally, while the US Armed Forces have officially been integrated for over seventy years, and the military has made great strides, Armey et al. (2019) still noted there to be instances where the Black soldier's military service experience significantly differed from those of their White fellow servicemembers. The most prevalent noted was through examining administrative records for 100,000 Army personnel that served in the early phases of either the Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts. They noted that Black soldiers were less likely to have been deployed or if deployed they were less likely to have faced intense combat which significantly impacted their ability for promotion. Additionally, Pope (2019) also noted that in the early phases of these conflicts, women were barred from duties that included direct combat. That, however, changed in 1994, marking a significant step forward for female soldiers, including those of color. They began to be given the same opportunities to serve their country as their male counterparts and while this is not specifically racial, in nature, it should be noted that as of 1993 Black women made up approximately thirty-three percent of female Army recruits; twenty-two percent of female Navy recruits; seventeen percent of female Marine recruits; and eighteen percent of female Air Force recruits (Pope, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This institutional review board-approved research utilized a qualitative case study framework. Pogrebin (2003) noted that the strength of qualitative research is the emphasis on specific situations and the people that experienced them using oral history to explain phenomenon. Creswell (2014) noted that case study designs are found in many fields and allow the researcher to develop an in-depth analysis within cases that are bound by both time and activity. This approach typically involves conducting interviews, which allows for the feelings and emotions of those most impacted to be conveyed to the reader. This, from a humanistic standpoint, may be more impactful (Creswell, 2014). This study is also transcendental due to the passage of time between the actual event and the recollection (Hall et al., 2020).

Although in-person interviews and a roundtable discussion with participants was initially the preferred methods to capture the sentiments of the study participants, due to the age and geographic locations of the participants, as well as the health risks involved in attempting an in-person setting during the time of the global pandemic, it was determined that Zoom calls and telephone interviews would be the safest way to proceed. Recruitment took place through the Inter-Agency Coordinator for the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. This contact provided a list of veterans who may be willing to participate, including veterans who had served during the Vietnam War, Grenada, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom. Participants who agreed to participate (See ***Table 1***) served in the US Army, US Marine Corps, and US Navy. Eight names and contact information were provided (six males and two females). Initial contact was made by the researcher, via email, which explained the purpose of the research. Of those, six completed an interview, one did not respond, and one initially responded but later opted not to participate. These individuals in addition to the four World War II veterans who had been

interviewed and recorded by Whelan (2021) serve as the case study participants.

All "live" interviews were conducted between March 22 and March 29, 2021. Participants were scheduled for the interview method of their choice: a Zoom call or a telephone call. During each "live" interview a set of open-ended questions were asked pertaining to (a) the branch of the military they served in and (b) whether their service included time spent during conflict; (c) their years of service, primary duty and rank; (d) their individual definition of patriotism and whether that had changed and/or evolved over time due to either their service or to some other extraneous occurrence; (e) whether or not there was a driving force behind their decisions to serve in the military; (f) their own personal experiences of serving in the military; (g) what their thoughts were on our current political climate and whether they felt that would have any bearing in shaping the next generation of Black soldiers.

Each participant in the live interviews agreed to have their names included as a means of preserving their own narrative of what they experienced while performing their patriotic duty for a country they loved unconditionally. For these case studies there were three primary research focus areas: (a) How Black veterans describe patriotism; (b) How these veterans describe their experiences in the military; and (c) How, if any, those military experiences impacted their concept of patriotism.

CASE STUDIES

HENRY LEGENDRE

Former US Army Corporal Henri A. LeGendre was part of the ninth Cavalry known as the Buffalo Soldiers. His story began in Harlem, New York, when in 1942, he came out of high school and volunteered for the Army. At the time, the Buffalo Soldiers were his only option. His basic training took him to Fort Clare, Texas, which was the oldest cavalry base in the US. He recalled that his basic training included equestrian horsemanship and that a symbol of successfully completing his training included getting his spurs, a cherished item he still had nearly 70 years later. He also noted that he fought racism from day one in the military from both fellow servicemen and from civilians around the bases he was stationed. As a Black soldier, the highest rank he was able to achieve was the rank of Corporal. He was proud of his service to his country. He stood up for what he believed in and loved the military because it afforded him a life he may otherwise not have been able to have. "For a Black man with no education, joining the military was the best option available" (Whelan, 2021, 31:14). Through the military he learned discipline and respect, something he noted to be lacking today in American culture. After returning home he was able to complete his education, receiving a degree in architecture, which enabled him to build a comfortable life for himself and his family.

VETERAN'S NAME & DATES OF SERVICE	BRANCH SERVED	CONFLICTS SERVED IN	MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY
Jabbar Surles 1992–2008	United States Army Sgt Major (Ret)	• Operation Iraqi Freedom • Operation Enduring Freedom	• United States Army Special Operations Command • Sgt. Mgr. Office of Special Warfare • Special Operations Medic
James Bethea USMC 1968–1972 US ARMY NG 1975–1994	• USMC: E-4 Corporal • US Army NG (Ret): E-7 Sgt First Class	• Vietnam 1968–1972 • Desert Storm 1975–1994	• 0351: anti-tank assault; infantry • fire support Sgt
Diana Graham 2005–2006	United States Army National Guard: E-4	Operation Iraqi Freedom	505th engineer battalion Battalion-level patient administrator
Anthony Jones 1986–2007	United States Navy: Petty Officer (Ret)	No direct combat deployment	• Personnel Specialist aboard *USS Independence/ USS Taylor* • Chief of Naval Operations: Pentagon
Jerome Archible 1969–1971	United States Army: E-4	Vietnam	1st Cavalry 552 Second MOS 11 Bravo; Infantry
Rodney Anderson 1979–2012	United States Army: Major Gen (Ret)	• Grenada • Operation Desert Storm • Operation Desert Shield • Operation Enduring Freedom	• 319 artillery commander • 82 airborne- command artillery battery • Pentagon Staff officer • Pentagon joint staff plans officer • Pentagon deputy director of army resources

Table 1 Name and Demographics for Participants in Live Interviews

JOHN R. THOMPSON

Former US Marine Corporal John R. Thompson was part of the Montford Point Marines. He recalled volunteering in November 1942 after watching a film clip that played before a movie in the theater he worked in. The clip depicted Marines storming out of an amphibious vehicle onto a beach. He recalls thinking, "now that's what a real man does" (Whelan, 2021, 5:13). His training mostly took place on the drill field and on the last week of basic training they trained with M-1 rifles for record. His marksmanship earned him his first stripe and promoted him to Private First Class. He talked about the fact that there was only a railroad track that separated Montford Point from Camp Lejeune, but it may as well have been an ocean because Black marines were not allowed to cross the track into Camp Lejeune. The highest rank he achieved while serving in World War II was also Corporal. He served in major conflict areas including Okinawa and Guam.

He recalled the same segregated ways followed him from the US into Europe. Racism extended to the local civilian population, he thought, because White soldiers arrived earlier and incited fear in the local population about the Black soldiers coming. His perception was that Japanese and German prisoners of war were treated more humanely than the Black soldiers. They accepted it, however, because it was what they had to do to fight for their country. He was ultimately awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. It was at this award ceremony that he recalls encountering the first Black general he had ever seen. In speaking with him, the general referred to him as "sir," which Thompson said took him by surprise. He recalled being told by that general that Black soldiers had advanced up through the ranks of the military hierarchy because of his (i.e., Thompson's) and other early Black soldiers' efforts. In reflecting, he indicated that the education he was able to get because of his military service was the best thing that ever happened to him, and as with LeGendre, afforded him the ability to provide for his family.

ELIZABETH B. JOHNSON

Former US Army Private First Class Elizabeth B. Johnson served with the 6888th Postal Battalion. She recalled seeing the posters of Uncle Sam hanging in her local post office claiming, "We want you!" After seeing the poster numerous times, she said that she thought, "Well, just maybe you've got me!" (Whelan, 2021, 6:10). Johnson received her training at Fort Devens in Massachusetts and described it as not hard but busy. During her time in the Army, she drove supply trucks and was later sent overseas to England and France where her company was part of 855 Black women members of the Women's Army Corp (WAC) who were put in charge of sorting through and redirecting millions of undelivered pieces of mail, a task she proudly shared they were able to complete in 8 months (Whelan, 2021). Pope (2019) noted that the backlog of mail in need of redirection numbered in the millions and in places the stacks were more than eight feet tall. Johnson felt that her contributions to the war effort were meaningful because mail was such an important part of a soldier's life. It was their connection to home, and she was proud of the part she played in helping get those to the men fighting for our country. When her duty to her country was complete, Johnson returned home and went back to school to earn her teaching certificate.

CHARLES STEVENS

Retired Army Master Sergeant Charles Stevens served in the 555th "Triple Nickle" Battalion. He also volunteered to serve his country and traveled to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, for his training as a medical corpsman. After his basic training he recalled asking if he could go to jump school and was put into the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion. He recalled that basic training consisted of physical training (PT) for breakfast, PT for lunch, PT for dinner, and PT for bedtime. It ultimately made him into what he described as an "Airborne kickin' machine" (Whelan, 2021, 8:35). He described it as the good life, recalling he was part of the first troops that had been ordered to be integrated, which was met with resistance from his fellow White servicemembers. During his time as a soldier, he was trained as a clinical specialist, which he indicated required him to complete an additional year of training. The 555th also carried the nickname "Smoke Jumpers" because they were routinely tasked with putting out fires caused by incendiary balloons the Japanese deployed that landed and exploded along the Oregon coast.

Stevens credited the military for affording him the opportunity to have a productive life in which he was able to raise a family. After retiring from the military, he continued his education receiving graduate degrees in both math, science, and in school administration. He reflected on growing up in a segregated community, his time in the military being segregated, and yet when he walked into a school as a teacher, the classroom was integrated. His hope, he recalled, was that the young faces of the next generation he was tasked with molding and shaping would not grow up to be racist.

RODNEY JOHNSON

Retired Army Major General Rodney Johnson served for 33 years, beginning in May 1979, and continuing until his retirement in September 2012. He served in conflicts including Grenada, Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Afghanistan. During his distinguished military career,

he served in multiple high-level capacities including commanding the 319 Artillery regiment in Fort Bragg, North Carolina; 82nd Airborne Artillery Battery; the Aide-de-Camp to Lieutenant General Calvin A. H. Waller, Commander, I Corps and Deputy Commander in Chief, United States Central Command; and during Operation Desert Shield/Storm served as Executive Assistant to General Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon. Additionally, he completed his master's degree in strategic planning from the Naval War College. As a master parachutist, he served four tours in the 82nd Airborne Division and completed 125 parachute jumps. He completed combat deployments to Grenada, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan where he was responsible for governance, development, and the rule of law. His final duty station before retirement was serving as Acting Commander of the 18th Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg.

He defined patriotism as "Taking an oath to give the last full measure, one's life, to protect and defend others and our way of life!" From his perspective, every American should be proud to live in a society where people of such character and conviction volunteer to give their lives for others. He described himself as a proud soldier for life. His concept of patriotism began to be defined by his father who was a World War II veteran. He described his father's generation of soldier as knowing when they left their homes and families to go to war, they would not be returning until the war was over or until they died. Knowing this, they still chose to serve.

He recalled his father talking later in life about what it felt like to serve his country in a segregated military, noting that they were even segregated on ships that took them into battle. He talked about the irony of being allowed to fight together, bleed together, and die together, yet when his father returned home from the war, he was not allowed to drink from the same water fountain. Some of the memories were too painful for his father to talk about, but when Major General Anderson thinks of patriotism, his father's face is the first image that comes to mind. A man who valiantly fought for his country and for the future of his family, yet when he returned home it was not to the hero's welcome that we see depicted in movies, but to a nation that afforded him few rights. His father, as most parents, wanted more for his children and he insisted that they receive the very best education they could.

Major General Anderson was motivated by young people that raised their hands and volunteered to serve in the armed forces and said that it caused him to always strive to give them the best leadership and management that he could. One of the most difficult tasks he was ever faced with was representing the Army at several funerals of those who died in the service of their country—a task he undertook 20 times. He recalled that the memory of speaking at the gravesite or offering a prayer or a hug to a loved one grieving is seared in his mind when he thinks about what it means to be a patriot of this country.

> As a soldier, you wear the American flag on the shoulder of your uniform. You know that if you fall there will be fellow servicemembers that will come to get you to bring you home, and that the nation will never forget you or leave you behind.

That, he noted, was of the things that makes American soldiers second to none and fearless in combat. It starts with the warrior ethos: "I will never leave a fallen comrade."

He recalled that when in an area of conflict and a comrade does fall, they are draped in the flag and moved through the camp. Everyone comes out to pay their respect to a hero—it is a solemn moment that serves to strengthen the resolve of completing their mission. These are the things he equates with patriotism—honor, solidarity, service, and sacrifice. To him, that means a nation founded on fairness and justice, and equality for all. Those are the things men and women of the armed forces fight and die for every day.

In considering the treatment of Black soldiers from the time of his father's service until the conclusion of his own, he thinks that the military is at the forefront of social change. He supported his statement by pointing out that the Army desegregated in the 1950s. He also referenced the Buffalo Soldiers, who were the first group of Black soldiers to form their own units during segregation and were well respected as military soldiers. He noted that as society changes so too does the military and acknowledged there were distinct differences between serving in the Army during the Vietnam War and serving in his era, with the most prominent difference being conscription versus volunteer service. As he put it, "It makes a substantial difference in who you are and why you are there. It also makes a substantial difference in job performance while serving." Major General Anderson shared that the Army's values serve as benchmarks: teamwork, loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.

While acknowledging that there are cases of discrimination in the military and instances where people may not have necessarily been treated fairly due to prejudices, he feels that the Army has less instances of prejudice and discrimination than exists elsewhere. The rationale being that Army leaders do not have time to contemplate who they are going to discriminate against, but rather focus on how to best get the job they have been tasked with completed to the best of their ability. He noted,

> Excellence is the hedge against anything negative that someone might say about you. We all have individual perceptions of people based on our first visual inspection, it's human nature and often something we unconsciously do. When you see someone in uniform, however, that association is what identifies them even before the color of their skin.

Regarding the impact the current social justice movements may have had on the next generation of Black soldiers, Major General Anderson said that he does not believe that the nature of man has changed in that what people teach their children continues. For example, children are not born with the innate ability to hate or to feel themselves superior over another; that is a learned behavior, often taught by parents or parental figures. The military, he thinks, must continue to reinforce their primary principles and values. Further, he shared that every American should be outraged at what took place on January 6, 2021 at the United States Capital, noting that the individuals that breached the Capital building not only assaulted the concept of democracy, but also assaulted the rule of law and everything that gives us our rights as citizens of this country, "What must be addressed is how and why Americans have gotten to the point that they feel doing something like that was appropriate." He noted that while they decry doing this in the name of love of country, their actions speak just the opposite. Finally, he said that we need to reestablish who we are as Americans, noting,

> Nothing that has happened in my life has moved us closer to chaos than January 6th. We came close to losing our democracy. Having served with dictators and understanding fascism, we really need to find ourselves as a nation and figure out who we are and the values that we hold in order to move forward. That is the most pressing issue.

JEROME ARCHIBLE

Former US Army Specialist Jerome Archible was drafted when he was in the 12th grade of high school. He recalled having to get a letter from his principal that would allow him to complete his senior year and graduate before beginning his military service. On June 6, 1970, he reported for basic training at Fort Bragg and then spent 8 months at Fort Steward, Georgia, for his Advanced Individual Training. He served in Vietnam with the First Cavalry 552 with a second military occupational specialty of Army Infantrymen, Eleven Bravo, for 11 months and 5 days. He recalled when he arrived back home after serving his country, that it was not to a parade or a celebration or even a pat on the back. He returned to what he felt were very limited civilian job opportunities and even less assistance from the Veterans Administration— especially for a Black man with only a high school education. He had been trained in the infantry; a job he described as the low-life jobs that many Black soldiers were assigned. While this served a purpose as a soldier, it did little to prepare him for life once he returned home.

He talked about taking tests before being assigned his duty in the military and said, "If you did not score high enough you were assigned to the lower-level jobs including tire repairman or shoe repairman." He had been denied the opportunity to attend college prior to being drafted and felt that put him at an immediate disadvantage. Former Specialist Archible described being sent to a country he knew nothing about and, while soldiers of mixed races fought together, they were otherwise segregated. His perception was that the officers, a majority of whom were White, would send Black soldiers into potentially dangerous situations ahead of White soldiers. He recalled being called the "N" word while assigned to a motor pool detail at Fort Stewart, Georgia, because he told a White soldier that he would need to wash his jeep off before it could be serviced. Within 2 weeks of that exchange, he found himself in Vietnam.

When former Specialist Archible thinks of patriotism, what first comes to mind are the way that Blacks and Whites are against each other. He sadly recalled that his great-grandfather was a sharecropper and his uncle fought in World War II. From his perspective, things had not changed all that much from how his uncle was treated as a returning veteran to how he was treated upon his return from Vietnam. He also recalled being taught as a child not to look a White man in the eye when speaking to him but to look at the ground. "He was too good for me to look him in the eyes. But he isn't today." He noted that there were still people that hate, and people that do not want a Black man or woman to move forward in life or have any measure of success. He felt that Blacks must prove themselves worthy of just being United States citizens. To him, patriotism seems to be more about equity and equality. It frustrated and saddened him that he laid down his life for what he says is the greatest country on earth, but when he returned home, he was still not recognized as an equal human being. The lesson it taught him was to teach his children to treat people better than he had been treated because hate was not something you were born with, but rather something you were taught.

Regarding the relevance of social movements of today versus those of the 1950s and 1960s, former Specialist Archible thought they are different because, "There was

so much hidden back then versus today's technology that allows someone to take a photo or post a video that everyone in the world could see it within a matter of seconds." Back then, he said, people would be hanged or just disappear. He happily noted that today we see all races coming together in support for equality for people of color. He is troubled, however, by the events of January 6th, especially those who carried the US flag and then weaponized it. "We fought for that flag; no country is better to live in than the USA. That's why everyone is trying to get here".

JABBAR SURLES

Retired US Army Sergeant Major Jabbar Surles served his county from 1992 until he retired in 2008. During his distinguished military career, he was part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom with the United States Army Special Operations Command. His military occupational specialty was Special Operations Medic. He defined patriotism as serving one's country to the best of one's ability in whatever capacity. He felt fortunate to have been able to serve stating, "not everyone gets the honor to serve for as long as I did." He described service as filling a void within our country and giving one's all towards that end.

His definition of patriotism has changed over time, a fact he attributes to both age and maturity. He also said that his thought process and beliefs had evolved throughout his years of military service. He comes from a family of military members including his father, uncle, stepfather, and cousins—all individuals who honorably served from the Vietnam War to the present. He admitted that he did not initially join the military because of a sense of patriotism, although that came once he was entrenched in the culture, but to finance a college education.

He noted jokingly, that acclimating to the military structure and culture was an easy transition for him because of the way he was brought up. He was "prepped" for the military at an early age by influential male familial role models. Sergeant Major Surles credited his uncle, a Vietnam veteran, and the man he described as being his first male role model, with being the one who initially influenced his decision to serve. He described him as epitomizing the character of a soldier: a tall, lean, Black male that carried himself well. He had an aura of pride. He also credited his stepfather, who came into his life as a teenager, with influencing his decision as well. His mother, he noted, was the only one that was not initially supportive of his decision to serve his country in the military, but nonetheless supported his decision to serve something greater than himself. He did not initially intend to make the military a career but does not regret ultimately doing so as his efforts afforded him opportunities few Americans realize.

> When discussing racism and discrimination within the ranks of the military he noted, The Army doesn't care what color your skin is. The job of the US Army is to serve a purpose to protect and defend this country. The Army throws you all into the mix and then trains you to work together and defend the person next to you.

When asked whether he had ever personally experienced racism within the ranks of the military he responded that he had, but quickly added that he took personal responsibility for putting himself in the position of giving the other individual the power to assert adding, "when you put yourself in a situation, you sometimes give others the power to determine your destiny because of your wrongdoing." He blamed his experience, in part, due to his own level of immaturity as well as how he was perceived (i.e., confident versus arrogant) by other soldiers. This, he said, is sometimes magnified by young black males. His perspective was that while racism may be present in the military it is not prevalent.

He described our current political climate as troublesome noting, "Instead of us thinking for ourselves and ensuring we are well informed before we make smart decisions, we are allowing others to think for us." Some of the more recent rhetoric, he noted, has allowed for more extremist's views to be vocalized on the national stage. This, whether intentional or unintentional, serves to amplify racism and allows those groups to essentially weaponize their agendas. Social justice movements, he felt, are more powerful today than those of previous generations because we are all connected to some form of social media platform. He pointed to the 2020 killing of George Floyd and the fact that citizens around the world were able to view what happened and raise their own voices in protest. He found those peaceful protests to be a good thing because it helped bring to light racism and colorism noting, "It's the brightest light out there right now. It may end up dimming a bit in different areas of our country, but the light won't go out."

His hope is that these bright lights will not shape the next generation of Black soldiers. When asked why, his response was that we should all be striving to be colorblind and what is occurring in society should not be allowed to influence the operations of the United States military. "The military is our national defense and if you have what is going on in society seep into young Black men who then apply that to their work environment, it would not be a good recipe for success." Having served most of the later part of his career

in special operations, where most of the leadership faces are still White, he took on the responsibility of carrying himself as a representative for all who look like him. He was the first Black male in the position that he held, but he indicated that he did not want to be the only or the last. He noted that as a senior non-commissioned officer (NCO) Black soldier it was a responsibility he proudly carried.

DIANA GRAHAM

Former US Army National Guard Specialist Diana Graham was the only female participant in this "live" study. She was attached to an aviation unit that deployed during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The unit she was attached to, the 505th Engineer Battalion, was not her assigned unit, but one she was transferred to so that the unit met deployment numbers required for that unit to deploy. She indicated that it was difficult being put with a unit where she knew no one (she was the only one from her unit transferred) and then suddenly deployed into a war zone. She described herself while in the military as being, "A low-level foot soldier that caused a lot of disruption in the norm so that others could have an easier time." Initially she was doing the same job that she had been while in her original unit, part of the Army Automated Logistical Specialist (MOS 92A), but indicated that due to the amount of racism and sexism she experienced, while on deployment, she began to transition into another area and became a patient administrator where she oversaw the running of an aid station.

She was most proud of that work; because of her efforts, nearly 80% of the military personnel received their appropriate disability. This, she noted, was due to the paperwork she completed while they were deployed and then ensured followed the soldier back to the states. She felt grateful to have been trained in that new area because she felt, otherwise, she would have cried herself to sleep each night over the mistreatment she received in the motor pool. The treatment she received with the unit she was attached to for deployment was nothing she had ever experienced with her old unit doing the same job.

She defined patriotism as pride of the red, white, and blue. She considered herself a patriot and noted that she has three miniature flags in her car that, according to her, serve a dual purpose: (a) they remind her that she honorably served her country, and (b) they provide a level of comradery, whereby she feels she could go into what she described as the most racist part of the country and if she got out of her car with her Army hat and the flags in her car, she would not be viewed as a Black woman that may be a threat, but rather as a veteran.

By her own acknowledgement she agreed that her definition of patriotism had changed over time, sharing that before she went into the service she could have cared less about the military, about veterans, or about their families. She had family members who had served in various branches but did not feel the military was her cup of tea. She attended drill each month because she had volunteered to do so and there was an expectation that she fulfill her obligation. It was not until she returned home from her deployment and watched those who had served lose their homes, struggle with mental health issues that corresponded to being deployed during times of conflict, and have trouble making the transition from military to civilian life that she began to see things differently. She described this as her "ah-ha" moment.

That "moment" has now evolved into her life's work and personal mission driving her to start her own project management consulting firm. She described this as bringing dreams and visions to reality by creating what she referred to as a trifecta model, where she and her team manage people, products, and change through speaking, training, and a development division. Her company has formed partnerships with community colleges, various trade industries, and with other entrepreneurs, including the US Department of Veterans Affairs, to ensure veterans receive all the benefits they are entitled to. The project she is most proud of, however, is the Veterans Life Center that she took from dream to reality. She proudly described it as a multi-million-dollar facility that can house up to 50 males and 50 females and offers 21st century transitioning to veterans with an objective of having them become completely self-sufficient within a 2-year period.

Finally, of the January 6th incident, she referred to it as domestic terrorism and noted that people continually show us who they truly are and we, as a country, are choosing not to believe them: "This is the 21st century and we see we have no growth as a country." She described our current political climate as "raggedy" saying that she was so disappointed in what we have become as a country. She even went so far as to acknowledge that she is grateful that she no longer wears the unform. What has happened has served to strengthen her resolve to work harder for those, like her, who have served their country and yet continue to struggle.

JAMES BETHEA

James Bethea served in two branches of the military: in the United States Marine Corps from 1968 until 1972 and in the United States Army National Guard from 1975 until his retirement in 1994. While in the Marine Corps he rose to the rank of Corporal and was deployed to Vietnam. While in the US Army National Guard he rose to the rank of Sgt. First Class and was deployed during Operation Desert Storm. In the Marine Corps, his job was with the 0351, as an anti-tank assault man. He served with an infantry company

doing infantry operation patrols that included guarding various facilities. In the Army National Guard, he was part of a fire support squadron where he was involved in the planning and coordination of organic and inorganic fire support, including air artillery and offensive and defensive fire planning with an armory unit.

He indicated that patriotism meant that an individual was willing to defend their country and way of life. "It is something you believe in," he said. He felt that it is our duty, as citizens of the United States, to defend the country that we live in. He acknowledged that his definition has probably altered over time. He referenced seeing people swinging the term "patriot" around while simultaneously trashing our democracy and calling THAT patriotism. That, he said, really bothers him. He noted, "As a citizen I have a duty to defend it from all enemies foreign and domestic. I didn't realize we had so many domestic." He equated what he witnessed on January 6th at the US Capital Building with the day the last Marine left Vietnam—a turning point in his life that made him question all the things he believed in.

As a 19-year-old Marine, he said that he was not really concerned about the geopolitical situation in the world. It was his duty to serve, and he did it to the best of his ability—a belief he still holds today. He volunteered for the Marine Corps so that he would not be drafted into the Army for Vietnam. He volunteered with three of his fellow classmates and they all trained at Parris Island. He recalled fighting for his country while at the same time 10,000 miles away, there were protests of Black youth who simply wanted to go into a bowling center. It, again, made him question why he was defending a country that, back home, did not recognize those that looked like him as equal US citizens. He is not, however, sorry that he served.

While serving in Vietnam he was part of Kilo Company Third Battalion, 36 Marines. He acknowledged there was a lot of racism and prejudices within the military during his time in Vietnam, but that there was solidarity within the ranks of the Black soldiers. He said he never really experienced what he perceived as racism personally but heard stories of other Black soldiers who had. While serving he met a lot of White men that he would have laid down his life for and he knew, without question, they would do the same for him. In the Marine Corps there was a brotherhood that transcended the color of someone's skin; "I would not have been able to live with myself if I thought I hadn't done everything within my power to make sure my fellow Marines were able to return home to their families—the same as me." The Marine Corps instilled in him certain values that have continued to serve him for a lifetime: perseverance and determination. When asked about his return from Vietnam, he shared that he and three of his friends were robbed the first night they returned to the states, in March 1970. Even with that, he was happy to be home. There were no parades for these returning veterans and it would be decades before anyone would thank him for his service.

After returning from Vietnam, he returned to finish his education obtaining not only a bachelor's degree in business administration, but also a master's degree in special education. He worked as a lineman for the power company for 24 years and spent 15 years in the classroom. His older brother, John, is the individual who most impacted his decision to volunteer specifically for the Marine Corps. He admired the way he carried himself. His brother also served in both the Marine Corps and the Army—he jokingly indicated that it seemed to be a family tradition. He shared that in 2020 he had a nephew that graduated from West Point and another that graduated from the Naval Academy. He thinks the next generation of Black soldiers will be impacted by the current social justice movements,

> Certain individuals will still be willing to serve, but they are going to ask more questions about why they are choosing to serve when they can't walk down a street in their own country without someone making negative assumptions about them.

ANTHONY JONES

Former US Navy Petty Officer First Class Anthony Jones served for 21 years and 4 months from January 1986 until April 2007. While not directly involved in conflicts, he was sent to patrol areas of conflict. On his last duty station, aboard the USS Taylor, he served in the capacity of personnel specialist, which required him to maintain the personnel records and pay entitlements of sailors onboard and to ensure their records were properly closed out when they left the ship. He also served on the USS Independence serving the Chief of Naval Operations at the Pentagon for three and a half years, conducting manpower analysis and logistics for supply and duty stations during the Base Realignment and Closure.

He noted quite simply that patriotism is the love of and dedication to one's country. It also included doing what was necessary for one's country to succeed. The concept of patriotism, in its truest form, has changed from his time serving in the military until now. He added that people have added to the definition of what patriotism means to fit what they want it to be.

He said there was no one who impacted his decision to volunteer—he described it as a rash decision—but one that he does not regret. He had two brothers in the military before him and they did not acclimate to the military way of life. Neither of them completed their service. He shared

that he was walking down the street one day and walked past the recruiting office. He walked in and went to the first open door. It happened to be the one for the Navy recruiter. When he shared the news with his family, he said that his mother thought it was strange since his older brothers had not done well with the military structure. He decided to forge his own path, took everything day by day and did what he needed to do to be successful. He shared that he had troubles throughout his years of service but was able to use them as learning experiences.

In thinking back, he only recalls having one bad experience, and it was at his first duty station. In his early days he indicated that he saw instances of racism but did not experience it directly. Regarding our current political climate, he described it as being very twisted. "We're supposed to be a country that is united, but that is far from what we are at this point." The social justice movements are gaining momentum, in part because of the violence and hate groups that do not see Blacks as being equal. He thinks the next generation of Black soldiers will be more vocal about what is happening around them. Where the difference will be made, he quips, is if those same vocal individuals are in positions of leadership. If that occurs and there is support through a chain of command that insists on shining a light on injustices, then he feels there would be the potential for true equality without fear of retaliation. He believed that there may be a rise in the number of Black men and women who enlist in the military, but still does not see a substantial rise in Black military officer ranks where they can really make a difference. That was where it was lacking, from his perspective, when he last served in 2007. His hope is that as change is occurring within society, so too is the color spectrum within the military hierarchy so that it is more representative of what our nation's citizens look like.

DISCUSSION

This case study had three primary focuses: (a) to describe how Black veterans defined patriotism; (b) to describe their experiences while serving their country in various branches in the military; and (c) to determine if those experiences, in any way, impacted their concept of patriotism. These foci were accomplished in the participants' voices and shared stories through the recordings made of the World War II soldiers, and through the live interviews conducted specifically for this research. Schoch (2019) noted that "a case study provides a comprehensive understanding of a bounded unit" (p. 246). Consequently, this method allows the reader to apply principles and lessons learned. This bounded unit is evident when examining the experiences shared in both sets of interviews; participants from the World War II interview spoke of those paving the way through blood, sweat, and tears, so that the next generation may have an easier path to follow. Similarly, veterans participating in the live interviews spoke of trailblazers breaking through barriers placed before them, ALL bound by their love of country and their determination to fight for her. This love and determination crossed the generational divide and is expressed similarly in the live interviews with the veterans of contemporary conflicts. These two groups are bounded by their unwavering determination to keep the country they love, unconditionally, safe regardless of barriers placed before them. They are all, by the truest definition, patriots that above all else, deserve respect from the citizens of a grateful nation.

Mayseless and Scharf (2011) found that there were two types of respect within the developmental context. There is unconditional respect that would be afforded to an individual simply because they are a human being, and there is contingent respect that hinges on someone being found worthy of such admiration. These two concepts can be used in both the context of how Black Americans feel about their country and how they perceive many in their country feel about them. Black Americans have, for the most part, volunteered to serve the country that they love regardless of whether that love and respect was reciprocated. They were serving something bigger than themselves, not for the glory or accolades, but because they felt it was their responsibility as a US citizen. Often, especially in the pre-Civil Rights era, that love, and respect was not reciprocated, and in fact, Black veterans returning home were faced with the same prejudices they experienced prior to joining the military.

The tone of this study's interviews, however, was not bitter, angry, or regretful. The sentiments echoed by each of those interviewed was that they loved their country, they did their duty as citizens of that country, and they were proud of their efforts. In reflecting on their humble beginnings, they all acknowledged that the opportunities afforded them through their military service allowed them to have a quality of life they would otherwise not have been able to achieve. Through their honorable service and contributions, they showed unconditional love to their country and countrymen, even with the understanding that the sentiment would not always be reciprocated.

Veterans that participated in the "live" interviews were products of the Civil Rights Movement and viewed themselves and their fellow countrymen through a different lens. These individuals fought for equality and against injustices not only on foreign shores but on their own as well. They questioned the establishment and were raised to see themselves as equals rather than inferior citizens.

They refused to accept the explanation, "that that's just how things were." They all defined patriotism using terms including:

- Duty
- Protect
- Oath
- Equality
- Service
- Pride
- Red, white, and blue
- Defending a way of life

There was also a consensus that while some level of racism within the military still existed, they believed that the military was on the forefront of addressing issues involving racism within the ranks. This seems to be supported by the literature. With only one female "live" interview, it is unknown if the statement involving sexism within the military is an anomaly or whether it exists in higher numbers. Former PFC Johnson, the World War II veteran interviewed by Whelan (2021) was not asked, nor did she indicate that she experienced any type of sexism. Her focus was on the pride she felt in serving her country and completing her mission.

The stories of these veterans and the millions that came before them are filled with examples of the level of unconditional love and respect Black servicemembers have shown for their country, their democracy, and the safety of their fellow countrymen. They failed to receive equal pay yet they continued to serve. They failed to be counted as individual men, as soldiers; yet they continued to serve. Some returned from the battlegrounds only to be lynched while still wearing their uniform; yet still others have continued to serve.

They served because, as one veteran stated, "That's just the way it was." They served because they were proud of their citizenship and felt it was their duty and obligation to fight and defend a way of life they had not yet been afforded. What they asked for in return was simple: to be treated with the unconditional respect that would be afforded to an individual simply because they were a human being. What they have been given by some, however, equates to contingent respect that hinges on some unforeseen circumstance they have yet to define or attain, that would find them worthy.

Raynor (2015) citing *The War College Report of 1936*, stated that White officers stereotyped the African American soldier to be, "An inherently inferior, child-like, shiftless, careless, irresponsible, emotionally unstable, musically included comical figure who lacks physical courage and is inclined of moral turpitude" (p. 2). This in no way resembled any of the character traits of the Black men and women who have and continue to be willing to sacrifice themselves serving their country. More recently, Patrick (2020) noted, "If love of a country is about more than symbols and ceremony, Black America has a lot to teach about patriotism" (n.p.). In his blog about what it means to be a Black patriot in America, he finds it to be tricky. Tricky to love a country that has time and time again failed to love Black people back. Tricky to serve one's country and then be refused service in establishments for no reason other than the color of their skin. Tricky because light-skinned Black men and women have been forced to lie about their race in order to be offered military training in something other than working in menial jobs and to be able to experience home ownership—a central part of the American Dream. As many of the veterans interviewed noted, we need a renewed understanding of what patriotism means. The definitions each of them offered centered around the unconditional love and respect of their country and an overwhelming desire to protect her founding principles.

From their comprehensive and extensive research through the historical archives of the military, Webb and Herrmann (2002) concluded that all minority groups have experienced what they termed to be the Three R Syndrome: Reject, Recruit, Reject. Members of minority groups were initially rejected from being allowed to volunteer their service to their country; they were subsequently recruited when there were no other options available, and were then relegated to lower level or hazardous jobs because they were thought to be the most expendable; and finally, when the looming crises was over, they were rejected again, often being denied any type of veteran benefits. This, too, is supported by the literature.

Throughout all the trials and tribulations and all the obstacles placed before them, Black men and women continue to come forward and volunteer to serve their country, and to show their unconditional love and respect for the principles our country is founded on. That is the definition of patriotism. It is an intangible thing that exists in the very souls of these men and women. It drove them to serve something greater than themselves with no guarantee of reward or recognition. It drove them to put their lives on the line every day while in the service of their country and to protect the man next them who may not return the sentiment. It drove them to extend a hand to fellow soldiers when that soldier had been taught the hand was unworthy. Patriotism is the unwavering position that, even with its problems, America is the best country in the world in which to live.

Poet, activist, and scholar Maya Angelou (1978) summed up the sentiments echoed by all the Black veterans utilized in this study. She wrote, "you may shoot me with your

words, you may cut me with your eyes, you may kill me with your hatefulness, but still, like air, I'll rise." Determination and hope were the driving forces behind the Black veterans interviewed for this article. They were all determined to forge a new path and to continue to break down racial barriers for Black soldiers of future generations; they all hoped that what they endured paved the way for the next generation to experience a better version of America and hope that all citizens, regardless of race, can become united. And finally, they hope that the next generation of US soldiers and citizens will be able to experience an America that truly has liberty and justice for ALL.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Tina B. Craddock *orcid.org/0000-0003-4446-9241*
Elizabeth City State University, US

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