

**RESOLUTION
IN RECOGNITION OF THE ROLE OF BLACK VETERANS
IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

Submitted by: Washington DC Branch
Date Adopted: April 9, 2009 at the Regular Monthly Meeting of the DC Branch
6:30 pm at the Israel Baptist Church, Washington DC

WHEREAS, there has been no war fought by or within the United States in which Blacks did not participate; including the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the War of 1812, the Spanish American War, World Wars I & II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf Wars on Terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan;

WHEREAS, Frederick Douglas voiced his strong opinion in his autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881): “I ... urged every man who could to enlist to get an eagle on his button, a musket on his shoulder, the star-spangled banner over his head, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States;”

WHEREAS, during the Civil War Black soldiers, commonly referred to as the United States Colored Troops, were treated as second-class citizens; health standards were so dismal that they never had enough doctors, hospitals were terrible, and they never got enough rest and often died from neglect by White officers and medical personnel;

WHEREAS, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois and William Monroe Trotter were both born in the nineteenth century, a few years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, were gifted Harvard Graduates, and their fathers were former Civil War soldiers, or veterans. They were the first generation of freedom’s children and founded the Niagara Movement in 1905;

WHEREAS, James Monroe Trotter who served in the Civil War with the proud 55th Massachusetts Regiment, was a leader in the fight for equal pay for Black troops; and after the war was the president of the Negro Ex-Soldiers’ and Sailors’ National Reunion Association in the 1880’s, which held its national meeting in Boston, in August, 1887 at Boston’s Tremont Temple attracting more than 300 veterans to the largest known assembly of black former soldiers and sailors after the civil war;

WHEREAS, the seal of the Niagara Movement for the Boston meeting in 1907, attended by 800 delegates, symbolized the connection between the Black soldiers’ sacrifices and African-American civil rights, or earned rights, as opposed to birth rights. To quote DuBois’ *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935) “Nothing else made Negro citizenship conceivable, but the record of the Negro as a fighter;”

WHEREAS, in his July 1918 “Close Ranks” an editorial for the NAACP’s *Crisis Magazine*, DuBois, whose ancestors had fought in the American Revolution, echoed Frederick Douglas in his belief that World War I offered the Black soldier an opportunity to gain his stripes; and while

many Black soldiers gave their all to the war, some winning medals for their bravery, the lynching did not stop and the schools, bathrooms and drinking fountains remained segregated;

WHEREAS, the 369th Infantry, known as the Harlem Hell-fighters, fought the Germans during World War I as part of the French Army and served the longest stretch in combat – 191 days without replacement – never losing a foot of ground or a man as prisoner; and at the end of their service, the entire regiment received the Croix de Guerre – France’s highest military honor from a grateful French nation;

WHEREAS, Henry Johnson of the 369th Infantry Division, who died penniless and alone, after holding off the Germans and eventually fighting with a knife when he had no more bullets; displaying the dogged determination that was reflected in the post-war New Negro spirit that refused to ‘kowtow’; was awarded a Purple Heart by President Clinton and awarded posthumously the Distinguished Service Cross by the Dept. of Defense;

WHEREAS, in 1917, Charles Hamilton Houston entered WWI as a commissioned first lieutenant in the segregated 17th Provisional Training Regiment and as a Second Lieutenant overseas encountered racism, more virulent than he had ever known before; and later wrote: *“The hate and scorn showered on us Negro officers by our fellow Americans convinced me that there was no sense in my dying for a world ruled by them. I made up my mind that if I got through this war I would study law and use my time fighting for who could not strike back.”*;

WHEREAS, the post war New Negro Movement, later the Harlem Renaissance, confirmed that life for Blacks in the North was sharply affected by World War I because almost 300,000 Blacks after serving to preserve democracy in Europe became committed to their own struggle for democracy at home;

WHEREAS, Alain Locke, the first black Rhodes scholar, wrote about a “New Negro” who had returned from battle with a bold new spirit that helped spark a new mood in the Black community, where Blacks were willing to settle for nothing less than equal rights, human treatment, and active involvement in politics, business, and the arts;

WHEREAS, at the beginning of World War II, when 75 percent of Black Americans resided in the South, 90 percent lived in poverty, only 25 percent had a high school education, one-third of employed Black men were sharecroppers or tenant farmers, and the majority of Black women labored as domestic servants or farmhands, Dorie Miller, a lowly messman attendant in the Navy, was catapulted to a national hero and an icon to generations of Blacks on December 7, 1941, after displaying heroism on board the USS West Virginia during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor;

WHEREAS, Jackie Robinson, before he became a famous baseball player, was court marshaled in the Army for refusing to sit in the back of the bus; but when later acquitted wrote that “It was a small victory, for I had learned that I was in two wars, one against the foreign enemy, the other against prejudice at home;”

WHEREAS, during World War II, the demand on the NAACP for assistance for Black soldiers who were unjustly convicted by court-martial, either because their officers assumed their guilt regardless of the evidence, or because they wanted to ‘set an example’ for other black soldiers, was so great that they had to turn down most requests unless the case was deemed to be “of national importance to the Negro race;”

WHEREAS, strict racial segregation in the U.S. Army required the development of separate African American flight surgeons to support the operations and training of the famed Tuskegee Airmen, a group of Black pilots who flew with distinction during WWII under the command of Capitan Benjamin O. Davis, who would later become the first Black General of the U.S. Air Force, highly decorated and served for 42 years;

WHEREAS, during WWII, the 6888 (Six Triple Eights) first all-woman Black Postal Battalion, serving in England then France, were given the daunting task of clearing out a 2-year backlog of over 90,000 pieces of mail. After tremendous sacrifices and enduring many injustices, much to the amazement of their White officers, they not only succeeded in their mission, but completed it in 3 months, and went on to make a positive impact on racial integration in the military;

WHEREAS, after serving overseas in the Army, Charles and Medgar Evers returned home to Mississippi, where in 1952 they began to organize voter registration drives for the NAACP; but in 1946 when they tried to register themselves to vote, they were turned away at the polling station by armed Whites who would do anything to stop them; Medgar was killed from a shot in the back on June 12, 1963, hours after President Kennedy gave a televised speech condemning segregation;

WHEREAS, when Blacks came home after World War II, they were warned not to wear their uniforms because White police were beating Black soldiers and searching them and if they had a picture of a White woman in their wallet, they risked being killed;

WHEREAS, Corporal Amzie Moore, who was drafted in the Army in 1942, whose job was to counter Japanese propaganda via media broadcast to remind Black soldiers of the difficulties and dangers they would face when they went home; ironically ended up after the war helping organize Blacks to resist a series of racist killings that had been designed to ensure that returning Black soldiers knew their place and did not disrupt the “southern way of life;”

WHEREAS, in 1942, an estimated 18,000 Blacks gathered at Madison Square Garden to hear A. Phillip Randolph, one of the most prominent leaders in the fight for civil rights, kick off a campaign against discrimination in the military. But even after President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 desegregating the military on July 26, 1948, discrimination continued;

WHEREAS, in early 1946 Walter White, NAACP Executive Director and a delegation of civil rights leaders briefed President Truman on the subject of racial violence against black veterans returning from WWII, and focused on the case of decorated black veteran, **Isaac Woodard**, who was beaten and blinded on a Greyhound bus in Batesburg, South Carolina while still in uniform. White’s memoir, "A Man Called White," quotes Truman as exclaiming “My God, I had no idea it was as terrible as that! We’ve got to do something;”

WHEREAS, Ralph D. Abernathy, Sr., who was also drafted into the Army during World War II, later stated that the Army perpetuated bigotry when it structured the vast civilian army because “all of the enlisted men in my company were Black, but our officers were White;”

WHEREAS, Rev. Benjamin Hooks, who served in the Army’s 92nd Division, found himself in the humiliating position of guarding Italian prisoners of war who were allowed to eat in restaurants that were off-limits to him. Such experiences helped deepen his resolve and that of other veterans, who like him later became civil rights leaders such as Whitney M. Young, Jr., Robert F. Williams and Rev. Hosiah Williams;

WHEREAS, the 92nd Infantry Division, better known as the Buffalo Soldiers, the only Black segregated unit to see combat during the Italian campaign of 1944-45, can trace their direct lineage back to the 9th and 10th Cavalry units from 1866 to the early 1890s, whose bravery earned them 24 Medals of Honor. But for Vernon J. Baker of the 92nd, his Medal of Honor would not be awarded until 1997 – 52 years overdue;

WHEREAS, former counsel to the NAACP, Thurgood Marshall, before the historic desegregation cases of 1954, spent weeks and months if not years on behalf of US troops during World War II and the Korean War investigating allegations of racism at court marshals and later concluded that “even in Mississippi a Negro gets a trial longer than those of many convicted black soldiers;”

WHEREAS, Oliver L. Brown, WWII Army veteran in *Brown v. Board of Education* from Kansas, and Harry Briggs, WWII sailor in *Briggs v. Elliott* from South Carolina were the fathers of two of the five named plaintiffs in the historic school desegregation cases of 1954;

WHEREAS, the significance of Black military World War II and Korean War heroes and heroines such as Pvt. Sarah Keys and WAC officer Dovey Roundtree’s triumphs in the courts against discrimination in interstate transportation (*Keys v. North Carolina Coach Company*, 1955), another landmark civil rights case that was decided six days before Rosa Parks historic protest of state Jim Crow laws on Montgomery buses can not be minimized. *Keys v. North Carolina Coach Company*, along with the companion train desegregation case, *NAACP v. St. Louis-San Francisco Railway Company*, represent a milestone in the legal battle for civil rights;

WHEREAS, Sgt. First Class Earl Dantzler was one of a number of Black Prisoners of War (POWs) during the Korean War who served in the Army’s 503rd field artillery unit with then-Corporal Charles Rangel, upon returning in uniform to his hometown of Richmond, Virginia, was immediately told to get to the back of the bus. Charles Rangel, now Congressman, later stated that “the greatest fight you will ever fight is not against the common enemies of America aboard, but right here fighting for your own civil rights;”

WHEREAS, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his address at Riverside Church on April 4, 1967, condemned the American hypocrisy in Vietnam for dashing the hopes of the poor at home while sending their sons, brothers and husbands to fight and to die in highly disproportionate numbers 8,000 miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia that they did not have in southwest Georgia or East Harlem;

WHEREAS, today, forty years after the war in Vietnam, Black veterans suffer at a disproportionate rate with hypertension, kidney dysfunction, respiratory disease, substance abuse, cancer, HIV/AIDS, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and other mental illness; are plagued by less than honorable discharges, health disparities and are disproportionately represented among the homeless veterans population nationally;

WHEREAS, Black veterans who were in the forefront of the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement; their strong resolve to address the paradox of military service abroad and the denial of basic rights at home, brought deeper meaning to the word ‘Democracy,’ and through their example motivated others to join and actively participate in the NAACP and other civil rights organizations, and ultimately transform the face of America;

WHEREAS, the veterans of the nation’s wars sowed the seeds for today’s bountiful harvest whereby the Niagara Movement, the NAACP, and the latter-day civil rights movement all share a common ancestry, the Civil War; and if there were no Civil War, there could be no Civil Rights Movement; and without a Civil Rights Movement, there could be no Barack Obama, President of the United States of America; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the NAACP, educate all of its members, their families, and our communities about the difficult challenges Black veterans faced when returning home, particularly in the South, their military sacrifice and patriotism, in fighting for equal rights and the dignity of a people; and

THEREFORE, BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the NAACP, direct its Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committees and its National Veterans Representative to help elevate the level of awareness of the Role of Veterans in the Civil Rights Movement and of the need to provide advocacy, service, and support for our veterans when transitioning back into our communities, this year and every year thereafter, through its National and State Conventions, Regional Conferences, and Annual Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Dinner.

Approved for revisions by the NAACP National Resolutions Committee – May 9, 2009 to be presented during the Legislative Session of the 100th National Convention of the NAACP in New York City, July 14, 2009.

Unit President:

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(Original Signed)

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Lorraine C. Miller, President

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Date Signed: April 29, 2009

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For questions regarding the contents of this resolution contact:

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