

The Tuskegee Airmen and the Second World War

The role of the armed forces in racial
integration in the U.S

Prof.

Gregory Alegi

RELATORE

Prof.

Carlo Magrassi

CORRELATORE

Giulia Presutti

Matricola: 649052

CANDIDATO

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	4
1.CHAPTER I – “<i>from single cases to the first black troops</i>”	
INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 THE RACIAL QUESTION.	9
1.2 THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION	12
1.3 THE CIVIL WAR AND THE UNITED STATES COLORED TROOP	18
1.4 THE BEGINNING OF SEGREGATION	24
1.5 BUFFALO SOLDIERS AND WESTWARD EXPANSIONISM	29
1.6 THE FIRST WORLD WAR	39
CONCLUSION	48
2.CHAPTER II - <i>The Tuskegee Airmen and the Red Tails</i>”.	
INTRODUCTION	50
2.1 TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENT	52
2.2 THE USA ENTERS THE WAR	62
2.3 THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN GOES INTO ACTION	67
2.4 RAMITELLI AND THE RED TAILS	76
2.5 RETURN TO HOMELAND	83
CONCLUSION	93

3. CHAPTER III- *Desegregation and the Cold War*

INTRODUCTION	94
3.1 THE POST-WAR WORLD	95
3.2 EXECUTIVE ORDER 9981	99
3.3 <i>THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT</i>	104
CONCLUSION	111
OVERALL CONCLUSIONS	112
Bibliography	114

INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of the present work is to analyze the role of the Armed Forces in racial integration in the U.S., with particular reference to the experience, during World War II, of the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African American flying unit in the U.S. Army Air Forces.

The text will be divided into three chapters.

The first will focus on the period before the Second World War, from the American Revolution to the First World War.

If at the beginning of American history, black soldiers fought alongside white troops, from the Civil War onwards the first regiments formed exclusively by African Americans were established.

A significant aspect that the chapter will highlight is the fact that the abolition of slavery, achieved as a result of the Union's victory and the enactment of the 13th Amendment, did not lead to a substantial improvement in the living conditions of the African American population.

On the contrary, slavery was replaced by segregation, a far more insidious form of subjugation, based on the false myth of 'separate but equal', a condition of marginalization that involved every aspect of American public life, including military conscription.

In fact, in the aftermath of the War of Secession, those who went down in history as the 'Buffalo Soldiers' were born, four regiments composed exclusively of soldiers of Afro-African descent, who fought during the Indian Wars and during the first extra-national US conflicts, such as the Spanish-American war for Cuban independence and the war with the Philippines.

Segregation involved each sphere of life for the Afro-American soldiers: black regulars were subjected to total isolation, discrimination, inferior equipment and food.

However, for African Americans fighting meant claiming their rights as citizens; enlistment, through which they could show the whites their military capabilities, represented a possible strategy to break the status quo.

With the United States' participation in World War I, from 1917 to 1918, several units of black soldiers were sent to France to fight alongside the Entente powers and experienced a much more egalitarian and inclusive cultural approach than in the American context.

This experience fueled demands for a change in American society.

It was at this time that black activism, the ancestor of the civil rights movements of the 1950s-60s, began to organize itself in a systematic manner and to gain greater public resonance.

The second chapter will focus on the Second World War and the role played by black airmen.

Before the United States entered the war, African-Americans were barred from a career in the Aviation.

However, as early as 1939, the need for men, a presidency strongly marked by Newdealist progressivism and social protests represented the winning mix that, through the enactment of the Civilian Pilot Training Act, allowed African Americans access to the United States Army Air Forces.

Thus, the Tuskegee Airmen was born, formed by the 332nd Fighter Group, the first African-American group of the Army Air Forces and the 477th Bombardment Group, the first black bomber unit.

In particular, the 332nd Fighter Group made its greatest contribution during the Italian Campaign, fought from 1943, starting with the landings in Sicily, until 1945.

The chapter will then focus on the experience of the Red Tails, the name under which the 332nd FG went down in history during the time it was stationed at Ramitelli, an airbase in Campomarino, Molise,

Here, the Tuskegee Airmen, flying P-51s with red tails, became the most skilled and well-known escort pilots in the US Army.

Finally, the third chapter will deal with the period immediately following the Second World War, characterized by the outbreak of another conflict that would affect the United States itself: the Cold War.

In particular, it will focus on two crucial events in the history of American racial integration: the enactment of Executive Order 9981 in 1948 and the passage of the Civil Right Act in 1964.

Executive order 9981, enacted under President Truman, abolished desegregation within the armed services.

The process of integration that seemed to proceed smoothly within the Air Force was not as effective and immediate within the Army.

Yet, we will see that while the Korean War, the first to be realistically fought within the Cold War, still began as a segregated war, the next conflict that actually contradicted the concept of 'Cold' with which the war went down in history, the Vietnam War, was fought by totally desegregated troops.

It was the first conflict since the Revolution in which blacks and whites served together as equals since its beginning.

The Vietnam War produced a profound crisis in the American consciousness which channeled the strains of all civil rights movements and of the '68 counterculture.

The path of racial integration within the US Army was complex and treacherous, but the tenacity of African American soldiers and civilians, at home and abroad, the stubbornness to prove their worth within a society that made white supremacy part of its identity, the desire to overcome the paradox of a reality that continued to progress while remaining locked in its chronic racial divide, resulted in the Armed Forces becoming the most racially integrated American institution ever.

CHAPTER I - From single cases to the first black troops:

INTRODUCTION:

The first chapter will address the role played by African American soldiers in the U.S. Federal Army before World War II.

The chapter will be divided into six main paragraphs.

It will start with a brief excursus on the beginning of American history and the birth of the Atlantic slave trade, the inauguration of a story of slavery and desires for redemption.

The following paragraphs will be divided in chronological order and will address the evolution of African American contributions in the battles fought by the United States from the very beginning, since the United States proper did not yet exist and the thirteen colonies were fighting for independence.

We will note how, while at first the participation of African-American males in the wars was part of a confused project, it later became a more systematic phenomenon that came to fruition with the emergence of the Buffalo Soldiers and thus of the first official black troops within the U.S. Army.

The Buffalo Soldiers were born in the twilight of the American Civil War, where they took up the Union cause in the hope that the defeat of the South and the abolition of slavery had meant the beginning of their rebirth as a minority people subjugated by the white majority.

It was after the Civil War years that African Americans began to be admitted to the West Point Academy, facing systematic discrimination and outright segregation.

The contribution of black soldiers was also crucial to the federal army during the Indian Wars and during the first extra national conflicts in which the United States, breaking with the isolationist tradition and reclaiming its role on the American continent, became involved.

With the United States' participation in World War I (1917-1918) some units of black soldiers, still sent in separate units, fought in France with the French army and experienced a different cultural approach that was much more egalitarian and far removed from American separatism. This experience influenced the debate on the need for a change in the American approach to segregation.

The implicit question that will stay with us throughout the chapter is:

Did conscription represent an effective rehabilitation strategy for the African American people?

1.1 THE RACIAL QUESTION:

In order to understand how African-American racial integration has also tried to make its way through military enlistment and sacrifice for the U.S. cause, it may be useful to review a brief excursus on how the racial question arose and how it has been from the beginning and still constitutes an intrinsically woven thread in American history.

Colonial history reflects the perception that Americans had of themselves.

The narrative by which the colonists composed their history was heavily centered on what was commonly justified as a civilizing mission: to bring the germs of freedom and democracy to the lands of the new continent. This was often a providential vision, gradually internalized in the American tradition.

In 1845, John Louis O'Sullivan coined the concept of manifest destiny: the U.S. was chosen by divine providence and it was its manifest destiny to take over the entire continent to spread freedom and civilization.

This was the idea of U.S. exceptionalism, which also often constituted a moral justification for its unstoppable expansionism.

When the New World dispute arose in the late 1400s, the idea of the native as a savage man to be tamed and an obstacle to civilization prevailed.

The other side of the coin of this demonization, however, was, on the contrary, a paternalistic idealization of him as an individual untouched by the corruption of European modernity, an idealization embodied perfectly in the noble savage Caliban described in William Shakespeare's "The Tempest".

While the native was to be civilized, the American represented the overcoming of European vice and corruption. A kind of Nietzschean new man who would rewrite his history from a blank page.

Indeed, with the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers on Cape Cod in 1620, the political myth of America as a place of rebirth, a refuge for the oppressed in search of freedom, began to be traced.

In reality, colonization for political and religious purposes will be most evident with the Great Puritan emigration beginning in 1630 and leading to the formation of the Massachusetts colony.

It is on that occasion that John Winthrop, one of the figures of Puritan England, will define America as the 'city on the hill,' a civilization set before humanity, built to dominate the whole ecumene.

Certainly this feeling of exceptionalism also arose from the complexity of the colonization process in the New World.

The empire created by the English reflected the internal situation of the island: the English society was conflicted, characterized by religious and political struggle.

With the exception of the West Indies, the North American colonies were not designed for the exploitation of valuable resources, but rather were thought of as peopling colonies for economic, religious or political purposes, a kind of outlet valve for internal dissensions within the mother country.

With the introduction of enclosures, many peasants were forced to go to the big cities. But in the city the poor man was criminalized, considered vagrant, lazy and burdensome to the common wealth. Emigration to the New World colonies became an opportunity for revenge, even with the risks that such a long and arduous journey would entail.

Adding to this is the fact that the idea of English colonization in America was not associated with the creation of a territorial empire like that of Spain, where superintendents and the army of the mother country were present there, but rather a composite empire where each colony possessed its own institutions and a high degree of self-government.

In a sense we could speak of a relationship at once antagonistic and mimetic between the colonies and the motherland.

In the colonies, culture and political institutions were distinctly English: even in their diversity, they were bound by the covenant of allegiance to the same king and adherence to legal institutions modeled on English common law.

Yet the fact that those who founded the colonies were often dissident social groups or expelled from the mother country produced colonial societies antithetical to the English one.

Given these preconditions, it is easy to understand how the colonists were driven by a deep desire for prominence that would shape all future U.S. history.

In this sense, the famous American Dream has a more remote origin than the Gilded Age of the late 1800s and the era of great self-made men like Rockefeller or Carnegie, and is inscribed in the very birth of the United States.

Yet although American history is born as a claim to freedom, it has always also been a history of domination and subjugation. It was in the founding act of the new nation that the groundwork was laid for what would be the American approach to the slave question first and then the racial question.

The freedom that the Pilgrim Fathers invoked, inspired by Thomas More's "Utopia," was dialectically intertwined with the slavery that has characterized American history since its inception.

After making use of corsairs, since the late 1500s, the Crown began to rely on private individuals, those who would lead the commercial revolution based on the Atlantic as a crossroads for the exchange of goods and men: slavery immediately became an integral part of the transatlantic economy.

In 1619 the first landing of black slaves to be used as labor on plantations occurred near Point Comfort, a port on the coast of the British colony of Virginia.

In 1661 the Barbados Slave Codes were enshrined in the West Indies, which specified what slavery was and defined the legal conditions of the slave and its formal distinction with the serf. The slave became a commodity, an entity that was totally deprived of humanity and could be freely traded, bought or sold.

It will begin the story of a people, full of pain, blood and tears, but also a story of redemption in the name of the freedom extolled in the work songs.

1.2 THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The American Revolution, along with the French Revolution, was the founding act par excellence of Western political modernity.

At the end of the Seven Years' War, financial stress is sky-high. British public debt increases and the political management of the colonial empire needs to be rethought. The relationship between the colonies and the mother country begins to crack.

Although the process leading to independence does not begin at all as an anti-colonial movement, it will gradually become so when the divergence between the claims of the colonists and the intentions of the Crown becomes insurmountable.

From 1765 the name of America understood as the set of the thirteen colonies begins to circulate; patriotic American movements (Sons/Daughters of liberty) arise, claiming freedom by invoking the principle of no taxation without representation.

Although the military contribution of African Americans during the Revolutionary War was very marginal, it is precisely with the events of '75-'83 that the idea that conscription could represent a strategy of racial integration and rehabilitation for African American slaves comes to the fore.

In fact, the British, as well as the American settlers, tried to involve slaves in the war, offering them freedom in exchange for military service.

The British were the first to make a formal offer to African American slaves: in 1775 Lord Dunmore, the governor of British Virginia, issued a proclamation promising freedom to all slaves who would fight for the British army. In the official proclamation, he recited:

I do hereby farther declare all indented servants, Negroes, or others (appertaining to rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining his Majesty's troops, as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this colony to a proper sense of their duty, to his Majesty's crown and dignity.¹

¹ The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. (n.d.). Lord Dunmore's Proclamation, 1775, last consultation 30 June 2023.
<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/lord-dunmores-proclamation-1775>

This move led to a considerable number of runaway slaves joining the British forces.

While many slaves saw in the alliance with the enemy of the fledgling state a glimmer of light, a means to gain freedom, the opposite phenomenon also occurred: large numbers of African Americans fought alongside the colonists throughout the war and the Revolution.

Enlistment and military sacrifice in the name of defending national freedom would be repaid with the promise of emancipation throughout the conflict and even after its denouement.

However, as is well known, although by the end of the Revolutionary War the institution of slavery had been abolished in almost all Northern states, it persisted throughout the South as the centerpiece of the Southern economy: the emancipation of African American slaves would not be achieved until many decades later, with the American Civil War and the enactment of the 13th Amendment.

Indeed, it is already with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the sacred documents of U.S. politics and the symbols of the birth of the Federation, that the controversial nature of American democracy emerges: the contradiction between the principle of freedom and its concrete application.

In the draft of the official document, anti-slavery Thomas Jefferson had included a clause in the Antithesis² in which he accused the King of carrying on the slave trade. However, since this clause provoked the reaction of the Southern colonies, it was deleted.

In doing so, Congress implicitly recognized the existence of slavery and of individuals who could not be considered members of the People as not beneficiaries of the rights enshrined in the Declaration.

The revolutionary nature of the document is evident in that it enshrines the independence of a sovereign state that did not exist before and does so on the basis of

² The antithesis of the Declaration is a part of the document characterized by the detailed list of all the charges against the king.

new principles that determined and still determine the relationship between government and the governed.

Yet although the principles invoked seemed to have universal resonance (not surprisingly, they would inspire all future anticolonial movements in Latin America, Asia, and Africa) the rights that flowed from them were not as universally protected.

Famous is the speech delivered by Frederick Douglass, a former slave as well as one of the leaders of the African-American movement, on July 4, 1852 on the anniversary of Independence.

The purpose of the speech was to state how in reality African Americans did not feel represented by the values of equality and freedom celebrated on that day not because they were inherently problematic but because they had become such since they were an expression of a false universalism.

Indeed, the Declaration reads:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness³.

The universalism of the concept of freedom invoked by the Declaration was contradicted by the selection of the beneficiaries of rights: they were intended exclusively for the white male settler.

The Declaration preached that it brought men together only because they recognized themselves in self-evident truths, but in fact women and African Americans did not possess civil, political, and social rights.

However, at that time, there was not yet a formal and sharp racial divide, and there were no separate military regiments.

In 1867, in *'The Negro in the American Rebellion'*, William Wells Brown, a former slave and an American abolitionist writer, will recite:

Both in the Federal Convention to frame the Constitution, and in the State Conventions to ratify the same, it was admitted that the blacks had fought bravely against the British, and in favor of the American Republic.⁴

³ National Archives. (31 January, 2023). Declaration of Independence: A Transcription, last consultation 30 June 2023. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

⁴ Brown W.W. (1867). *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, Boston: Lee & Shepard, 3.

Indeed, one of the most famous episodes that helped fuel the spark that would culminate in the Revolution, the Boston Massacre, is associated with the actions of an alleged African American rebel known as Crispus Attucks.

Although there is a great deal of uncertainty about his real ethnicity (the most reliable sources report that he was the son of an African father and a Massachusetts Indian mother), his story has been passed down by the subsequent antislavery movement as an example of the courage and loyalty of the African American people.

The event erupted when, following the passage of the Townshend Acts, a series of laws passed by the British Parliament to impose greater fiscal and political control over the colonies, British troops were sent to Boston to ensure their enforcement and avert resistance and the colonists.

It was on that occasion that on March 5, 1770, clashes began on King Street that led to the deaths of five American civilians.

The pretext was a British guard's attack on a barber's apprentice that provoked a mob reaction. When British soldiers were deployed to be ready to intervene in case of a rebellion, violence flared up.

Brown recounts:

Crispins Attucks was the first to fall: he and Samuel Gray and Jonas Caldwell were killed on the spot. Samuel Maverick and Patrick Carr were mortally wounded. The excitement which followed was intense. The bells of the town were rung. An impromptu town meeting was held, and an immense assembly was gathered.

Three days after, on the 8th, a public funeral of the martyrs took place. The shops in Boston were closed; and all the bells of Boston and the neighboring towns were rung. It is said that a greater number of persons assembled on this occasion than were ever before gathered on this continent for a similar purpose⁵.

Another example of African-American bravery recounted is that of Peter Salem. A number of sources, although disputed, including that of Captain Samuel Swett, who is said to have been an eyewitness to the event, testify that it was the black soldier who killed Royal Marines officer John Pitcairn during the Battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775.

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 4

And again, William Wells Brown recalls the pivotal role played by African American soldiers in the Battle of Rhode Island on August 29, 1778.

That year the first all-black regiment –the 1st Rhode Island- was formed and in February, the Rhode Island legislature announced that any slave volunteering for the new battalion would be considered free and would receive the same wages and bounties as regular soldiers.⁶

Unlike what would happen in the future, blacks and whites fought side by side in that battle, and although the Americans lost, the African American soldiers proved their valor and obstinate resistance.⁷

Even during the second war fought against the British, the Anglo-American War of 1812, there is evidence of the participation of black soldiers alongside American troops.

On December 3, 1814, the *Niles Weekly Register*, the first American magazine, weekly circulated from 1811 to 1848, published General Andrew Jackson's Proclamation pronounced on September 21 1814, addressed to the African American people. It was entitled '*To the Free Colored Inhabitants of Louisiana.*'

In the Proclamation, the general, who gained fame during the 1815 Battle of New Orleans and would later become president of the United States in 1828, called for the participation of African American soldiers in the war by promising in return equal rewards offered to white troops.

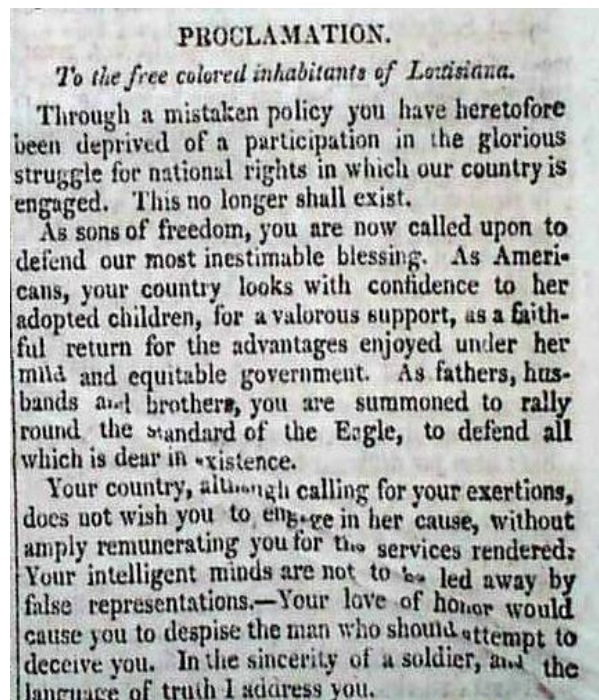
In fact, the Proclamation, addressing the black population, stated:

Your country, although calling for your exertions, does not wish you to engage in her cause without amply remunerating you for the services rendered. Your intelligent minds are not to be led away by false representations. Your love of honor would cause you to despise the man who should attempt to deceive you. In the sincerity of a soldier, and the language of truth, I address you. To every noble-hearted, generous freeman of color, volunteering to serve during the present contest with Great Britain, and no longer, there will be paid the same

⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 5-9

⁷ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 46.

bounty, in money and lands, now received by the white soldiers of the United States.⁸



Picture 1.1: General Andrew Jackson's Proclamation

(Pastnow, History, Arts and Stuff, December 3, 2014)
<https://pastnow.wordpress.com/2014/12/03/december-3-1814-to-the-free-colored-inhabitants-of-louisiana/>

Despite the promises, and the wind blowing sensations of change, the future of Afro-American soldiers would be quite different from what was envisioned at the dawn of American history: if previously the radicals were those who fought for the separation from Great Britain, after the Independence, rebels became those who fought in the name of anti-slavery struggle.

⁸ Pastnow, History, Art and Stuff. (December 3, 2014). December 3 1814: To The Free Colored Inhabitants of Louisiana, last consultation 6 July 2023.
<https://pastnow.wordpress.com/2014/12/03/december-3-1814-to-the-free-colored-inhabitants-of-louisiana>

1.3 THE CIVIL WAR AND UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS:

Southern ideology perceived slavery as the key element in reproducing an open and dynamic civil society like that of the North.

Cotton represented white gold, the essential resource to increase profits through exports and the engine to stimulate a development process parallel to the Unionist one. And the slave system represented nothing more than the pivot on which the productivity of such an economy rested, as well as the functional tool for preserving the white social order. An organization judged hierarchical and repressive by Northern nationalism, which contrasted it with the idea of free labor.

The problem of slavery first arose more concretely over the issue of westward expansion. Tensions erupted between the North and the South about slavery in the new states: the Southern ruling class feared that the spread of the free man ideal might produce so many abolitionist states that it would lead to a constitutional amendment that would eradicate slavery everywhere.

Although it was primarily an economic (industrialism-mercantilism of the North VS plantation capitalism of the South) and political (relationship between the federal government and individual state governments) conflict rather than an ideological one, antislaveryists claimed slavery represented an anachronism incompatible with the evolution of American democracy and a moral contradiction to the values it invoked.

Philanthropic associations favored the escape of slaves with the "Underground Railroad," and the abolitionist movement published and disseminated stories about the plantation system to tell Northern men about it.

Yet back then, the abolitionist movement was still in its infancy: being against slavery did not necessarily mean admitting equality between blacks and whites.

On the other hand, supporters of Southern arguments claimed protection of the right to property, which, under the Fifth Amendment, could not be restricted "without due process of law" or "without just compensation," and of the principle of popular sovereignty, according to which it should be the citizens of the new states who should decide whether to be annexed as slaves or free.

In 1857, in *Dred Scott vs Sandford* ruling, the Supreme Court adopted a position close to the Southern cause.

The African American Dred Scott, who had been taken by his master first to Illinois (a free state) and then to present-day Minnesota (where there could be no slavery by virtue of the Missouri Compromise by which a boundary was established at the 36th parallel, the Missouri Compromise line, above which slavery could not be allowed for future annexations), claimed, once he had been transferred, to be recognized as a free man.

The Supreme Court ruled that African American slaves were not legally recognized as citizens but as property and therefore did not possess the right to bring suit and address the Court and that Congress did not possess the authority to legislate on individual American territories.

Lincoln's election to the White House ignited tensions.

Although in his public speeches he had never avowedly indicated that he wanted to abolish slavery in the states where it already existed, he manifestly did not tolerate the institution of slavery in the newly conquered western territories and was determined to prevent its spread.

On the day after Abraham Lincoln's election (Nov. 4, 1860), the South Carolina legislature called a special convention to certify an exit from the Union: on November 20, the petition for secession was accepted.

In early January, six other states followed South Carolina's lead and on February 4 proclaimed a new state entity, the Confederate States of America, with a new Constitution and a new president, Jefferson Davis.

For the South, the war was necessary; it was a war fought in the name of a constitutionally protected right, the right of secession: the people were fighting for their independence. On the other hand, the North claimed to take up arms in the name of national unity: the Union was a guarantee of prosperity, development and security, and its collapse would also mean the dissipation of the ideals of freedom and democracy on which the very birth of the United States rested.

In reality, the Confederacy was a danger to Northern industries: it had favored relations with Great Britain and controlled strategic ports over which it could have exercised a monopoly by hampering Northern entrepreneurs and merchants.

Hostilities began on April 12, 1861, when Confederate forces attacked Fort Sumter: the Civil War opened.

At the beginning of the War, African Americans could not officially fight in the Union army.

But, during the first year of the conflict, they could still contribute to the military effort by joining the Navy and serving as spy in the Loyale League, the secret Afro-American organization which will became the most important source of information for the Union intelligence.

However, in July 1862, the U.S. Congress passed first the Confiscation Act, which freed slaves whose owners had rebelled against the United States, and then the Militia Act, which authorized the president to use free blacks and former slaves from rebellious states in any capacity in the federal army.

On September 22, 1862, Abraham Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, an executive order stating that if the Southern states did not cease their rebellion by January 1 of the following year, the Emancipation Proclamation would go into effect. The South did not surrender and the Proclamation went into effect: thus, the liberation of all enslaved African Americans in the territories of the Confederate States of America was decreed.

The emancipation of the slaves, however, would be imposed only on the rebel states and not on the four neighboring states of Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland and Delaware that had remained loyal to the Union but at the same time had continued to practice the institution of slavery.

In fact, the proclamation stated:

*That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.*⁹

This illustrates how the Civil War did not begin as a war fought for the abolition of slavery but evolved as such.

⁹ National Archives. (reviewed on May 10, 2022). Emancipation Proclamation (1863), last consultation 5 July 2023.

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/emancipation-proclamation>

In fact, Lincoln's priority was not at all to abolish slavery, but rather to preserve the integrity of Union and prevent secession, and for this reason he wanted at all costs to keep the support of the slaveholding states that had remained loyal to the Union.

Although many today argue that the Proclamation had no real efficacy because it purported to impose the will of the Federal State on territories over which Union abolitionists had no jurisdictional power, the practical reality was that the Union, by force of arms, would have all the power it needed to establish policy in the occupied territories.

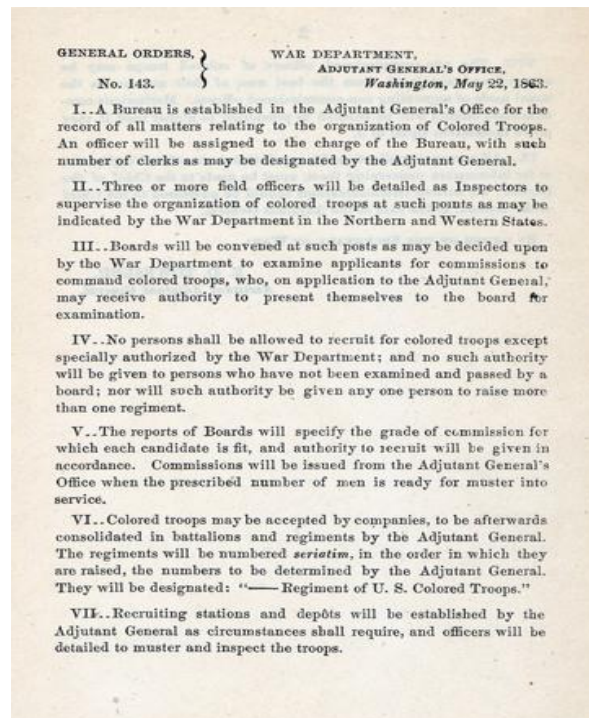
Indeed, when the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863, Union forces had regained control of large areas of the South.

After the Proclamation, free blacks throughout the North began to enlist. Later, Southern slaves also began to take up arms against their former masters: the Union army began to officially recruit and enlist African Americans.

On May 22, 1863, the Union War Department issued General Order 143, which gave birth to the United States Colored Troops.

Massachusetts Governor John Andrew quickly responded to Lincoln's call for the establishment of black regiments and began forming the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, one of the first African American regiments to serve in the U.S. Civil War.

On July 18, 1863, the 54th Regiment participated in the assault on Fort Wagner, a key Confederate post protecting the port of Charleston, South Carolina.



Picture 1.2: General Order 143
(National Archives, 10 May 2020)
<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/war-department-general-order-143>

If captured, Fort Wagner would have given the United States the opportunity to bombard Fort Sumter, an important step in reaching the city that many considered the birthplace of the Civil War.¹⁰

For the South, South Carolina and Fort Sumter were the "birthplace" of Confederate independence, while for the North, Charleston symbolized secession: the Union army hoped that if federal forces could force the city to surrender, they could make the entire Confederacy capitulate.

Although the assault failed and the African American soldiers were repulsed with heavy casualties, their valiant conduct convinced many in the North to reconsider their opposition to allowing blacks to serve in the Union army.

During battles such as Fort Wagner, African American soldiers demonstrated their bravery in battle, their military skill and their courage in the face of the enemy.

Leaders such as Frederick Douglass helped recruit soldiers for the regiment. In July 1863, he delivered a speech in Philadelphia in which he urged African American men to enlist in the Union Army, arguing that military service represented an unprecedented opportunity to gain the rights of citizenship.

Not surprisingly, two of Douglass's sons, Charles and Lewis Douglass, served in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment.¹¹

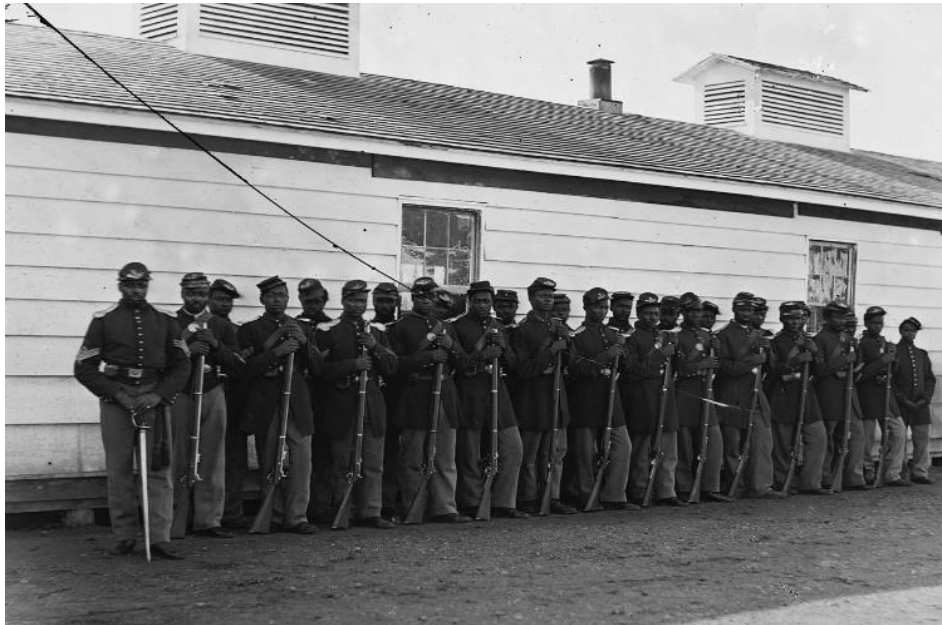
By the spring of 1864 African American soldiers would become an important part of operations in Virginia under the command of General Ulysses Grant: they would fight in the battle of Petersburg. Petersburg was an important objective because it was the center of supply transports for the Confederate States Army, led by General Lee, in northern Virginia. It took General Grant nine and a half months to achieve his goal of capturing Petersburg, during which time he launched numerous simultaneous offensives on several supply lines until Lee, unable to drive the Federates back, relented.¹²

¹⁰ National Park Service. (7 January, 2023). The 54th Massachusetts and the Second Battle of Fort Wagner, last consultation 8 July 2023.

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/the-54th-massachusetts-and-the-second-battle-of-fort-wagner.htm>.

¹¹ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 119.

¹² *Ivi*, 137-141.



Picture 1.3: Afro-American troops during the Civil War
(American Battlefield Trust, n.d.)
<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/united-states-colored-troops>

The battle of Petersburg was crucial to the outcome of the war.

During the Siege of Petersburg, in the Virginia theater, at the Battle of New Market Heights on September 29-30, 1864, African American soldiers earned the Medal of Honor for their heroism.¹³

On April 9, 1865, General Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox.

The defeat of the South meant the defeat of an economic system antagonistic to that of the North.

After the Civil War there would be only one national economic project: that of Northern industrial and financial capitalism.

It was the service in the Civil War that led to the enlistment of Afro-Americans in the Regular army in 1866: four regiments of African descent soldiers were established in the regular army for infantry regiments and two for cavalry regiments.

When the army was reorganized in the 1869 via General Orders No. 16, the 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st Infantry were consolidated into the 24th and 25th Infantry and, together with the 9th and the 10th Cavalry would have gone to earn fame as Buffalo Soldiers.¹⁴

¹³ *Ivi*, 138

¹⁴ Field, R. (2004). *Buffalo Soldiers 1866–91*, Osprey Publishing, 6.

1.4 THE BEGINNING OF SEGREGATION

The War represented in a sense a second revolution, a caesura between the before and after: in January 1865 the 13th Amendment was passed, permanently abolishing slavery throughout the land.

But the end of the War also meant the emergence of a social divide that has not yet fully healed, the beginning of a history of discrimination, hatred and extremism.

It began the system of racial segregation based on the principle of 'Separate but equal.'

The discrimination that characterized slave society had been reincarnated in a new form, paradoxically even more insidious and violent.

Before the Civil War, Southern racism, while inherently unjust, did not necessarily translate into hatred of the black population, which was perceived rather as property, on a par with objects and animals. Black identity was associated with the image of Uncle Tom, naturally subordinate to the white master but not hated.

Southern ideology was permeated by the belief that slavery was necessary for the black population as by its very nature incapable of progressing to civilization on its own. The black man was "but a grown up child," asserted slaveholder George Fitzhugh.

The thesis held by Southern plantation owners was that slavery elevated the African American population from the condition of intellectual weakness to which God had relegated them, and that Northern moralism was hypocritical because industrialization had created a more deplorable form of oppression than the one they perpetrated, white slavery.

It is true that, since the beginning, the fear of potential mass rebellion seeped deep within, justified by the fact that the black population was actually majority in the Southern states. Indeed, Douglass tells us in his article "The North Star" how much the Southern public discourse had fomented the fear regime following a number of riots that occurred intensely from the 1930s onward, notably that of Nat Turner.

But the most violent hatred emerged after the Civil War.

The attempt to create a multiracial democracy failed from the outset: in late 1865 the old racial order was restored in the South and the Black Codes were enacted, which,

modeled on the earlier Slave Codes, aimed to legally restrict the new freedoms granted to the former slave population.

In response to the codes of the South, two laws were passed as obstacles to their practical implementation: the Freedmen's Bureau that established the first federal agency in the War Department, which was supposed to support the social integration of free blacks and the Civil Right Act which, for the first time, declared all persons born in the United States to be citizens, "*without distinction of race or color, or previous condition of slavery or involuntary servitude.*"¹⁵

Both bills passed despite the veto of then-President Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor, who, though antislavery and Unionist, did not support the idea that blacks and whites should enjoy equal rights.

In view of the possibility of capitalizing on the potential of the mass of African Americans (who for obvious reasons were assumed to vote for the Republican Party), Congress initiated the procedures for the so-called Reconstruction Amendments: the 14th Amendment (1868), granting citizenship rights to blacks, and the 15th Amendment (1870), recognizing the right of blacks to vote.

Meanwhile, during the years of Reconstruction, the Union Army occupied the South, which was divided into five military districts with the aim of promoting constituent assemblies that would create Constitutions that included all the new amendments.

The harsh conditions imposed after the war and the military occupation only fueled Southern feelings of frustration and led to the emergence of extremist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, founded in 1866 in Tennessee by former Confederate Army soldiers.

Before the War, violence and lynchings were far more limited: black slaves were protected as someone's property. Later their condition changed all but radically: from slaves they became laborers employed on the same plantations but also losing any form of protection and guarantee.

Emancipation may have been a moral triumph, but with no money, no job training and little food or shelter, it was a socioeconomic disaster.

¹⁵San Diego State University (n.d.) Civil Right Act of 1866, last consultation 15 July 2023. <https://loveman.sdsu.edu/docs/1866FirstCivilRightsAct.pdf>.

During the Reconstruction Age, the Northern states maintained not only military but also political control over the Southern states (traditionally Democratic and conservative), which became substantially controlled by Republicans¹⁶.

As a result of this, African Americans were effectively able to assert their rights and many were also elected to local and state offices.¹⁷

However, as early as 1870, the hegemony of the Democratic Party in the South was restored through the activities of the so called Party of Redeemers.

In 1874, the Democratic party, previously split between the North and the South, re-compacted itself by winning a majority in the House of Representatives, which became a negotiating ground between the two factions.

When Republican Hayes became president in 1876 with a guaranteed promise to the Democratic Party to withdraw federal troops from the South, blacks were abandoned to their fate: the following year Jim Crow laws would be enacted.

They legitimized racial segregation in all activities of daily living, a system later formally recognized and sanctioned by the Supreme Court in the Plessy vs. Ferguson ruling of 1896.

In 1890 the state of Louisiana had passed a law according to which railroad companies operating within the state should provide separate carriages for whites and blacks. On June 7, 1892, Homer Plessy, who was white-skinned but also the great-grandson of a black man and therefore of mixed ancestry, took a train to move within Louisiana, sitting in the carriage designated for whites. When asked to move to the carriage intended for blacks, Plessy refused and was arrested. After unsuccessfully appealing to the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana, he went before the Supreme Court of the United States, which recognized the legality of the rule on the basis of which Plessy was arrested. Racial segregation officially became constitutional.¹⁸

¹⁶ Bonazzi, T. (2016). *Guerra civile americana*. Milano: RCS, 143.

¹⁷ Foner, E. (1982). Reconstruction Revisited. *Reviews in American History*, 10(4), 82. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2701820>.

¹⁸ Ficker, D. J. (1999). From Roberts to Plessy: Educational Segregation and the “Separate but Equal” Doctrine. *The Journal of Negro History*, 84(4), 310. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2649034>.

Thus, through the new laws, strategies were found to legitimately break free from the guarantees of Reconstruction Amendments: segregation was present in all public services, even within the Army.

In 1802, the U.S. Congress established the West Point Military Academy.

Despite the Academy's resistance, the Republican War Department insisted on admitting black officers into the army, leading to the forced admission of black cadets.

However, the Academy refused to graduate them, and a period of both psychological and physical intimidation and abuse of black cadets ensued.

Between 1870 and 1898, twenty-two black individuals were admitted to West Point. Of these, only twelve were able to attend, six stayed beyond one semester, and only three successfully completed exams and graduated, surviving four years of discrimination.¹⁹

In 1877, Henry Ossian Flipper, from a middle-class black family in rural South Georgia, became the first African American to graduate from West Point. His graduation caused a stir and skepticism, with the New York Times doubting his success and a black newspaper fearing for his safety. However, Flipper passed the exams exceptionally well and was praised for his modesty and gentlemanly behavior.²⁰

Flipper decided not to accept a government offer from Liberia, a territory colonized by former American slaves, to become an army commander, preferring to remain the only black officer in American troops. He served in the 10th Cavalry and helped build a major project, "Flipper's Ditch," a drainage system for wells suspected of spreading malaria at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Flipper also distinguished himself as an explorer and messenger during a military campaign in 1880-1881.²¹

¹⁹ Field, R. (2004). *Buffalo Soldiers 1866–91*, Osprey Publishing, 7.

²⁰ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 9.

²¹ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 160.



Picture 1.4: Henry Ossian Flipper
(Texas State Historical Association,
updated: October 22, 2020)

<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/flipper-henry-ossian>

However, his career suffered a setback when he was falsely accused of embezzlement while serving at Fort Davis, Texas, in 1881. Although he was found innocent of this charge, he was found guilty of "conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman." This verdict forced him to leave the army in disgrace. Flipper tried for years to clear his name, but to no avail.

After a long struggle, Flipper's reputation was finally restored in 1976, and in his honor, in 1977, the West Point Academy established the Henry O. Flipper Memorial Award to celebrate the leadership, self-discipline and perseverance demonstrated by cadets in the face of exceptional challenges.²²

²² Ivi, 161.

In 1978, Flipper was exhumed with military honors. In 1999, the injustice suffered was corrected when President Bill Clinton officially granted a presidential pardon to Flipper, calling it an event overdue for more than a century.²³

Jhon H. Alexander was the second African American to graduate from West Point, in 1887, followed two years later by Charles H. Young.

Both were assigned to the 9th Cavalry. Alexander served at Fort Washakie, Wyoming, and later in Nebraska and Dakota territory, becoming, after the Indian wars, professor at the Department of Military Science and Tactics at Wilberforce University, in Ohio. Young became the highest-ranking black officer during the World War One, and the first black officer to hold the rank of colonel.²⁴

1.5 BUFFALO SOLDIERS AND WESTWARD EXPANSIONISM:

Westward expansion was the building ground of nineteenth-century American foreign policy.

An initial westward expansion had already occurred in 1803 with the annexation of Louisiana during the Jeffersonian period and then continued throughout the century until there would be no more significant forms of Indian resistance as there had been in the past and the U.S. territory would be conquered entirely.

Effectively, American institutions continually changed in view of the encompassing of new territories and the ever-increasing enlargement of the population, justifying violence against natives as a necessary struggle to "civilize" the West and combat its wilderness.

²³ *Ibidem.*

²⁴ Field, R. (2004). *Buffalo Soldiers 1866–91*, Osprey Publishing, 8.

In *Cherokee vs Georgia* judgment (1831-32), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Indian nations should be considered '*domestic independent nations*', that is, communities under the protection and tutelage of the federal government. Thus, the claim for independence made by the Cherokee following the passage of the Indian Removal Act²⁵ of 1830 was rejected.

In a sense, in the 1800s a kind of reversal of roles between Americans and Native Indians took place in America: previously the weakest were the settlers, who, having arrived in the new land, had no experience of it and could only seek the protection of the Indian peoples, the "Lords of the Land".

An early formal justification for American expansionism, not only within the territory of the United States but within the borders of the entire continent, was the Monroe Doctrine, drafted by John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State, and delivered by then-President James Monroe, in a speech before Congress on December 2, 1823.

It was a kind of foreign policy manifesto expressing the idea of U.S. supremacy on the American continent and thus the legitimacy of what would be its future imperialist eagerness.

Specifically, the doctrine rested on three basic principles: non-colonization, that is, the idea that European countries should not pursue policies of colonization or occupation in North and South America; non-intervention, according to which the U.S. should not interfere in European affairs and vice versa; and finally separation or policy of the two spheres, which sanctioned the existence of two separate spheres of influence between Europe and America and the 'assertion of the exclusivity of U.S. expansion within the American continent.

The African-American soldiers played a crucial role in the US Army on the Western frontier from 1866 to 1891. Black regiments, each assigned to white officers, in addition to fighting in the field, performed the daily task of protecting settlers, travelers and workers; they built roads and erected forts and thousands of miles of telegraph poles²⁶.

²⁵ The Indian Removal Act was a law enacted by President Andrew Jackson that provided for the removal and deportation of eastern Native American tribes to territories west of the Mississippi River.

²⁶ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 143.

Until the early 1890s, these troops constituted approximately 20 % of all regular forces on active duty in the American West.²⁷

Thus, one out of every five soldiers in the conquest of the West was black.

They perceived enlistment as a possible strategy to break the system of segregation and obtain equal rights of the white population. And despite the isolation, discrimination, inferior equipment and food, for many African Americans it was a dream come true: it meant no more cotton and farms, regular 13 euros a month, assured meals, a chance to break the patterns.

There was no shortage of racial disorder: the black regulars were subjected to total segregation, and many white officers refused to be assigned to these regiments.

Very often they were exposed to forms of violence and cruelty by their own officers or were at the center of disputes between their commanders and those of the white troops.

When the 10th Cavalry first assembled at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1867, under the command of Colonel Benjamin Grierson, the commanding officer, Colonel William Hoffman, argued heatedly with Grierson intimating that he should not form his men too close to the white troops and forcing him to send his companies to Fort Riley, Kansas, for further training.²⁸

In addition, Buffalo Soldiers were continually exposed to discrimination and racism by white civilians who inhabited the areas they garrisoned.

Racial unrest broke out especially in Texas: Fort Concho in the Texas state represented one of the most troubling spots for Afro-Americans when in the late 1970s 10th Cavalry soldiers served together with the 16th Infantry.

Often race relations depended on the relationship between whites, blacks and Indians: where the Indian population was large and little room existed for internal disagreements within the same army, blacks tended to be treated better.²⁹

In fact, African American troops distinguished themselves by their valor in the field: the idea that military enlistment and victory could be the means of securing

²⁷ Field, R. (2004). *Buffalo Soldiers 1866–91*, Osprey Publishing, 3.

²⁸ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 145.

²⁹ *Ivi*, 144.

freedom for themselves and their people and the fact that they, due to military racism, had to work much harder for equal recognition than white soldiers meant that, despite possessing inferior means in numbers and quality, they would become the best of the New Army.

Accounts state that they stayed longer on the frontier, deserting less and re-enlisting more than their white counterparts.

By the end of the Indian Wars even white troops developed a deep respect for Buffalo Soldiers and recognized their valor: eighteen medals of honor out of 416 awarded went to black soldiers between 1866 and 1891. Many of their white officers were similarly awarded, which often indicated the quality of the troops.³⁰

Black troops were initially sent to isolated outposts in Kansas (Fort Leavenworth), the Dakotas (Fort Rice), Nebraska (Fort Robinson), Utah (Fort Duchesne), Wyoming (Fort Washakie), New Mexico (Fort Tularsu), and Texas and the Rio Grande border (Fort McKavitt), all far from white populations. As the Indians were subdued and white settlements grew on the plains, black units generally concentrated in Texas and Arizona.³¹

The first clashes occurred in the Central and Southern Plains.

The Great Plains were under siege Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne, Sioux and Arapaho warriors, struck all across Kansas and Indian territor.

The earliest fight between black cavalry troopers (in particular Company F of 10th Cavalry) and Indians occurred on August 2, 1867 under the command of Captain George A. Armes, along the Salin River, 40 miles northeast of Fort Hays.³²

It was probably during these early actions that Afro-American soldiers earned their nickname, even if it is doubtful that they ever used the term themselves.

In particular, when in 1867 eight hundred Cheyenne were defeated by ninety soldiers of the 10th Cavalry in a battle near Fort Leavenworth, the Indian people were said to have cut the skin of a buffalo to make and sell the black "scalps." The Cheyennes saw a resemblance between the hair of black trooper and the fur of the buffalo.³³

³⁰ *Ibidem.*

³¹ *Ibidem.*

³² Field, R. (2004). *Buffalo Soldiers 1866–91*, Osprey Publishing, 12.

³³ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 145.

After experiencing their qualities in combat, the Native Americans developed a profound respect for black soldiers and, comparing them to an animal they considered sacred, called the soldiers of the 10th Cavalry “Buffalo Soldiers”. Afterwards, the name would be applied to all black units.

It was meant as a compliment that black troopers understood and accepted with pride. And later in years the cavalrymen adopted the animal as a prominent feature of their regimental crest in addition to the fact that the name would have been inherited from the black soldiers who fought during the two World Wars.³⁴

In 1867, the year the 10th Cavalry Regiment arrived in Leavenworth, the Commission for Peace with the Indians was held at Medicine Lodge Creek, Kansas.

This commission was convened at the behest of Congress and proposed the implementation of the reservation system with the goal of ending conflicts on the Plains and keeping Indians as far away from settlers and railroads as possible.³⁵

However, the truce promoted by the Medicine Lodge Peace Commission was short-lived: central Plains Indians were soon enraged when treaties were violated by white settlers. In April 1867, white individuals set fire to the Cheyenne and Sioux village of about one thousand to five hundred people located along the Pawnee Branch of the Arkansas River. This hunting area had been guaranteed by a government treaty. In response to this violation, the Cheyenne and Arapaho organized groups of retaliatory attacks, but the army responded with retaliation.³⁶

The same pattern of warfare raged on the Texas border with the Kiowa and Comanche, which the 10th Cavalry would also fight in Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

Meanwhile the principal duty of the 9th Cavalry stationed on the Texas plains was to establish and protect the mail and the stage route from San Antonio to El Paso, and to reinstate law and order in the Country contiguous to the Rio Grande frontier, which had been disrupted by Mexicans as well as by native American during the Civil War years.³⁷

³⁴ Field, R. (2004). *Buffalo Soldiers 1866–91*, Osprey Publishing, 13-14.

³⁵ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 145.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Field, R. (2004). *Buffalo Soldiers 1866–91*, Osprey Publishing, 17-18.

In 1870, Sergeant Emanuel Stance of the 9th Cavalry became the first black man to receive the Medal of Honor in the Indian Wars when at Kickapoo Springs, Texas, he drove off about 30 Kickapoos.³⁸ On June 25, 1876, during the Battle of Little Bighorn, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, one of the officers who refused to be assigned to command black regiments, ended up massacred by the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians and Arapaho.³⁹

In the years to come, Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn was celebrated by Americans as a kind of martyrdom.

The battle also entered the public imagination because, starting in 1887, it became an integral part of Buffalo Bill's big spectacle, the Wild West Show: one of the first examples of a mass public manifestation.

The shows greatly romanticized the figure of the white American cowboy and his life on the frontier.

Also Hollywood contributed greatly to whitewash the West: the story of the westward expansion was told as if it had the white man as its only protagonist, excluding on the one hand the immigrants (who had participated in the construction of the routes to the new territories) and on the other hand the black soldiers who were erased from the western landscape.

The year many after Little Big Horn, northern tribes began to surrender: a gradual shift from Indian wars to wars of confinement and discipline on reservations began.

One of the most frustrating campaigns for the Buffalo Soldiers was the Victorio War, 1879-1880. Victorio, leader of the Warm Springs Apaches, wished to remain in his ancestral home and wanted to prevent the Apaches from being moved to the San Carlos reservation in the Arizona desert.

In August 1879, Victorio left the reservation to hide in the mountains of northern Mexico and send out raiding parties. Black troops became involved in hunting down the rebels. He was pursued by the U.S. and Mexican armies, Texas Rangers and civilian

³⁸ Ivi, 20.

³⁹ Morosi S. & Rastelli P. (23 September, 2017). Buffalo soldiers: gloria (con qualche dubbio) dei neri nell'esercito Usa, Corriere della Sera, last consultation 20 July 2023. <https://pochestorie.corriere.it/2017/09/23/buffalo-soldiers-gloria-con-qualche-dubbio-dei-neri-nellesercito-usa/>

groups. His capture and killing in October 1881 at Tres Castillos in northern Chihuahua by a joint Mexican-U.S. effort broke the back of the Apache revolt.⁴⁰

Two members of the 9th Cavalry, Sergeants George Jordan and Thomas Shaw, received a Medal of Honor for their actions at Tres Castillo.⁴¹

In 1885, with the Texas frontier reasonably stabilized, the 9th and 10th Cavalry were sent to Oklahoma and Arizona, respectively.

Specifically, the 10th Cavalry moved to the Department of Arizona, to fight in the Geronimo campaign of 1885-1886.⁴²

Eventually defeated by U.S. military forces and continuous waves of encroaching settlers, the tribes negotiated agreements to resettle on reservations.

In 1887, the Dawes Act was passed that allowed the federal government to divide Indian lands into small parcels that would be granted to all those Indians who would agree to move away from their tribe and become independent farmers.

The act was touted as the beginning of a path to integration and citizenship.

In reality it was a forced integration leading to a relinquishment of the cultural heritage of the native Indians as it was a process of land dispossession on which a previously nonexistent system of private property was imposed.

By the last decade of the 19th century, except for pockets of war with Apache and Sioux, the Wild West was essentially tamed. The Indian wars culminated in 1890 with the massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee, South Dakota⁴³.

After the Indian Wars, the Buffalo Soldiers participated in the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine War of Independence (1899-1902).

In 1896, the Republican Platform reaffirmed the value of the Monroe Doctrine and the two-sphere theory: the weakness of the Spanish empire, manifested in its inability to curb revolts in the imperial territories of Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines, should not have been a pretext for European intervention.

⁴⁰ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 161.

⁴¹ Field, R. (2004). *Buffalo Soldiers 1866–91*, Osprey Publishing, 41-42.

⁴² *Ivi*, 46-47.

⁴³ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 143.

Faced with a Spain unable to protect its territories, The U.S. supported the Cuban independence struggle, led by revolutionary José Martí, mainly because American interests in Cuba were crucial.

Due to outside pressure, then-President William McKinley agreed to position the battleship USS Maine off the port of Havana.

Tensions erupted when, in February 1898, the battleship mysteriously exploded. The dynamics were unclear: some believed it was due to self-combustion of coal inside the ship, others that it was an attack by the Spanish.

This idea was fueled by the press that amplified in sensationalist tones the struggle for Cuban independence throughout the conflict. A "yellow press" that started to act more on commercial rather than party logics as in the past.

President William McKinley issued orders to institute an immediate blockade around Cuba and recalled military forces to Tampa, a Florida port of embarkation, in preparation for war operations. Subsequently, in March 1898, the 25th Infantry Regiment, composed of African American soldiers, became the first U.S. troop to be deployed to Tampa.⁴⁴

With war officially declared, the War department authorized four new regiments of black troops the Buffalo Soldiers- the 7th through 10th U.S. Volunteer Infantries, with mostly white officers.

Most Afro-Americans ideologically supported the War: Cuba was considered a colored country and one of the leaders of the Cuban rebellion, Antonio Maceo, son of a Venezuelan father and Afro-Cuban mother, was celebrated as a martyr by the black population.

Despite the scarcity of black officers, the Spanish-American War was the most integrated American War since the Revolution.

In particular, the Buffalo Soldiers participated in three crucial battles, coming to the rescue of the "Rough Riders," the 1st Volunteer Cavalry, a battalion made up of volunteers who had already fought in the Indian Wars, headed by future President Theodore Roosevelt.

⁴⁴Ivi, 175-177.

In the battle at Las Guasimas, 10th Cavalry troopers went to the aid of Rough Riders in trouble. They were celebrated as heroes.⁴⁵

In the battle of Hell Caney, the 24th Infantry fought alongside the 13th Infantry. But it was San Juan Hill that was the most integrated battle of all. There were two brigades of integrated cavalry: the 9th Cavalry in the First Brigade with the white 3rd and the 6th; and the 10th Cavalry in the Second Brigade with the Rough Riders, the 1st Regular Cavalry and the Cubans insurgents.⁴⁶

However, Roosevelt, who had made a promise to always remain attached to the Buffalo Soldiers, began to betray them shortly after the Battle of San Juan Hill.

In 1899, after the conclusion of the war, all black volunteer regiments were disbanded. The black officers of the volunteer regiments were discharged. Although black soldiers could still attain the rank of non-commissioned officers, all black officers were reassigned to the regular army as private troops. Between 1899 and 1948, fewer than ten black individuals would attain officer rank in the regular army.⁴⁷

The war was very short: the U.S. won partly because Spain was already occupied in other conflicts. Then-Secretary of State John Hay called the 113-day conflict a "splendid little war."

In 1898 Spain and the US signed the Treaty of Paris: Spain recognized Cuba's independence and ceded Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the US for \$25 million.

After the war, there were questions about what to do with the liberated territory.

Part of the Cuban independence movement would have wanted, in the name of the Monroe Doctrine, for Cuba to be annexed to the US. However, Congress opposed this eventuality by claiming that it would have resulted in a mixed-racial composition of the State.

In fact, Congressional disagreement to potential Cuban annexation to the U.S. was already manifested during the conflict when, in April 1899, the Teller Amendment was passed, a joint resolution that stipulated that, once the conflict was over, America would recognize Cuba's self-rule.

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, 180-181.

⁴⁶ *Ivi*, 182-185.

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, 179.

However, in 1901, with the Platt Amendment to the Cuban Constitution, relations between Cuba and the United States were formally defined: the U.S. reserved the right to intervene in Cuba in the event of unrest or situations endangering its autonomy. Thus, Cuban self-government was limited.

There remained the open Question of the Philippines, which represented a primary interest for the U.S. as they were strategic in controlling the port of Manila and thus trade to Asia and the Pacific.

The Philippine independence movement led by Emilio Aguinaldo who had fought against Spain would later fight against U.S. rule as well.

The “Insurrectors” set up a government on the island of Luzon, and prepared to attack Americans based in Manila. ⁴⁸

On March 2, 1899, two new regiments of black soldiers were created: the 48th and 49th Volunteer Infantry, which followed the Buffalo soldiers across the Pacific.

However, controversy existed within the black population regarding the legitimacy of fighting a war against a population racially discriminated against by the same actor who segregated and prevented the development of their own people.

In the eyes of many, fighting against the independence of the Filipinos, subjugated by an enemy that propagated the racial inferiority of its own people by relegating them to a lower status in all activities of daily life, was utterly paradoxical.

The war with the Philippines lasted 3 years.

The end of the conflict posed the Empire dilemma: the U.S. challenge regarded how to exercise control without becoming an imperialist power, how to continue a work of "civilization" without having to incorporate what they considered a racially inferior population.

The U.S., in order not to appear to be an imperialist power and to mask the expansionist goal that would characterize all of McKinley's and later Roosevelt's foreign policy, claimed that its goal was not to dominate territory but rather to lead inferior nations to a higher degree of civilization.

American imperialism was not promoted as a territorial expansion, but rather as an expansion of civilization.

⁴⁸ *Ivi, 190-192.*

An idea perfectly propagated by the literature and journalism of the time and expressed by Kipling's famous poem, *The White Man's Burden*, the one that will be interpreted as a veritable manifesto of American imperialism and colonialism, again justified and indeed exalted as a providential mission, a task of civilization.

Once again, after silencing Filipino freedom claims, the U.S. debate was embedded in a context where the issue of citizenship was linked to whiteness.

1.6 THE FIRST WORLD WAR:

The 1916 election campaign was strongly focused on the fact that the then incumbent President, Woodrow Wilson, had been able to keep the US out of the war.

In fact, neutral status was maintained even when Germany started submarine warfare against Great Britain indirectly involving neutral countries: in 1915 the British liner *Lusitania*, a merchant ship also carrying American civilians, was sunk.

The gradual shift from neutrality to war in 1917 was the result of the resumption of submarine warfare by Germany and the interception of the Zimmermann telegram, a coded document sent by the German foreign minister to the German ambassador in Mexico with the proposal to create a potential alliance against the United States with the promise of the restitution of the former territories that Mexico had lost in the previous war of 1846.⁴⁹

On 2 April 1917, Wilson delivered a speech in which he urged Congress to vote in favor of declaring war on Germany.

He stated that intervention was inevitable because the actions of an autocratic regime such as Germany would call into question the survival of democracy in America and throughout the world.

⁴⁹ Mexican–American War (1846-1848).

Such a decision had to be legitimized by the idea that civilization had to overcome the barbarities perpetrated by Germany, which, by continuing to pose a threat to all those ships crossing the Atlantic and invading Belgium, had failed to take into consideration the rights of neutral countries and had therefore contravened all those principles that had governed the international system since the Peace of Westphalia.

Wilson's interventionist vision went from the defense of American neutrality to the defense of neutral countries to the defense of all humanity.

The idea was that the United States should not go to war out of revenge or supremacism, but in the name of justice and the human rights of which it felt it represented in the world. The survival of all mankind would be at stake if the sacred rights of nation and people were subjugated by imperialist violence.

Wilson used universalistic language that appealed to the values of humanity rather than the American nation. Yet, the US was portrayed as having the most responsibility to defend those rights.

The US changed the way it perceived itself and its role in the world: Wilson outlined an American political project that went beyond the circumscribed episode of the war.

Even before the end of the conflict, he expected European countries to tacitly accept the preponderant role that the USA attributed to itself according to a vision of American universalist nationalism.

The President was representative of the progressive culture that believed there was a difference between civilised and non-civilised nations and that the former had a moral responsibility to restore international order and to impose their superiority.

From Wilson onwards, the terms 'empire' and 'imperialism' were banished from American political language (they began to be conceived as something antithetical to the United States). Rather, peace could only be maintained by a partnership of democratic nations, the only ones capable of acting as guarantors of a peaceful international order.

Yet, the America that conceived of itself as a bastion of democracy was the same America that continued to perpetrate systematic abuse of African-American citizens in the 'legality' of Jim Crow laws.

US President Woodrow Wilson endorsed David Llewelyn Wark Griffith's (1875-1948) racist film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), an apologia for the KKK that promoted a portrayal of black humanity as biologically inferior and morally depraved, advocating the vigilante style of the clan as a necessary action for whites.⁵⁰

The beginning of World War I marked an increase in tensions within the United States over the meaning of democracy and the role of the democratic nation-state in defending human and civil rights.

Women were also involved in this process. In 1916, Jeannette Rankin, from Wisconsin where the vote for women had already been granted, became the first woman to be elected as a member of the House.

When Congress voted on 6 April 1917 to enter the war, Jeannette Rankin voted against, reciting what was to become a famous phrase: *I want to stand by my country, but I cannot vote for war.*

During the conflict, American women mobilized for the constitutional recognition of women's right to vote.

In 1917 New York suffrage leaders organized a parade, the New York Parade, which emphasized women's wartime contributions and efforts.

The picketing at the Casablanca continued until very belatedly in 1920, when Wilson agreed to support the ratification of the 19th Constitutional Amendment.

It read:

*The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.*⁵¹

⁵⁰ Associazione Nazionale Combattenti e Reduci. (2021). Gli Afroamericani nella Grande Guerra, tra discriminazioni razziali e riscatto sociale, last consultation 20 July 2023. <https://www.combattentiereduci.it/notizie/gli-afroamericani-nella-grande-guerra-tra-discriminazioni-razziali-e-riscatto-sociale#:~:text=attesa%20e%20fiducioso,-,%22,al%20combattimento%20in%20prima%20linea.>

⁵¹Library of Congress. (n.d.), U.S. Constitution-nineteenth Amendment, last consultation 30 July 2023. [https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-19/.](https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-19/)



Picture 1.5: The New York Parade

(*New York Times*, Rotogravure Picture Section, November 4, 1917. Serial and Government Publications Division, Library of Congress (098.00.00))
<https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/women-fight-for-the-vote/about-this-exhibition/confrontations-sacrifice-and-the-struggle-for-democracy-1916-1917/suffrage-and-world-war-i/war-and-suffrage-come-together-in-new-york-parade/>

In the same year as the New York Parade, the Silent Protest Parade was held in New York, in which some 10,000 African Americans participated with the aim of achieving a change in segregated American society.

This is why black soldiers, who had participated in every military conflict in US history, enlisted in the army in order to reclaim their status as citizens and fight for their country, in the hope that this would lead to greater social equality.

When war was first declared, blacks were refused at many recruiting stations. They were relegated to support roles that did not require great responsibility.

The Marines, the Air Corps, the Army Field Artillery, or the Army Corps of Engineers excluded blacks completely, the Navy limited their service to menial roles such as cooks and stewards, and the army remained racially segregated.⁵²

At the onset of the war, there were approximately ten thousand blacks in the regular Army, all members of the Buffalo Soldiers 9th and 10th Cavalries and 24th and 25th Infantries.⁵³

⁵² Williams C.L. (2010). *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 6.

⁵³ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 204-205.

To meet the demands of war, the War Department re-organised the US Army into a new divisional structure and established two new black Army combat units: the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions.

The 92nd, composed mainly of recruits and a select number of black and African-American volunteers already serving in the regular army, included regiments 365 to 368 and served under the American flag.

The 93rd Division, which included the 369th Infantry Regiment, known as the Harlem Hellfighters, and the 370th Infantry Regiment, to which the Germans gave the name 'Black Devils', the 371st and 372nd Divisions, served with the France.

The decision to assign the units to the French army for the duration of the American participation in the war was motivated by the very fact that many white American soldiers refused to perform combat service with blacks.

It was General John J. Pershing who ceded control of the 93rd to the French army, which in turn provided the soldiers with French arms, helmets, belts and handbags, although they continued to wear their US uniforms.⁵⁴

The general sent a directive to the French army on 17 August 1918 in which he warned the French army not to be too familiar with the black troops who would fight with them, nor to praise them too much:

It is important for French officers who have been called upon to exercise command over black American troops, or to live in close contact with them, to have an exact idea of the position occupied by Negroes in the United States.

The American attitude upon the Negro question may seem a matter for discussion to many French minds. But we French are not in our province if we undertake to discuss what some call "prejudice." [recognize that] American opinion is unanimous on the "color question," and does not admit of any discussion.

The increasing number of Negroes in the United States (about 15,000,000) would create for the white race in the Republic a menace of degeneracy were it not that an impassable gulf has been made between them.

As this danger does not exist for the French race, the French public has become accustomed to treating the Negro with familiarity and indulgence.

This indulgence and this familiarity [These] are matters of grievous concern to the Americans. They consider them an affront to their national policy. They are afraid that contact with the French will inspire in black Americans aspirations

⁵⁴ Ivi, 202.

which to them (the whites) appear intolerable. It is of the utmost importance that every effort be made to avoid profoundly estranging American opinion. Although a citizen of the United States, the black man is regarded by the white American as an inferior being with whom relations of business or service only are possible. The black is constantly being censured for his want of intelligence and discretion, his lack of civic and professional conscience, and for his tendency toward undue familiarity.

We may be courteous and amiable with these last, but we cannot deal with them on the same plane as with the white American officers without deeply wounding the latter. We must not eat with [the blacks] them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside of the requirements of military service. We must not commend too highly the black American troops, particularly in the presence of (white) Americans. It is all right to recognize their good qualities and their services, but only in moderate terms strictly in keeping with the truth.⁵⁵

The war fueled ethnic conflicts in America, not only against the black population but against all strata of society that could be linked to some form of contestation.

In a way, it created the conditions for a xenophobic version of patriotism: the American Protective League (an association with a mandate from the Ministry of Justice that ends up carrying out espionage actions) gave rise to a system of suspicion for everything that was considered anti-American. Even female pacifism was strongly stigmatised.

Anything that questioned the war effort was considered an act of treason.

With the 14-point speech, Wilson proposed to reform the international system on the basis of formalised and clear rules, transparent pacts that could reconcile different interests and submitted to international public opinion.

It was with this speech that Wilson presented the creation of the League of Nations, an instrument designed to concentrate and organize the power of the democracies and especially that of the USA, in a position of leadership.

Wilson's speech has been handed down through the ages as strongly progressive, especially for its proposal to enshrine internationally the principle of self-determination of peoples.

However, the President's vision was far from being idealist and the suggestion to apply such a principle must have been strictly restrained. On the contrary, he was

⁵⁵ Yale MacMillan Center. (n.d.). A French Directive, last consultation 30 July 2023. <https://glc.yale.edu/french-directive>

strongly convinced that colonialism was a structural aspect of international relations since, in his vision, not all peoples were capable of governing themselves.

Wilson found very strong opposition in the Senate especially for Article 10 of the Statute of the League of Nations, which implied the ceding of American sovereignty to an international body, in that the power to intervene militarily against aggressor states was transferred to it.

Undoubtedly, the Wilson presidency was a period of political experimentation, modernization and social transformation.

Yet the progressivism claimed internationally was much weaker within US society, and the supposed racial hierarchy he believed existed between peoples was even more manifestly vindicated within national society.

The fact that the United States of America saw itself as a bastion of equality and freedom seemed absurd to the entire African-American community.

Already during the Great War, numerous riots and acts of violence by whites against blacks occurred in Northern cities as the conflict had produced the first major migration of blacks to the industrial cities of the Mid-West in search of good jobs and higher wages that could be offered by the industries that were working for the war.

Famous was the East St. Louis Riot on 2 June 1917 when white peoples turned on blacks resulting in the deaths of 40 of them.

Things did not change after the conflict: the America that came out of the war was not so different from the one that entered it: a nation that continued to be divided, segregated.

Although members of the 92nd and 93rd Divisions had served valiantly at the front, the Wilson administration refused to allow them to march alongside their white counterparts in official victory parades in France after the war.⁵⁶

On the contrary, despite the warnings of General Pershing, American soldiers were decorated by the French Army: more than a hundred members of the 369th won the *Croix de Guerre* or the even more prestigious *Medaille Militaire*.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Foner E. (1998). *The Story of American Freedom*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 177-185.

⁵⁷ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 204.

Their homecoming was also thwarted. It is true that when the soldiers of the 369th regiment returned to New York on 17 February 1919, they received a hero's welcome.

Their parade in Harlem up Fifth Avenue was the greatest black American celebration since Emancipation.⁵⁸

Yet, for thousands of other soldiers, the return by no means appeased the hostility shown by whites in the south and north. They returned to segregated communities, deprived of all the rights that American democracy claimed as identity.

Significant in this regard is the 1925 Army War College report entitled *The Use of Negro Manpower in War*.

It offers an articulate and unfortunately realistic picture of the treatment to which black soldiers were still subjected after the end of World War I, despite the remarkable military performance offered.

Some of the passages in the report read:

Black men are very low in the scale of human evolution, the cranial cavity of the Negro is smaller than the white and his brain weighs less.

The intelligence of the Negro is shown in his inability to compete with the white in professions and other activity in peace time when mental equipment is an essential for success. The Negro is by nature subservient and believes himself to be inferior to the white man.

He is most susceptible to the influence of crowd psychology. He cannot control himself in the face of danger to the extent the white man can. He has not the initiative and resourcefulness of the white man. He is mentally inferior to the white man."

In general, the Negro is jolly, docile and tractable, and lively but with harsh or unkind treatment can become stubborn, sullen and unruly.⁵⁹

These were the lenses through which black men and soldiers were perceived in the eyes of American society in the twilight of the Great War.

Between 31 May and 1 June 1921, the Tulsa Massacre took place, when a white mob began attacking members of the African-American community in the Greenwood neighborhood.

⁵⁸ *Ivi*, 269.

⁵⁹ Army War College (U.S.) (1925). *The use of negro manpower in war*, National government publication, Washington, 13, 8, 17.

The pretext was the accusation that a black boy, 19-year-old Dick Rowland, had assaulted and raped a white woman. Sources as to whether the boy was actually responsible were conflicting. However, there were frequent cases of false accusations against black men.

The Ku Klux Klan had based much of its activity on the defense of white women against blacks. But in 1925 it began to lose credibility and become very marginalized following numerous accusations of corruption.

Undoubtedly, the war also had a significant effect on the African-American social structure.

The pressure for change began to grow.

Numerous riots broke out in cities such as Washington, DC, Omaha, Nebraska and Chicago, Illinois.

Claiming recognition for their military commitment and refusing to return to their old social status, African Americans, trained to fight and defend themselves on the battlefield, reacted by rebelling.

Forms of black activism began to develop more systematically, marking the beginning of the history of the African American movement.

Civil rights groups and black leaders actively worked to eradicate segregation in the military and society. Racial tensions, fueled by scientific racism and segregationist policies, pushed for greater awareness of racial injustices.

Groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) proactively enlisted ex-soldiers in their memberships.

The two main associations respectively represented the voice of two mirroring currents of thought: Du Bois's integrationist and Garvey's separatist. They laid the germs for the two traditions of thought of the African American movement in the mid-20th century, respectively embodied by Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.

The war had given them the ability to rise up and fight back with determination, a crucial step towards the future revolution that would unfold decades later through civil disobedience and black nationalism.

CONCLUSION:

The chapter traced the evolution of the contribution of black soldiers in the main wars fought by the United States from the American Revolution through World War I.

The answer to the question posed to us in the beginning is not univocal.

To speak of an improvement in the condition of the African American people in the United States from slavery through the first two decades of the 20th century is an argument that, like any fact characterized by a certain degree of complexity, does not lead us toward absolute truth.

In relative terms, certainly moving from slave and commodity status to citizen status represented a revolutionary fact. But the phenomenon was more complex than it may appear.

As mentioned in the chapter, early in American history, when the thirteen colonies decided to rebel against a rule recognized increasingly as tyrant rather than "maternal," African American soldiers participated and fought alongside the white settlers.

Later, as the United States began to emerge and strengthen as a state entity, white and black soldiers began to be separated.

The end of slavery meant the beginning of segregation.

Segregation was a very insidious form of racism because it ensured that, in compliance with Reconstruction Amendments, African Americans were formally American citizens and could perform all normal daily activities.

Yet, in practice, they were prevented from asserting their constitutional rights.

Especially in the American South, they had little access to well-paid jobs and educational opportunities, and their right to vote was often prevented through bureaucratic subterfuge.

It was clear that the military involvement of black soldiers responded to specific logics and represented a strategy if not a necessity for the American state rather than an opportunity for integration.

However, certainly black soldiers had the opportunity to show their gifts and skills that were recognized and appreciated at home as well as by "enemies."

Probably, in many cases, the relationship between black and white people in America was not the result of true xenophobic thinking on the part of the latter but rather of the idea of racial inferiority that had been internalized by the American mentality over the centuries.

CHAPTER II - The Tuskegee Airmen and the Red Tails

INTRODUCTION:

The second chapter will focus on the Second World War and the role that African American soldiers played in the war of European liberation from the Nazi-fascist threat.

It will be divided into five main paragraphs.

In particular, the emphasis will be on the exploits of the African American Airmen. But the path that led to their success was by no means linear.

At the end of the First World War, despite the contribution of black soldiers to the wars fought by Americans up to that time, the idea of the psycho-physical inferiority of blacks persisted, based on the aforementioned 1925 Army War College report, *The Use of Negro Manpower in War*.

Consequently, African Americans, deemed unfit to fly aircraft, were barred from civil and military aircraft.

However, the chapter will show how, through the mobilization of the fledgling civil rights movements, there was a significant reversal.

In 1939, in fact, President F.D. Roosevelt approved the Civil Pilot Training Act which activated a program that, by aiming to increase the number of civilian pilots, was also extended to black colleges.

In particular, the main protagonist of this opportunity was the Tuskegee Institute, which was one of the most prestigious black colleges.

The willingness to join the United States Army Air Forces was certainly the result of a sincere desire to fight in the name of the nation and to feel American, but it

was above all an ideological choice, an achievement that would have meant contradicting the prejudice with which American society continued to label the black population.

Aviation, at a time between the two world Wars, was one of the most highly regarded sectors and, from the African-American perspective, being part of it would have meant social and civil redemption.

After shedding light on the historical context, the election of President F.D. Roosevelt, the New Deal years and the decision to enter the war, the chapter will retrace the exploits of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the first black flying squadron, and of all the squadrons that subsequently emerged, then merged into a single Fighter group in May 1944, the 332nd Fighter Group, the first African-American group of the Army Air Forces.

In particular, we will see how the 332nd Fighter Group made its greatest contribution during the Italian Campaign, fought from 1943, starting with the landing in Sicily, to 1945.

The last paragraph focuses on the period when the 332nd FG was stationed at Ramitelli, an aviation base in Campomarino, Molise.

Here, the African-American Airmen, known as Red Tails (because of the red color with which they painted the tails of their distinctive P-51 aircrafts), carried out mostly escort missions.

Ramitelli's represents a historical parenthesis that, being from Molise, aroused enormous interest in me.

Delving into the story of the Red tails was an opportunity for me to discover a page of history written in such a familiar context and a source of pride towards my homeland.

2.1 TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENT:

On 4 March 1933, F.D. Roosevelt won the presidential election against the then incumbent President Herbert Hoover.

At the same time, on 23 March 1933 in Germany, Hitler passed laws restricting civil liberties: the new regime was inaugurated.

It was then that the economist Keynes suggested to Roosevelt an alternative solution to the economic crisis to Soviet planning and the fascist and Nazi regimes, a third way.

Indeed, with F.D. Roosevelt's presidency came one of the most transformative periods in American history. He inaugurated a political, social and economic project, a democratic response to the crisis, the New Deal.

From 1933 to 1935, the main objective was economic recovery.

There was a clear orientation with regard to the economic objective, but all the measures implemented, although they saw the active intervention of the state, did not provide for executive control, with top-down policies, but rather in the form of the 'broker state'.

Subsequently, as the emergency situation subsided, the period known as the 'second New Deal' began, in which the Roosevelt administration had a much more reforming stance in terms of economic and social redistribution policies.

In one of his 'fireside' speeches (so called because they favored a horizontal, citizen-to-citizen style of communication, with simple and direct language), on 4 July 1933, he reassured that what was being done was totally within the logic of the American political tradition, in spite of those who accused him of introducing policies that deviated from the status quo.

Most African Americans were doubtful of the New Deal's benefits, because racial prejudice continued to persist.

Black workers at the grassroots level advocated for increased employment prospects and joined new labor unions to fight for economic rights. But a major change progressively surged over black politics: many Afro-American voters migrated from the

Republican Party to the Democratic one, engaged in more militant racial justice activities.⁶⁰

Indeed, the New Deal saw a major political realignment through the construction of a new democratic coalition, a political structure that was to last until 1968 and included the middle class (typically Republican, from the northeast and mid-west cities), the immigrant working class (also typically Republican), women and the African-American population.

An informal body of African-American councilors, the Federal Council of Negro Affairs (or 'Black Cabinet'), was created: for the first time, therefore, black people entered the Casablanca, mainly thanks to the role of Eleanor Roosevelt.

The first lady was certainly the first to play a public role, not only because she was active per se in the Democratic Party or civil rights movements, but also because, her husband being very ill, she often had to stand in for him, especially by supporting trips across the country as a sign of closeness to the people that the president could not otherwise have endured.

Thanks to the new political conjuncture, in the 1934 elections, the Democratic Party also won in the typically Republican states (Mid-West and West).

This new political realignment put an end to the '1896 system' that had created one-party areas under McKinley: the Democratic Party became strongly competitive even in the typically Republican states.

However, one of the 'drawbacks' of this phenomenon was that Roosevelt had to deal with a particularly complex Democratic party, as it was voted in by a majority formed on the one hand by a South that continued to be racist, segregationist and conservative and on the other by a reformist North.

This is why with respect to the racial issue, Roosevelt ended up sending contradictory messages that affected progressive public opinion.

For example, despite the commitment of his wife Eleanor, he would never have supported the anti-lynching law as it would have meant losing the support of the Southern Democratic Party.

⁶⁰ Murphy M. B. (19 November, 2020), African Americans in the Great Depression and New Deal, American History, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.632>

Significant was the Scottsboro Boys episode, when in 1931 nine African-American boys were falsely accused of molesting white women and publicly lynched and hung from trees in Southern towns. It was belatedly discovered that this was a false accusation.

The song 'Strange Fruit' sung by the American Billie Holiday went down in history as the quintessential indictment of the lynchings of the Jim Crow era. Indeed, the 'strange fruit' metaphorically represents the bodies of blacks hanging from the trees where they were hanged.

As might be expected, the crisis of '29 only exacerbated the economic and social conflicts.

Although the economic policies of the first 100 days had put the economy back on track, the problems surrounding what Roosevelt had called, during a public speech, the 'forgotten man' had not been addressed and dissected yet.

The idea expressed in the *Forgotten Man Speech*, was that metaphorically speaking, just as Napoleon had forgotten the infantry to make room for the cavalry, the American state during the crisis had forgotten the economic 'army' and the individuals that made it up.

The war veterans, who had been assured a bonus as compensation for their sacrifice for the fatherland, never got what they were promised because the arrival of the crisis did not allow the project to be funded and they expressed their frustration by camping out in front of the Casablanca.

Not surprisingly, at the inauguration of the presidency, Roosevelt first sent his wife with an advisor to talk to them, sending a message of listening diametrically opposed to Hoover's approach, who had, on the contrary, used violence in dealing with this social problem.

Very violent strikes began, fueled by the populist movements that developed during the 1930s and which hinged on divisive issues: these included Huey Long and Priest Coughlin on the issue of redistribution of the minimum family income and Francis Townsend on the issue of pensions.

In 1935 the Committee On Industrial Organization (CIO) was formed, a non-'trade' union that organized workers along industrial lines and included immigrant workers while also introducing new forms of mobilization such as the sit-in.

But above all, the Great Depression only accentuated the rampant segregation in the United States: African-Americans were the first to lose their jobs and the cultural and social divide grew inexorably.

In 1938, Congress introduced the Fair Labor Standards Act (minimum wage in factories, regulation of overtime work, prohibition of child labor).

This produced strong opposition from Southern Democrats: firstly, because establishing equal treatment between blacks and whites went against Southern practice; secondly, because setting a minimum wage in factories meant encouraging the emigration of black workers to the North, where they would find better living conditions.

The Southern Democrats' opposition began to merge with the Republican opposition, as was evident from the formation in 1938 of the Commission on Un-American Activities, chaired by Southern Democratic Congressman Martin Dies, which investigated the alleged presence of communists among the New dealers.

Despite their abilities and resources, African Americans were barred from participating in technologically advanced activities such as civil and military aircraft.⁶¹

Until that moment, there has never been a black pilot in the US military. Many military commanders believed that black pilots lacked the necessary intelligence to be combat pilots.⁶²

However, the aspiration to be able to fly and fight, once again, for their country was strong.

At the time, pilots ruled popular culture. They were the heroes of newspapers, literature, comic books, and cinema. The accomplishments of pilots during WWI had penetrated the collective imagination and flying an airplane was synonymous with courage and honor.⁶³

For African-Americans, once the US entered the war, fighting fascism and Nazism abroad would also mean facing racism at home; proving, once again, that the

⁶¹ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 31.

⁶² Doeden M. (2019), Tuskegee Airmen, Lerner Publications, Minneapolis, 9.

⁶³ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 30.

reports about them and their physical and mental inferiority were nothing more than a distorted perception of reality.⁶⁴

In 1944, in *'An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy'*, a study of race relations, the economist Gunnar Myrdal pointed out how the famous American creed would be called into question if the race problem was not solved, as the ideals of American freedom and democracy would clash with the reality to which the African-American people in the USA were subjected.

To solve the contrast between whites and blacks, what Dubois called the 'color line problem', participation in the war could have been a solution in the eyes of the African-American people.

By 1940, black population had amassed an arsenal of protest techniques and were on their path to reach full citizenship rights.⁶⁵

Black politicians, civil rights organizations, and the African-American press would shortly push the government and institutions to establish aviation training schools and gave rise to a segregated Air Corps.⁶⁶

On 3 April 1939, President Roosevelt, thanks also to the work of Senator Henry H. Schwartz, passed Public Law 18, which provided for an expansion of the Army Air Corps.⁶⁷

This was also a faint hope for the African-American people: one component of the bill allowed for the preparation of black pilots through the establishment of training programs in black universities in order to place black troops in the American Army Air Force.⁶⁸

Congress approved the Civilian Pilot Training Act in the summer of 1939, establishing a US Government-sponsored Civil Pilot Training Program (CPTP) with the declared goal of expanding the number of civilian pilots.

⁶⁴ Hunter A. G. & Rollins A. (2015) *We Made History: Collective Memory and the Legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen* *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 71, No. 2, University of Central Missouri, 264—278.

⁶⁵ Murphy M. B. (19 November, 2020), *African Americans in the Great Depression and New Deal*, *American History*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.632>

⁶⁶ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 31.

⁶⁷ "Eleanor Roosevelt and the Tuskegee Airmen" (n.d.), FDR Presidential Library & Museum, last consultation 17 August 2023. <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/tuskegee>

⁶⁸ Doeden M. (2019), *Tuskegee Airmen*, Lerner Publications, Minneapolis, 9.

The government's goal was to educate up to 20,000 civilian pilots each year in order to build a pool of potential military pilots, which he believed the country would need soon.⁶⁹

The program was initially expanded to six black colleges and the training of blacks in white colleges was also approved. The program soon expanded to several more schools.⁷⁰

Among these institutions, one of the most active was in Tuskegee, Alabama.

Tuskegee University was founded on 4 July 1881 following a compromise reached between an African American former slave and Alabama Senate Candidate W. F. Foster. Foster asked what Adams wanted in return for him securing the black vote in the election. Adams replied that he wanted the founding of an institution that would provide education for African Americans, who were excluded from white universities due to segregation. Foster kept his promise and with the help of his colleague in the House of Representatives, Arthur L. Brooks, a bill was passed to establish a 'Negro Normal School at Tuskegee'.

On 15 October 1939, the CAA (Civil Aeronautics Authority) approved the Institute's application and it became part of the project.

The Tuskegee experiment had begun.



Picture 2.1: The first five fighter pilots graduated from Tuskegee on March 7, 1942. From left to right are R.M. Long (instructor); George Roberts; Benjamin O. Davis Jr.; Charles DeBow; Mac Ross; and Lemuel Curtis, (U.S. Air Force, n.d.)

<https://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/196718/davis-leads-the-99th-into-combat/>

⁶⁹ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 32.

⁷⁰ National Museum of the United State Air Force. (n.d.). Civilian Pilot Training Program, last consultation 19 August 2023. <https://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/196137/civilian-pilot-training-program/>

It was, however, an experiment that was not intended to revolutionize the reality of the situation and, on the contrary, was designed, once again, to be carried out on a segregated basis.

The Tuskegee Army Air Field was located in the Jim Crow South. Alabama was one of the most racist states in the United States. Tuskegee was divided into two parts: white inhabitants who did not want to interact with the black populace and fresh African-American recruits from all over America.⁷¹

In May 1940, the first students in the Civil Pilot Training program graduated.

Still, in that year there were still no African-American flyers in the US armed forces.

But it was a presidential election year at the time. In his historic third term as President, Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt championed the cause of the African-American community. In 1932 and 1936, the African American vote was critical to his election⁷².

Roosevelt realized that action had to be taken in order to avoid Wilson's mistake of not involving Republican opponents in the war strategy.

Instead, he initiated a dialogue with the internationalist members of the Republican Party and especially with his opponent in the 1940 elections, Wendell Willkie, who, despite the Rooseveltian attempt, began to work hard to bring the African-American vote back into the Republican Party.

He was appointed as a special envoy for a world tour to enlist the support of the Soviet Union and the Chinese government-in-exile for the creation of an alliance that would later form the UN.

In 1943, Willkie published the book *'One World'* which was a great success. It is a denunciation of the colonial system.

The idea behind the essay was that freedom should be extended to all, regardless of race and skin color, and that in order to solve inequalities in the colonial domains, the US should overcome racial rifts within its borders so as to become a global model of freedom.

⁷¹ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri,36.

⁷² Ivi, 33.

Given Wilkie's popularity, to prevent the black community from siding with him in the November presidential election, and under pressure from activists, the press and political groups, the administration led by the President pushed the United States Army Air Corps to reverse its position and accept black candidates in their flying programs⁷³.

On 16 September 1940, a bill passed in Congress requiring all armed services to enlist black men. Consequently, the War Department announced the start of training for 'coloured personnel' in the Army Air Force.⁷⁴

Having obtained his third term in the White House, Roosevelt continued his policy of supporting the African-American community.

In June 1941, when a march in Washington of African-American associations proposed by civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph to protest against racial discrimination in the war industries was threatened, Roosevelt sought a compromise with the black leaders.

In order to prevent internal defections, he agreed, in return for cancelling the march, to sign Executive Order 8802, which prohibited racial discrimination in the war industry.

However, despite the enormous significance of the event, the order merely abolished discrimination in employment within the defense industry and did not abolish segregation within the army at all. Moreover, by further encouraging emigration northwards, it had the side effect of fomenting race riots.

The beginning of the training of black pilots meant that, in 16 January 1941, the War Department announced the creation of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the first black flying squadron, an air force unit composed exclusively of black men trained at the Tuskegee Institute.⁷⁵

It was officially formed in March 1941.⁷⁶

The work at the Tuskegee Institute, notably the aeronautical school, piqued the curiosity of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. She requested a fly with one of the Tuskegee

⁷³ *Ivi*, 34.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵ National Archives and Record Administration. (n.d.). A People At War, last consultation 20 August 2023. https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/a_people_at_war/new_roles/99th_pursuit_squadron.html

⁷⁶ Doeden M. (2019), *Tuskegee Airmen*, Lerner Publications, Minneapolis, 10.

pilots during a widely publicized visit to the Tuskegee Army Air Field on 29 March 1941.⁷⁷



Picture 2.2: Chief Civilian Flight Instructor Charles Alfred Anderson took Eleanor Roosevelt on an hour-long flight
(*Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, n.d.*)
<https://www.fdrlibrary.org/tuskegee>

Despite the Secret Service's concerns, Chief Civilian Flight Instructor Charles Alfred Anderson, regarded today as "The Father of Black Aviation," piloted Mrs. Roosevelt for more than an hour over the skies of Alabama.

Flying with Anderson highlighted Eleanor Roosevelt's deep commitment to Black pilots and the Institute's training program. The press coverage of her flight experience helped advocate for the competency of these pilots and increased the Institute's profile.⁷⁸

By July 1941, construction had been completed on the Tuskegee Army Airfield (TAAF), a military airfield about 14 kilometers northwest of Moton Field used to train the Tuskegee Airmen.⁷⁹

First Lady Roosevelt also loaned the college \$175,000 to construct this training field.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ "Eleanor Roosevelt and the Tuskegee Airmen" (n.d.), FDR Presidential Library & Museum, last consultation 17 August 2023. <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/tuskegee>

⁷⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁹ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia (24 August, 2023) "Tuskegee Airmen". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last consultation 24 Aug. 2023 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tuskegee-Airmen>. Accessed 28 August 2023.

⁸⁰ Adkins A. (2022). The Tuskegee Airmen: African-American Heroes of World War II, *Sunland Tribune*, Scholar Commons, University of South Florida, 28(5), 27.

Here the recruits would go through basic training and then advanced flying training. The cadets were under the orders of Captain Noel Parrish and Second Lieutenant Harold C. Magoon, two white officers. However, while at first the command of the 99th Fighter Squadron was entrusted to white officers, after the entry into the war, the first all-black air unit was entrusted to black commanding officers: segregation required that a unit consisting only of black pilots have a black leader.⁸¹

Lieutenant George S. Roberts became the first black man to command the squadron in June 1942. In August 1942, Captain Benjamin O. Davis Jr. was chosen to lead what would be the future Tuskegee squadron group on overseas combat missions. He was the son of the first African-American general in the U.S. Army and the most celebrated black West Point graduate since lieutenant Flipper.⁸²



Picture 2.3: Benjamin Oliver Davis, Jr.
(*Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. 6 September, 2023.*)
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tuskegee-Airmen>

The years of training had hardened the Tuskegee boys. The long cohabitation, the hardships they faced and the desire to prove wrong the prejudice they were victims of had led to great cohesion within the squadron.

⁸¹ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli.* Mazzanti Libri, 46.

⁸² Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House.

The extensive training had provided the boys from Tuskegee with everything they needed to succeed in the theatre of war; the pilots of the 99th had accumulated vastly more flying time than any other fighter pilot. The recruitment system based on 'quotas' meant that only a limited number of airmen could complete the training. The War Department had instituted a system whereby only those with superior ability or education were accepted with the result that only the ablest and most intelligent African-American candidates were offered the opportunity to be recruited⁸³.

The squadron became an elite.

2.2 THE USA ENTERS THE WAR:

During the pre-war climate of tension, the US was unsure whether to take part in European dynamics again.

Roosevelt faced very strong opposition in Congress, especially in the Senate: the Isolationists had been investigating since 1934 that the war under the Wilson administration had in fact been prompted by pressure from the war industries, who wished to increase profits and not by the need to protect the international order.

The isolationists included female pacifist groups, exponents of agricultural progressivism and exponents of xenophobic, i.e. the opponents of the New Deal, also influenced by German and Italian fascist propaganda.

One only has to think of the German American Bund, a Nazi propaganda movement organised in the United States of America from 1933, mainly in the circles of the German American community.

⁸³ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 39.

The best known isolationist pressure group was the America First Committee (AFC), whose main spokesman was Charles Lindbergh who, among other things, was the first American aviator to cross the Atlantic solo and non-stop in the Ryan Spirit of St. Louis.

From 1935 to 1937, Congress passed the Neutrality Acts to prevent the US from becoming involved in what was emerging as a conflict. They prohibited Americans from travelling on warships, required the president to enact an arms embargo, prohibited loans to belligerent countries and introduced a cash-and-carry system for non-military goods.

In 1937, the Neutrality Laws were extended to Spain, where a civil war was in progress.

Indeed, 1937 was a watershed year: episodes such as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the Spanish Civil War showed how the League of Nations was unable to ensure peace and stability in the international system.

On 5 October 1937, with the Quarantine speech, Roosevelt tried to convince the American public and political class that action was needed.

He took up the Wilsonian concept of interdependence and pointed out its main contradiction: while it intensified the connections between countries, it also made them more vulnerable. The idea was that in the context of World Wars, the bonds of interdependence made isolation utopian.

He likened belligerence to an infectious epidemic, as it was capable of spreading irrepressibly due to the imperialistic desires of certain powers.

Although it could be kept at bay by a variety of means, these were not definitive techniques: neutrality was no guarantee of peace in the face of a contagious war.

According to Roosevelt, the USA, encircled by the Euro-Asian threat (Germany on the one hand and Japan on the other), would in any case end up turning into a garrison state in one way or another.

The events of the following year ended up corroborating this analysis: in March 1938, German troops invaded Austria to accelerate the annexation; the Munich Conference, in September of the same year, while attempting the appeasement policy aimed at soothing Hitler's expansionist goals and averting military intervention against

Germany, proved to be in vain with Kristallnacht, which showed that Hitler could not be controlled by national laws.

This allowed Roosevelt to put pressure on Congress to pass laws to offer aid to democratic European countries, especially France and Great Britain: in 1939 the Cash and Carry Law was modified, allowing the sale of American arms to the two countries; in 1941 the Rent and Loans Law was introduced, granting military supplies to those countries deemed useful for the defence of the USA in an anti-fascist function, extended also to the USSR.

After the defeat of France and the signing of the Second Compiègne Armistice in 1940, Roosevelt stated during the Arsenal Speech that if the enemies encircled US power, then the US would be forced to become a militarized state based on a war economy.

With the 1940 elections, the 3rd Roosevelt mandate was inaugurated.

This was a highly unusual event since the practice was to have two, but it was accepted in an emergency context in which the country needed secure leadership.

However, there was much hostility even within the Democratic Party itself, but in the end the first lady, with a very short speech centered on the emergency state, managed to convince the Democratic convention of her husband's third nomination.

In order to convince the American public, Roosevelt reiterated the idea that had accompanied American foreign policy from the very beginning, the conviction that the USA should stand as a bastion of democracy and acquire global leadership.

The concepts of freedom and security were profoundly changed: in the *Four Freedoms Speech*, delivered on 6 January 1941, he stated how freedom was no longer only about traditional civil rights, but also about social and economic ones, such as right of speech, of religion, freedom from fear, from want, just as security was no longer simply defence of the borders (national security) but also social security.

The discourse of the Four Freedoms is seen by historian and lawyer Elisabeth Borgwardt, in '*A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights*' as the basis of the Atlantic Charter, signed on 10 August 1941 by Churchill's Great Britain and

Roosevelt's USA to sanction collaboration against Nazi tyranny and establish international peace⁸⁴.

In fact, the Charter, although born as an agreement between nations, can be regarded as a forerunner of the documents enshrining the fundamental freedoms: the subject shifts from 'nations' to 'all men' and to human rights, which, as such, intrinsically belong to individuals and must be guaranteed regardless of any status.

The situation precipitated following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour at dawn on 7 December 1941.

The precedent for the attack was the expansionist policy of Japan, an ally of Germany and Italy, which, already engaged in a war of conquest against China, had taken advantage of the European conflict to extend its expansionist aspirations to all the territories of South East Asia, particularly targeting French Indochina, and had entered into an agreement with the Vichy government to install military bases there.⁸⁵

In July 1941, Roosevelt refused to sign a trade treaty with Japan and established a blockade of steel and iron supplies to countries outside the Western Hemisphere in a context in which half of the steel and iron underpinning Japanese production came from the USA. It was an exercise in pressure on Japan to withdraw from China.

The Japanese Air Force attacked, without prior declaration of war, the US fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor.⁸⁶

Two thousand four hundred US soldiers killed and 1100 wounded. The attack ended the dilemma between isolationism and internationalism: Congress had no choice but to vote for a declaration of war against Japan.

As in 1917, pacifist Jeannette Rankin voted against.

The collaboration between the federal government and the film studios gave rise to several productions aimed at creating a pro-war public opinion.

With the war, the unemployment of the 1930s was reabsorbed and the New Deal introductions were further consolidated.

The fighting of the Second World War was a decisive factor for US growth and prosperity, but particularly for social inclusion: women began to work in war industries

⁸⁴ BORGWARDT, E. (2005). *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt6wpqj8>

⁸⁵ Sabbatucci G. & Vidotto V. (2007), *Storia contemporanea, Il Novecento*, Editori Laterza, 186-187.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

due to the shortage of male labour, and due to the participation of immigrants in the war, some kind of integration was fostered.

Yet, for the African American soldiers, the long-awaited trial by fire was slow in coming. The War Department still seemed to have no plans to assign the 99th FS to combat missions.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, on 19 February 1942, the 100th Fighter Squadron, formed on 27 December 1941, had reached Tuskegee Army Air Field. It was the second unit composed of black pilots to be activated, after the 99th PS⁸⁸.

In March 1942 the first class of African-American pilots at Tuskegee Army Air Field completed advanced pilot training.

There were only five who completed the training: other than Capt. Benjamin O. Davis Jr and George S. Roberts, Lieutenants Mac Ross; Lemuel R. Custis; Charles H. DeBow Jr.⁸⁹

Subsequently, on 13 October 1942, the 332nd Fighter Group, the first African-American group of the Army Air Forces, consisting of the 100th, 301st and 302nd Fighter Squadrons, was activated at Tuskegee Army Air Field and, in 1944, also incorporated the 99th Pursuit Squadron, later renamed the 99th Fighter Squadron (15 May 1942).⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 46.

⁸⁸ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). *Tuskegee Airmen Chronology*, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency, 5, last consultation 20 August.
https://www.tuskegee.edu/Content/Uploads/Tuskegee/files/TUSKEGEE_AIRMEN_CHRONOLOGY12.2011.pdf.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ Department of the Air Force, Office of Air Force History, *Air Force Combat Units of World War II*, Maurer Maurer, Washington, 1982.

2.3 THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN GOES INTO ACTION:

On December 1942, when Col. Parrish became commanding officer of the school, replacing Col. Frederick Kimble, he allowed more desegregation of the facilities on the field than his predecessors.⁹¹

The TAAF commander lobbied hard for the Tuskegee Airmen, trained and ready for combat, to be deployed in the war, finding an ally in the first lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

His determination led him to personally go to Washington to convince the War Department to give the pilots of the 99th FS a chance.⁹²

His efforts achieved the desired result: on 1 April 1943, the combat employment order for the African-American pilots of Davis' squadron arrived.⁹³

Commander Davis was aware of the importance of the moment: the Tuskegee airmen held the future of blacks in the air force, the army and American society more generally in their hands⁹⁴.



*Picture 2.4: Poster for war bonds depicting Tuskegee Airman Robert W. Diez
(National Museum of African American History & Culture, n.d.)
https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2011.168*

⁹¹ Doeden M. (2019), *Tuskegee Airmen*, Lerner Publications, Minneapolis, 12.

⁹² Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 47.

⁹³ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 344.

⁹⁴ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 47.

It represented the general feeling of most African Americans, who saw the war as a means to preserve democracy and human rights for all oppressed peoples while battling racial injustice.

The squadron, consisting of 287 men and 42 officers, arrived by train on 4 April, at Camp Shanks, New York, in preparation for deployment overseas for combat. On 16 April 1943, the 99th Fighter Squadron sailed aboard the steamship *Mariposa* from New York harbor, bound eastward across the Atlantic Ocean for Africa.⁹⁵

It arrived later at Casablanca, French Morocco, its first overseas base, and began serving the Twelfth Air Force.⁹⁶

From here, the pilots were transferred by train to the old Luftwaffe base in Oued Nja, an isolated place not far from Fez in the Moroccan desert. After a week, the planes arrived, Curtiss P-40 Warhawks, aboard which the men of the 99th FS devoted themselves to exercises and the study of flight tactics.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, the Allies were pushing the Axis forces out of the African continent. 'Operation Torch', which had led to landings in Morocco and Algeria in November 1942, allowed the Allies to advance towards Tunisia.

On 9 May, the 99th FS participated in the parade held in Fez to celebrate the liberation of Tunisia and, three days later, the Axis forces, despite fierce resistance, vastly outnumbered and outgunned by the Allied armies, were finally defeated and surrendered.

The Tunisian campaign thus ended with a major strategic success for the Allies who took possession of the entire North African coast.⁹⁸

While the Tunisian campaign was still in progress (January 1943), at the Casablanca Conference in Morocco, the British and Americans decided that, once the African front was closed, the landings would take place in Italy, which was considered the easiest target both for logistical reasons (the proximity of Sicily to the coast of

⁹⁵ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). Tuskegee Airmen Chronology, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency, 9.

⁹⁶ Haulman D. L. (2008), 112 Victories: Aerial Victory Credits of the Tuskegee Airmen Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1.

⁹⁷ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). Tuskegee Airmen Chronology, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency.

⁹⁸ Deakin F.W. (1990). *La brutale amicizia*, Torino, Einaudi, pp. 99-112 e 143-166.

Tunisia) and for political-military reasons (the state of crisis in which the Italian armed forces and the fascist regime itself were in).⁹⁹

Even the missions of the pilots led by Benjamin Davis would target the Italian peninsula.

‘Operation Husky’, the Allied code name for the invasion of Sicily, began on 9 July 1943, preceded in June by the occupation of the island of Pantelleria and the Pelagic Islands (Lampedusa, Linosa and Lampione) during what was called ‘Operation Corkscrew’.

It was the first Allied operation on Italian soil during the Second World War. The operation began on 9 May 1943 with a violent Allied bombardment of the island of Pantelleria, the most fortified and garrisoned of the four.¹⁰⁰

From the spring of 1943 to the summer of the following year, the 99th FS became an integral part of the operation and was assigned to white fighter groups, including the 324th, the 33d, and the 79th, as not enough black pilots had graduated from Tuskegee to form the three squadrons needed to form a Fighter Group.¹⁰¹

On 29 May, the 99th FS was attached to the 33rd FG, under the command of Colonel William "Spike" Momyer. This was a potentially explosive situation, because of the complicated relations that could have arisen between the pilots and because of the surviving prejudice that whites continue to have against the men who had come from Tuskegee.¹⁰²

The Commander of the 33rd FG did not hide his dislike and hostility towards the newcomers and, already on the first day, did not return the greeting of Davis and his deputy George "Spanky" Roberts.¹⁰³

On 2 June, the 99th Fighter Squadron flew its first combat mission, flying P-40 aircraft on patrol over the Mediterranean Sea and strafing fortified areas on the island, including the German-controlled airfield. From 2 to 9 June 1943, the 99th Fighter Squadron flew an average of two missions daily; these were mostly machine-gun

⁹⁹ Sabbatucci G. & Vidotto V. (2007), *Storia contemporanea, Il Novecento*, Editori Laterza, 192.

¹⁰⁰ Salmaggi C. & Pallavisini A. (1977). *Continenti in fiamme - 2194 giorni di guerra, cronologia della seconda guerra mondiale*, Milano, Mondadori.

¹⁰¹ Haulman D. L. (2008), *112 Victories: Aerial Victory Credits of the Tuskegee Airmen Air Force* Historical Research Agency, 2.

¹⁰² Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 49.

¹⁰³ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 341.

missions against ground targets, alternating with escort missions to A-20 and B-25 bombers. On 7 June 1943, the 99th Fighter Squadron moved to Fardjouna, Tunisia, from which base it took part with other units in air raids on the island of Pantelleria.¹⁰⁴

On 9 June 1943, the 99th Fighter Squadron encountered enemy aircraft for the first time during a mission on which it escorted 12 A-20s over Pantelleria Island. The squadron formation had scattered when a German fighter force twice its size and flying superior aircraft attacked it from above and out of the sun.¹⁰⁵

Commander Momyer accused the Tuskegee Airmen of not having the same desire to fight as white pilots and drew up a report through which he intended to end the Tuskegee Experiment once and for all. The report questioned whether the 99th Fighter Squadron should remain in combat.¹⁰⁶

However, Gen. George C. Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the Army, decided to study the issue, assigning review of the 99th to the War Department's permanent Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies. The committee, led by John J. McCloy, called on Davis to testify and he was able to convince committee members to endorse his squadron's continued combat role¹⁰⁷.

Meanwhile, other black flying organizations were being created. The first of June 1943, the 477th Bombardment Group (Medium) was activated at MacDill Field, Florida, with the 616th, 617th, 618th, and 619th Bombardment Squadrons. They would later become the first bomber units of the Tuskegee Airmen but will never actually be deployed in the conflict.¹⁰⁸

In fact, because the Army Air Force did not have high expectations of African-American soldiers' ability to fly bombers, no training schools for black bomber pilots had been established and the unit was severely penalised, at least until the following year, by a lack of men.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). Tuskegee Airmen Chronology, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency, 11.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁶ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 55.

¹⁰⁷ Gropman. A.L. (2002). The Air Force Integrates, 1945-1964, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1978), pp. 12-14; <http://www.aviation-history.com/airmen/davis.htm>

¹⁰⁸ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). Tuskegee Airmen Chronology, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency, 10.

¹⁰⁹ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 124.

On 11 June 1943, the enemy forces surrendered at Pantelleria without the need for an invasion. The capitulation paved the way for the Allied invasion of Sicily, which was supported by the 99th Fighter Squadron.

On 2 July 1943, 99th Fighter Squadron pilots escorted B-25 medium bombers in an attack on Castelvetro, in southwestern Sicily. Charles B. Hall of the 99th Fighter Squadron scored the squadron's first aerial victory by shooting down an FW-190 enemy aircraft. Never before had an African-American fighter pilot in the U.S. armed forces shot down an enemy aircraft.

On 3 July 1943, the 99th Fighter Squadron joined three other fighter squadrons of the 324th Fighter Group, to which it was attached, in escorting medium bombers to Sicily.¹¹⁰



Picture 2.5: Hall is congratulated by Gen. Canon for his victory

(Aces of World War II, n.d.)

<https://acesofww2.com/tuskegee/>

On 10 July 1943, during the invasion of Sicily, the 99th Fighter Squadron covered the landing of Allied troops at Licata.¹¹¹

Within a few weeks, the first Anglo-American troops seized the island, poorly defended by troops largely convinced of the inevitability of defeat.

¹¹⁰ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). Tuskegee Airmen Chronology, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency, 21.

¹¹¹ *Ivi*, 12.

The Sicilian campaign ended on 17 August 1943: the Anglo-American landslide represented the coup de grace for the fascist regime, which, discredited by an unbelievable string of military failures, was already seeing signs of discontent multiply within it.

On 25 July 1943, Mussolini was arrested and Marshal Pietro Badoglio was appointed head of government. The announcement of Mussolini's fall was greeted by the population with irrepressible demonstrations of jubilation. The enthusiasm with which the country greeted the fall of fascism was due not so much to the joy of regaining freedom as to the widespread hope of an imminent end to the war. But the exit from the conflict would not be forthcoming.¹¹²

On 3 September 1943, the Badoglio government signed the armistice with the allies.

It was an act of surrender with no guarantee for the future. The king and the government abandoned the capital and fled to Apulia under the protection of the Allied forces while the Germans proceeded with a systematic occupation of the entire central and northern part of Italy.¹¹³

In the autumn of 1943, Italy was divided into two completely separate state entities: while in the south, monarchical power survived, albeit under Anglo-American authority, the north and centre were under German and Italian Social Republic authority, the new fascist state founded by Mussolini, which was liberated by German airmen and paratroopers on 12 September 1943.

Meanwhile, the men of the 99th FS, aggregated with the pilots of the 79th Fighter Group, although not officially due to segregation, moved to Molise for the first time on 22 November 1943, at the Madna Airfield, which had just been built inside the Foggia Airport Complex (Maurer, 1982).

On January 16, 1944 the squadron moved again, from Madna to Capodichino Airdrome, near Naples.¹¹⁴

Less than a week later, more than 37,000 Allied troops began an amphibious attack of Anzio.

¹¹² Sabbatucci G. & Vidotto V. (2007), *Storia contemporanea, Il Novecento*, Editori Laterza, 193.

¹¹³ Sabbatucci G. & Vidotto V. (2007), *Storia contemporanea, Il Novecento*, Editori Laterza, 193-194.

¹¹⁴ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). *Tuskegee Airmen Chronology*, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency, 18.

On January 23, Luftwaffe planes assaulted Allied forces as well as two hospital ships in the harbor. Four Army Air Forces fighter groups and squadrons were tasked with repelling enemy air raids. The 99th Fighter Squadron was one of them.¹¹⁵

On January 27 and 28, formations of German FW 190s raided Anzio.

During those two days, eleven of the squadron's pilots shot down enemy fighters. Capt. Charles B. Hall, who had scored the squadron's first aerial victory over seven months earlier, was among the victorious. Eight fighter squadrons participated in this air defense of Anzio, shooting down 32 enemy aircraft and the 99th had the highest score of all.¹¹⁶

Col. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., a former squadron leader, returned to the United States in October 1943 to take command of the 332nd Fighter Group, the first African-American fighter group. The group proceeded to the Mediterranean Theater in February 1944, with three squadrons assigned, the 100th, 301st, and 302nd. The 99th was added to the group on May 1.¹¹⁷

Members of the 99th Fighter Squadron would still be able to shoot down enemy aircraft, but only on close air support and interdiction operations for the 12th Air Force. The 332nd Fighter Group's new duty was to accompany heavy bombers from the 15th Air Force on operations against enemy key sites in southern and central Europe. They were one of seven such people.

By the end of May, the force had been outfitted with P-47 Thunderbolt aircraft and had relocated to Italy's Ramitelli Airfield, Molise.¹¹⁸

In the meanwhile, in late 1944, the 477th Bombardment Group had reached enough qualified personnel to undertake specific training and be deployed in combat. They were moved to Freeman Field, Indiana with more adequate facilities than their previous base at Godman Field, Kentucky.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Kit C. Carter and Robert Mueller, (1991) *The Army Air Forces in World War II: Combat Chronology, 1941-1945* (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1973), pp. 256

¹¹⁶ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). *Tuskegee Airmen Chronology*, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency, 18-19.

¹¹⁷ Department of the Air Force, Office of Air Force History, *Air Force Combat Units of World War II*, Maurer Maurer, Washington, 1982.

¹¹⁸ Ravenstein, C. A. *The Organization and Lineage of the United States Air Force* (1986), Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986), 33-35.

¹¹⁹ Gropman. A.L. (2002). *The Air Force Integrates, 1945-1964*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1978), pp. 12-14; <http://www.aviation-history.com/airmen/davis.htm>

It was at Freeman Field that another fundamental page in the history of the Tuskegee Airmen and their battle against segregation was written.

The pretext was the opening of a club for black officers at the new site, which would be added to the only one already existing within the facility. This was a strategy to prevent black officers from attending the same club as white officers and thus to continue to maintain the principle of segregation, despite an Army Regulation directive stating that facilities reserved for officers should be open to all members of the bases. The segregation of the units, coupled with the discriminatory attitude that continued to pervade the military environment, despite the successes of the black squadrons, prompted the pilots of the 477th to organise a planned, non-violent protest on 5 April 1945: in groups of four, systematically and at regular intervals, the pilots would attempt to enter the white-only facility.¹²⁰

The protests went on throughout the night, until the club was closed, and continued the following day. A total of 61 black men were arrested on charges of attempting to enter the club by disobeying orders from their superiors.¹²¹

Although they were released, on 7 April, Selway, the same Colonel who had arranged for the opening of the second club, drew up a new order, which denied them access to a whites-only officers' club and which he said would meet all the legal technical requirements. Only three agreed to sign the declaration accepting the new directives, while 101 refused. On 13 April, the 101 officers were transferred to their old base at Goodman Field, where they were placed under arrest, pending court martial.¹²²

The NAACP, upon learning of the events, sent a telegram to President Roosevelt hoping for his intervention. On 19 April, in view of the delicacy and potential explosiveness of the situation that had arisen, which would greatly affect the morale and surrender of the African American soldiers, General George Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, ordered the release of the 101 black officers.¹²³

¹²⁰ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 128.

¹²¹ Gropman. A.L. (2002). *The Air Force Integrates, 1945-1964*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1978), pp. 12-14; <http://www.aviation-history.com/airmen/davis.htm>

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

After the Freeman Field incident, all the commanders of the 477th BG, until then exclusively white officers, would be replaced with black officers and Colonel Benjamin Davis, would be appointed commander of the unit.¹²⁴

Thus, although the first African-American bomber unit did not have the actual opportunity to fight during World War II, it was the protagonist of one of the most incisive episodes of rebellion in the African-American military.



Picture 2.6: Men of the 477th Bombardment Group (National Air and Space Museum, n.d.)
<https://airandspace.si.edu/multimedia-gallery/si-90-3833jpg>

¹²⁴ *Ibidem.*

2.4 RAMITELLI AND THE RED TAILS:

While up to that point the black squadrons had been attached to existing white units, with all the consequent dynamics of conflict and segregation, once they arrived at Ramitelli, at the end of May 1944, all the squadrons were attached to the 332nd FG, led by O. Davis Jr: for the first time an entire unit composed exclusively of black soldiers was employed in battle.¹²⁵

In particular, as already mentioned, the 99th Fighter Squadron was assigned to the 332nd Fighter Group on 1 May, but did not physically join the group, remaining attached to the 324th Fighter Group, until early July.¹²⁶

Ramitelli became the base for bomber escort operations: Tuskegee's pilots were assigned to the 15th Air Force to take care of escorting B-17 and B-24 heavy bombers on missions over enemy territory.¹²⁷

On 6 June 1944, 'Operation Overlod', the Normandy landings, began to liberate occupied France and open a second front in Europe.

General Ira Eaker asked Colonel Benjamin Davis if his men were ready to escort the bombers into Germany, so far untouched by foreign armies, and other enemy territories. Davis seized the opportunity by instructing his men never, under any circumstances, to abandon the escorted bombers, not even to seek glory or shoot down enemy fighters, what would later prove to be the winning tactic of the 332nd Fighter Group.¹²⁸

The group flew its first mission with the Fifteenth Air Force on June 7, 1944.¹²⁹

Throughout the month of June, the group escorted bombers to Munich, Budapest, Bratislava, Bucharest, and Sofia, as well as strafing missions to Airasca-Pinerale Landing Ground (Italy) and roads in Yugoslavia and Albania.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 128.

¹²⁶ Haulman D.L.(2015), *A SHORT HISTORY OF THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN*, Chief, Organizational Histories Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

¹²⁷ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 90.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹ Rose, Robert A. (1980). *Lonely Eagles, The Story of America's Black Air Force in World War II*. Los Angeles, CA: Tuskegee Airmen Inc., Los Angeles Chapter.

¹³⁰ MOTON FIELD/TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY (1998), United States Department of Interior, Southeast Regional Office National Park Service Atlanta, Georgia.

On June 25, 1944, eight P-47 pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group, including 2d Lt. Gwynne W. Pierson of the 302d Fighter Squadron strafed a German warship in the Adriatic Sea, in Trieste Harbor. No other German warship was reported hit by Allied aircraft that day.¹³¹

While until then the pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group had flown P-47 aircraft, from July (in particular from the 4 July mission) they were assigned the P-51 Mustang aircraft as a replacement.

The P-51 had a longer escort radius and could fly faster and farther than any of its predecessors, but was more vulnerable to enemy fire than the P-47 fighters with their air-cooled engines.¹³²

Each of the Fifteenth Air Force's four P-51 fighter escort groups had its own colour or identifying motif on the tails of its aircraft. The 332nd therefore decided to make the new Mustangs recognizable, distinguishing them from fighters in other groups, so that the bombers and the Germans knew that the Tuskegee Airmen were on the mission. It was decided jointly to paint the tails of all those 51s red.¹³³

That was the moment when they became the 'Red Tails'.

When, on 6 July 1944, the first elements of the 99th Fighter Squadron arrived at Ramitelli Airfield, the Fighter Group began to form in full.

The fact that it was composed of four Fighter Squadrons was a distinctive feature: usually a Fighter Group was composed of three Squadrons but the need for segregation had led to the formation of a single group for all African-American pilots.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). Tuskegee Airmen Chronology, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency, 28.

¹³² Haulman D.L.(2015), A SHORT HISTORY OF THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN, Chief, Organizational Histories Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 4.

¹³³ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁴ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 85.



*Picture 2.7: North American P-51 Mustang fighter plane
(U.S. Air Forc, n.d.)
<https://www.af.mil/News/Photos/igphoto/2000593917/>*

On July 16, it destroyed two Macchi 205s, Italian-made enemy aircrafts, on a fighter sweep to Vienna. The following day, July 17, members of the 332nd Fighter Group escorted Fifteenth Air Force B-24 Liberators on a raid against a marshalling yard and railroad bridge at Avignon in southern France and destroyed three Me-109s (Rose, 1980).

But, as far as aerial victories are concerned, July 18 was the best day yet. The group destroyed two FW-190s and nine Me-109s. Between July 20 and 30, the 332nd destroyed another nineteen enemy fighters, making a total of thirty-nine aerial victories in nine missions between July 12 and 30, 1944, the most they ever scored in a single month.¹³⁵

As the days passed, escort missions for heavy bombers became more and more numerous.

By the end of August, more than two months after the start of Operation Overlod, the Allies were able to break through the German defences and sweep into northern France.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Rose, Robert A. (1980). *Lonely Eagles, The Story of America's Black Air Force in World War II*. Los Angles, CA: Tuskegee Airmen Inc., Los Angeles Chapter.

¹³⁶ Sabbatucci G. & Vidotto V. (2007), *Storia contemporanea, Il Novecento*, Editori Laterza, 201.

At the same time, 15 August saw the start of ‘Operation Dragoon’, the Allied invasion of southern France, planned to take place in conjunction with the Normandy landings but later postponed until late summer.

The Red Tails participated, flying 28 missions that led to the destruction of radar stations in southern France and the destruction of 105 aircraft grounded at enemy airfields.¹³⁷

In September, due to bad weather, the FG carried out only 16 missions, which, however, resulted in the destruction of 30 aircraft on the ground during the bombing of the airfield at Ilandza, Yugoslavia.¹³⁸

On September 10, 1944, the 332nd Fighter Group was the protagonist of a significant celebration.

Brigadier General Benjamin Davis Senior arrived at Ramitelli to deliver the Distinguished Flying Cross to his son. General Ira Eaker, commander of the Mediterranean Allied Air Force, Major General Nathan F. Twining, commander of the 15th Air Force, and Brigadier General Dean C. Strother, leader of the Fifteenth Fighter Command joined him. Along with Davis, there was Captain Joseph Elsberry, Lieutenant Jack Holsclaw, and Lieutenant Clarence "Lucky" Lester.¹³⁹



Picture 2.8: General Benjamin O. Davis pins the Distinguished Flying Cross on his son, Lt. Col. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. at Ramitelli Airfield, Italy.

(TuskegeeAirmen Museum Management Program National Park Service, n.d.)
https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/tuskegee_airmen/selected_individuals/Benjamin_Davis/TUSK041.html

¹³⁷ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 93.

¹³⁸ MOTON FIELD/TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY (1998), United States Department of Interior, Southeast Regional Office National Park Service Atlanta, Georgia.

¹³⁹ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 95.

By 1945, the Axis powers could already say they were virtually defeated.

In mid-January, after the last German counteroffensive in the Ardennes, the Red Army, having conquered Warsaw, crossed all Polish territory, advancing towards Berlin. The Anglo-Americans attacked on the Rhine, which they crossed by the end of March, to penetrate the capital.¹⁴⁰

The bad weather in January constrained the 332nd FG, which flew only eleven missions, including escort missions to photographic reconnaissance and bombing communications and oil targets in Vienna, Munich, Prague, Stuttgart, Regensburg and Linz.¹⁴¹

However, in February the weather improved and the group flew thirty-nine missions in twenty-eight days.¹⁴²

On 6 March, the 302nd Fighter Squadron was disbanded: the 332nd FG also acquired the standard number of squadrons, the 99th, 100th, and 301st.¹⁴³

The missions of the P-51s were now directed at the heart of what remained of the Third Reich.

On 24 March 1945, the 15th Air Force was engaged in the longest mission in its history: it was to fly more than 2,500 kilometres, round trip, to hit the Daimler-Benz tank assembly plant in Berlin.¹⁴⁴

For this mission, the AAF assigned the 332nd, along with three other fighter groups, the 31st, 52nd and 325th, to accompany the B-17s of the Fifteenth Air Force to Berlin.

¹⁴⁰ Sabbatucci G. & Vidotto V. (2007), *Storia contemporanea, Il Novecento*, Editori Laterza, 201.

¹⁴¹ MOTON FIELD/TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY (1998), United States Department of Interior, Southeast Regional Office National Park Service Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁴² MOTON FIELD/TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY (1998), United States Department of Interior, Southeast Regional Office National Park Service Atlanta, Georgia. Department of the Air Force, A.F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Office of Air Force History Headquarters USAF, *Combat Squadrons of the Air Force World War II*, Maurer Maurer, Washington, 1982

¹⁴³ Department of the Air Force, A.F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Office of Air Force History Headquarters USAF, *Combat Squadrons of the Air Force World War II*, Maurer Maurer, Washington, 1982

¹⁴⁴ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 107.



Picture 2.9: 332nd Fighter Group pilots attending a briefing, March 1945
(SFO Museum, 3 February, 2023)

<https://www.sfomuseum.org/exhibitions/red-tails-ramitelli/gallery#5>

Members of the 332nd were to accompany the bombers to the outskirts of Berlin, where members of the 31st would take over the escort and the Red Tails would return.¹⁴⁵

The 31st, however, failed to reach the rescue point in time, and the 332nd stayed with the bombers until they reached their objective, although they were aware that the available fuel did not ensure a return to Ramitelli.¹⁴⁶

It was a tough challenge: the German Me 262 jet aircraft represented and the first jet-powered fighter in history to enter operational service and was far more effective than the propeller-driven P-51. Despite this, the 332nd was able to exploit the P-51's greater agility in the mission and was able to shoot down three Me-262s.¹⁴⁷

The three men protagonists of this memorable achievement were 1st Lt. Roscoe Brown, 1st Lt. Earl R. Lane, and 2^d Lt. Charles V. Brantley, all of whom belonged to the 100th Fighter Squadron.¹⁴⁸

Despite its success, the group did not emerge from the battle unscathed and not all the men of the 332nd Fighter Group returned from the mission.

¹⁴⁵ MOTON FIELD/TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY (1998), United States Department of Interior, Southeast Regional Office National Park Service Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁴⁶ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 110.

¹⁴⁷ *Ivi*, 110.

¹⁴⁸ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). *Tuskegee Airmen Chronology*, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency, 58.

In particular, the Missing Air Crew Reports mention five P-51 fighters of the 332nd Fighter Group 59 as missing: on board were Captain Armour G. McDaniel and Flight Officers James T. Mitchell, Jr. and Leon W. Spears of the 301st Fighter Squadron and Second Lieutenants Ronald Reeves and Robert C. Robinson of the 100th Fighter Squadron.¹⁴⁹

However, for successfully escorting the bombers, the Army Air Forces awarded the 332nd Fighter Group the coveted Distinguished Unit Citation, the only one of World War II. Instead, the group's 99th Fighter Squadron was awarded its third Distinguished Unit Citation for this mission.¹⁵⁰

The following week, the 332nd Fighter Group completed another important mission. On March 31, 1945, the 332nd Fighter Group conducted a fighter sweep and strafing mission against railroad and other targets in the Munich area of southern Germany.

During the mission, twelve members of the group shot down a total of 13 enemy airplanes, including FW-190s and Me-109s. Three 332nd Fighter Group P-51D pilots were reported missing that day.¹⁵¹

The next day, 1 April, the fighter group destroyed another twelve enemy planes in the area of Wels, Austria.¹⁵²

Throughout the last month of the war, the group continued to take part in missions, totaling fifty-four missions with seventeen enemy planes shot down in three encounters.

On 26 April 1944, the 332nd had its last victory, destroying the last four enemy aircraft in the Mediterranean Operations before the end of the war. Four days later, on 30 April 1944, the fighter group flew its last mission, the 311th.¹⁵³

The 332nd Fighter Group had shot down a total of 94 enemy aircraft during World War II.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ *Ivi*, 59.

¹⁵⁰ *Ivi*, 73.

¹⁵¹ *Ivi*, 44.

¹⁵² MOTON FIELD/TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY (1998), United States Department of Interior, Southeast Regional Office National Park Service Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁴ Haulman D.L. (14 Novembre, 2011). Tuskegee Airmen Chronology, Organizational History Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency.

On the same day, the Russians entered Berlin and Hitler abandoned command of the Reich, committing suicide in the underground bunker where the seat of government had been moved.

On 7 May 1945, the act of capitulation of the German armed forces was signed at Allied headquarters. The war fought in Europe officially ended on the note between the 8th and 9th of May.¹⁵⁵

The war on the continent thus ended, but the world conflict would continue in the Far East.

2.5 RETURN TO HOMELAND:

The experience of Tuskegee Airmen in World War II represents a major starting point for the struggles fought by African Americans to receive full recognition of civil rights in the U.S. military and society.

The Tuskegee Airmen upset the fictitious balance of "separate but equal" that defined American society and its army, becoming one of the most honored and respected fighter groups of World War II, a legend.

The 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group flew 1,578 missions, destroying nearly 260 enemy aircraft, sinking one enemy ship, and demolishing numerous enemy sites. These airmen gained 95 Distinguished Flying Crosses, as well as the Legion of Merit, Silver Stars, Purple Hearts, the Croix de Guerre, and the coveted Distinguished Unit Citation, for their actions. The group also had the distinction of never losing a single bomber on an escort mission to enemy fighters. This gained the Tuskegee Airmen the admiration of both American bomber crews and the German Luftwaffe.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Sabbatucci G. & Vidotto V. (2007), *Storia contemporanea, Il Novecento*, Editori Laterza, 201.

¹⁵⁶ MOTON FIELD/TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY (1998), United States Department of Interior, Southeast Regional Office National Park Service Atlanta, Georgia.

The performance of the 332nd Fighter Group contrasted favorably compared to that of the other fighter units with which it deployed overseas during WWII. The group lost far fewer bombers to enemy planes than the Fifteenth Air Force's other fighting groups.¹⁵⁷

The Germans feared the Red Tails while the esteem for the 332nd and desire for their protection grew day by day among the Allies.

On 8 May, at the dawn of the end of the World War, the pilots of the 332nd FG took part in a ceremony to celebrate Victory Day in Europe and were awarded various honours.

An even more remarkable event in this regard was the ceremony that took place on 8 June in Cattolica, on the Adriatic Sea, where the 332nd FG was relocated after the end of the war: Colonel Yantis H. Taylor presented Colonel Benjamin Davis with the Silver Star, one of the highest US military honours. He also awarded five Distinguished Flying Crosses, five Air Medals and one Bronze Star.

It was also a memorable event because it was the occasion during which Commander Davis officially bade farewell to his troops. He would in fact leave for the United States to take command of the 477th Composite Group at Godman Field.¹⁵⁸

In his goodbye speech, Colonel Davis stated how having led the 332nd Fighter Group had been an honour for him and how it had brought pride to all American Army Air Forces and to the black community at home.¹⁵⁹

Undoubtedly, during the conflict, The Tuskegee Airmen demonstrated that African-Americans were among the best escort pilots. They made manifest through action how the legend of the intellectual and physical inferiority of the black population had been nothing more than the fruit of a mentality that had suffocated black identity for centuries, starting from the slave trade of the 'Black Atlantic'¹⁶⁰.

However, it is also important to remember that behind the epic efforts of the 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group were thousands of 'invisible heroes', men and women who served in military and civilian support groups in a wide variety of roles,

¹⁵⁷ Haulman D.L.(2015), A SHORT HISTORY OF THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN, Chief, Organizational Histories Branch Air Force Historical Research Agency Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 11.

¹⁵⁸ MOTON FIELD/TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY (1998), United States Department of Interior, Southeast Regional Office National Park Service Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁰ Term coined by Paul Gilroy in 1993.

including officers and enlisted men, flight instructors, mechanics, air traffic controllers, parachute riggers, electrical and communications specialists, military police, medical professionals, laboratory assistants, cooks, musicians, and supply, fire-fighting, and transportation personnel.¹⁶¹

Certainly, their activity was essential to the construction of the Red Tails myth and to the path of the struggle in the name of civil rights.

As with any great action performed by man, the success of the whole cannot be separated from the contribution of the individuals who are part of it.

Yet, returning home and leaving Ramitelli was not at all easy for the Tuskegee pilots.

Ramitelli represented a world of its own, a base unmarked by maps, a separate entity where an aura of mystery reigned around these famous red-tailed pilots who, little by little, had become a legend. They flew the skies of Europe in defence of bombers, only to vanish to a remote and unknown base. Many in the military and aviators, allied or enemy, were unaware that aboard those escort fighters were Tuskegee's famous African-American pilots.¹⁶²

Certainly the Red Tails were leaving a happy reality.

They were separated from the white military just as in Tuskegee, but the relationship with the local population was profoundly different.

Alabama was a Southern state, one of the most racist in America, a reality that reckoned with the legacy of a slave society that, in the Southern myth, appeared perfect and seemed to have been compromised by a war that, a century earlier, had altered the balance of the fledgling American states.

In Ramitelli, by contrast, the Italians paid no attention to the color of their skin. To them they were Americans, they were the liberators.

The peaceful relationship with the inhabitants of Campomarino can be seen in the Red Tails' own words.

¹⁶¹ MOTON FIELD/TUSKEGEE AIRMEN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY (1998), United States Department of Interior, Southeast Regional Office National Park Service Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁶² Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 88.

Marco Altobello in *'Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli'* reported the testimony of Captain Roscoe Brown about the conditions in which they lived, which was broadcast in the documentary film *'The Tuskegee Airmen: Sacrifice and Triumph'*.

The Captain reported that in Ramitelli, the Red Tails lived in tents, in an agricultural area with farms. The local population were mostly farmers and children and there was no prejudice against them.

And again, the declaration made to the author by Tim Gray, President of the World War II Foundation, testified that the Italians did not care at all about skin colour. To them, they were simply Americans.

According to Gray, there was a very good relationship between the people of Campomarino and the Tuskegee Airmen and an interaction that made them feel part of the community.

Demonstrating the friendly perspective with which the people of Campomarino perceived the African-American airmen and their exploits, was the narrative with which the legend of the Red Tails was told and continues to be illustrated by the Molise municipality.

In this regard, a monument dedicated to the Tuskegee Airmen was inaugurated on 16 July 2023 in Campomarino, during a ceremony organised by the municipality and the Establishment of the Tourist and Cultural Services Centre, in collaboration with the U.S. AirForce Base in Aviano.

It is a black and gold plaque listing the hunting squadrons with the dates of Ramitelli's presence in the field.

For the local population, the idea that an important page in the 20th century history of Italian and American military aviation was written at home has always been a source of pride, a means of enhancing and increasing the monumental, historical and cultural heritage of the area.

And the racial issue never came before the intellectual urgency of recognising the magnitude of the victory achieved not only in the struggle against Nazi-fascist ideology, but also against the discrimination that hindered the recognition of African Americans as individuals and citizens equal to whites.

To celebrate, a little less than a century later then, is to remember.

And to remember means to recognise the power that the acquisition of the right to fight had in the Afro-American struggle for civil rights, as well as the role played by Campomarino in history.

The area where the Ramitelli airport once stood has now almost entirely returned to agricultural use, the building used as an operations and briefing room is in a state of disrepair, but in recent years, the Campomarino municipality has been ensuring that the site is enhanced as a regional heritage site¹⁶³.



Picture 2.10: Participants of the Tuskegee Airmen Monument dedication watch the ceremony at Piazza Madonna Grande in Campomarino, Italy, July 16, 2023.

(Aviano Air Base, 21 July, 2023)

<https://www.aviano.af.mil/News/Display/Article/3466619/tuskegee-airmen-honored-with-memorial-in-italian-city/#gallery-4>

Certainly, Ramitelli's contribution to the integration process between whites and blacks was that it was the most suitable base for Allied bombers during emergency landings.

In this regard, a significant episode occurred on 29 December 1944, when lack of time forced several squadrons of B-24s from the 15th Air Force, a total of 18 Liberators, 17 from the 485th Bombardment Group and one from the 455th Bombardment Group, to return from their mission and land at Ramitelli. It was then

¹⁶³ *Ivi*, 154.

that one of the first and most memorable episodes of integration within the American Air Force occurred: the crews stayed together for five days, celebrating the arrival of the New Year, without racist incidents occurring.¹⁶⁴

On 4 May 1945, the dismantling of the Ramitelli Airfield began. On 22 June, the 99th FS returned home to be integrated into the 477th Composite Group. After a short stay in Lucera, the other squadrons of the group also returned to the United States.¹⁶⁵

At the time of repatriation, what frightened the pilots of the 332nd most, was the return to a segregated society, to a social condition of inferiority, to a daily life lived as second-class citizens.

The question that reverberated in the minds of the 332nd FG pilots was whether having risked their lives for their country, having gone to great lengths to become airmen, and having fought to prove the worth of their people, was nothing more than the price they had to pay to initiate a substantial revolution in American society, whether it was worth it.

On 30 September 1945, they boarded the U.S.S. Levi Woodbury and arrived in New York on 16 October. They were stationed at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Three days later, the 100th and 301st FS were inactivated (the same fate had befallen the 302nd in March). The 332nd Fighter Group was disbanded, only the 99th FS remained active.¹⁶⁶ In the documentary 'Double Victory: The Tuskegee Airmen at War', Airman Roscoe Brown recalled his landing in America after leaving Ramitelli:

*Coming into New York Harbor, with the flags waving and everybody exhilarating,
Down the gangplank we g. here is a soldier that has a sign "white troops this way, colored troops this way".
And Over with the white troops there was a whole bunch of press and bands and so on. Over with the colored troops, the Black troops, there was one reporter and a small band. And I said to myself " Welcome back to the good old USA."¹⁶⁷*

¹⁶⁴ Ivi, 103.

¹⁶⁵ Ivi, 139.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁷ (13 January, 2012) Double Victory: The Tuskegee Airmen at War, Lucasfilm

It was clear from the outset that, while in the military a process of integration had been initiated, at least ideologically, because there was no doubt that the contribution of the African-American pilots to the outcome of the war had been recognized within the military, in American society segregation continued to survive, as if nothing had changed.

To return meant to be trapped again in a reality of discrimination where the racial question remained unresolved.

It seemed that the real challenge was not fighting the Nazis, as this implied being a member of the American Army Air Force and, as such, enjoying the social prestige that such assignments entailed, but rather returning to civil life.

Many Tuskegee Airmen found it very difficult to re-integrate into American society in all aspects of daily life, especially in the world of work.

With all the experience and skills they had demonstrated and learned during the war, many went to the airlines to apply for jobs, but they refused to hire black pilots or mechanics.¹⁶⁸

Once again, the expectations of the African-American community seemed to have been unfulfilled.

The idea that fighting in the Army Air Force would revolutionize the status quo of American society, that it would represent the beginning of a downhill path for the black community, was soon betrayed.

And the frustration of having experienced what integration with the white population meant made the reality even harder to digest.

Before the entry into the war, when civil rights organizations such as the NAACP were fighting for African-American soldiers to gain the right to fight and fly, it was expected that sacrifice for the national cause would be the starting point of a social and civic progress that would put an end to the Jim Crow laws society.

Throughout the conflict, the struggle to support the cause of the Tuskegee pilots and to denounce the paradoxicality of fighting in the name of democracy against all that America denounced as antithetical to its own identity values and still continuing to experience the humiliation of segregation continued.

¹⁶⁸ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 141.

The Black press emerged as a vibrant channel of expression of African American revenge.

In particular, the Pittsburgh Courier, a newspaper that has always been close to the black community, gave impetus to the so called 'Double V' campaign, a movement that claimed the right to full citizenship at home for African Americans

'Double V' because it was believed that the war, once successfully concluded, would not only mean victory against Nazi-fascism in Europe and around the world, but also a victory against the discrimination and segregation that the black community continued to face at home, within the military and within American society.¹⁶⁹

The 'V for Victory' gesture, which had now become a symbol of hope for all allied troops and was associated in the collective memory with the historic photos of the British prime minister, acquired a parallel, even deeper and more identity meaning for African Americans.¹⁷⁰



Picture 2.11 Participants in the Double V campaign, 1942. (National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.)

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/what-was-black-americas-double-war/>

¹⁶⁹ Gates H.L. Jr. (n.d.). What Was Black America's Double War?, last consultation 16 September 2023. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/what-was-black-americas-double-war/>.

¹⁷⁰ Altobello M. (2023). Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 122-123.

The event that gave impetus to the campaign was a letter sent to the Courier by James G. Thompson, on 30 January 1942, in which he expounded his concerns about a situation whose urgency seemed to persist and demanded that African Americans, once they returned from the battlefields, could finally be treated as American citizens.

The article was titled '*Should I Sacrifice to Live 'Half American'?*'.

At point 3 of the letter, Thompson wrote:

*'Being an American of dark complexion and some 26 years, these questions flash through my mind: 'Should I sacrifice my life to live half American?' 'Will things be better for the next generation in the peace to follow?' 'Would it be demanding too much to demand full citizenship rights in exchange for the sacrificing of my life?' 'Is the kind of America I know worth defending?' 'Will America be a true and pure democracy after this war?' 'Will colored Americans suffer still the indignities that have been heaped upon them in the past?' These and other questions need answering. I want to know, and I believe every colored American, who is thinking, wants to know.'*¹⁷¹

It was the letter that triggered the campaign and inspired its slogan.

From that moment on, the Courier began publishing articles, testimonials, photographs and drawings in support of the campaign, gaining enormous resonance among the entire black community.¹⁷²

There were Double V dances and parades, Double V flag-raising ceremonies, Double V baseball games between black professional teams, Double V beauty pageants and Double V songs, Double V clubs spread across the country.¹⁷³

It had become an identitarian hallmark.

However, the Double V campaign lasted a year, naturally dying down by 1943.

Although, the end of the conflict and the return to the United States showed how the campaign had failed to achieve its objective, there is no doubt that the protest

¹⁷¹ Pinellas County School Board. (n.d.). James Thompson's Letter to the Pittsburgh Courier. (<https://www.pcsb.org/cms/lib8/FL01903687/Centricity/Domain/7034/james-thompson-letter.pdf>)

¹⁷² Washburn, P. S. (1986). The Pittsburgh Courier's Double V Campaign in 1942. *American Journalism*, 3(2), 73–86. doi: 10.1080/08821127.1986.10731062.

¹⁷³ Simmons, C. A. (2006). *The African American press: a history of news coverage during national crises, with special reference to four black newspapers, 1827-1965*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. Retrieved.

movements and journalistic propaganda had a major impact on the activism that would characterise the civil rights movements of the 1960s.

It helped to stir the consciences of the bonded black people, sowing the seeds of the future Civil Rights Movement.

In September 1945, the Double V insignia disappeared from the paper, replaced in 1946 by a Single V, signifying that a victory, at home, had yet to be achieved.

CONCLUSION:

The second chapter traced the battles of the Second World War in which the Afro-American pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group participated.

As with the first chapter, the question that ran throughout the writing of the second was whether participation in World War II represented a redemption strategy for the African American people.

As with the African-American slaves who in 1861 fought a war they did not perceive as their own in order to gain freedom, so, almost a century later, the black pilots were willing to sacrifice themselves in order to offer a glimmer of hope to their people, the hope of being recognised as citizens, of ending segregation, of starting a new life.

Undoubtedly, their exploits had an international resonance and tangible effects on the world's opinion of them.

But, at the end of the Second World War, the journey was only just beginning.

And even today, America reflects the complexity of a society that makes progress its identity but racial discrimination its social scourge.

CHAPTER III-

Desegregation and the Cold War:

INTRODUCTION:

The third and final chapter will focus on the post-World War II context.

It will be divided into three main sections.

The first will present a historical excursus on the events that led to the breakdown of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, the two greatest world powers to emerge from the world conflict, and the outbreak of the Cold War.

In addition, it will discuss how the Second World War gave impetus to the integration process of the international system through the creation of the United Nations and of all the other international organizations, of an economic and political nature.

The second paragraph will focus on Executive Order 9981, which, issued under President Truman on 26 July 1948, formalized the desegregation in the armed services.

The integration process was gradual and slow: the Korean War, which broke out in 1950, began as a segregated conflict.

However, the need for men meant that, midway through the conflict, the executive order began to be really implemented.

Finally, the last section will focus on the emergence of civil rights movements, which although already existing, reached their peak in the 1960s.

These movements were intertwined with the protest struggle against the Vietnam War, the first to be fought by the desegregated army from the beginning to the end.

3.1 THE POST-WAR WORLD:

On 12 April 1945, shortly after the Yalta conference in which the separation of spheres of influence took place and in which the USSR promised the opening of the front to Japan, President Roosevelt died and was replaced by the Democratic Vice-President Harry S. Truman, a self-made man from Missouri.

Truman found himself managing post-Yalta era.

The first international meeting he attended as President was the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, at which he issued an ultimatum to Japan. When the US, Britain and China demanded unconditional surrender from Japan, the request was rejected and, on 6 August, Truman ordered the first atomic bomb to be dropped on the city of Hiroshima. More than 160,000 people died. Three days later a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. On 14 August the Japanese accepted unconditional surrender.¹⁷⁴

The Second World War officially ended.

Truman's accession to the US presidency coincided with an abrupt change of climate in the international geopolitical landscape.

Before Truman replaced Roosevelt, expectations about the reconstruction and the creation of a stable and peaceful world order were high. Roosevelt died believing that, once the war was over, his 'Grand Design' would be realized.

Picking up on the Wilsonian project, he believed that, once the world conflict was over, the US would be the protagonist of a reorganization of the international system.

In 1944, the Allied forces met at the Bretton Woods Conference with the intention of reforming the international economic system under the banner of the free market and creating new supranational financial institutions.

¹⁷⁴ Remini, R.V., (22 November 2017). *Breve Storia Degli Stati Uniti d'America*, Bompiani, 312-313

The plan for the creation of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods agreements, through which the USA intended to assume responsibility for international politics and trade, were the two main pillars of the Rooseveltian project.

He hoped that, beyond the war and the fascist threat, there could be cooperation with the USSR through the recognition of its sphere of influence (which took place at the Yalta Conference) and the dialogue relationship with Stalin. He also thought that the UK could continue to exercise its hegemony in Europe to counterbalance Soviet power and its eventual expansionist aims.

In his view, the US would have to accept the role of the USSR, Great Britain and China as regional powers but would have to assert itself as the sole global power. In fact, he believed that America's hegemonic capacity was evidenced by the fact that the US had overcome in a democratic manner the three major crises of the first half of the 20th century: World War I, the '29 crisis and World War II.

In addition, he firmly believed that American leadership would have produced a generalized consensus since the principles of Bretton Woods liberalism were objectively shared by other countries.

However, Truman, as soon as he took office, realized that the Soviet ally could no longer be considered as such due to the actions carried out in the territories under its influence, especially in Poland: extremely repressive policies, dismantling of economic and industrial infrastructures, no respect of the will of the people.

When in February '46, in a public speech, Stalin reiterated the Leninist doctrine, the omen of an imminent clash between the world's two greatest powers became increasingly tangible.

The following month, in Fulton, USA, Churchill delivered the famous 'Iron Curtain' speech.

In February 1947 Great Britain, which within the Rooseveltian vision was to take responsibility for the European order, declared that it was no longer able to economically and militarily support the democratic governments of Greece and Turkey, the scene of civil wars, and Truman feared that the USSR might expand its sphere of influence westwards across the Dardanelles Strait.

On 12 March 1947, in order to convince Congress of the need to allocate aid to the democratic forces in Greece and Turkey, Truman delivered his famous Doctrine before the joint House-Senate session.

In fact, it was the formal declaration of the containment policy that America would adopt, as it was a strongly ideological discourse that did not merely call for monetary funds, but focused on the opposition between democracy and totalitarianism.

In 1948 there was the first major crisis between East and West that involved Germany being divided into four parts.

The US, Britain and France announced a currency reform plan that would bring the three areas under their control together, but the USSR opposed this plan by blocking the access routes that linked West Berlin to the areas occupied by the West. Truman decided to intervene with an airlift to supply the western part of Berlin, until Stalin decided to abandon the blockade in May 1949.¹⁷⁵

On 23 May the Federal Republic of Germany was formed and later, on 7 October, also the German Democratic Republic.

The Cold War had begun.

Meanwhile, before tensions exploded, under President Roosevelt, the process of creating the new economic and political world order had begun.

The blueprint for the creation of the United Nations had already been negotiated in 1944, during the Dumbarton Oaks Conference.

On 25 April 1945, the United Nations Conference for International Organisation (UNCIO) opened in San Francisco, following which the powers that were opposing the third Reich during the Second World War, signed the UN Charter.

As we know, the desire to create an international 'police' body super partes, rooted in the wish to avoid new wars and to maintain peace, found already expression in the 14 points proposed by Wilson in the Paris Conference after the First World War, when the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations, was created.

It was the first universal international organization but it failed, mostly due to the notorious article 1 of the Constitutive Pact which concerned the free withdrawal from the organization.

¹⁷⁵ Sabbatucci G. & Vidotto V. (2007), *Storia contemporanea, Il Novecento*, Editori Laterza, 212.

This is why it was only after the Second World War that this need of interaction was really fulfilled because the conflict showed how international cooperation was a necessity.

Indeed, the birth of the United Nations was strictly linked to the development that international law was experiencing after the war: it shifted from being a simple law of coexistence between states to be a real law of cooperation.

Until that moment the protection of human rights was considered a matter under the exclusive jurisdiction of sovereign states and the international law respected the traditional principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. But the 2WW with its horrors spread the awareness that human rights couldn't be only under the state powers and that their violation represented a serious threat for international peace and security.

The shock of the holocaust and of the national socialist regime in Germany and the desire to prevent similar tragedies in the future gave impetus to this process of internationalization of human rights.

In the Atlantic Charter, a sort of military and common defense agreement signed in 1941, there was already a clear explicit reference to the need of ensuring the protection of fundamental rights as the foundation of a new international legal order.

But it was only with the United Nations that, for the first time, there was an explicit recognition of the protection the human rights as a primary purpose.

The art 1 of the UN Charter says:

The Purposes of the United Nations are:

- 1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;*
- 2. To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace;*
- 3. To achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and*

4. *To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.*¹⁷⁶

Indeed, primarily American was the basic inspiration behind the organization of the United Nations. Once again, The United States were experiencing the contradiction of a society that internationally elected itself as the supreme bastion of democracy, at the head of this new postwar global “peace” order, but internally was characterized by a huge racial divide that was struggling to heal itself, not least because of the segregation that continued to survive, inside and outside the military.

3.2 EXECUTIVE ORDER 9981:

In May 1945, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy and Secretary Robert P. Patterson requested US Army commanders to produce reports on the performance of black units and recommendations on the implementation of an optimal post-war racial policy.¹⁷⁷

Specifically, three general officers, under General Alvan C. Gillem, Jr., were ordered to study Army racial policy and to prepare a report on how the restructured military could lead to a more efficient employment of African-Americans in the post-war military.

The conclusion of the Gillem Board's report, "*Utilization of the Negro Manpower in the postwar army policy*", filed in April 1946, was that it was necessary for the army to eliminate any consideration based on race as soon as possible (Altobello, 2023).

¹⁷⁶ United Nations, UN Charter, last consultation 20 September <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>.

¹⁷⁷ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 399-400.

The report was approved by General Dwight Eisenhower, the new Chief of the Army Staff, and Patterson, but did not provide for a substantial abolition of segregation within the army.¹⁷⁸

It sent mixed messages. For example, it stated that integration of units was recommended for duty hours only, while off-duty housing would remain segregated and recited that manpower would be used without regard to race only at unknown date.¹⁷⁹

As happened with Executive Order 8802, issued in June 1941, under pressure from civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph, there was a breakthrough.

Together with Grant Reynolds, he formed the *Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service and Training*, with the avowed aim of getting the army desegregated.

At first, the Committee approached Congress, but then, fearing that it would not achieve the desired result, it addressed Truman in person, sending him a formal letter, asking for an executive order.¹⁸⁰ A month later, on 26 July 1948, Truman issued Executive Order 9981.

The order read:

*It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.*¹⁸¹

Truman's choice was partly because he appreciated the service that black soldiers had performed during World War II, partly political because he wanted black votes in the upcoming Presidential election.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli*. Mazzanti Libri, 147.

¹⁷⁹ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 403.

¹⁸⁰ McGrath J. (4 May 2009), "Why was Executive Order No. 9981 so important?", last consultation 15 September 2023. <https://history.howstuffworks.com/history-vs-myth/executive-order-9981.htm>.

¹⁸¹ National Archives. (8 February, 2022). Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces (1948), last consultation 20 September 2023. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9981>

¹⁸² Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 15.

This decision provoked a reaction from the Southern Democrats that led to the split of the Democratic Party in the 1948 elections. On the one side was Truman, on the other Strom Thurmond with the Dixiecrats and on the other George Wallace, the future governor of Alabama.

Historians M. Heiss and M.J. Hogan in the *'Origins of the National Security State and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman'*, have highlighted how the National Security Act was very divisive, as it was a product of American military internationalism, opposed by the more conservative who feared that through it the US would become a militarized state (garrison state)¹⁸³.

Certainly Truman carried with him the legacy of Southern culture.

He was from Missouri, a profoundly racist state, where his grandparents had owned slaves, and he had grown up in a home that openly disavowed abolitionism and considered white supremacy natural.¹⁸⁴

But he was also a very astute politician, who understood the importance of the black vote for his political fortunes, and, Machiavellianly, these highly pragmatic assessments, as well as a sincere appreciation for the military exploits of African-American soldiers, also stemming from his being a World War I veteran, prevailed.

However, the armed forces did not immediately implement Truman's executive order.

Certainly, The United States Air Force, was in this sense a precursor of the military racial integration process.

It became a separate and independent branch of the Army in September 1947 and initiated a remarkable process of internal change in order to maximize military efficiency. In fact, in 1947, Congress passed the National Security Act that led to the creation of the new Department of Defense and previously absent national security institutions, including the United States Air Force. It would in fact replace the former United States Army Air Forces, which were still subordinate to the US Army.

¹⁸³ Heiss M. & Hogan M.J. (1 aprile 2015), *Origins of the National Security State and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, Truman State University Press.

¹⁸⁴ National Park Service. (18 August, 2021). *Harry S Truman and Civil Rights*, last consultation 20 September 2023. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/harry-s-truman-and-civil-rights.htm>

Indeed, the preparation of the 332nd FG and the 447th BG prompted the USAF to consider abolishing the policy of racial segregation since it implied a significant waste of manpower and resulted in the Air Force becoming the first of the armed services to achieve significant racial integration in 1949.¹⁸⁵

On 11 May 1949, the Air Force issued letter 35-3, which officially stated that the policy of the United States Air Force was to ensure equal treatment and opportunity for all members of the Air Force, without regard to race, colour, religion, or national origin, and that all individuals, regardless of race, would be afforded equal opportunity for appointment, advancement, professional advancement, promotion, and retention in all branches of the United States Air Force.¹⁸⁶

A month later, on 30 June 1949, the 332nd was decommissioned and all black personnel were integrated into the other departments of the US Air Force.¹⁸⁷

The Army and Navy took significantly more time than the Air Force to achieve a great degree of racial integration. Desegregation certainly met with resistance from individuals and structures rooted in the segregationist racial approach of the time.

Thus, The Korean War, the first war actually fought by the Americans in the context of the Cold War, opened as a segregated war.¹⁸⁸

Indeed, during Truman's second term, with the outbreak of the Korean War, the militarization phase of the Cold War began.

In 1950, North Korea, controlled by the USSR since the end of World War II and the defeat of Japan, its previous invader, attacked South Korea, controlled by the US and recognised by the UN in 1948 as the Republic of Korea.

With a resolution, the UN Security Council approved a multilateral armed intervention that would restore the initial situation, i.e. the separation of the two territories at the 38th parallel.

The process was facilitated by the fact that the USSR no longer participated in UN meetings in protest at the fact that the organization did not recognize the communist China of Mao Tse Tung.

¹⁸⁵ Altobello M. (2023). *Red Tails*. Da Tuskegee a Ramitelli. Mazzanti Libri, 149.

¹⁸⁶ *Ivi*, 148-149.

¹⁸⁷ *Ivi*, 140.

¹⁸⁸ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 15.

The multilateral intervention then turned out to be a US intervention led by general Douglas MacArthur.

Initial difficulties were numerous. On the night of 31 August 1950, the North Korean counter-offensive forced the 24th infantry, the only all-black infantry regiment in Korea, to withdraw from the Battle of Battle Mountain¹⁸⁹.

The squadron was accused of cowardice but the truth is that the heat, lack of water and poor training greatly affected its surrender.

In fact, even the white troops performed poorly but, once again, blacks were the easiest target to blame.

Battle Mountains was one of a succession of defeats in late August and early September but, by mid-October, North Korean forces had been expelled from the South and MacArthur with United Nations troops, despite the dissent of the American commanders and Truman, started the invasion of the North, attempting to push on as far as China.

Troops of the American Eighth Army's 25th Division, including the 24th Infantry, were exactly where Truman had ordered them not to be: above the 38th Parallel, up to the Yalu River.¹⁹⁰

However, Mao's Chinese army intervened in support of the North Korean troops.

On November 23, the 25th Division was informed that at least two Chinese divisions and part of the North Korean division were directed towards them.

In two days since the Chinese attack, a thousand U.S. troops were killed or wounded and the retreat began.

After the withdrawal of UN troops, Chinese soldiers broke through the 38th Parallel and took the South Korean capital.

When the Chinese crossed the Yalu, the 9th, the first integrated regiment in Korea, defended itself to the bitter end and was badly hit.

A period of stalemate began in which neither side could win a landslide victory.

In April 1951, MacArthur was dismissed by the President, who accused him of delusions of grandeur and replaced him with General Matthew B. Ridgway.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹*Ivi*, 423-425.

¹⁹⁰ *Ivi*, 426-427.

¹⁹¹ *Ivi*, 415.

Halfway through, it became the first officially integrated war since the Revolution¹⁹².

By September 1951, probably due to the opposing performances of the segregated 24th Infantry and the integrated 9th Infantry, the Army seemed finally ready for integration¹⁹³.

On 26 June, the army announced that it would complete the integration process within six months and that the 24th Infantry would be disbanded.

It was officially deactivated on 1 October 1951.

The Korean War ended with an armistice under Eisenhower presidency, which brought the situation back to pre-1950.

3.3 THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT:

When the Republican Eisenhower was elected president in 1953, the racial issue exploded.

In 1954, the Supreme Court, in the ruling *Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka*, declared school segregation unconstitutional, ending the principle affirmed by the *Plessy vs Ferguson* judgment. From that point on, the battle to enforce it in schools began: the courts in '55 asked the counties to proceed with all deliberative speed to desegregate schools.

The change in the Supreme Court's orientation towards the racial issue legitimized the Civil Rights movement: in 1955 Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her seat on the bus to a white man.

This was not the first case of such a protest, but Rosa Parks had all the characteristics to become the exemplary one: she was a worker, a member of the Church

¹⁹² *Ivi*, 16.

¹⁹³ *Ivi*, 429-432

and an activist in the civil rights movement. Eleanor Roosevelt publicly justified her act of resistance.

The same year, the figure of Martin Luther King emerged: in 1957, the association in which he would act as leader was created, on the basis of the strategy of non-violent action.

If M.L. King became the leader of civil disobedience, Malcolm X emerged as the radical leader of black nationalism, which arose mainly after the second half of the 1960s at the instigation of young blacks from the urban ghettos of the North, who perceived their own reality as far removed from that of the middle class that had hitherto fueled the movements against racial segregation. Formally, blacks in the North had rights but they had to experience more widespread racism and higher rates of unemployment than blacks in the South.

They identified with the words of Malcolm X because he was one of them. His rhetoric was typical of the Northern street gangs, the so-called 'Cats in the street'.

His reflection on black identity echoed the text published by DuBois in 1897, '*The Conservation of Races*', that read:

What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? If I strive as a Negro, am I not perpetuating the very cleft that threatens and separates Black and White America? Is not my only possible practical aim the subduction of all that is Negro in me to the American? Does my black blood place upon me any more obligation to assert my nationality than German, or Irish or Italian blood would?¹⁹⁴

For Malcolm X, the choice was clear. The key was the positive affirmation of a difference: being African American, which until then had been an element of discrimination, was now to become the basis for political, economic, social and cultural recognition in the public space.

Meanwhile, the segregationist South mobilized against Brown's ruling: in '56, the Southern Manifesto was signed, claiming that the South was the victim of legal discrimination because the Court's new stance, acting in a state field of action, namely education, was illegitimate and contrary to the Constitution.

¹⁹⁴ Teaching American History, The Conservation of Races, W.E.B. Du Bois (1897), last consultation 21 September 2023, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/the-conservation-of-races/>

In their view, the decision in *Plessy vs Ferguson* had expressly stated that if a state provided separate but equal services, it would not violate the 14th Amendment, and this interpretation, having become customary and part of life in many Southern states and citizens, should not be overturned.

The manifesto initiated the South's massive resistance against black students entering school.

One of the most significant episodes was that of Little Rock (1957) in which Eisenhower, hitherto disinterested in the civil rights issue, realized that it was an institutional conflict because it was the governor himself who opposed the Supreme Court ruling. So he decided to use federal troops to ensure that the African-Americans of Little Rock could go to school.

In 1960, a sit-in in the white cafeterias began in Greensboro and, from there, the protest movement soon spread to college towns throughout the South.

This was the climate in the 1960 election campaign that saw the triumph of the Democrat John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

In his candidacy acceptance speech, he introduced the slogan of the 'New Frontier', echoing the myth of 19th century process of civilization. By 'New Frontier' he meant a set of challenges that would revitalize the American dream, among them the battles waged by the civil rights movement.

In fact, at the time of his election, university integration still met with opposition from many states.

Wallace, who had distanced himself from Truman's Democratic Party in the '48 elections and become governor of Alabama in '62, pronounced during his inauguration speech the phrase: 'Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever'¹⁹⁵.

He also positioned himself in front of the university entrance in Alabama to prevent black students from entering.

In '62, Kennedy agreed to deploy federal troops to allow students into Mississippi universities, promoted an executive order preventing segregation in

¹⁹⁵ Battaglia, L. (27 June, 2020). La Segregazione Razziale negli Stati Uniti D'America, Policlic, last consultation 21 September. <https://www.policlic.it/la-segregazione-razziale-negli-stati-uniti-damerica/>

federally funded housing programs, and gave speeches in which he stated that the issue of racial discrimination was not a regional problem, but a moral crisis that needed to be addressed at the federal level in Congress.

28 August 1963 saw the famous march to Washington, during which Martin Luther King delivered the famous speech 'I have a dream'.

But, less than a month later, on 15 September '63 in Birmingham there was one of the most violent racial incidents when KKK activists placed a bomb in front of a church, resulting in the death of 4 girls and the injuring of 22 others.

On 22 November 1963, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas: Vice President Johnson assumed the presidency, swearing in the plane carrying Kennedy's corpse from Dallas to Washington.

Johnson's presidency was one of the defining moments of the New Deal's progressive liberalism. On 27 November 1963, he made a speech before Congress in which he expressed his intention to dismantle those regulations that continued to maintain racial discrimination in America.

Meanwhile, in April 1964, Malcolm X delivered his speech *'The Ballot or the Bullet'*, in which he expounded the philosophy of Black Nationalism: the idea was to carry out programs for the benefit of black interests, to begin to control the politics and economy of one's own community. He perceived the paradoxical effect of desegregation: black communities were becoming ghettos where social mobility was effectively impossible as integration processes were pushing the black middle class into the suburbs of other parts of the city.

Malcolm X, on the contrary, invited people to stay in black neighborhoods to contribute to the well-being of the community. In particular, he urged to use the vote in a politically conscious manner and not to support a party that did not in fact distance itself from the Dixiecrats, the white supremacist democrats.

The same year as Malcolm X's speech, one of the most important milestones of the civil rights struggle, the Civil Rights Act (1964), was achieved.

Signed on 2 July, it declared desegregation in schools and other public places, and authorized federal government intervention to facilitate this process. Furthermore, Title 7, which deals with discrimination by employers, included gender and national

origin in addition to race, color and religion. The aim of this measure was thus no longer only to ensure racial equality, but also gender equality.

However, the passage of the Civil Rights Act left out the issue of African-American participation in voting.

But 1964 was an election campaign year for the presidency and civil rights associations engaged in the Mississippi Summer Project, a volunteer campaign whose aim was to involve the African American community in the voting process and to encourage the registration of blacks on the electoral roll in Mississippi.

The victory in '65 was understood by Johnson as a mandate to complete the civil rights mission and to address the voting issue. In '65, the march from Selma to Montgomery led to the passing, on 6 August, of the Voting Rights Act, the purpose of which was to prohibit racial discrimination in voting and to remove those barriers that prevented blacks from effectively enjoying the right to vote enshrined in the 15th Amendment.

The year '65 was also the year of the downfall of Johnsonian progressive liberalism mainly due to the administration's choices that had to do with South East Asia. Already under the Kennedy administration, the number of American military advisers sent to South Vietnam had increased, as it was considered an important place to keep under Western control to contain communist influence and expansion.

In 1965, Vietnam War became not only the issue on which the Johnson administration failed, but also the fuse for a series of issues that would put an end to the liberal consensus: social conflict increased, resulting in a sort of "cold civil war".

The turning point came in 1964: in August of that year there was an incident in the Gulf of Tonkin in which an American destroyer was involved (although it is assumed that the whole incident was provoked by the Americans in order to have a casus belli to declare war). The incident was Johnson's opportunity to ask Congress to pass a resolution authorising him to take all necessary measures to suppress an attack against the American armed forces.

On 4 August 1964, the United States officially went to war against North Vietnam: the bombing began and the American contingent continued to grow exponentially.

It was the first war since the Revolution in which blacks and whites served together as equals since its beginning.¹⁹⁶

Certainly, the ascension of African-American Colin Powell to the top of the US Armed Forces proved that integration within the army had been achieved.

In 1963, Captain Colin Powell was in Vietnam as a military adviser, serving for the first time with a South Vietnamese army unit, but in 1968, on 27 July, after a series of successful trainings in the United States, Major Powell returned to Vietnam, this time as a staff officer assigned to the Americal division.¹⁹⁷

Another turning point was the TET offensive: on the night of 30-31 January 1968, Buddhist New Year's Day, troops of the North Vietnamese National Liberation Front invaded South Vietnam. This offensive profoundly changed the relationship between the presidency and public opinion as it showed that the war was not being won by the United States.

Certainly Vietnam represented a boulder for the legacy of Jhonsoon, whose peculiarity was expressed by his dual nature as a Texan and a Democrat: he was consigned to history as a strongly conservative president, despite all his efforts in domestic policy in terms of racial integration and the welfare state.

On 31 March 1968, Johnson announced that he would not run again: the knowledge that this would lead to the defeat of the Democratic Party came into play.

In '68, the Republican Nixon won the election with a promise to end the Vietnam War through what he called 'peace with honour'.

The architect of Nixon's foreign policy was Kissinger, who theorised that the US should begin to abandon its messianic and paternalistic vision and behave like a normal power, adopting a Real Politik as it was no longer able to bear the costs of its global engagement.

1968 was both in the USA and in Europe the high point of contestation and the crisis of the liberal and western model of development: on 4 April, Martin Luther King, the leader who could have found a form of mediation between white and black America, was assassinated.

¹⁹⁶ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 15.

¹⁹⁷ Parry R. & Solomon N. (18 October, 2021). *Behind Colin Powell's Legend – My La*, Consortium News, last consultation 21 September 2023. <https://consortiumnews.com/cn-live/>.

The Paris Agreement of '73 marked the end of the US engagement in Vietnam and the beginning of reconciliation talks between North and South Vietnam. This was not a final peace: in '75, the communists broke the pact and went on to conquer Saigon, forcing US embassy officials to flee.

Vietnam war was the most unpopular conflict and also the first not to be won in American history.¹⁹⁸

It produced a fracture between the two Americas, a generational civil war that contrasted the vision of those who perceived the conflict as a legitimate war, fought in the name of the anti-communist mission, and those who instead denounced its intrinsic injustice. The overlapping claims of protest movements, black power, radical feminism, and peace movements, which acted as 'lobbies', as interest groups but at the same time supported each other, produced an enormous global resonance, a polyphony of protest voices with which the US government had to deal.

"Why are we in Vietnam?" was the question that historian Marilyn B. Young, asked herself in '91 when writing *The Vietnam Wars* and which became a moral question that marked American identity forever, a motto of protest against a national reality that was perceived, especially by the younger generations, as tyrannical¹⁹⁹.

After Vietnam, the Army understood that there could be no more such wars, detrimental to its international and national prestige, and needed to encourage more cohesion and inclusion opening doors for women, as well as for black men (Buckley, 2002).

The New Army reached its apogee in the Persian Gulf War, fought under George Bush's presidency in 1990, the first American War whose chief military leader was black.

Even today, the Armed Forces represent the only organization in American society in which whites are routinely commanded by black: once one of the most racist public institution in America, the Army has become the driver of the process of racial integration.

¹⁹⁸ Buckley, G. (July 3, 2001). *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, New York: Random House, 18.

¹⁹⁹ Young M.B. (1991), *Vietnam wars 1945-1990*, Perennial

CONCLUSION:

The third and final chapter dealt with the Cold War period which, through the bloody and contested conflicts and through the resonance of the civil rights movements, traced the path that over the years has made one of America's most discriminatory institutions the most racially integrated bureaucratic body of all.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS:

I would like to conclude with a little reflection on why the desegregation process in America started with the military.

A crucial aspect to take into account when looking at the US context is the role attributed to the Supreme Court, which, unlike what happens in Europe, where there are Constitutional Courts, acts both as a constitutional judge and as the highest court of the ordinary system of justice.

But in America the act of interpreting the Constitution and checking the compliance of every law with the Constitution itself is not static at all, it is rather a process.

Since the American constitutional text, besides being the oldest, is very rigid, any development in reading and implementing it can stem only from the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court, to which in fact is granted a huge power.

For example, the Supreme Court has and always has had a key role in defining the nature of US federalism.

During the Civil War and the Dred Scott case cited in the first chapter, it was clear, for instance, how the Court's preponderant orientation was more in support of individual states' rights rather than the powers of the federal government.

Thus, whereas prior to *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the Supreme Court held that desegregation was entirely legitimate and compatible with the 15th Amendment insofar as blacks were guaranteed the same services as whites, albeit separate, a position embodied in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling, there was an explicit reversal of position from 1954 onwards.

It is no coincidence that after this change, the enactment of the Civil Rights Act and the gradual process of desegregation in all spheres of American public life has been realized.

Although one might expect the orientation of the Supreme Court to tend to be harmonious with presidential plans since, in fact, it is the President who appoints the judges of the Court itself, it is by no means that simple. In fact, based on the most sacred

and ancient principle of the US Constitution, the balance of powers and the check and balance system, the Senate must validate the appointments made by the President.

Consequently, it is a fairly strong procedure because the President of the United States represents a party that is not necessarily the majority in the Senate.

For example, in '46, during the mid-term elections of the Truman Democratic presidency, the Republican Party triumphed in Congress.

However, the President had partial leeway over the management of the army since one of the powers constitutionally vested in him is to *'be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States'*.

This may explain why Truman was able to promulgate Executive Order 9981 and why it was precisely from the military that the process of emancipation of the African American population in US society began.

Although it cannot be said that the racial divide in America has healed, we can say that military conscription has historically represented a tool that the black American population has used to show its worth and overturn, five centuries after the beginning of the Atlantic trade, the racial supremacist prejudice.

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