

Fighting for Equality: Black Veterans and the Two Reconstructions

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Two Reconstructions

- 1865-1876
 - 13th Amendment: Outlawed Slavery
 - 14th: Equal Protection and Due Process
 - 15th: Guaranteed the right to Vote
 - Freedman's Bureau
 - Black Representation, State and Federal
 - 1964-1965
 - Civil Rights Act
 - Enforcement of Brown
 - Anti-discrimination (Employment): more blacks and women in management, among other things
 - Voting Rights Act
 - Increased black representation at all levels
 - Better services and more progressive policies
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Why Only These Periods?

- Followed wars in which democratic values were emphasized
 - Substantial movements present
 - Widespread black participation !
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American Revolution: 1775-83



Spanish-American War

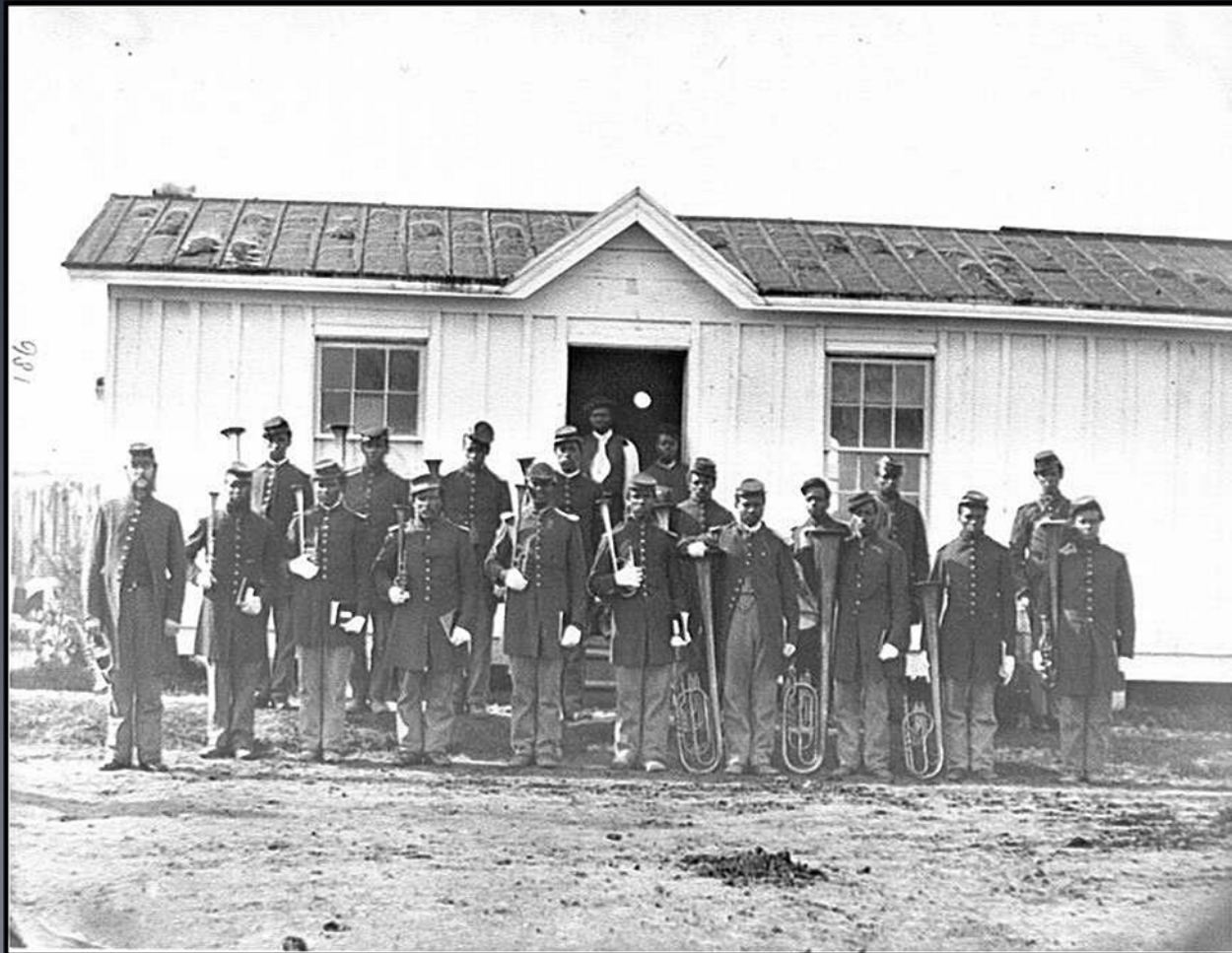


World War I: 1917-18



Colored troops on guard in France.

Civil War: 1861-65



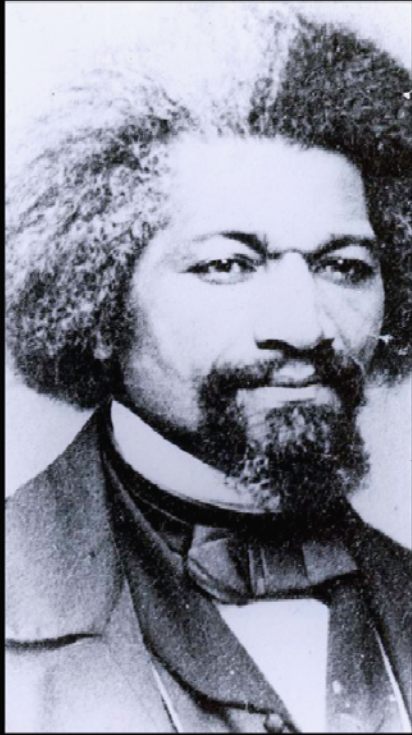
World War II: 1941-45



Korean War: 1950-53



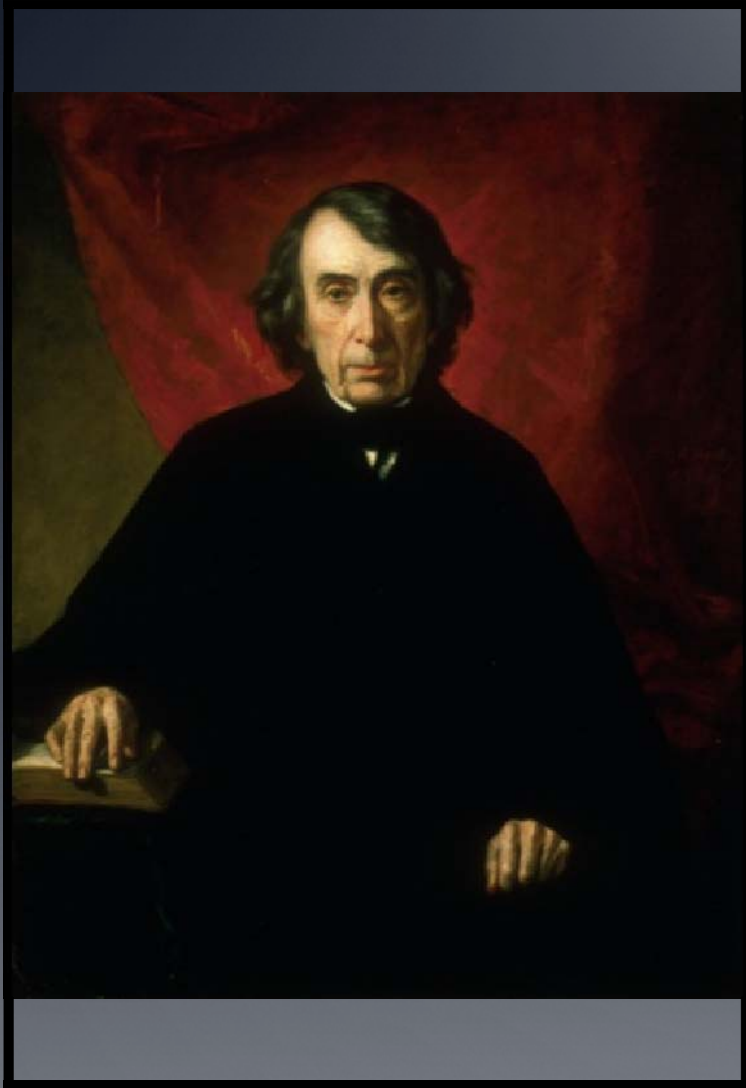
It's about sacrifice



- “For once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket; and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States.”

Preparing the Ground for Civil War

- The Militia Act (1792)
 - Fugitive Slave Law (1793)
 - Voting Rights Rescinded: 9 States (1802-1838)
 - Blacks Expelled from Armed Forces (1820)
 - Fugitive Slave Law (1850): use of Federal Marshals, free of charge; No time Limits
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Chief Justice Taney

- **Dred Scott (1857):** Taney declared blacks to be “[an] inferior and subordinate class of beings [with] no rights that whites are bound to respect.”
- **Rationale:** Partially attributed to blacks not serving in state militias.

First Reconstruction

- Civil War Amendments
 - Freedman's Bureau
 - Black Representation
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Why?

- Benjamin Franklin Butler, a Union general who commanded black troops, cited the battlefield deeds of blacks to justify the extension of civil rights to them. In congressional testimony in 1874, the general recounted the scene that crystallized his support for equality:
 - There, in a space not wider than the clerk's desk and three hundred yards long, lay the dead bodies of 543 of my colored comrades, slain in the defense of their country, who had laid down their lives to uphold its flag and its honor, as a willing sacrifice. . . . [A]nd as I looked at their bronzed faces upturned in the shining sun, as if in mute appeal against the wrongs of the country for which they had given their lives, and whose flag had been to them a flag of stripes, in which no star of glory had ever shone for them, feeling I had wronged them in the past and believing what was the future duty of my country to them, I swore to myself a solemn oath: "May my right hand forget its cunning, and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if ever I fail to defend the rights of the men who have given their blood for me and my country this day and for their race forever."
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The Beginning of the Nightmare: Redemption and Regression

- Dissolution of the Freedmen's Bureau (1872)
 - Jim Crow
 - Disenfranchisement @ state level
 - Civil Rights Neutralized
 - Proof of involuntary servitude (13th)
 - So long as the state didn't discriminate it was fine (14th)
 - Lynching (1882)
 - Plessy (1896): Separate but Equal
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The Nightmare Continues...

- Red Summer (1919); 135 blacks killed by white mobs; 10 veterans--in uniform
 - Tulsa Race Riot (1921): 26 blacks, 10 whites killed; 40 sq. blocks of Greenwood burned, 1K homes
 - 1939:
 - 93% blacks below poverty line
 - black men earned 44% of white men
 - Southern states spent 3x as much on whites vs blacks for school
 - 1930-40: 142 blacks murdered by whites
 - Hospitals and Cemeteries Segregated
 - Emmett Till Murdered (1955)
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Good News?

- Deseg. War Industries & FEPC (1941)
 - Smith v. Allright (1944)
 - Deseg. Military (1948)
 - Brown (1954)
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Not Really...

- FEPC not permanent, folded (1946)
 - Smith v. Allright: Thwarted by Literacy Exams, etc.
 - Military Deseg.: Not 'til 1951; racism persisted
 - Brown: Massive Resistance, Not Enforced
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Toward the Second Reconstruction

- Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955)
 - Sit-ins (1960)
 - Freedom Rides (1961)
 - Birmingham March (1963)
 - Selma March (1965)
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The Second Reconstruction

- Civil Rights Act (1964)
- Voting Rights Act (1965)

Icons of the Movement

Dr. King



Ella Baker



Stokely Carmichael



Rosa Parks



Association with Black Churches, Civil Rights Organizations, and Black Students

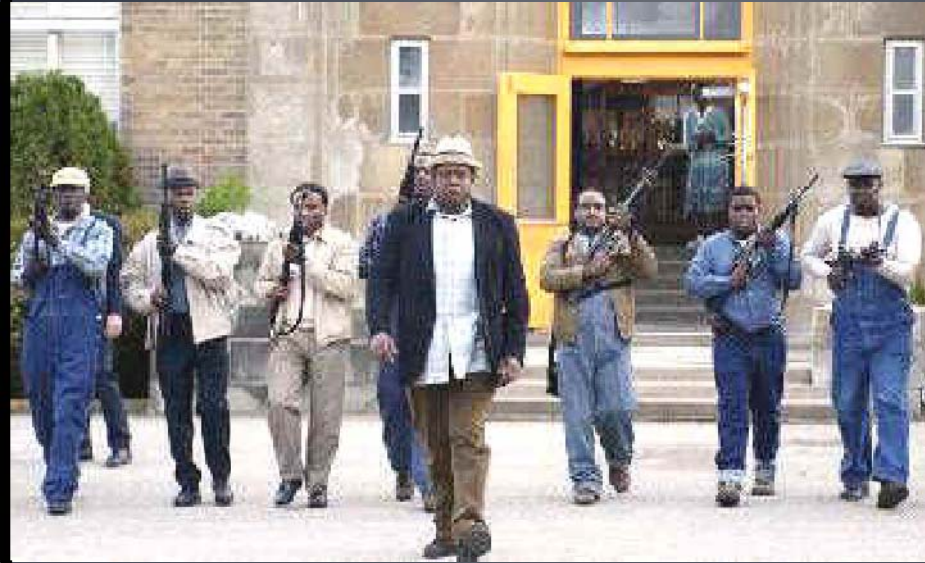
- King: SCLC
 - Baker: NAACP & SNCC
 - Carmichael: SNCC
 - Parks: NAACP
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Black Veterans Who Were Key

Hosea Williams



- WWII, all-black unit attached to Patton's 3rd Army
- Led political arm of Savannah, GA NAACP
- Led "Bloody Sunday March" over Edmund Pettus Bridge



“Chilly Willy” Thomas

Charles Hamilton Houston



- Amherst graduate
- Harvard Law
- Architect of NAACP Legal Strategy
- World War I Officer

Medgar Evers



- World War II
- First Field Secretary, NAACP
- Assassinated: 1963

Robert F. Williams



- Born: Monroe ('25)
 - Founder, Black Armed Guard
 - Received NRA charter
 - President Monroe NAACP; most militant chapter
 - Defended blacks from Klan violence
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Floyd B. McKissick



- WW II, Europe
- First black graduate, UNC-CH Law ('51)
- Organized sit-ins in NC; helped defend them, too.
- Chair of CORE ('66-'68); radicalized the organization



Amzie Moore

- * Served in Europe in WWII
- * Founded Regional Council of Negro Leadership
- * President of Cleveland, MS NAACP
- * Helped organize Freedom Summer Voter Registration



Conclusion

- Military service is important for top down reform
 - It's also import from the bottom up
 - It's about the symbolism
 - It's also about the institutional effects
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