CHAPTER 3

Taking the Crooked with the Straight

The Pros and Cons of African American Military Experience during the 1940s and '50s

> 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.
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> —Douglass, 1863, quoted in Benjamin Quarles, *Frederick Douglass*

In chapter 2, I defined black republicanism and suggested how it drew on the symbolic meaning of military service. In this chapter I will take the first empirical step toward confirming the influence of black republican ideology among black veterans of World War II and the Korean War by investigating the military experiences of a group of black veterans. The epigraph, one of Douglass's many trenchant observations, captures the essence of black republicanism. The overarching idea begins with the uniform and the suggestion that donning it should transform one into a member of the national political community. It's a public declaration that these black soldiers are committed to the defense of American ideals. More important, however, the uniform carries with it the expectation that these soldiers are to be recognized by the political community as American citizens. Of course, the uniform's principal accessory, the weapon, also symbolizes citizenship; so says the Second Amendment and Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's reliance upon it to deny Dred Scott's petition for citizenship. However, Douglass's prose suggests another use for the weapon: it is also a potential tool for securing, by force if necessary, the freedom and equality for which black veterans fought.

This chapter and chapter 4 will apply this portrait of black veterans of the Civil War to their mid-twentieth-century successors. The confidence and righteousness of purpose that Douglass illustrates finds its ideological expression in black republicanism. Like other ideologies, black republicanism is rooted in shared experience. In this case, that experience

is constituted by the sacrifice associated with military life that promised to provide service members with relatively unique group experiences. Beginning with basic training, individuals who join the military are encouraged to leave their old selves behind and to think in terms of the unit. In the context of a total institution (Goffman 1974), they are taught to practice martial virtues of discipline and courage, pushing themselves to accomplish new and difficult tasks. Service during time of war, especially for those who participate in combat, is even more intense.

When we consider the effects of black veterans' race on their experiences, as I touched on in chapter 2, we must expand these parameters. As the literature makes clear, black servicemen made sacrifices beyond those required of whites. Initially they were forced to endure discrimination as a matter of policy; later it lingered as a matter of custom. Much of the scholarship on the military experience of African Americans correctly concentrates upon the consequences of the mistreatment of black servicemen and the ensuing racial conflict. More specifically, it documents how discrimination and segregation affected the morale of black troops, making some reluctant to do battle with the foreign enemy. This body of work also highlights black troops' willingness to contest domination in the military and suggests that their aversion to fighting had more to do with their mistreatment in the military and in society than it did to any innate fear of dying (Barbeau and Henri 1974; Binkin 1993; Dalfiume 1969; Fletcher 1974; Foner 1974; Kryder 2000; McGuire 1983; Nalty 1986; Stouffer et al. 1949).

This chapter takes a more comprehensive approach to the military experience of black veterans of World War II and the Korean War, examining both the good and the bad experiences associated with their military service. The chapter's title, "Taking the Crooked with the Straight," is drawn from a line in August Wilson's play *Fences* (1985) that suggests that in life one must take the bad with the good. The black veterans I interviewed seem to have done just that. To be sure, they have memories associated with segregation and discrimination, which are bitter to this day; but encountering different cultures, contributing to the nation's defense, and developing more confidence helped black soldiers to develop a unique perspective on racial domination. Even a symbol as seemingly minor as wearing the uniform helped to reshape how veterans viewed themselves: it symbolized personal and racial pride as well as confidence.

As this chapter illustrates, their military experience was on balance a positive one for many black veterans and something on which many of them continue to draw as a source of motivation and inspiration. More important, understanding the positive and negative aspects of black veterans' military experience and how they departed from the Southern

norm lays the foundation for understanding the behavior of black veterans as a social group. Resisting the discrimination to which they were exposed in the military made black servicemen more willing to oppose it once they departed the military and returned to the South. As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, this willingness depended in no small part upon the increased self-confidence, racial awareness, and courage that came from bearing arms and fighting to defend the nation.

A Description of the Data

For the investigation in this chapter and chapter 4, I draw on seventeen of the twenty-five interviews I completed with veterans who were born in the South and continue to live there. Each served in either World War II or the Korean War; some interviewees served in both. Of the seventeen subjects, six were officers; the rest were enlisted men; twelve were combat veterans. A total of nine were drafted; eight volunteered. Volunteers generally either joined for socioeconomic reasons—that is, they served to escape crushing poverty in the South—or they sought to have more control over the branch of the military in which they would serve. Either way, under these circumstances, one may argue that these men didn't really volunteer, especially if doing so implies joining the military out of a sense of patriotism. Signing up to join the military in order avoid undesirable assignments, or to escape poverty, some argue, amounts to conscription (Leal 1999).

The interviews varied in duration from 35 to 150 minutes. To account for interregional variation between the Deep South and the Border South, I conducted interviews in Houston, Texas, during the summer of 2003 and in New Orleans, Louisiana, during the winter of 2004. While the interviews were conducted in metropolitan areas, many of the veterans came from the small towns and rural areas of the South. (See appendix C for details.)

By virtue of surviving (in some cases thriving) in a Jim Crow military establishment, especially during wartime, these are exceptional individuals. Yet, as individuals, there are stark differences among them. The men varied in age from sixty-nine to ninety years of age at the time of the interview. The educational achievement among them ranged from high school dropout to doctoral degree holder. Among them were a retired university president, a retired professor, and a retired principal; the group also included a retired firefighter and a retired state police officer. There was also a handful who made a career of the military, serving twenty years or more. The working class is also represented, with a painter, a photographer, and a cook among the interviewees. Both for

the sake of brevity and privacy, I use only the veterans' last names to identify them.

The central purposes of this book are to (1) demonstrate that military service contributed to insurgency among black Southern veterans, and (2) to explain *why* this was the case. To the extent that interviews reveal processes, they are ideal for the second purpose, more so than survey research, which is better suited to the first task. In survey-based research, "the researcher infers the links between the variables," whereas "in intensive interviewing, the researcher induces the respondent to create links between the variables" (Hochschild 1981, 24). Furthermore, interviews, unlike surveys, force the respondent to articulate meaning. In the absence of qualitative information of how culture informs agency, we only know what the coefficients (based on survey data) tell us. The interview assists us with placing the numbers in the broader social and cultural context, aiding with their interpretation (McCracken 1988). In short, these interviews highlight a path through which military experience leads to subscription to black republicanism, and how black republicanism in turn sparked resistance.

Every methodological approach has its disadvantages, and the in-depth interview is no exception. It lacks the *statistical* precision associated with survey-based evidence, and representative samples are difficult to secure. In the absence of a representative sample, and given the relatively small number of observations that are typical of in-depth interviews, it's difficult to claim that interview findings are generalizable to the population at large. Obviously, external validity is important. Having said that, theory demands that I first establish a mechanism by which military experience connects with insurgency—something that, I contend, is ultimately explained by black republicanism. Upon establishing these relationships, such as why military service tended to spur resistance on the part of black Southerners, I attend to the issue of external validity. Ultimately I will turn to survey-based evidence in chapters 5 and 6 as a means of testing propositions based upon the claims I make in which military experience spurred challenges to white supremacy.

In this particular study, moreover, I had to contend with the passage of time. In some cases, I asked veterans to recall episodes that occurred sixty years earlier. Critics may, therefore, credibly charge that the passing years may have distorted the memory of the veterans I interviewed. While I cannot dismiss this possibility, it is also true that life-altering events in the lives of individuals tend to be recalled with a good deal of precision (Reisberg and Heuer 1992; Schuman and Scott 1989; Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000). Moreover, the use of closed questions, ones that form the basis of survey-based research, isn't the best way to capture responses beyond the discrete, easily accessed answers on which quantitative research depends (McCracken 1988). For this reason,

I submit that requesting respondents to recall the meaning of their military service, in the context of white supremacy—in some cases sixty years ago—lies beyond the reach of quantitative research. In this case, an approach more conducive to recalling as well as interpreting the meaning of events—especially those that are important life events—is warranted (Lee 2002, chap. 5; McCracken 1988; Schuman 2008). Hence, we must use something other than closed-ended responses when questions require the respondent to go beyond the typical, on-the-spot, top-of-the-head assessment on which most survey research is based (Zaller 1992). In sum, since I rely on this set of interviews as an initial but not a definitive test of the validity of my argument about black republicanism, and since I am more interested in what military experience *meant* to veterans in the context of the postwar South than in precisely what it contained, concerns about the distortions of memory or inability to generalize beyond the following interviews do not diminish the validity of my conclusions.

The Crooked: Negative Aspects of Black Veterans' Military Experiences

Perhaps the most frustrating part of the black military experience was the prejudice and discrimination to which black servicemen were subjected. Even as the military took them to places far beyond Dixie and put them in the same uniform as whites, black Southerners continued to be dogged by racial oppression. Whether it was segregation during the Second World War or racism in the ranks as American forces helped prosecute the Korean War, black servicemen were forced to engage in conflicts that had nothing to do with the battlefield. On many occasions they faced open hostility in the Southern towns in which they were stationed stateside. They sometimes also faced it overseas, where white soldiers taught locals the finer points of Jim Crow. In this section, I identify the portion of blacks veterans' military experience that both alerted them to the stubbornness of white supremacy and created space for directly confronting it, both of which were critical to the formation of black republicanism. The interviews that follow represent the general sentiment of other veterans. The selections herein are simply the best articulations of each point, not the only ones.

Discrimination, Conflict, and Disaffection

In the mid-twentieth-century United States, almost all of the military bases were located in the South, and many in the officer corps were Southerners. Discrimination at these bases was rampant, and black soldiers

were often the targets of verbal and physical abuse. Not even black officers were exempt. Dr. Bashful's experience is an example of black officers' experience and their reaction to mistreatment. Born in Louisiana, Bashful, now the retired chancellor of a historically black university, was drafted, serving in the army from 1942 to 1946. For two of those years he was an artillery officer in Italy attached to the all-black—and, as we've seen in chapter 1, much maligned—Ninety-Second Division. Before shipping over to the European theater, his unit prepared for deployment by going on various field exercises. On one occasion, while bivouacking in the states, his commanding officer, a white colonel, gathered the officers and instructed them on the upcoming exercise. Prior to dismissal, the colonel designated the areas in which the officers were allowed to relieve themselves: "This trench is for the white officers; this other trench is for the black officers," Bashful recalls the colonel saying in a rather matter-of-fact tone. When the meeting was over, he remembers with a mix of glee and pride that "almost every black officer there went to the white trench and urinated. That told them in a nice way to go to hell."

While he and some of his fellow black officers felt good about taking action to register their protest, Bashful ultimately became disillusioned with the ways in which black officers and soldiers were allowed to be mistreated: "I was very disappointed in some of the experiences which were allowed to take place while I was in the service . . . some of the riots that took place . . . some of the experiences which the [black] soldiers in uniform had happen to them." He places the blame not so much on army policy as on the federal government, which allowed black soldiers to be treated poorly and thereby enabled some of the racial incidents that such disrespect precipitated. "The fact that the government did not stop them, investigate them, issue reports . . . the fact that the government allowed these things to happen," he protests, "was very disappointing to me."

Perhaps because Bashful and his colleagues were officers, they dealt with mistreatment and their attendant disappointment in a relatively peaceful, genteel way. This, after all, is how officers are supposed to conduct themselves—as gentlemen. Enlisted men are not bound by the same code of conduct. Two Purple Heart awardees, both of whom were among the first to serve in as integrated units during the Korean War and were enlisted men, recall dealing with racism in the ranks more aggressively. The first, Mr. Thornton, was born in Giddings, Texas, and raised in Le Grange, Texas, where his father tended farm and worked in a chicken hatchery. His father went no farther in school than the fifth grade, while his mother completed the tenth grade. Thornton finished high school and, after leaving the military, attended some college. He was drafted in 1950, after which he spent a short stint at Fort Ord, California, shipping

over to Korea in 1951. Thornton remembers that the treatment to which he was subjected by whites in his unit caused him to be "very bitter about white people." "Some of the things you read, some of things you heard . . . were messed up," he comments. "I didn't particularly enjoy some of the remarks that they [whites] would make." On occasion he confronted his tormentors, to no good result: "That got me in trouble, because I resented it, and I would let the white boys know I resented *them*," he says with a trace of anger.

A second veteran of the Korean conflict, Mr. Baines, has similar memories, though he recalls black soldiers taking action. Some white soldiers, it seems, enjoyed mocking blacks in his unit, questioning their intellectual capabilities among other things. Black soldiers, he chuckles, "were not too keen on being mocked by whites." Since they were in Korea and not the South, Baines recalls, they felt free to retaliate when they were accused of being dumb or their manhood was challenged. As a result, "there was a lot of fistfights going on with the white boys," he says. In the Twenty-Fifth Division in which Baines served "there was a fight every day." With some amusement, he recalls, "Every day some white boy was getting the mess beat out of him—*every day*." He laughs, "I mean, it got to be so bad, and the funny thing about it is that it wasn't even necessary. It would be because of a corny remark. But it was fun to see them [blacks] make some of them [whites] apologize, you know?"

Sometimes, though, the degradation to which black GIs were subjected was so stunning and complete it was difficult to digest, much less counter. Perhaps the most devastating blow to African American morale occurred stateside when German and Japanese prisoners of war (POWs)—the battlefield enemy—were accorded better treatment than black troops. Volunteering to serve upon finishing high school, and returning to the United States after serving in the Pacific theater during the Second World War, Mr. McWilliams, a seventy-six-year-old veteran of World War II and Korea who was raised in New Orleans, was assigned to a base in the South. There he discovered that "the Japanese soldiers and . . . the German soldiers had privileges that we [African American GIs] did not have." The German prisoners of war "had some privileges of war here—in *America*," McWilliams screamed in lingering disbelief. "They could go into the officer clubs—white officer clubs—and we could not go into them. We used to pay German and Japanese prisoners of war to go into the service club or PXs to get items for us. They could go to the social clubs and to the officer's club, these enlisted clubs, and we could not go!" McWilliams was upset as he recalled this, and for good reason: the *enemy* had received more respect than he and his fellow black soldiers had.

This type of mistreatment also extended to off-base ventures. Black military police officers routinely took German POWs out on work detail, during which they needed to be fed. The retired colonel recalls instances during World War II at a POW camp in New Orleans when "white officers, during lunchtime, would bring meal tickets to them [the POWs] and take the Germans to certain restaurants to eat." The black MPs were not allowed to enter these restaurants. "They had to stay outside or go to the back! Local whites was also inviting German—German *POWs*—to their home! But at the same time, they were still kicking blacks' butts down here!" As the colonel's comments suggest, instances of such unfair treatment were extremely insulting to black servicemen.

Discrimination and Third Parties

Serving overseas introduced third parties into an already volatile, if familiar, situation. Overseas, white servicemen often tried to convince locals to behave according to the tenets of white supremacy. Sometimes this strategy worked; sometimes it failed. Among black soldiers, the outcome mattered less than did their exposure to a racial dynamic to which they were not accustomed.

In general, exposing people to new patterns of social relations and cultural norms tends to expand their worldview by enlarging their perceptions of what is possible (Grasmick 1973; Inkeles 1969). In the context of the military, Glenn Elder and his colleagues have found that military service increases one's self-awareness by experiencing new places and interacting with new people (Elder, Gimble, and Ivie 1991). Employing this logic we should expect black Southerners who were exposed to different, more egalitarian cultures to have begun an aggressive interrogation of white supremacy.

In Europe during the Second World War, white troops attempted to upset the relatively amicable social relationships that had developed between some of the locals and black GIs. Mr. Baskin is one soldier who became annoyed with this interference. Born in 1919 in the city of Houston, Mississippi, he was familiar with the ways of Jim Crow. After volunteering for service in January 1941, he served in Scotland, England, France, and Germany during the war. After transferring from Scotland, Baskin reported to an airbase in England. "The English were very receptive to us for a while," he recalls, until "a lot of the white GIs came and kind of stirred things up and caused some problems." In France and Germany, by contrast, "there was no problem; the attitudes were so different from what it was in the South." Baskin felt more at ease in Europe than he did in the South. After suggesting that Europeans did not subscribe to

group-based stereotypes, Baskin clarified, "They received you as a person, as an individual. There weren't any hang-ups about the color of your skin; they were much more receptive there than they were in the States at the time."

Serving overseas, in other words, was a refuge for Baskin, and it changed his attitudes toward race relations. He remembers, "There were periods of time when it [the racism on Southern bases] affected me very negatively, but after . . . I guess after I went overseas I began to see things differently. I began to realize that things weren't as bad as they sometimes seemed, because I came in contact with a lot of people who were very nice and very helpful. . . . Then later on, during the time I was in Europe, they began integration, and I was able to get different views and different feelings about the races."

Mr. Thomas had a similar experience during the Second World War. He was born in 1917 to a housewife and a railroad brakeman. Drafted in 1942, he entered the army air corps after two years of college, eventually earning a master's degree from Oxford University. The English, according to Thomas, treated him simply as a foreigner—not as a *black* GI. "When you are in a foreign country and you mingle and mix with foreign people," he says, "they treat you just like another foreigner." Serving overseas in a segregated air corps, he remembers saying to himself, "It's regrettable that I have to be three to four thousand miles away from home to experience what freedom really feels like." Europeans do not see color, according to Thomas; instead, "they just see another American in a uniform," adding, "But they become disillusioned when they are compelled to realize that all Americans don't think the same thing about Americans." The discrimination on the part of white GIs against black GIs confused some of the Europeans with whom Thomas came into contact. Britons in particular questioned why white GIs spoke so horribly about blacks. Were they not all Americans? The Britons in his social circle used to ask, "What's the matter? Why do they say these things about you? Why do they identify you as people with tails and all those kind of things?" It bothered him when his English buddies brought these remarks to his attention. These interrogations "raised serious questions in the mind" about white Americans. In his opinion, "Whites [soldiers] didn't feel bad about doing what that did to us."

Even so, for Thomas, the policy of segregation and the discrimination it bred were even more infuriating than the insensitivity of white servicemen. Thomas believed that the armed services could have served as a model for race relations in America. He felt that if blacks were going to serve, "at least it would mean that blacks and whites would be in the same organizations [and that] they'd have the same barracks in the same company, and all that sort of thing—doing the same things." Had that

happened, Thomas believes, it "would have had a [positive] impact on the attitude of blacks returning to America." When the army insisted upon maintaining its policy of segregation, however, it all but guaranteed that black soldiers would remain embittered about it as they separated from the army. With a hint of lingering disappointment, Thomas flatly states that "when the practice of segregation is not only practiced, but reinforced in the services, [the black soldier] comes back with anything but a positive attitude."

Attempts to export the racial mores of the South were not confined to the European theater of operations; white GIs aimed to export Jim Crow to the Far East, too. Colonel McWilliams's experience in the Far East is a classic case. Reflecting on a stint in the Philippines in the latter stages of the Second World War, when he was an enlisted man, and on his time spent in Korea, where he was an officer, he recalls how white GIs made "it a Jim Crow society [over there]," explaining, "The American whites overseas tried to put the '*for white only*' sign up." Sometimes white supremacists convinced locals to adopt their belief in black inferiority. According to McWilliams, more than a few Koreans "catered to" Jim Crow—actions that he and other soldiers found hard to believe. For the most part, black GIs "were treated okay," he concedes, "but it [white supremacy] was so embedded . . . it was so indoctrinated that blacks were inferior to whites." "The whites," he protests, "preached this. And they [the locals] believed it! That's all they [the locals] could see, was white!"

Baskin's, Thomas's, and McWilliams's experiences with racism overseas showed them just how determined some white servicemen were to maintain the racial status quo, increasing the men's racial awareness. All of these encounters, however, happened in town or on post. Other, more disturbing incidents occurred in a different context, one in which the battlefield enemy made black soldiers aware of the unjust conditions under which they served. Perhaps the most painful and ironic way in which black GIs became more racially aware was through the eyes of the enemy. While serving overseas, some black GIs were propagandized directly by the enemy, who made them aware of their second-class status in the United States. Mr. Baines had such an experience during the Korean War.

Sometime after reporting for duty in Korea in August 1950, Baines's company captured a few North Korean soldiers. To his surprise, some of the prisoners spoke broken English. "Some of those Koreans," he remembers, "asked me some questions that really stung." While he was on guard duty, he says, he and a prisoner "got into a conversation." Baines recounts, "He asked me, 'Why are you over here fighting against us? We haven't done anything to you. You're not even free in your own country,

man!'" Upon reflection, he says, "That hurt me, because it was true." With palpable sense of continuing outrage, Baines explains, "It had never dawned on me that that I'm over here fighting these people and I'm not even free in my own country."

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Just as earlier studies have concluded (Dalfiume 1969; Foner 1974; McGuire 1983; Nalty 1986), my interviews demonstrate that black soldiers resented the mistreatment to which were subjected and that this resentment sometimes affected their morale. My findings also confirm historical accounts in which black servicemen actively resisted affronts to their dignity and manhood. Yet the men I interviewed discussed, in addition to these subjects, the range of strategies black troops used to deal with discrimination and mistreatment. From the more veiled efforts of the officers to the more brazen modes employed by enlisted troops, black servicemen often fought back.

These interviews also validate the scholarly consensus that the experiences associated with travel, such as contact with new cultures and people, promoted a more cosmopolitan, progressive outlook so that veterans who served overseas tended to return home more mature (Elder et al. 1991; Mettler 2005b). But the interviews also reveal that black veterans, like other black Southerners who became increasingly militant as they moved beyond their Southern roots (Marx 1967), were frequently radicalized by the military experience. The interviews suggest a mechanism through which service overseas stimulated a racial awareness that peeled away the veil of white supremacy that many black Southerners had reluctantly come to accept as a fact of life. Coming into contact with more tolerant cultures and observing the tenacity of white supremacy among some white troops pushed black GIs to question the legitimacy of Jim Crow more than they would have had they remained in the South.

I'm not suggesting that service overseas was necessary for the interrogation of Jim Crow. As I have shown in chapter 1, history is replete with examples of soldiers who bucked white supremacy, soldiers who never served a day outside of the United States. Nevertheless, when one compares the modicum of equality to which black troops were exposed overseas to the white supremacy with which all blacks had to deal, it became increasingly likely that black veterans would be radicalized. Indeed, the attempted transplantation of Jim Crow showed black servicemen that no matter what their contributions to the war effort, the inferiority associated with their race would always outweigh their sacrifices in the eyes of mainstream American society.

Serving overseas also lit the path to racial awareness in another way. By facilitating friendships with locals, through which black servicemen became increasingly aware of alternative patterns of race relations, the illegitimacy of white supremacy was laid bare. Again, this is not to suggest that all Europeans were opposed to a racial order in which whites were perceived as unambiguously superior, as some certainly were not (Carby 1999; Gilroy 1991; Small 1994; Winant 2001). For the most part, however, black servicemen had positive experiences with individuals associated with the dominant culture overseas. Perhaps it's also the case that equal treatment by Europeans caused them to imagine themselves part of the broader American political community. After all, many of the French and English, among others, had accepted them, had they not? Based on this, it wasn't unreasonable to think it possible that American whites would also accept them on their return. Consequently, as we shall see in chapter 4, they had a hard time returning to the racial status quo in the South upon separating from the military.

The Straight: Positive Aspects of Black Veterans' Military Experiences

Generally, military service represents a turning point in the lives of veterans insofar as travel and overcoming the challenges associated with military life contribute to veterans' self-assurance (Elder, Gimble, and Ivie 1986). Moreover, military service expanded many black servicemen's educational and occupational opportunities, from which they subsequently benefited (Mettler 2005a, 2005b; cf. Katznelson 2005). Indeed, by any objective criteria, black veterans were better off for their military service during the Second World War and the Korean War. On average, their educational and occupational achievements were superior to those of black nonveterans (Cohen, Warner, and Segal 1995; Kasarda 1976; Little and Friedland 1979; Lopreato and Poston 1977; Moskos and Butler 1996; Phillips and Gilroy 1992).

Beyond these objective measures, however, we know very little about how black veterans of World War II and Korea view their service. Did military service increase the self-confidence of black veterans, or did the disrespect that they endured in uniform and upon their return to the South dampen any positive feelings they may have otherwise had about their achievements? If military service is indeed foundational to black republicanism, as I claim, we should expect veterans to take pride in their service and to have gained confidence from their military experiences. In addition, if their positive associations with the military contributed to

the formation of republican attitudes, we should also expect at least some of the veterans to emphasize the importance of sacrificing for the good of the black community. In short, black veterans should express their positive feelings about their military experience in the language of republicanism.

Because I examine veterans who served during the Second World War *and* the Korean War, I must entertain the possibility that black veterans' military experience may have been affected by the period in which they served. This is relevant because there was a change in the manpower policy between the wars, one that went from an official policy of segregation during World War II to one of integration—albeit limited—during the Korean War. It is possible that veterans of the latter war had a better overall experience than World War II veterans because they were allowed to fight and serve on a more equal basis. On the other hand, World War II was considered a "good war" (Gerstle 2001), one that continues to capture the American imagination. Though costly in terms of blood and treasure, the Korean War has not attained the same level of social and political significance (Ducksworth 1994). Veterans of the Second World War may consequently perceive their military experience in a more positive light than their counterparts who served during the Korean War.

As it turns out, the veterans with whom I spoke, from both eras, take great pride in their military accomplishments. Several indicated, moreover, that military service furnished them with a sense of achievement and confidence they had never felt before serving. While others were not happy that they were drafted and therefore viewed military service as a duty or burden, even these veterans were ultimately glad they complied with the law.

Mr. Thomas, a World War II army air corps veteran, is a case in point. For him, the military was an important turning point. Beaming with lingering satisfaction, Thomas says that military service "was the cornerstone of my life." Thomas views military service as both a duty and a privilege: "By virtue of your citizenship, it was a duty to serve, and in the service, you could be happy with it or unhappy with it." But he balances duty and obligations against the "privileges and opportunities that you wouldn't get otherwise," concluding, "A lot depended on what your attitude was." Thomas chose to make the best of the situation, matriculating at Oxford University after the war. "The air force made it possible for me to attend the world's most famous—or one of the world's most famous—universities," he says. "Had I not been in the air force, I don't think that that would've happened. So, I can be very grateful to the air force for the opportunity."

Another veteran of World War II, Mr. Grant, uses the language of republicanism to express similar gratitude for the lessons he learned in the

military. Born in 1918, he served in the Ninth Calvary, one of the four black regiments created in 1866 by order of Congress. Drafted in 1942, Grant saw extensive duty in North Africa and southern France, landing a month after D-Day. Of the 227 men with whom he departed the United States in 1943, only 27 returned. His feelings about serving are a bit mixed. He surrendered himself to military service for the good of the country. Sighing, he adds, "There was no need of registering any animosity . . . you tried to make the best of it . . . you had to go. There was no value in going along with a chip on your shoulder . . . because your life depended on your ability as well as the next guy. So you were part of the puzzle and you adhered accordingly." Despite his initial reluctance to serve, Grant takes pride in having done so, admitting, "I'm proud, I'll start right off on that. It was something that had to be done and I made the most of it." As for what the service did for him, he comments, "I had confidence, but it [military service] kept it boosted." Military service was "a duty to society," and he is glad to have done it, regardless of how he felt about being called up at the time. He explains, "I don't regret the fact that I went into the service . . . as a result of going into the service it was very beneficial when we came out. They had the GI Bill of Rights so you could go to school—job openings and things of that sort."

For others, military service represented a means of seeing the world and gaining access to opportunity. Mr. Moret, a seventy-nine-year-old native of Louisiana, is one example. As one of the celebrated Tuskegee Airmen, he volunteered to join the army as a means of realizing a lifelong dream of flying. He departed New Orleans in 1943 for flight training in Alabama. Moret has fond memories and takes pride in what he did. "I'm proud to have done what I did," he says, "and evidently, masses of people think the same way, because I am so often called on to give talks about my experiences, and not just to blacks, but more often by whites." Thus, military service was "certainly not a burden" for him. Though Moret "was fulfilling an obligation at the time," flying was also "something that [I had] wanted to do since [I] was a little boy." He also mentions how the military exposed him to people with different backgrounds, something that probably would not have happened had he not served. As the Tuskegee airman tells it, "[the service] put me in with other guys from all over the country" and "gave me an opportunity to hear stories of life from other parts of the country."

Like Thomas and Grant, Moret also conceives of his military service in terms of sacrifice and the common good, the essence of republicanism. "In the period that I came up in, the nation was at war," he says, "[and] everybody should have served, you understand?" For him it mattered not whether one was drafted or one volunteered because "the need was there at the time." Moret sees the need for the draft's return today because he

feels that contemporary Americans are selfish. In his estimation, more universal military service has the potential to bring the country closer together, because "the conditions in the military [make] one consider other people." With equal parts urgency and irritability, Moret cautions, "We can't be on our own and don't worry about the other guy, you understand?" To illustrate his point, he describes his first rendezvous training mission at Tuskegee, flying an AT-6 in the fall of 1944:

> I was to be at a certain point at a certain time to meet up with certain other airplanes. I had flown a three-legged triangle before getting to this point, so my navigation skills were being tested. It was kind of misty that particular day, hazy, and when I got up to my point, there were the other planes that I was to meet up with. I said, "These guys are the ones I'm going to depend on to go and fight. They are determined to be as skillful and accurate as I'm trying to be"; and this is a good feeling. This is a protection, like a backup that you have standing right beside you, you know, and that's what the military was a molding factor at.

In this regard Moret believes that military service taught him the value of teamwork: "Yeah, the military definitely molded me . . . the military gave me a sense that everything I did was a team effort."

When interviewing veterans, I also asked them whether they saw their military service as a privilege or a duty—as something they gladly performed or something into which they had to be coerced. According to Mr. Baskin, a veteran of World War II, military service was a privilege, not a duty. He wanted to reenlist. Upon the birth of his son back in the United States, however, his wife "enticed [him] to get out and come back home." Baskin remained long enough for the service to change the way he viewed himself. "I have a much higher opinion of myself and my lifestyle," he says, "than I did prior to [serving]." As a result of his stint in the military, Baskin feels more confident and self-assured. He also takes great pride in his having served because it enabled him to assist other soldiers and rise through the ranks. "I felt that I accomplished something, and I felt that I helped a lot of people when I was in the service. . . . I felt that I was in a good position to do some things and in many cases I did. . . . I was able to get promoted and I rose through the ranks fairly rapidly, and so I felt very fortunate," he says with obvious satisfaction.

A similar theme emerges from Mr. Pete's perspective. A Korean War veteran who hails from Nacodoches, Texas, Pete is the son of a sharecropper and housewife who volunteered to join the military to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered in the service. He reported to the Korean Peninsula just prior to the commencement of hostilities in 1950 and was attached to the all-black Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment. Overall, Pete describes his service as a privilege: "I'm glad I went in for the experience, adventures, and that's some experience that you get. You don't get it out here. I enjoyed that portion of it." For him, the principal drawback of serving in the military was that one's tour of duty interrupts one's life. "I was kind of slowed down a little bit when I got out. I mean, I was behind because when I went to college I had to go there and start with younger students, and that really had a burden on me and had an effect." Since he was so much older than the other students, he found returning to school difficult. Pete considered quitting but ultimately decided against it. "It was a struggle," he says, "but I'm glad I got through it."

Pete credits his military experience with allowing him to get through the rough patch he faced upon separating from the military. It gave him the courage and confidence to get on with his life: "I mean, number one, I was more matured. See when I went in I was green and crazed, and I didn't know anything. Never had been away from home and I was just glad, you know, to go in and get that experience. I had a chance to grow up. . . . I had a chance to travel and get some experience." Compared to other things he did prior to enlisting, the military served as an invaluable growth opportunity: "I mean, it helped me go to through life better out here and to pursue better things out here in civilian life." In sum, Pete says, "It gave me more confidence. It made a man out of me."

Others share the view that the military boosted their confidence, helping them to overcome a rough start in life. Mr. Baines's story represents this perspective. Born in 1928 in Wharton, Texas, Baines lost his father early in his life. His mother, who had a fifth-grade education, was left to fend for seven children. Life was "very, very tough" for his family, he recalls, "We had very little money." Coming from such a tough upbringing, the military allowed him to feel good about himself. Indeed, Baines views his performance in the military as a source of confidence; it was a chance for him to prove himself. With great pride, he says that his military experience "made me feel that the jobs that I accomplished in the military . . . the training that I received and the awards that I received . . . proved that I'm the equal to any other man." In a rather wistful tone, he goes on to catalog what else he gained from his experience in the military. For instance, the military also taught him discipline and broadened his horizons: "It gave me some stick-to-it-ness; it taught me about things that I would never have seen before, had I not gone into the military. The travel that I saw, the people that I met . . . it has changed my life. It made me a better person." While Baines saw military service as a duty citizens must perform, he was glad to do so. "This country's been good to me and my family," he says, "despite all of this prejudice and discrimination. I think it's the greatest country in the world."

Baines's positive view of the military is augmented by what serving did for him personally and professionally. During his initial run at college, he dropped out. "I just wasn't ready for college," he says. "Then I went into the United States Army. That was the smartest move I ever made was to go into the United States Army, because then I had the chance to travel. I didn't realize I would end up in a war, though." Nonetheless, as he sees it, "the military was a turning point, because after I came back from the war, I had the chance to go back to college and get my education and [buy] my home and so forth, and do both my bachelor's and master's degree on the GI Bill, otherwise I probably wouldn't have had the money to do it. That was a significant turning point in my life."

Many of the men I interviewed, then, viewed their time in the military in a positive light; it was challenging but worth it. The military helped build a foundation for success in their postservice lives. I failed to encounter a consensus on this point, however. Some of the veterans I spoke to had reservations about the sacrifices they made, including the lifelong injuries they sustained in the service. Mr. Thornton is one of them. He feels that to a certain extent he and other young men of his generation were duped into service: "I guess because I was kind of, I guess, brainwashed to feel that as a young man that we were . . . that I was obligated to serve my country, and this was a duty that I had to do." Still, Thornton says that serving "wasn't a burden," and that in fact he considered it to be a noble act: "I also saw it as, not prestige, but . . . I thought it was a good thing to do, you know? To be honest with you, once I had gone through my basic and realized it was a job, I said, 'Well, hell, I'll make the best of it and enjoy it,' you know?"

Thornton's cheerful disposition changed shortly after he arrived in Korea, where he suffered from frostbite and head injuries. He was angry at the military for failing to adequately prepare him for the conditions he would encounter: "I was angry at, uh, I was angry at the army I guess because I felt that I wasn't protected enough." He was also upset by what he believed to be inadequate training for the mission:

> I felt that the basic [training] I received did not forewarn me about what I was going into. I really didn't know what I was going into. Hell, I didn't know what was in Korea. I didn't realize it was that cold in Korea, you know? I felt as though our clothing was inadequate because of that climate that we were in. I had no idea that it was that type of weather over there. Of course, I kept wondering, "What the hell am I doing here? Why? What for? Why do we want these hills and these mountains? What for? What's over here for us?"

After sustaining his injuries, Thornton recalls, it was not clear whether he would recover; his condition was touch and go for quite some time. "I stayed unconscious for about six months and my wife had been told and my mother had been told that if I lived I would be a vegetable, and that I'd never walk again." In the end, however, surviving the war improved his self-image and allowed him to better appreciate life. As he reflects on it now, Thornton says that the service made him stronger: "It made me realize that I developed a will to live and to live a strong life and a beautiful life, and I think it helped me there."

Mr. McWilliams's experience is a slight departure from the others; he was initially indifferent about going to war. He has no recollection of what motivated him to fight, though he suspects that his motives were instrumental rather than sentimental. "I think I went (to the Korean War) because of the opportunity to be promoted to lieutenant," he guesses. Even though he is not quite sure why he did not resist going to war, he is clear about what did *not* motivate him: "It was not fighting the communists. It was not for freedom. No, you were ordered to go into combat. You didn't question it. It may sound silly, you know, as I look at it now. Flag waving? Fighting for the flag? God, no! Defending democracy? No, it wasn't that, either. You were just told to go and you went. You got orders and went."

Even so, McWilliams believed it important that blacks be allowed to fight. Black Americans, in his estimation, have always been stigmatized by what he perceived as an unfair assessment of their fighting ability. McWilliams drew on history to illustrate his point: "You go all the way back to the Spanish-American War, you had [a] very limited number of black combat units. And especially during World War I the black units were sent over to France to fight, but didn't get the chance." Turning to the Second World War, he makes the following observation regarding black military service. "It was so stigmatized," he says indignantly, "that you had a couple of black combat units that they shipped them to a place away from combat areas. They said they didn't have the backbone, or they couldn't fight under stress or they—they just couldn't, or were not—good combat people." The "they" to which the colonel refers are "the Southern senators and generals and everybody else—because they didn't give them [blacks] a chance to prove themselves—the 371st Tank Battalion and the Triple Nickel Airborne Battalion."

It was only during the Korean War, the colonel argues, that the military establishment acceded to political pressure applied by the black community: "Now, come the Korean War, the pressure was on for black combat [men]. They [blacks] demand, 'Let's have some black infantry units. Let's have some black tankers. Let's have some black artillerymen, airborne units.'" Recalling his own experience in Korea with the Twenty-Fifth Regiment of the Twenty-Fifth Division, he remembers the unit "do[ing] an outstanding job in Korea, but because of the overwhelming

forces of the North Korean and Chinese, they ran a bunch of people—including whites—back. But because it was the Twenty-Fifth, a black unit, it was broadcast that we ran."

In the end, though, McWilliams is glad that he served—glad that he had the opportunity to engage in combat. He believes that fighting made blacks "more of an American than this picture they portrayed of us." Combat experience allowed him and fellow black servicemen to say, with a sense of gratification, "Hey, I served, and served in a combat unit. They didn't just throw me in the military to clean the latrines or drive a truck, or to do some of this manual labor." The actions of black servicemen in World War II and Korea, he believes, corrected the misperception that they were incapable of fighting. McWilliams also clamored to fight in order to prove a point. He says that he was determined "to prove that [black soldiers] could do the same as anyone else, because they said blacks were not good enough or capable of fighting in combat against an enemy." He admitted one final reason for fighting: it was a means of proving his manhood to whites. "It was very important," McWilliams explains, "to say that I'm a man also."

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If we look beyond the negative effects of segregation and discrimination, military service was a positive experience for many of the black veterans I interviewed. This confirms McMillen's (1997) and Moore's (1996) findings that black veterans of the Second World War took pride in their service, as well as their conclusion that military service was a turning point in the lives of black veterans. My findings extend these results to veterans of the Korean War as well. In other words, it didn't matter *when* one served; all are proud of what they accomplished and learned in the military. Even for Thornton and McWilliams, both of whom were ambivalent about their experiences in the military, military service was, overall, a positive experience. Their opinions regarding the *conditions* under which they joined the military, however, are mixed: some saw it as a duty to fight for their country, something they were compelled to do. Others considered it a privilege, something they were glad to undertake. This split seems to correspond to how much veterans believed they had benefited from their service. Those who perceived military service as an opportunity for advancement, whether personal or racial, tended to call service as a privilege. Those who believed that nothing in the way of tangible advancement would result from their service, on the other hand, appear to have perceived it as a duty or burden. This is a slight departure from Mettler's (2005b) findings as they pertain to white veterans in that almost all of her subjects believed their military service to have been an

obligation they were happy to fulfill. It is safe to say that race has something to do with the difference between white veterans who were happy to fulfill their obligations and some of the black veterans who were less than enthusiastic about doing so.

In the end, though, each of the men I interviewed believes his military service was worthwhile and that it contributed to the greater good, be it national security or dispelling the notion that blacks are not effective fighters. The experience associated with military service, as predicted, gave the veterans confidence and taught them teamwork and discipline. The finding that military service produces confidence is in keeping with prior research (Elder and Clipp 1989). My findings differ, however, in the sense that black veterans emphasize the *opportunities* provided by the military as a source of their confidence. Indeed, that several mentioned the opportunities for which they were grateful affirms that the military gave them a chance to excel, convincing them that they were capable of exceeding the low expectations imposed by racism. Black veterans, furthermore, tended to use whites as a benchmark for measuring their successes: their ability to compete with whites in the military made them feel successful. Finally, serving in the military affirmed veterans' masculinity, especially for those who saw combat. Proving their mettle on the battlefield, as Samuel Stouffer and colleagues (1949) have suggested, gave black servicemen an opportunity to refute racist claims that they were too cowardly or too dumb to serve on par with whites.

Donning the Uniform

Many veterans spoke of the uniform as a symbol of the pride they felt in their service. Sometimes, a uniform transcends mere association with the group in that it represents group attributes, ultimately coming to represent the group, and becomes the focus of attention (Joseph and Alex 1972). Put differently, the uniform becomes a means by which individuals identify with the core values of the organization it represents (Pratt and Rafaeli 1997). In the case of the American military, the uniform represents the martial virtues of discipline, courage, and sacrifice, the last of which is indispensable to the practice of republicanism: without sacrifice, there is no civic virtue.

Perhaps more important, at least for black Southerners, the uniform symbolized their equality, their membership in the political community. It also embodied these service members' sense of accomplishment and their commitment to American ideals. For these reasons we should expect black veterans to express pride in having donned the uniform, some of which they derived from how they were received in the black community.

I can find no better example than Dr. Carey's experience. Born and raised in rural Florida, Carey moved to Louisiana to take a faculty position at a historically black university in the 1960s. His father, who had only a second-grade education, was a fruit grower, and his mother, a housewife, had a seventh-grade education. As much as he admired his father's work ethic, Carey didn't wish to follow in his footsteps; he wanted something more. He wanted to attend college, and he knew his parents didn't have the resources to send him. After listening to a recruiting pitch in which the recruiter apprised him of the educational opportunities that accompanied military service through the GI Bill, he was persuaded to join, enlisting on June 12, 1950—thirteen days prior to the commencement of the Korean War. Nonetheless, for a young man from such humble beginnings, military service and the uniform that symbolized it were a means of elevating his status. Carey felt "pretty damn proud" of his uniform. "In the rural South," he says, "the military is viewed with a bit more respect than, say, in the Northern inner city." Once reports from the Korean War began to trickle back to America, black Southerners gained an even greater appreciation of the sacrifices made by black soldiers. (See appendix C for content analysis.) Because Carey was wounded, he returned home early on a medical furlough. Consequently, there were few black servicemen around when he returned home. On the occasions when he decided to wear his uniform in public, it "gave me a measure of respect," he says with unabashed pride, "especially among blacks and my peers. Whites also respected it."

Carey is not the only veteran to feel this way about the uniform. Thornton also derived great pride from wearing his uniform, especially off-post, around family and friends: "When I wore my uniform I felt proud. I really did. I felt proud." He elaborates, "I was especially proud of wearing it if I went to church. You know, with members of my family. I also discovered there was a lot of sympathy with it." The uniform, according to Thornton, had cachet beyond the black community. "If you had your uniform on," he declares, "you were allowed to do almost anything. Without it, you didn't." According to Carey and Thornton, black soldiers in uniform commanded a grudging respect from white Southerners. Thornton remembers that "they [whites] wouldn't bother you. They were normal, you would hear it [the racist talk], but they wouldn't challenge you."

Veterans also internalized how the uniform, which symbolized desert and achievement, made them feel. Mr. Carter, a career army man who volunteered in 1940, declares, "[Wearing the uniform] made me feel as though I was a true American—that I merited everything that I received." For Williams, the uniform represented much more. "I know that once I got in that uniform, I was somebody; I stood for something," he says.

"The uniform showed me what discipline was . . . it told me how to receive and accept responsibility." Before he volunteered to join the army at the age of seventeen in 1952, Williams was illiterate. He did not remain that way, he says, because "the uniform of the United States Army helped educate me when I probably never would be educated." Baines, too, was "proud, very proud" to wear the uniform. "By going into the military," he recalls, "I not only traveled but I had the opportunity to really meet people, to engage in war, fight for this country, and make me proud of what I've done."

Not all of the veterans I interviewed hold the uniform in such high regard. For Mr. Stewart, drafted in 1945, wearing the uniform changed nothing. Even after the war, he recalls with some bitterness, "they [whites] looked at you . . . you're just another nigger, you know?" He recalls an experience he had while he was on leave. En route from California to Texas, he stopped at a gas station. "I needed to use the bathroom," he remembers. "I had my wife, and we stopped there, and I said we'll stop at the service station and get some gas. So I asked the attendant, did they have a restroom? He said, 'Not for colored.' I said, 'Well, don't put no gas in the car.' " Stewart was in uniform when this exchange took place.

The uniform, it seems, meant something different to each veteran. Some emphasized how it made them feel. To others, it brought a measure of respect from the black community and from some whites. Why did the uniform mean so much? Like the right to vote and the right to work (Shklar 1991), being permitted to wear the uniform represented an elevation in social standing. The uniform at once conveys the depth of one's commitment to America and the reality of one's membership in the national community. This is why the black community took pride in the servicemen's achievements: they represented blacks' commitment to the nation's ideals. White Southerners respected the uniform, if not the individual, for similar reasons. Of course, as Stewart's example indicates, affinity for the uniform was not universal. If the other veterans' sentiments are even remotely representative of black Southerners who served during the Second World War and the Korean War, however, we may conclude that many veterans drew positive meaning from donning the uniform.

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This chapter explored the military experiences of black servicemen from the South during the Second World War and the Korean War. Most accounts of black veterans' experience in the military centers on the egregious policies and practices to which they were exposed, and rightfully

so. The positive aspects of military service, however, are often buried under the debris of segregation and discrimination. The veterans I interviewed appreciate the opportunities military service provided them. Many take pride in their service; overcoming the challenges they encountered in the military filled them with confidence. These sentiments were not unanimous, of course. On more than one occasion I spoke to veterans who were angry at the persistence of racism in the military and at being forced by the draft to serve a country that allowed the military to export its racist practices overseas. Overall, though, the veterans I talked to seem to have made the most of their experiences, and these experiences shaped their lives and laid the foundations of a black republican worldview.

From a theoretical perspective, we can also observe the ways in which the military, as an institution, shaped the behavior of black servicemen. Both race-neutral and racialized effects of military service are apparent in the testimonies of the veterans I interviewed. On the one hand, the policy of segregation institutionalized racism in the military. Even though desegregation eventually eliminated the institutionalization of racism in the military, it remained intact as a practice, infecting the chain of command from top to bottom during the Korean War. On the other hand, military culture is also responsible for institutionalizing courage, pride, discipline, and the confidence that comes from bearing arms. Racialized effects, including the racial awareness gained from serving overseas and exposure to educational as well as vocational experiences, also served veterans well upon their departure from the military. In the absence of these experiences it is difficult to imagine that black servicemen would have taken on white supremacy in the way that they did. All of these experiences contributed to the development of veterans' worldview of black republicanism and thereby helped to sustain their resistance to domination.

The bittersweet experience of serving overseas—the feeling of at once being liberated by one's encounters with foreigners and oppressed by one's own countrymen—is something that black veterans did not soon forget. Together, the negative and the positive aspects of their military experiences came to represent their ability to overcome adversity, their courage, their sense of self-worth, their sense of equality, and their sense of manhood. As a result, veterans returned to the South with a new sense of self and their ability to change things. They returned with a new set of expectations, confident of their ability to achieve them. There is no doubt that serving in a Jim Crow military curbed the potential of some soldiers, sailors, and airmen. But the educational opportunities, travel, sense of purpose, and—for some—leadership that were also part of military experience ensured an upward trajectory for many of these men for the rest of their lives.

These experiences set black veterans apart from other black Southerners, laying the groundwork for the formation of a group. As we shall see, the members of this group had an attachment to America, its ideals and institutions, but not the type of blind attachment often confused with patriotism. Instead, theirs was a critical attachment. Black veterans returned home determined to secure the rights to which they, and the community they represented, were entitled. After all, if they were willing to die to preserve freedom overseas—a freedom they had failed to enjoy prior to their departure—why should they not have been willing to die for it when they returned?