

In 1948 the US military was officially integrated. In a country smitten with Jim Crow, the KKK, and other forces of racism; President Truman defied common thought and made African-Americans equal to all others in recognition of their valor during WWII. His decision sent shock waves throughout the heavily segregated America of the late 1940s. Never before had African-Americans truly been equal to white people in any aspect of American society. The US military has been a driving force for racial integration in our society because it has created an expectation for equality among African-American veterans, and provided a model of racial equality for the rest of America to look up to.

One way in which the US military has been a force for integration in our society is by creating an expectation among African-Americans that they deserve to be equal to everyone else. Veterans returning from the military left a place of equality to return to discrimination back at home. This stark change created a sense among veterans that something had to be done. 300 of them took action in Atlanta in 1946, when the city wouldn't let the former soldiers become policemen because of Jim Crow laws in effect at the time. This caused a protest in front of city hall, where veterans chanted for their rights to be part of the police force. The rally failed, but in 1948 eight African-Americans were hired to be policemen in Atlanta. In addition to protesting, African-American veterans took action against white supremacy in post-WWII America by fighting back against organizations like the KKK. They did this by protecting prominent civil rights leaders against attacks, and resisting the KKK when it used force to try to prevent African-Americans from voting. As W.E.B. Dubois says in his poem "Returning Soldiers", "We return. We return from fighting. We return fighting." African-Americans were not done fighting oppression once they defeated it abroad.

The U.S military has also been a vehicle for integration in America by serving as a model for racial equality. One example is the outstanding service of African American pilots as part of the Tuskegee airmen. Despite that service; in the late 1940s, the US had no part of life where African-Americans were truly equal to people of other races. This all changed when Truman integrated the US military and ended all segregation in our defense forces. The “Double V” campaign jumped at the opportunity to build off of military integration and translate it into everyday life. The proponents of the campaign argued that the US military had finally been integrated, but African-Americans were still segregated in their daily lives. This argument gained recognition among prominent African-American leaders who looked to the military as a source of inspiration. As Martin Luther King Jr. says in his speech “The Drum Major Instinct”, “Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve”. King channels the equality of the US military as an example of how all are equally capable of greatness. He is saying that anyone who can protect our nation deserves the right to fulfill their potential and “be great”. He had the ability to make this claim because he was able to hold up the military as a prime example of equality. Without military integration; King would not have an example of how everyone can be equal in America to preach to his congregation. The military has served as a model for societal integration for events like the “Double V” campaign of the late 1940s to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

The US military has been a force for integration in our society by inspiring African-American veterans of WWII to fight for their rights once they returned home, and by serving as a model for integration in our society for Americans to look up to. Truman’s decision to integrate the US military inspired millions of African-Americans to fight for their equality, ranging from returning vets to prominent Civil Rights leaders. One has to wonder what the state of racial

equality would be like in America today if Truman hadn't made the revolutionary decision to integrate the US military.