



# **Reject, Recruit, Reject: A Well-Worn Pattern of American Military History**

A Response from the Inclusion Allies Coalition  
Written by Greg Jenkins

# Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: A Long Military History



Executive Order 9981, issued by President Harry Truman in 1948, marked the formal beginning of desegregating the U.S. armed forces.

Full integration lagged until 1953, near the end of the Korean War, driven largely by depleted reserves of white infantry soldiers.



Established in 1971 as the Defense Race Relations Institute, DEOMI was created during the Vietnam War era to address escalating racial tensions within U.S. military ranks.

Its mandate focused on education, leadership accountability, and promoting equal opportunity amid widespread unrest and social upheaval.



In 1976, Congress authorized U.S. military service academies to admit women, including West Point, the Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy, and the Coast Guard Academy.

This landmark decision expanded access to leadership training and significantly broadened military career pathways for women across the armed forces.



## But, the Reject-Recruit-Reject Pattern Continues

From the Indian Wars through today, the U.S. military has repeatedly enacted a “reject–recruit–reject” cycle toward women and racial minorities.

When manpower needs were low, they were excluded or segregated; when wars demanded personnel, they were recruited—often into hazardous, lower-status roles with limited advancement.

After conflicts ended, these same groups were dismissed, demobilized, or denied full recognition and benefits, reinforcing systemic inequality despite demonstrated service and sacrifice.

# Despite Rejection, Women & Minorities Served With Distinction



Harriet Tubman was among the Union's most effective Civil War intelligence operatives and the first woman in U.S. history to plan and lead an armed military raid.

Her 1863 Combahee Ferry operation freed more enslaved people than any single Civil War action, yet she went unpaid for years and fought repeatedly for a military pension.



Native American Code Talkers—from Navajo, Choctaw, Comanche, Lakota, and other nations—were recruited in World Wars I and II to build unbreakable military codes.

Their languages enabled communication across the European and Pacific theaters, proving decisive to U.S. operational success against enemy forces.

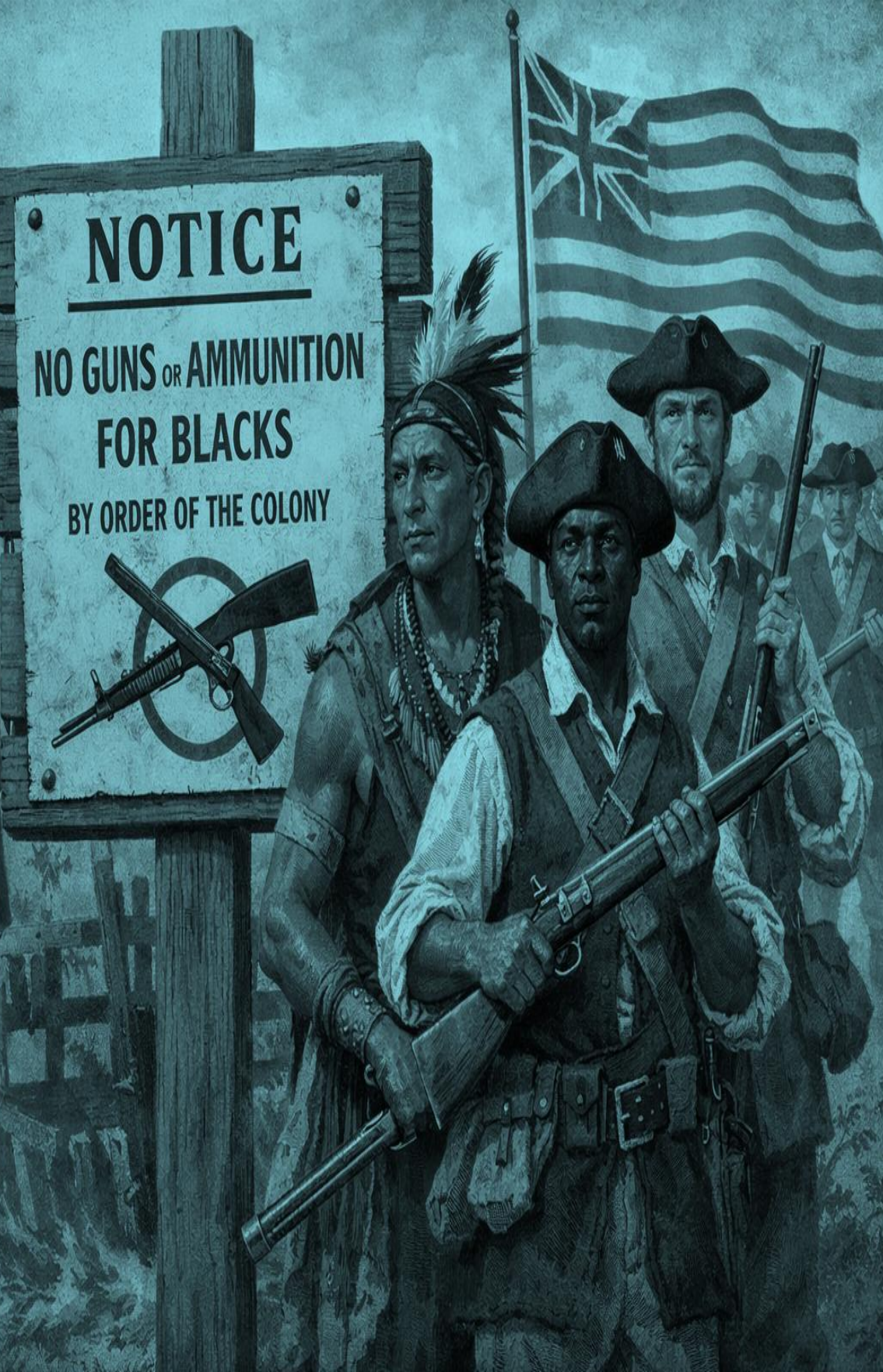


The 442nd Regimental Combat Team, composed of Americans of Japanese descent, fought in World War II while many of their families were incarcerated at home.

Despite this injustice, they became the most decorated U.S. military unit for its size and length of service in history.



# COLONIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD



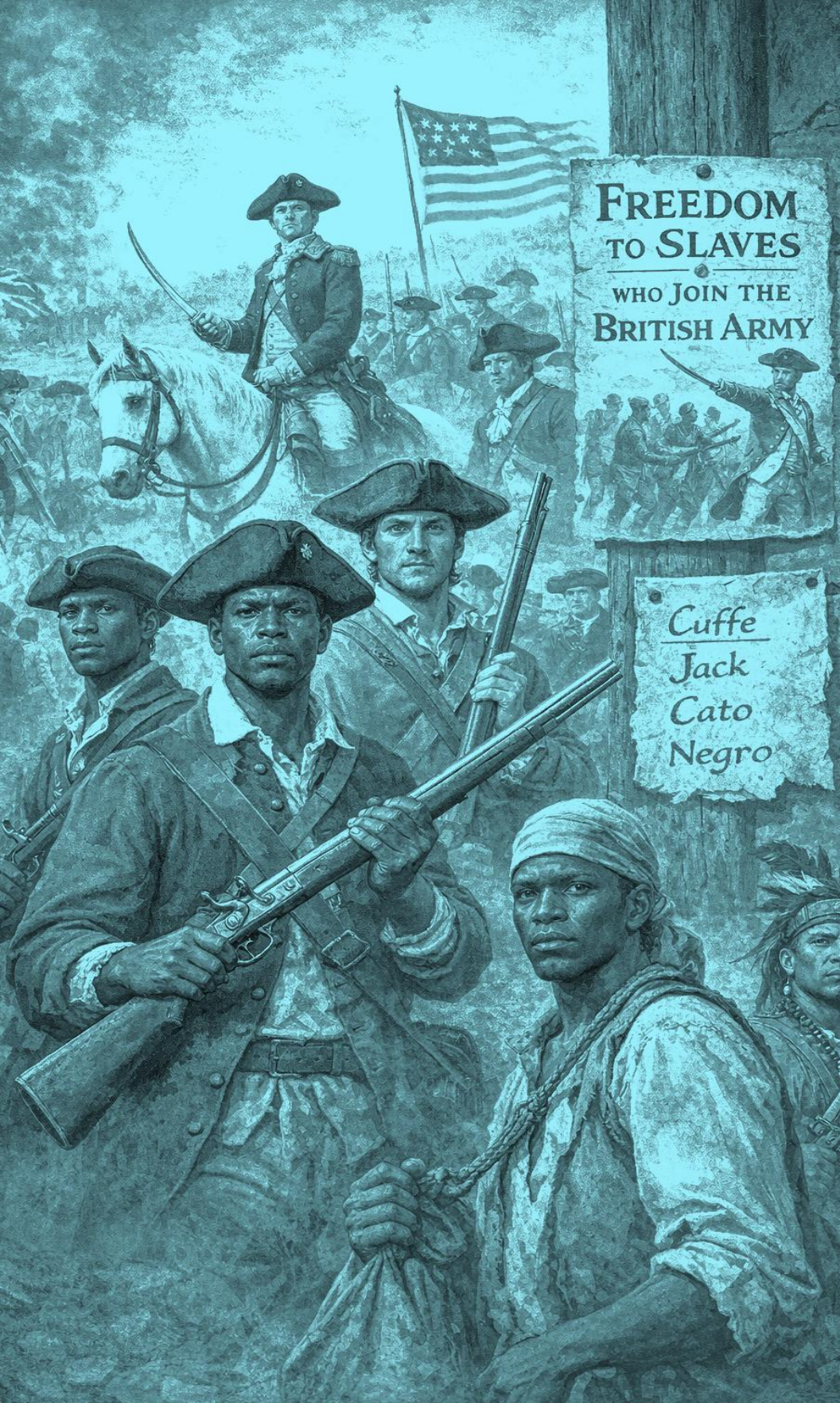
## Colonial Period (1528 to 1774)

Before the American Revolution, colonial militias required all able-bodied men to serve, regardless of race, and included free and enslaved Africans.

As fears of slave uprisings grew in the 1600s, colonies such as Virginia barred Blacks from bearing arms. These restrictions reflected concerns over economic security and racial power.

When service declined, militias later recruited marginalized groups, including Native Americans and people of African descent.

# American Revolution (1775–1783)



When Washington took command in 1775, Black enlistment was restricted, while the British promised freedom to enslaved people who fought for the Crown.

Manpower shortages soon forced reversals, and Black soldiers served across the Army and Navy, often unnamed or poorly recorded.

Some enslaved men substituted for White masters, and a few all-Black units formed.

Native nations were courted selectively.

After independence, racial exclusion was reinstated through law and policy.

# War of 1812 (1812-1815)

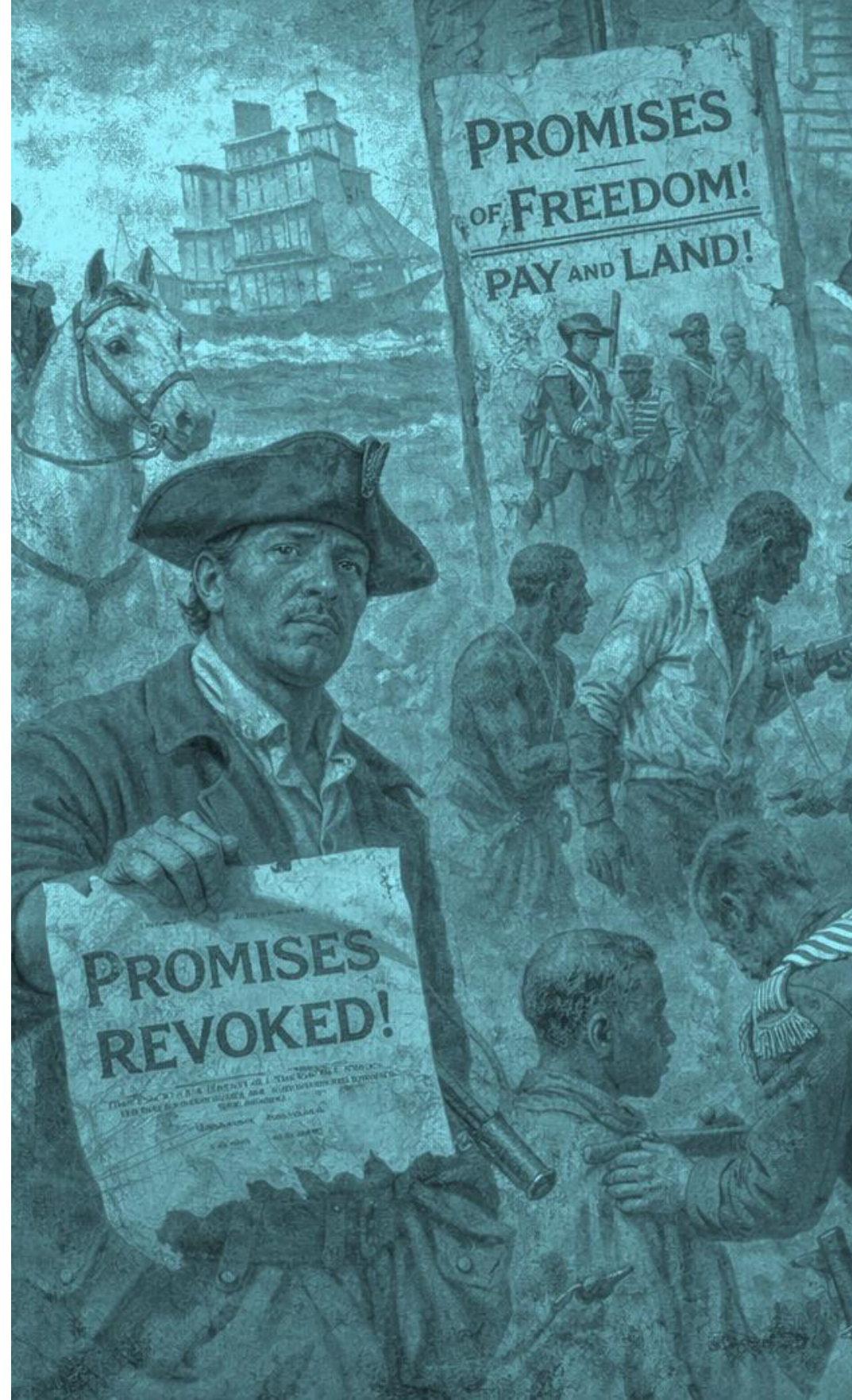
During the War of 1812, Blacks were enlisted only when White manpower was insufficient.

Enslaved and free Blacks served as soldiers and sailors, often in segregated units.

Andrew Jackson promised freedom, pay, and land to Black troops at New Orleans, then revoked those promises and disarmed them after victory.

Although both sides offered freedom, most Blacks were returned to enslavement under the Treaty of Ghent.

After the war, U.S. policy formally excluded Blacks from military service.





**CIVIL WAR PERIOD**

# The Civil War (1861-1865)



At the Civil War's outset, Blacks were barred from Union service, but mounting casualties led to segregated Black units under White officers.

Black troops faced lower pay, higher death rates, and brutal treatment when captured, including massacres such as Fort Pillow.



The Confederacy used enslaved Blacks extensively in labor roles and later considered arming them.

Blacks also served in the Navy under restrictions, while Hispanics and Native Americans fought on both sides, often losing land and rights afterward.



**WHAT HAS BEEN THE PERSONAL IMPACT?**

# Personal Impact:

## How Did It Feel for Black Americans?

### BLACK AMERICANS — EXCLUSION, HUMILIATION, AND DETERMINATION

James R. Carter

“When I was turned down, it hurt. It made you feel less than a man, like you weren’t good enough to fight for your own country.”

Source: Montford Point Marines oral history, U.S. Marine Corps

<https://www.lejeune.marines.mil/News/Article/512498/montford-point-marines-day-celebrated>

### Charles Johnson

(reflecting on segregation) “We wanted to serve like everybody else, but the message was clear: your country doesn’t trust you, even when it needs you.”

Source: National WWII Museum, African American Experiences Collection

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/african-americans-world-war-ii>

### James Thompson

“Being denied the right to fight made me feel **angry and ashamed at the same time**—ashamed not of myself, but of a nation that asked for loyalty while withholding dignity.”

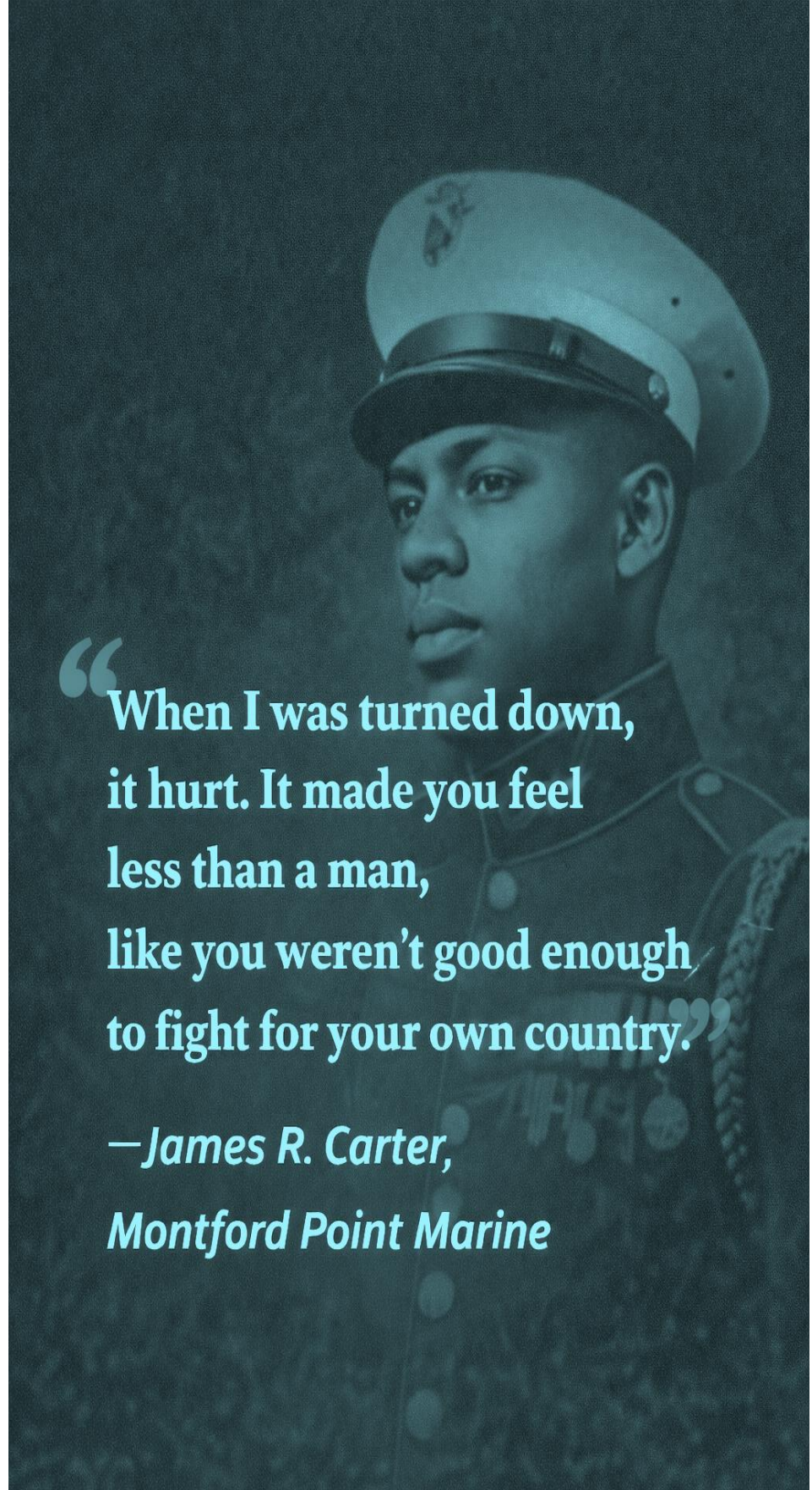
Source: *Pittsburgh Courier*, “Double V” campaign letter, 1942

<https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84024546/>

### Charity Adams Earley

“Every rejection carried the same message: you are needed, but not fully wanted. That reality was **exhausting and infuriating**.”

Source: *One Woman’s Army* (memoir), Texas A&M University Press



“When I was turned down, it hurt. It made you feel less than a man, like you weren’t good enough to fight for your own country.”

—James R. Carter,

*Montford Point Marine*

# Personal Impact: How Did It Feel for Japanese and Asian Americans?

## JAPANESE AMERICANS — FEAR, GRIEF, AND CONFLICTED LOYALTY

### Mike Masaoka

“We were told we were not fit to serve, and yet expected to prove loyalty. That contradiction left many of us feeling **afraid, wounded, and desperate to belong.**”

Source: Densho Digital Archive, oral history

<https://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1000-2/>

### Robert M. Wada

“When my brother was rejected because he was Japanese, it felt like **our citizenship was erased in a single sentence.**”

Source: Densho Digital Repository

<https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-densho-1000/ddr-densho-1000-356-transcript/>

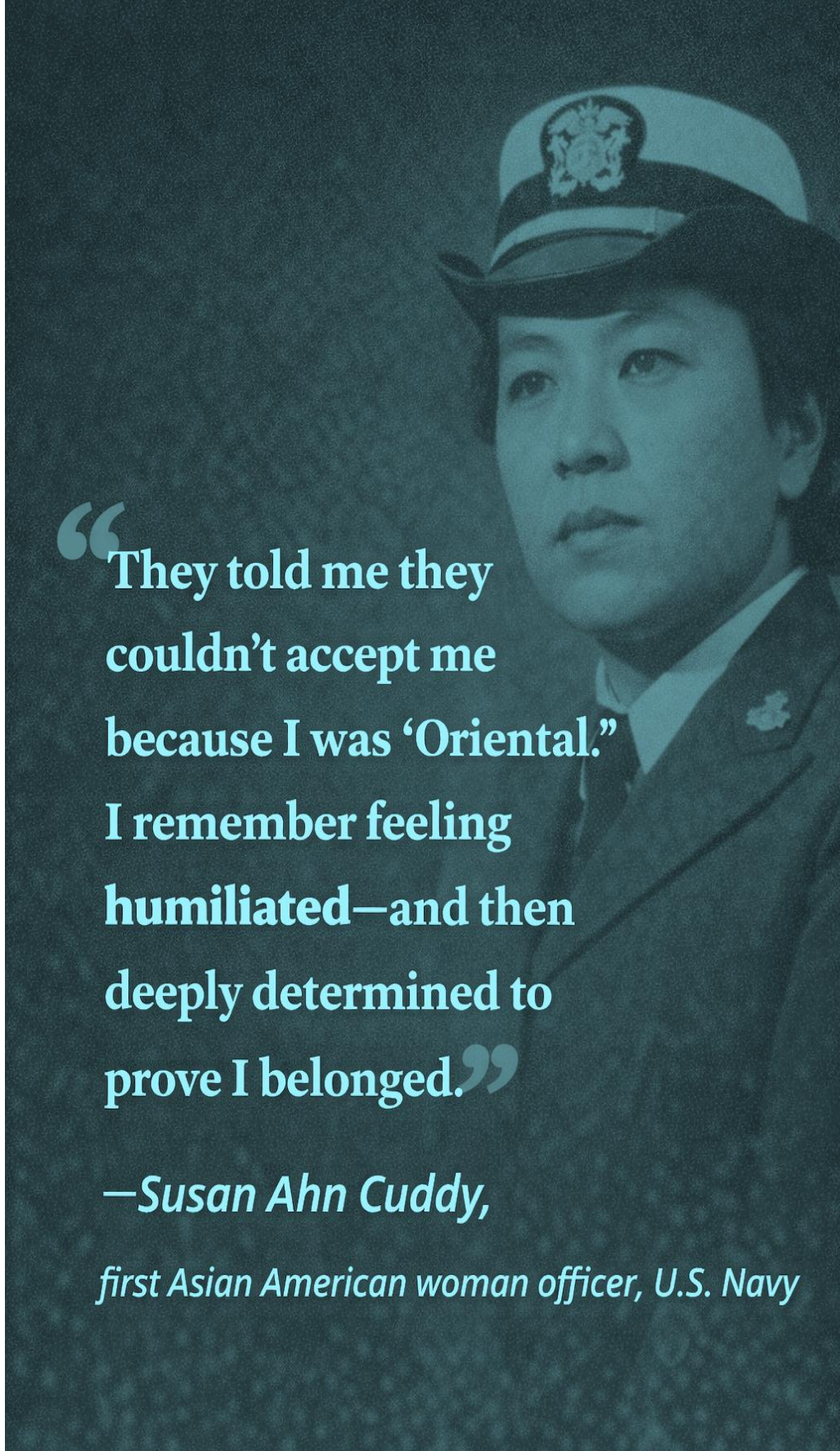
## ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN — HUMILIATION AND RESOLVE

### Susan Ahn Cuddy

“They told me they couldn’t accept me because I was ‘Oriental.’ I remember feeling **humiliated—and then deeply determined** to prove I belonged.”

Source: Los Angeles Public Library, *Shades of L.A.* Oral History

<https://exhibits.lapl.org/shadesofla/items/show/5593>



“They told me they couldn’t accept me because I was ‘Oriental.’ I remember feeling **humiliated—and then deeply determined to prove I belonged.**”

—*Susan Ahn Cuddy,*

*first Asian American woman officer, U.S. Navy*

# Personal Impact: How Did It Feel for Native Americans?

## NATIVE AMERICAN / INDIGENOUS PEOPLE — INVISIBILITY AND RESENTMENT

### Joseph Garry

“We were not even citizens, yet our young men were expected to fight. That contradiction made us feel **used, invisible, and angry.**”

**Source:** National Museum of the American Indian, WWI accounts

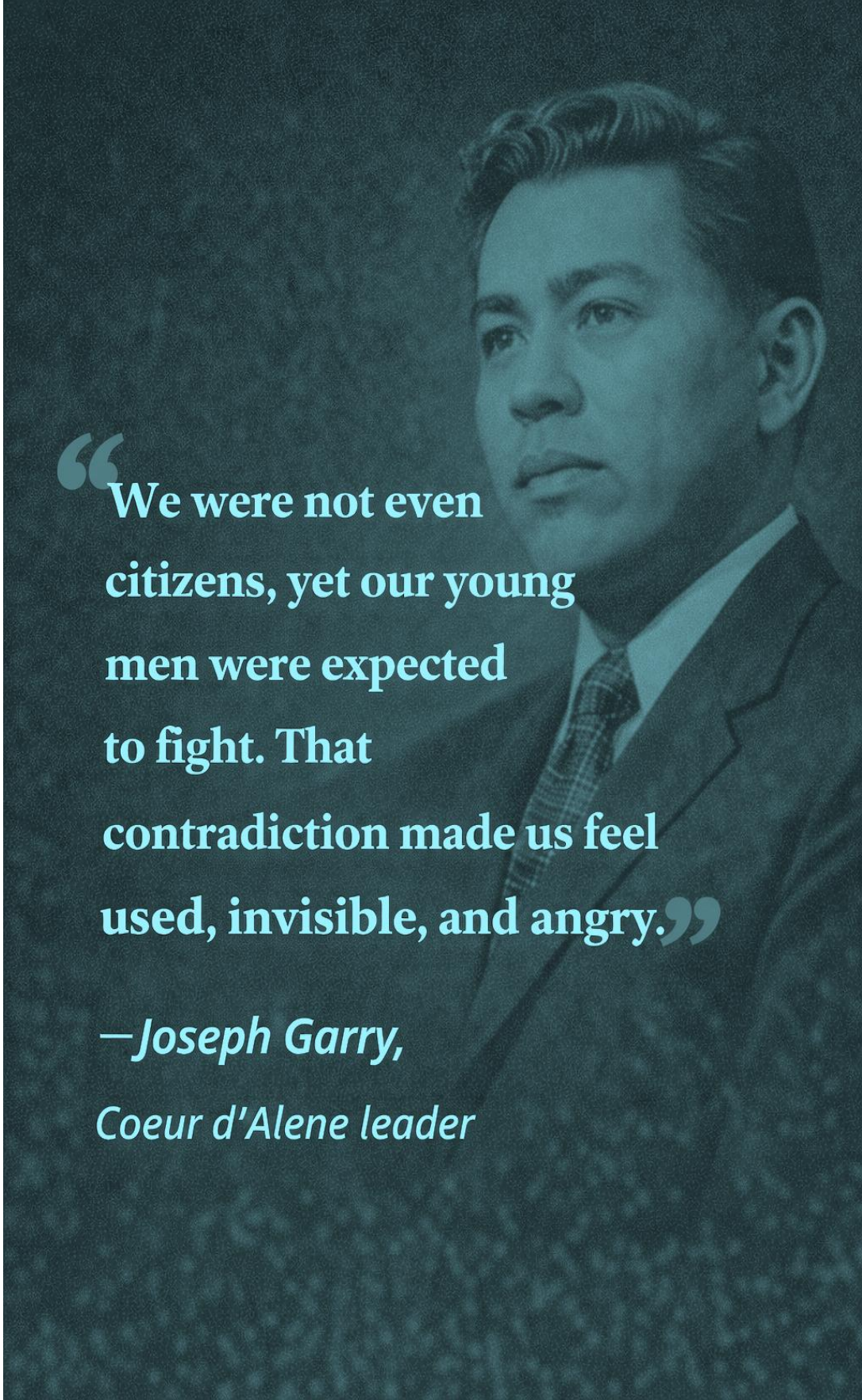
<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/world-war-i>

### Thomas Wildcat Alford

“We fought for a country that did not recognize us. That knowledge stayed with me—**pride mixed with deep resentment.**”

**Source:** Oklahoma Historical Society oral histories

<https://www.okhistory.org/research/indianveterans>



“We were not even citizens, yet our young men were expected to fight. That contradiction made us feel used, invisible, and angry.”

—Joseph Garry,

*Coeur d'Alene leader*

# Personal Impact: How Did It Feel For Latino/Hispanic Americans?

## LATINO / HISPANIC AMERICANS — PRIDE COLLIDING WITH REJECTION AND HUMILIATION

### Macario Garcia

*(Mexican American soldier, denied service at a Texas restaurant after the war)*

“I fought for my country, and I got medals, and I **don’t think I deserve this.**”

**Source:** U.S. Army Center of Military History; Smithsonian Latino Center

<https://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/wwII-mxam.html>

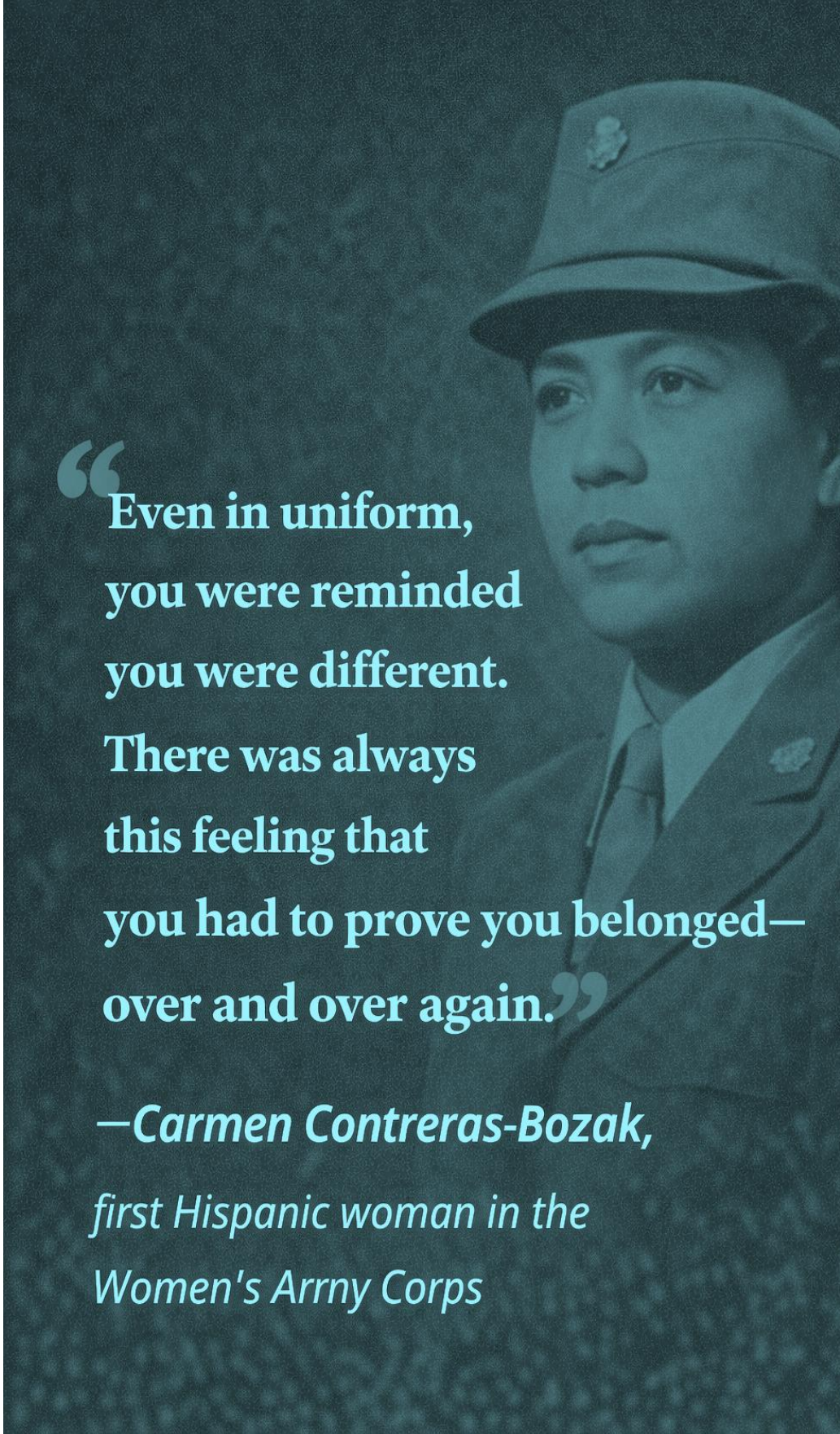
This moment came *after* his service — and captures the emotional whiplash many Latino veterans described: pride in service paired with **deep humiliation and disbelief** at continued exclusion.

### Carmen Contreras-Bozak

“Even in uniform, you were reminded you were different. There was always this feeling that **you had to prove you belonged** — over and over again.”

**Source:** U.S. Army Women’s Museum oral history

<https://www.armyheritage.org/75-information/soldier-stories/241-carmen-contreras-bozak>



“Even in uniform, you were reminded you were different. There was always this feeling that you had to prove you belonged— over and over again.”

—*Carmen Contreras-Bozak,*  
*first Hispanic woman in the*  
*Women's Army Corps*

# Personal Impact: How Did It Feel for Filipino Americans?

## FILIPINO & FILIPINO AMERICAN SOLDIERS — BETRAYAL AND ERASURE

Ben Skardon

*(on the 1946 Rescission Act stripping Filipino WWII soldiers of promised benefits)*

“We were told we were U.S. soldiers. Then suddenly we were told we were not. **It felt like our service was erased.**”

Source: Library of Congress Veterans History Project

<https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.72956/>

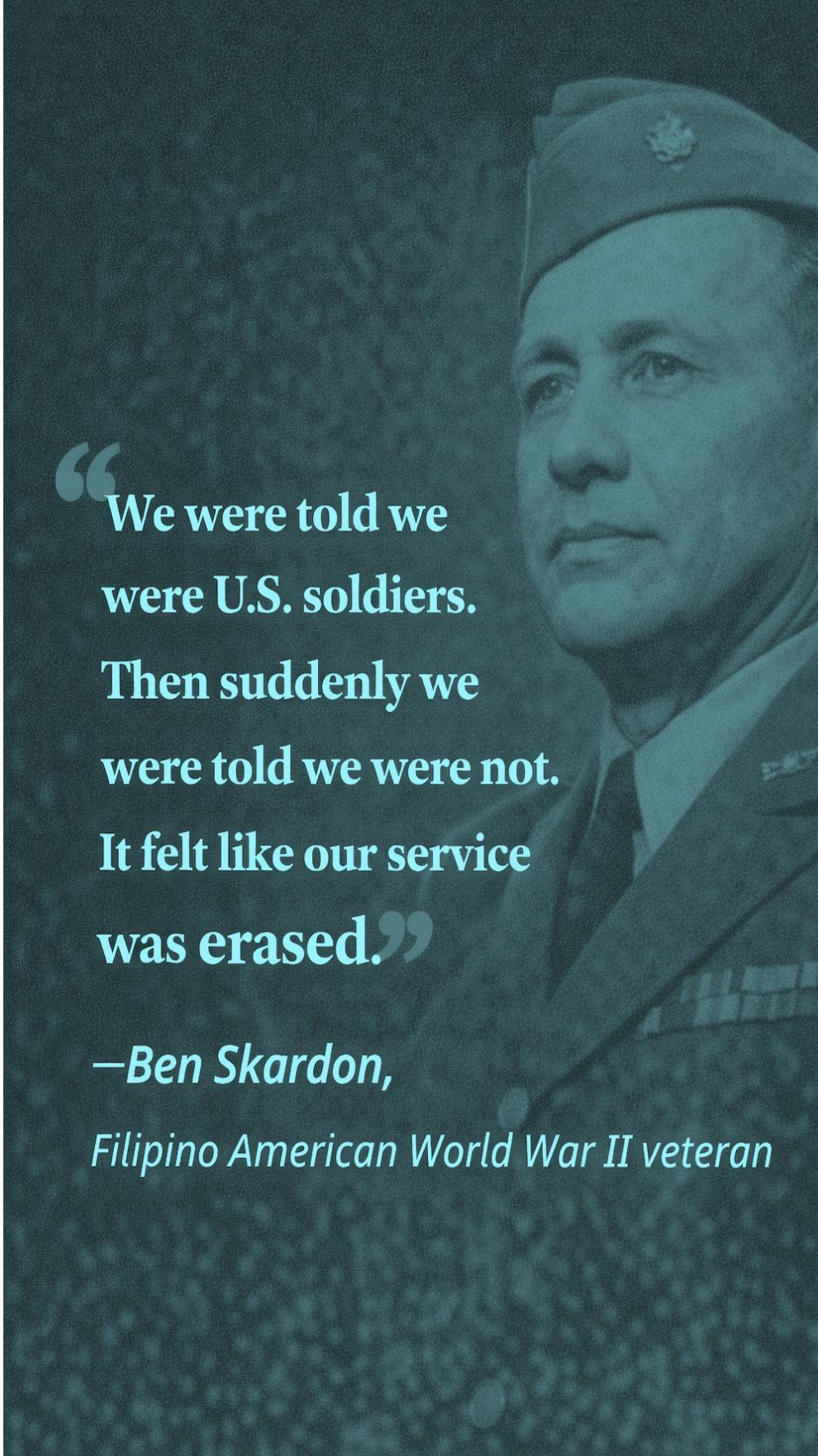
This is the “heart” of Filipino exclusion: **betrayal after loyalty**, and the grief of being written out *after* risking everything.

### Antonio G. De Ocampo

“We fought, we bled, and many died believing America would remember us. When the benefits were taken away, it felt like **we were never meant to matter.**”

Source: Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project; National Archives

<https://www.archives.gov/research/filipino-veterans>



“We were told we were U.S. soldiers. Then suddenly we were told we were not. It felt like our service was erased.”

—Ben Skardon,

*Filipino American World War II veteran*

# Personal Impact: How Did It Feel for Post 9/11 Muslim Americans?

## POST-9/11 MUSLIM AMERICANS — SUSPICION, FEAR, AND MORAL INJURY

**James Yee**

*(wrongfully accused of treason after 9/11)*

“I went from being a U.S. Army chaplain to being treated like the enemy. **My faith made me guilty until proven innocent.**”

**Source:** *For God and Country*, James Yee (2005)

This quote captures **moral injury** — not just fear, but the shock of realizing service did not protect him from suspicion.

**Hassan Aziz**

“After 9/11, wearing the uniform didn’t shield me. It made the questions worse. **I felt like I was constantly being watched — by the same country I served.**”

**Source:** Veterans of Color oral history collection, Center for American Progress

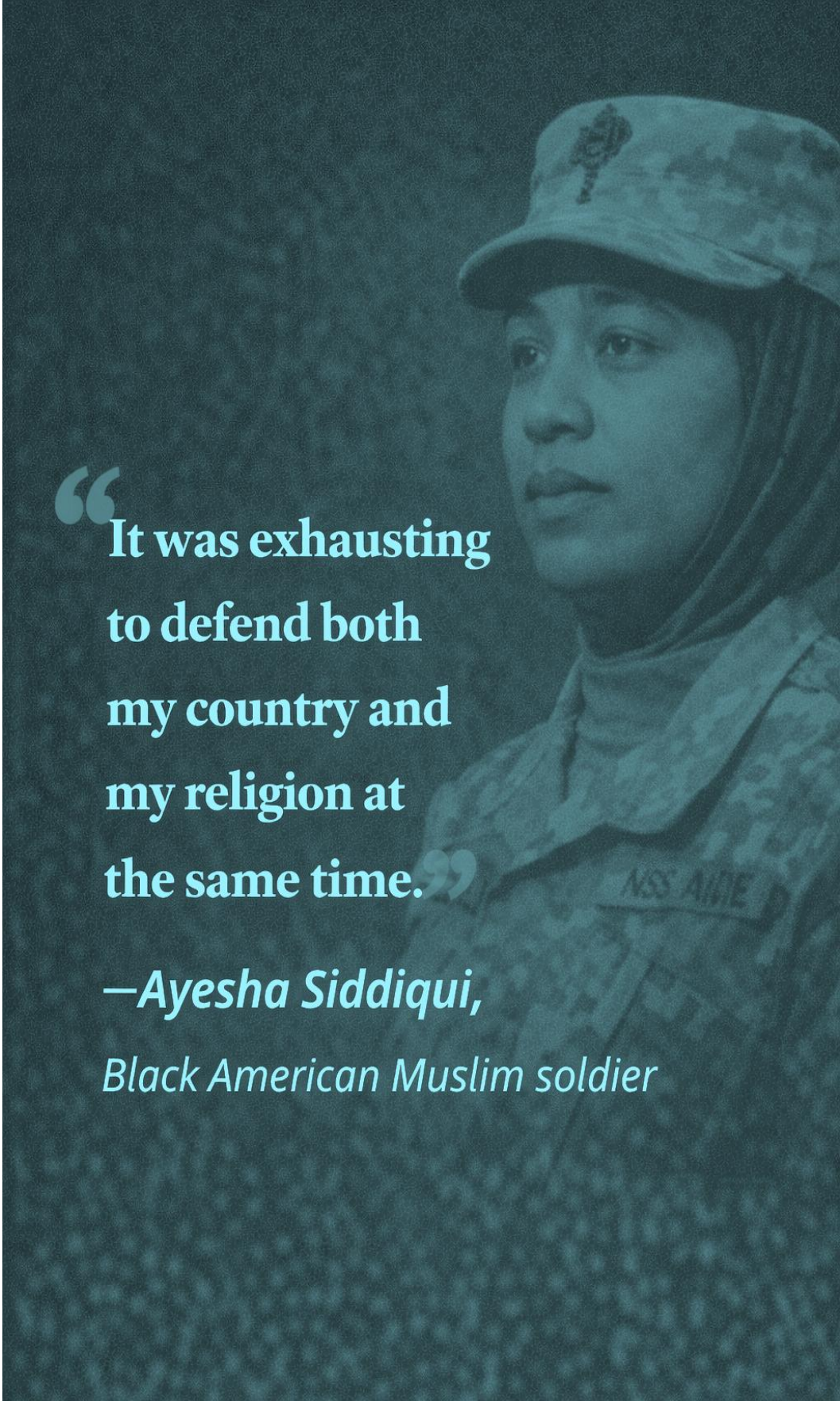
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/muslim-american-veterans/>

**Ayesha Khurram**

“I loved serving, but there was always fear — fear that my name, my faith, or my family would be used against me. **That kind of fear never really leaves you.**”

**Source:** Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN) interviews

<https://servicewomensactionnetwork.org/>



“It was exhausting to defend both my country and my religion at the same time.”

—*Ayesha Siddiqui,*  
*Black American Muslim soldier*



# CALL TO ACTION



**CALL TO ACTION: HOW CAN WE RESPOND?**

## What Employers Can Do?



- Recruit & Retain: Create veteran hiring pipelines
- Support Transition: Offer mentorship and peer coaching programs
- Sponsor community events that demonstrate long-term commitment

## What DEI Professionals Can Do?



- Include Veterans as a Distinct Cultural Group
- Build Cultural Competence Around Military Service
- Support and Strengthen Veteran Employee or Business Resource Groups

# Leveraging Veteran Service Organizations (VSO)

501 (c) 3 Non-profit VSO: 40,000+



- **National-level:**
  - American Legion, VFW, IAVA, Team Rubicon, The Mission Continues, AcademyWomen
- **Local/community-level:**
  - County veteran coalitions, veteran entrepreneur incubators, adaptive sports programs



# References

## **U.S. MILITARY HISTORY (OFFICIAL)**

### **U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH)**

<https://history.army.mil>

### **Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC)**

<https://www.history.navy.mil>

### **Marine Corps History Division**

<https://www.usmcu.edu/Research/Marine-Corps-History-Division>

### **Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA)**

<https://www.afhra.af.mil>

### **U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office**

<https://www.history.uscg.mil>

### **Joint History Office (Joint Chiefs of Staff)**

<https://www.jcs.mil/About/The-Joint-Staff/Joint-Staff-History>

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND DOD INSTITUTIONS**

### **Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI)**

<https://www.deomi.mil>



# References

## EXECUTIVE ORDERS & FEDERAL POLICY

### **Federal Register – Executive Orders**

<https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders>

### **National Archives – Executive Orders**

<https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders>

### **Congress.gov (Legislation & History)**

<https://www.congress.gov>

### **GovInfo (Official Government Publications)**

<https://www.govinfo.gov>

## U.S. MILITARY SERVICE ACADEMIES (HISTORY & ARCHIVES)

### **U.S. Military Academy (West Point) – History & Archives**

<https://history.westpoint.edu>

### **U.S. Naval Academy – Nimitz Library & Archives**

<https://www.usna.edu/Library/Archives>

### **U.S. Air Force Academy – History & Heritage**

<https://www.usafa.edu/history>

### **U.S. Coast Guard Academy – History & Library**

<https://www.uscga.edu/history>