

BRUTALITY -from Page 1

W. Bush bestowed one of the nation's highest honors on these men giving them the Congressional Gold Medal for their brave actions, contributions to freedom and democracy. The medal is reserved for notable contributions to science, medicine, public servants, officials and humanitarians. Only about 300 have been issued since early colonial history.

On that day Bush said, "It was different for the men in this room. When America entered World War II, it might have been easy for them to do little for our country. After all, the country didn't do much for them. Even the Nazis asked why African American men would fight for a country that treated them so unfairly. Yet the Tuskegee airmen were eager to join up."

To understand the president's statement, we would have to look back and see the challenges these men faced and the obstacles they have overcome is positive proof that African Americans can learn, compete and succeed at any task. According to information from the National Museum of the United States Air Force During World War II, the U.S. military was racially segregated.

It reflected American society and Jim Crow laws of the day. Most black soldiers and sailors were restricted to labor battalions and other support positions. African Americans were barred from flying for the U.S. military.

Civil rights organizations and the Black Press exerted pressure that resulted in the formation of an all African-American pursuit squadron based in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1941. They became known as the Tuskegee Airmen. The Tuskegee Airmen included pilots, navigators, bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instructors, and all the personnel who kept the planes in the air.

It was a time in American history, when there were many people who thought that black men lacked intelligence, skill, courage and patriotism. These Black men came from every section of the country, with large numbers coming from New York City, Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit. However, before the airmen came on the scene, few African Americans who learned to fly in the early 1900s were either self-taught or trained overseas.

After Charles Lindbergh's 1927 flight, African-American interest in flying increased and many aviation clubs and schools were formed. The U.S. government sponsored African-American flight training in

1939 with the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) Act. Administered by the Civilian Aeronautics Association (CAA), the Act authorized selected schools to offer CPT primary flight training for pilots in case of a national emergency. Schools for African American candidates included Tuskegee Institute, Howard University, Hampton Institute, and the Coffey School of Aeronautics.

The government paid for ground and flight school instruction. Colleges provided instructors, physical examinations for potential students, and transportation to approved flying fields. Tuskegee, Alabama, became the focal point for the training of African American military pilots during World War II. Tuskegee Institute received a contract from the military and provided primary flight training while the army built a separate, segregated base, Tuskegee Army Air Field (also referred to as the Advanced Flying School) for advanced training. Support personnel were trained at Chanute Field in Illinois.

The first class, which included student officer Capt. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., began training on July 19, 1941. Rigorous training in subjects such as meteorology, navigation, and instruments was provided in ground school. Successful cadets then transferred to the segregated Tuskegee Army Air Field to complete Army Air Corps pilot training.

Black airmen who became single-engine or multi-engine pilots were trained at Tuskegee Army Air Field (TAAF) in Tuskegee, Alabama. The first aviation cadet class began in July 1941 and completed training nine months later in March 1942. Many cadets got their primary flight instruction at Moton Field, Tuskegee, from Charles A. "Chief" Anderson.

Thirteen started in the first class and five successfully completed the training, including Captain Davis, Jr., a West Point Academy graduate. The five aviation cadets earned their silver wings to become the nation's first Black military pilots in March 1942. Four were commissioned second lieutenants, and all five received Army Air Corps silver pilot wings.

Other Black enlisted members were trained in support roles as aircraft and engine mechanics, armament specialists, radio repairmen, parachute riggers, control tower operators, policemen, administrative clerks and all of the other skills necessary to fully function as an Army Air Corps flying squadron or ground support unit. In 1943, the 99th Fighter Squadron made its debut when it was sent to North Africa in April 1943 for combat duty. They were joined by the 100th, 301st, and 302nd African American fighter squadrons and together the groups formed the 332nd fighter group.

Under the able command of Davis, the well-trained and highly motivated 332nd flew successful missions over Sicily, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. Bomber crews named the Tuskegee Airmen "Red-Tail Angels" after the red tail markings on their aircraft. Also known as "Black" or "Lonely Eagles," the German Luftwaffe called

them "Black Bird Men."

The Tuskegee Airmen flew in the Mediterranean theater of operations. The Airmen completed 15,000 sorties in approximately 1,500 missions, destroyed over 260 enemy aircraft, sank one enemy destroyer, and demolished numerous enemy installations. On one occasion, the squadron shot down 13 German fighters.

In another recorded skirmish, despite being outnumbered, the 332nd under Davis and 39 aircraft, attacked more than 100 German fighters, shooting down five. Between 1941 and 1945, Tuskegee trained over 1,000 Black aviators for the war effort. The Tuskegee Airmen were awarded numerous high honors, including Distinguished Flying Crosses, Legions of Merit, Silver Stars, Purple Hearts, the Croix de Guerre, and the Red Star of Yugoslavia.

A Distinguished Unit Citation was awarded to the 332nd Fighter Group for "outstanding performance and extraordinary heroism" in 1945. The airmen overcame segregation and prejudice to become one of the most highly respected fighter groups of World War II and undoubtedly proved conclusively that African Americans could fly and maintain sophisticated combat aircraft. It was their achievements, together with the men and women who supported them, that paved the way for full integration of the U.S. military.

It was their service that helped President Harry S. Truman decide to sign Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948. It directed that the "highest standards of democracy" were essential in the armed services, and that "there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons, without regard to race, color, religion or national origin." That prompted President Bush to say in the medal ceremony that "the Tuskegee Airmen helped win a war, and you helped change our nation for the better. Yours is the story of the human spirit, and it ends like all great stories do -- with wisdom and lessons and hope for tomorrow. And the medal that we confer today means that we're doing a small part to ensure that your story will be told and honored for generations to come."

It is a story that must not be abbreviated or left to gather dust in history. It must be the catalyst and motivator that propels every Black young male mind towards a mindset that says, "I am somebody." It is time for Black males to believe and tell ourselves that we "are talented can be a positive role model, can make a positive impact on my world, life, family and community."

The focus must shift from life on probation and the penitentiary to the rich educational, military and scientific Black minds that have come before and paved the way for our opportunities for successes and excellence. The Tuskegee Airmen have shown the way and we must never let them down and never allow that brave legacy of the airmen to die. African American males must pick up that torch now, carry it and build on that rich tradition of the Tuskegee Airmen for generations to come. ★

other times, I begin to take a tally of all the Black males who visited with their mother, sister and grandma. Bud, please tell our brothers that it's okay to visit their sons. I'm praying for you that God bless you and may he continue to watch over our sons and daughters in prison.

Gigi Walker
via email

EDUCATION -from Page 1

stated in *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*: "In the United States, all powers which are not assigned to the federal government by the U.S. Constitution are reserved to the people or individual states. Since the federal Constitution does not mention education, and the U.S. Supreme Court has held conclusively there is no federal Constitutional right to an education, public education has always been under the general control of the individual states. The steadily expanding role of the federal government in public education since the late nineteenth century has recently become a subject of heated debate, as many states (and more than a few Senators and members of Congress) perceive the U.S. government to be overstepping its constitutional bounds."

Race card aside, in spite of its noble intent, many African Americans lament that integration is the worse thing that could've happened to our communities. Especially our schools that once were the cornerstone of our (real or imagined) "Whole Village" neighborhoods that produced a generation of the best and brightest young leaders who matriculated from separate and unequal schools that were virtually ignored by public education's hierarchy. For sure, a casual glimpse at pre-integration Black History reveals that our educators were also community leaders. Especially strong Black males. Ex-athletes often became coaches and ultimately principals, who were also role models for our boys. Need we suggest that the demise of strong Black male leaders in schools contribute to the destruction of Black families?

Meanwhile, the paradox of learning more with less, as Black children appeared to do before *Brown v. Board*, was addressed in Howard University professor Steven D. Jamar's 2004 article (**Brown Fifty Years Later: a Brief History of Brown**) that revealed: "*Brown v. Board of Education* has its critics. For the most part the criticisms relate more to disappointment that

things have not moved more quickly or that the vision of some of a colorblind society has not been realized. The work symbolized by *Brown*, the work of advancing the cause of social justice, is never ending. Nonetheless, the fundamental changes wrought by *Brown* have been for the better. But the law of unintended consequences applies here. Schools are still segregated, though not as a result of laws mandating segregation.

"People often still judge people on the basis of the color of their skin. Furthermore, *Brown* can be turned either way: for affirmative action or against it and in favor instead of a technical (though empirically false) colorblind approach to equal protection. *Brown* is also about freedom for groups, but the current Supreme Court tends to think of freedom as purely an individual matter. *Brown* did not promise a perfect world. It did cause a spark of hope and led to three decades of progress. *Brown* just stated that separate is not equal and that the state cannot create second-class citizens on the basis of race. The rest of the work is still up to us." Translation: Since the people don't really have a voice when politicians are controlled by special interest groups, the most effective solution to the educational crisis will have to come from the only group of people who has a vested interest in education because of their kids, the parents."

Perhaps it's a far reach, but Black America's eligible voters have tremendous power in their hands (see **Publisher's Analysis**), but political apathy renders it useless. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. "*Human progress never rolls on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men and women to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces to stagnation. We must use this time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.*" Ideally, the time is ripe for Black voters to do right on November 6, 2007. ★

Michael Vick's treatment an overkill

The August 27, Monday Night Football game on ESPN between Atlanta and Cincinnati was one of the worse covered games I have ever watched. I turned on the TV to see a football game and all I got was a "hang Michael Vick night." The programming was relentless in its condemnation of Vick. You would have thought that he had killed someone. Not only did the programming start out with Vick's problems, but also throughout the game, they pounded away at him. In the broadcast booth, the commentators forgot about the game and carried out a public lynching of Vick. They even had a Black lawyer in the booth to delineate Vick's crimes. On the field, they recruited a Black newspaperwoman from the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* to outline the disaster. I suspect that the purpose of having Blacks also condemn Vick is to counter any charges that the ESPN coverage of Vick is racial. I have my doubts that it is not racial, especially when

the ESPN camera crew proudly showed the statues of Confederate generals at the Georgia Stone Mountain Park, the same generals who fought so hard to keep Blacks in slavery. As the game mercilessly came to a close, ESPN promised that after the game they would continue the rage on their post game show. ESPN is not alone in their overkill of Vick. The other national news companies, all White-owned, laid the wood to Vick even though a major story in the nation's capital concerning the very survival of our democracy, deserved more coverage than the Atlanta quarterback. The Attorney General of the United States, Alberto Gonzales was resigning from office under a cloud of trying to usurp the Constitution of the United States. Now that to me seems like a bigger story, but I guess that when you can put another Black man in jail there is no greater story.

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Letters to the editor should include name, address and daytime phone number (name & city will be printed).

We got mail...



More men should make prison visits

I would like to personally take time to say that it is not often that men visit their sons in prison. It is to be commended of you (Bud), because you are not ashamed of your son as you often speak of him in your column. I have two sons in prison and in the seven years that I have visited TDC, seldom do I see a Black man. I looked around and begin to count the men and there were none. On that day and several

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