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**Christopher S. Parker: Fighting for Democracy**

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## INTRODUCTION

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This is the country to which we soldiers of Democracy return. . . . But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that the war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.

*We return.*

*We return from fighting.*

*We return fighting.*

—W.E.B. DuBois, “Returning Soldiers”

I have always had a feeling that I was just as much entitled to register to vote as anybody. This thinking seemed to take on momentum after getting out of the service, knowing the price I paid . . . my life had been at stake . . . why shouldn't I have the rights and privileges of any citizen? . . . If I could go over there and make a sacrifice with my life, I was willing to do it here, [even] if it meant death.

—William Bailey, World War II veteran,  
quoted in Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy:  
The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972*

Beginning in the late 1940s, black Southerners grew increasingly forceful in their rejection of white supremacy. Consider 1946, a year in which black Mississippians publicly challenged white dominance on at least two occasions. First, they contested the legitimacy of one of Mississippi's most popular politicians, U.S. senator Theodore Bilbo. Bilbo, who was seeking a third term in the Senate, was accused of scaring black Mississippians from the polls during the 1946 campaign. Upon lodging a complaint, the local chapter of the NAACP, along with other black organizations, looked forward to ousting from the Senate a man who had opined on the campaign trail that “the best way to keep the nigger from voting [was] to do it the night before the election,” hinting that, “‘Red blooded men know what I mean’” (quoted in Dittmer 1994, 2). Faced with a courthouse packed with whites who shared Bilbo's sentiment, two hundred black Southerners from throughout the state testified, at great personal risk, to the obstacles they had encountered while trying to vote. Bilbo agreed not to take his seat in the upper

chamber until the matter was resolved. Ironically, he died of cancer of the mouth before the Senate came to a decision. This was a symbolic victory for the black Mississippians who denied one of the more racist politicians in the South the right to (mis)represent them for a third term.

That same year black Mississippians again sought to challenge white authority. This time, however, they did so with weapons. On the morning of July 2, 1946, twenty-one-year-old Medgar Evers gathered a group of young black men and headed for the courthouse in Decatur, Mississippi, intent on voting in the Democratic Party primary. Twenty armed white men blocked the group, warning them to end their quest. Feeling humiliated, the black men went home, retrieved small arms of their own, and returned (Dittmer 1994). Outnumbered, Evers and his contingent declined to continue, but their defiance sent a powerful message. Their actions suggested that they were prepared to take by force, if necessary, their right as American-born citizens to have a say in how the country was run.

While Evers and his group ultimately decided to avoid using weapons to contest white supremacy, other black Southerners relied on armed resistance as a tactical response to its violent strains. Elsewhere in the South, a year later, in 1947, black Southerners defied the Ku Klux Klan. In Monroe, North Carolina, Klan members planned to mutilate the body of Benny Montgomery, a World War II veteran who had killed his white boss after the man attacked him. Following Montgomery's conviction and execution, the Klan sought to express its disrespect for the man, and the black community of Monroe, by stripping the flag from Montgomery's coffin and dragging the veteran's body through the streets. A man named Robert F. Williams, along with other black men who lived in Monroe, refused to let this happen. When Klan members approached the funeral home to seize the body, they found the gun sights of more than three dozen rifle-wielding black men trained on them, at which point the Klan declined to engage. Another encounter between Williams and the Klan occurred ten years later. Williams, along with some of the members of the Monroe chapter of the NAACP, of which he was the leader, repelled an attack by the Klan on the home of one of the chapter's officers. The men defended the home behind fortified positions and coordinated rifle fire. As a result, city officials convened an emergency meeting during which they agreed to ban the Klan from assembling in public (Tyson 1999, chap. 3).

There were others who believed in the necessity of armed resistance. In response to threats from the Klan and local authorities, Earnest "Chilly Willy" Thomas founded the Deacons for Defense and Justice in 1964 to

protect the black citizens of Jonesboro, Louisiana.<sup>1</sup> Consider one example of how the Deacons serviced the black community: On a cool morning in March 1965, black high school students in Jonesboro prepared to assemble their daily picket line. The police, already on site, called the fire department to help disrupt the demonstration by dousing the students with water from high-pressure hoses. As the firemen retrieved their hoses from the truck and returned, a car full of the Deacons arrived. The men exited the vehicle and loaded their rifles with buckshot in full view of the police. As the firemen prepared to spray the students, one of the Deacons instructed the other three: “‘Here he comes. Okay. Get ready. . . . When you see the first water, we gonna open up on them. We gonna open up on all of them.’” Turning to the police, he warned, “‘If you turn that water hose on those kids, there’s gonna be some blood out here today’” (quoted in Hill 2004, 69). The police officers and firemen retreated before a shot was fired. Without the Deacons to protect them, moreover, the Congress of Racial Equality’s (CORE’s) efforts to register voters and desegregate public facilities in Louisiana would have been jeopardized (Fairclough 1995; Hill 2004).

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What motivated these individuals and others like them to risk their lives by challenging white authority? Why were they willing to chance the violent reprisals to which black Southerners were often subjected when they tried to vote, much less openly testify against one of the most powerful politicians of the time? More important, why did they run the risk of death or economic ruin to which wielding weapons against whites exposed them? One answer is that black civic institutions—churches and secular civic organizations—provided those black Southerners who did resist with the social and psychological armor they needed to withstand threats. This explanation fits the first intervention, suggesting why

<sup>1</sup> Chartered in 1965, Deacons for Defense and Justice were an armed self-defense group. According to their charter, they proposed to “‘instruct, train, teach, and educate Citizens of the United States and especially minority groups in the fundamental principles of the republican form of government and our democratic way of life’” (quoted in Hill 2004). According to Hill (2004), the defense motive was buried deep in the text of the charter: “‘This corporation has for its further purpose, and is dedicated to, the defense of civil rights, property rights and personal rights of said people and will defend said rights by any and all honorable and legal means to the end that justice may be obtained’” (quoted in Hill 2004, 60–61). Originally formed to protect CORE workers and civil rights activists from Klan terror, the group’s mission expanded to protecting from the Klan or the police anyone who required its help.

black Mississippians stood fast to challenge Bilbo. But churches and other black civic organizations typically shied away from armed resistance.<sup>2</sup>

How, then, do we explain why some black Southerners chose this mode of resistance? If we pay close attention, these vignettes suggest another source of strength on which some black Southerners drew: military experience. The protagonists of each of the incidents of violent resistance described above had either fought in or served during the Second World War or the Korean War. Medgar Evers, for instance, served as part of the famed Red Ball Express, the famous post-D-Day logistical operation that allowed the Allied forces to roll across Europe during the Second World War. His brother Charles and the other men who accompanied him that day in Decatur, Mississippi, had also served during World War II. Moreover, the majority of those who testified against Bilbo were also veterans of the Second World War (Dittmer 1994). Robert F. Williams served first in the army, during the Second World War, and later in the marines. Indeed, most of the men who had assisted him in fending off the Klan, on both occasions, were also veterans of World War I, World War II, or the Korean War. He recruited veterans to his chapter of the NAACP because, in his opinion, veterans “don’t scare easy” (Williams 1998, 14). And Earnest “Chilly Willy” Thomas, along with many of those who took up arms to defend the students in Jonesboro that day and on later occasions, was also a veteran: he served in the Korean War while other Deacons had served in World War II, as well as in Korea.

This book explores why these and many other black “soldiers of democracy” followed the exhortation of W.E.B. DuBois, issued at the close of the First World War and reproduced in the first epigraph of this introduction, to fight for equality. My central argument is that black veterans’ willingness to challenge white supremacy and resist Jim Crow rested to a significant extent upon their military experiences. They drew, first, on their perception that their service in the military made them full members of the political community; it merited full citizenship. Second, they drew on their military experiences, which exposed them to opportunities that bolstered their sense of agency and opened their eyes to the possibility of black-white relations in which they were considered equals. Finally, the

<sup>2</sup>This is not to say that some citizens, who were involved in local movement activities, also renounced armed resistance. The reluctance to employ armed resistance is a philosophy with which national civil rights organizations generally agreed, though CORE and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) eventually reconsidered this position (Hill 2004; McAdam 1988).

confidence they gained from serving during wars in which they were forced to fight against the enemy in the field at the same time that they battled racism in the ranks sustained their commitment to fight white supremacy as well as their confidence to do so.

## MILITARY SERVICE AND INSURGENCY

If we adopt the conventional views of military service and insurgency, and the conduct typically attributed to each, it is difficult to believe that military training could have resulted in challenges to authority. Scholars have identified several traits inculcated by the military that would seem to be anathema to protest. The military profession is typically associated with order, for instance, while insurgency and protest are associated with *relative* chaos. Scholars also argue that the military places a premium upon obedience, resulting in a preference for social order among soldiers that endures long after their separation from active duty (Janowitz 1960; Schreiber 1979). Insurgents use protest as a means to challenge authority, but challenging authority is forbidden in military circles. Finally, scholarly convention holds that a stint in the military breeds conservatism and reverence for tradition, neither of which is conducive to change (Abrahamsson 1970; Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; McClosky 1958; Segal et al. 2001), whereas insurgents by definition seek to change the status quo.

Military service is also believed to promote several normative values, among them national loyalty and fraternity (Janowitz 1983; Snyder 1999). In the early days of the American republic, patriotism and a preoccupation with national defense temporarily suspended class cleavages, sowing the cohesion necessary to defeat the British in the Revolutionary War (Chambers 1987; Cohen 1984, chap. 5). On the eve of the First World War, ex-president Theodore Roosevelt and his confederates insisted that military service would cure what they perceived to be flagging national cohesion and a lack of discipline among American youth, while it would also “Americanize” millions of immigrants (Chambers 1987, chap. 3; Gerstle 2001). Some thirty years later, as the Second World War drew to a close, universal military training as a means of creating a more homogenous and virtuous citizenry emerged once again as a subject of public discussion. In the 1940s and ’50s, proponents of this idea argued that the ability of military training to promote democratic ideals, encourage a sense of fraternity and national unity through fulfillment of a common obligation to the country, and develop character merited its institutionalization. In consequence, Congress seriously considered passing the

Universal Military Training Act in the late 1940s and '50s, which would have mandated military service for all adult males.<sup>3</sup>

How, if at all, can the values and attitudes imparted by the military be harmonized with protest and, in some cases, civil disobedience? If the military promotes a preference for the status quo, social order, and for national unity and fraternity, how can we explain some black veterans' resistance to Jim Crow? In the context of the South, was not resistance inconsistent with the status quo and social order? Moreover, how is it that the military, an institution not known for its democratic practices, helped overthrow what some (e.g., Mickey, forthcoming) call authoritarian rule in the South? In this book, I make sense of the relationship between military service and resistance by considering how the civic education soldiers receive in the military affects their postservice attitudes. Indeed, through socialization and education, it is believed that soldiers are instilled with strong feelings of fraternity, a belief in the importance of national unity, and reverence for the democratic values for which they are prepared to die (Burk 2002; Cohen 1984, chap. 5; Janowitz 1983).<sup>4</sup> If black veterans bought into the republican version of citizenship, in which citizenship is earned through civic and martial practices (Snyder 1999), their views may have changed on a range of issues. Such veterans would have returned to the South feeling entitled to the equality for which they had fought.

The performance of military duty, furthermore, would have brought them to identify more strongly with the nation and its values. In other words, fighting *on behalf of* democracy ultimately resulted in black veterans fighting *for* democracy. Fighting for the preservation of freedom and equality elsewhere heightened their consciousness of racial differences when they returned to a South that failed to acknowledge, much less appreciate, their sacrifices. From this perspective, then, insurgency flowed from veterans' race consciousness, their sense of entitlement, and the shift in their political identity, according to which a perception of

<sup>3</sup> Several investigations have sought to assess the effect of military socialization on postservice attitudes and behavior (Bachman and Jennings 1975; Campbell and McCormick 1957; Christie 1952; Dorman 1976; Ernest and French 1955; Jennings and Markus 1976, 1977; Lippert, Schneider, and Zoll 1978; Roghmann and Soduer 1972; Segal and Segal 1976). Notwithstanding the inconsistent findings—that is, that some of these works identify service-induced differences while others fail to do so—none of these studies is sensitive to the issue of race. Of the studies that are sensitive to racial considerations, the evidence was collected well after the civil rights movement (Ellison 1992). See also Leal (1999), which assesses the effect of military service on Latino political activism.

<sup>4</sup> Janowitz (1978) has argued that after World War I the connection between military service and citizenship weakened. Nuclear weapons, Janowitz believes, made it difficult for the individual to imagine his importance to the pursuit of war.

their improved standing in the political community amplified their determination to achieve the equality they believed they had earned. Thus, some argue, veterans' activism ultimately rested on their perceived relationship to the national community: As full members, they insisted upon fighting for the rights they had earned (Brooks 2004; O'Brien 1999; Tyson 1999).

Political scientist Ronald Krebs's (2004, 2006) interrogation of this line of argument—indeed, of the very proposition that military socialization can produce veteran activism—is perhaps the most thoroughgoing to date. Krebs questions the ability of the military establishment to induce, via socialization, a shift in the identification of veterans of the sort required for political activism. Military service, he argues, is incapable of producing the sort of social transformation that people like Theodore Roosevelt have attributed to it. Unlike Janowitz (1983), who argues that the military is a principal source of civic education, Krebs argues that the military is not a “school for the nation.” In his book *Fighting for Rights* (2006), in which he ultimately gauges the relative ability of blacks in America, and the Druze in Israel, to leverage military service as a means of achieving first-class citizenship, Krebs argues that military experience lacks the capacity to launch veterans toward meaningful interrogation of the status quo. Beyond the usefulness to minority groups of referring to wartime contributions as a rhetorical device with which to secure post-war benefits, he believes that military service, through the direct intervention of veterans, is incapable of reshaping the nation. If military socialization is to galvanize disparate groups of men into a cohesive whole, Krebs contends, it must persuade them to reconsider who they are, and how they define their political community. In the American case Krebs suggests, however, that a lasting commitment to a new, more American, identity is difficult to forge through military service for at least two reasons. First, veterans return to and rejoin social networks in which the regimentation associated with the military is not appreciated. Once they return, moreover, pressure is placed upon them to conform to civil societal norms and leave their military experiences in the past. Second, the endurance of identity shifts brought about by military socialization is limited by the fact that veterans typically leave the military prior to the age at which their political attitudes settle, foreclosing the ability of military service to have a lasting effect on the individual. In short, Krebs suggests that the radicalization of black veterans would have to rest on their having formed new and lasting identity commitments (i.e. identification with the nation) while serving in the armed forces. He maintains that such commitments are not formed; it follows that black activism is unlikely to have been prompted by the radicalization of black veterans while in the military.

Both of the approaches to the activism of black veterans just described have merit, yet each is limited by the fact that the extent of veterans' overall participation in the civil rights movement remains unclear. Consider the approach in which military service is believed to stimulate activism. A few narratives in which veterans' military service appears to have promoted their participation in the movement offer valuable insight into veterans' motives for challenging white supremacy, but they are limited to specific cases, such as, say, those of Tennessee or Georgia (Brooks 2004; O'Brien 1999). Furthermore, the scope of these inquiries is often limited to veterans of the Second World War. Thus, we cannot make any general claims regarding black veterans' activism based on these accounts, because we have no way of knowing the extent of their activism throughout the South, beyond the small cadre who were typically among the leadership of black civic organizations.<sup>5</sup> Nor do we know definitively if black veterans' civil rights activism was largely confined to those who served in the Second World War or if veterans of the Korean War also challenged white supremacy. Finally, before we can trumpet the relationship between military service and militancy, we must account for alternative explanations of resistance, such as those that attribute it to education, income, membership in black civic organizations, and racial solidarity (Marx 1967; Rochon 1998). Without accounting for these alternatives, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which military service affected the activism of black Southerners.

Krebs marshals an impressive array of social scientific evidence to interrogate the means by which many believe veterans become radicalized through their military experience. Yet none of it offers a *direct*, systematic test of his claim that military service fails to promote activism, particularly among black veterans. To be fair, the main thrust of Krebs's work centers upon the indirect effect of military service on social progress. He does a fine job of illustrating how and why the Druze were able to take advantage of the cultural capital associated with military service, and why blacks failed to do likewise.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, to arrive at this conclusion, Krebs must first demonstrate the impotence of the *direct* effect of military service in which veterans' military experience propelled them toward insurgent behavior, a claim that rests on suggestive, though far

<sup>5</sup> See also Dittmer (1994), Edgerton (2002), and Lawson (1976), all of whom suggest that black veterans were committed to activism across the South—after the Second World War. See also Payne (1995) for veterans' activity in Mississippi, Tyson (1999) for North Carolina, and Fairclough (1995) and Hill (2004) for Louisiana. Again, however, this issue is whether or not veterans were active beyond notables like Robert Williams, Medgar Evers, and Hosea Williams.

<sup>6</sup> See Krebs (2006) for reasons why military service failed as a rhetorical tool for African Americans.

from conclusive, evidence. In the absence of more compelling evidence, can we say for sure that veterans failed to contribute to insurgency in the South? What is needed is an approach conducive to an examination in which a range of factors may be considered.

This book takes such an approach. It does so by showing that, regardless of locale, many black veterans challenged white supremacy in the period following the Second World War and the Korean War. Equally important—as I will detail below—the book accomplishes this task by bringing to bear more systematic evidence on the question of whether or not military service, particularly one’s military experience, produced activism among black veterans, independent of more well-known sources of insurgency. In the end, this book theorizes and tests a mechanism through which military service sparked insurgent attitudes and behavior—an approach that thus far remains absent from the literature.<sup>7</sup> It shows how the meaning and experiences associated with military service combined to produce citizens willing to fight for their fair share of the democracy for which they had sacrificed so much.<sup>8</sup>

## RECASTING MILITARY SERVICE AND RESISTANCE

I take the position that military service and insurgency are indeed compatible. To do so, however, I must shift the explanation of the relationship between military service and resistance away from military socialization to one that pivots instead upon the *meaning* associated with military service. This is necessary because it is a common belief that military

<sup>7</sup> Mettler’s (2005a, 2005b) work also examines the politicization of black veterans. Her work interrogates the ways in which the GI Bill affected the political activism of black veterans. While she shows that the policy feedback effects of the GI Bill boosted the political engagement of veterans, her investigation concentrates on veterans, since they were the only group eligible for benefits. In short, Mettler seeks to discriminate between veterans on the basis of GI Bill usage. My project seeks to discriminate between veterans and nonveterans, the latter of which functions as a control group of sorts.

<sup>8</sup> While military experience contributed to insurgency in this way, the social history of the civil rights movement reveals that one need not have been a veteran to resist Jim Crow segregation. Indeed, from Martin Luther King Jr. and Stokely Carmichael to Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hammer, we are more familiar with the deeds of activists who were without military experience. Of course, Dr. King led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) while Carmichael served as the voice for the more militant SNCC. Baker and Hammer, it seems, were versatile in their respective abilities to be counted among the leadership of several organizations during their respective lives. Baker was involved with the NAACP and the SCLC, and was key to the foundation of the SNCC (Ransby 2003). Hammer, a native of Mississippi, was also involved with the SNCC and was a founding member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

socialization, with its putative ability to produce good citizens, eventually gives way to political socialization, which, with its emphasis on “learning . . . those values, attitudes, and modes of behavior that help people ‘fit in’ to their political systems” (Conover 1991, 131), in turn, is more in tune with maintaining the status quo, something the veterans in the vignettes presented earlier clearly sought to upset. Instead of political socialization, these black veterans seemed to be driven by something else. That “something,” I believe, was political learning. Political learning, a process best described as one by which individuals come to apprehend knowledge of the political sort, departs from political socialization in at least two ways: the lessons learned need not support the existing political order, as is required for political socialization; nor is there a requirement that the lessons learned be of the deliberate kind, the product of pedagogy. Put differently, political learning “refers to the learning of any politically relevant material regardless of whether or not this learning promotes support for the existing political regime . . . [and] regardless of whether or not the learning is deliberate” (Conover 1991, 131).<sup>9</sup>

The meaning attached to military service, for African Americans, is one way to explain the source of black veterans’ political learning. Historically, African Americans have used military service as a strategy for achieving equality, so much so that the utility of military service to achieve equal rights had “become an article of faith” among African Americans by the mid-twentieth century (Nalty 1986, 10). This is why, as Stouffer and colleagues (1949, chap. 10) discovered during the Second World War, black soldiers in that conflict believed their service would be rewarded with more equal treatment in postwar America. Indeed, as we shall see in chapter 1, black Americans’ military service has contributed to racial advancement in the past.

But to fully understand the dynamic through which African Americans’ military service has positively influenced the struggle for civil rights, we must also consider how the *experience* of military service itself transformed veterans. Fighting for democracy (or, for those who never had the opportunity to fight, simply serving), I contend, symbolized the equality to which African Americans aspired. Bearing arms to preserve America’s democratic ideals, in the eyes of black (and white) Americans, had come to be associated with first-class citizenship; this meant full membership in the political community, which included the enjoyment of civil as well as political equality (Conover, Searing, and Crewe 2004). Wearing their nation’s uniform likewise represented veterans’ attachment to the nation and reflected

<sup>9</sup>Theoretically, political socialization is subordinate to political learning to the extent that the latter is the broader, more capacious concept. For more on political learning see Jennings and Niemi (1974, 1981) and Siegel (1989).

their improved social standing. Consequently, many black veterans believed that they deserved treatment commensurate with this standing.

The symbolic effect of military service provides the normative rationale for black veterans' resistance, but it fails to explain the conduct of the veterans in the vignettes given at the opening of this chapter, because it fails to identify the positive impetus for their actions. Why, in other words, did veterans decide to act on their beliefs? Surely other black Southerners felt moral outrage, but many were not in the practice of confronting domination with weapons. Military experiences, I argue, are what separated black veterans from nonveterans and, for many veterans, furnished this impetus. For black Southerners, service in the military exposed them to people, places, and circumstances that perpetual civilians never encounter. As we shall see, these experiences also provided black servicemen with a fresh perspective on their station in American society. While serving overseas, many black veterans were often treated by the dominant racial group with a measure of respect to which they were unaccustomed. Of course, segregation and discrimination within the military created hardships and resentment among black soldiers, the effects of which cannot and should not be minimized. Nevertheless, black soldiers—especially those hailing from the South—were often assigned responsibilities that required them to think and perform in new and different ways. Accomplishing challenging and novel tasks in the context of defending liberty, I argue, gave black soldiers an enhanced sense of agency. Moreover, many of them looked on their years in the service as an achievement that gave them confidence and the strength to resist white supremacy on their return to the South.

In sum, I argue that for black veterans, military service instilled a set of normative beliefs and experiences that motivated them to act to secure their rights as citizens. Normatively, fighting, or the willingness to do so, conveyed to black servicemen a sense of equality; the performance of citizenship, in other words, transformed black veterans into citizens of the first rank (Snyder 1999). Their service-linked belief in their entitlement to all of the benefits of American democracy created, as I will show, a moral warrant to pursue change. On the positive side, their military experiences fueled these veterans' sense of agency and introduced them to the possibility of change. The confidence they gained from bearing arms and resisting subordination in the military spilled over into their postservice lives. Witnessing new patterns of race relations overseas likewise alerted them to the possibility of change. These experiences encouraged many black veterans to participate in local struggles in which "ordinary people" challenged white supremacy (Brooks 2004; Dittmer 1994; Fairclough 1995; O'Brien 1999; Payne 1995; Tuck 2001; Tyson 1999).

## THEORY AND METHOD

My argument about the political effects of military service is based on a theoretical approach that resembles the one adopted by Lieberman (2005) in his comparative analysis of government policy. Drawing on his synthetic approach, *Fighting for Democracy* combines ideational and institutional approaches to explain the political attitudes and behavior of black veterans. In the context under consideration here, military service—and its association with democratic citizenship (Burk 1995; Janowitz 1976; Krebs 2006; Salyer 2004; Snyder 1999)—served as a cultural resource on which black veterans drew for the purpose of advancing claims on America for the redress of grievances.<sup>10</sup> When Southern civil society, as well as state and local authorities, failed to recognize these service-based claims, however, this failure motivated veterans to act. Thus, the meaning of military service represents the ideational component of my approach.

But military service entailed more than just ideational consequences, furnishing black veterans with the motivation to act; it *enabled* them to act. Institutions, as taken-for-granted scripts and standard operating procedures, among other things, shape individuals' preferences (Meyer and Rowan 1991). More important, however, institutions are capable of empowering individuals (Smith 1992), creating the conditions for agency through symbolic action (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Black veterans' experiences within the military, I submit, ought to be considered as interactions with an institution that empowered them to participate in and even help lead the postwar civil rights struggle. After all, courage, discipline, and leadership, all of which are institutionalized in the military, were drawn upon by black veterans who either led or founded key civil rights organizations (Brooks 2004; Carson 1981; Forman 1972; Hill 2004; see also appendix D for examples). Enduring institutionalized discrimination and segregation while in the military also prepared black veterans for insurgency upon returning to civil society. Many of them, as we shall see, became accustomed to challenging white supremacy while still in uniform. Thus, the military as an institution was a source of agency for black veterans.

If the theoretical approach of *Fighting for Democracy* is synthetic in nature, so is its methodological approach, which applies qualitative and quantitative methods to the analysis of new and existing sources of evi-

<sup>10</sup>For more on the ways in which culture promotes agency, see Archer (1988); Laitin (1988); Sewell (1992); Swidler (1986); and Wedeen (2002).

dence on the political attitudes and behavior of black veterans.<sup>11</sup> The most original source of evidence is a series of semistructured interviews I conducted with twenty-five veterans, all of whom served during the Second World War, the Korean War, or both. The interviews serve two purposes: first, they permit me to examine how, if at all, military service is reconciled with postservice militancy; second, my analysis of the interviews generates hypotheses that are subsequently tested using quantitative data in the latter chapters of the book. To test these hypotheses, I draw on the superb, if underemployed, data collected by Donald Matthews and James Prothro in the South during the early 1960s for the Negro Political Participation Study. This appears to have been the most complete survey instrument administered in the South during the civil rights movement; it contains attitudinal and behavioral items that measure everything from Southern traditionalism to political participation. Using data contemporaneous with the movement provides a basis for perhaps the most systematic investigation to date of the ways in which military service influenced political attitudes and behavior in the South during the movement. Moreover, this data also permits me to explore the external validity of the interview findings, as well as grapple with competing explanations for militancy among black veterans.

#### BROADER CONTRIBUTIONS

Exploring the political attitudes and behavior of black veterans during the latter stage of the civil rights movement in the South contributes to at least three streams of research. First, it advances our understanding of the relationship between war and racial progress by adding a much-needed individual-level explanation to existing work. In some accounts, war helped shape racial policy in America, forcing political elites to respond to world opinion in the context of the Cold War by addressing, if not correcting, racial injustice in the South (Borstelmann 2001; Dudziak 2000; Kryder 2000, Skrentny 2002). Others have demonstrated that the ideological reasons for war mobilization, the scope of the mobilization, and the consequences of each have also fueled racial progress (Klinkner and Smith 1999; Kryder 2000). Doug McAdam's work (1999) likewise cites factors beyond the individual level, arguing that, among other things, the economic push and pull of war and the concomitant interregional and

<sup>11</sup> A mixed-method approach is becoming increasingly popular in political science (Cohen 1999; Harris 1999; Harris-Lacewell 2004; Hochschild 1995; Lee 2002; Mettler 2005b; Sawyer 2006).

intra-regional migration from rural areas to Southern metropolises sparked postwar change.<sup>12</sup> This book, by contrast, highlights the ways in which military service transformed *individuals* first into soldiers and then into activists who fought for more equitable treatment. It shows how mobilization for war may also lead to postwar micromobilization for change.

Another research agenda to which this book contributes is one in which war affects the development and vibrancy of American civil society. Some scholarship demonstrates the ways in which patriotism underwrote the growth of civil society. For instance, Robert Putnam's (2000) observations on the effect of World War II and Theda Skocpol and colleagues' (2002) findings pertaining to the Civil War and World War I both document the growth of civic associations in America. From a different perspective, Suzanne Mettler (2005b) shows the same thing. More to the point, her work highlights the ways in which military service, through the GI Bill, strengthened democratic civil society through the political activism of veterans who served during the Second World War. These veterans, buoyed by their appreciation for the opportunities bestowed upon them by the state, decided to continue their service to America by vigorously discharging their obligations as citizens. This book adds to this burgeoning literature by showing a means through which war helped to develop and expand black civil society. Although some black veterans chafed at the relatively conservative, buttoned-down culture of the NAACP (Forman 1972; Henry 2000; Hill 2004; Tyson 1999; Williams 1998), many others helped expand its membership in the Deep South in the postwar years (Payne 1995). Black veterans also helped found and lead other, more grassroots civil rights organizations that were important to the success of the movement, including the Deacons for Defense and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (Brooks 2004; Carson 1981; Henry 2000; Hill 2004; see also appendix D). This book outlines a mechanism, one that differed from patriotism or policy-feedback effects, that contributed to the development and expansion of democratic civil society.

*Fighting for Democracy* also connects with the literature on the civil rights movement by demonstrating that black civic institutions were not the only sources of insurgent attitudes and behavior among black Southerners. It remains undeniable that black churches, civil rights organizations, and fraternal groups were the principal institutional sites through which black Southerners contested white supremacy in the South (Harris 1999; McAdam 1999; Morris 1984; Skocpol, Liazos, and Ganz 2006). Nonetheless, the comment of William Bailey in the second epigraph for

<sup>12</sup>See Sawyer (2006) for an excellent comparative perspective in which he combines macro and micro approaches to explain racial dynamics in Cuba.

this introduction, indicates why military service furnished black veterans with additional motivation to challenge the status quo. Bailey suggests that as an American, he had always felt entitled to participate in the political process, yet military service and the sacrifice it entailed had a transformative effect on his attitudes toward citizenship. In light of his sacrifice, exercising his civic rights assumed a sense of urgency he had not felt before serving. He was willing to die for that to which he felt himself entitled.

This conviction, I contend, is what separated Southern veterans from nonveterans, giving the latter additional motivation to resist white supremacy. While it was not a contemporaneous source of agency, as were churches and black civic organizations, the military nonetheless ought to be viewed as an “agency-laden institution” of the kind referred to by Aldon Morris. Such institutions, Morris explains, “generate cultural materials [that] . . . produce and solidify trust, contacts, solidarity, rituals, [and] meaning systems . . . of members embedded in their social network” (2000, 447). Military service, for African Americans, produced similar outcomes. Indeed, *Fighting for Democracy* suggests that military service was an important source of agency for black veterans.

#### PLAN OF THE BOOK

The exploration that follows begins with the historical and theoretical foundation upon which the balance of the book rests. Chapter 1 introduces the historical context of African American military service, tracing the relationships among race, war, and citizenship since the American Revolution and demonstrating why, in the mid-twentieth century, African Americans tended to view military service as a means of advancement for the race and the individual as well as a way to earn the respect of whites. The chapter reveals a republican narrative in that African Americans benefited from military service only when their efforts during wartime were at least appreciated, if not necessarily celebrated, by the nation. When, on other occasions, they were either denied the opportunity to serve or their service was maligned, African Americans’ social progress tended to stall or even regress. More important, the chapter shows that black veterans’ insurgent attitudes and behavior predated the Second World War, highlighting a pattern by which black servicemen and veterans grew increasingly intolerant of the domination to which they were subjected.

Chapter 2 elaborates my theoretical argument, building a framework through which we may apprehend black veterans’ resistance and activism. If the first chapter is about revealing the consistency of black veterans’

resistance, chapter 2 ventures to explain why these veterans continued to challenge white supremacy. As I have already suggested, this book draws on a combination of cultural claims and institutionalism to support its theoretical argument. I argue that the normative meaning of military service, in concert with the institutional experience associated with the military, was conducive to the development of a worldview among black veterans consistent with what I term “black republicanism,” which, as I conceive it, describes a set of beliefs and values that drew on republican principles—adapted to fit blacks’ experience in America—as a means of guiding black veterans’ attitudes and behavior on their return to Southern society.

Chapters 3 and 4 lay the empirical foundation for the balance of the book. The third chapter examines the symbolic meaning of military service by considering the experiences and views of seventeen of the black veterans with whom I conducted in-depth interviews over a two-year period. This chapter gives life to their experiences within the military as an institution. The veterans discuss their struggles serving in a Jim Crow military and the mistreatment to which they were subjected. But they also go into some detail about how they fought back—sometimes quite literally. The chapter also reveals how military experience gave veterans a fresh perspective on the world and a sense of self-confidence. In chapter 4, I probe the contours of black republicanism in light of these interviews. In doing so, the chapter highlights the normative dimension of military service. While many of the veterans I spoke to identify with the country and its values, they rarely hesitated to criticize America. In most cases, they used republican rhetoric to frame their respective criticisms of the country. Many argued that the sacrifices that they made for themselves—and on behalf of the black community—should have cleared the way for more equal citizenship for African Americans. In several instances, as we shall see, this instigated the activism that I associate with black republicanism.

In the next two chapters, I explore the attitudinal and behavioral implications of military experience for black veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War living in the South. These chapters generalize the findings from the interviews to black veterans in the mass public. Relying on the Negro Political Participation Study, an exceptional, if underappreciated source of data, chapter 5 examines the insurgent attitudes of veterans and compares them to the attitudes of nonveterans, who serve as a baseline group. Ultimately this chapter illustrates that black veterans’ military experience inoculated them against a preference for the Southern status quo—against the reluctant acceptance of white supremacy as a fact of life. These findings confirm, on a larger scale, what many of the interviews suggest: black veterans were committed to change.

In chapter 6, I turn to the examination of insurgent behavior. It is one thing to harbor democratic *attitudes* in the midst of a society committed to white supremacy. It is quite another thing, however, to act on these beliefs, especially when doing so often risks jeopardizing one's livelihood, even one's life. For the purposes of this study I argue that political mobilization in the context of white domination is a good proxy for insurgent behavior. Indeed, to the extent that mainstream political mobilization prior to the ratification of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 challenged white authority, it should be considered a form of insurgent behavior. This chapter shows that the activism described by my interviewees was not confined to a handful of veterans. Veterans' active challenge of white supremacy, we shall see, carried over to at least two modes of conventional political participation: voting and political activism. Regardless of the perceived danger associated with the mode of participation, black veterans as a group insisted on using the mainstream political process to challenge white supremacy. These results lend support to the activist claims I make concerning black republicanism.

In the book's conclusion, I revisit issues raised in this introduction and summarize the main findings. Substantively, I find that taking seriously the effects of black veterans' military experience adds to our stock of knowledge about the civil rights movement. The book shows that black veterans' military experience furnished another source of resistance, one that until now has largely remained confined to the many local struggles in which black veterans helped provide leadership. However, this book also suggests that black veterans did more than provide leadership during key campaigns, as historians have clearly shown to be the case. *Fighting for Democracy* also indicates that veterans were a significant segment of the struggle's rank and file. I then proceed to consider the broader implications of the book and directions for future research. For instance, the book highlights the use of republican rhetoric as a means of guiding the pursuit of reform. In this way I also show that military service, true to its republican roots, was conducive to democratizing the South. Black Southerners, however, used it as a means to wrest freedom and equality from enemies within, instead of protecting them from threats originating elsewhere.