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Blue & Gold and Black: Racial Integration of the U.S. Naval Academy (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)

Robert J. Schneller Jr.

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During the twentieth century, the U.S. Naval Academy evolved from a racist institution to one that ranked equal opportunity among its fundamental tenets. This transformation was not without its social cost, however, and black midshipmen bore the brunt of it.

Blue & Gold and Black is the history of integration of African Americans into the Naval Academy. The book examines how civil rights advocates' demands for equal opportunity shaped the Naval Academy's evolution. Author Robert J. Schneller Jr. analyzes how changes in the Academy's policies and culture affected the lives of black midshipmen, as well as how black midshipmen effected change in the Academy's policies and culture.

Most institutional history is written from the top down, while most social history is written from the bottom up. Based on the documentary record as well as on the memories of hundreds of midshipmen and naval officers, Blue & Gold and Black includes both perspectives. By examining both the institution and the individual, a much more accurate picture emerges of how racial integration occurred at the Naval Academy.

Schneller takes a biographical approach to social history. Through written correspondence, responses to questionnaires, memoirs, and oral histories, African American midshipmen recount their experiences in their own words. Rather than setting adrift their humanity and individuality in oceans of statistics, Schneller uses their first-hand recollections to provide insights into the Academy's culture that cannot be gained from official records. Covering the Jim Crow era, the civil rights movement, and the empowerment of African Americans from the late 1960s through the end of the twentieth century, Blue & Gold and Black traces the transformation of an institution that produces men and women who lead not only the Navy, but also the nation.

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