

Biography

A veteran of the U.S. Navy, Bryon L. Garner earned his Master of Liberal Arts from Johns Hopkins University and is currently pursuing his PhD at the Union Institute and University. Bryon has presented and written about intersectionality, masculinity and patriotic identity. Bryon recently published “Asymmetry and Duality: Black Veterans in America” in Black & Magazine, <https://blackandmagazine.com/2020/06/commentary-asymmetry-and-duality-black-veterans-in-america/>

Abstract

What does it mean to be a black man and a patriot in America in the 21st century within the context of illiberal cultural impulses within the US military which still support Confederate history? Post-Civil War US military culture was shaped by small, exclusive numbers and limited accessibility while also being subject to shifting American perceptions of the US Civil War. Integrating former Confederates and their descendants within the ranks of US military contributed to the valorizing of Southern military and cultural history. Concurrently developing with the rise of segregation, the whitewashing of the legacy of the South’s slave culture intertwined with the ascendancy of American nationalism and American jingoism in the early 20th century. American nationalism, jingoism, the whitewashing of Southern culture and the valorization of Southern military culture combined within multiple dimensions to normalize illiberal perspectives regarding race and patriotism in America. In just over a century, what has been created is a universe in which names and legacies of Confederate generals are still commemorated as the names of US military bases and the Confederate flag is only now banned by US service chiefs. While contemporary perceptions of the US military largely accept the military’s victory over the trauma of segregation and segregationist impulses was manifested in President Truman’s Executive Order 9981, Confederate commemoration has a long and multi-dimensional history within the US military. There is a precarity of existence for black veterans – on one hand, they are celebrated for supporting the American cause, while on the other hand pernicious racialized critiques persist which diminish the value of the black contribution. Commemorations such as these are asymmetrical to values such as freedom and equality, particularly, with regard to America’s black veterans.