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Honorbound

Veteran Doris Miller Tribute

Doris Miller, an African American hero of World War II, was born in Waco, Texas, on October 12, 1919, to sharecroppers Connery and Henrietta Miller.¹ Despite being assigned to the Stewards Branch as a cook due to racial segregation in the U.S. Navy, Miller's courageous actions during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, made him a notable figure.² Without prior training, he manned an anti-aircraft gun, downing two Japanese planes and assisting in the rescue of wounded soldiers after exhausting his ammunition.³ Initially referred to as the "unnamed Negro messman," Miller's heroism was reluctantly acknowledged by Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, who opposed Black men in combat roles.⁴ Knox's prejudice and intense hatred, represented by his statement that Black soldiers were "trying to break into a club that doesn't want them.", stood in sharp contrast to the courage and fortitude exhibited by heroes like

¹ Doris Miller Memorial. "Doris's Story." Accessed April 3, 2024.
<https://dorismillermemorial.org/doris-story/>.

² Encyclopedia Britannica. s.v. "Doris Miller." Accessed April 3, 2024.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Doris-Miller>.

³ Remembering Doris Miller - JSTOR Daily. Accessed April 3, 2024.
<https://daily.jstor.org/remembering-doris-miller/>.

⁴ "Remembering Doris Miller - JSTOR Daily." Accessed April 3, 2024.
<https://daily.jstor.org/remembering-doris-miller/>.

Doris Miller.⁵ Miller received high honors, including the Navy Cross and the Purple Heart, for his extraordinary courage.⁶ He was commended by Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, who remarked on the significance of Miller's recognition as the first African American to receive such high tribute in the Pacific Fleet.⁷ Despite his newfound celebrity status, Miller returned to sea and was killed in action when the USS Liscome Bay was sunk by a Japanese submarine in November 1943.⁸ His legacy endured through films and statues honoring his heroism.⁹ In 2010, Miller was honored on a U.S. postage stamp and posthumously received the distinction of having a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier named after him.¹⁰ These recognitions underscored Miller's lasting impact and contributions to World War II, despite the prejudice and racism he faced,¹¹ Miller's act of courage would have been forgotten if not for advocacy and recognition, highlighting the importance of acknowledging the contributions of people of color in shaping

⁵ Bernard C. Nalty, "The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II," *Marines in World War II Commemorative Series*, 2. [The Right to Fight African-American Marines in World War II PCN 19000313200_1](#).

⁶ Naval History and Heritage Command. "Doris Miller." Accessed April 4, 2024. <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/research/histories/biographies-list/bios-m/miller-doris.html>.

⁷ Naval History and Heritage Command. "Doris Miller." Accessed April 4, 2024. <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/research/histories/biographies-list/bios-m/miller-doris.html>.

⁸ BBC. "Who was Doris Miller, the first African American to receive the Navy Cross?" January 20, 2020. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51168798>.

⁹ BBC. "Who was Doris Miller, the first African American to receive the Navy Cross?" January 20, 2020. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51168798>.

¹⁰ Remembering Doris Miller - JSTOR Daily. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://daily.jstor.org/remembering-doris-miller/>.

¹¹ Remembering Doris Miller - JSTOR Daily. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://daily.jstor.org/remembering-doris-miller/>.

history .¹² His legacy serves as a testament to the resilience and bravery of African American servicemen during World War II, challenging systemic racism and discrimination.¹³

¹² BBC. "Who was Doris Miller, the first African American to receive the Navy Cross?" January 20, 2020. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51168798>.

¹³ Naval History and Heritage Command. "Doris Miller." Accessed April 4, 2024. <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/research/histories/biographies-list/bios-m/miller-doris.html>.

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