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Review of *Black Valor: Buffalo Soldiers and the Medal of Honor, 1870-1898* By Frank N. Schubert

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Black Valor is another book about heroification, a degenerative process (much like calcification) that makes people over into heroes. Through this process, the American educational media turn flesh-and-blood individuals into icons, perfect creatures whose conflicts, pain, ambiguities, and human frailties are polished out of existence. This is another example of a hidden curriculum that denies the humanity of Indians and produces propaganda casting them as the "bad guys," "marauding Indians," "wild Indians," or just plain "enemies" in the American saga. The essential story, however, is the nastier one of the US Government using one group of oppressed people to disenfranchise another, with both the Indians and Buffalo Soldiers seriously compromised and demoralized in the process. Discussions of historical truths in the US are rarely glamorous because we have inherited a colonialist past that subjugated human dignity and freedom in the name of manifest destiny.

Most conquering nations justify their actions by claiming cultural and political superiority. The essential delusional quality of American "exceptionalism" notwithstanding, the US Government's acts of conquest and the process of deculturation reflected a belief held by many Americans in the superiority of Protestant Anglo-American culture and US political institutions. Popular historians and educators find this side of history hard to tell.

Notions of the necessity of Indian subjugation coalesced with such concepts and euphemisms as "The Settlement of the West" or "How the West Was Won." National heroes and stories of wilderness struggle generated a Frontier Myth casting Indians in a negative, brooding light. The pervasive power of this myth has shaped our presentations of US history. Curricula have paid scant attention to federal policies toward American Indians or to how so-called "expansion policies" led to Euro-American dominance on the North American continent and the genocidal consequence to the indigenous people of this land.

Black Valor: Buffalo Soldiers and the Medal of Honor, 1870-1898. By Frank N. Schubert. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1997. Photographs, maps, bibliography, index. xi + 231 pp. \$22.95.

American history is full of fantastic and important stories like those of the Buffalo Soldiers, stories with the power to spellbind audiences—even audience of difficult seventh-graders—while revealing what America has been about and, to a degree many would wish to deny, continues to be in the present.

When history is read as heroification or triumphalism, students develop no understanding of causality in history. What is missing in *Black Valor* is any analysis of the underlying irony of the white man's government using one racial minority to subdue another. Our ancestors both served the US in combat before we even had the right to vote. We both deserve that history should chronicle our stories with honor and accuracy. We are, in fact, warriors engaged in the ideological battle over the construction of knowledge. As for *Black Valor*, it will come as no surprise that heroification has stolen from us the important facets in the lives of the Buffalo Soldiers, leaving only melodramatic minutiae.

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