

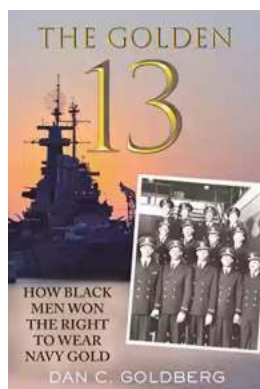
# How Black Men Won The Right To Wear Navy Gold: The Inspiring Journey of African Americans in the US Navy

Throughout history, African Americans have faced countless challenges and fought for their rights in various aspects of American society. One lesser-known battle they fought and eventually won was the right to wear navy gold in the United States Navy.

The struggle for equality within the Navy stretches back many decades, with Black men being excluded from certain roles and denied important distinctions. However, through perseverance, determination, and a commitment to justice, African Americans gradually overcame the discriminatory barriers that once prevented them from achieving the highest honors within the Navy.

## Early Discrimination and Challenges

In the early years of the United States Navy, African Americans were largely excluded from serving on ships. Slavery was still prevalent, and Black individuals were not viewed as equals in society. Enslaved Africans were typically used as laborers and servants on naval vessels, with limited opportunities for advancement.



## The Golden Thirteen: How Black Men Won the Right to Wear Navy Gold by Dan Goldberg (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 14843 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

X-Ray : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 288 pages



Despite these limitations, some noteworthy Black individuals did manage to rise through the ranks. Perhaps the most famous example was John L. Dorsey, who became the first Black man to receive a naval officer's commission during the Civil War. His appointment was initially met with resistance and challenges, but his undeniable knowledge and skills eventually earned him acceptance and respect from his fellow officers.

## **The Golden Age of the Harlem Renaissance**

The early 20th century marked a significant turning point for African Americans in the Navy, coinciding with the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance. This cultural movement celebrated Black excellence in various fields, including music, art, literature, and more.

As the Harlem Renaissance gained traction, African American sailors began demanding equal opportunities and recognition within the Navy. These calls for equality were rooted in the belief that talent, skill, and dedication should be the sole criteria for advancement, regardless of race or ethnicity.

One key figure during this period was Joseph L. Lewis, an influential Black naval officer who spearheaded the efforts to change the discriminatory practices within the Navy. Lewis used his platform and connections to advocate for the rights of Black sailors and challenge the prevailing prejudices.

## **The Fight for Navy Gold**

For many years, the prestigious Navy Gold badge, also known as the enlisted surface warfare specialist insignia, was almost exclusively reserved for white sailors. This distinction conveyed a level of expertise and represented a significant milestone in a service member's career.

African Americans, however, were disproportionately denied the opportunity to earn this honorable badge, despite their qualifications and contributions to the Navy. This injustice fueled a determined campaign for equality among Black sailors.

Through lobbying, protests, and the tireless efforts of individuals like Joseph L. Lewis, Black sailors gradually began to break down the barriers that prohibited them from obtaining Navy Gold. The decisive breakthrough came in 1971 when Admiral Elmo Zumwalt Jr., the Chief of Naval Operations, issued a directive that eliminated the discriminatory practices surrounding the badge.

## **Legacy and Progress**

The struggles faced by African Americans in the Navy paved the way for greater inclusivity and equality within the military. Today, Black sailors have the opportunity to achieve the highest ranks and serve in all roles within the Navy.

Furthermore, the fight for Navy Gold marked a significant moment in the ongoing civil rights movement. It highlighted the power of collective action, perseverance, and the determination to break down systemic barriers.

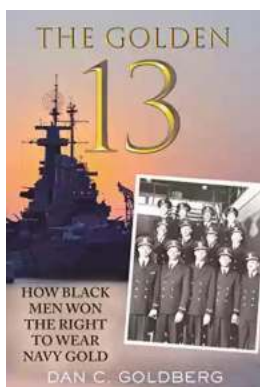
## **Inspiring Future Generations**

The story of how Black men won the right to wear Navy Gold serves as a powerful reminder of the courage, resilience, and determination displayed by

African Americans throughout history. It is a testament to their unwavering commitment to justice, equality, and the pursuit of excellence.

By remembering and sharing this story, we honor the sacrifices made by those who came before us and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

So, let us celebrate the contributions and milestones achieved by African American sailors in their journey towards equal recognition and rights within the US Navy. Their story teaches us that progress is possible, even in the face of adversity, and that unity and perseverance can help break down the barriers that once seemed insurmountable.



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The story of the thirteen courageous Black men who integrated the U.S. Navy during World War II, leading desegregation efforts across America and anticipating the civil rights movement

Through oral histories and original interviews with surviving family members, Dan Goldberg brings thirteen forgotten heroes away from the margins of history and into the spotlight. He reveals the opposition these men faced: the racist pseudo-science, the regular condescension, the repeated epithets, the verbal abuse and even violence. Despite these immense challenges, the Golden Thirteen persisted — understanding the power of integration, the opportunities for black Americans if they succeeded, and the consequences if they failed.

Until 1942, black men in the Navy could hold jobs only as cleaners and cooks. The Navy reluctantly decided to select the first black men to undergo officer training in 1944, after enormous pressure from ordinary citizens and civil rights leaders. These men, segregated and sworn to secrecy, worked harder than they ever had in their lives and ultimately passed their exams with the highest average of any class in Navy history.

In March 1944, these sailors became officers, the first black men to wear the gold stripes. Yet even then, their fight wasn't over: white men refused to salute them, refused to eat at their table, and refused to accept that black men could be superior to them in rank. Still, the Golden Thirteen persevered, determined to hold their heads high and set an example that would inspire generations to come.

In the vein of *Hidden Figures*, *The Golden Thirteen* reveals the contributions of heroes who were previously lost to history.



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