**African-American Bandsmen in the U.S. Navy:**

**A movement toward racial integration**

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*Presented at the annual conference of the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association Hershey, PA March 26-27, 2015*

**ABSTRACT**

The service of blacks in the United States Military can be traced back to the founding of the country. However by the end of World War I, African-Americans in the military branches were relegated to only cooking and cleaning duties. As the United States prepared to enter World War II, the pressure to admit African-Americans into full service of the military increased from political maneuvering and social pressure from the African-American community. In addition, an overall shortage of manpower led the military branches to employ blacks in all areas of service. However many black servicemen were forced to serve in segregated camps and received segregated training.

The Navy resisted racial integration for some time, yet the initial inclusion of blacks in the Navy was first accomplished by creating all-black Navy bands for service across America. Black Navy musicians reported for musical training at a segregated facility, the Great Lakes Training Camps because the Naval School of Music, the designated music training camp for musicians, was closed to blacks. As a result, over 5,000 African-Americans received naval music training at the Great Lakes Camps from 1942-1945. These all-black Navy bands became ambassadors for the Navy and representatives of social change in America.

The purpose of this research is to provide a modern perspective of this historic movement toward integration of the military through the service of African-American bandsmen. The questions guiding this investigation include: 1) What circumstances moved the Navy to racial integration? 2) Who were the first African-Americans to integrate the modern Navy as naval musicians? 3) and to document the details surrounding this historic time. This historical inquiry was conducted through the use of:

Official naval documents, press releases, media articles, archived video interviews of former Navy B-1 Band members, and various secondary sources.

**Applications**

Historical research in music education offers practicing educators opportunities to fulfill multiple state standards in music classes. For example, annually the month of February is celebrated as Black History Month. Presenting musical lessons related to the historical context of the service of African-Americans in military bands aligns well with Common Core Standards and fulfills English/Language Arts Standards and History/Social Studies Standards. Providing music students this instructional background throughout a music course also satisfies Common Core Standards for reading through and analyzing how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact. This type of lesson connects the role of music to American history, contributing to the historical idea of bands serving as ambassadors. Additional topics could include the broad range of musical genres these military bands played during this musical time period. Particularly, Navy band musicians were well trained in various genres of music in order accommodate varying requests ranging from symphonic and swing music to jazz band performances at dance halls. As it relates to Pennsylvania history, one of the members of the first all black Navy band, the Navy B-1 Band, is a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This further associates the historic movement of racial integration in the U.S. military to Pennsylvania.