



JOSEPH J. DIOGUARDI
MEMBER OF CONGRESS
1985 - 1989

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November 30, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Thirty years ago, almost to the day in November 1986, Dr. Leroy Ramsey, an African American military historian, came to visit me on Capitol Hill. He told me a story, which was very hard for me to believe—that 1,550,000 Black Americans served in World Wars I and II, and not one received our nation’s highest military honor, the Medal of Honor, although hundreds were recommended for it by their commanding officers.

As a Republican Member of the House from New York with a very large African American constituency, I felt morally bound to investigate and correct what I would soon discover to be an historic egregious violation of racial justice. As a junior Member of the minority party in the House, I knew better than to try to do this alone, and so I enlisted the support of someone I had come to know early on: Mickey Leland, a Democrat from Houston, Texas, who was then the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Mickey and I went all in on bringing the issue of racial injustice fostered by racial segregation in the military to the attention of the press and our fellow Members. On October 20, 1987, we introduced H.R. 3509 and H.R. 3510, to waive the five-year statute of limitation for the relief of African Americans Henry Johnson (Army, World War I) and Dorris “Dorie” Miller (Navy, World War II). We also collected 180 signatures of House Members and got the attention of then Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci who, after meeting with me and Mickey Leland, ordered an independent study at our urging.

The rest is now history, as you can see in the attached booklet that I prepared and handed out at your White House ceremony for Henry Johnson on June 2, 2015, the ninth Medal of Honor issued as a result of the work initiated by me and Mickey Leland three decades earlier. And, while I would like to think that our work is finished, I cannot help feeling that Congressman Mickey Leland, who died tragically in a plane crash in 1989 delivering food to Ethiopia just months after our meeting with Secretary Carlucci, would want me to attain at least one more Medal of Honor for his fellow Texan and Navy hero, Dorie Miller. As our President and

Commander-in-Chief, I strongly believe that you have the authority to issue another Medal of Honor before your second term expires on January 20, 2017, just as you have the authority to issue a pardon by that same date. What a wonderful deed that would be for racial justice! It would counter the conventional wisdom of “justice delayed is justice denied,” and it would put a bright star on your legacy as our 44th President. It would also become a lasting memorial for the humanitarian work of Mickey Leland, whose life was tragically cut short in the service of others.

The case for Dorie Miller’s Medal of Honor has been made by so many since his heroic actions on the USS West Virginia at Pearl Harbor exactly 75 years ago this December 7. Over the years since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Miller was recognized with the Navy Cross; a U.S. postage stamp commemorated his heroism; and a Navy ship bore his name until it was retired from service. Most recently, the new National Museum of African American History and Culture has a sizeable exhibit in Dorie Miller’s honor.

I have never understood why our country has been so sparing in awarding our nation’s highest military honor to finalize Miller’s historic legacy in perpetuity. This act would not only uphold the highest standards of our great country’s moral legacy, it also would contribute greatly to overcoming our nation’s terrible history of racism—especially for the benefit of young African Americans in need of the recognition of more heroes whose actions were inspirational “under fire.” I hope that you will consider awarding a Medal of Honor to Dorie Miller posthumously in conjunction with your upcoming trip to Hawaii for the 75th commemoration of the awful attack on Pearl Harbor, where Miller inspired us all with heroic actions way beyond the call of duty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe DioGuardi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and a small dot at the end.

Joseph J. DioGuardi