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Chapter 1 : World War I And The African-American Experience

Though often overshadowed by World War II, the African-American experience in World War I was a transformative moment in black history, says Chad Williams, chair of the African & Afro-American Studies Department. The author of "Torchbearers of Democracy: African-American Soldiers in the

What began as a seemingly distant European conflict soon became an event with revolutionary implications for the social, economic, and political future of black people. The war directly impacted all African Americans, male and female, northerner and southerner, soldier and civilian. Migration, military service, racial violence, and political protest combined to make the war years one of the most dynamic periods of the African-American experience. Black people contested the boundaries of American democracy, demanded their rights as American citizens, and asserted their very humanity in ways both subtle and dramatic. Recognizing the significance of World War I is essential to developing a full understanding of modern African-American history and the struggle for black freedom. When war erupted in Europe in August, most Americans, African Americans included, saw no reason for the United States to become involved. This sentiment strengthened as war between the German-led Central Powers and the Allied nations of France, Great Britain, and Russia ground to a stalemate and the death toll increased dramatically. The black press sided with France, because of its purported commitment to racial equality, and chronicled the exploits of colonial African soldiers serving in the French army. Nevertheless, African Americans viewed the bloodshed and destruction occurring overseas as far removed from the immediacies of their everyday lives. The war did, however, have a significant impact on African Americans, particularly the majority who lived in the South. The war years coincided with the Great Migration, one of the largest internal movements of people in American history. The Great Migration Between and , roughly , black southerners packed their bags and headed to the North, fundamentally transforming the social, cultural, and political landscape of cities such as Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Detroit. The Great Migration would reshape black America and the nation as a whole. Black southerners faced a host of social, economic, and political challenges that prompted their migration to the North. The majority of black farmers labored as sharecroppers, remained in perpetual debt, and lived in dire poverty. Their condition worsened in 1916 as a result of a boll weevil infestation that ruined cotton crops throughout the South. These economic obstacles were made worse by social and political oppression. By the time of the war, most black people had been disfranchised, effectively stripped of their right to vote through both legal and extralegal means. Jim Crow segregation, legitimized by the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court ruling, forced black people to use separate and usually inferior facilities. The southern justice system systematically denied them equal protection under the law and condoned the practice of vigilante mob violence. As an aspiring migrant from Alabama wrote in a letter to the Chicago Defender, "[I] am in the darkness of the south and [I] am trying my best to get out. The American industrial economy grew significantly during the war. However, the conflict also cut off European immigration and reduced the pool of available cheap labor. Unable to meet demand with existing European immigrants and white women alone, northern businesses increasingly looked to black southerners to fill the void. In turn, the prospect of higher wages and improved working conditions prompted thousands of black southerners to abandon their agricultural lives and start anew in major industrial centers. Black women remained by and large confined to domestic work, while men for the first time in significant numbers made entryways into the northern manufacturing, packinghouse, and automobile industries. Anxious white southerners claimed that northern labor agents lulled unsuspecting black southerners to the North and into a life of urban misery. But, to the contrary, the Great Migration was a social movement propelled by black people and their desires for a better life. The Chicago Defender, which circulated throughout the South, implored black people to break free from their oppression and take advantage of opportunities in the North. Even more influential were the testimonials and letters of the migrants themselves. Migrants relied on informal networks of family and friends to facilitate

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their move to the North. Individuals would often leave to scout out conditions, secure a job, and find living arrangements, then send for the rest of their family. Word of mouth provided aspiring migrants with crucial information about where to relocate, how to get there, and how best to earn a living. Southern migrants did not always find the "promised land" they envisioned. They frequently endured residential segregation, substandard living conditions, job discrimination, and in many cases, the hostilities of white residents. Older black residents sometimes resented the presence of the new migrants, as neighborhoods became increasingly overcrowded and stigmatized as ghettos. But life in the North was nevertheless exciting and liberating. No longer subjected to the indignities of Jim Crow and the constant threat of racial violence, southern migrants experienced a new sense of freedom. Southern culture infused northern black communities with a vibrancy that inspired new forms of music, literature, and art. The Great Migration marked a significant moment in the economic, political, social, and cultural growth of modern black America. President Woodrow Wilson initially pledged to keep the country out of the conflict, arguing that the United States had nothing to gain from involving itself in the European chaos. Wilson won reelection in on a campaign of neutrality, but a series of provocations gradually changed his position. Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in the Atlantic Ocean and sank several vessels carrying American passengers. On March 1, , the Zimmermann Telegram, in which Germany encouraged Mexico to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers, became public and enflamed pro-war sentiments. Wilson felt compelled to act, and on April 2, , he stood before Congress and issued a declaration of war against Germany. These words immediately resonated with many African Americans, who viewed the war as an opportunity to bring about true democracy in the United States. It would be insincere, many black people argued, for the United States to fight for democracy in Europe while African Americans remained second-class citizens. The United States government mobilized the entire nation for war, and African Americans were expected to do their part. The military instituted a draft in order to create an army capable of winning the war. Large segments of the black population, however, remained hesitant to support a cause they deemed hypocritical. A small but vocal number of African Americans explicitly opposed black participation in the war. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, editors of the radical socialist newspaper *The Messenger*, openly encouraged African Americans to resist military service and, as a result, were closely monitored by federal intelligence agents. Many other African Americans viewed the war apathetically and found ways to avoid military service. Black political leaders believed that if the race sacrificed for the war effort, the government would have no choice but to reward them with greater civil rights. Over one million African Americans responded to their draft calls, and roughly , black men were inducted into the army. Charles Brodnax, a farmer from Virginia recalled, "I felt that I belonged to the Government of my country and should answer to the call and obey the orders in defense of Democracy. On July 2, , in East St. Louis, tensions between black and white workers sparked a bloody four-day riot that left upwards of black residents dead and the nation shocked. Eight thousand marchers, the men dressed in black and the women and children in white, solemnly advanced down Fifth Avenue to the sound of muffled drums and holding signs such as the one that read, Mr. President, why not make America safe for democracy. Violence erupted again the following month in Houston, Texas. On the night of August 23, , the soldiers retaliated by marching on the city and killing sixteen white civilians and law enforcement personnel. Four black soldiers died as well. The Houston rebellion shocked the nation and encouraged white southern politicians to oppose the future training of black soldiers in the South. Three military court-martial proceedings convicted soldiers. Sixty-three received life sentences and thirteen were hung without due process. The army buried their bodies in unmarked graves. Despite the bloodshed at Houston, the black press and civil rights organizations like the NAACP insisted that African Americans should receive the opportunity to serve as soldiers and fight in the war. Black college students, particularly those at historically black institutions, were the driving force behind the camp. Howard University established the Central Committee of Negro College Men and recruited potential candidates from college campuses and black communities throughout the country. The camp opened on June 18, , in Des Moines, Iowa, with 1, aspiring black officer candidates. At the close of the camp on October 17, , men

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received commissions, a historical first. The military created two combat divisions for African Americans. One, the 92nd Division, was composed of draftees and officers. The army, however, assigned the vast majority of soldiers to service units, reflecting a belief that black men were more suited for manual labor than combat duty. Black soldiers were stationed and trained throughout the country, although most facilities were located in the South. They had to endure racial segregation and often received substandard clothing, shelter, and social services. At the same time, the army presented many black servicemen, particularly those from the rural South, with opportunities unavailable to them as civilians, such as remedial education and basic health care. Military service was also a broadening experience that introduced black men to different people and different parts of the country. They contributed to the war effort in significant ways and formed the backbone of African-American patriotic activities. Clubwomen, many under the auspices of the National Association of Colored Women NACW, led "liberty loan" campaigns, held rallies, and provided crucial material and emotional support for black troops. The war also spurred an increase in political activism amongst black women. For the growing number of women who worked outside the home, the war created new opportunities for them to organize collectively and advocate for greater pay and equitable working conditions. Laundresses in the South formed associations and engaged in strikes to protest unfair treatment at the hands of their white employers. In Mobile, Alabama, for example, some laundry workers walked off the job, insisting, "We are protesting against this discourteous treatment and we intend to stay out until our communications are answered and they agree to deal with our committee. Political Leaders The war and the pressures of patriotism tested the effectiveness of black political leaders. A number of prominent African Americans worked closely with the government both to rally black support for the war and to address issues such as lynching, segregation, and discrimination against soldiers that exacerbated black dissent. Emmett Scott, the former secretary to Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute, served as a special assistant to the Secretary of War in charge of matters related to African Americans and the war. His efforts yielded limited results. He did, however, organize a major conference of black newspaper editors and political leaders in Washington, D. The following month, W. Du Bois wrote the editorial "Close Ranks," in which he stated, "Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy. The controversy reflected the tension between patriotism and race loyalty many African Americans grappled with throughout the war and leaders such as Du Bois struggled to navigate effectively. Fighting Overseas The war most directly impacted those African Americans called to fight and labor in the military overseas. Over , crossed the Atlantic and served in France. They dug ditches, cleaned latrines, transported supplies, cleared debris, and buried rotting corpses. Nazaire, Bordeaux, and other French port cities to load and unload crucial supplies.

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Chapter 2 : Black History | MNCPPC, MD

African Americans and World War I Chad Williams - Hamilton College. World War I was a transformative moment in African-American history. What began as a seemingly distant European conflict soon became an event with revolutionary implications for the social, economic, and political future of black people.

This forced migration was unique in American history. But the slave trade was not new to Europe or Africa. In the eighth century, Moorish merchants traded humans as merchandise throughout the Mediterranean. In addition, many West African peoples kept slaves. West African slaves were usually prisoners of war, criminals, or the lowest-ranked members of caste systems. An engraving depicting the convention of the Anti-Slavery Society, held in London. People attended from around the world, including from the U. Wikimedia Commons The capture and sale of Africans for the American slave markets were barbaric and often lethal. Two out of five West African captives died on the march to the Atlantic seacoast where they were sold to European slavers. On board the slave vessels, they were chained below decks in coffin-sized racks. An estimated one-third of these unfortunate individuals died at sea. In America, they were sold at auction to owners, who wanted them primarily as plantation workers. Slave owners could punish slaves harshly. They could break up families by selling off family members. Despite the hardships, slaves managed to develop a strong cultural identity. On plantations, all adults looked after all children. Although they risked separation, slaves frequently married and maintained strong family ties. Introduced to Christianity, they developed their own forms of worship. Spirituals, the music of worship, expressed both slave endurance and religious belief. Slaves frequently altered the lyrics of spirituals to carry the hope of freedom or to celebrate resistance. In time, African culture enriched much of American music, theater, and dance. African rhythms found their way into Christian hymns and European marches. The banjo evolved from an African stringed instrument. The sound of the blues is nothing more than a combination of African and European musical scales. Vaudeville was partially an extension of song-and-dance forms first performed by black street artists. Abolition and Civil War In the 17th and 18th centuries, some blacks gained their freedom, acquired property, and gained access to American society. Many moved to the North, where slavery, although still legal, was less of a presence. African Americans, both slave and free also made significant contributions to the economy and infrastructure working on roads, canals, and construction of cities. By the early s, many whites and free blacks in Northern states began to call for the abolition of slavery. In , Douglass escaped to Massachusetts, where he became a powerful writer, editor, and lecturer for the growing abolitionist movement. The economy of the industrial North depended on the slave-based agriculture of the South. Douglass challenged his Northern audience to take up the cause against Southern slavery. Some people expressed surprise at how fiercely black troops fought. But black soldiers were fighting for more than restoring the Union. They were fighting to liberate their people. Reconstruction and Reaction With the defeat of the Confederacy, Northern troops remained in the South to ensure the slaves newly won freedom. Blacks started their own churches and schools, purchased land, and voted themselves into office. By , African Americans had sent 22 representatives to Congress. Marcus Garvey, a proponent of racial separation. Wikimedia Commons But many Southerners soon reacted to black emancipation. Supported by the surviving white power structure, Ku Klux Klan members organized terrorist raids and lynchings. They burned homes, schools, and churches. When Northern troops left in , the white power structure returned. Within a couple of decades, this power structure succeeded in completely suppressing blacks. African Americans were excluded from voting. Southern states wrote Jim Crow laws that segregated blacks from white society. Blacks lived under constant threat of violence. World War I opened many factory jobs. In the s, strict new laws drastically cut European immigration. The drop in immigration created a demand for industrial workers in the Northern cities. Southern blacks, still oppressed by segregation, began to migrate northward in increasing numbers. Young black men eagerly took unskilled jobs in meat packing plants, steel mills, and on auto assembly lines in Chicago, Omaha, and Detroit. Black workers

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unquestionably improved their lives in Northern cities. Indoor plumbing, gas heat, and nearby schools awaited many arrivals from the rural South. Discrimination also met them. Yet black urban culture blossomed. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican immigrant, preached black pride, racial separation, and a return to Africa. By the early 1900s, Garvey had an estimated 2 million followers, most of them Northern city-dwellers. Harlem, an uptown New York City neighborhood, drew black migrants from the South. Black commerce and culture thrived in Harlem. After World War I, a group of black writers, artists, and intellectuals gathered there. Like Marcus Garvey, many sought cultural identity in their African origins. Unlike Garvey, however, they had no desire to return to Africa. They found creative energy in the struggle to be blacks and Americans. This gathering of black artists and philosophers was called the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes, a black novelist and poet, used the language of the ghetto and the rhythms of jazz to describe the African-American experience. Jazz continued its development as a uniquely American art form in Harlem, where prominent nightclubs like the Cotton Club featured great jazz composers like Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson. Their music lured whites uptown to Harlem to share the excitement of the Jazz Age. Zora Neale Hurston combined her writing ability with her study of anthropology to transform oral histories and rural black folk tales into exciting stories. Jazz great Louis Armstrong. Wikimedia Commons The Depression brought many blacks and whites together for the first time. In the cities, a half-million African Americans joined predominantly white labor unions. What we want, what we represent, what we endure is what America is The differences between black folk and white folk are not blood or color, and the ties that bind us are deeper than those that separate us. The common road of hope which we all traveled has brought us into a stronger kinship than any words, laws, or legal claims. Though issues of discrimination remain, African Americans endure, achieve, and lead. Name some African cultural influences that have been absorbed into American society. Which do you think are most important? The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction.

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Chapter 3 : Fighting for Respect: African-American Soldiers in WWI | blog.quintoapp.com

AFRICANGLOBE - Though often overshadowed by World War II, the African-American experience in World War I was a transformative moment in Black history, says Chad Williams, chair of the African & Afro-American Studies Department.

History Fighting for Respect: After being detached and seconded to the French, they wore the Adrian helmet, while retaining the rest of their U. Army-issue Brodie helmet, correct for that time. America was a segregated society and African Americans were considered, at best, second class citizens. When the United States declared war against Germany in April of 1917, War Department planners quickly realized that the standing Army of 400,000 men would not be enough to ensure victory overseas. The standard volunteer system proved to be inadequate in raising an Army, so on 18 May Congress passed the Selective Service Act requiring all male citizens between the ages of 21 and 31 to register for the draft. Even before the act was passed, African American males from all over the country eagerly joined the war effort. They viewed the conflict as an opportunity to prove their loyalty, patriotism, and worthiness for equal treatment in the United States. Following the Civil War, the Army disbanded volunteer "colored" regiments, and established six Regular Army regiments of black troops with white officers. In 1917, the infantry regiments were reorganized into the 24th and 25th Infantry. The two cavalry regiments, the 9th and 10th, were retained. These regiments were posted in the West and Southwest where they were heavily engaged in the Indian War. During the Spanish-American War, all four regiments saw service. When World War I broke out, there were four all-black regiments: The men in these units were considered heroes in their communities. When it came to the draft, however, there was a reversal in usual discriminatory policy. Draft boards were comprised entirely of white men. Although there were no specific segregation provisions outlined in the draft legislation, blacks were told to tear off one corner of their registration cards so they could easily be identified and inducted separately. Now instead of turning blacks away, the draft boards were doing all they could to bring them into service, southern draft boards in particular. One Georgia county exemption board discharged forty-four percent of white registrants on physical grounds and exempted only three percent of black registrants based on the same requirements. It was fairly common for southern postal workers to deliberately withhold the registration cards of eligible black men and have them arrested for being draft dodgers. African American men who owned their own farms and had families were often drafted before single white employees of large planters. Although comprising just ten percent of the entire United States population, blacks supplied thirteen percent of inductees. While still discriminatory, the Army was far more progressive in race relations than the other branches of the military. Blacks could not serve in the Marines, and could only serve limited and menial positions in the Navy and the Coast Guard. By the end of World War I, African Americans served in cavalry, infantry, signal, medical, engineer, and artillery units, as well as serving as chaplains, surveyors, truck drivers, chemists, and intelligence officers. Although technically eligible for many positions in the Army, very few blacks got the opportunity to serve in combat units. Most were limited to labor battalions. The combat elements of the U. Army were kept completely segregated. The four established all-black Regular Army regiments were not used in overseas combat roles but instead were diffused throughout American held territory. There was such a backlash from the African American community, however, that the War Department finally created the 92d and 93d Divisions, both primarily black combat units, in 1918. With the creation of African American units also came the demand for African-American officers. The War Department thought the soldiers would be more likely to follow men of their own color, thereby reducing the risk of any sort of uprising. Most leaders of the African American community agreed, and it was decided that the Army would create a segregated, but supposedly equal, officer training camp. In May 1918, Fort Des Moines opened its doors to black officer-trainees. Approximately 1,000 men attended the camp in Des Moines, Iowa. Two hundred fifty of those men were already noncommissioned officers, and the rest were civilians. The average man attending the camp only had to have a high school education, and only twelve percent scored above average in the classification tests given by the

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Army. They practiced drilling with and without arms, signaling, physical training, memorizing the organization of the regiment, reading maps, and training on the rifle and bayonet. However, as Ballou noted after the war, the men doing the training did not take the job very seriously, and seemed to consider the school, and the candidates, a waste of time. Consequently, the War Department determined that the instruction at Fort Des Moines was poor and inadequate. Also adding to the poor training was the fact that no one knew exactly what to expect in France, so it was difficult to train as precisely as was needed. On 15 October, African-American men received their commissions as either captain or first or second lieutenant, and were assigned to infantry, artillery, and engineer units with the 92d Division. This was to be the first and only class to graduate from Fort Des Moines; the War Department shut it down soon after their departure. Future black candidates attended either special training camps in Puerto Rico from which officers graduated, the Philippines, Hawaii, and Panama, or regular officer training facilities in the United States. The Army had no written policy on what to do if an officer training camp became integrated, so each camp was allowed to decide for itself the manner in which the integration was executed. Some were completely segregated and others allowed for blacks and whites to train together. Over additional black officers graduated from these camps, bringing the total number to 1, Although African Americans were earning higher positions in the Army, that did not necessarily mean they were getting equal treatment. Black draftees were treated with extreme hostility when they arrived for training. The War Department rarely interceded, and discrimination was usually overlooked or sometimes condoned. Because many Southern civilians protested having blacks from other states inhabit nearby training camps, the War Department stipulated that no more than one-fourth of the trainees in any Army camp in the U. Even when integrated into fairly progressive camps, black soldiers were often treated badly and sometimes went for long periods without proper clothing. There were also reports of blacks receiving old Civil War uniforms and being forced to sleep outside in pitched tents instead of warmer, sturdier barracks. Some were forced to eat outside in the winter months, while others went without a change of clothes for months at a time. Not all black soldiers suffered treatment like this, however, as those who were lucky enough to train at newly erected National Army cantonments lived in comfortable barracks and had sanitary latrines, hot food, and plenty of clothes. The first black troops sent overseas belonged to service units. Because the work that these units did was absolutely invaluable to the war effort, commanders promised special privileges in return for high-yield results. With such motivation, the soldiers would often work for twenty-four hours straight unloading ships and transporting men and materiel to and from various bases, ports, and railroad depots. As the war continued and soldiers took to the battlefields, black labor units became responsible for digging trenches, removing unexploded shells from fields, clearing disabled equipment and barbed wire, and burying soldiers killed in action. Despite all the hard and essential work they provided, African American stevedores received the worst treatment of all black troops serving in World War I. Although not nearly as respected as any of the white soldiers involved in the war effort, African American combat troops, in many respects, were much better off than the laborers. The two combat divisions—the 92d and 93d Divisions—had two completely different experiences while fighting the Great War. Ballou, who had organized the first African American officer candidate school. Organized in a manner similar to the other American divisions, the 92d was made up of four infantry regiments, three field artillery regiments, a trench mortar battery, three machine gun battalions, a signal battalion, an engineer regiment, an engineer train, and various support units. Although in no case did a black officer command a white officer, most of the officers up to the rank of first lieutenant in the unit were African American. Unlike just about every other American unit training to go into battle, soldiers from the 92d were forced to train separately while in the United States. Bullard was not only a staunch racist, but he also had a rivalry going with BG Ballou. In order to make both Ballou and the black soldiers appear completely incompetent, Bullard spread misinformation about the successes and failures of the 92d. Regardless of how well the 92d Division actually did on the battlefield, it was virtually impossible to overcome the slander from prejudiced officers. Following some initial successes in Lorraine in mid-August, on 20 September, the 92d was ordered to proceed to the Argonne Forest in

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preparation for the Meuse-Argonne offensive. The division reached the front lines just before the first assault. The 16th Infantry Regiment immediately received orders to fill a gap between the American 77th Division and the French 37th Division. However, due to their lack of training with the French, shortages of equipment, and unfamiliarity with the terrain, the regiment did not successfully complete this important assignment. After the disaster in the Argonne, the entire division was sent to a relatively quiet area of the front in the Marbache sector. Their primary mission was nevertheless a dangerous one: The danger of the assignment was reflected in the casualties sustained in just the first month of patrolling. By late 1918, the German Army was in full retreat, the Allied Commander in Chief, Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch, wanted to apply heavy pressure for a decisive breakthrough and defeat. The 92d was ordered to take the heights east of Champney, France, on 10 November. Although only lasting one day, the attack was fierce and bloody, costing the division over 1,000 casualties. As the 92d Division struggled to clear its reputation, the 93d Division had a much more successful experience. Unlike other American infantry divisions, the 93d was limited to four infantry regiments, three of which were comprised of National Guard units from New York, Illinois, Ohio, Maryland, Connecticut, Massachusetts, the District of Columbia, and Tennessee. Being made up of mostly draftees and National Guardsmen, the 93d lacked any sort of consistency in its experience or composition. The unit also lacked its full number of combat units and support elements, and as a result never attained full divisional strength. Seeming to have odds stacked against it, the 93d fared remarkably well when faced with battle. National Archives The situation was desperate in France, and with exhausted and dwindling armies, the French begged the United States for men. He decided to give them the regiments of the 93d Division since the French, who had used French colonial troops from Senegal, had experience in employing black soldiers in combat. The first African American combat troops to set foot on French soil belonged to the 93d Division. Armed, organized, and equipped as a French unit, the 93d quickly adjusted to their new assignment. Although experiencing some difficulties like language problems, the black soldiers were treated as equals. The 16th Infantry was the first regiment of the 93d Division to reach France. They arrived in the port city of Brest in December. On 10 March, after three months of duty with the Services of Supply, the 16th received orders to join the French 16th Division in Givry en Argonne for additional training. After three weeks the regiment was sent to the front lines in a region just west of the Argonne Forest. For nearly a month they held their position against German assaults, and after only a brief break from the front, the 16th was placed once again in the middle of the German offensive, this time at Minacourt, France. From 18 July to 6 August, the 16th Infantry, now proudly nicknamed the "Harlem Hellfighters," proved their tenacity once again by helping the French 16th Division drive the Germans from their trenches during the Aisne-Marne counter-offensive. In this three-week period, the Germans were making many small night raids into Allied territory. During one of these raids, a member of the 16th Infantry, CPL Henry Johnson, fought off an entire German raiding party using only a pistol and a knife.

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Chapter 4 : African Americans and World War I

Add this title to the expanding number of books now studying the African American experience in World War I, in which almost , African Americans served in combat.

Chad Williams How were African-American soldiers received during the war and afterward? The service of African-Americans in the military had dramatic implications for African-Americans. Black soldiers faced systemic racial discrimination in the army and endured virulent hostility upon returning to their homes at the end of the war. At the same time, service in the army empowered soldiers to demand their individual rights as American citizens and laid the groundwork for the future movement for racial justice. The memory of the First World War “ the opportunities as well as the disappointments ” remained very much alive for African-Americans as the Second World War approached. In many ways, World War I marked the beginning of the modern civil rights movement for African-Americans, as they used their experiences to organize and make specific demands for racial justice and civic inclusion. These efforts continued throughout the s and s. For most African-American soldiers, service in World War I allowed them to broaden their social, political, geographic and cultural horizons. Having the opportunity to travel to different parts of the country and, for the approximately , African-American soldiers who served overseas, to different parts of the world, was a life-altering experience. Did the war serve as an opportunity to spread African-American culture internationally? In France, many African-American soldiers interacted with African soldiers and laborers from the French colonies in North and West Africa, forging bonds and sowing the seeds of a pan-African consciousness. African-American soldiers also became cultural ambassadors, introducing France and the world to jazz through the various regimental bands that took the country by storm. At home, what were the most prominent effects of the war on African-Americans? World War I marked the beginning of the Great Migration, the most prominent and lasting effect of the war on African-Americans and the nation. Eager to escape the racially oppressive social and political environment of the South and lured by wartime industrial job opportunities, approximately , African-Americans migrated to northern cities such as Chicago, New York and Detroit. The Great Migration, which continued throughout the s, fundamentally transformed the demographics of the United States. What role did African-American women play during the war? African American women played a central role in the war effort. Black women also served in various social welfare organizations like the Red Cross, YMCA and YWCA to provide much needed support to black troops in the face of institutionalized discrimination. As they supported African-American soldiers, black women also used the war effort to advance their own claims to equal citizenship.

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Chapter 5 : Browse Items Â· World War II: The African American Experience

The First World War and the experience of black soldiers integrated among the more liberal French social milieu, deserves greater recognition as a transformative event in the history of the African American's pursuit of civil rights.

Part 1 Part 1 Narrator: In the summer of , at docks up and down the eastern seaboard, thousands of American soldiers boarded ships bound for France. They were the vanguard of a new American army, about to enter the most destructive war the world had ever known. The United States goes from being the country on the other side of the ocean to being the preeminent world power. This is the birth of the on-going debate over how involved America should be in the world. The troops were drawn from every corner of the country, and reflected the teeming diversity of turn-of-the-century America. Helen Zoe Veit, Historian: In many ways World War I forced Americans to ask what are we as a country? Who are we as a people? All across the country, communities staged elaborate celebrations to send their men off to war. But underneath the calls for unity, Americans were deeply divided. World War I showed Americans the best and worst that the country is capable of. It lays bare questions the Americans continue to ask themselves for the rest of the 20th century. This was a period of deep paranoia in this country. Women who refused to set aside their campaign for suffrage because of the war were set upon by mobs and carted off to prison. African-American men joined in a war for freedom abroad, while being denied it at home. The war galvanizes African Americans, not just to fight for their country, but to fight for their rights as American citizens. When the ships let loose their lines and headed out to sea, the troops on board were entering a conflict of unprecedented bloodshed and suffering, one that had come to be known as The Great War. Dan Carlin, Podcast Producer: Crowds were flocking to theaters to see the newest film by Charlie Chaplin. A loaf of bread cost six cents. In , the nation boasted a population of almost a hundred million people. A third of them were immigrants, or had parents who had been born abroad. And one out of three Americans lived on farms. Women could vote, but only in twelve states of the union. In the South, African Americans had virtually no political rights at all. Europe was a one-week steamship voyage away. In the United States was the largest producer of steel. It had the biggest transportation network. It had more energy resources. It had the second biggest population in the western world saving only Russia. But the American people as a whole were quite ambivalent about whether or not they actually wanted to become one of the great powers that arbitrated the destinies of the world at large. I think that Wilson had, even in this vision of America as a moral beacon in the world, as a city upon a hill, this sense that Americans had something to give to the world. Germany was led by a kaiser, Russia a tsar. Great Britain and France, two democracies, jealously guarded far-flung colonial empires. The assassination of an obscure Austro-Hungarian aristocrat by a Serbian nationalist had provided a pretext to unleash imperial rivalries that were breaking the continent apart. Germany and its ally, Austria Hungary, declared war on Serbia and her ally, Russia. Germany then invaded France â€” through neutral Belgium â€” and Russia. Britain came to the aid of, the French and the Belgians and suddenly, millions of men were fighting a war whose very purpose seemed hard to comprehend. What were they thinking? They had so much going for them. Europe was the most prosperous part of the world, the most powerful part of the world. It had had extraordinary progress. It had a century of almost unbroken peace, and suddenly they blundered into this war. Almost from the outset of the war, Woodrow Wilson was trying to find diplomatic solutions. He believed if all the heads of state could sit at a table and confer, they could probably have ended this war. As he faced the greatest international crisis of his presidency, Woodrow Wilson was falling apart. In a small bedroom on the second floor of the White House, his wife Ellen lay dying. They had been married for 29 years, and she had borne him three daughters, standing by him during his dramatic rise to the White House. Two days after war broke out, at five in the afternoon, she died. Here is the president of the United States who is so bereft he is actually contemplating giving up the office. He does not know how he can go on without this woman, who really sacrificed everything she could for him. He sat next to the casket during a sleepless train ride back to her family home in Georgia. For the first

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time in decades, Woodrow Wilson was facing the future alone. The son of a Scottish Presbyterian minister from Virginia, he was a bookish young man with a delicate constitution who became a successful lawyer and scholar of American government. He was a former professor, a former college president and the governor of New Jersey. He had a meteoric rise in politics and in an age of oratory, he was a very fine speaker. Woodrow Wilson was the most religious president we ever had. Woodrow Wilson is a man who got on his knees twice a day and prayed. He read scripture every night. He said grace before every meal. His faith informed everything he ever said, everything he ever thought, everything he ever did. An idealistic Democratic crusader, Wilson had spent his first two years in office driving through Congress a historic set of progressive reforms. His penchant for soaring rhetoric masked a pragmatic, and often ruthless, politician. He was also the first Democrat from the South to be elected president since Reconstruction. Almost overnight, thousands of promising civil service jobs that had been a path of upward mobility for African Americans were now open to whites only. Wilson felt that forward thinking white people were really best positioned to see to the well being of African Americans. And I think he felt confident that at some point African Americans would be able to be incorporated into the larger civic and democratic body in some way. He makes almost no effort to bring African Americans into any role in the government and in fact takes so many steps to alienate them that many African Americans who thought he would be a progressive on race become bitterly disappointed in him. Woodrow Wilson is the only United States president who was born in a country that had lost a war, the Confederate States of America. He carried that with him. He believes in democratic values, liberal values, he believes in peace. On August 18th, Wilson emerged from his grieving long enough to issue a proclamation. America is not a monolith. America is composed of a great many different communities. Take New York City. You had Irish who had no desire to go over and fight for the British king. You had Russian Jews who had no desire to go over and fight for the Tsar. You had German-American immigrants and Austrian-American immigrants who had no desire to go over and fight against their country. He thinks America has something to teach everyone. Part of it is ego. Wilson believes himself able to deliver these democratic practices to the global stage. He sees himself as well equipped to be this person. Ambassador Page saw little chance that America could stay detached from the great conflict that was shaking the world to its foundations. The day war broke out, the impeccably tailored American war correspondent Richard Harding Davis settled into his first class cabin on board a ship bound for France, and enjoyed a cold glass of champagne. Davis was perhaps the most famous journalist of his day, and the war promised to be the biggest story of his already legendary career. He had made a name for himself reporting for the newspapers owned by Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, filing dispatches from war zones around the world. His vivid reports of the exploits of the Rough Riders in Cuba had helped catapult the young Theodore Roosevelt to national renown. Now Americans were counting on Davis to bring them news of the shocking developments in Europe. While he was crossing the Atlantic in the first week of August, German troops continued their invasion of neutral Belgium, rushing to encircle Paris and defeat the French and the British before the huge Russian armies to the east could mobilize. The German war plans called for them to defeat France first, within a short period of time, and then turn those armies on the Russians. The German army was well aware that its task was to arrive in Paris 42 days—not 43 days—42 days exactly after the invasion of Belgium. And the population in Belgium and northern France was not going to stand in the way. By August 17th, as hundreds of thousands of Belgian refugees were streaming away from the advancing German army, Davis had commandeered a motorcar and was headed in the opposite direction. He managed to find his way to Brussels to witness German forces entering the Belgian capital. The entrance of the German army into Brussels has lost all human quality. No longer was it regiments of men marching but something uncanny, inhuman, a force of nature. This was a machine, endless, tireless, with the delicate organization of a watch and the brute power of a steam roller. For three days and three nights the column of gray, with 50, thousand bayonets and 50, lances, with gray transport wagons, a gray cannon, like a river of steel, cut Brussels in two.

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Chapter 6 : The African American Experience in World War I & Aftermath – World War One & the Coppe

Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience During World War I (The African American History Series) - Kindle edition by Nina Mjagkij. Download it once and read it on your Kindle device, PC, phones or tablets.

As a member of the all-black 368th Central Postal Directory, he had seen action on the front in Champagne and had been rewarded with medals from the French and from the city of Norfolk. Military service had carried the farmer and dockworker from Portsmouth, Virginia, on the edge of the Chesapeake Bay, to St. Nazaire, France, on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. His unit, known and celebrated as the Harlem Hellfighters, had been comprised of black men hailing from places as far ranging as New York to Puerto Rico – and they had been placed within the French Army, trained and incorporated with French soldiers. Looking out from Portsmouth, one might suspect that the world was bigger than Virginia, less bounded than the U. And so Sergeant Watts, named for Christopher Columbus himself, summed up the effect of his time abroad in a single line: The Library of Virginia. Military service brought the world to bear on the lives of the nearly 4 million African Americans who served during the First World War, and on the broader black community who pinned their hopes on black soldiers. Whether they remained stateside or sailed abroad with the American Expeditionary Forces AEF, black soldiers found themselves caught up in a global drama with substantial domestic ramifications. As early as 1915, scholar and activist W. Proponents of Jim Crow and defenders of African American rights fought a war over democracy at home in the midst of the Great War. African Americans saw the war as an opportunity to remind their fellow Americans that black folks had not only built the nation, they had sacrificed for its defense ever since Crispus Attucks fell in the Boston Massacre almost years before. Service abroad would extend that sacrifice. Their letters home capture both the courage and trauma involved in modern warfare as well as the pain and disillusion of realizing that their fellow soldiers were as invested in policing the color line as they were in fighting Germany. At the same time, word came back to them of the rise in lynchings on the home front – from at least 36 in 1915 to at minimum 60 in 1916 – often public and gruesome. If the hostility of the military leadership did not clue African Americans into the limited scope of this war for democracy, then white racial terrorism drove the point home. The French liner La France arrives home carrying 15th Infantry fighters who won honors in the war overseas. The National Archives and Records Administration. Yet African Americans would not concede the point. By their ken, the explosion of racist terror also signaled that Jim Crow was on the defensive. In doing so, it empowered them to see vast horizons and imagine new political configurations – to appeal to French ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, even as they explored kinship with African troops dubious about French empire. For African Americans once hemmed in by Jim Crow, the war expanded their sense of place and possibility. This reconfigured consciousness would have profound effects on American democracy, as the activists who came of age politically during the First World War launched the world-changing mass civil rights movement during the Second World War. Learn More Related Features.

Chapter 7 : World War I and the African-American experience | BrandeisNOW

Painting of African American soldiers fighting German soldiers in World War I, and head-and-shoulders portrait of Abraham Lincoln above. Courtesy of American Memory at the Library of Congress. The Crisis says, first your Country, then your Rights!

Chapter 8 : Oxford AASC: Focus On African Americans in World War I

Describe the experience of African American soldiers during World War I. segregated, gov't policy: segregate soldiers, careful distribution of black units in country, couldn't join marines, menial jobs in navy, nurses couldn't travel much, assigned to black units only, black women couldn't care for white men, few saw action, high ranking:white.

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Chapter 9 : Background Â· World War II: The African American Experience

Which one of the following is NOT true of the African American experience in World War I? A) The French friendliness toward them contrasted with white Americans. B) Most were put in the most dangerous combat positions.