

HELL FIGHTERS, BLACK DEVILS, AND ONE WICK-ED MA-AN: HOW MARTIAL
IMAGERY IN BLACK POPULAR CULTURE HELPED DEFINE MANHOOD
DURING THE WORLD WAR I ERA

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of History
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2013

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the popularization of modern black masculinity during the World War I era. Focusing on mass media representations of black soldiers before, during, and after the war, it reveals a near-total popular culture saturation of aggressive and courageous imagery that black men increasingly used as a guide to confront racism, justify armed self-defense, and force local and federal governments to address black grievances. These martial representations in film, inexpensive artwork, black “histories” of the war, editorial cartoons, popular novels and poems, and in commemorative events featuring black soldiers provided a well-defined guide outlining the modern, masculine black man.

Too often historians of the period focus on the “Talented Tenth,” young, energetic middle-class African Americans, and the complications they experienced as they struggled to maintain respectability and redefine their gender and social standing in a rapidly modernizing world. Prior to World War I, the primary model for manly protest was through quiet petitions to government officials and the grudgingly passive acceptance of a racist society that might eventually bestow equality based on thrift and hard work. The war provided African Americans with a more forceful, but now domesticated model that encouraged assertiveness, and at times violence to secure full citizenship and civil rights based on the heroic actions of the black soldier.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and close friends that kept me sane throughout this long and arduous process, to my colleagues who remain buried under mountains of their own research, and most of all, to my beautiful wife for all of her love, support, and sacrifice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for this opportunity to recognize the many colleagues, friends, faculty members, research assistants, and family members who have contributed their time, energy, and expertise to this project. I am most indebted to John M. Giggie, the chairman of this dissertation, for his guidance throughout, and for encouraging me to consider the challenges facing black men in the early twentieth century with a greater depth and breadth. I would also like to thank all of my committee members, Kari Frederickson, Andrew Huebner, Lisa Lindquist-Dorr, and W. Fitzhugh Brundage for their invaluable comments, questions, and critiques. Your input has driven me to produce a more thoughtful and complete dissertation. I must also acknowledge the contributions of Bill Link, Alan Petigny, Jack Davis, Jeffery Adler, Brian Ward, and Bertram Wyatt-Brown for their influence on both this project and myself as a young historian.

This dissertation was made possible by the intellectual and financial support of a select group who deserve recognition as well. The generous dissertation fellowships and research grants provided by the History Department and Graduate Council at the University of Alabama, and the John Hope Franklin Research Center enabled me to devote my full attention to such a monumental task. I am grateful for the research assistance provided by Brett Spencer, Peter Malanchuk, Alison Quammie, and Tammi Lawson at the Universities of Alabama and Florida, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, respectively, and the many talented research assistants and archivists at the College Park and Washington branches of the National Archives. Equally invaluable was the consideration exhibited by my department chairs at Santa

Fe College, Bill Little and Doug Diekow, and Dave Tegeder for being so very flexible with my teaching schedule.

To my colleagues, both formerly and currently in the History Departments at the University of Alabama and the University of Florida, I thank you for helping me develop the ideas behind this work, many of which took shape during the hour-long carpool to and from campus in Colin Chapell's Honda Civic and John Mitcham's Chevy Cobalt. David, Megan, Matt, Jonathan Medley, Mouse, Jared, and the Seminole were all critically important sounding boards as well.

To my family and friends in Birmingham and Gainesville, I thank you for your honest opinions and patience. Tom and Andrea, I always looked forward to giving you drafts of my chapters, and I equally anticipated your thoughtful critiques. And finally, this project would be lost without the three most important women in my life. To my grandmother, your editorial brilliance I cannot thank you enough for. Mom, your loving encouragement and thought-provoking questions were the perfect motivation throughout this grind. And to my wife, Kristin, your unyielding support inspires me to be the best friend, husband, and historian I can be.

The recent race riots at Longview, Texas, Washington, D.C. and Chicago, Ills., call for a brief analysis of the general causes underlying such outbreaks. Some of the causes, such as lynching, disfranchisement, jimcrowism and segregation, have been long standing; but it required the awakened spirit of the Negro soldier returning from France full of bitter resentment to set the spark that has released the pent up feelings of the masses. Conditions have been very tense in many places since demobilization started. Primarily, the colored soldiers returned from France very much embittered. Their grievances were compound. In addition to the grievances common to white and colored soldiers alike, were added the sting of the insidious propaganda and prejudice from which Negro soldiers keenly suffered in France at the hands of white Americans. The free social intermingling in France made the discriminating restraints of America more galling. The total absence of color prejudice among Frenchmen made the returning Negro soldier impatient and resentful of proscription at home. Open acts of hostility on the part of white Americans against them, the report of which to the War Department brought no redress or relief, intensified the discontent. Such nefarious communications as the confidential circular sent out from the American army to French officers in August, 1918, in which the French were requested to conform with American customs and traditions in their attitude toward colored American soldiers, have aroused the most bitter resentment among Negroes throughout the country. It was but natural that the bitter feeling of the returning soldiers should be communicated to the civilian population...

...Here military lessons come into play. The Negro has been taught to fight. Added to a natural pugnacious instinct, he has been given the equipment, both intellectual and physical. The government has taught him the lessons of violence during the world war. Defense of himself against German whites is quickly shifted to defense of himself against American whites. As a whole Negroes have resolved never again to submit to the treatment which they have received in the past, and any attempt to deny them such privileges and rights as they are entitled to, in common with other men, will be promptly resented. The above is a true statement of existing conditions, verified by personal observation and contact with Negroes of all classes.

Major Walter H. Loving, Military Intelligence Division
August 6, 1919

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PROLOGUE: A New Definition of Manhood Forged in Battle

As United States forces advanced amid a shower of bullets toward Santiago, Cuba, during the Spanish-American War, a thirty-nine-year-old lieutenant colonel in the First Volunteer Cavalry noticed that one of his men refused to charge forward. Approaching him on horseback, the officer inquired why the soldier lay clinging to the ground behind a small bush while the rest of the men advanced. Upon receiving no response, the superior chided his man for being “afraid” while he remained in the saddle, commanding his troops from an elevated and far more vulnerable position. Just then, a bullet meant for the lieutenant colonel tore through the cowardly soldier, killing him instantly. For a moment, Theodore Roosevelt pondered the exchange and thought it almost justified that he, “who was on horseback in the open, was unhurt, and the man lying flat in the cover beside [him] was killed.”¹ For Roosevelt, such weak behavior was wholly unbecoming of a man, especially one wearing the uniform of the United States Army. That summer, as the nation celebrated the rather quick victory over Spain, American men eagerly followed the exploits and opinions of the charismatic Roosevelt as he redefined their gender.

For white and black men alike, the fifty-year span from 1880 to 1930 marked an age of rather fluid definitions of manhood, which can be examined through the lens of popular martial culture. Historian Kirk Savage, for instance, cites the active decision to almost completely exclude African American soldiers from commemorative Civil War sculpture during the last two decades of the nineteenth century as evidence of larger movement by white men to address

¹ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders* (New York: Scribner’s, 1899), 126.

insecurities about their own manhood. The emergence of thousands of citizen-soldier monuments during these years, reproduced in cities, towns, and villages throughout the country, were all adorned with a nearly identical “able, dutiful, moderate, self-disciplined” solitary white male soldier celebrating a manhood that “could not be realized without suppressing the memory of slavery and the black soldiers who fought to eradicate it.”² By honoring white Civil War soldiers exclusively in such a manner, those in control of shaping the public memory of the war and the nation’s identity afterward in popular culture blocked this pathway to acceptable manhood for black men prior to 1900. Black martial manhood was certainly still visible during these years, in the form of the tens of thousands of black soldiers serving in the regular army and local militia regiments, and the countless martially themed parades held by black fraternal orders during these years, but that manhood could not be confirmed in stone as one of the legacies of the Civil War.

Without the ability to establish their claim to manhood in this popular fashion, black leaders in the late 1800s scrambled to find another suitable route to demonstrate their capacity for civilized manliness. Many felt that the pathway to proving one’s manhood and merit as a citizen through racial uplift offered the greatest odds for success. Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and other leading African American voices of the age encouraged this by mirroring the actions and activities of middle-class whites of Western European descent, who, prior to the seemingly reckless bloodshed of World War I, proclaimed themselves the sole possessors of a truly civilized society.³ Uplift could be accomplished by practicing any number of the facets defining Victorian-era civilized manliness, including economic thrift, sexual self-restraint,

² Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldier, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 207.

³ Wilson Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 10-11, 20.

producerism, respectability in one's community, membership in any one of the various popular fraternal organizations, and the demonstration of one's intellectual abilities, among many others.⁴ And while middle-class black men did not claim the exclusive rights to the qualities that demarcated manliness, their attempts to highlight their own achievements in civility often meant posing themselves in opposition to, and sternly critiquing the rough, lurid, and unrestrained behavior of the black masses. Thus defining themselves in such a way provides the basis for visible, although at times fluid distinctions between the black middle and working classes, not based on economic or employment status, but on public behavior.

As uplift-minded African American men struggled to prove their worth to their white counterparts, the manly qualities of thrift and self-restraint they strove for were becoming less popular among white men. A number of historians have concluded that the nation's infatuation with Theodore Roosevelt's campaign in the Spanish-American War and the popularity of his earlier accounts of frontier life are evidence of a distinct shift in white male gender identity, transitioning from Victorian-era manliness to modern masculinity around the turn of the century. Those men who advocated Roosevelt's concept of manhood feared that they were losing touch with the "strenuous life" and were becoming too "feminized." Historians Gail Bederman and Kristin L. Hoganson argue that white men like Roosevelt advocated a type of conflict-bound virility that would not only cement their place atop civilization's hierarchy through imperial

⁴ For an analysis of the complexities facing male gender construction during the late-Victorian period, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Elliott Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prizefighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

conquest, but also redefine manhood based on power and dominance. This more aggressive and violent strain of white male gender identity also coincided with a period where the white-dominated political and social order in the South was in jeopardy. For black men, especially in the South, these changes to white male gender identity proved catastrophic.⁵

The social and political challenges to white control in the South wrought by the Civil War and Reconstruction left many white southerners scrambling to shore up their place in American society. The result was more than fifty years of Jim Crow segregation and disfranchisement that was accompanied by countless instances of physically and psychologically crushing racial violence. The original, and most frequently assumed reason for this violence revolved around a southern code of honor and the Lost Cause ideology.⁶ This code of honor encompassed two general spheres: personal honor and community honor. At the heart of both lay the protection (by violence if necessary) of white virtue. As time passed and the memories and behaviors of slavery faded, many southern white men perceived a new generation of young, uncontrollable black men who posed a threat to the sexual purity of white women. Defending white womanhood had thus become the most readily explainable answer for the motives behind white racial violence toward black men. As historian Timothy Tyson noted, “in a world that

⁵ For a thorough analysis of the detrimental effects of the Jim Crow era on black southerners, see Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

⁶ For a further analysis of the southern honor code, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Wilber J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). For a further analysis on the Lost Cause ideology, see William C. Davis, *The Lost Cause: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E. B. Treat, 1868).

lacked healthier conceptions of male identity, violence in the defense of womanhood did much to define both whiteness and manhood.”⁷ In the decades following the Civil War, images of “Negro domination,” in both politics and the bedroom—whether real or imagined—struck a raw nerve in many white Americans.⁸

This honor code also provided the southern white population a way to cast African Americans as heathens and savages. The antithesis of white female purity was the image of the immoral, uncivilized “black-beast-rapist.” In creating these images of whiteness and blackness, white men were able to justify their racially motivated violence by concluding that African Americans were not equally human, validating their self-defined white supremacist beliefs. As she investigated the truth behind the South’s violent behavior, black journalist and anti-lynching advocate Ida Wells-Barnett grimly concluded that “humanity abhors the assailant of womanhood, and this charge upon the Negro at once placed him beyond the pale of human sympathy.”⁹ Whites had the ability to punish blacks without attacks upon their own conscience.¹⁰

But as Wells-Barnett and others probed more deeply into the causes and excuses given for racial violence, a more sinister plot became apparent. White politicians used the defense of

⁷ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 50-53; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 137; Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 140.

⁸ For an analysis of the sexual insecurities in white men leading to the creation of the myth of the black beast rapist, see Lisa Lindquist-Dorr, *White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race in Virginia, 1900-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Diane Miller Sommerville, *Rape & Race in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁹ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors; A Red Record; Mob Rule in New Orleans* (New York: Ayer, 1969), 10.

¹⁰ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*, 5.

white womanhood as a device for uniting white voters of different economic classes and parts of the South. The brief political fusion of black Republicans and Populists in the 1890s struck a tender nerve within the Democratic Party in the South. Tired of “Negro domination,” southern politicians like South Carolina Governors Ben Tillman and Cole Blease, and Mississippi Governor James Vardaman sought a way to unite poor, working class whites with the middle and upper classes. They accomplished this, in part, by alerting the white yeomanry to the mythical black male rapist that could be lurking around any corner, waiting impatiently for another snowy-pure victim.¹¹ The resulting period of “Redemption” for southern Democrats ushered in not only the systematic disfranchisement of African American voters across the South, but also the creation of an atmosphere where violent attacks on black men could occur without much provocation.¹²

And yet the avenues for protest and redress available to black leaders were limited by the social and political restraints of the age. As Reconstruction came to a close and the nation’s white men from the North and South rekindled the ties of brotherhood, black community leaders witnessed a quarter-century’s worth of civil rights progress and access to elected public offices evaporate.¹³ By advocating a path defined by conservative, white middle-class values, Booker T.

¹¹ Sommerville, *Rape & Race in the Nineteenth-Century South*, 201-202; See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 146; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 62-67.

¹² For a further analysis of attempts to disfranchise African American voters in the 1890s, see V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949); J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Neil McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); and Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹³ For a further analysis of white reconciliation in the decades following the Civil War at the expense of African Americans, see David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in*

Washington emerged as the leading voice guiding African Americans forward. Racial uplift achieved through economic thrift, a functional education, and civic responsibility would earn the respect of whites, who would hopefully then bestow upon African Americans a fuller measure of citizenship. Washington's reluctance to aggressively attack racism in public was shaped by his subscription to the codes of late-nineteenth-century manliness that demanded self-control, restraint, and comportment. And while Washington provided valuable direction in the late-nineteenth century, that direction must be understood within the limiting framework of his personal belief in accommodationist tactics and his close ties to the Republican Party.¹⁴

Washington felt that confronting white supremacy with scathing critiques of southern politics and the justice system were too aggressive for the time, and were most clearly articulated in his famed address at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition on September 18, 1895.

As Washington and government officials continually proved unwilling to address the issue of mob violence and disfranchisement head-on, more assertive black newspaper editors, clergymen, heads of fraternal organizations, historians, poets, and fiction writers stepped forward and offered alternative solutions for the debilitating effects discrimination and lynchings had within their communities. One of their primary goals was laying bare the lie that black men were lynched because they were unrestrained sexual predators. Wells-Barnett helped lead this crusade in 1892, using her Memphis newspaper, *The Free Speech*, as her mouthpiece. Her fact-finding

American Memory (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001) and Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldier, Kneeling Slaves*.

¹⁴ For a further analysis of Booker T. Washington's philosophies on education and his relationship with the Republican Party, see Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and W.E.B. Du Bois's more critical work, *Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903).

mission was not well-received by white Memphians because she revealed the truth behind white supremacists' tenuous political position and their extralegal methods for reclaiming social and political control by reducing black claims to civility and manliness and conversely confirming those qualities in themselves.¹⁵

Alexander Manly, the owner and editor of Wilmington, North Carolina's African American newspaper, the *Daily Record*, engaged in a similar endeavor later in the decade, sparking one of the era's most brutally repressive race riots in 1898. Manly used his newspaper to challenge the double-standard that defined sexual relationships between black men and white women as instances of uncontrolled rape, while the "inconceivable" cases where white men sexually assaulted black women found little reprisal. Further threatened by Manly's ability to unite poor voters of both races, Democratic mayoral candidate Alfred Waddell used the cover of election excitement to destroy the *Daily Record's* office and run the better part of Wilmington's black population out of town. The potential exposure of white supremacy's ugly truths posed by these two editors resulted in a typical southern response, violence (or threats thereof) and the forced flight of both Wells-Barnett and Manly to a safer environment in the North.¹⁶

While this cadre of black writers and newspaper editors actively confronted the myths about southern black manhood, a towering figure stepped into the ring, challenging nearly all

¹⁵ V. P. Franklin, *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths: Autobiography and the Making of the African-American Intellectual Tradition* (New York, Scribner, 1995), 66-67; Also see Alfreda M. Duster, ed., *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Paula J. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching*, (New York: Amistad, 2008).

¹⁶ From the relative safety of the North, Wells-Barnett and Manly joined forces with other African American newspaper editors, activists, and religious leaders to form a more comprehensive and multi-faceted vision for reform and progress than the path set forth by Washington and like-minded conservative black leaders and Republican allies. See William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 19-20.

previous definitions of black male identity. In the decade prior to World War I, Heavyweight Champion Jack Johnson's sheer physical prowess, proclivity for dating white women, and reckless behavior at once confirmed white fears regarding the unrestrained capacity of black male sexuality and contradicted the professed goals of black leaders who sought uplift through respectability and impulse control. Historian and Johnson biographer Geoffrey C. Ward claims that the boxer's behavior "alarmed" Booker T. Washington and represented "the antithesis of everything Washington had always said a black man should be: he was free-spending, not thrifty; brash instead of humble; [and] defiant in the face of white laws and customs intended to hamper his movement and limit his choices."¹⁷ This new and dangerous masculinity promoted by Johnson, however, popularized a set of behaviors that empowered the individual to think and act outside the established middle-class gender boundaries. Johnson's popularity thus swelled among African Americans because of both his unwillingness to comply with the subdued behaviors expected of a black man in the early 1900s and because of the elation they vicariously felt when the "Galveston Giant" pounded on white opponents inside the squared circle.¹⁸

The masculinity purported by Jack Johnson serves as the diametrical opposite to that of Washington, but these two choices were, by no means, the only ones available for black men to follow. While less confrontational than the manhood projected by the physically and sexually imposing boxer, a younger generation of black ideologues emerged during the first two decades of the twentieth century harboring their own ideas of proper masculine behavior. One such

¹⁷ Geoffrey C. Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 145; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 440-444.

¹⁸ Johnson actively chose to fight white opponents following his victory over Heavyweight Champion Jim Jeffries on July 4, 1910, because the racial tensions the fights created were more financially lucrative for Johnson and they afforded him the opportunity to continuously flout racial conventions of the era.

example was the owner and editor of the *Chicago Defender*, Robert Stengstacke Abbott, who situated himself somewhere between these two poles by advocating some of the uplift philosophies of his predecessors along with an unbending denunciation of discrimination and lynching common among his more aggressive contemporaries.¹⁹ These black men more readily embraced modern consumer culture and a more urgent approach to securing equality, but were still able to temper their message when necessary to appeal to powerful white elites.

Black men could also draw inspiration from one of the more consistent examples of black manhood throughout this period in the form of the many public fraternal organizations that remained popular into the 1930s. The visual culture on display in the parades held by the Knights of Pythias, Knights Templar Freemasons, the UNIA, and others contained a distinctive fusion of Christian values and middle-class respectability that did not offend white onlookers, with images of martial masculinity in the form of fraternal members donning traditional military regalia.²⁰ In both the North and the South, these affairs presented to black spectators one of the few remaining bastions of black male autonomy at a time when other public examples of manhood

¹⁹ For more on the *Defender* editor, see Roi Ottley, *The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955).

²⁰ In addition to a lengthier discussion of martially themed parades held by fraternal organizations in chapter 4, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 55-82; John M. Giggie, *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 59-74; Alessandra Lorini, *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the Search for Racial Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999); Kathleen A. Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Mitchell Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). For more on UNIA and the Universal African Legion parades, see Summers, 66-101.

such as casting a ballot or serving in a local militia were disappearing.²¹ It was becoming increasingly evident as the 1910s progressed, that the restrictive, reserved, and respectable manliness espoused by black conservatives was no longer the sole example of black manhood available, highlighting the variety and fluidity of the black male identities that marked the age.

The death of Booker T. Washington in November, 1915, symbolized the passing of his philosophies out of popular black thought. For more than a decade, challenges to Washington's conservative conception of racial uplift were voiced by Wells-Barnett, W.E.B. Du Bois, William Monroe Trotter, and others, and by the mid-1910s, these critiques were gaining momentum, especially among working-class audiences.²² Despite his well-acknowledged relationship with the Republican Party during the Roosevelt and Taft administrations, in the eyes of more eager civil rights activists, Washington failed to generate enough substantial positive gain. Steady increases in lynchings, the wholesale disfranchisement of black voters across the South, and the emergence of a system of segregation that all defined the Jim Crow era occurred during Washington's tenure as the unofficial spokesman for the race, and these facts could not be overlooked by the critics of the Tuskegee program. The founding of the NAACP in 1909, the steadily increasing northward migration of African Americans, and frustration over the slow pace of Washington's path to progress all contributed to the shifting appreciation of a more aggressive approach to securing civil rights as the 1910s advanced.

²¹ In addition to the martial masculinity presented to black male audiences during fraternal order parades, membership in such organizations further reinforced notions of black manhood by giving members the opportunity to fulfill their roles as providers at home by accessing building and home loans and life and burial insurance offered through their fraternal orders. Furthermore, within the secure confines of their lodges and meeting halls, these men engaged in activities that bolstered male camaraderie free from white intrusion and influence.

²² For a more thorough analysis of the contest for black leadership during the first two decades of the twentieth century, see Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Wilson, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*.

In addition to the wildly celebrated hyper-masculinity displayed by Jack Johnson, the aggressive young black entrepreneurs and community leaders who emerged during the early twentieth century, and the countless examples of martial manhood displayed in the parades of black fraternal organizations, one of the most noticeable places where the transition away from a popular belief in patience and accommodation played out was in the nationally distributed martial imagery in black popular and print culture in the decade surrounding World War I. Before the war, this imagery showed passive, patient, and occasionally, abuse-laden black soldiers. The qualities exhibited by these soldiers reflected the traits ascribed to Victorian-era manliness, both black and white, rather than the modern masculinity that became increasingly appealing after the summer of 1918. The aggressive nature of the war, and the hundreds of thousands of working-class African American soldiers who experienced it firsthand, stood in clear contrast to traditional middle-class gender norms, and this aggressive behavior soon became viewed as a viable tool for defending black rights and safety at home in the postwar period. But little had changed for the black elite class after the war. Their elevated status was still tenuous at best, so advocating tactics such as armed self-defense was largely left in the hands of working-class black men with comparatively less to lose.

Historian Martin Summers has noted that older, more conservative black elites openly rejected these gender constructions, and younger elites who may have privately agreed with such behavior feared that subscribing to these aggressive masculine values in public would jeopardize the elevated social and political status they worked so diligently to create. Summers concludes that “in this sense, the black middle class is defined...by its self-conscious positioning against the black working class—through its adherence to a specific set of social values and the public

performance of those values.”²³ These bourgeois principles marked the ideological difference from the aggressive masculinity endorsed by the working class that was often too risky for the black middle class to publically embrace during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

When confronted with challenges that required a more physical response, many black elites became fully aware of the complexity of their precarious position in society. The tactics available to them were dictated by their elevated social standing, and demanded patience, compromise, finesse, and, occasionally, submission, despite a longing to act with greater urgency and force. The depths of this complexity were often voiced in the literature and media produced for, and consumed by, black elites, and is most explicitly seen in the behavior of Dr. Kenneth Harper, the protagonist in Walter White’s first novel, *Fire in the Flint* (1924). Harper went to France as an officer, but despised the carnage and waste of war. He returned home and served his community as a physician and intellectual, while taking pride in avoiding the political and cultural unrest that roiled just below his feet. Harper’s pacific world was shattered when his younger brother was lynched for killing two members of a white mob. His well-mannered, elitist reasoning abandoned him momentarily, as he thought only of retaliatory violence. For the remainder of the novel, White uses Harper to reveal the internal turmoil experienced by the Talented Tenth, the black elites forced to weigh the decision to fight back and potentially sacrifice everything.²⁴

By not having to navigate the complex landscape of patronage and public image that their social betters encountered, the black working class could play by a different set of rules. Their

²³ Summers, 6.

²⁴ For a more thorough analysis of White’s *Fire in the Flint*, see Marlon B. Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 105-120; Mark Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 133-147; and Summers, 211-224.

response to discrimination and racial violence was shaped, in part, by the hyper-masculine wartime culture that celebrated the black soldier in World War I, whose physical dominance, grit, and forceful and immediate action more readily became their standard of black manhood. When two African American privates, Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts, single-handedly routed a German raiding party in no man's land in the early morning hours of May 14, 1918, for example, American newspapers hailed the two heroes as "first class Americans." Their pictures were splashed across front pages and their story was told in countless editorial columns. No one could have predicted that the grizzly details of their encounter, and countless other acts of black martial heroism, would play a key role in revising way African American men understood both their manhood and their place in American society. The validation of their aggressive, masculine actions during the war helped accelerate the widespread endorsement of similar behavior, typified by a forceful urgency, among black men facing the trials of the Jim Crow era in the immediate postwar years.

Unlike the muted accounts of black soldiers during the nineteenth century, depictions of black men, both in and out of uniform, vanquishing white enemies became standard subject matter in political cartoons in black newspapers, inexpensive artwork, commemorative historical volumes detailing black participation in the war, public events and parades featuring black soldiers, and war films during and immediately after World War I, as part of a black-controlled news media and consumer goods market that did not exist prior to the preceding two decades. These images, in conjunction with the growing popularity of violent themes in coon songs, the raw aggression in boxing matches, and the tradition of martially inspired black fraternal organization parades represent the culmination of a twenty year shift away from earlier gender

norms dictated by white middle-class values that called for politeness, respectability, and patience among a population struggling for equality and domestic tranquility.

The late-1910s and 1920s certainly was the era of the New Negro, but what this nomenclature exactly meant varied greatly by class status. The term popularized by Alain Locke in his 1925 anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, generally applied to black intellectuals and the vibrant, young, socially elite crowd in urban black communities. Locke's New Negro was a black man or woman who employed political and academic discourse and advocated the production high art and literature to change the negative racial stereotypes of passivity, laziness, and a general lack of intellectual and cultural sophistication that had been foisted upon the race by whites.²⁵ The phrase, however, came into use in popular print media seven years earlier to describe the changing attitude of black men in general in the wake of World War I. Commentators in 1918 and 1919 spoke of a New Negro forged in battle that fully embraced the mores of modern masculinity—powerful, physically dominant, and violent. For working-class black men, the latter definition of the New Negro was the model of manhood that they could best associate with and incorporate into their daily lives, and they did so with greater ease and fewer complications than their social betters.

The black population's acceptance of a more aggressive, masculine pursuit of civil rights, first sputtered to life during the Spanish-American War era. It crystallized during the World War I years, where it became domesticated and more palatable for many black elites as the martial masculinity exhibited by black soldiers was transplanted into postwar culture. It then continued on through World War II and the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, speaking to the

²⁵ For a more complete expression of Locke's definition of the New Negro, see Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro," *Survey Graphic* 6.6 (March, 1925): 631-634; and Locke, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925).

continuity of the black freedom struggle since the turn of the twentieth century. Marking these early dates as critically important for the creation of black militancy and notions of masculinity within the black community will allow historians to isolate the origins and inspirations that encouraged African American men to take up arms to protect their families and neighborhoods and commit to an unrelenting drive for equality. These events, then, highlight a long-standing tradition that embodies a significant part of the greater freedom struggle, rather than a few brief moments of bravado or insanity decades before Robert Williams, the Deacons for Defense, and the Black Panthers advocated such behavior in the 1960s.

The early twentieth century was a complex and dynamic time when the social, cultural, political, and economic identity of the United States was being transformed. The men who called themselves “race leaders” changed and redefined themselves and their ideologies quite frequently. For the millions of African Americans living primarily in the South, accommodationism was espoused as a far more popular option than the militant resistance advocated by a daring few prior to the 1910s. The subsequent Great Migration, the development of a national black news service and the growth of the *Chicago Defender*, the emergence of a cadre of more assertive civil rights activists, a building frustration with the pace of advancement among young African Americans, and of equal significance, the cultural changes wrought by World War I converged to make this second, more militant avenue forward publically acceptable.

And while this study attempts to distinguish the diverging modes of acceptable public behavior between the black working class and their social betters, it is critically important to consider that neither of these groups were monolithic in their thoughts and actions. Pragmatism and individuality often dictated, to varying degrees, where on the spectrum between

accommodationism and militancy someone fell, marking this as a period of ideological fluidity. Du Bois flirted with passivity and submission during the war. By supplying scores of black rioters with weaponry during the riot in East St. Louis in 1917, Dr. Leroy Bundy, a wealthy black dentist, shows evidence of a broadening interest in modern masculinity among a previously conservative black elite. And Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts had difficulty coping with their roles as working-class black war heroes and died rather unceremonious early deaths.

As unfortunate as their postwar personal lives were, images and accounts of Johnson and Roberts dominated the news media almost immediately after their fateful encounter with two dozen German raiders in May 1918. This demotic form of media was a central feature in the shaping of black popular culture and provides the backbone of the source material used for this project, with a handful of African American newspapers playing a specifically vital role. Extant copies of widely circulated black weeklies including the *Chicago Defender*, *Cleveland Gazette*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, and *New York Age* were painstakingly examined from cover to cover over a ten-year period from 1914-1923, revealing any changes in tone and media content before, during, and after the United States' involvement in World War I. Forays into the *Washington Bee*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Savannah Tribune*, *Richmond Planet*, *Cincinnati Union*, and *Topeka Plaindealer*, along with black monthly magazines such as *The Messenger*, *Crusader*, and *The Crisis* provided additional material along a broad spectrum of opinions and viewer locales.

The *Defender*, however, was by far the most popular black press of the era, claiming a circulation of a staggering 230,000 copies per week by 1920.²⁶ Historian William G. Jordan suggests that *Defender* employee J. Hockley Smiley was responsible for the paper's mass appeal by implementing a policy of sensational writing that, during the decade surrounding the war,

²⁶ Ottley, 139.

transformed the paper into an “organ of racial propaganda” and boosterism.²⁷ Depending on a source with a reputation for inaccurate, and on occasion, blatantly fabricated news coverage requires a more methodical, and at times, skeptical analysis of the claims being made therein. In this case, examples of sensationalized or self-serving content in the *Defender* were cross-checked against other African American and white newspapers, and when possible, the writer’s motives for publishing such material were also evaluated.

Modern historians, myself included, wrestle with this lack of factual reportage, but in a cultural history such as this, the quantifiable difference between fact and fiction is often less significant than the amplified and exaggerated message that contemporary black readers had few qualms about purchasing, viewing, and embracing, evidenced by the meteoric ascent of the *Defender* during the 1910s and ‘20s. *Defender* correspondent Eugene Brown’s coverage of the Rosewood race riot in early January, 1923, is a prime example of a case where the message relayed by the most widely distributed black newspaper outweighs our current knowledge of the author’s ‘creative’ treatment of the event. Brown claimed that a black World War I veteran named Ted Cole helped inspire the local African American population in the rural Florida town to take up arms in what was suggested as a successful defense of their homes against a white mob. After ninety years of scholarly attention, we now know that Cole was a figment of the author’s imagination and that Rosewood was effectively leveled. A casual reader of the *Defender* on January 13, 1923, however, without having an intimate knowledge of the events in that north-central Florida town, had much less reason to doubt Brown’s front page headline: “Ex-Soldier is Hero in Bloody Riot” and the two-page account that followed.²⁸ The take-away message for

²⁷ Jordan, 32-33.

²⁸ *Chicago Defender*, January 13, 1923.

contemporary black readers was that martial heroism was an effective deterrent to mob violence. In this manner, the historical inaccuracies in the *Defender*, while still being recognized, take a backseat to the author's intended purpose of advancing an advocacy of martial masculinity.

In addition to the often-embellished general news coverage and editorial columns, these newspapers served as a source of information for a host of other popular culture forms. For example, by tracking the prevalence of a certain film in a newspaper's theater listings over consecutive weeks in conjunction with editorial reviews of that film, one can estimate the popularity (or lack thereof) of said motion picture.²⁹ The same technique can be applied to a wide range of consumer goods that appeared in advertisements in widely circulated newspapers such as the *Defender*. Nearly all of the examples of martial artwork, historical war monographs, and wartime memorabilia that were advertised on the pages of black newspapers and magazines exist today in various archives, catalogs, and public collections, thanks in large part to their mass production roughly one hundred years ago.

Determining which of these items working-class African Americans most likely gravitated toward was accomplished by first analyzing the content of a product, then its affordability based on the advertised price, and its availability to black consumers. Jennie Louise Welcome's painting "Charge of the Colored Division Somewhere in France," for example, was advertised in the widely circulated *Defender* beginning July 20, 1918, and ran in twenty-one

²⁹ Many of the films explored in chapter 5 of this study no longer exist due to the deterioration of the original film stock as released to the public over the past ninety years. Under such limiting factors, the most fruitful avenues for analyzing the content of these lost films were the contemporary reviews by staff writers Tony Langston and Lester B. Walton at the *Chicago Defender* and *New York Age*, respectively, and Harry T. Sampson's encyclopedic reference, *Blacks in Black and White: A Source Book on Black Films (Second Edition)* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995), along with examining the original U.S. Army Signal Corps footage available at the National Archives (Record Group 111) that was later edited by black film companies to suit the commercial demands of black audiences.

consecutive weekly issues through December 7. The prints could be purchased for a modest twenty-five cents—certainly within the budget of working-class African Americans.

Furthermore, consumers could acquire the print directly from the Touissant Studios in Harlem via the advertisement, or from a list of local agents licensed to sell the firm's products from Massachusetts to Texas, and many points in between.³⁰ Finally, the content of the piece stands out as explicitly violent, depicting an African American soldier burying his bayonet into a fallen German combatant, capturing the aggressiveness, physical male dominance, and martial masculinity that was amplified by the war. And while these products were by no means exclusively purchased by working-class consumers, especially as black elites became more comfortable with such imagery, the mass appeal of "Charge of the Colored Division" was derived from its portrayal of a rough masculinity that was more familiar to working-class black men.

One of first examples of martial pop culture that featured this aggressive martial masculinity depicted war hero Henry Johnson in an editorial cartoon that ran in the *Defender* on June 1, titled "Two Real Americans." This specific cartoon marked the turning point between prewar sketches in editorial artwork depicting passive and heartbroken black soldiers lamenting their mistreatment, and postwar images showing an unyielding, masculine fighting spirit. This transition in the way African American soldiers were drawn in editorial cartoons is the subject of the study's second chapter. Representations of Henry Johnson and other black soldiers in inexpensive artwork and affordable published historical volumes are explored in chapter three,

³⁰ See October 5, 1918 advertisement in *Chicago Defender* for a list of names and addresses of Touissant Studio agents residing in Alabama, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Texas, Indiana, Kansas, Tennessee, Ohio, and Massachusetts.

mirroring the thematic transition in martial imagery from prewar conservatism to postwar physical prowess in working-class consumer goods.

Chapter four takes working-class black audiences into the streets to witness innumerable soldier parades and public celebrations of martial heroism. The fifth chapter explores the presence of martial imagery in the emerging black film industry, and its influence on the working-class black audiences that flocked to theaters in the late 1910s and early 1920s. And finally, the sixth chapter analyzes the cumulative effect of this pop culture saturation of martial imagery on how black men responded with increasing militancy to racial violence in the immediate postwar years. But before any investigation of early twentieth century martial masculinity can be conducted, the trend's development and limitations during the Spanish-American War era must be evaluated—which is the subject of chapter one.³¹

³¹ The decade leading up to the Spanish-American War in 1898 serves as the starting point for this project because it represents the first foreign war conducted by the United States since the conclusion of the Civil War and the passage of the Reconstruction-era constitutional amendments that supposedly guaranteed citizenship to former slaves. Thus, the conflict with Spain in Cuba and the Philippines marked the first opportunity for all able-bodied African American men to volunteer their services in defense of what was now fully their own country. Black military participation in both the U.S. Armed Forces and in state and local militia organizations dates back to the Revolutionary War, and continued essentially unbroken through the war in 1898, but for the purposes of this project, beginning in 1890 captures enough of this tradition which led into a distinctly new period of foreign service after emancipation.

CHAPTER 1: A Safe and Manly Middle Ground: Black Martial Imagery During the Spanish-American War Era.

Over the course of four sweltering July days in 1898, United States soldiers assaulted a number of well-defended Spanish positions on the hills surrounding Santiago, Cuba. Both white and African American troops participated in the costly but successful affray. The account of the charge in the Salt Lake City *Broad Ax*, however, shocked many readers by suggesting that Theodore Roosevelt's famed Rough Riders:

Were ambushed by the Spaniards and would have been utterly annihilated had not these black men gone to the rescue, and driven the Spaniards into retreat. On the memorable day when the battle raged...and it looked as though our army was doomed to defeat, these Negro soldiers, these heroes of the American army, went bravely up the hill of San Juan, captured the blockhouse before the fire of Spanish bullets as thick as hail in a hail storm and thus won the battle to the honor of our country.¹

The heroics of the all-black 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry Regiments became the focal point of similar reports in black newspapers in addition to the coverage in the *Broad Ax*. One point that stands out in these reports is the suggestion that Roosevelt's men faced certain death on the battlefield until they were saved by the heroics of their African American compatriots. This interpretation of the events near Santiago, however, was not typically found in the mainstream American press. There, the heroism of the African American regiments was greatly downplayed, ignored, or twisted into tales of cowardice, leaving the future-President Roosevelt's miraculous survival and victory alone in the spotlight.

The development of these two competing memories can be explained by the handful of African America newspaper editors, like Julius F. Taylor of the *Broad Ax*, who felt compelled to

¹ *Broad Ax (Salt Lake City)*, November 26, 1898.

address the general lack of recognition of black heroism during the Spanish-American War. In the weeks following the U.S. Army's victories at El Caney and Santiago, Harry C. Smith, editor of the *Cleveland Gazette*, another black newspaper, reminded his readers that the four African American regiments performed as well as any white regiment. He further explained that "the effort of several leading daily [white] papers to make it appear that the Rough Riders did it all, died in its infancy."² An appeal to black soldiers and civilians that appeared in both the Indianapolis *Freeman* and the *Broad Ax* expressed even bolder sentiments, claiming "the white press desire[s] to show that colored officers are incompetent and that Negro privates are insubordinate under colored officers. Boys, give them the lie by showing that you are the best and bravest soldiers who follow the stars and stripes."³ As race relations deteriorated at the close of the nineteenth century, these organs of African American culture and identity waged a battle to establish the "gallant negro soldier" as the ideal role model for current and future generations of African American men.

The presentation of such heroes and their likenesses progressed through three distinct phases in the 1890s. First, accounts of well-trained state-level black militia groups created during and after the Civil War were widely publicized in a variety of media outlets underscoring the soldiers' roles as exemplary citizens in the years leading up to the war with Spain in 1898. Public events such as military training encampments, parades, and picnics allowed black civilians to become familiar with and appreciate their armed young men. Secondly, the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars at the end of that decade contributed accounts of unparalleled wartime bravery and sacrifice to the soldiers' heroic aura. The final stage in the construction of

² *Cleveland Gazette*, July 23, 1898.

³ *Broad Ax (Salt Lake City)*, January 14, 1899.

these gallant figures was their transformation from ephemeral subjects in weekly black newspaper columns to immortals in histories, bound volumes of poetry, and works of fiction—all lasting works that could be celebrated, cherished, and passed down through generations of African American readers. This process of showcasing black soldiers in popular and print culture became a fashionable method of presenting acceptable manly behavior that fit the mores of the age.

The visibility of black men in military uniforms expanded in the aftermath of the Civil War. Although African Americans had served in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, an estimated 173,000 black soldiers served in the Civil War—thirty-five times the number that helped free the nation from British rule.⁴ The tradition of patriotism by black Americans was undeniable, and the Civil War represented a highpoint in African American participation in the armed forces. Some 85,000 African Americans served in the army of occupation following the war, leaving a lasting impression on millions of former slaves.⁵ Between the late 1860s and 1890, black veterans of the Civil War and their supporters formed countless militia and paramilitary organizations dedicated to protecting the rights of African Americans.⁶

⁴ There were an estimated 5,000 black soldiers participating in the Revolutionary War. Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 64-69. Estimates of black soldiers in the Civil War ranged from 160,000 to 200,000. The figure used here, 172,984, was listed in Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 92. For a thorough analysis of the various roles played by black soldiers in the Civil War, see William A. Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862-1867* (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2011).

⁵ Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 132-133.

⁶ Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 36. For an overview of black militia participation in public activities between the Civil and Spanish-

The frequency of public exhibitions by black militia organizations prior to the outbreak of war with Spain in 1898 represented an attempt by African Americans to project an image of strength and discipline to both black and white onlookers. According to historian Kathleen Clark, “Black southerners understood that their rights were only as secure as their ability to defend them with force, and they demonstrated their will to do just that in highly militaristic urban processions, as well as in the frequent drills that were conducted by black militias on the streets of southern towns.”⁷ And while these militia regiments wielded little tangible power and were at the mercy of local and state governments, they played a pivotal role in entertaining and inspiring the African American public. Among other redeeming characteristics, their well-choreographed drill exhibitions and near flawless discipline record were typical attributes of Victorian-era manliness, which put a premium on respectability and self-restraint.

One such example developed in the former Confederate capital, where black Richmonders were fully aware of the importance of military training for young men at the outset of the 1890s. The foundation for a permanent military school for African Americans was laid out by a handful of local officials and officers in the black regiments of the Virginia Volunteer Infantry during the summer of 1891.⁸ Despite the accessibility of secondary education in the area, the representatives agreed that avenues leading to military training for local African

American Wars, also see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 55-104; Alessandra Lorini, *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the Search for Racial Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999); and Mitchell A. Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

⁷ Clark, *Defining Moments*, 126.

⁸ The initial preamble and resolutions from this meeting were first printed in the *Richmond Times*, the city’s white daily newspaper, on July 9, 1891. The *Richmond Planet*, the black weekly from Richmond reprinted the article several weeks later, on September 19.

Americans were completely obstructed. Echoing Victorian-era aspirations of upward mobility, the *Richmond Planet* urged that in order to reach “a higher plane of civilization,” proper military training was equally vital for young black men.⁹ Along with access to an education, an African American man needed martial instruction to “prepare him to protect his country and fireside against invasion and revolution”—essentially suggesting that the proposed curriculum would generate strong, patriotic *men*.¹⁰

In addition to providing military instruction, the training schools and annual state encampments offered a venue for the soldiers to interact with the public. The week-long encampment of the 1st Alabama Battalion at Camp Thomas G. Jones in Mobile beginning on July 2, 1895, highlighted the bond between black state militiamen and the citizens they vowed to protect. The 1st Alabama was comprised of two companies of between fifty and seventy men.¹¹ Mobile’s Gilmer’s Rifles, led by career politician, civil servant, Freemason, and Alabama State Trooper, Captain Reuben Romulus Mims—the epitome of Victorian-era manhood—gained national acclaim as the “standard of perfection” in both drill and discipline.¹² The second company was Montgomery’s Capital City Guards, under the leadership of Captain Abraham Calvin Caffey. Together, these two groups were invited, on three occasions in the 1890s to join the white battalions at the Alabama State Troop training camps in Mobile.¹³

⁹ *Richmond Planet*, September 19, 1891.

¹⁰ *Richmond Planet*, September 19, 1891.

¹¹ *Mobile Daily Register*, July 2, 3, 1895.

¹² *Washington Bee*, April 9, 1887.

¹³ For a more complete history of Mobile’s Gilmer’s Rifles see Beth Taylor Muskat’s “Mobile’s Black Militia: Major R. R. Mims and Gilmer’s Rifles,” *Alabama Review* 57.3 (July 2004): 183-205.

Members of the black companies desired the attendance of locals, both black and white, at Camp Jones to display their newly learned maneuvers. Public invitations, visitation hours, and a schedule of events appeared in the *Mobile Daily Register* and the *Mobile Daily News*. The soldiers requested the attendance of local African Americans, so they could show off the skill and discipline they had learned under Mims and Caffey.¹⁴ The black communities from Mobile and Montgomery accepted the invitation. Thousands flocked to the encampment. Excursion trains ran between the two cities providing transportation for the scores of black spectators traveling roughly 150 miles from Alabama's capital to visit the camp. Inclement weather complicated matters but failed to discourage the "1,500 colored people who had come to witness the martial glory of their race."¹⁵

By late afternoon on July 5, an estimated 4,000 black Alabamians gathered to observe the highlight of the program—an elaborately staged mock battle between the Capital City Guards and Gilmer's Rifles.¹⁶ This exercise showcased the black troopers' skill with a variety of firearms and their discipline. Members of the crowd noted that after the trumpet sounded to cease firing, not a single rifle or pistol was discharged.¹⁷ Following the mock battle were marksmanship contests and drills. The day's events culminated with an opportunity to meet the troops at a reception held on the camp grounds, and Mims extended the camp visiting hours from ten to eleven that evening.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Mobile Daily News*, July 2, 3, 5, 1895; *Mobile Daily Register*, July 3, 5, 1895.

¹⁵ *Mobile Daily Register*, July 6, 1895.

¹⁶ *Mobile Daily Register*, July 6, 1895; *Mobile Daily News*, July 5, 1895.

¹⁷ *Mobile Daily Register*, July 6, 1895.

¹⁸ *Mobile Daily Register*, July 6, 1895.

The encampment ended on July 7, with farewell addresses given by Colonel Harvey E. Jones (white) of the Alabama State Troops (AST), Major Mims, Dr. C. N. Dorsette, and Reverend A. F. Owens, the battalion chaplain, to both the troops and the throngs of spectators in attendance.¹⁹ Jones, one of the highest-ranking officers in the AST, “officially complimented the battalion for their excellent drilling, good order in camp, their deportment on the streets of the city, and the martial spirit manifested,” and ensured the place of the 1st Alabama in the state militia.²⁰ Mims further acknowledged the progress the troops had made and thanked the men for their soldierly obedience. The *Daily Register* noted that both speeches left lasting impressions on the soldiers and civilians alike.²¹

Local newspapers provided detailed coverage for the black Alabamians unable to attend the festivities in person. For six days, stories of black soldiers filled the pages of the *Mobile Daily Register* and the *Mobile Daily News* with accounts of group and individual accomplishments. Highly skilled black men were publicly acknowledged by name and rank. A common example was the case of Second Lieutenant W. G. Lewis of the Gilmer’s Rifles. He was described as the “best drilled man in the camp,” which obviously contradicted the stereotype of the brutish black man who was incapable of self-restraint.²² Both black and white newspapers praised these well-drilled, armed black men. The commonly held fears of millions of white southerners that black men in uniform would shatter their fragile social and political system was somewhat mollified by the newspaper coverage from Camp Jones. The arrival of black troops at

¹⁹ *Mobile Daily News*, July 7, 1895.

²⁰ *Mobile Daily Register*, July 7, 1895.

²¹ *Mobile Daily Register*, July 7, 1895.

²² *Mobile Daily News*, July 3, 1895.

military training camps populated by far greater numbers of white soldiers often led to tension and occasional violence, but the African American divisions of the 1st Alabama quickly earned the respect of their white comrades. The *Mobile Daily News* proudly reported that after one full day in camp, “There has not been a single arrest made thus far and no disorder has occurred.”²³ Good discipline was maintained throughout the encampment, and following the breaking up of camp on July 7, the same daily paper reported that “there was not one case of a colored wearer of a uniform acting in such a manner as to call even a reprimand from [any] civil guardians of the peace.”²⁴ These reports of well-disciplined black militiamen eased white fears and stirred black pride.

Official training encampments were not the only arena where the public interacted with these regiments of black soldiers. The early 1890s also marked a high point for unofficial public displays involving black militia groups during parades, town fairs, and community picnics where African Americans could bear witness to martial imagery. A well-choreographed mock battle between companies of the Colored Virginia Volunteers at Island Park, Virginia, on August 3, 1891, for example, was the highlight of a day filled with “base-ball contests” and carnival games. Similar in content to the performance by Alabama’s Gilmer’s Rifles and Capital City Guards, the thunderous roar of musket fire echoed along the banks of the James River.²⁵ Unofficial events such as the Island Park mock battle allowed the regiments to raise funds for new equipment, and to supplement the meager state allowance given to each company.²⁶ These extracurricular

²³ *Mobile Daily News*, July 3, 1895.

²⁴ *Mobile Daily News*, July 7, 1895.

²⁵ *Richmond Planet*, August 8, 1891.

gatherings could also be organized far more frequently than the annual encampments held by state governments, giving the public more opportunities to watch—and help fund—their local heroes.

With the memory of the 1st Virginia Volunteers' mock battle still fresh in the minds of black Richmonders, the *Richmond Planet* printed a lengthy history of the city's African American militia regiment. Serving to satisfy the public's desire for images of daring black soldiers, the article was released six weeks before the city's 1891 Great Agricultural and Industrial Fair—an event that would showcase, among other things, the “martial skills of the Negro.”²⁷ The highlight of such events was often the drill and target competition between black regiments from various Virginia towns. The State Guards from Richmond were very much a source of pride for that city's residents, and John Mitchell, Jr., the *Planet*'s editor, made sure his readers appreciated their skill. The article cited two instances where applause for the State Guards' precise maneuvers erupted before the troop had even finished their drill.²⁸ The account added to the celebrity of the State Guards by claiming that the unit was present at the presidential inaugurations of James A. Garfield in 1881, Grover Cleveland in 1885, and Benjamin Harrison in 1889. The black troops were highly commended at each event.²⁹ The well-planned timing of this article surely whetted black Richmonders' appetites for the upcoming fair.

²⁶ State funding for the First Alabama Battalion, for example, amounted to a total of \$200 annually, paid in four \$50 increments. Muskat, “Mobile's Black Militia,” 198.

²⁷ *Richmond Planet*, October 3, 1891.

²⁸ *Richmond Planet*, August 29, 1891. These performances occurred at the 1879 and 1880 exhibitions. The applause at the later event proved so boisterous that the Guards failed to clearly hear an order leading to a misstep that cost them first prize. The article claims that this was the only time the State Guards failed to win the highest honors.

²⁹ *Richmond Planet*, August 29, 1891.

As the Great Agricultural and Industrial Fair of 1891 drew closer, the *Planet* outlined the activities to take place on Thursday and Friday, October 8 and 9. The entire second day of the event was reserved for the military parade, drill exhibitions, marksmanship contests, and mock battles.³⁰ The article referred to these festivities as a considerable source of pride: “To witness this great military display alone should be sufficient inducement for every race loving Negro man or woman to attend the Fair. The exhibits will do great credit to the skill and industry of the Negroes of Va., and every man of African descent will have reason to be proud of his racial connection.”³¹ Later, the *Planet* revealed that the District of Columbia National Guards and the Baltimore Rifles made the journey southward to partake in the festivities.³²

1892 marked another banner year for African American militia regiments in Virginia. In less than four months, from July 4 to October 12, black Virginians bore witness to three more massive fairs featuring large-scale military processions. The Virginia Industrial, Mercantile, Building and Loan Association hosted the first celebration on July 4, commemorating its first anniversary, and the 116th for the United States. More than 3,000 spectators watched a baseball game, followed by the competitive drill and mock battle orchestrated by Major Joseph B. Johnson from the 1st Battalion, Virginia Volunteers.³³ After the second annual fair hosted by this same association in mid-September, the crowds headed for Lynchburg, Virginia, roughly 100 miles due west from Richmond. Advertisements for the “Lynchburg Colored Fair” ran for weeks

³⁰ The first day recognized agricultural and industrial organizations and achievements, provided opportunities for vendors of new farm and factory equipment to hawk their wares, and provided a stage for preachers and politicians to address the masses.

³¹ *Richmond Planet*, October 3, 1891.

³² *Richmond Planet*, October 17, 1891.

³³ *Richmond Planet*, July 9, 1892.

in the *Planet*, promising reduced railroad fare into the town, and boasting a military and civic society parade of more than 5,000 men.³⁴

Georgia regiments of black militia also entertained the general public by hosting a picnic at Atlanta's Piedmont Park in July of 1890. The goal was to celebrate the race's recent martial achievement but also to stress its discipline and decorum. The day-long affair gave Georgians an opportunity to witness drill and shooting competitions, horse races, and a fifty yard dash where the winner, in an added feat of quickness and strength, not only had to cross the finish line first, but also pull the head off a goose. The Lincoln Guards from Macon and the Columbus Volunteers arrived to join the three units from Atlanta, the Georgia Cadets, Fulton Guards, and Governor's Volunteers, making this a state-wide gathering. To further prove their conformity to the proscribed values of late-nineteenth-century manliness and emphasize the orderly and sober reputation of the regiments, organizers banned alcoholic beverages at the event.³⁵

Life in a black militia unit did not always focus on parades and mock battles, and accounts of African American troops serving their local community and state during times of crisis also found their way into black newspapers during the 1890s. By printing accounts of communities relying on African American militia, black newspapers suggested that these groups were of greater value than simply parading and drill exhibition. In its brief history of the black battalions of the Virginia State Guard, the *Richmond Planet* included an anecdote regarding the prompt response of the black militiamen to a fire at the Virginia State Penitentiary where they prevented inmates from escaping.³⁶ A second example reached the black press in Richmond from

³⁴ *Richmond Planet*, September 17, 1892.

³⁵ *Atlanta Constitution*, July 10, 1890.

³⁶ *Richmond Planet*, August 29, 1891.

Cleveland, Ohio. There, Mayor John H. Farley responded to an ongoing street-car strike by calling out the state militia—including the African American regiments—to disperse the rowdy employees and return order to the city. Farley commended the black troops for their “soldierly bearing, and prompt obedience of orders.”³⁷

For many white community leaders and public officials, however, doubts still remained regarding the usefulness, viability, and competency of their local black militia units in the heat of battle. Drill exhibitions, parades, and the occasions when African American militiamen were called on to preserve the peace were quickly becoming an unnecessary and potentially dangerous pastime in the eyes of the southern Democrats that were steadily recapturing political power by the late 1890s. These well-disciplined black soldiers were never a legitimate physical threat to southern whites because of their small numbers. They were, however, incredibly unsettling to the psychological well-being of white men who, themselves, could be the only ones capable of such civility and restraint. Their entire self-ascribed racial hierarchy depended on it.

And so a key component to southern “Redemption” was the crippling of any and all avenues to political and social equality for African Americans, and between 1890 and 1905 the machinery to disband black state militia units was put in place.³⁸ The termination of these

³⁷ *Richmond Planet*, August 19, 1899.

³⁸ For a more complete analysis of southern politics from the end of Reconstruction to the beginning of the Jim Crow Era, see classical studies V.O. Key Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949); C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); and newer analyses Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Post-Emancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

regiments was done in lockstep with a wider campaign by southern white supremacists attempting to roll back the political and social gains made during Reconstruction that introduced millions of black male voters and more than 2,000 African American officeholders.³⁹ The struggle for control of southern statehouses in the 1890s that forged a threatening political alliance between black and white poor farmers yielded momentary victories for Populist and Fusion Party candidates, only to fall victim to both legal and extralegal coups that secured the place of white supremacy in southern politics for more than fifty years.⁴⁰

Amid this turbulent political climate, the nation would find itself engaged in a war with Spain over custody of the crumbling European empire's North American and Pacific colonial territories, people, and resources. As a national call to arms was raised, officials in the U.S. Army, along with most white Americans, felt it was morally and militarily unacceptable to have black officers in command of any black regiments that may be formed.⁴¹ The denial of many

³⁹ For a further analysis of the role of African Americans during Reconstruction, see W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1935); Howard N. Rabinowitz, ed., *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Forrest G. Wood, *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

⁴⁰ For a further analysis of the political "fusion coalition" between southern black voters, poor white farmers, and the Populist Party, see Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*; Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁴¹ One of the primary concerns expressed by white military brass and civilians was the possibility of black officers coming to command white troops in the field. If, for example, a white regiment (with white officers) and a black regiment (with black officers) were fighting alongside each other, and the white officers perished, both units would then be commanded by the remaining black officers. Other foreseeable tensions arose over whether or not white soldiers would have to salute black soldiers that outranked them. The commissioning of black officers would violate the understanding of racial hierarchy that white Americans had developed over the previous three centuries.

capable black militia officers to an equivalent rank in the nation's wartime volunteer army regiments exasperated many black community leaders, who began subscribing to *Richmond Planet* editor John Mitchell, Jr.'s advocacy of the slogan "No Officers, No Fight."⁴²

The solution was relatively simple for white governors and army generals looking to avoid mustering in black officers—simply ignore the black regiments and draw from the all-white companies. Such was the case in Virginia with the well-drilled black state militia unit, the 1st Battalion of Volunteer Infantry commanded by Major Joseph B. Johnson. Ultimately, there was enough pressure exerted on Governor J. Hoge Tyler, leading to the formation of the 6th Virginia Volunteers regiment of the U.S. Army.⁴³ The District National Guards militia regiment faced similar problems and despite having "the support of the black press and of Negro Republican officeholders concentrated in Washington, its efforts to win a place in the volunteer army were of no avail."⁴⁴ Outraged by the state's refusal to muster them in, scores of black militiamen in the nation's capital considered resignation.⁴⁵

With the outbreak of war in Cuba in 1898, the United States government called up volunteer units from several states, including Alabama. Despite the popularity of the state's black officers, it asked that they, too, be replaced by whites. News of the sacking of high-ranking black officers prompted outrage from the Gilmer's Rifles and Capital City Guards. Indeed, most of the company from Mobile remained loyal to Major Mims and Captain C. J. Harlbert, and

⁴² Ann F. Alexander, *Race Man: The Rise and Fall of the "Fighting Editor," John Mitchell Jr.* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 92; *Richmond Planet*, May 7, 1898.

⁴³ Alexander, *Race Man*, 89-93.

⁴⁴ Willard B. Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1903* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 77.

⁴⁵ *Washington Bee*, May 7, 14, September 10, 1898.

refused the order. Eventually, Alabama Governor Joseph F. Johnston told them to either disband or close ranks and join Montgomery's Capital City Guards. For the black troops who still yearned to see real action, acquiescing to the installation of white officers became their only option. Eventually, a suitable white officer was placed in charge of the newly formed 3rd Alabama Volunteers, a conglomeration of black soldiers from Montgomery, Mobile, Huntsville, Troy, and Birmingham. But those soldiers who remained loyal to Mims stayed in Montgomery and missed their chance to fight in Cuba. They remained in the state militia until the Guards were mustered out in 1905.⁴⁶ It appeared that as the African American militiamen inched closer to fulfilling the requirements for manhood defined by white, middle-class, Victorian-era values, efforts were being made to arrest that development by unnerved white politicians.

The coming of the Spanish-American War, however, marked a turning point in the public roles of other black soldiers, and how these roles would be disseminated to black communities. As government officials debated the merits of war with Spain, military leaders rushed to prepare the nation's fighting forces. More than a decade of relative peace had left the army ill-prepared for combat, and units of soldiers now deemed unfit or unnecessary were being eliminated. Under such circumstances, black militiamen had limited options in the spring of 1898. They could enlist in the regular army and serve under white officers, hope their state governor would muster in their regiment as a volunteer unit, or disband completely. As the nation readied for combat and many black militia regiments fell by the wayside, newspaper accounts of black soldiers

⁴⁶ Willard B. Gatewood, "Alabama's "Negro Soldier Experiment," 1898-1899," *Journal of Negro History* 57.4 (October 1972), 339-343; Muskat, "Mobile's Black Militia," 204-205; *Birmingham Wide-Awake*, December 14, 1905. Alabama Governor William D. Jelks explanation for the disbanding of the regiment was their playing and singing "We'll Hang Jeff Davis on a Sour Apple Tree" while parading through Montgomery.

entertaining the public at picnics and parades faded into memory.⁴⁷ During this transitional period, the light-hearted images of mock battles were being replaced by a select group of black men who had the opportunity to become wartime soldiers for the United States of America. Newspaper editors prepared to deliver the second representation of manhood to black communities across the South—in images of African Americans as gallant wartime heroes.

The sinking of the *USS Maine* in Havana Harbor on the evening of February 15, 1898 changed more than the diplomatic relationship between two world powers. The conflicts in Cuba and the Philippines were the first foreign wars for the United States since the ratification of three constitutional amendments that bestowed full citizenship on the nation's former slaves. As exchanges between the United States and Spain grew more tense over the following two months, American men prepared for war. Heated arguments erupted among African American leaders over whether young black men should sacrifice their lives overseas defending a nation that offered them no protection from racially motivated violence and discrimination at home. Despite warnings from numerous trusted voices, black men rushed to enlist, setting aside their personal grievances to patriotically answer the call to duty. In an instant, the surroundings for many black soldiers shifted from mock battles on local baseball fields to charges on Cuban and Philippine battlefields. The popular image of the black soldier was greatly affected by what the *Washington*

⁴⁷ The mustering out of southern black militia regiments did not, however, stamp out all traces of martial culture in black public events and celebrations. Black Civil War veterans, fraternal organizations such as the Knights of Pythias, and the Universal African Legion (the paramilitary branch of Marcus Garvey's UNIA) all continued to hold widely attended public events long into the twentieth century that featured overt references to martial culture. See Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 70-75; Martin Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class & the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 93-101; and more broadly, Lorini, *Rituals of Race*.

Bee termed an act of “Spanish treachery.”⁴⁸ The black press capitalized on this new man—exemplified by his bravery, discipline, and unyielding courage in combat—as a true action hero.

The events that transpired near Santiago, Cuba, in early July had newspapermen scrambling to put columns together that would do justice to the courageous black combat soldiers. Accounts of the battles at El Caney and San Juan Hill, and the bravery exhibited by the four African American regiments in the regular army, spread with lightning speed. According to one white newspaper writer for the *New York Journal*, despite their “naturally peaceful” background and “careless and playful military discipline,” the reporter was awestruck by the courage and marksmanship of the black soldiers, and how “an inspiring cause can make soldiers worthy to rank with Caesar’s legions or Cromwell’s army.”⁴⁹ Of the 24th U.S. Infantry’s charge on San Juan, the *Washington Evening Star* reported that African Americans across the country were undeniably proud to hear of the daring advance by the black regulars that “inspired the entire line to heroic action.”⁵⁰ These two laudatory examples from white newspapers suggest that at least for this brief moment, the stereotypical depictions of lazy and careless black men could be set aside. Over the course of the war, accounts of gallantry filled the pages of black and white newspapers—many of which focused on the operational details of African Americans troops.

Printing letters from the front lines in Cuba and later from the Philippines gave black newspaper editors yet another avenue to publicize these new wartime heroes. African Americans

⁴⁸ *Washington Bee*, February 26, 1898. “Spanish Treachery” is the title of the *Bee*’s article covering the disaster.

⁴⁹ *Washington Bee*, July 9, 1898.

⁵⁰ *Washington Bee*, August 13, 1898. At the time of the Spanish-American War, there were four permanent regiments of African American soldiers in the United States Army, the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments and the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments. Volunteer regiments were often mustered in during times of war, but these four units remained in active and continuous duty from their formation in the late 1860s into the 1950s.

at home witnessed the arduous life of a black soldier through reports of costly victories and treacherous fighting conditions. Corporal Walter E. Merchant, of Company D, 48th Volunteer Infantry, sent home good news from the front lines in the Philippines. The soldier proudly claimed that men in his regiment had unwavering confidence in their black officers, and that racially narrow-minded white officers in the regular army were publicly congratulating their African American volunteers on a daily basis.⁵¹ As positive correspondence poured in, African Americans at home became personally invested in the pride and gallantry of their men overseas.

Combat bravery by African American troops also provided evidence to white soldiers that Victorian-era manliness might not be exclusive to the white race. Not only did this collection of manly qualities forge an image of stronger black men, it also evoked—for the first time in many cases—feelings of begrudging respect from some southern white men.⁵² A Private Smith (white), of the 71st Volunteer Infantry submitted a letter to the *Richmond Planet* revealing a dramatic change in his views. He admitted that only after living with black soldiers in camp and relying on them on the battlefield did he truly get to know them. The *Planet* ran a second letter written by a white soldier, this one from a Sergeant Stewart, of Theodore Roosevelt's 1st Volunteer Cavalry. In this note, Stewart disclosed how his opinion of *all* African Americans had been changed for the better by his experiences fighting alongside the 10th Cavalry in Cuba.⁵³

In addition to the cheery accounts of swift victories and the marginal improvements in race relations, there were an equal number of letters arriving from the front exposing the macabre

⁵¹ *Richmond Planet*, July 28, 1900; *Southern Watchman (Mobile)*, August 25, 1900.

⁵² *Broad Ax (Salt Lake City)*, July 9, 1898. These feelings were most prevalent among white men who served alongside black soldiers, and witnessed, firsthand, their courage and patriotism. Running counter to this point lies the reaction of a vast number of southern white men who felt threatened by regiments of militarized, armed black men.

⁵³ *Richmond Planet*, April 22, 1899.

side of war. These dispatches served as reminders to the men and women at home that actual warfare was far different from the choreographed battles they witnessed earlier in the decade. Horace Flood, an African American Private in the 9th U.S. Volunteer Infantry penned a letter to his former employer in New Orleans describing his experiences in Cuba days after the Spanish surrender in mid-August, 1898. After a number of rather mundane paragraphs, Flood recalled his encampment atop San Juan Hill. At first, his heart swelled as images of the 24th Infantry charging that same hill filled his memory. By late afternoon, however, his senses had had time to take in *all* of the stimuli at this historic site, and he began noticing the hoards of flies surrounding the hill and the nauseating stench of fallen soldiers hastily buried in shallow graves.⁵⁴

Flood's memoirs were supported by the casualty statistics printed alongside letters such as his. The *Washington Bee* estimated that more than 900 black soldiers comprising the 24th Infantry awoke on July 1, 1898, ready to charge San Juan Hill. Roughly one-third of that original force (just over 300 men) would survive the attack—more than 600 would not.⁵⁵ Other firsthand accounts verify these statistics, claiming that “when roll was called, after darkness had put an end to the fighting, companies originally numbering one hundred men reported only seventeen, twenty, and twenty-three present.”⁵⁶ These casualty reports, however, appear to be largely exaggerated, but this may be explained by considering one the editor's possible motives for such fabrications. Emphasizing, and in fact embellishing the losses suffered by the 24th Infantry seemed to be of far greater importance to Editor W. Calvin Chase than presenting factually accurate statistics because accentuating the sacrifices made by these soldiers reinforced their

⁵⁴ *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 24, 1898.

⁵⁵ *Washington Bee*, October 29, 1898.

⁵⁶ Herschel V. Cashin, et al., *Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry* (New York: Ayer, 1899), 130.

manliness. With the one-year anniversary of the battle approaching, and the outbreak of war in the Philippines, the *Bee* ran the same inspirational one-line editorial for weeks: “Don’t forget how the negroes fought on San Juan Hill.”⁵⁷

As the grim reports of black soldiers killed in action reached the United States mainland from the Philippine Islands, black newspapermen printed the names of those killed in action. “And so the bloody work goes on,” wrote *Planet* editor John Mitchell, Jr. in August 1899 after listing the names and companies of seven men, all from the 24th Infantry, who had been either killed or wounded in battle.⁵⁸ Two weeks later, a second article in the *Planet* recounted the tragic drowning of eleven soldiers, ten of whom were from the 24th, and one white private from the 4th Cavalry.⁵⁹ Mitchell’s public opposition to the war in the Philippines can be read in the tone of his writing, but he always opened his darker articles with a few words of praise for the gallant soldiers carrying on a cruel and unjust fight he felt had little tangible reward. It may be in these more sorrowful and morbid accounts that black newspapers cemented this updated image of the soldierly black man, epitomized by the realization of another Victorian-era gender norm, his complete self-sacrifice and willingness to face death for the people and values he cherished.

The hard work performed by black newspaper editors and staff writers during the late 1890s to bolster this image of black manhood did not go uncontested. Undoubtedly, the most dangerous threat came from Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, officer of the acclaimed Rough Riders, the 1st Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, and later Governor of New York and President of the United States. In January 1899, Roosevelt published the first of a series of articles on the Rough Riders

⁵⁷ *Washington Bee*, June 17, 1899.

⁵⁸ *Richmond Planet*, August 19, 1899.

⁵⁹ *Richmond Planet*, September 2, 1899.

in *Scribner's Magazine*. Although these articles focused mainly on the exploits of his white cavalymen, a number of passages criticized the African American troops fighting alongside him in Cuba. Even Roosevelt's praise for the black soldiers' valor was qualified by his remarks that "they are, of course, particularly dependent upon their white officers. Occasionally they produce non-commissioned officers who can take the initiative and accept responsibility precisely like the best class of whites; but this can not be expected normally, nor is it fair to expect it."⁶⁰

Roosevelt's comments suggesting that the majority of African Americans could not function without white leadership were met with little opposition among white readers.

Further attacking this image of African American strength, Roosevelt claimed that the black soldiers in his charge acted cowardly by drifting to the rear of the formation in the heat of battle. Having sufficiently inspired the black troops at revolver-point, Roosevelt felt proud of his ability to connect with his African American comrades, stating that "this was the end of the trouble, for the 'smoked Yankees'—as the Spaniards called the colored soldiers—flashed their white teeth at one another, as they broke into broad grins, and I had no more trouble with them, they seeming to accept me as one of their own officers."⁶¹ After reading this account in *Scribner's*, John Mitchell Jr. interpreted Roosevelt's motivational tactics quite differently, drawing a comparison to "the roughest and most brutal overseers" from antebellum southern plantations.⁶² It was clear that mainstream white opinions of the performance of African American soldiers were designed to reinforce a constructed racial superiority that was threatened by these armed, disciplined black men.⁶³

⁶⁰ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders* (New York: Scribner's, 1899), 141.

⁶¹ Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders*, 142-143.

⁶² *Richmond Planet*, April 22, 1899.

Under such attacks, those attempting to strengthen the image of black manhood struck back by printing their own accounts of courageous African American soldiers. In an article run on the same day, on the same page of the *Planet*, Mitchell supplied a variety of letters under the title “What Col. Roosevelt Did Not See.”—all of which directly refuted the future president’s assertions that black soldiers were a timid lot incapable of responsibility or leadership.⁶⁴ It was here that Mitchell printed the praiseworthy letters from Sergeant Stewart and Private Smith, the fair-skinned soldiers whose white supremacist beliefs dissolved after witnessing the gallantry of their black brethren.

The battlefield failures of ineffective white regiments gave additional ammunition to black editors, making the typically well-drilled black regiments look like saviors by comparison. Various black newspapers were quick to point out that the 25th U.S. Infantry rescued Roosevelt’s fabled Rough Riders from almost certain annihilation.⁶⁵ As the war in the Philippines escalated, and African American troops were being called to the front, the *Richmond Planet* suggested that the reliance on African American soldiers was simply another case of white troops being unable to finish the job. Editor Mitchell noted that “when white men fail to accomplish the task, then colored men are expected to come willingly forward” and clean up the mess.⁶⁶

Undisciplined white soldiers made the comparison even easier. On August 16, 1898, the 2nd Immune Regiment of white volunteers that was stationed in Santiago, Cuba, failed miserably

⁶³ For more examples of stinging white criticism of African American troops in the mainstream press, see *Atlanta Constitution*, June 11, 12, 1898.

⁶⁴ *Richmond Planet*, April 22, 1899.

⁶⁵ *Broad Ax (Salt Lake City & Chicago)*, August 6, 1898, October 14, 1899; *Washington Bee*, August 13, October 1, 1898; *Richmond Planet*, June 24, 1899.

⁶⁶ *Richmond Planet*, June, 17, 24, 1899.

at its task of preserving order within the town. Instead of maintaining order, the white soldiers wreaked havoc in Santiago, having been accused of discharging their firearms within the city, being drunk and disorderly, and burglarizing local businesses and residences. Of even greater concern was the allegation “that the virtue of women and little girls was not safe while they were in Santiago.”⁶⁷ Major General William Shafter had seen enough lawlessness, and ordered the troops away from the city. To add insult to the already injured ego of the white troops, the soldiers that replaced them, the 8th Illinois Volunteer Regiment, were African American.⁶⁸

During the final years of the nineteenth century, the newly forged image of the courageous, patriotic, self-sacrificing, and physically and emotionally strong black man received a great boost in the form of two American wars. The foundation for this image had been laid by the black militia organizations that were prevalent throughout the early 1890s. The Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, as covered by black newspapers, then highlighted the heroics of African American men in combat and provided enough documentation to successfully repel any challenges to these developing ideals.

The production of more enduring representations of black soldiers helped make permanent this version of the ideal black man. Newspaper coverage of these heroic African Americans provided only momentary glimpses of their courageous actions. Daily and weekly accounts in black papers remained significant only until the next edition came off the press. Bound historical volumes, works of art, poems, and novels marketed to African American audiences presented them with more lasting images of courageous and patriotic black soldiers. These combatants may have been fighting for access to American democracy and equality, but

⁶⁷ *Washington Bee*, September 10, 1898.

⁶⁸ *Weekly News and Courier (Charleston, SC)*, August 20, 1898; *Washington Bee*, September 10, 1898.

their image was often taken by black publishers for a different reason—to give their race examples of heroic, respectable, self-restrained *men* to emulate during one of the more brutal periods of race relations in the United States. The image of the heroic black soldier was made significantly more durable during this final transitional stage, in neatly bound volumes to be cherished in African American homes and inspire future generations.

As the Spanish-American War came to an end, black war historians churned out volumes recounting the heroics of black soldiers in action. By examining how the works targeted black audiences, two significant issues became apparent. First, black readers were very strongly encouraged, almost guilt-tripped into purchasing military histories that detailed the exploits of African American soldiers. According to the *Southern Watchman*, a black weekly newspaper printed in Mobile, Alabama, no collection of African American literature was complete until it contained a copy of Herschel Cashin's *Under Fire. With the Tenth U. S. Cavalry*, which the paper predicted would be quite popular among African Americans because it revealed the historical "facts as they really existed."⁶⁹ The *Washington Bee* proclaimed that Edward A. Johnson's *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War* "should be in the hands of every negro in the country."⁷⁰ The *Bee* also reviewed a copy of James M. Guthrie's *Camp-Fires of the Afro-American: Or, The Colored Man as a Patriot, Soldier, Sailor, and Hero in the Cause of Free America*, declaring that a book of this content and quality had been greatly desired and was long overdue. The review went on to claim that *Camp-Fires* was appealing to readers of all ages, and it would be a perfect holiday gift.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *Southern Watchman (Mobile)*, November 4, 1899.

⁷⁰ *Washington Bee*, July 22, 1899.

⁷¹ *Washington Bee*, November 4, 1899.

The second theme that book reviewers and advertisers highlighted was the number and quality of the illustrations in these histories—especially images of armed black soldiers. *Camp-Fires* was billed as containing more than 700 “profusely illustrated” pages, and used the most advanced color print technology for many of its images. Perhaps the greatest incentive for an African American to order the book was that “every purchaser receive[d] free a large premium picture, in fine colors, of the heroic charge of the US Colored Regulars near Santiago, Cuba. The picture is 18 x 24 inches in size, on plate paper, and is a work of art that will be desired by all self-respecting Colored people, who prefer paintings which honor their own race.”⁷² This companion artwork, when paired with Guthrie’s book brought visual representations of bravery, courage, manliness, and patriotism into the home—reinforcing these traits for years to come.

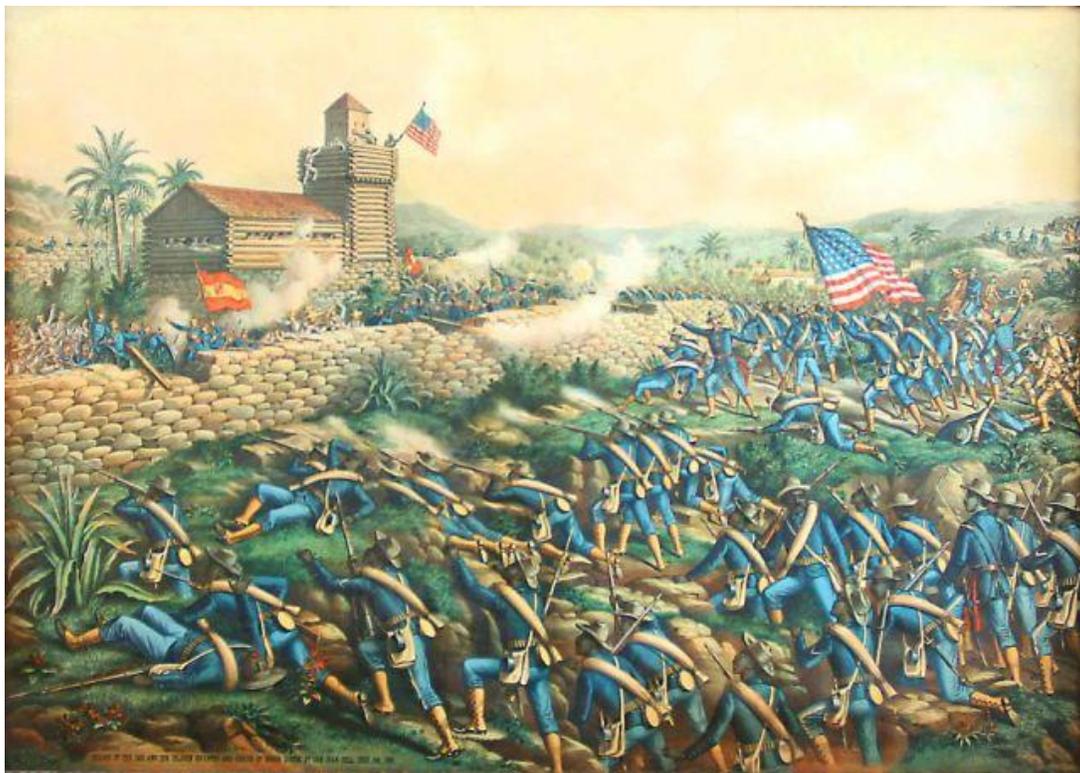


Figure 1. “Charge of the 24th and 25th Colored Infantry and Rescue of Rough Riders at San Juan Hill July 2, 1898” by Kurtz and Allison, 1899. A similar piece of artwork accompanied the purchase James M. Guthrie’s war history, *Camp-Fires of the Afro-American*, as advertised by the *Washington Bee* in November, 1899.

⁷² *Washington Bee*, November 4, 1899.

A number of these authors focused their histories on particular regiments, such as the 6th Virginia, the 3rd North Carolina, or the 8th Illinois, devoting lengthy sections of their works to these troops. Book reviewers for local black newspapers were sure to note the inclusion of any potential hometown boys in a particular work, a prime example being the *Richmond Planet*'s review of Johnson's *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War*. Following a general description of the book, the writer for the *Planet* concluded his review by noting that the 6th Virginia received its own chapter, the highlight being a portrait of local hero Major Joseph B. Johnson, of Manchester.⁷³ The following week, *Planet* writers reviewed two more regional military histories, T. G. Steward's *How the Black St. Domingo Legion Saved the Patriot Army in the Siege of Savannah, 1779*, and Thomas L. Leatherwood's broadside titled *Military Portrait Group of the Officers of the 3rd North Carolina U. S. Volunteer Infantry*. The latter chronicled the "first regiment organized and officered by colored men."⁷⁴ Combining descriptive reviews, hints of local appeal, and references to captivating depictions of black soldiers, these advertisements fostered a reverence for African Americans in the armed forces.⁷⁵

Published representations of black soldiers during the 1890s were not, however, limited to historical volumes. Famous African American poets and fiction writers such as Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Charles W. Chesnutt, and David Bryant Fulton (often writing under his pen name, Jack Thorne) filled pages and minds with dramatized accounts of brave black soldiers and soldierly acts. By overemphasizing certain character traits exhibited by African American troops, these

⁷³ *Richmond Planet*, July 1, 1899. Manchester sat on the South bank of the James River, facing Richmond and was officially incorporated into the city of Richmond in 1910.

⁷⁴ *Richmond Planet*, July 7, 1899.

⁷⁵ For a book review of Harry Stanton McCard and Henry Turnley's *History of the Eighth Illinois United States Volunteers* (Chicago: E.F. Harman, 1899), see the *Broad Ax (Chicago)*, October 21, 1899.

writers sought to reinforce the notions of bravery, sacrifice, leadership, and patriotism that were desperately needed by black men in the face of racial violence and political exclusion during the Jim Crow era.

Like so many histories published at the end of the nineteenth century, many of the poems recalled the heroic stories of earlier black soldiers. Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "The Colored Soldiers" first appeared in 1896 (two years prior to the Spanish-American War), as the citizenship rights gained by African Americans from Emancipation to the end of Reconstruction were fast becoming memories. Published in *Lyrics of a Lowly Life*, "The Colored Soldiers" describes the sacrifices black combatants made during the Civil War to erase the stain of slavery from American history:

Yes, the Blacks enjoy their freedom,
And they won it dearly, too;
For the life blood of their thousands
Did the southern fields bedew.
In the darkness of their bondage,
In the depths of slavery's night,
Their muskets flashed the dawning,
And they fought their way to light.⁷⁶

In "The Colored Soldiers," Dunbar proclaimed that the virtues that made black Civil War veterans so great—brotherhood, citizenship, and leadership—had not been lost to the ages, and reminded the young African American men reading his work that they, too, possessed these qualities.⁷⁷ Reverend B. A. Imes immortalized the bravery of Sergeant George Berry, of the 10th U.S. Cavalry, in poem. Of Berry, who planted the flags of his regiment and the 3rd U.S. Cavalry atop San Juan Hill, Imes wrote:

⁷⁶ Paul Lawrence Dunbar, *Lyrics of a Lowly Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1897), 116.

⁷⁷ Dunbar, *Lyrics of a Lowly Life*, 117.

“Old Sergeant Berry,” a veteran strong,
And modest in manner as brave of will,
Henceforth shall be told in story and song,
How you led in the fray on the San Juan Hill;
How with Titan-like tread the brave band you led
Till your flag on the summit its folds outspread.⁷⁸

Men such as Sergeant Berry typified the ideal model for young African Americans—fearless, modest, heroic, and resolute in defense of democracy.

Turn-of-the-century popular fiction written by African American authors also capitalized on the image of the soldier and his courageous traits. The race riot that took place in Wilmington, North Carolina on November 10, 1898 provided the backdrop for two such novels: David Bryant Fulton’s *Hanover; or Persecution of the Lowly. A Story of the Wilmington Massacre* (1900) and Charles W. Chesnutt’s *Marrow of Tradition* (1901). Fulton’s work, based half in fact, included the likeness in name and deed of Daniel Wright, a black politician responsible for shooting white rioters during the fray. Wright was almost immediately lynched; but in Fulton’s account of the riot, the martyr earned a place in the pantheon of warrior heroes—not next to men such as Leonidas, Napoleon, John Brown, Nat Turner, and Davy Crocket—but “far above them all, in letters that shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, the name of DAN WRIGHT.”⁷⁹ Fulton also compared Wright’s leadership to Major General Israel Putnam, an inspirational commander during the Revolutionary War who implored his men to fight against the steepest odds.⁸⁰

Chesnutt’s *Marrow of Tradition* also celebrated the traits of a soldier in the character of Josh Green. Like Daniel Wright, Green was not a veteran of any war, but Chesnutt refers to his

⁷⁸ Cashin, *Under Fire*, 283.

⁷⁹ Jack Thorne [David Bryant Fulton], *Hanover; or Persecution of the Lowly. A Story of the Wilmington Massacre* (1900, reprinted New York: Arno, 1969), 85.

⁸⁰ Thorne, *Hanover*, 84.

actions in a variety of martial terms when this tragic hero was leading the resistance against the white mob in fictional Wellington.⁸¹ Green gauged the resolve of his men “with the eye of a general,” and ordered them behind cover as tensions arose.⁸² Once Green and his band were temporarily sheltered in the safety of the town’s black hospital, Chesnutt’s tragic hero positioned armed watchmen at each window “with the instinct of a born commander.”⁸³ As the mob closed in on the fortified hospital and set the structure ablaze, Green gave his men a final rallying speech when all hope of victory seemed lost. The doors of the flaming building burst open, and Green and company rushed out to face death like men, taking a handful of vigilantes with them.⁸⁴ Chesnutt, however, was conflicted about men such as Josh Green, seeing them as both brave and foolish. The author concluded that despite all the positive, martial qualities in Josh Green, his aggressive nature needed to be countered by the middle-class, conservative values of Wellington’s black doctor, William Miller.⁸⁵

The open, physical confrontation exhibited by the fictional Josh Green troubled Chesnutt in 1901 because the author, like many other black and white Americans, was not ready to embrace such aggressive behavior. The actual events that transpired in Wilmington helped reinforce this sentiment. The complete destruction of Alexander Manly’s *Daily Record* during

⁸¹ Wellington was the fictitious town modeled after Wilmington, North Carolina in Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1901).

⁸² Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, 299-300.

⁸³ Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, 301.

⁸⁴ Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, 306-309.

⁸⁵ Richard Yarborough, “Violence, Manhood, and Black Heroism: The Wilmington Riot in Two Turn-of-the-Century African American Novels,” in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and its Legacy*, eds. David Cecelski and Timothy Tyson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 237.

the riot, and his forced flight to the North speak to the grim realities of blunt defiance and candid honesty as a means for creating social and political equality. As Ida Wells-Barnett and Manly both found out, direct challenges to the fabricated racial hierarchy in the 1890s proved to be too threatening to southern white Democrats scrambling to reinforce their dominance during that turbulent decade. The Victorian-era rules of engagement were still in play in Memphis, Wilmington, and all points South during this period. It was clear that a middle-ground role model was needed to bridge the gap between Booker T. Washington's submissiveness and Wells-Barnett and Manly's forceful opposition, and the well-disciplined, but battle-hardened black soldier was a perfect fit.

Representations of black soldiers such as these were widely accessible during the final years of the nineteenth century. Public displays of support and appreciation for the brave African American combatants fighting in Cuba and the Philippines served as meeting grounds where black citizens could gather and celebrate the bravery, leadership, and patriotism exhibited by the young men of their race. Histories, poetry, and novels reinforced these qualities by linking past war icons to their local heroes. The pervasiveness of these images in public and private life, and the aggressive marketing of these representations underscored the value of courage and manliness in African American communities. Furthermore, the creation of these symbols by black authors and poets was needed to combat the emotional corrosion caused by images of lynchings and allay white fears of savage black men.

On July 9, 1898, the editor of the Salt Lake City *Broad Ax* explicitly noted a perceived correlation between press coverage of the Spanish-American War and incidences of lynchings. The article begins: "As the war news becomes dull the lynching of negroes starts up again."⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *Broad Ax (Salt Lake City)*, July 9, 1898.

Accounts of the war—and brave black soldiers—up to that point had had some noticeable influence either encouraging African Americans to defend themselves, or in deterring white vigilantes. Newspaper editors, such as the *Broad Ax*'s Julius Taylor, understood their role as active creators of heroic models for African Americans across the United States. In June of the following year, Taylor moved the *Broad Ax* to Chicago in order to reach a wider black audience. The African American population in Chicago had more than doubled over the previous decade, and far exceeded that of Salt Lake City, and the city's emergence as the Midwest's transportation and commercial hub made Chicago a prime location for the new *Broad Ax* office.⁸⁷ From his new base of operation, Taylor continued to praise the bravery and manhood of black soldiers and advocate the use of armed self-defense in the face of racial violence.

But the advocacy of armed self-defense and open confrontation often diverged too greatly from the Victorian-era gender norms that were central to black manhood and racial advancement in the late-nineteenth century. Over the next twenty years, a debate raged among black leaders regarding the boundaries of such aggressive and assertive behavior that drove a seemingly impenetrable wedge between the supporters of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. The more conservative Washington still represented the majority of African Americans in the summer of 1906 when tensions and violence erupted in Brownsville, Texas, between the town's white residents and members of the 25th U.S. Infantry stationed at Fort Brown. President Roosevelt's investigation of the affair resulted in the dishonorable discharge of the entire regiment, and while some black newspaper editors captured the protest that arose from scores of African Americans over what they perceived as a miscarriage of justice, it was ultimately

⁸⁷ U.S. Census Office, *U.S. Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900*. Vol. 1, *Population*. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1901), 613, 644. The black population of Chicago grew from 14,271 to 30,150 between 1890 and 1900, and greatly surpassed that of Salt Lake City, which reported an African American population of a mere 278 in 1900.

Washington's voice that found the ear of the president. Washington politely asked Roosevelt to reconsider the matter, and then quietly submitted to the president's blunt refusal. Washington opted to preserve what little political power he had curried with the Roosevelt administration through tactics of accommodation, modesty, and discretion—a course directed by the Victorian-era conventions he devoutly followed.⁸⁸

It was under these conditions that the roles played by Julius Taylor, John Mitchell Jr., W. Calvin Chase, Ida Wells-Barnett, and a host of other black newspaper editors became vital for the reinforcement of black manhood in the 1890s. Their presentation of African American soldiers, as both state militiamen and troops in the United States armed forces, kept images of courageous, armed black men in plain sight. Historians, poets, and novelists also recognized the desire for works celebrating African American bravery, and churned out dozens of handsomely bound volumes recounting the gallantry of innumerable black soldiers. The quality, durability, and message of these collections projected an image of martial courage, obedience, and respectability as a standard-bearer of manliness for young black men in the late-Victorian era.

White reactions to these accounts of black martial heroism in the late-nineteenth century were widely varied, and often depended on the conditions of their exposure to these valorous deeds. Some white Americans viewed the well-disciplined African American soldiers with a new objectivity and begrudgingly accepted their black brothers-in-arms as real men. Many others, however, felt deeply threatened by these black soldiers who displayed an apparently new-found mastery of both discipline and marksmanship. By acknowledging these developments, white men would have to recognize the civilized, respectable, and courageous black soldiers as equals—something few were prepared to do. And so as the 1890s progressed, the increasing

⁸⁸ Lewis N. Wynne, "Brownsville: The Reaction of the Negro Press," *Phylon* Vol. 33, No. 2. (2nd Qtr., 1972), 153-160.

visibility of black men in uniform became another factor driving insecure white men to pursue a course of racial violence aimed broadly at eliminating all challenges to white social and political power.

For African American men, these representations of martial heroism created a model of manhood that did not project weakness and submission. As Booker T. Washington continually shied away from directly challenging discrimination and racial violence, a handful of other black leaders emerged to direct a more diverse strategy for achieving equality and full citizenship. In addition advocating political agitation and higher education, this cadre of black activists, writers, and newspaper editors presented black men with a powerful example of how to not to cower or submit to racial discrimination and violence while still maintaining an air of discipline and respectability. In the image of the late-nineteenth century black soldier, the average black man found a model of manhood that was forceful and inspirational without departing from the established gender norms of the period.

Booker T. Washington's failure at Brownville in 1906 proved to be a major turning point in the black public's belief in accommodation. Over the next twenty years, the traits that defined the ideal black man would undergo significant changes, moving away from the respectability and comportment typical of the white middle class, and toward the modern emphasis on leisure, conspicuous consumption, assertiveness, and the physical prowess displayed by the working-class black man. What would remain unchanged, however, was the conduit that carried these gender-defining traits to the masses—the image of the black soldier—represented two decades later by the roughly 400,000 sable doughboys that crossed the Atlantic during World War I, armed and ready to fight.

CHAPTER 2: The Worm has Turned: Black Masculinity and the World War I Soldier in Editorial Cartoons.

The first African American units to arrive in Europe during World War I had roughly ten months of action to make their mark before an armistice was reached on November 11, 1918. In that short time, one unit in particular, the 369th U.S. Infantry, provided Americans at home with a number of heroes that gained national acclaim. Privates Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts, for example, gained fame while manning a lookout on the Allied front lines on the edge of the Argonne Forest in France. Before daybreak on May 14, Private Roberts alerted Johnson to the faint sounds of barbed wire being cut to the rear of their position. The glow from their illumination rockets revealed between twelve and twenty-four German soldiers attempting a daring traverse of no man's land toward the Allied trenches.¹ Both American soldiers suffered wounds in the ensuing skirmish, and having expended the ammunition in their three-round clips, the two resorted to whatever weapons were within their reach. Roberts, immobilized from his injuries, could only lob hand grenades at the enemy, and was quickly captured. Johnson, however, determined to regain possession of his comrade, concussed one German with the butt-end of his rifle, and gutted two more with his bolo knife—the two who were carrying Roberts away. Fearing a larger American force than the two watchmen from the 369th, the attackers retreated leaving a trail of blood, weapons, and bullet-torn clothing that led back to the German lines.²

¹ Arthur W. Little, *From Harlem to the Rhine: The Story of New York's Colored Volunteers* (New York: Covici Friede, 1936), 193-194.

There, in the predawn darkness near Verdun, France, on May 14, two black men gave newspaper reporters a pair of heroes. Within two weeks, the names Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts became legendary stateside. The *Chicago Defender* first reported on the heroics of Johnson and Roberts eleven days later, on May 25, but only had time to reprint the story from the *Chicago Daily News*.³ When the *Defender* staff writers crafted their own coverage of the heroes the following week, they devoted most of the allotted space to two large pictures of Johnson and Roberts, followed by a rather terse account of their heroism. The caption under the images simply read: “The two soldiers serving their Race and their country ‘over there,’ who displayed remarkable bravery and courage. When outnumbered by twenty-four Germans, these two heroes drove them away and saved their comrades from total destruction.”⁴ On the paper’s back page, the bravery exhibited by Johnson and Roberts was the subject of a column titled “Courage and Cowardice,” contrasting their heroics against a depraved Georgia lynch mob that murdered six black farmers including Mary Turner who met her fate just hours after the lynching of her husband.⁵

² Emmett J. Scott, *Scott’s Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (1919), 257-259.

³ *Chicago Defender*, May 25, 1918. Similar accounts of Johnson and Roberts’ heroism were detailed in both white and black newspapers across the country. See *New York Times*, May 21, 22, 1918; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 20, 1918; *Washington Post*, May 21, 1918; *Atlanta Constitution*, May 21, 1918; *Richmond Planet*, June 22, July 6, 13, 1918; *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 24, 1918. The roughly ten-day delay between the events in France and their appearance in American newspapers was simply due to the standard government censorship policies during the war.

⁴ *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1918.

⁵ *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1918. Making the crime even more heinous was the fact that Mary Turner was pregnant, and after she had been hanged and riddled with bullets, her abdomen was sliced open, causing the fetus to fall to the ground, where it was crushed under boot. A copy of this editorial was deemed seditious by the Military Intelligence Division and subsequently

According to Editor Robert S. Abbott, it was obvious who the true protectors of American values were. As the quest for full citizenship, equality, and a guarantee of domestic safety painfully trudged forward during the Jim Crow era, the extraordinary combat exploits of Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts were assigned a new meaning. The black press had co-opted their story and presented it to the roughly twelve million African Americans who were in dire need of patriotic role models who would not cow or wither in the face of a barbaric foe—whether that foe be German or Georgian. And to drive his point home without any possible chance for confusion, Abbott printed a copy of William Allen Rogers’s cartoon titled “Two Real Americans” beside his column decrying southern mobbism.⁶ Those two real Americans were none other than Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts. The cartoon was a raw and violent depiction of what would later be known as “the Battle of Henry Johnson” showing the dead or dying bodies of German assailants strewn in piles up to the hero’s ankles. The message was clear. The path to full citizenship and an end to racial violence might not follow the passive accommodationist tactics so commonly associated with Booker T. Washington. A new avenue for generating change emerged out of the early morning darkness on May 14, 1918. “The Battle of Henry Johnson” was a call to action.

removed from public displays such as the storefront window of Tom W. Gilbarth, in Minneapolis, along with other material. See Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, National Archives II, College Park, MD, Record Group 165, Series M1440, file no. 10218-204 (Lt. Frank E. Evans, IO-Avitn-Mechanics Training School, St. Paul, MN to C, MIB. Re: Letter from Lt. Wm Lewis, Tom W. Gilbarth), pg. 2. Hereafter, records of the National Archives will be designated by NA, followed by the Record Group (RG) number and file or item number.

⁶ *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1918. The original title of cartoon as it appeared in the *New York Herald* on May 21 read “Two First-Class Americans.” For the purposes of this project, the cartoon will be referred to by its *Chicago Defender* title considering the goal of this project is explaining how editorial cartoons were presented to, and viewed by African Americans, not white audiences. The *Defender* strikes closer to this mark.

TWO REAL AMERICANS
By W. A. Rodgers in The New York Herald



Figure 2. “Two Real Americans,” by William Allen Rodgers, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1918.

The Rogers cartoon was the first of its kind. After scouring an assortment of the leading black newspapers and magazines for the majority of the 1910s, it became evident that editorial cartoons featuring black soldiers that appeared in African Americans newspapers prior to World War I were markedly different. Many of these pre-war cartoons depict highly decorated black veterans, either from the Spanish-American War or the border conflict with Mexican rebel Pancho Villa, lamenting their lack of recognition or the discrimination they faced while in the service of the United States. Their response to such mistreatment in early editorial cartoons was either teary-eyed resignation or stoic patriotism—nothing resembling the assault on discrimination and racism that the black World War I soldier would wage in pen and ink in the following years.

The characteristics of modern masculinity that were sketched into editorial cartoons of black soldiers were equally prevalent in pen-and-ink representations of black male civilians after the war. The aggressive nature, physical prowess, and open willingness to confront mob violence and racial discrimination became common traits possessed by the average black man, as represented in cartoon art. With examples of martial masculinity leading the way, an army of black men appeared more willing to roll up their sleeves in preparation for battle. No longer would their wives, children, and communities be the targets of violence and oppression. Such aggressive public behavior was typically the *modus operandi* of working-class African Americans, but the popularity of wartime martial imagery such as “Two Real Americans” helped domesticate a more forceful variety of manhood for all black men. And despite the often grim realities of exchanging gunfire with whites on the streets of American cities, in the privacy of black cartoon art created for black audiences, these masculine warriors and heroes almost always emerged victorious.

This shift in content, from more conservative and manly depictions of black soldiers to ones emphasizing violence and modern masculinity, was caused by two primary factors. After four years of brutal fighting, Americans reveled in the ability of U.S. troops to turn the stalemate of trench warfare into an Allied offensive and relatively quick victory. The military achievements of 1918 seemed only to confirm the aggressive foreign policy agenda set forth by Presidents McKinley, Roosevelt, Taft, and now Wilson. Martial heroism and vigorous masculinity were now fully ingrained in American popular culture. Within this atmosphere, the second necessary factor driving the changes in African American cartoon content occurred. During the war, a cadre of young, opinionated, and assertive black cartoonists took control of the art departments in a handful of key black newspapers and magazines. The cartoons produced by

twenty-one year old Leslie Rogers at the *Defender* and twenty-nine year old George H. Ben Johnson at the *Richmond Planet*, among others, were often brimming with the aggressive vitriol that defined their generation and gender identity. And while these artists occasionally employed a more conservative tone in their work after the war, the widespread endorsement of martial masculinity afforded them the option of attacking discrimination and racism with force if necessary in their artwork.

Some of the earliest editorial cartoons of the pre-World War I era exploring the plight of African American soldiers focused on the violence that erupted in Brownsville, Texas, on August 13, 1906. The standard southern tradition of African Americans stepping off a sidewalk to make way for a party of whites came into contention when a group of uniformed, black soldiers from the 25th U.S. Infantry refused to yield to a group of white men and women. One of the white men knocked a trooper to the ground with the butt of his pistol and threatened to open fire. Within hours, rumors began spreading that the soldiers had assaulted the white women, a far worse crime than refusing to create space on a sidewalk. One account claimed that the following evening, an incensed mob of local whites “attempted to storm Fort Brown and met a hail of lead. As a consequence one obstreperous Texas ranger is dead and another wounded.”⁷

Government officials declared that African American soldiers firing on an angry white mob was no way for U.S. troops to behave, and the fate of the 25th then followed a tumultuous path from Brownsville, through Oklahoma, all the way to the front door of the White House. Local investigations produced shoddy evidence at best, centering around a collection of spent shell casings supposedly fired from “military rifles,” but no guilty individuals could be identified. It was clearly evident that Brownsville natives sought the swift removal of the black

⁷ “Uncle Sam’s Retreat from Brownsville,” *The Voice of the Negro* 3 (October, 1906), 397.

soldiers, and after numerous clashes between the white townspeople and black soldiers beginning immediately upon their arrival at Fort Brown on July 28, local whites soon got their wish. The War Department yielded to the demands of the Brownsville masses and moved the 25th north to Oklahoma. When probed by President Roosevelt in the following weeks, the troops the president nicknamed “the midnight assassins” remained unified, refusing to divulge the guilty parties involved in the shooting. The decision to disband companies B, C, and D of the 25th because of their refusal to testify was the final crushing blow in this saga, marking a sad end to the military careers of these highly decorated veterans.⁸



Figure 3. “The Government Troops,” by Garfield Thomas Haywood, *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 8, 1906.



Figure 4. “The Brownsville Twins,” *Cleveland Gazette*, February 19, 1916.

Editorial cartoonists working for black newspapers almost immediately seized upon the opportunity to portray the injustice of “the Brownsville Affair” for their audiences. Within a month of the incident, the *Indianapolis Freeman* ran staff cartoonist Garfield T. Haywood’s

⁸ “The Hopeful Sign,” *The Voice* 3 (November, 1906), 467.

“The Government Troops” depicting Uncle Sam hastily dragging the regiment out of Texas.⁹

The black soldier appears childlike and powerless in the firm grasp of a government clearly more interested in maintaining social customs than supporting its troops in the face of racism. Booker T. Washington’s anemic attempt to have President Roosevelt reconsider the penalties levied on the troops was rather quickly dismissed, and the faith that many African Americans put in both of these leaders began to crumble, accelerating the black public’s acceptance of more assertive avenues of protest.¹⁰ Later cartoons captured the lingering pain of the regiment’s dishonorable discharge long after 1906, as seen in the *Cleveland Gazette*’s “The Brownsville Twins” depicting Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft satirically “assisting” the soldiers of the 25th into the “door of hope,” which appears to be as beneficial as being booted into a cesspool.¹¹

African American troops patrolling the nation’s southern border continued to face discrimination by local Texans and institutional racism within the U.S. military in the years between Brownsville and World War I. When the 8th Illinois National Guard regiment was sent southward in the summer of 1916, a handful of white soldiers greeted them with gunfire.¹² The

⁹ *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 8, 1906. For a more complete analysis of the decision to dishonorably discharge 167 members of the 25th U.S. Infantry following the incident in Brownsville in the summer of 1906 and Senator Joseph Benson Foraker’s failed attempt to have the soldiers’ names cleared, see John D. Weaver, *The Senator and the Sharecropper’s Son: The Exoneration of the Brownsville Soldiers* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Lewis N. Wynne, “Brownsville: The Reaction of the Negro Press,” *Phylon* Vol. 33, No. 2. (2nd Qtr., 1972), 153-160.

¹¹ *Cleveland Gazette*, August 8, 1914, February 19, 1916. The “door of hope” refers to a policy held by Roosevelt and Taft of rewarding African American public servants and politicians with government positions via patronage suggesting that their service will not go unnoticed by the Republican Party during their administrations.

¹² On July 24, three members of the 8th ING were shot by a crowd of white soldiers and civilians while stationed in San Antonio. The brawl and ensuing shots resulted from the

scuffle left three black troopers wounded and twenty more in the local jail. Evidence suggests that the three wounded soldiers were shot in the back as they fled, a fact that found its way into *Chicago Defender* staff cartoonist Fon Holly's editorial sketch titled "Is This What They Enlist For?"¹³ Here, the 8th Illinois stands at attention, eyes peeled for signs of Mexican rebel Pancho Villa. A party of white soldiers prepares to open fire on the unsuspecting African American troops behind the cover and safety of some nearby boulders. And while this is certainly a commentary on the manly bravery of the 8th Illinois—especially when compared to the cowardice exhibited by the concealed white soldiers ready to shoot fellow U.S. servicemen in the back—it is also an example of the stoic inactivity displayed by black troops in editorial cartoons when confronted by racial violence prior to 1918.

IS THIS WHAT THEY ENLIST FOR?



Figure 5. "Is This What They Enlist For?" by Fon Holly, *Chicago Defender*, July 29, 1916.

exchange of some racial epithets directed at the black soldiers. See coverage in the *Chicago Defender*, July 29, August 19, 1916.

¹³ *Chicago Defender*, July 29, 1916.

Another such example is a cartoon titled “Welcome Home” that ran on the editorial page of the *Chicago Defender* on October 28, 1916.¹⁴ The panel shows the reunion of a mother and her son who had just returned from the aforementioned tour of duty on the border with the 8th Illinois. In this tender moment, the soldier casts aside his rifle to embrace his elderly mother, instantly shedding any concerns he had regarding his regiment’s mistreatment by white soldiers and civilians in Texas. He did not return angry, or even inspired to lead a movement for change. He returned seeking the safety and comfort of his mother. Cartoonist Fon Holly belonged to the older, more conservative generation of black artists whose commentaries tread the well-worn path of hoping community service, respectability, and family values would earn black men greater access to civil rights. Representations of black soldiers in such a manner were common prior to World War I, but would be supplanted over the next two years by cartoon art depicting the attitude and actions of black combat soldiers.



Figure 6. “Welcome Home: Mother—The Word That Means a World to Me,” by Fon Holly, *Chicago Defender*, October 28, 1916.

¹⁴ *Chicago Defender*, October 28, 1916.

In addition to the institutional racism experienced by the black soldier in the field during this era was the nearly impossible task of gaining entrance to, and eventually graduating from the nation's top military colleges. Even if a young black man received a congressional appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, and then passed the rigorous physical and academic entrance examinations, life as a cadet at the nation's premier martial college was anything but easy. The occasional black cadet to attend West Point was often the only member of his race on campus at that time, and was subjected to four years of incredibly harsh treatment by his classmates. Actually graduating from the academy proved even more challenging for African American cadets, where between 1870 and 1935, a grand total of three black men successfully completed the program—all of whom graduated between 1877 and 1889.¹⁵

These hardships appeared in Fon Holly's 1916 editorial cartoon titled "The Bitten Hand," which highlights the institutional racism plaguing the admissions process for the Army and Naval Academies at West Point and Annapolis, respectively.¹⁶ In the background, Uncle Sam gladly welcomes into the military academies the sons of a white southerner—whose apparently racist acts have flown in the face of true American ideals. In the foreground stands a well-dressed, but disabled black veteran of the Mexican War struggling to answer his equally dapper son's question: "Why is it father, we cannot go to these schools?" A solitary tear rolls down the cheek of the war hero because he knows that his sterling military record, indeed the more than

¹⁵ Jonathan Sutherland, *African Americans at War: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 512. The three African American graduates from the United States Military Academy, listed in order by graduating class were Henry O. Flipper (1877), John H. Alexander (1887), and Charles Young (1899). The next black man to graduate from West Point was Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. in 1936.

¹⁶ *Chicago Defender*, May 6, 1916.

two centuries of loyal service by African Americans, will once again go unrecognized.¹⁷ Judging by this veterans' apparent heartache, he finds little hope in using his martial heroism as a weapon in the fight against institutional racism in the American military and society in general.

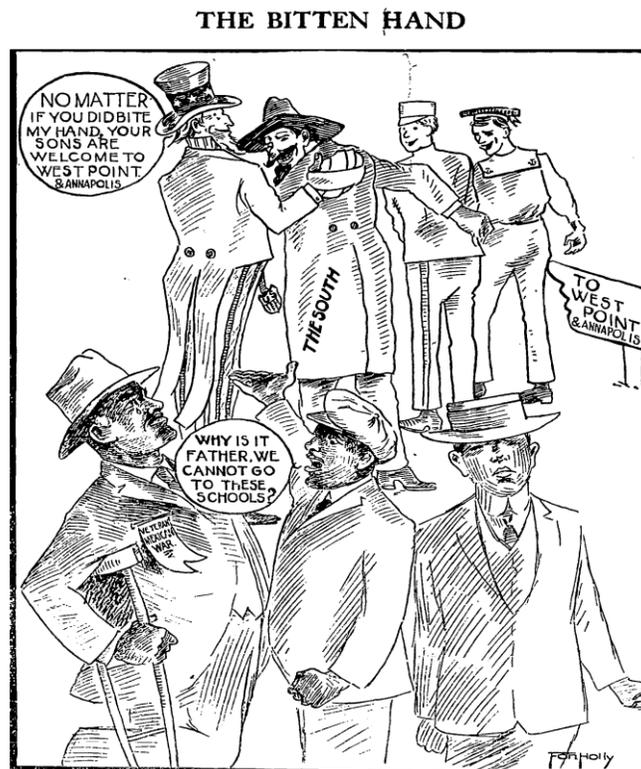


Figure 7. “The Bitten Hand,” by Fon Holly, *Chicago Defender*, May 6, 1916.

In one final example of the passive restraint characterized by black soldiers in editorial cartoons prior to the United States landing troops in France in the spring of 1918 is a sketch titled “In Spite of All.”¹⁸ In this Louis Hoggatt cartoon, an African American soldier stands stoically at attention, ready to faithfully defend America and democracy overseas. This soldier, however, has his back turned to the domestic troubles facing African Americans at home. Behind him blow the turbulent winds of “race prejudice,” “persecution,” and “injustice,” but this soldier fails to

¹⁷ The Mexican War referred to in this cartoon is referencing the General John “Black Jack” Pershing’s expedition into northern Mexico to quell Pancho Villa’s rebellion.

¹⁸ *Chicago Defender*, January 26, 1918.

respond. In an effort to “close ranks” and put aside these domestic problems, this loyal and faithful soldier is following a course of patience and obedience suggested by many black elites—a course that will draw significant criticism after the war.¹⁹



Figure 8. “In Spite of All,” by Louis Hoggatt, *Chicago Defender*, January 26, 1918.

Each of these examples of pre-war editorial cartoons featuring black soldiers reflected the traditional gender construction popularized decades earlier, emphasizing uplift, comportment, duty, and respectability. In the summer of 1918, however, the image of the black soldier in editorial cartoons received a radical makeover illustrating a change that highlighted both the intimacy of hand-to-hand combat, and the aggressiveness it required. The general public’s endorsement of the war and the vigorous masculinity it required was evident in white America’s

¹⁹ The “Close Ranks” philosophy was most clearly articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois in an article of the same title in the NAACP’s monthly publication, *The Crisis* in July, 1918. Du Bois would later demand a sterner, more forceful contest for African American rights after the war, in effect criticizing his earlier position of passivity and decorum for the sake of patriotism.

infatuation with Sergeant York.²⁰ African Americans had their own heroes in Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts, but the qualities of all these men were the same. Fearlessness, assertiveness, and a force of body and spirit never before demanded all defined this new man of action.

Roughly one-fifth of the nearly 400,000 African American soldiers who went to France saw combat, and their exploits were captured in William Allen Rogers's cartoon, "Two Real Americans." In no American war to that date had African American soldiers served in such great numbers, and individual acts of heroism were in equally great supply. Within two weeks of their successful routing of some twenty-four German raiders, Privates Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts had gained celebrity status back home. Parades were thrown in their honor. Military medals were pinned on their chests. A handful of unscrupulous black men even posed as Johnson, collecting donations for public speaking engagements.

But their appearance in the Rogers cartoon which originally ran in a white New York daily, the *Herald*, and was later reprinted in the *Defender* in early June and in Emmett J. Scott's historical volume, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* in 1919, showed quite a different incarnation of the black soldier from previous renderings in editorial cartoons.²¹ Here was a depiction of Henry Johnson, in one hand carrying an incapacitated Needham Roberts, in the other, his blood-drenched, fourteen-inch bolo knife. At Johnson's feet lie scores of dead or dying Germans—white men powerless to stop the onslaught of the seemingly possessed black soldier. The uninhibited display of masculinity shown in this portrayal of Johnson, when coupled with the cartoon's title, "Two Real Americans,"

²⁰ For more on Sergeant York, see David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), and the 1941 film *Sergeant York*, starring Gary Cooper, which further fueled the war hero's popularity.

²¹ *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1918; Scott, 22. The cartoon also appeared in the *Boston Guardian* on June 1 and July 6, 1918 as well.

unequivocally validated the gender norms linking modern masculinity, violence, and citizenship that had become increasingly popular over the previous two decades.

The cartoon certainly carries with it some connotations of savagery that many white Americans still believed were typical traits of black men at that time. In *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality*, historian Richard Slotkin points out that Johnson's "frowning mouth is white in his Black face—he is at one and the same time a "first-class American" hero and a blackface minstrel."²² Slotkin argues that the praise heaped on Johnson and Roberts by the white press in the summer of 1918 contained both sincerity and ridicule, evident in all of New York City's white dailies.²³ Certain other factors are at play in Rogers's cartoon that suggest, at least for this specific piece of artwork, that such criticism may not be entirely warranted.

First, the type of media, technological limitations, and the artist's previous works must be considered here. Attempting to capture a combat scene at night where an African American man is the focal point of a work being printed in half-tone (black and white only) was quite challenging in 1918. Parts of Johnson's face must be illuminated to show some amount of detail. William Allen Rogers's other cartoons where an African American man is the subject use a similar technique and none of these can be misinterpreted as minstrelsy or savagery.²⁴ Rogers was perhaps the most well-known cartoonist of the day, working as the lead artist for *Harper's*

²² Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 151.

²³ For a more complete analysis of white press coverage of the "Battle of Henry Johnson" and its racist undertones, see Slotkin, 138-151.

²⁴ See "Negro Preacher" and "Black Man with Ceremonial Mace and Letter I" in Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog of William Allen Rogers's works and "The Veteran Sergeant Mingo Sanders" in *Cleveland Gazette*, January 25, 1919 for other examples of Rogers's portrayals of black men.

Weekly from 1877 to 1902 after the departure of Thomas Nast, and then for one of New York's largest dailies, the *Herald*, as well as *Life*, and *Puck*.²⁵ Comparing Rogers's war-era cartoons of Germans as savage beasts—pickelhaube-wearing, mustachioed gorillas and elephants for example—to his depictions of African Americans, the latter group appears in his works devoid of ridicule. Had the artist wanted to inject racist undertones into this piece, it would certainly be more evident.

More importantly however, is shifting the attention away from how white audiences interpreted "Two Real Americans" to the opinions of black viewers. Two of the most notable black men commenting on the war were *Defender* Editor Robert S. Abbott and Special Assistant to the Secretary of War Emmett J. Scott. Both men used the cartoon to promote black patriotism and manhood. Neither man was in any way critical of the potential interpretation that "Two Real Americans" was a negative representation of Henry Johnson or black men in general. Abbott and Scott could have commissioned other artists to create cartoons bearing the likeness of Henry Johnson, but they did not. The manner in which these writers presented the cartoon to the black public thus can only be seen as a ringing endorsement of martial masculinity.

By the summer of 1919, it was fully evident that editorial cartoons depicting black soldiers in black media outlets embraced these new masculine gender norms. Americans witnessed the bloodiest stretch of race riots to date that summer, and the role that returned black soldiers played in defending their homes and communities cannot be discounted. African Americans displayed a greater willingness to fight back in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Longview, Texas, Elaine, Arkansas, and Omaha, Nebraska. Returning from "a war to make the world safe for democracy" to a homeland that failed to uphold those same freedoms frustrated

²⁵ Artist Biography, William Allen Rogers, http://www.sil.si.edu/ondisplay/caricatures/bio_rogers.htm, accessed March 6, 2013.

and infuriated many black veterans, but their reaction to this adversity in cartoon art was markedly different from earlier wars. Where patience and obedience were once thought of as the path to uplift, now action—through force if necessary—had become an acceptable method of creating change. In the immediate postwar period, the returned veteran in action became the standard-bearer for black manhood shown in editorial cartoons.

Nothing epitomized this new representation of black masculinity more clearly than *The Messenger*'s September, 1919, cartoon titled "The "New Crowd Negro" Making America Safe for Himself."²⁶ In this exemplary work, a returned veteran races into battle against the American "Hun" behind the wheel of a heavily armed vehicle with guns blazing. A white soldier lies dead in the foreground, and a number of others run for their lives. The cartoon capitalizes on the rhetoric and imagery of the war in more ways than simply showing uniformed black veterans continuing the fight for democracy and domestic tranquility. Atop the panel reads a popular wartime quote from President Woodrow Wilson responding to German claims that force alone would settle the political differences between those nations embroiled in The Great War: "Force, force to the utmost—force without stint or limit!"²⁷ The course set by Wilson during the war was not so easily forgotten by the African American veterans confronted with mob violence upon their return.

²⁶ *The Messenger*, (September, 1919), 17.

²⁷ Woodrow Wilson: "Speech at the Opening of the Third Liberty Loan Campaign, delivered in the Fifth Regiment Armory, Baltimore: "Force to the Utmost"," April 6, 1918.

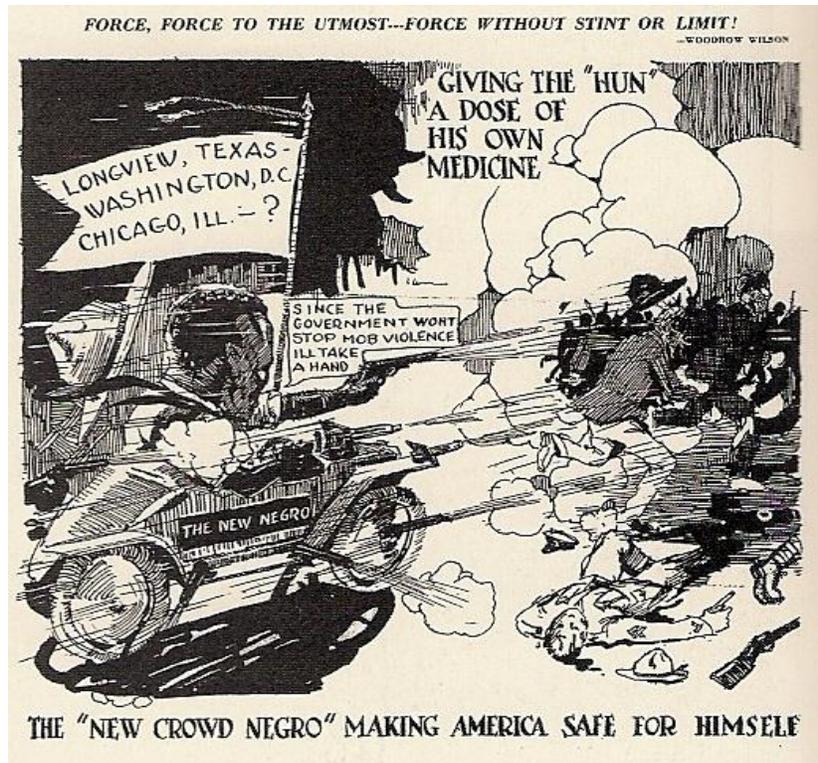


Figure 9. “The “New Crowd Negro” Making America Safe for Himself,” *The Messenger*, September, 1919, 17.

References to the race riots and mob violence that bathed American cities in blood during the summer of 1919 completed the transition to the postwar responsibilities of the black veteran, and black men in general. The veteran shown in *The Messenger*’s September cartoon is leading a group of black men into the fray behind a battle flag with the names of the race riots from that summer appearing in block lettering serving as a rallying point.²⁸ The text bubble originating from the lips of the veteran captures both the frustration and determination of this new breed of black men now meeting violence head-on, and reads: “Since the government won’t stop mob violence I’ll take a hand.” After donning his military attire, and rolling up his sleeves, this gritty soldier represents a clear departure from the passive reactions or stoic attention to duty that typified cartoons of black soldiers before the war.

²⁸ This larger group is just out of scene, but evidenced by a clearly defined black hand firing a weapon at the white vigilantes from the artwork’s left border.

The potency of this cartoon was not lost on the handful of white readers who perused the pages of *The Messenger*. The blatantly explicit imagery depicting white Americans being gunned down by returned black veterans proved rather unnerving for New Yorker William T. Hornaday, President of the American Guardian Society, Vice President of the Army League of the United States, and member of the Board of Trustees of the American Defense Society. Hornaday vilified the editors of *The Messenger* in a letter sent to the magazine's offices within days of the cartoon's publication. The offended white subscriber claimed that at a time when the nation needed close the chasm between the races, he found it shocking and extremely counter-productive to publish a cartoon that seemed to only exacerbate racial tensions. Typically not ones to shy away from controversy and debate, Editors A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen printed Hornaday's critical diatribe along with a forceful response from the magazine's business manager and Croix de Guerre recipient from the 367th U.S. Infantry, Victor R. Daly. In addition to detailing the magazine's standard position on workers' rights, Daly explained that the publishers advocated "armed resistance" and not "armed conflict" and intimated that actions other than what was shown in the cartoon was equitable to cowardice.²⁹

One of the ugliest traditions defining the Jim Crow period was the lynching of thousands of African Americans. In the postwar period, however, a new solution to ending the violence appeared in cartoons in black newspapers and monthly magazines. The November, 1919, issue of the *Crusader* magazine contained one such example titled "The Worm Turns."³⁰ In the first of two panels, a typical southern "gentleman" presents to the viewer some of his finest work, an

²⁹ The Open Forum: A Most Interesting Controversy, *The Messenger*, (October, 1919), 29-31.

³⁰ *Crusader*, (November, 1919), 5. The colloquial phrase "the worm turns" was often used in the early twentieth century to demarcate a noticeable change in attitude among the expression's subject.

African American man hanging from a tree, neck stretched and set ablaze with two more black men laying dead at his feet. He explains rather bluntly that southerners needed no assistance in settling “this nigger problem.”

The second panel reveals the obvious change in attitude of southern black men that appeared in the twelve months after World War I’s conclusion. Our once-confident southerner now frantically appeals to the federal government for help, crying “this nigger problem has changed.” In hot pursuit is a pistol-toting black man clearly willing protect his life with lethal force if necessary. The continual failure of black political leaders and sympathetic whites to secure a federal anti-lynching bill in the first two decades of the twentieth century left black men in the South with no other option than to defend themselves and openly confront lynch mobs. The worm had turned, and cartoons such as the one printed in the *Crusader* informed black readers that patience and passivity were no longer championed, and that a new, viable, and masculine alternative was encouraged as a deterrent to southern mobbism.³¹

³¹ The aggressive nature of this cartoon drew the attention of a Military Intelligence Division investigation within days of the November copy of *Crusader* hitting newsstands. See NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-349 (Maj. J. E. Cutler, USA MID to Maj. W. H. Loving. Re: “The Crusader”), pg. 29-34.

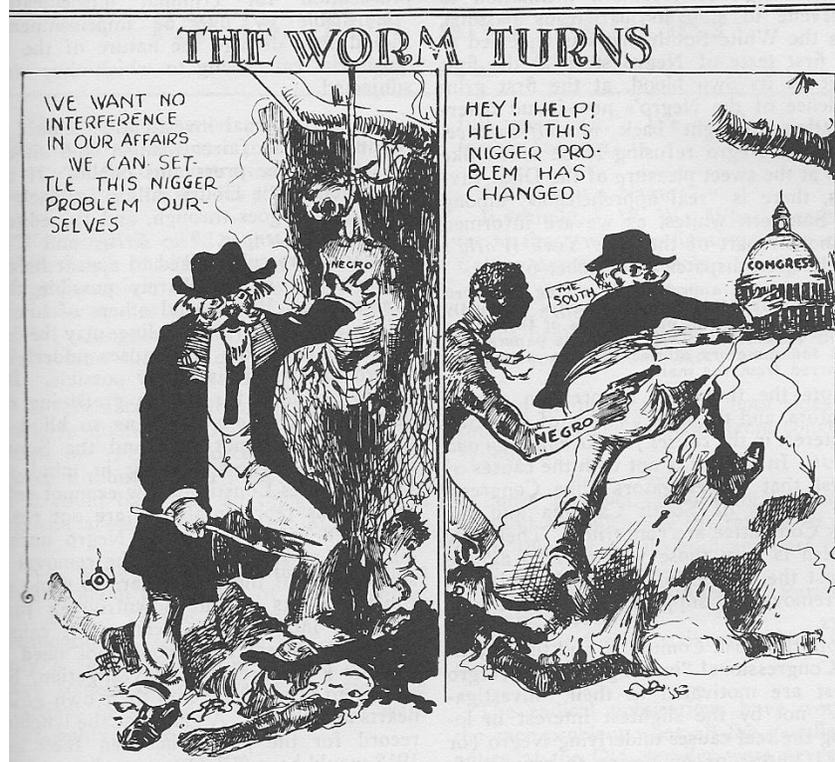


Figure 10. "The Worm Turns," *Crusader*, November, 1919, 5.

A second cartoon, also titled "The Worm Turns," appeared on the *Richmond Planet*'s front page on August 8, 1919—this time in response to the Washington, D.C. and Chicago race riots.³² Artist George H. Ben Johnson depicts a group of three dejected and physically beaten white men representing a "thug," "lyncher," and "rioter" discussing their place in American society. The ringleader admits with some resignation that "the blacks fought back. We've got to go." At their feet lies a pool of blood from the twenty-five African Americans lynched in the first half of that year. The new willingness by African Americans to defend their communities with force, however, had apparently stemmed the tide of unimpeded white-on-black racial violence. The loss of life and property suffered by the black populations of Washington and Chicago would have occurred regardless of black resistance. At least now African Americans were

³² *Richmond Planet*, August 8, 1919.

sending an unmistakable message to white vigilantes—the worm had turned, and now there would be a price paid in the blood of white men if the riots and lynchings continued.



Figure 11. “The Worm Turns,” by George H. Ben Johnson, *Richmond Planet*, August 9, 1919.

Perhaps the two most energetic and recognizable young black cartoonists to emerge during the war years were George H. Ben Johnson at the *Richmond Planet* and Leslie M. Rogers at the *Chicago Defender*. By 1917, *Planet* founder and editor John Mitchell, Jr. found his schedule too full to manage the newspaper (which included producing all the paper’s editorial cartoons) and his banking and real estate investments, and handed control of the art department over to the fiery twenty-nine year old Johnson.³³ Communications professor Benjamin R. Bates keenly points out that Johnson was part of the second generation of black cartoonists, but the

³³ For more on John Mitchell, Jr.’s editorial career, community involvement, and real estate and banking endeavors, see Ann Field Alexander, *Race Man: The Rise and Fall of the “Fighting Editor,”* John Mitchell, Jr. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

first to come of age after the Civil War and Reconstruction.³⁴ Leslie M. Rogers followed a similar path, taking the reins at the *Defender* in January, 1919, at the age of twenty-one. Becoming young men at the height of the Jim Crow era hardened the resolve of public commentators such as Johnson and Rogers, and the force, frustration, and vigor that typified their generation is clearly evident in many of their pieces.

In two more editorial cartoons appearing in the *Chicago Defender*, Leslie M. Rogers depicts the new black man, and the black male body in an undeniably masculine style. His contribution to the editorial page on December 20, 1919, titled “You’re Next” highlights the fighting spirit now being embraced by all of Chicago’s African American men.³⁵ Masculinity incarnate, with a broad stance, rolled-up sleeves, well-muscled forearms, and disproportionately massive balled fists, this black man is set for battle. He has already made quick work of “segregation” represented by a battered older white man sitting dazed in the frame’s background. A visibly trembling companion, labeled “discrimination” is next in line to receive a pounding from the black Chicagoan. Whether Rogers is suggesting using actual violence to combat segregation and discrimination or simply capturing the new, aggressive determination exhibited by African Americans in the fight for equality is unclear. One conclusion, however, can certainly be drawn here—depictions of black men in such a style were wholly absent from artwork prior to World War I.

³⁴ Benjamin R. Bates, Windy Y. Lawrence, & Mark Cervenka. “Redrawing Afrocentrism: Visual Nommo in George H. Ben Johnson’s Editorial Cartoons.” *Howard Journal of Communications* 19.4 (2008), 280.

³⁵ *Chicago Defender*, December 20, 1919.

“YOU’RE NEXT”



Figure 12. “You’re Next,” by Leslie M. Rogers, *Chicago Defender*, December 20, 1919.

This theme would continue in many of Rogers’s works as long as African American safety and civil rights remained in doubt. His September 24, 1921 sketch titled “We’re Not Looking for Trouble, But—” is an undeniable advocacy of forceful self-defense amid continuous threats of violence by the Ku Klux Klan.³⁶ A scowling, solitary black man, again with exaggerated fists and feet, rolls up his sleeves and stands at the ready. An increasingly large number of African Americans were shedding the more conservative tactics of petitioning the government for protection against mob and Klan violence. In the face of immediate threats, the lengthy—and in many cases, unsuccessful legal battles being waged by black elites in the 1910s, ‘20s, and ‘30s were of little immediate, tangible aid. And while these methods would eventually

³⁶ *Chicago Defender*, September 24, 1921.

bear fruit, black men recognized that they were essentially alone in their fight to curtail racial violence during the Jim Crow period.

We're Not Looking for Trouble, But—



Figure 13. “We’re Not Looking for Trouble, But—,” by Leslie M. Rogers, *Chicago Defender*, September 24, 1921.

As months passed without any substantial headway made in securing an anti-lynching bill, a growing sense of frustration developed with the standard legislative process. Without the support of southern politicians in the nation’s capital, attempts to address the issue of mob violence never stood a chance. The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, which was adopted by the Republican Party and the Harding Administration and quickly passed by the House of Representatives in January of 1922 met a slow, painful demise due to southern senators’

filibusters later that year and again in 1923 and 1924.³⁷ Leslie Rogers predicted the impending failure of the bill and sketched the mounting discontent among black southerners in an editorial cartoon titled “Asking Too Much of Him” which ran in the *Defender* on August 5, 1922.³⁸ Here, a visibly marred black man implores his white senator to address the racial violence plaguing the South to no avail. Unconvinced of the urgency of the matter, southern senators had little interest in alienating their white constituents for the sake of equality and civil rights.

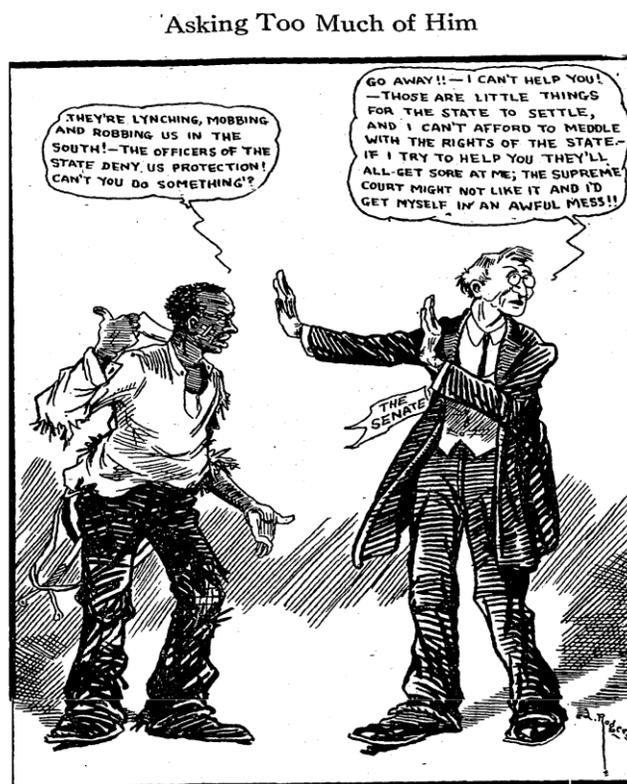


Figure 14. “Asking Too Much of Him,” by Leslie M. Rogers, *Chicago Defender*, August 5, 1922.

Despite repeated rejections, the conservative methods of soliciting the federal government for the protection of their rights remained a well-traveled avenue of protest prevalent

³⁷ For more on the debate over, and eventual defeat of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, see *Congressional Digest* 1.6 (March 1922), 11-15; “Political Effect of the Dyer Bill” in *New York Times*, July 9, 1922; and Michael Perman, *The Southern Political Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 37-42.

³⁸ *Chicago Defender*, August 5, 1922.

in editorial cartoons—especially among black elites. In this postwar period, either mode for securing civil rights could be employed, and when deemed more applicable, the conservative, elitist approach held sway. One such example, published in the *Baltimore Afro-American* on August 8, 1919, captures this theme. In “Wake Up Uncle! Or You Are Going To Fall,” a well-dressed black man gladly accepts Uncle Sam’s offer to fight for democracy in Europe, and finds himself frustrated a year later when his rights have been continuously ignored.³⁹ While this socially and financially successful black veteran is taking action in the form of holding a trip-line labeled “retaliation” in front of an unaware Uncle Sam, his response pales in comparison to the postwar cartoons appearing in the *Defender*, *Messenger*, and *Crusader*. The upper-class veteran here has shed his martial attire for his suit and tie, he no longer wields his military-issued rifle, and he is not directly confronting those who endanger his rights and safety.



Figure 15. “Wake Up, Uncle! Or You Are Going To Fall,” by Brown, *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 8, 1919.

³⁹ *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 8, 1919.

The continuation of this type of conservative, legal appeal is important to note. The emergence of a more aggressive, masculine approach to securing equality and civil rights as defined by the black soldier in cartoon art did not wholly replace more conservative tactics. Pragmatic cartoonists could choose which of these options best served their intentions. Even the outspoken Leslie Rogers occasionally incorporated the artistic style of his predecessors. During the summer of 1918, when Rogers had just begun contributing work for the *Defender*, he submitted a cartoon very closely resembling Fon Holly's "Is This What They Enlist For?," this time depicting black World War I soldiers being shot in the back by their white counterparts.⁴⁰ Rogers also drew a number of editorial cartoons in the early 1920s showing the shadowy specter of an African American soldier standing over the shoulder of the president silently reminding him that the democracy they fought for in 1918 was still not a reality in the United States.⁴¹ As such, the war became a focal point for protesting the inequity in both American society and the military. More importantly, however, the war crystallized an alternative definition of black manhood steeped in the qualities of martial masculinity. This was then endorsed by the producers of popular culture, and marketed to frustrated black men.

A similar formula was employed again more than two decades later as black men answered the call to arms during World War II. On May 8, 1943, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*

⁴⁰ This particular cartoon nearly resulted in the arrest of *Defender* Editor Robert S. Abbott for violation of the Sedition Act, signed into law on May 16, 1918. Abbott avoided arrest by purchasing liberty bonds and encouraging his readers to follow suit. See Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage During National Crises, with Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827-1965* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 1998), 39; Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *"Investigate Everything": Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 126.

⁴¹ See "The Silent Protest," *Chicago Defender*, August 21, 1920; "Shall America Heed the Advice of a Race-Hating Demagogue," *Chicago Defender*, November 24, 1923; and "For My Sake, Mr. President," *Chicago Defender*, February 9, 1924.

printed an editorial cartoon titled “Sergeant Henry Johnson: American Hero-World War I” highlighting the exploits of the Albany railroad porter turned war hero.⁴² As part of a series of more than one hundred famous African American figures distributed to black newspapers across the country, U.S. Office of War Information (OWI) cartoonist Charles Alston recognized the motivational value in recounting Johnson’s deeds in artwork for millions of black viewers some twenty-five years after the hero and his lookout partner Needham Roberts fought for their lives in no man’s land. Alston’s cartoon clearly explains the transformative effect of World War I on men such as Johnson, where the “peaceful redcap” becomes an inspirational hero and trained killer dressed in Army khaki across the bottom half of the piece.



Figure 16. “Sergeant Henry Johnson: American Hero-World War I,” by Charles Alston, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, May 8, 1943.

⁴² *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, May 8, 1943.

But the aggressiveness and violence so clearly evident in “Sergeant Henry Johnson” was somewhat atypical for Alston’s OWI cartoon series. Rarely did the artist include violent depictions in the handful of pieces devoted to black war heroes, choosing instead to detail the rare accounts where African Americans were recognized by the military for their service. These other military-themed biographical cartoons included Colonel Charles Young, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., Colonel Edward Gourdin, Mess Attendant Elvin Bell, and the aviatrix and flight instructor Lieutenant Willa Brown—none of which depict hand-to-hand combat.

The series is also noteworthy for its total disregard of the racial tensions still facing African Americans in the 1940s—a decision that may have contributed to the series’ rejection by one of the nation’s largest black newspapers, the *Chicago Defender*. According to retired journalism professor Harry Amana, the *Defender* chose to completely ignore the wartime contributions by Alston, which Amana claims may not have “fit in” with the newspaper’s editorial policy.⁴³ The *Defender* had traditionally been one of the most outspoken, critical, and at times militant voices decrying racial inequality and discrimination dating back to the paper’s founding in the early twentieth century. Staff cartoonists for the *Defender* often addressed issues such as racially biased labor practices, the seemingly futile effort to secure an anti-lynching law, and at times of war, discrimination and the mistreatment of African American soldiers in the military. On many occasions, these unwavering sharp critiques of the federal government ran contra to the “close ranks” cooperation and optimism appearing in Charles Alston’s World War II cartoons.

⁴³ Harry Amana, “The Art of Propaganda: Charles Alston’s World War II Editorial Cartoons for the Office of War Information and the Black Press,” *American Journalism* 21(2) (Spring, 2004), 106-107.

The editorial cartoon remains a traditional method for generating awareness of a particular social or political issue. In the 1910s and 1920s, African American cartoonists consistently used their pens and sketch pads to condemn the inequality and injustice that typified the age for their massive audiences. It became clear, however, that by the summer of 1918 a new, more aggressive message appeared in print. This path to full citizenship and protection from racial violence exhibited in editorial cartoons was popularized by the First World War and the public acceptance of violent and assertive behavior in defense of democracy. Postwar editorial cartoons did continue to embrace the more traditional, conservative approach at times, but from 1918 onward black audiences had a clear choice. The growing frustration with an incomplete set of civil rights led many African Americans to seek out a different way forward, and the fighting done by black soldiers in France illuminated this new path typified by urgency, aggression, and force.

The cartoon depictions of African American soldiers during the World War I era that validated martial heroism and masculinity, however, only held the public's attention for a rather brief seven-day window. With each new weekly newspaper edition came a new and potentially different theme illustrated on the editorial page. These artists also used their platform to voice their discontent with unfair labor practices, unpopular political candidates, or discriminatory police investigations, in addition to their martially themed cartoons. For more lasting representations of these martial traits, black audiences only had to turn the page in their newspaper to find advertisements for larger, full color, inexpensive artwork that celebrated the black soldier. The subject matter of these pieces closely mirrored that of the era's editorial cartoons, but where the weekly sketches faded quickly out of memory, a framed color print

depicting the violent “Battle of Henry Johnson” could inspire young black men for years to come.

CHAPTER 3: Cherished Gifts in Print: Affordable Artwork and Published Histories of Black Participation in World War I

In early April, 1919, Bud Williamson received a call requesting his presence at an art dealer's store in Cordele, Georgia. What the traveling picture salesman had hoped would be a promising lead quickly turned into a violent attack. Upon his arrival, Williamson had his stock of photographs seized and destroyed by the white store owner, who then proceeded to beat the unsuspecting salesman over the head with a blunt object. Before Williamson could gather himself, the store owner drew a pistol and forced it into Williamson's mouth, demanding that the salesman leave town immediately. The cause of the ferocious assault was the two men featured in Williamson's pictures—none other than Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts, the most celebrated African American war heroes from the recently concluded conflict in Europe.¹ The unnamed white art dealer felt it was necessary to resort to violence to prevent the sale of these pictures to local blacks because of the message the images conveyed. Masculinity incarnate, pictures of Johnson and Roberts that captured their physical dominance and aggression were exactly the type of role models that black men needed and white southerners feared.

In spite of the difficulties faced by Bud Williamson, the production and sale of inexpensive art, photographs, and historical volumes detailing the martial heroism of African American soldiers in World War I quickly became a lucrative business for publishing companies which capitalized on the growing mail-order industry popular among working-class blacks in the late 1910s. For as little as fifteen cents, consumers could purchase any number of these products

¹ *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1919.

from local salesmen or directly through newspapers and magazines. The prevalence of these items in black popular culture during and immediately after the war was undeniable as publishers and printers flooded the market with millions of copies of pictures and books chronicling the role African Americans played in securing democracy in Europe. But the primary goal of these pop culture producers was not simply exploiting a black working class who now had a greater disposable income. Of far greater importance was the task of replacing images and accounts of traditional white American heroes and role models in black households with war heroes and community leaders of a darker hue.

For a brief three year window from 1917 through 1919, a perfect cocktail of factors enabled working-class African Americans in northern cities to experience unprecedented economic prosperity. The nation's wartime economy greatly expanded the number of industrial job opportunities available. When combined with a significant decline in foreign-born immigrant laborers, demand, and subsequently wages spiked upward. African Americans watched their take-home pay double in many cases during these years, and until the postwar recession reached its crippling peak by the end of 1920, urban black workers enjoyed a momentary taste of the good life.² Despite a steady wave of black migrants from the South, many northern cities were able to maintain fairly low levels of unemployment during the war.³ And while hiring practices

² Gareth Canaan, "'Part of the Loaf': Economic Conditions of Chicago's African American Working Class During the 1920's," *Journal of Social History* 35.1 (Autumn, 2001): 157-158. African American women in Chicago's National Box Company witnessed their wages increase from \$0.13 per hour to roughly \$0.26 per hour between 1917 and 1919. Black Pullman Porters received an even greater increase in pay between 1916 and the mid-1920s, with their monthly income jumping from \$27.50 to \$72.50.

³ Statistical data on urban black unemployment prior to 1930 is particularly difficult to interpret considering the seasonal nature of many unskilled and semi-skilled occupations, a lack of complete U.S. Census data on unemployment, and the turbulent national economy prior to the Great Depression. For a more complete analysis of the economic condition of urban African

throughout the nation were rife of discrimination and a lack of upward mobility, at least during the war years, black workers breathed a sigh of relief.

And so with more money in their pockets and a glut of affordable consumer goods on the market, the black working class was exposed to, and purchased images and accounts of martial heroism and masculinity that popularized their conception black manhood. The widespread availability and subject matter of these products celebrated the aggressive, and often violent nature of the black combat soldier that many black elites had reservations about fully endorsing. To be certain, more conservative representations remained available to African American consumers, typified, for example, by the comparatively expensive photographic portraits of James Van DerZee, but the war also created a market and appreciation for low culture images of black soldiers directed predominantly at working-class consumers. The clearly visible distinction between products marketed to the black masses and their social betters reflects their tastes as consumers and the various definitions of black manhood to which they could subscribe. The fact the more aggressive depictions of martial masculinity were also the least expensive and most actively advertised in popular media outlets suggests that the target audience for such works of wartime art and historical volumes were black working-class buyers, although this market was certainly not closed or exclusively theirs by any means.

The availability of such works was made possible by a truly remarkable network of distributors and sales agents who employed an equally diverse set of advertising schemes to target the black working class. In addition to simply purchasing any of these items directly from an ad seen in a newspaper or magazine, distributors often hired agents to peddle their products in

Americans in the 1920s, see among many others, Canaan's "Part of the Loaf"; Theodore Kornweibel, Jr. "An Economic Profile of Black Life in the Twenties," *Journal of Black Studies* 6.4 (June, 1976): 307-320; Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

cities and towns throughout the country. Outfitted with portfolios of samples of “patriotic pictures,” these agents canvassed their cities bringing their goods directly to the masses. During the summer of 1918, for example, some 5,000 agents in every part of the country were hitting the streets hawking copies of the wildly popular painting “Colored Man Is No Slacker.” On top of their slim commission for each piece sold, these salesmen were further encouraged to move the picture by a \$100 cash prize staked by the *Chicago Defender* for the agent who sold the greatest number of copies by midnight of July 5.⁴

And in the locales where agents were unavailable, artists and distribution companies relied on advertisements in a host of widely circulated black newspapers and magazines including the *Chicago Defender*, *Messenger*, and *Crusader* to target working-class consumers. In perhaps one of the more popular advertising tactics, distributors capitalized on a growing sense of race consciousness and pride during the war years. If African Americans were going to display patriotic portraits and banners in their home and shop windows, why not have these images celebrate the brave work being done by black soldiers? The vast majority of these advertisements contained phrases urging that their works “should be in every home where Race Pride Dwells.”⁵ The Touissant Studios ad campaign for “Charge of the Colored Division Somewhere in France” in August, 1918, implored potential customers that “by putting these patriotic pictures in every Negro home in America you not only urge the Race to greater efforts to “help win the war,” but you perpetuate the gallant deeds of valor being done by our boys

⁴ *Chicago Defender*, June 29, 1918. The *Defender* made sure to extend the deadline for sales orders postmarked through July 6 to allow rural agents enough time to travel to the nearest post office and remain eligible for the prize.

⁵ *Chicago Defender*, April 27, 1918, among countless others.

“over there.”⁶ It was clear that through these advertising tactics, art distributors sought to instill more than simply patriotism in a time of war. Of greater value was the lasting account of martial heroism hanging prominently in millions of black homes. This attempt to inspire black consumers to purchase their products, however, was only one of many schemes employed by art distributors in their effort to place images of black soldiers in every home, school, business and church frequented by African Americans.

A second feature common to many of the art advertisements targeting the black working class was how affordable the products were. By not only pricing the artwork at fairly low prices, but also then explicitly pointing out just how inexpensive they were, distributors made it quite clear that their products were within the reach of even the most modest budget. In anticipation of its September 1, 1918 release, the *Chicago Defender*'s review of Charles Gustrine's painting titled "True Sons of Freedom" claimed that despite the "tremendous cost of production, we will place the picture on the market at the small price of 25 cents."⁷ Philadelphia art dealer Julian B. Miller, Jr. headlined his advertisement for a collection of postcards featuring black soldiers and sailors in simple, boldface capital lettering: "SOMETHING EVERYBODY NEEDS," followed almost immediately by "Negro pictures and post cards at exceptionally moderate prices."⁸ The prices for the popularly sized 16 x 20 inch prints were between ten and twenty-five cents, certainly a fair price to pay for a piece of artwork that was designed to inspire a generation.

⁶ *Chicago Defender*, August 17, 1918. Similar versions of this quarter-page advertisement appeared in at least ten subsequent issues of the *Defender* over the following five months, in addition to the various other ads Touissant Studios ran during this time.

⁷ *Chicago Defender*, August 31, 1918.

⁸ *Crusader*, (December, 1918), 24.

**PICTURES
at LOW PRICES**

25 for \$1.75; 50 for \$2.75, by mail. Or 100 by express, \$5.00

1—Welcome Home	5—True Blue
2—Colored Troops in Great Battle	6—True Sons of Freedom
3—Colored Troops in Hand to Hand Battle	7—The Eighth Colored Regiment
4—Our Colored Heroes	8—And Fifteen Other Pictures

GREAT NEW WAR BOOK
History of the American Negro in the Great World War
By Hon. W. Allison Sweeney.

Silk finished cloth binding, stamped elaborately with gold and 3 colors of ink and foil. Retail price..... \$2.75
Rich full seal grain keratol leather with massive full gold side title and black stamp, marble edges. Retail price..... \$3.75

**COLORED HISTORY OF THE COLORED TROOPS IN THE
WORLD'S WAR.**

Not a so-called History, but a real, complete history of Colored Soldiers, handsomely bound cloth binding. Price (1 book) by mail \$1.50. Now ready, and a stirring review of Colored troops on postcards and other beautiful cards of Colored people. No two alike. Send postoffice money order always. Agents now making \$10 and \$15 a day off these goods. 12 assorted, 25c; 100 for \$10.

ART PUBLISHING CO.
208 WEST 64TH STREET NEW YORK CITY

Figure 17. Art Publishing Company advertisement featuring a variety of modestly priced pictures and W. Allison Sweeney's *History of the American Negro in the Great World War*. *Chicago Defender*, May 3, 1919.

For the consumer who favored photographic keepsakes depicting black soldiers as opposed to a dramatized artist rendition, the market also offered packages of postcards at equally low prices. Commonly bundled in sets of 12 or more, the assorted photos featured African American troops drilling and marching at camp prior to embarking for France, and action shots of black heroes in combat. By August, 1918, the Art Publishing Company in New York City offered an inexpensive line of new cards that included images of Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts.⁹ These sets often sold for twenty-five cents per assorted dozen, or seventy-five cents for one hundred. Larger distribution firms such as Touissant Studios and the Art Publishing Company claimed to have stacks of postcards on hand numbering more than one million during

⁹ *Chicago Defender*, August 10, 1918.

the peak of the cheap martial artwork craze in 1918 and 1919.¹⁰ At a mere two cents per postcard, this corner of the popular art market represented the most inexpensive and more than likely the most widely circulated form of commemorative martial imagery during and immediately after the war.

And if the modest prices were not a great enough incentive, many art production companies offered package deals with other commemorative pieces or useful household items. During the war, for example, *Defender* staff writer and entrepreneur Tony Langston advertised “Colored Man Is No Slacker” alongside a handful of other patriotic items including service stamps to attach to one’s letters as postage and storefront window decorations bathed in red, white, and blue.¹¹ In the weeks following the armistice, Langston’s production company offered a large welcome home banner in preparation for the soldiers’ homecoming along with a scripture-themed calendar, and a list of more than fifty of the “highest grade patriotic and race pride pictures” that consumers could choose from.¹² These mix-and-match artwork offers were also a common feature in advertisements by the Bethel Art Company and the Art Publishing Company from New York, and Chicago’s Art Novelty Shop, Equal Justice Picture Company, and Famous Art Company. By bundling the already inexpensive artwork in either bulk orders or with other items, black working-class customers could support the war effort and endorse martial masculinity at a discounted rate.

Within this framework of easily accessible consumer goods featuring black soldiers, a shift in subject matter was perceptible by the summer of 1918. In the spring and early summer,

¹⁰ *Chicago Defender*, May 25, July 13, October 28, December 7, 1918; *Crusader*, (October, 1918), 23.

¹¹ *Chicago Defender*, June 29, July 6, 1918.

¹² *Chicago Defender*, December 7, 1918.

for example, E. G. Renesch's "Colored Man Is No Slacker"—depicting an African American officer giving his well-dressed love one final embrace—dominated the market. But the hysteria surrounding the exploits of Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts in May led almost immediately to the celebration and endorsement of artwork featuring aggressive combat themes. From this point forward, the more idyllic prewar and early war prints either flagged greatly in popularity or shared an increasingly crowded stage with artist renditions of battle scenes. Thus, the martial imagery marketed to, and purchased by the black consumers after the summer of 1918 contributed not only to the causes of patriotism and race pride, but also to the popularization of male gender norms centered around combat heroism.

Chicago-based artist E. G. Renesch remains one of the early twentieth century's most recognizable lithographers, producing a wide variety of works featuring military and historical subjects. Issuing a series of roughly twenty prints between 1917 and 1919 that highlighted the political and military leaders of the Great War, the significant battles, and a host of touching domestic scenes, Renesch's works garnered mass appeal—with few more popular than "Colored Man Is No Slacker." The painting's two subjects, an African American officer and his sweetheart, are framed on her side by the warmth and comfort of their beautifully adorned rural home and on his by the officer's regiment earnestly marching off to war. His grim, but determined expression is balanced by her faithful and loving gaze, but both understand the gravity of the moment. The officer's unblemished manly appearance is equaled by the soldiers under his command, marching in flawless unison. For white audiences who happened to come across a copy, the docile piece allayed fears that black soldiers were unrefined sexual predators who were incapable of perfecting the military arts. For African American viewers, "Colored Man

Is No Slacker” represented yet another full measure of devotion to the flag, as an intersection between patriotism, race pride, and manly duty.



Figure 18. “Colored Man Is No Slacker,” E. G. Renesch, 1918.

And for the early part of 1918, “Colored Man Is No Slacker” generated enormous sales. Patriotism ran high as millions of American troops arrived in France. Those who remained at home were encouraged to show their loyalty by displaying such works of art in their homes, schools, churches, and shop windows. For African Americans throughout the country, “Colored Man Is No Slacker” filled that capacity. According to the *Defender*, “one distributor in Georgia ordered 500, one in Texas ordered 1,000, [and] one in Indiana ordered 2,000. Thousands are to

be seen everywhere in Chicago.”¹³ Demand for copies of the print climaxed in the weeks leading up to Decoration Day on May 30 and the Fourth of July, as countless black consumers used the martial artwork to show their patriotism during these two holidays. Distributor Tony Langston evidenced the sheer chaos in his sales office in the weeks prior to Decoration Day, citing the overwhelming volume of orders for “Colored Man Is No Slacker” pouring in from “every section of the country.”¹⁴

The success of “Colored Man Is No Slacker,” especially in the South, was due in part to the painting’s conservative subject matter. There was little objection by white southerners to a print that displayed the middle-class respectability of Renesch’s black officer and his sweetheart. This unarmed soldier is completely non-threatening—the columned and exotically flowered front porch of his home is a visual testament to his thrift, economic achievement, and sensible middle-class tastes, and his sweetheart is a properly dressed black woman. If ever there was an image of a black soldier that would garner the approval of white southerners in the early twentieth century, this was it.

But for African American viewers, the painting almost certainly took on quite a different meaning. In addition to the rather obvious message of patriotic loyalty and duty, “Colored Man Is No Slacker” was also billed as “a silent protest against any kind of injustice.”¹⁵ The recent graduation of some 639 officers from the nation’s first African American officer’s training camp at Fort Des Moines was a significant step forward in recognizing the capability of black leaders and ending institutional racism in the military, but the subsequent poor treatment of these

¹³ *Chicago Defender*, April 27, 1918.

¹⁴ *Chicago Defender*, May 4, 1918.

¹⁵ *Chicago Defender*, April 27, May 4, 1918.

officers undermined this victory. The officer pictured in “Colored Man Is No Slacker” attempted to resuscitate the reputation for the Fort Des Moines graduates, and any other maligned or oppressed group.

By midsummer, however, the content of these affordable pieces of artwork changed dramatically. E. G. Renesch, for example, capitalized on the heroism of black combat soldiers, specifically the exploits of Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts in a print titled “Our Colored Heroes.”¹⁶ And while historian Jennifer Keene points out that the artist took significant license by placing the heroes in a somewhat tranquil forest far removed from no man’s land, Johnson and Roberts are shown engaged in violent hand to hand combat.¹⁷ The work’s most striking feature is the artist’s rendering of Henry Johnson in action. The hero’s moonlit arm links Johnson’s stern expression to his knife-wielding right hand, as he plunges the weapon into the bloodied chest of his foe. Under and around Johnson’s feet lay scores of Germans—scores of white men—a detail surely noticed by black audiences who cherished this historic moment captured in commemorative artwork. Further sacrificing accuracy for effect, Needham Roberts has been resurrected in the print’s background, and is driving a bayonet into one of his assailants while fending off a host of others.

¹⁶ “Our Colored Heroes,” Military Poster Collection, Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York City Public Library.

¹⁷ Jennifer D. Keene, “Images of Racial Pride: African American Propaganda Posters in the First World War.” In *Picture This! World War I Posters and Visual Culture*, edited by Pearl James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 233-236. Keene devotes the majority of her analysis of “Our Colored Heroes” to the historical inaccuracies in the works setting to emphasize how artists romanticized combat on the Western Front to make individual feats of heroism more recognizable to viewers in a war “dominated by heavy artillery.” And while she admits that “Our Colored Heroes” provided a “strong retort” to doubts about black martial capabilities, she suggests the work’s greatest legacy was its rather unwelcomed reality check for many white Americans.

“True Sons of Freedom” linked together themes of martial masculinity, patriotism, and the continuing struggle for equality and civil rights.

Advertising and sales firms anticipated that “True Sons of Freedom,” released on September 1, 1918, would surpass “Colored Man Is No Slacker” and all other patriotic prints for African Americans in popularity. Distributed by the majority of the African American art firms including the Langston and Brascher Circulating Bureau and the Art Publishing Company, this print was in high enough demand that it remained the focal point in advertisements for the remainder of the war and into 1919. And while other, more conservative paintings such as E. G. Renesch’s “True Blue” joined the roster of available artwork for sale, “True Sons of Freedom” and other combat-themed pieces dominated the landscape.¹⁹ By the conclusion of the war, “Colored Man Is No Slacker” was nearly impossible to find. If the continued advertisement and availability of certain prints is an indication of popularity and demand, then the disappearance of “Colored Man Is No Slacker” by September 1918 and the longevity of violent combat scenes such as “Our Colored Heroes” and “True Sons of Freedom” suggests that the black working class not only preferred the more aggressive subject matter, but also continued to purchase such works.

¹⁹ Released in late 1918 or early 1919, “True Blue” depicts an African American woman in middle-class Victorian era dress standing in her richly appointed living room, gazing longingly at a portrait of her husband who is fighting in Europe. She is joined by her three equally well-dressed children as the family cat lies sleeping by a warm fire. The tranquility and comfort of this scene was a marked departure from the other works listed with “True Blue” in many ads, works such as “Colored Troops in Great Battle,” “Colored Troops in Hand to Hand Battle,” “Our Colored Heroes,” “True Sons of Freedom,” and “The Eighth Colored Regiment.”

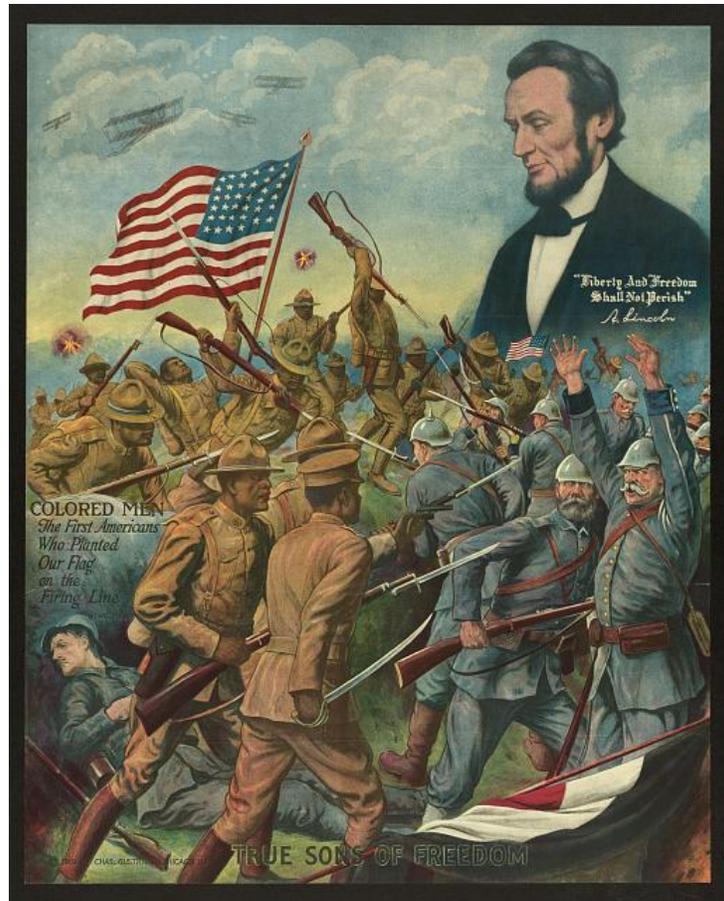


Figure 20. “True Sons of Freedom,” Charles Gustrine, 1918. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, WWI Posters, [LC-USZC4-2426].

The heroic deeds of Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts inspired yet another iconic piece of artwork featuring an aggressive African American soldier in combat—Madame Jennie Welcome’s “Charge of the Colored Division Somewhere in France.” Completed in late July, 1918, Welcome’s masterpiece depicts a black trooper from the 15th New York National Guard Regiment who has stormed across no man’s land to a barbed wire protected German trench.²⁰ Welcome’s work captures the moment when this black hero buries his bayonet into the enemy’s

²⁰ In an effort to avoid confusion among her patrons, Welcome depicts her soldier with a canteen labeled “15” linking him to the 15th New York National Guard, the all-black regiment that hailed from Harlem—her home town. Upon being mustered in to the wartime army, the regiment was redesignated the 369th U.S. Infantry Regiment. By continuing to use the 15th New York’s markers, Harlemites would instantly recognize this hero as one of their own.

chest. “Charge of the Colored Division” transplants the viewer to the Western Front where this sable doughboy makes his daring assault. Unlike the romanticized backdrop of “Our Colored Heroes,” Welcome highlights the macabre and grisly conditions in which these black men triumphed.²¹



Figure 21. Sepia reproduction of “Charge of the Colored Division Somewhere in France” featured as the frontispiece to E. Touissant Welcome’s book, *A Pictorial History of the Negro in the Great World War*.

Even the United States government took notice of Welcome’s work and its potential for inspiring patriotism among some twelve million African Americans by accepting it as a poster for the War Savings Stamp and Liberty Loan drives in August 1918.²² The black press looked

²¹ “Charge of the Colored Division Somewhere in France,” Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York City Public Library.

beyond the subject of the painting to the artist herself, emphasizing the important role that a black woman played in producing such a fine work.²³ And so on Monday, September 2, 1918, Welcome and a host of other notable African Americans including Tuskegee president Robert R. Moton and actor Bert Williams took to the streets of Harlem for a two-week savings stamp drive. More than 6,000 copies of “Charge of the Colored Division” were distributed throughout New York City to advertise the event. Over the course of the campaign, patrons and patriotic citizens could meet the local heroine on the steps of the Harlem branch of the New York Public Library (later renamed the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture) to discuss the painting and purchase stamps and posters featuring the work.²⁴

Madame Welcome and her husband, Ernest Touissant Welcome parlayed the success of the War Savings Stamp drive into even greater sales of “Charge of the Colored Division” as a stand alone piece. The *Defender* announced that “on the first day [on the market] it was said at the Touissant studio that more than one thousand of these virile pictures were sold, and mail orders coming into the office are exceptionally heavy. Framed, one of the patriotic pictures would make a perfect setting for any room in a Race home.”²⁵ While the featured artist was busy during the War Savings Stamp drive, her husband was touring the country with “a corps of men” promoting the piece, making stops across Pennsylvania, Missouri, Rhode Island, and Illinois.²⁶ The print’s acceptance by the War Department and wild popularity among African Americans

²² *A Pictorial History of the Negro in the Great World War, 1917-1918*. (New York: Touissant Pictorial Company, 1919), 50.

²³ *Crusader*, (December, 1918), 11.

²⁴ *Chicago Defender*, September 7, 1918.

²⁵ *Chicago Defender*, August 17, 1918.

²⁶ *Chicago Defender*, September 14, 28, 1918.

can be seen as a ringing endorsement of martial masculinity in combat. And as hundreds of thousands of copies remained hanging in the homes of African Americans, the value of the work transcended the war into a peacetime directive on acceptable behavior in defense of liberty and democracy.

The production and sale of images of black soldiers was not, however, the exclusive business of Jennie Louise Welcome within her family. The artist's younger brother James Van DerZee was well on his way to establishing himself as the preeminent portrait photographer in Harlem by the time the United States entered World War I, and frequently photographed soldiers before and after their service in France. But the siblings' subject matter, artistic styles, and preferred type of media all reveal a clear distinction between their target audiences within the African American consumer market. Welcome's inexpensive, mass-produced prints of the violent "Charge of the Colored Division" appealed primarily to working-class black buyers. Van DerZee's portraits, on the other hand, were private and exclusive, and were often staged with backdrops and costumes to suit the middle-class tastes of his consumers. And so even within this artistically talented family, competing definitions of manhood are evident in their martial artwork.

Jennie and James Van DerZee grew up in a relatively large, but comfortable family in Lenox, Massachusetts, in the late nineteenth century. The rural town was a vacation destination for wealthy white families at the time, and the Van DerZee children were exposed to a wide variety of high culture and quickly developed their natural musical and artistic skills.²⁷ Jennie

²⁷ Jim Haskins, *James Van DerZee: The Picture-Takin' Man*, (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1979), 22-42. Among those families that vacationed in Lenox were the Vanderbilts, the Morgans, the Westinghouses, and the Danas, all of whom attended the Trinity Episcopal parish where Jennie and James's father John worked as a sextant. James also recalled a visit to the family home by W.E.B. Du Bois while the latter attended college at Harvard.

attended the nearby Kellogg Art School in Pittsfield and the Boston Art School, and by the time she was twenty-five, was running the Touissant Conservatory of Art and Music with her husband out of their New York City home.²⁸ The success of his older sister drew James to Harlem by the early 1910s, where he opened a photography studio adjacent to the Conservatory. In 1915, he struck out on his own, opening the Guarantee Studio at 109 West 135th Street.²⁹ For the remainder of the decade, the two siblings would further cement their position as mainstays in the burgeoning Harlem art scene.

An interview with Jennie Welcome in August, 1918 by a *Defender* reporter reveals the breadth of the artist's work in both size and subject matter. Her works could be found throughout Harlem's theaters, churches, and restaurants as evidence of the artist's popularity within her community. The Seventh Day Adventist Church on 131st Street and Seventh Avenue were graced with a massive ten foot long by nine foot wide river scene completed by the local artist. Her studio was cluttered with extraordinary paintings of prize fighters, religious leaders, and pastoral scenes, among many others. The reporter, however, was most impressed by a six-part series that chronicled the exploits of an African American soldier from his touching departure for France to his triumphal return. Parts four and five in the series are noteworthy because they recognize the effort and sacrifice of a black Red Cross nurse coming to the aid of a wounded black soldier and devoutly standing by him in a field hospital.³⁰ Here, Welcome pays tribute to the role African American women played in serving their country. But none in the series received as much

²⁸ *Chicago Defender*, August 24, 1918; *The Crisis*, (December, 1910), 2.

²⁹ Haskins, 97-99.

³⁰ Despite the artist's rendition in these two paintings, no black Red Cross nurses set foot on French soil during the war.

acclaim as the second painting, the wildly popular “Charge of the Colored Division Somewhere in France.”³¹

Her brother’s growing reputation landed Van DerZee the opportunity to photograph the country’s most famous black war heroes—Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts—on two separate occasions. The first portrait of the two veterans was taken in 1920, and featured an authenticity not common in Van DerZee’s studio works. Johnson and Roberts were dressed in their combat uniforms, their trench gear lies at their feet complete with their military issued gas masks. The subjects glare forcefully into the camera which captures the martial masculinity exhibited by the soldiers from their now famous encounter in no man’s land in May 1918. In the immediate postwar years, Van DerZee portrayed the two heroes with the force and imposing physical dominance black viewers desperately needed. Representations of African American soldiers in such a manner reminded viewers that despite the armistice ending the war in Europe in November 1918, the contest to end discrimination and racially motivated violence in the United States still raged. As suggested by Van DerZee’s 1920 portrait of Johnson and Roberts, black men must remain prepared for combat.

³¹ *Chicago Defender*, August 24, 1918.



Figure 22. “Portrait of Needham Roberts and Henry Johnson” (1920), by James Van DerZee.

When Van DerZee had the chance to photograph the two icons toward the end of that decade, the heightened postwar racial tensions had abated somewhat. In “Looking Backwards,” Johnson and Roberts are noticeably more relaxed. Historian Mark Whalan notes that the somber tone of the portrait indicates the two heroes’ introspective reflection on both their harrowing experience in France as well as an unrealized recognition of their combat heroism by the United States government. The image is also a commentary on Van DerZee’s understanding of black elite values and the importance of a manicured appearance.³² The artist often “lent stylish clothes to his sitters as well as touched up their portraits to provide “evidence” of social mobility and achievement.”³³ This was almost certainly done in “Looking Backwards” considering Henry Johnson’s financial troubles in the years before his untimely death on July 5, 1929.

³² Mark Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 227-231.

³³ Whalan, 230.



Figure 23. “Looking Backwards” (c. 1929), by James Van DerZee.

The differences in style and subject between the works of Jennie Welcome and her brother James Van DerZee ran parallel to the greater divisions within the black martial art market. Artwork featuring African American soldiers produced for elites projected an image of respectability, courage, and upward social mobility, seen in such works as E. G. Renesch’s “Colored Man Is No Slacker” and James Van DerZee’s “Looking Backwards.” The sheer violence of World War I, however, opened the door for the domestication of images of aggressive black soldiers validating the violent and vigorous form of masculinity that had slowly developed over the previous two decades. These inexpensive and widely available prints celebrated the physical dominance of men such as Henry Johnson, endorsing such behavior as an acceptable approach for securing democracy in combat. But these works were not discarded on November 11, 1918 as Johnson’s regiment crossed the Rhine. They continued to grace the walls of African American homes after the war, and helped redefine acceptable gender norms as their

message encouraged black men to more aggressively resist racial violence and discrimination in the immediate postwar years.

In addition to the stand alone pieces and the War Savings Stamp posters, another place where Jennie Welcome's famed "Charge of the Colored Division" could be seen in 1919 was on the opening pages of *A Pictorial History of the Negro in the Great World War, 1917-1918*, published by her husband's Touissant Pictorial Company. Such bound historical volumes offered consumers detailed written accounts of the roles that more than 400,000 black men played in World War I, and often included many of the graphic depictions of black soldiers that were sold separately. The meaning and market for these informative, handsomely bound keepsakes mirrored that of the martial artwork genre. Similar sales and distribution tactics were employed by publishing firms, and the two products frequently appeared side by side in newspaper and magazine advertisements throughout the late 1910s and early 1920s. Displayed prominently on a coffee table, mantle, or bookshelf, any one of these volumes contained within its pages the ability to inspire black men beyond the present generation.

The annals of history, when written by the mainstream white press, typically overlook, understate, or cast a negative light on the role of African American soldiers in the wars of the United States despite their significant participation in every affair aside from the Mexican War in the 1840s. And so with each successive war, black writers, educators, and community leaders attempted to chronicle black patriotism from a non-white point of view with works directed at black readers. The war raging in Europe offered black writers and historians the opportunity to pen yet another chapter detailing the bravery and devotion of young black men in defense of their country. A central theme with all of these works were their claims of authenticity and historical accuracy, evidenced by many a title containing phrases such as "true," "complete," or

“official.” The burgeoning black press made these accounts accessible to consumers throughout the country, regardless of region or socioeconomic standing. The roughly twenty different volumes published during and shortly after World War I were designed to supplant white versions of the affair, and fill black homes and bookcases with positive accounts celebrating black martial glory.

A primary function of these works was to inform and inspire black readers with factual coverage of the war from the black perspective. As Europe caught fire in 1914, black military historian and theologian T. G. Steward completed *The Haitian Revolution*, highlighting Toussaint L’Ouverture’s famed slave revolt—Steward’s second volume on the subject. When American troops were shoving off for France in early 1918, two more works chronicling the military history of black soldiers appeared on the market, the Austin Jenkins Publishing Company’s *Negro Soldier in Our War* and John E. Bruce’s forty-eight page booklet, *A Tribute for the Negro Soldier*.³⁴ The latter recounted the role played by various non-white combatants throughout human history, and was billed as containing “much historical matter about previous wars and facts about the present war.”³⁵ These select works, along with a handful of others, were instrumental in bringing earlier accounts of black heroism to the fore, detailing black

³⁴ *Negro Soldier in Our War* was later attributed to Kelly Miller (see advertisement titled “Three Negro War Books” in *Chicago Defender* May 24, 1919), and is most likely an unofficial name for *The World War for Human Rights* which was initially published by the Austin Jenkins Publishing Company in 1917, penned primarily by Frederick E. Drinkler. In 1919, a lengthier version of the book, with roughly 300 additional pages focusing solely on African American participation in the war was released and credited to Miller listing “important contributions” by Drinkler and General John J. Pershing. Both the Austin Jenkins Company and Kelly Miller were briefly investigated by the Military Intelligence Division in late 1918 for potentially publishing inflammatory or seditious material regarding race relations in the U.S. armed forces. NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-91 (Fr Cotton, DJ Agt. Washington, DC. Re: Cobb & Scott, Geo W. Cook, and Kelly Miller), pg. 5-6.

³⁵ *The Crisis*, (June, 1918), 67. For additional reviews of Bruce’s *A Tribute for the Negro Soldier*, see *Crusader*, (October, 1918), 18; (July, 1919), 14-15.

participation from the Revolutionary War to the Battle of Carrizal. All of the histories published prior to the summer of 1918, however, could not capitalize on the war record of the African American soldiers currently fighting on French soil.

As troops returned home lauded as heroes during the spring of 1919, the brief but incredibly powerful period of black martial culture reached a frenzied peak. Film companies circulated a handful of praiseworthy movies centered around African American soldiers. Artists churned out the bulk of their works for the consumer market. Add to this the publication of the majority of the historical volumes detailing the accounts of these combat soldiers, and working-class African Americans encountered martial imagery constantly in their daily lives. In order to capitalize on the celebration of the black soldier, historians spent the winter months following the war researching and composing their manuscripts resulting in the publication of no fewer than ten volumes by May of 1919. And with the advertising tactics employed by art firms already a proven success, publishers of war histories joined the fray.

In many cases, art distribution companies picked up the rights to sell multiple war histories alongside their various prints of martial artwork. After the flurry of publications in early 1919, it was not uncommon to see two or more of these written or visual works advertised in the same space. The Art Publishing Company, for example, ran an ad in *Crusader* magazine selling “two great books”—W. Allison Sweeney’s *History of the American Negro in the Great World War* and Emmett J. Scott’s *Official History of the American Negro in the World War*.³⁶ Throughout much of 1919, Sweeney and Scott’s books often appeared together or paired with other popular works including Kelly Miller’s *Our War for Human Rights*, the Touissant Pictorial Company’s *A Pictorial History of the Negro in the Great World War*, and J. A. Jamieson and

³⁶ *Crusader*, (November, 1919), 2.

company's *Complete History of the Colored Soldiers in the World War* giving buyers a wide range of choices when it came time to place an order.³⁷

As part of an ingenious marketing campaign, two leading black editors gave away tens of thousands of copies of war histories for free—with a paid one-year newspaper subscription. The *Chicago Defender* announced that “\$27,500 Worth of the Greatest Book Ever Published [was] to Be Given Away” to the first 10,000 new subscribers, that book being none other than W. Allison Sweeney's.³⁸ For four consecutive weeks in autumn, 1925, the *Richmond Planet* ran an equally enticing offer featuring Kelly Miller's *The Negro in the World War*.³⁹ Consumers seeing the Austin Jenkins Company's advertisement in the *Cleveland Gazette*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, and the *Chicago Defender* were offered a free copy of “Colored Man Is No Slacker” or their choice of any other twenty-five cent picture with the purchase of Miller's earlier work in 1919.⁴⁰ Perhaps the most striking giveaway accompanying the purchase of one of these war histories was offered by the Chicago-based United States Publishing House. Upon receipt of the purchase price of \$2.75, the first 200 buyers would not only take delivery of Sweeney's *History of the American Negro in the Great World War*, but would also receive a full-sized sword “secured from the European battlefields” free of charge.⁴¹ What better way to celebrate the martial heroism of African American soldiers than with commemorative book and an actual weapon from the conflict?

³⁷ See advertisements in every issue of *Chicago Defender* throughout April, May, and June, 1919.

³⁸ *Chicago Defender*, June 25, 1921.

³⁹ *Richmond Planet*, September 5, 12, 19, 26, 1925.

⁴⁰ See numerous reprints of this advertisement titled “War History” in the *Cleveland Gazette*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, and *Chicago Defender* during the first half of 1919.

⁴¹ *Chicago Defender*, September 20, 27, 1919.

Comrad for Valor on the Field of Battle, I present
You with the Enemies Sword"



AGENTS MAKING BIG MONEY

Write for Territory—Send for the Book, Sword and Directions for Selling. Mr. Sweeney says, "This Book Should be Read by Every Negro in the World." Every Reader of this Paper knows he is a Fearless Leader—Support Him—Buy His Great Book—Special Introductory Offer—Only \$2.75 Cloth Bound—\$3.75 Moroccolat Binding—Free Sword with Each Book. For a Short Time Only. Agents Sample—Prospectus 25c. Write Today

United States Publishing House 3712 Lake Park Ave.
CHICAGO, ILL.

Figure 24. Advertisement for W. Allison Sweeney's *History of the American Negro in the Great World War* featuring a battlefield sword given to the first 200 buyers. *Chicago Defender*, September 27, 1919.

After the conclusion of the war, the market for African American war histories burst with volumes short and long detailing the exploits of black soldiers, support staff, and civilians during the conflict. Topics commonly found in these compendiums ranged from regimental histories and troop movements to the roles played by black men and women on the home front. The Baltimore Book Company asked potential buyers of Kelly Miller's *Our War for Human Rights* if they "wish to know how your soldiers and your sons have brought deathless glory to the race fighting the fight on the fields of France?"⁴² The United States Publishing House in Chicago posed a paragraph's worth of appetite-whetting questions in its ad for Sweeney's *History of the American Negro in the Great World War*. If readers were not "aware that a Negro was the First American to Receive the Croix de Guerre with Palm and Gold Star" or "That out of 45,000

⁴² *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 4, 1919.

Negroes engaged in battle only 9 were taken prisoners,” they could certainly discover this information in Sweeney’s anthology.⁴³ Rhetorical questions such as these were a typical feature in advertisements for war histories, and often emphasized the vast wealth of knowledge contained on their pages.

But these works were more than just collections of factual material not found in histories of the war written by white authors. They were meant to inspire a generation of young, assertive black men frustrated with conservative tactics for accessing equality and full citizenship. Explaining the value of Sweeney’s *History of the American Negro in the Great World War* in an advertisement in the *Chicago Defender*, Editor Robert S. Abbott urged his readers to “think what a spur to the ambition of every child of our race it will be to have in the home and constantly before him the acts of heroism of his relatives under conditions that every minute seemed likely to be the last of his life.”⁴⁴ Sweeney’s book had been on the market for just over two years when this ad ran in June of 1921, and over the course of those twenty-four months, dozens of brutally violent race riots erupted across the nation. The parallels between the harrowing conditions facing black soldiers fighting against a white enemy to defend democracy in France and those facing young black men in the United States during the Jim Crow era were certainly not lost on those writing, selling, and reading books such as Sweeney’s *History of the American Negro in the Great World War*. The forwards of many of these volumes contain an acute discussion of the patriotism and devotion exhibited by black soldiers and the continuing effort to secure equality in the months and years following the war.

⁴³ *Chicago Defender*, September 20, 1919.

⁴⁴ *Chicago Defender*, June 25, 1921.

As such, a concerted effort was made on behalf of each of these books that they should function as a guide to future generations of African Americans, passed down from father to son. And with so great an emphasis on instilling the traits of the soldier on male readers—especially youths—countless eager minds were saturated with images of armed black men. E. A. Johnson felt the need to caution readers from getting too excited by such martial imagery in his preface to the Touissant Pictorial Company's *A Pictorial History of the Negro in the Great World War, 1917-1918*. Just one page after Jennie Welcome's awe-inspiring "Charge of the Colored Division" depicting a black soldier plunging his bayonet into a white foe, and mere paragraphs after suggesting that young African Americans "should grow up with these examples of bravery and patriotism engraven on their very souls," Johnson requests that his readers "then take a moment's meditation from the heat of enthusiasm you find yourself in" to reflect on the grand victory of democracy over totalitarianism.⁴⁵ The men being celebrated in these works, one must remember, were soldiers. They were men trained to be physically dominant and use deadly force. The take-away lessons from these fully illustrated historical volumes may well have been that violence was required for the creation and preservation of democracy and equality.

And as any good war history should be, the pages of these books were full of action and violence—the definition of an increasingly popular brand of manhood—often in the words of the soldiers themselves. The twenty-seven page booklet *Heroes of 1918*, released as a fundraiser for Chicago's black servicemen, contained the brief memoirs of a handful of veterans from the 370th U.S. Infantry. Erkson Thompson of Company H explained that fighting German troops in the

⁴⁵ *A Pictorial History of the Negro in the Great World War, 1917-1918*, 5. Also see the preface for Z. Withers' *Heroes of 1918: Stories from the Lips of Black Fighters* (1919). Here Withers suggests that "The thought and spirit that actuated these heroes we should instill into the minds of our children in order that the nation shall remain forever the "Land of the free and the home of the brave.""

trenches near Chateau Thierry was the truest test of manhood, stating that “this is the place of all the places where the right to live is determined solely upon being 100 per cent a man.”⁴⁶

Describing a daring bayonet charge by Company G on the Hindenburg Cave in late September 1918, Sergeant E. A. Means claimed that “this was the opportune time to prove to the German the Negro fighting blood, if they did not know it before. This was the time to nail the lie that ‘Black men lack character.’ This was the time of the acid test of hell-fire where cowardice would perish...the time to write in history the un-erasable blood heroism of Negro fighters.”⁴⁷

According to the stories of the soldiers of the 370th told in *Heroes of 1918*, combat under such conditions forged modern manhood.

Chapters and sections of many other books also detailed the heroics of this famed Illinois regiment including Scott’s *Official History of the American Negro in the World War*, the Touissant Pictorial Company’s *A Pictorial History of the Negro in the Great World War, 1917-1918*, and Sweeney’s *History of the American Negro in the Great World War*—all released to the public in 1919.⁴⁸ And yet the former 8th Illinois “Black Devils” only made up a fraction of the African American fighting force in World War I, sharing the stage with many other regiments, most notably the 369th U.S. Infantry—the “Harlem Hellfighters.” Scott’s mammoth 512-page work included chapters on each of the black combat regiments, and an entire chapter devoted to Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts. These were all men of action, and the thousands of pages spent on their exploits made this fact undeniable.

⁴⁶ Z. Withers, ed. *Heroes of 1918: Stories from the Lips of Black Fighters* (1919), 4.

⁴⁷ Withers, 21, 24.

⁴⁸ For these accounts of the 370th U.S. Infantry (8th Illinois National Guard), see Scott, 214; Touissant, 40; and Sweeney, 164.

While illiteracy rates among African Americans were continually declining by the 1920s, almost one quarter of the population aged ten and up still could not read.⁴⁹ For this potential audience, and anyone interested in graphic depictions of the war and African American participants, the number of illustrations in each work was a critical selling point. Scott's *Official History of the American Negro in the World War*, for example, contains 87 unnumbered pages of photographs in addition to the more than 500 pages of text. War photographer Edward L. Snyder's collection of images of the all-black 92nd Division (comprising the 365th, 366th, 367th and 368th U.S. Infantry Regiments) were exclusively available in the Argonne Forest War Picture Company's *Colored Soldiers in France*, a 64-page pictorial study of the contribution of the country's black fighting men.⁵⁰ Nearly every advertisement for these war histories mentioned both the quantity and quality of their illustrations, adding powerful images to the textual accounts of black martial heroism.

War histories aimed at conservative or southern black audiences often contained a more tempered message outlining the psychological changes wrought by the war and the hope that black patriotism and loyalty would bring about a second reconstruction in the region. Writing from Memphis, Tennessee, Miles V. Lynk explained the rationale behind African American participation in the war and what the race anticipated in its wake with a quote from renowned black public speaker Roscoe Conklin Simmons:

⁴⁹ U.S. Census Office, *U.S. Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the year 1920*. Vol. 2, Chapter 12: *Illiteracy*. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1922), 1150.

⁵⁰ *Chicago Defender*, July 12, 1919.

And the Negro—for what did he fight? Standing alone like a man in No Man’s Land, under orders from the American white man, the Negro fought to make a Man’s Name and a place to stand in Every Man’s Land—the United States of America. Protecting the women of France from the invading foe, by the command of the government of his native land, the Negro fought for protection for his own women in Dixie...Holding his gun without a tremor and aiming it without fault, the Negro fought to hold the American ballot without a sigh and mark it without a single fear. Any hand good enough to pull a trigger in defense of the American ballot is good enough to put a cross mark on that ballot and have it counted.⁵¹

It is here, in the early pages of Lynk’s *The Negro Pictorial Review*, that the aggressive and unflinching nature of the black soldier, when coupled with his patriotic duty to the nation ultimately culminates in the granting of voting rights to African Americans.

Pushing the envelope further in *The Negro in the Light of the Great War*, Baltimore’s NAACP field secretary and Dean of Morgan College (now Morgan State University), William Pickens explains the motives behind the ferocity exhibited by African American soldiers in combat. The author suggested that “when a black American shot a German in France, he hoped he saw a lyncher die—a spiritual death. It is not a paradox, it is truth, that the Negro thrust his bayonet harder in Europe when he thought of conditions in the United States.”⁵² But Pickens immediately tempered such an inflammatory statement, by changing subjects and spending the remainder of his booklet discussing black labor, industry, education, and religion, and how true democracy and full citizenship would be reached on the strength of these pillars.⁵³ In order to avoid the same fate at Ida Wells, or picture salesman Bud Williamson, black war historians in the

⁵¹ Miles V. Lynk, *The Negro Pictorial Review; A Visual Narrative of the Negro’s Glorious Part in the World’s Greatest War. Of the Great War*. (Memphis: Twentieth Century Art Company, 1919), 11.

⁵² William Pickens. *The Negro in the Light of the Great War; Basis for the New Reconstruction*. (Baltimore: The Daily Herald Print, 1919 (?)), 5.

⁵³ Pickens, 6-8.

South had to conclude their works with cautious aspirations for a brighter future where conservative values eventually overcome deeply rooted racism.

Identifying which, if any of these books were exclusively aimed at working-class black consumers is somewhat difficult considering the breadth of content of each of these works and their ability to cater to a host of audiences within a single volume, but some distinctions can be made. The price point for a select group of inexpensive war histories gives some indication of the target audience. *Heroes of 1918*, for example, was advertised in the *Chicago Defender* for a mere thirty-five cents, and while it was a significantly shorter volume than the majority of the other books on the market, it was also sold at a fraction of the price.⁵⁴ New York's Bennett and Churchill Publishers offered J. A. Jamieson and company's *Complete History of the Colored Soldiers in the World War* for a comparatively low price of seventy-five cents, and made sure potential customers recognized this incredible bargain. In their ad in the *Defender*, the publishing house prompted consumers with a limited budget to consider the cost of more expensive works by asking them the following question: "Why pay \$2.00, \$3.00, or \$4.00 for a so called history when you can buy a better one for .75 cents?"⁵⁵ More expensive books such as Scott's or Sweeney's were certainly popular among all African Americans, but for the working class, some historical volumes celebrating the black soldier offered a greater value for their hard-earned money.

The more aggressive, and at times less refined content of these two works is also indicative of their authors—combat veterans themselves who took the opportunity to publish their own experiences in the war. An example of this casual and violent masculinity manifest in writing can be seen in the caption below the famed picture of Henry Johnson waving from his

⁵⁴ *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 12, 1919.

⁵⁵ *Chicago Defender*, May 3, 1919.

seat in an automobile during his regiment's homecoming parade on page forty-seven of J. A. Jamieson and company's *Complete History of the Colored Soldiers in the World War*. Here, the caption reads "JOHNSON, THE MAN WHO CHOPPED THEIR HEADS OFF" referring to the fateful evening in May 1918 that brought nationwide recognition to the diminutive hero.⁵⁶ The same photograph appears in Emmett J. Scott's *Official History*, but with a more eloquent caption, reading "Welcoming a Victorious Hero. Henry Johnson, the American Private who killed four Germans and wounded twenty-two with his bolo knife, and was the first American of any race to receive the Croix de Guerre, being carried in triumph up Fifth Avenue on his return."⁵⁷ In other places, Jamieson's writing is more refined, but rarely if ever do writers from elite backgrounds such as Emmett Scott, W. Allison Sweeney, and Kelly Miller choose to employ such blunt and violent language.

The tone of the period's three largest and most comprehensive studies of black participation in the war reflects the conservative, elitist standards of their authors. W. Allison Sweeney and Emmett Scott both represent an older generation of black writers who established their reputations as influential voices in the black community in the 1880s and 1890s at a time when conservative values and an uplift ideology held sway. Sweeney served as the editor of the somewhat reserved *Indianapolis Freeman* during these years, and continued in this tradition upon joining the editorial staff of the *Defender* in the 1910s. Scott spent eighteen years serving as the personal secretary to Booker T. Washington before becoming a Special Assistant to Secretary of War Newton Baker in 1918. Kelly Miller had been appointed Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Howard University by the time he began work on his war history. In

⁵⁶ John A. Jamieson, et al. *Complete History of the Colored Soldiers in the World War*. (New York: Bennett and Churchill, 1919), 47. Emphasis here is original.

⁵⁷ Scott, sixth unnumbered plate following page 16.

addition to their own personal views on race and activism that shone through in their anthologies was the fact that none of them bore witness to the carnage that defined World War I. All three of their works lack the visceral rawness of the aforementioned accounts written by combat veterans themselves. This small difference in writing style—indicative of each author’s personal experiences—speaks volumes to what each author understood to be an acceptable way to present the image of the African American soldier to black readers.

Black families in the immediate postwar period and beyond often awoke each day seeing images of martial masculinity hanging on the walls of their homes and reading about the exploits of black soldiers in a number of historical volumes available for purchase. The market for such items remained active and viable through the early 1920s as the black population experienced a steady increase in disposable income thanks to the growing postwar economy and greater job security as the number of impoverished European immigrants they competed for jobs with slowed to a trickle. The demand for representations of martial heroism was met by a host of artists and writers all seeking to not only cash in on this lucrative market, but to also provide their customers with examples of manhood that served as a primer for young black men. What these examples looked like changed over the spring and summer of 1918, however, with more conservative martial imagery giving way to an acceptance and glorification of the violent and aggressive masculinity exhibited by black combat soldiers such as Henry Johnson. The war opened the door for competing definitions of black manhood, and the brutal conditions which led to victory in France in defense of democracy were seen by many African Americans as an appropriate way to secure their own civil rights in the United States during the Jim Crow era.

But exposure to these images of martial masculinity was not limited to the inexpensive artwork and historical volumes that adorned the walls and bookshelves of African American

homes. In many cases, African Americans simply had to step out into the street to witness one of the countless commemorative parades featuring black soldiers during the World War I era. These soldiers often trained in plain view of the general public on the main thoroughfares of Chicago, New York City, Cleveland, Richmond, and Cincinnati prior to their journey to France. They were welcomed home by nearly all as heroes, and were given a heroes' welcome in all the aforementioned cities and many others. The parades, banquets, and speeches that accompanied their return from war were attended by millions of civilians eager to catch a glimpse of these beacons of masculinity.

CHAPTER 4: Witnessed by a Dense Mass of Humanity: Soldier Parades and Public Displays in the World War I Era

A steady flurry of white snow fell as the Swedish transport ship *Stockholm* pulled into harbor off West 55th Street and the North River in New York City on February 12, 1919. The *Stockholm* was laden with 2,084 American soldiers returning from France, the majority of whom comprised the 369th U.S. Infantry Regiment—the “Hellfighters of Harlem.” Among them were Colonel William Hayward and renowned bandmaster James Reece Europe. The thousands of New Yorkers that gathered on the pier that blustery winter morning clamored to celebrate, hug, and thank these black soldiers who held the front lines for a record 191 days to conclude the war. Cries filled the crisp air for one man, however—Sergeant Henry Johnson. Newspaper reporters frantically sought the diminutive hero for a few words recounting his bravery from that fateful night nine months earlier.

Over the din of cheers, the singing of songs, and the clinking of medals pinned to the uniforms of the 369th, Colonel Hayward called Johnson to his side, introducing him to reporters as the man “who is the whole war.”¹ With some initial coaxing, the modest and bashful coal merchant and railroad porter revealed the grizzly details of his encounter with a German raiding party in the early morning hours of May 14, 1918. The hero spoke of the numerous bullet and bayonet wounds he suffered, and how his partner that night, Private Needham Roberts, was quickly incapacitated. Johnson explained that after expending the ammunition for his temperamental French rifle, he drew his trusty bolo knife and set to work filleting his assailants.

¹ *Richmond Planet*, February 22, 1919.

Enraged by racist epithets hurled by the Germans, and given supreme confidence by his membership in the “Hellfighters” regiment, Johnson single-handedly killed or wounded an estimated twenty-four German raiders, earning fame, respect, and numerous citations for bravery that night.² He returned to New York a hero and icon that his people could see, hear, and touch.



Figure 25: Henry Johnson’s triumphant return to Harlem (Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 165-WW-127-39).

The celebration of men such as Henry Johnson continued five days later as an estimated two million spectators lined the streets of Manhattan and Harlem to witness the official homecoming parade for the 369th. Johnson made the journey perched in a convertible automobile, partly to signify his status as a war hero and partly because he was still recovering from the wounds he suffered during the war. When the regiment reached Harlem around 1:30 in the afternoon, the “dense mass of humanity, which included mothers, wives, sisters, and sweethearts of the soldiers sent up a shout of greeting which rivaled the noise from the guns of

² *Richmond Planet*, February 22, 1919.

the black troops when they had the Germans on the run.”³ No one was more wildly cheered that day than Johnson. For blocks Harlemites shouted “O-oh, you wick-ed Hen-nery Johnson! You wick-ed ma-an!” as the hero grinned and bowed amid the praise.⁴

The main thoroughfares of New York City belonged to the black soldiers on February 17, 1919. This was nothing new, however, as African Americans have long embraced such events as a means for securing their access to public spaces for celebrations of black pride and citizenship. Dating back to the Emancipation Day celebrations of the 1860s, African American parades, public speeches, and community festivals all played a crucial role in establishing a public forum for black cultural expression. For the five decades prior to the Great Migration and World War I, the vast majority of these events occurred in southern cities, where increasingly racist white populations often influenced and subdued the affairs. Historian Kathleen Clark points out that by 1913, elite black community leaders across the South tempered their public displays to accommodate white spectators that were grudgingly granting black participants access to their cities.⁵

In earlier decades, the African American soldier played an invaluable role in such parades, public speeches, and community fairs by defining a key component of Victorian-era manhood—respectability, patriotic duty, and proper public decorum. In the fifty years following emancipation, black men pursued numerous paths to establishing their claim to American citizenship. Whether it lay in the church, family, or economic arenas, these men attempted to

³ *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 21, 1919.

⁴ W. Allison Sweeney, *The History of the American Negro in the Great World War* (Chicago: G. G. Sapp, 1919), 273.

⁵ Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 188-228.

display a mastery of all aspects of their surroundings. As the franchise was steadily stripped from their arsenal by the end of the century, these three areas, when combined with military service, appeared to be the best path forward for black men seeking to prove their worth.⁶ The black men who volunteered to protect their communities as members of local militia organizations did so in part to continue a long tradition of patriotic sacrifice that dated back to the American Revolution. But their enlistment was also a display of manhood that was almost always off limits prior to emancipation. Since southern governors were often apprehensive about actually using their black militia regiments, commemorative public processions were effectively the only way for these men to make their presence known.

By the turn of the century, however, the tradition of black militia participation in the South had all but vanished. Seeing that the black militia regiments were rarely called to action, they became little more than an unnecessary expenditure for southern governors. Couple that with white politicians' desires to fully dissolve any claims to citizenship by their black populations, and the fate of the African American militia regiments seemed bleak. One by one, southern states eliminated the black militia organizations, beginning with Louisiana in 1889, followed by Florida in 1891, Mississippi in 1898, North Carolina in 1899, and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama in 1905.⁷ As each regiment fell by the wayside, their ability to project an image of manhood for the rest of their communities in parades, public drill exhibitions, and local fairs also disappeared.⁸

⁶ Clark, 72-73, 84, 117-118.

⁷ Beth Taylor Muskat, "Mobile's Black Militia: Major R. R. Mims and Gilmer's Rifles," *Alabama Review* 57.3 (July 2004): 204. Also see Charles Johnson, Jr., *African American Soldiers in the National Guard: Recruitment and Deployment during Peacetime and War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992).

Black fraternal organizations across the region, however, stepped in to fill the void of public displays of manhood left in the wake of the wholesale disbanding of southern black militia regiments between the Spanish-American War and World War I. Many historians have noted the invaluable function these fraternal orders played in the continued existence of images of black martial masculinity.⁹ The military-themed costumes worn by members of the Knights of Pythias, the various branches of Masonic Orders, the Knights Templar, the UNIA, and the like were almost always styled to resemble mid-nineteenth century European officers' dress uniforms—complete with medallions, sashes, tassels, and ceremonial swords. For southern white onlookers, the martial imagery displayed during the public affairs of black fraternal orders echoed a sense of decorum, respectability, and reverence to traditional white, Europhilic social behavior. For African American audiences, however, these men embodied a sense of race pride and tempered martial manhood that was able to flourish despite the tightening ligatures of the Jim Crow era in the South.

As access to public space in southern towns and cities grew increasingly limited for expressions of black manhood, a growing number of black men looked to the North for a more favorable atmosphere to display their manly traits. It had become painfully clear that the avenues leading to full citizenship and an uninhibited expression of manhood were becoming choked off in the South by the early twentieth century. At the same time, the urban landscapes in Chicago's

⁸ Clark, 126-129.

⁹ For more on the cultural importance of martial masculinity in fraternal organization parades, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 55-82; John M. Giggie, *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 59-74; Alessandra Lorini, *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the Search for Racial Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999); and Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 56-57, 83-97.

South Side, Cleveland's Central Avenue district, and Harlem were becoming more appealing to African Americans looking to escape the South. The increasingly dense population of African Americans in these and other northern cities afforded them a level of political and cultural autonomy never experienced before. Many leading African Americans brought their understanding of race relations with them to the North, wanting to patiently and peacefully advance the race forward free from the social constraints of the South. Northern cities also offered greater economic opportunities for many African Americans if they were motivated enough to leave behind the familiarity of agricultural life. Finally, these locations also provided black men the chance to either join or create new military organizations to display their manhood and patriotism in ways that were no longer viewed as acceptable in the South.

The growth of Chicago's black community in the city's South Side neighborhood occurred during the three decades prior to World War I. A developing sense of isolation, independence, and racial solidarity emerged as white Chicagoans slowly adopted many of the anti-African American sentiments that gained traction throughout the country in the 1890s, and black community leaders began embracing the autonomy afforded by a disinterested and increasingly hostile white population.¹⁰ Based on U.S. Census Reports, Chicago's black population rose from 14,271 to 109,458 between 1890 and 1920, the geographic footprint of predominantly black neighborhoods failed to keep pace, and Chicago's South Side black population density skyrocketed.¹¹ Furthermore, the city's working-class heritage was reflected in

¹⁰ For a more detailed analysis of Chicago's African American community in the early twentieth century, see Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Urban Black Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

its African American population, evidenced by a mere 2.6 percent of all working-age black males holding jobs categorized in the 1920 census as “professional” compared to the 77 percent classified as either laborers, porters, janitors, servants, or waiters.¹²

As South Side Chicago became a city within a city, young black entrepreneurs capitalized on this incredibly dense population of African Americans centered around State Street. More than a dozen movie theaters and countless restaurants, dance halls, jazz clubs, and other businesses sprang up along the State Street “Stroll” between 26th and 39th Streets, which served as the mecca for Chicago’s vibrant black cultural scene. While offering a nurturing environment for the city’s elite black intellectuals, the Stroll’s close proximity to scores of Chicago’s unregulated vice dens earned that district a rather bawdy reputation. Historian Jacqueline Stewart noted that especially after sundown, the Stroll’s atmosphere became increasingly dominated by the young, single, working-class black men who defined modern masculinity. As the average African American man strutted along the Stroll, this new mix of sexual prowess, cheap amusements, and the potential for violence emerged as a point of great concern and criticism among black elites.¹³

By day, however, many of these same working-class men were often parading the streets of Chicago’s African American neighborhoods in a wholly different capacity, as members of the

¹¹ Spear, 12.

¹² U.S. Census Office, *U.S. Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*. Vol. 4, *Population, Occupations*. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1922), 1076-1079. The “professional” category included lawyers, physicians, clergymen, teachers, actors, musicians, and dentists. While it is true that African Americans themselves did not define class categories along occupational lines, this statistical information does illuminate a rather significant disparity between the number of black laborers and professionals in Chicago.

¹³ Baldwin, 25; Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 116-118, 133-138.

city's famed all-black 8th Illinois National Guard Regiment. Annual trips to Camp Lincoln in Springfield for training, review, and Decoration Day festivities provided the public a chance to view these men in formal parades.¹⁴ Over the course of the one-week encampment at Camp Lincoln in 1914, black Chicagoans were treated to three such parades. Colonel Frank A. Denison struck up the band as the Springfield-bound regiment marched to the Illinois Central train station on Michigan Avenue on the evening of July 25, 1914. While in camp, special excursion trains brought more than 7,000 African Americans from the South Side to witness the full dress parade, and *Defender* correspondent Carey B. Lewis made sure to note that only a few hundred spectators turned out to see the three white regiments march. The dress parade marked the beginning of the day's events, and thousands of black Chicagoans stayed to mingle with the soldiers and enjoy a concert presented by Sergeant Bill Berry's regimental band. On August 2, the 8th Illinois broke camp and returned home, again parading through the streets of their hometown.¹⁵

Decoration Day events for the 8th Illinois typically included a mixture of somber remembrance for the soldiers who passed away that year, a festive parade, and an elegant ball for the regiment that evening. Reverend J. C. Anderson of the Quinn Chapel AME Church spoke earnestly of the role that the 8th played in upholding both religion and civilization in general, emphasizing "the fact that the soldiers of today must be of the better classes to be "good soldiers"" in order to lead the race forward along a constructive path.¹⁶ The following evening,

¹⁴ The title for Decoration Day gradually shifted to Memorial Day after World War II, but was not officially changed until 1967.

¹⁵ *Chicago Defender*, July 25, August 1, 1914. The *Defender's* coverage of the 1915 annual encampment on August 7 and 14, highlighted similar events, proclaiming that an estimated 10,000 spectators attended the Governor's Day parade at Camp Lincoln that year.

some 2,500 guests attended the Decoration Day ball at the 7th Regiment's armory that showcased "Charming women, beautifully gowned, ranking officers in full-dress uniforms, delightful music from the Eighth Regiment band, [a] presentation of medals, testimonials and speeches, [and] plenty of room to dance."¹⁷ The 8th marched in every Decoration Day parade in Chicago until the 1917 event, which they were unable to attend because the scores of new recruits had not yet received their state-issued uniforms in time.¹⁸ It was quite clear that when the regiment was on public display black Chicagoans were "justly proud of the 8th Regiment and the influence it wields on a big city like Chicago."¹⁹

As the nineteenth anniversary of the 8th Illinois approached, Chicago's black soldiers once again took to the streets, this time to participate in the cornerstone laying ceremony for their massive new armory at 35th Street and Forest Avenue. On Sunday, October 11, 1914, the 8th paraded through the principal streets surrounding the new building with their regimental band belting out martial airs attracting thousands of spectators to the line of march. When the men reached the site of their future home, a number of dignitaries praised the regiment's stalwart service in Cuba following the Spanish-American War as part of a greater tribute to the long tradition of African American patriotism when the nation sounded the call to arms. The state

¹⁶ *Chicago Defender*, May 30, 1914.

¹⁷ *Chicago Defender*, May 30, 1914. These extravagant pre-war balls and galas held by the regiment confirm the claim made by historian Wilson Moses, who suggests that African American cultural identity prior to World War I often mirrored upper-class white, European patterns since these were generally understood to be the defining qualities of civilization. Wilson Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 20, 28, 247,

¹⁸ *Chicago Defender*, June 3, 1916, June 2, 1917.

¹⁹ *Chicago Defender*, June 5, 1915.

recognized the regiment's reputation for discipline and bravery, and awarded the soldiers a proper and permanent home, officially ending their years training in a livery stable.²⁰

But the new armory in the heart of Chicago's South Side served a much greater purpose than simply providing the regiment a place to gather and train. Countless public events were hosted at the facility from the day it opened. The public grand opening of the structure was a "Colonial Reception," ball, and a house warming affair held on the evening of February 22, 1915, the theme undoubtedly inspired by George Washington's birthday. Despite what was reported by the *Chicago Defender* as an incessant rain, more than 2,500 guests attended the gala event to see what was billed as the "biggest military assemblage ever witnessed in this country."²¹ The new armory also served as the site for the regiment's annual military ball, where the greatest effort was given to attract the most renowned entertainers and prepare the dance floor for the evenings festivities.²² As the regimental band played and numerous pieces of militaria adorned the walls, the scores of spectators that attended events at the armory during the World War I era were constantly reminded of the importance of the 8th Illinois for black Chicagoans.

Throughout 1916, President Woodrow Wilson repeatedly promised to keep the United States out of the conflict that was sweeping across Europe. That did not mean, however, that he was unafraid to deploy U.S. troops closer to home. Tensions between the United States and Mexican bandit Pancho Villa boiled over after the latter crossed the border and raided Columbus, New Mexico, killing seventeen Americans on March 9, 1916. In order to improve border

²⁰ *Chicago Defender*, October 17, 1914.

²¹ *Chicago Defender*, February 13, 20, 27, 1915.

²² *Chicago Defender*, May 22, 1915.

security, Wilson ordered troops south, including the famed 8th Illinois. Once again, the finest regiment in the state donned their uniforms and set out for the Illinois Central train station, and once again, thousands of Chicagoans bid them farewell in what the *Defender* called “one of the best tributes ever received by a regiment leaving Chicago.”²³ What made the 8th so valuable to the African Americans they left behind was their impeccable record in the service of the country dating back to their stint in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, something no other black National Guard regiment or martially themed fraternal order could claim prior to 1918. They truly were “the Fighting Eighth.”

And yet the only fighting the regiment saw during their three and a half months on the border was with a handful of intoxicated members of the provost guard of the 19th Regiment who hurled some “vile language” at the black troops. When the volley of bullets ceased, three soldiers in the 8th were shot, and another twenty were in the local jail. Shortly after a similar affray between the regiments erupted a second time, the soldiers from Chicago were on their way home.²⁴ The treatment of the 8th Illinois by southern white soldiers was openly condemned by black leaders across the nation as one more example of the lack of respect given to African American men in military uniform. All that was put aside, however, when the 8th returned to Chicago on October 28, and the regiment was greeted with “hysterics” as they took command of the South Side streets during their homecoming parade.²⁵

By the spring of 1917, President Wilson could no longer ignore his economic ties to England and France and the growing list of German atrocities. On July 25, the 8th Regiment’s

²³ *Chicago Defender*, July 1, September 30, 1916.

²⁴ *Chicago Defender*, July 29, August 19, 1916.

²⁵ *Chicago Defender*, November 4, 1916.

bugler sounded the call to arms marking a three-month-long frenzy of activity as the men prepared for war. They paraded from their armory to Schorling Park on July 29 to be the guests of honor at Andrew “Rube” Foster’s American Giants baseball game.²⁶ Receptions and farewell services were held in August, September, and October giving Chicagoans numerous opportunities to say goodbye to their beloved 8th Illinois.²⁷ On Friday, October 19, the soldiers gathered their gear and marched that familiar route to the train station. This time, the procession lasted more than two hours as the companies from Chicago had grown to a full war strength of 2,002 men.²⁸ It was a somber moment for many who understood that they may never see their sons, husbands, or brothers again. Upon reaching camp in Houston, Texas, the regiment would officially be mustered in to the United States Army and redesignated the 370th U.S. Infantry before shipping off to France.²⁹

The 8th Illinois was not the only regiment of African American soldiers to hail from Chicago. As part of the Selective Service Act passed by Congress on May 18, 1917, some 737,626 black men between the ages of 21 and 31 were initially drafted into the United States Army.³⁰ Those called to arms from the Windy City became a significant portion of the 365th U.S. Infantry, a regiment that would experience a much more difficult and controversial time in the

²⁶ *Chicago Defender*, July 28, 1917.

²⁷ *Chicago Defender*, August 18, September 8, 29, 1917.

²⁸ *Chicago Defender*, October 13, 20, 1917.

²⁹ For detailed regimental histories for all four regiments in the 93rd Infantry Division, see NA, RG 120 (Records of the American Expeditionary Forces), 93rd Division: Box 1: 293-11.4 History.

³⁰ Emmett J. Scott, *Scott’s Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (1919), 66-74. These numbers would increase over the course of the war as more soldiers were needed.

Great War. The 365th was under considerably more scrutiny than their National Guard brethren because they were to be officered by the recent graduates from Fort Des Moines, the nation's first training camp exclusively for black officers. Furthermore, the draftees who were mustered in to the 365th from Chicago were men who initially had little interest in military participation, seeing that at any time prior they could have joined the 8th Illinois. They were soldiers forced into service and tended to come from the ranks of Chicago's elite black population, as noted by the *Defender* staff correspondent who accompanied the draftees to Camp Grant for training.³¹

When Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts were fighting off Germans "over there" the 365th was still stuck at their training camp in Rockford, Illinois. It took significantly longer to whip the inexperienced drafted men into shape, and by the time they were ready for deployment, there was less than three months remaining in World War I. The vast majority of the regiment's parades and drill exhibitions took place at Camp Grant in Rockford, some 90 miles northeast of Chicago, giving black Chicagoans significantly fewer opportunities to witness the 365th in all their martial glory. Finally, on the first weekend in August, the 4,000 Chicago draftees from the 365th left their homes one last time for Camp Grant and eventually France.³² In their possession was a regimental flag given to them by *Defender* Editor Robert S. Abbott.³³

³¹ *Chicago Defender*, November 3, 1917. The correspondent reported that there was no roughness or alcohol consumption among the new soldiers, and that the "gentlemanly appearance and actions" of the well known "doctors and ball players" won them praise from local whites.

³² *Chicago Defender*, August 10, 1918.

³³ The flag donated by Abbott was significant for two reasons. First, any regiment presented with such a flag solemnly promises to return it upon their return home. Secondly, the flag given to the 365th was the first of its kind donated by a newspaper editor, white or black. See *Chicago Defender*, February 16, 23, 1918, for details of the presentation ceremony.

And while the soldiers performed relatively well in combat, the loss of their battle flag and the ridicule they faced from white soldiers left the regiment with feelings of disgrace. On September 26, 1918, Colonel A. E. Dietsch, commanding officer of the 365th ordered the two soldiers in charge of guarding the regimental flag to the front, leaving the colors behind in a barn, securely packed with the officers' baggage. As the regiment continued its push forward, the flag was lost and never recovered. With the end of the war quickly approaching, a half-hearted attempt to locate the flag was made by a number of white officers to no avail and the regiment was forced to march with either no colors or with a flag borrowed from the 317th regiment. This was a severe blow to the morale of the men in the 365th, who "became the laughing stock of the division" for the duration of their service, and were subjected to ridicule on board the transport *Olympic* by countless white officers and men for their failure to bring the colors home.³⁴

The African American regiments that hailed from Ohio, and most notably Cleveland, emerged from a wholly different set of social conditions than their brothers-in-arms from Chicago. The black community in Cleveland prior to the Great Migration was fairly small, consistently making up between one and two percent of the city's overall population until 1920.³⁵ Of even greater importance, historian Kenneth Kusmer notes that primarily through paternalism and patronage, elite black Clevelanders were able to orchestrate significantly more peaceful race relations than in other northern urban centers at this time.³⁶ This tradition of peace,

³⁴ *Chicago Defender*, March 1, August 9, 1919. This scathing account of the callous behavior of the white troops and the subsequent embarrassment and ridicule felt by the 365th landed Editor Abbott in hot water with the Bureau of Investigation. See NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-133 (IO-CD to C, MIB. Re: "Chicago Defender" and anonymous complaint).

³⁵ Kenneth Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland: 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 10.

³⁶ Kusmer, 53-65.

equality, and conservative middle-class values remained intact for black elites, but as the city's black population experienced a 307 percent increase between 1910 and 1920, a sharp socioeconomic division became clear. The new black residents moved into the area vacated by old-stock immigrants who had become wealthy enough to purchase homes in the suburbs. But the expanding black neighborhood was firmly bounded on the south and southwest by the "staunch resistance of certain urban ethnic groups" including recently arrived Poles, Hungarians, and Italians.³⁷ With no place left to go, the concentration of black Clevelanders steadily increased throughout the 1910s and 1920s.

As the demographics and geography of black Cleveland changed, a new cadre of entrepreneurs vied for leadership in the African American community. While still maintaining many of the middle-class values that the old guard subscribed to, these new leaders increasingly attempted to distance themselves from the stifling patronage and accommodation of local whites. One place this was expressly manifested was in their demand for black officers of the state's one African American National Guard regiment, the 9th Ohio. Such blunt demands were new and rather unwelcomed by the governor and white military leaders, and often handicapped the Ninth's chances of seeing combat. The regiment missed their opportunity to fight in Cuba in 1898 and on the Mexican border in 1916, making it only as far as training camps in Dunn Loring, Virginia, and Columbus, Ohio, respectively. The regiment's treatment during the border campaign in 1916 was especially denigrating for the black Ohioans. While the white National Guard regiments were ordered to Camp Willis in Columbus to prepare for duty, the 9th Ohio was asked to arrive early and prepare the camp for the white soldiers and return home when the tents

³⁷ Kusmer, 170-171. The initial area of black settlement in Cleveland was along Central Avenue. After the influx of black southerners in the 1910s, this region expanded eastward to East 105th Street, north to Euclid Avenue, and south to Woodland Avenue, but no further.

were pitched and latrines were dug. The employment of black soldiers for such menial labor drew heated criticism from *Gazette* Editor Harry Smith.³⁸

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young, one of the highest ranking black officers in the U.S. Army, expressed his disappointment with the service record of the languishing Ohio regiment in a letter to Editor Smith in the wake of the Camp Willis disaster. Comparing their poor record to that of the 8th Illinois's, the native Ohioan lamented that "Ohio will not let Illinois beat us and that we will have a regiment as creditable to black people as the 8th Illinois, and to be used in a way as dignified as the 8th Illinois."³⁹ Because of his lengthy military career, the 9th Ohio was occasionally placed in the hands of Colonel Young, and calls from black community leaders went up to fill the rest of the officers' ranks with capable black men. But once again, these demands seemed to only aggravate white politicians in the state. As the nation readied its military forces for combat in Europe in August 1917, the Army unceremoniously "retired" Colonel Young and threatened to completely disband the 9th Ohio.⁴⁰

All the rumors regarding the fate of the Ninth were put to rest when the regiment received orders to mobilize and entrain for Camp Sheridan in Montgomery, Alabama that October. Colonel Young would remain on the sidelines, but the rest of the regiment was mustered in intact as the 372nd U.S. Infantry. And so, on October 19, Clevelanders of all races put the recent officership debate aside, braved a cold, wet snow, and turned out en masse to send the 9th off to war.⁴¹ Moved by the parade, Andrew McSpadden, an elderly black Civil War veteran, longed for

³⁸ *Cleveland Gazette*, July 1, 15, 1916.

³⁹ *Cleveland Gazette*, August 15, 1916.

⁴⁰ *Chicago Defender*, August 11, 1917.

⁴¹ *Chicago Defender*, October 20, 1917.

his youth and recalled just how important military training had been for him. According to the aged patriot:

military drill and discipline educate both mind and body, form habits of punctuality, attention, industry, and obedience. They give the active exercise necessary for bodily health and vigor. Every man is improved in his carriage, health, habits, and respect for law and constituted authority by the training of the drill. His faculties are all improved and brought under better command.⁴²

McSpadden's comments clearly represented the Victorian era gender norms so common among black Clevelanders in the decades leading up to World War I.

While the black troops in Ohio lurched toward combat readiness, another black community was in the process of furnishing perhaps the most celebrated African American regiment to see action in World War I, the "Fighting Fifteenth" New York National Guard. Here, the concentrating of African Americans in Harlem during the late 1910s offers yet another glimpse into the crucial role played by black soldiers in their communities prior to World War I. What began as an upscale white neighborhood north of Central Park drastically changed by the end of the decade. Following a collapse in Harlem's housing market, many of the properties were vacated, opening the door for tens of thousands of black migrants from the South and various Caribbean points of origin to rent apartments at slashed rates. The black population in Harlem steadily grew from roughly 50,000 in 1915 to 73,000 by the end of the war, and a staggering 165,000 by the end of the 1920s.⁴³ The area north of 110th Street between 5th and 8th Avenues was well on its way to becoming the focal point of black culture in the United States by the time President Wilson took the country to war.

⁴² *Cleveland Gazette*, November 3, 1917.

⁴³ Bill Harris, *The Hellfighters of Harlem: African-American Soldiers Who Fought for the Right to Fight for Their Country* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2002), 86-89.

A place for the black soldier in Harlem's distinct developing culture was established when the 15th New York National Guard Regiment was signed into existence by Governor Charles Whitman on June 16, 1916. Colonel William Hayward, a close friend of Whitman's, was given command of the regiment under the express condition that like every black regiment in the country (aside from the 8th Illinois) this one be officered by white men.⁴⁴ But unlike the 9th Ohio which labored in an institutionally racist system under white officers for more than two decades, the 15th New York and its supporters in Harlem were more concerned with getting the regiment off the ground as the war in Europe trudged on. In six months, recruitment for the 15th had yielded the requisite number of soldiers to earn full state recognition, and in less than a year, Hayward's regiment reached its full peacetime strength of 1,378 men.⁴⁵

The meteoric rise of the regiment was made possible in part by one man—bandmaster James Reece Europe. When the 15th paraded in 1916 and 1917, it certainly was not the regiment's ragtag uniforms or shouldered broomsticks that attracted young black men to the enlistment offices. The martial airs belted out by the regimental band under the direction of Europe was Hayward's trump card.⁴⁶ "Big Jim" Europe firmly established himself as the leading African American orchestral composer and conductor throughout the 1910s, founding the Clef Club at the Marshall Hotel in 1910. Europe's orchestras were booked at all the high society affairs that decade, and these business relationships would prove to be invaluable for the funding

⁴⁴ For Hayward's personal account of the regiment's formation, training, and service, see NA, RG 120 (Records of the American Expeditionary Forces), 93rd Division: Box 1: 293-13.6 Reports on Organization.

⁴⁵ Harris, 14-15.

⁴⁶ *Chicago Defender*, June 23, 1917.

of the 15th New York after its creation in 1916.⁴⁷ On June 29, 1917, for example, some 7,000 elite New Yorkers crowded into the Manhattan Casino to hear the Fifteenth Regimental Band led by Europe, with the proceeds from the affair shoring up the regiment's bottom line.⁴⁸ Thus the regiment owed much of its early development to Hayward's political ties and Europe's association with wealthy white New Yorkers.

And while Hayward and Europe were establishing the political and financial foundations for the regiment, the average black soldier in the 15th New York was developing a close bond with the residents of Harlem. The upstart regiment would not have a proper armory to call home until 1924, so for nearly ten years, the borough's main thoroughfares became the regiment's drill and parade grounds. While Colonel Hayward lamented the poor training conditions, the nightly exercises gave local blacks a chance to embrace the young men who were eager to test their mettle.⁴⁹ The additional dress parades Harlemites bore witness to as the regiment traveled to and from training camps attracted thousands of spectators and reinforced the notion that the men were growing increasingly more proficient in the martial sciences.

Like Chicago, New York's substantial African American population furnished the bulk of an infantry regiment through the draft as well—the 367th “Buffaloes.” This inexperienced collection of draftees was under close examination like many of the other regiments of black soldiers. One account of the regiment's most notable parade on March 23, 1918, claimed that the 5th Avenue parade route was added to show white onlookers in Manhattan that in four months

⁴⁷ Peter N. Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle: The Harlem Hellfighters' Struggle for Freedom in WWI and Equality at Home* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009), 9-14; Harris, 55-65. Also see Reid Badger, *A Life in Ragtime: A Biography of James Reese Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁴⁸ *Chicago Defender*, June 30, 1917.

⁴⁹ Scott, 199.

black men could become polished, respectable soldiers. Further north in Harlem, where the seven-mile procession concluded, reserved acceptance gave way to pandemonium. The same account declared that “Harlem went mad,—went clean out of its mind,—with delight and amazement at the showing made by the “Buffaloes,”—THEIR OWN!”⁵⁰ The hundreds of thousands of spectators that witnessed the 367th parade that day were undoubtedly impressed by the transformation of more than 3,000 young black men into “a snappy, disciplined, war-ready, full-strength regiment in four months.”⁵¹

And nowhere was this emphasis on discipline and martial appearance more evident than in accounts of the black officers that recently graduated from Fort Des Moines. Nearly every record of the parades by the four drafted regiments, the 365th, 366th, 367th, and 368th Infantries noted their officers’ flawless appearance. The *Defender*’s coverage of the Buffaloes’ March 23 parade in New York, for example, claimed that while the black draftees carried themselves quite well, one glimpse of the black officers put the rest of the men to shame.⁵² When the 368th paraded in Baltimore on April 6, 1918, the *Afro-American* made sure to note that the regiment had received fine training from its Fort Des Moines graduates—four of whom were hometown boys. President Wilson reviewed the soldiers that afternoon and as the 368th marched by, the thunderous applause for the black regiment undoubtedly answered any questions the Commander-in-Chief had in authorizing the nation’s first black officer’s training camp.⁵³ It

⁵⁰ *The Presentation of the Colors to the 367th Regiment of Infantry, Colonel James A. Moss Commanding, by the Union League Club, and the Parade of the Regiment of New York City, March 23, 1918* (New York: S. L. Parsons and Company, 1918), 4-5, 9; *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 29, 1918; *Chicago Defender*, March 23, 30, 1918.

⁵¹ *The Presentation of the Colors to the 367th Regiment of Infantry*, 4.

⁵² *Chicago Defender*, March 30, 1918.

seemed, for now, that the high regard for the 639 Des Moines graduates was a clear victory for the black elites that fought so vigorously for their creation. What was yet to be seen, however, was whether these men could live up to the expectations of black and white leaders at home as combat officers in an institutionally racist United States Army in France.

The conditions for change in Chicago, Cleveland, and New York were ideal when the war ended in November 1918. African American residents in these cities spent months, and in some cases years supporting their local troops. They attended fundraising events for the soldiers and solemnly watched the men parade to embarkation points that would eventually carry them to the front lines in France. And with the steady growth and relative autonomy of the black communities in northern cities, the populations there could honor their returning heroes at war's end in whatever manner they saw fit. The martial decorum that dominated the prewar, mixed audience public events could—and often did give way to wild parades and receptions in locations where the black masses could spill over the parade route barricades and dance the night away to the new infectious syncopated jazz tunes played by the regimental bands.

For the first time, the postwar parades, speeches, and fairs presented African Americans with options. Elites could and did continue to celebrate and honor the soldiers in the more conservative fashion they were accustomed to, but the war had also popularized and domesticated a more aggressive and violent brand of black manhood. Accounts of heroism beginning with Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts's intrepid episode marked a pivotal moment when unproven boys became battle-hardened men. Memories of the young-looking freshly minted soldiers were largely erased on May 14, 1918. The men coming home would not be wearing the crisp khaki uniforms and apprehensive smiles they were last seen in. Many of the

⁵³ *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 5, 12, 1918.

warriors that returned from France had been forever changed by combat. They lived and died by a new set of values that welcomed violence, physical dominance, and supreme self-confidence and shunned passivity and meekness. When the soldiers made their triumphal return, their attitude as “new Negroes” had the potential to inspire other black men to contest discrimination, inequality, and lynching with a ferocity that had yet been seen.

Perhaps the first public commemoration of the heroic deeds of Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts was a banquet thrown in their honor in New York City on July 5, 1918. This event highlights the beginning of this broad shift toward embracing the physical prowess characterized by modern gender norms. Johnson’s wife and Roberts’s parents were the guests of honor among the more than 2,000 dignitaries at the reception thrown by the Women’s Auxiliary for the 15th New York National Guard. Former President Theodore Roosevelt sent his warmest regards along with a large silk American flag. Governors Charles Whitman and Walter Evans Edge and Secretary of War Newton Baker also sent telegrams recognizing the valorous deeds. The affair had all the trappings of a high society event, complete with a full supper served by the Women’s Auxiliary and music performed by members of the Clef Club. A public endorsement of such an incredible violent and bloody episode, however, was atypical for the white and black elites in attendance. It was clear that from this point forward such behavior was endorsed and revered by all within the bounds of patriotism during a time of war.⁵⁴

The three months that separated the Armistice on November 11, 1918, and the arrival of the troops back home the following February further marked this transitional period when

⁵⁴ *Chicago Defender*, July 6, 1918. Needham Roberts was also honored at Manhattan’s Dolphin Hotel on November 4, 1918, when he passed through New York City on furlough while he recovered from the wounds he suffered nearly six months earlier. Representatives of the *Chicago Defender* and *Amsterdam News* organized the event, but lamented not having more time to plan the affair to attract a greater crowd. See *Chicago Defender*, November 9, 1918.

embracing the aggressive, modern masculinity gained traction, even if tentatively. Governor Whitman only had to mention the “mighty record of the 15th New York Regiment making the Huns do the turkey-trot” back to Germany in a November 1 campaign speech at the Metropolitan Church in Harlem to get black voters whipped into a frenzy.⁵⁵ In Brooklyn, Oliver Wendell Morton lobbied the victory parade committee to have the predominantly African American Local 968 of the Longshoremen’s Union’s float manned by black members. His suggested theme for the float was a reenactment of Madame Welcome’s now-famous painting “Charge of the Colored Division” which explicitly depicted a black soldier driving his bayonet into a fallen German enemy. After some discussion the idea was accepted, and on November 16, Brooklynites enthusiastically cheered a parade float that showed a black man stabbing a white man—within the context of battle, of course.⁵⁶

But not all the postwar celebrations centered around the violence and combat glory of the nation’s African American troops, leaving plenty of public space for more conservative civilians to participate in the fanfare. On December 6, for example, the Committee on Public Information hosted a grand peace jubilee and ball for black New Yorkers at the Manhattan Casino. Highlighting the event’s entertainment was a recitation of some war heroics, but the guests were also treated to an elaborately decorated hall and an appearance by noted elocutionist Mary Ross-Dorsey from Boston.⁵⁷ In Rockford, Illinois, three hundred members of the 365th Infantry Regiment that were left behind hosted an elegant dance at the Soldiers’ Club in Camp Grant on January 18, 1919. Wives, girlfriends, and female acquaintances from the surrounding towns

⁵⁵ *Chicago Defender*, November 2, 1918.

⁵⁶ *Chicago Defender*, November 23, 1918.

⁵⁷ *Chicago Defender*, November 23, 1918.

enjoyed the fine entertainment and commented on the gentlemanly conduct of the soldiers that evening.⁵⁸ In the months before the first troop ships returned home, African Americans of all classes seized the opportunity to express their patriotism and honor the bravery of black soldiers in whatever manner they saw fit.

The first black troops to arrive from overseas were the thirty-six officers and 1,119 men from the 814th Pioneer Infantry hailing mainly from Kentucky. As their transport, the *Celtic*, docked in New York Harbor on December 18, their regimental band belted out “Old Kentucky Home” for the anxious crowd gathered on the shore. But the arrival and parade for the 814th was somewhat reserved because the regiment was still in a training camp in Winchester, England, when the armistice was signed, and thus never reached the battlefields of France. New York and the rest of the nation had to wait another two months for the first combat troops to return.⁵⁹ Thanks to a press release by Emmett Scott in late January, 1919, that detailed the return schedule for many of the black regiments, local Soldiers’ Comfort Committees (comprised of loved ones, church members, and representatives from local black newspapers) had more than three weeks to finalize their plans for the homecoming events.⁶⁰ Thousands of people lined the docks of New York City’s naval ports in mid February braving winter temperatures and in some cases freezing rain and snow to warmly welcome their loved ones.⁶¹

During a nine-day period beginning on February 9, New Yorkers witnessed an historic and incredible sight—five of the eight black combat regiments pulled into the city’s harbors

⁵⁸ *Cleveland Gazette*, January 25, 1919.

⁵⁹ *Cleveland Gazette*, December 28, 1918, January 18, 1919.

⁶⁰ *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 24, 1919.

⁶¹ *Richmond Planet*, February 22, 1919.

bearing the scars and stories of their costly victory. The first to arrive via the *LaFrance* were the famed 370th, roughly 1,600 members of the former 8th Illinois “Black Devils.” Two days later the behemoth transport ship *Leviathan* docked in Hoboken, New Jersey, just across the Hudson River from New York City, carrying nearly 10,000 men from the 371st, 372nd, and parts of the 368th Regiments. The following morning, on February 12, the *Stockholm* arrived laden with the former 15th New York—Harlem’s own “Hellfighters.” The remainder of the 368th reached New York three days later on board the *Harrisburg*, and on February 17, the 367th “Buffaloes” made landfall via the *Rotterdam*. All totaled, more than 20,000 African American combat troops disembarked in New York City and made their way homeward that week.⁶²



Figure 26. The *La France* with her cargo of 370th Infantry “Black Devils” on deck, just before docking in New York harbor on February 10, 1919 (Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 111-SC-64005).

⁶² *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 24, 1919; *Cleveland Gazette*, February 15, 1919; *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919; *Richmond Planet*, February 22, 1919; *Union* (Cincinnati), February 22, 1919.

As the soldiers made their way across the country to their home towns, the frequent train stops were cause for celebration. The residents of Conneaut, Ohio, for example, greeted and dined the famed 8th Illinois as they returned to Chicago.⁶³ Scott's advanced notice paid off, and tens of thousands, in some cases, hundreds of thousands of local blacks turned out to witness the parades. The frenzied environment at these affairs was caused, in part, by the fact that black combat regiments were the first full regiments of American troops to return from France.⁶⁴ Generally, the parades were more impressive in the North, especially in Chicago, New York City, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, where entire battalions of black National Guardsmen were mustered in early in the war, shed their blood in the final months of combat, and were mustered out together after the war's conclusion. Southern and western cities with dense African American populations participated as well, most notably in Richmond, Atlanta, and Topeka.

Five days after their arrival, the "Hellfighters" were scheduled to parade in New York City. A raucous crowd had formed hours before the procession began, lining 5th Avenue from 23rd Street in lower Manhattan clear to the streets of Harlem where many of the soldiers called home. The sight was moving. The regiment marched at full war strength, nearly 3,000 battle-scarred men with dented trench helmets, bullet-torn uniforms, bayonet-tipped rifles, and the dirt of combat on their boots.⁶⁵ They strode the roughly seven-mile route twenty abreast, barely breaking attention to smile at their loved ones and the many dignitaries that braved the cold February weather to greet them. As the parade moved from the racially mixed crowd in Manhattan to the almost entirely African American crowd in Harlem the atmosphere began to

⁶³ *Union* (Cincinnati), February 22, 1919.

⁶⁴ *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919; *Union* (Cincinnati), March 1, 8, 1919; *Richmond Planet*, March 1, 1919.

⁶⁵ *Cleveland Gazette*, February 22, 1919.

change. The streets alone could not contain the reported 300,000 spectators in Harlem, and many gathered on rooftops, overcrowded fire escapes, and leaned out windows just to catch a glimpse of their heroes as they marched by.⁶⁶

Black Harlemites from “all stations of life” attended the parade that Monday morning. The local board of education ordered the public schools in Harlem closed for the day so that the children could witness the historic moment when the 15th New York took to the streets. Many of the young boys in the audience wore makeshift army uniforms with the regiment’s rattlesnake patch emblazoned on the shoulders. The shops that lined Lenox Avenue, that for months displayed that same regimental logo in their windows, closed their doors to allow their employees to view the parade. After being mustered out of service later that week, the men in the “Old 15th” returned to their prewar jobs as waiters, Pullman porters, busboys, elevator men, and the like, but for many of the spectators in Harlem witnessing this event, memories of the dented helmets, the bullet-torn battle flag, and limping veterans made the violence of war a tangible reality. Beneath the joyful smiles the soldiers returned changed men capable of incredible force—and from February 17 onward, all of New York knew it.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Harris, 3-10; *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 21, 1919; *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919.

⁶⁷ *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919; *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 21, 1919; Harris, 7; Nelson, 211-257; Sweeney, 267-274.



Figure 27. Homecoming parade for the 15th New York “Hell Fighters” passing the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue (Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 111-SC-38761).

While New York was agog on February 17 with its famed “Hellfighters,” black Chicagoans erupted in an equally impressive celebration honoring the arrival of the 8th Illinois that same day. The regiment dubbed the “Black Devils” by their German adversaries had returned to the city numerous times from combat in the past, but their reception on this February morning was markedly different. Robert E. Butler, staff correspondent for the *Defender*, pushed his way to the front of what he called “a sea of flesh” to greet the regiment at the La Salle Street train station at 7 a.m. He was just in time to hear the soldiers let out a shrill “whoop—the kind that caused the blood to curdle in the Germans’ veins.”⁶⁸ Butler’s account of the day’s festivities

⁶⁸ *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919.

mirrored the sentiments taking place in Harlem—noting both the ferocity of the returning soldiers and the similarly forceful celebration of those men by the general public.



Figure 28. Chicago parade of the 370th Regiment (Old 8th Illinois) passing the reviewing stand on Michigan Avenue, where the crowds were so dense that troops could not march in regular formation. (Scott, *Official History of the American Negro in the World War*, fifth unnumbered plate following pg. 288).

For the next hour or so, the regiment marched amid a wild crowd to the Chicago Coliseum where they filed in, relaxed, and mingled with some 30,000 loved ones. And yet the day's events were just beginning. The men of the 8th enjoyed a meal with friends and family for the first time in sixteen months as the sound of laughter, mournful cries, and Sgt. William Berry's regimental band filled the stadium. Those spectators able to gain entry into the Coliseum were the envy of the additional 30,000 Chicagoans forced to wait outside by local police who struggled all day to maintain some level of order. After a series of speeches from notable

dignitaries heaped praise on the “Black Devils,” orders were given to shoulder their rifles and fall in line for the marquee parade up Michigan Avenue.⁶⁹

Shortly after 2 p.m., the stalwart men of the “Fighting Eighth” were in formation at the intersection of 16th Street and Michigan Avenue. Just like their fellow soldiers in New York, Chicago’s black veterans marched in full “trench apparel—helmet, cartridge, belt, service overcoat, bayonet, and rifle,” and when combined with their expressions of “self-determination and a fighting bull-dog spirit [that] was still stamped all over their bronzed faces...they were fully capable of striking terror into the hearts of the Germans” and anyone else who stood in their path.⁷⁰ And just like New York, the local schools and businesses were closed for the day allowing children and working-class black Chicagoans the opportunity to witness the event. But unlike the parade in New York, Chicago’s police department could not contain the frenzied mob that spilled out into the street. Robert Butler, still trying his best to keep pace with the day’s events wrote of the chaos that developed, that “again and again the line of march was not distinguishable, girls carrying rifles and men carrying soldiers. Everywhere there was a riot of color, as all manner of persons waved the Stars and Stripes and French tricolor.”⁷¹ Eventually the procession reached Chicago’s Grand Central station and the men entrained for Camp Grant to be mustered out of service.

When the 9th Ohio returned to Cleveland on February 22, a similar spirit of jubilation swept the city’s streets. Crowds began gathering at Union Station more than three hours before

⁶⁹ William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 217-222; *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919; *Chicago Broad Ax*, February 22, 1919; *Cleveland Gazette*, February 22, 1919.

⁷⁰ *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919; *Chicago Broad Ax*, February 22, 1919.

⁷¹ *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919.

the two special New York Central trains were scheduled to arrive. As the trains pulled in around noon that Saturday, “it seemed that bedlam reigned supreme” until the police were able to restore some semblance of order.⁷² Tens of thousands of Clevelanders lined the streets from the train station, westward through the downtown business district where the reviewing stand was erected, and into the heart of black Cleveland along Euclid and Central Avenues. The martial atmosphere was amplified to greater heights that afternoon because February 22 also marked the twentieth anniversary of the Ninth’s homecoming from their abbreviated service during the Spanish-American War.

It took nearly three hours for the regiment to finish their triumphant march through the city, concluding their procession at the Central Armory where thousands of guests awaited the “Red Devils.” The soldiers carefully lined 900 trusty, battle-proven rifles up against the wall at the north end of the reception hall, and for the guests in attendance, this was an exceptionally powerful display of potential force. But for their brief time at the armory, all the men could think about was hugging their loved ones, dancing to the popular new jazz tunes played by their regimental band, and chowing down on a fine spread of smothered chicken, mashed potatoes, butter beans, pickles, hot coffee, and large slices of apple pie.⁷³ After the festivities were over, the men departed for Camp Sherman in Columbus for demobilization.

⁷² *Chicago Defender*, March 1, 1919.

⁷³ *Cleveland Gazette*, March 1, 1919; *Chicago Defender*, March 1, 1919.

OHIO AFRO-AMERICAN HEROES OF THE OLD NINTH BATTALION

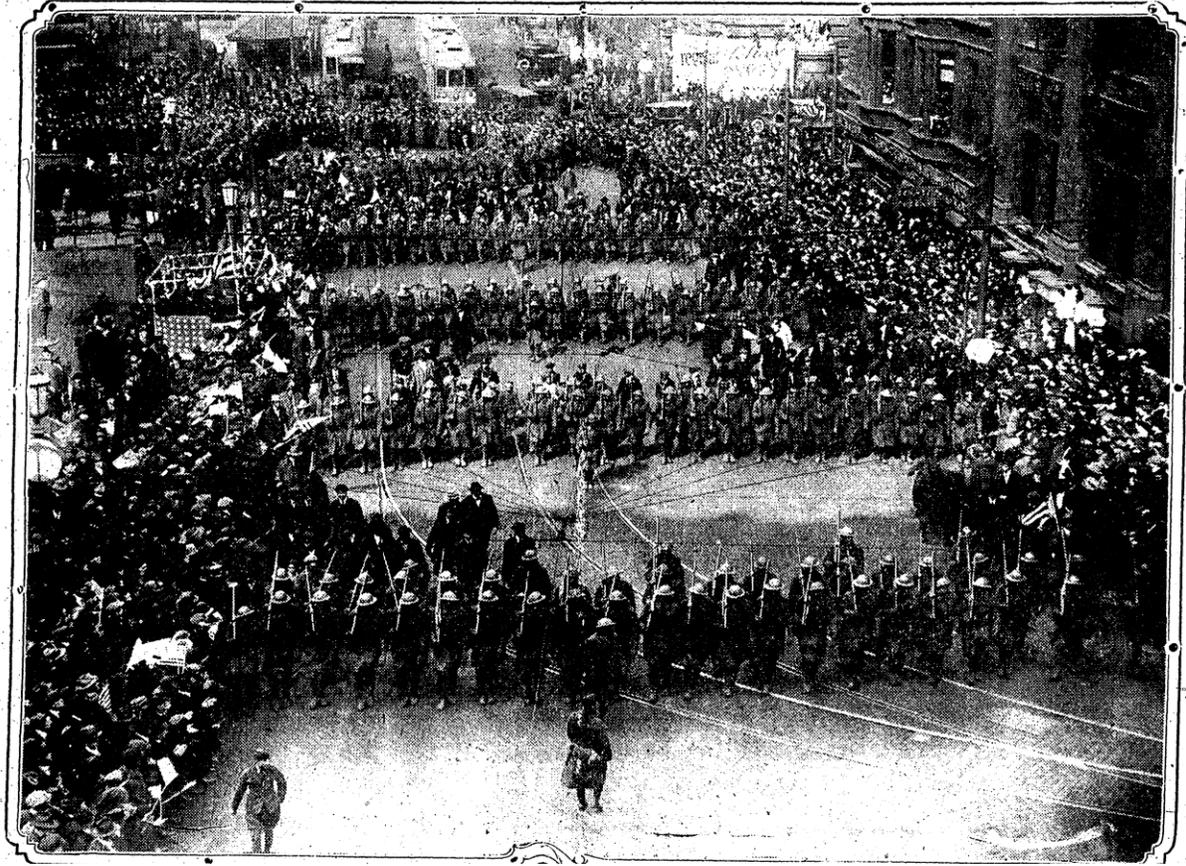


Figure 29. Homecoming parade for the 9th Ohio leaving Union Station in Cleveland on February 22, 1919. *Cleveland Gazette*, March 1, 1919.

Over the next ten days, two more impressive parades commandeered the streets of Ohio cities. The members of the 9th Ohio, fresh from their rousing homecoming in Cleveland paraded as the first full body of returned troops in the state capital on February 23. By Monday, March 3, one company of men from the 365th Infantry and the 317th Sanitary and Supply Regiments returned home to the throngs of black Cincinnatians that awaited them. The *Union* correspondent covering the parade noted that the men “came back transformed. Never was there a finer appearing body of soldiers than those who, with the even tread of veterans, marched proudly along familiar streets to the music of the bands, with the colors whipping in the breeze and with the cheer of thousands of citizens, that banked the streets from the Central Union depot

to the armory, ringing in their ears.”⁷⁴ Like all the other returned soldiers, the 365th marched through Cincinnati in full combat gear, complete with dented trench helmets and well-worn gas masks. And just like the weekday parades in New York and Chicago, the Cincinnati schools were closed allowing the children from the Stowe and Douglass schools to participate in the affair alongside what seemed like every other black Cincinnati.⁷⁵

Slowly, black veterans returned to the South as well, and for the immediate time being, were shown the respect deserved by men who bravely served their country. It was clear, however, that the social and cultural importance of these southern parades highlighted the various paths African Americans could take forward. In Frederick, Maryland, thousands gathered to witness the return parade of sixty-two black soldiers who were joined in the line of march by black Civil War veterans, school children and their teachers, members of the Red Cross, and other prominent citizens. But many of the participants in this April 4 parade also carried protest banners demanding equality and fair treatment. One particularly poignant banner read: “400,000 of us were under the flag to fight for you, now give us fair play and a square deal.”⁷⁶ Riding the wave of patriotic fervor, this parade revealed a more active course for defeating Jim Crow.

Further South, the mood was quite different. On May 16, more than 5,000 African Americans including a large number of returned soldiers were permitted to parade in the streets of Savannah, Georgia. Here, there was cautious optimism considering that this was the first time in twenty-five years that actively enlisted black soldiers were allowed to parade the streets of that

⁷⁴ *Union* (Cincinnati), March 8, 1919.

⁷⁵ *Union* (Cincinnati), March 1, 8, 1919.

⁷⁶ *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 11, 1919.

city.⁷⁷ Adding to the tempered hope was the honor and respect given to the three black commissioned officers that led the parade. For African Americans in Savannah, “their presence typified the true spirit of a world democracy, and indicated the possibilities of what may come in the great struggle for the complete freedom of mankind.”⁷⁸ The black population that remained in the South imagined a brighter future where respect and equality were won by the manly deeds of black soldiers in France. By the end of the year, however, these hopes were dashed as stories of black veterans being lynched—many still wearing their military uniforms—swept across the region.

For many of the black veterans, especially those in New York and Chicago, military service and martial displays in public continued long after being demobilized. These men simply reorganized the ranks of their neighborhood black National Guard regiments, this time with the knowledge, honors, and scars of their combat experiences shaping their roles as local celebrities and community leaders. In the years following the war, Decoration Day parades consistently included the 15th New York and 8th Illinois Regiments in their respective cities. On May 25, 1919, the “Hellfighters” drilled in front of thousands at Olympic Field in Harlem in preparation for the Decoration Day parade five days later, treating local residents to two public events in less than a week. The martial atmosphere during these holiday processions was especially powerful in Brooklyn in 1920 when, for the first time in history, black veterans of three wars marched

⁷⁷ African American festivals and parades in Savannah continued to feature aging black Civil War and Spanish-American War veterans and martially themed fraternal organizations prior to 1919. This parade was marked different because of the status of the black soldiers on display, as active duty black combat veterans fresh from war.

⁷⁸ *Chicago Defender*, May 17, 1919.

together.⁷⁹ The 15th New York was still without an armory of their own, so their tradition of drilling in the streets of Harlem continued after the war as well.

Armistice Day celebrations also became commemorative events celebrating the bravery and sacrifice of the World War I soldier. For more than a month, the proceedings held in Harlem for the 1920 event were advertised in the newspapers. In addition to the typical parade route through the city, the afternoon's festivities included a series of athletic contests and races, music provided by the regimental band, and other "amusements" to which an estimated 10,000 spectators attended despite the cold November weather.⁸⁰ Once night fell, the celebration truly began at a reception at the 22nd Engineers' Regiment armory on Broadway and 168th Street. For the fifty-cent price of admission, guests were entertained by a drill competition between the Harlem and Brooklyn companies of the Fifteenth, witnessed the awarding of numerous medals and citations to combat veterans, and enjoyed an evening full of dancing on the "biggest and best dance floor in the U. S. A."⁸¹ Halfway across the country, black Chicagoans reveled in a similar affair held at the 8th Illinois's armory that evening.

⁷⁹ *Chicago Defender*, May 24, 31, 1919, June 5, 1920.

⁸⁰ *Chicago Defender*, November 20, 1920.

⁸¹ *Chicago Defender*, November 6, 1919.

ARMISTICE NIGHT
NOVEMBER 11, 1920, AT THE 22D REG. ARMORY
 Broadway and 168th Street. Largest Armory in the United States.
PRIZE DRILL—CONCERT—DANCE
 Crack companies of the 15th Inf. in exhibition drill. Famous 15th Infantry
 band of 80 pieces. Biggest and best dance floor in the U. S. A.
ADMISSION 50C **VETERANS FREE**
 Broadway subway to door. Special Fifth avenue busses direct to armory
 from Harlem.
MAJOR FRANK R. CHISHOLM **LIEUT. WILMER F. LUCAS**
 Chairman Secretary

Figure 30. Advertisement for the 1920 Armistice Celebration in New York City, *Chicago Defender*, November 6, 1920.

But these two holidays were not the only affairs that brought the soldiers and the public together. After a brief hiatus during the war, the 8th Illinois resumed throwing its annual military ball in February, 1920. The gala event was well-attended, with roughly 3,000 black Chicagoans turning out to witness the affair. Both former and current officers of the regiment, along with the Red Cross sanitary drill unit donned their full dress uniforms and performed a meticulously choreographed march much to the delight of the city's black elites in attendance.⁸² Society events such as these continued to expose middle and upper class African Americans to a martial culture they were accustomed to—typified by the formal dress and disciplined maneuvers of the black regimental officer.

Working-class black Chicagoans also spent a fair amount of time with the 8th Illinois as well. Local citizens were always welcome to watch various companies drill throughout the week at the regiment's armory. And the soldiers still paraded on the streets of the South Side for various other occasions. On July 25, 1920, for example, the men were once again hosted by "Rube" Foster as the guests of honor at an American Giants baseball game in what was billed as

⁸² *Chicago Defender*, February 14, 28, 1920.

“8th Regiment Day” at Schorling Park. According to the *Defender*, some 400 soldiers including the regimental band struck out from the armory followed by a number of local social organizations and baseball fans that morning. Once they arrived at the stadium, the soldiers drilled before the capacity crowd, then took their seats in the stands and cheered on the Giants as they battled their in-state rivals, the Joliet. ⁸³ After the war, the regiment also began fielding a travelling basketball team and participated in a host of other sporting events. It was during these postwar years that the soldiers became a pop culture mainstay in Chicago—especially in arenas that required displays of physical dominance—further solidifying their influence on definitions of modern masculinity.

In addition to witnessing the parades and other public events featuring returned black soldiers, many civilians attended speeches that paid homage to the veterans and laid out the greater role veterans were to have in their communities after the war. But exactly what that role was was hotly debated. A central point of emphasis in that debate was how passive or aggressive African American veterans should be in creating a truly democratic society after safeguarding these values in Europe. Should the soldiers simply be examples of patriotism and sacrifice, or should they actively continue to fight for safety and equality upon their return. As sides in black communities were drawn, the dividing lines usually fell between working-class and elite blacks, based on what they understood to be acceptable public behavior. Continuing a tradition of patience and accommodation, many black elites clung to the hope that the service record of the brave black troops would be enough to warrant full equality and protection when they came home. That patience was wearing thin for many others, however, and armed with examples of forceful action heroes, a new way forward was becoming clear. In countless public speeches and

⁸³ *Chicago Defender*, June 19, July 24, 1920.

debates, a rhetoric focusing on continuing the fight at home following the example set by the average black soldier was offered up to audiences around the country.

Roscoe Conklin Simmons, perhaps the most renowned black orator in the United States in the early twentieth century, exhibited a pragmatic awareness of location and audience that cemented his place as a representative for *all* African Americans. Speaking to a massive, mixed-race crowd in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 21, 1917, Simmons laid bare his anticipation that this “divinely appointed” war and the patriotic sacrifice of the black soldier would earn black men the respect they so deserved when the war was over.⁸⁴ Speaking seven months later to a similarly assembled crowd in Jackson, Mississippi, Simmons emphasized his devotion to the flag, declaring that “in a time of peace I am a Negro, and I spell it with a capital N, and am proud of it. When the war drum is sounding and throbbing, I am transferred into a loyal, hopeful, faithful American: a man with one hope, one ambition, one starry flag: a patriot like every one else worth while.”⁸⁵ In both of these speeches, the orator refrained from fiery rhetoric and the potential problems facing African Americans after the war.

The tone and content of Simmons’s speeches changed quite dramatically, however, when given to predominantly African American audiences in the North. The orator still waxed patriotic, but spoke in much greater detail on bolstering black manhood and the need to continue fighting to ensure democracy at home after the war. Speaking to a crowd of more than 4,000 African Americans at the Syria Mosque in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on October 3, 1918, Simmons’s language was markedly different than in his southern engagements. Here he was openly critical of lazy, insubordinate white soldiers, and thundered that when the job in Europe

⁸⁴ *Chicago Defender*, December 22, 1917.

⁸⁵ *Chicago Defender*, August 3, 1918.

was done, the returned black veteran and civilian alike “will then proceed to make his own country safe for democracy.”⁸⁶ Toward the end of the war and immediately after, Simmons gave a number of lectures in Chicago to massive throngs in large venues around the city echoing similar sentiments, demanding that the soldiers remain resolute and proud of their valorous deeds upon their return.⁸⁷ For northern black men, the message was clear—the fight for democracy must continue stateside, and black soldiers should lead the charge.

After languishing in prison for his role in the East St. Louis race riot in 1917, Dr. Leroy Bundy also joined the public speaking circuit to encourage African Americans to actively pursue justice and equality after the war.⁸⁸ While never serving in the military, Bundy clearly understood the lessons to be gained by black participation in the war. He concluded his lecture to an overflow crowd at the South Park AME Church in Chicago on May 2, 1920, as he usually did—by pointing out that when compared to conditions in France, democracy in the United States was “false illusion,” and that the New Negro alone could remedy this by the new-found force of his own hands.⁸⁹ One month later, Bundy would more clearly lay out his definition of the New Negro to African Americans in Cleveland as part of his speaking tour with Colonel Otis B. Duncan. Like many other black community leaders, Bundy recognized the changes to black

⁸⁶ *Chicago Defender*, October 5, 1918.

⁸⁷ *Chicago Defender*, November 30, 1918, May 3, 1919.

⁸⁸ Bundy was charged with supplying rifles and ammunition to his neighbors for them to defend themselves. The East St. Louis dentist was certainly an anomaly in comparison to other elite African Americans in the early 1920s. Very few men of his social standing were willing to sacrifice everything in order to protect their communities, and Bundy paid the price. After his release from prison, he moved back to Cleveland where he grew up, and had to rebuild his career from scratch.

⁸⁹ *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 8, 1920.

fight like hell.”⁹⁰ The *Defender* correspondent covering the affair was taken aback by how enthusiastically the capacity crowd of 1,200 approved of such an aggressive statement.⁹¹ It appeared that even some members of the clergy were growing dissatisfied with conservative, accommodationist methods.

On April 24, 1919, another renowned preacher and civil rights activist took to the podium in his church, this time to give the opening address welcoming home some recently returned black soldiers. But Reverend Francis J. Grimke’s address that evening was far more than a simple congratulatory celebration honoring the safe return of the veterans crowded into the 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D. C. Grimke’s speech was a gender-laden directive on the new rights and responsibilities the men needed to uphold as community leaders and role models. In return for their sacrifice for family and country, the soldiers earned “a right to speak—to speak with authority; and that right [they] *must* exercise.”⁹² Returning home and quietly slipping back into a racist and oppressive society that deprived them of life and liberty was absolutely not an option. Grimke concluded his remarks to the veterans, and everyone else in the audience, by expressing the “hope that every man of you will play a man’s part in the longer and more arduous struggle that is before us in battling for our rights at home.”⁹³

⁹⁰ Carpenter was shot through the hand during the U.S. invasion of Guanica, Puerto Rico, on July 25, 1898. Richard R. Wright, Jr., *Centennial Encyclopaedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: R. R. Wright, Jr., 1916), 269-270; *Chicago Defender*, October 4, 1919.

⁹¹ *Chicago Defender*, October 4, 1919.

⁹² Address by Francis J. Grimke to the Men Who Have Returned from the Battle Front, April 24, 1919. NAACP Papers, Part 7 (Anti-Lynching Campaign), Reel 2, Frame 318.

⁹³ Address by Francis J. Grimke to the Men Who Have Returned from the Battle Front, April 24, 1919. NAACP Papers, Part 7 (Anti-Lynching Campaign), Reel 2, Frame 318.

The millions of African Americans unable to personally witness these public spectacles featuring heroic black soldiers need not fret, however. The burgeoning black film industry provided the perfect arena for the continued popular culture saturation of martial imagery in leisure activities outside the home, often times projecting filmed coverage of the homecoming parades in Chicago and New York City. Working-class people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds flocked to the movies in the late 1910s and early 1920s, and films about martial heroism comprised a substantial portion of the subject matter available for eager audiences. These “cheap amusements” were the preferred leisure activities among the black working class, and the content presented here varied significantly from the high-culture entertainment still popular among black elites. In addition to the wide array of love stories and wilderness adventures, working-class African American moviegoers could pay a mere five cents and spend their evenings with black soldiers on the silver screen.

CHAPTER 5: Projecting Martial Imagery for All to See: Black Soldiers on the Silver Screen

The house lights darkened on a standing-room-only crowd inside the Lafayette Theater at 7th Avenue and 131st Street in Harlem an hour before midnight on Saturday, May 15, 1920. More than 1,250 spectators piled into the theater to witness the premier of *From Harlem to the Rhine*, a five-reel motion picture capturing the exploits of the neighborhood's "Hell Fighters" on film. Excitement in the audience grew as the regiment was shown preparing for war three years prior while the famed 15th Regimental Band belted out martial tunes. Footage of the hometown heroes fighting in France brought further exhilaration from those in attendance. The loudest applause, however, was reserved for the scenes showing the triumphant return of the soldiers as they paraded up Lenox Avenue just over a year earlier.¹ A fair portion of these wildest cheers went up during the parade footage of "Black Death" himself—Henry Johnson, who exactly two years earlier routed twenty-four German raiders in no man's land on the edge of the Argonne Forest in France.

By the mid 1910s, working-class African Americans began spending more time at the movies, but the predominantly white film industry during these years continued to produce racist and derogatory representations of black men, typified by the release of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* in February, 1915. Even the first wave of war films produced by white studios

¹ *New York Age*, May 22, 1920; Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Black and White: A Source Book on Black Film (Second Edition)* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995), 250-251. The footage of this parade was more than likely taken by the U.S. Army Signal Corps and obtained for *From Harlem to the Rhine*. See NA, RG 111-H, item 1181, reel 2 (Port of Disembarkation, New York Harbor, 1919).

portrayed African Americans soldiers negatively. Lester A. Walton, film critic for the *New York Age* voiced his disapproval of such representations after viewing the Hearst-Pathé newsreel footage from the war in August, 1918, citing two scenes in particular. The first showed black soldiers wholly incapable of learning French, “comically” suggested by their holding a textbook upside down while scratching their heads in confusion. The second, and even more insidious clip depicts two black soldiers debating whether enlisting in the army or navy provided a greater chance of avoiding the dangers of combat—effectively labeling the men as cowards.²

Three months later, Walton once again left the theater disappointed over the omission of the role played by black soldiers in the Committee on Public Information’s (CPI) *America’s Answer* in November, 1918. The film reportedly showed hundreds of medal recipients on the screen, none of whom were African American. One black soldier’s absence was particularly galling for Walton—Henry Johnson, “of the old 15th from New York [who] was the first American doughboy to be awarded the Croix de Guerre for conspicuous bravery by the French.”³ It was clear to this critic that realistic representations of black soldiers were not going to appear in films produced by white studios. He called on the fledgling black-owned studios scattered across the nation to pick up the slack and present the image of the heroic black soldier to black and white audiences alike. In time, they would answer, producing no fewer than fifteen films in the decade surrounding World War I that either featured or were exclusively devoted to black soldiers.

² *New York Age*, August 24, 1918. For a full analysis of Walton’s response to the Hearst-Pathé newsreels, see Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 121-127.

³ *New York Age*, November 30, 1918.

As more working-class, urban-dwelling African Americans earned and spent a greater disposable income, the market for cheap amusements blossomed.⁴ African American movie theaters, along with baseball leagues and dance halls catered to working-class customers who had money to spend, and now had places to spend it. Citing data collected by the Bureau of Labor in 1920, Lizabeth Cohen posits that working-class families in Chicago spent “more than half of their amusement budgets on movies” and a significantly larger proportion of their income on seeing films than their social betters.⁵ This claim was further supported by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations that scrutinized black social and cultural life in Chicago prior to the July, 1919 riot. In surveying dozens of recently arrived southern black migrants, the commission discovered that one of the most appealing attractions of the city was a greater access to non-discriminatory movie theaters and other cheap amusements.⁶ Filmmakers capitalized on this new demand, and many of their motion pictures were marketed as a source of racial pride, often featuring black soldiers in action.

In addition to the demand for inexpensive entertainment by the working class, two other forces provided the impetus for the rapid growth of the black film industry in the late 1910s. The

⁴ For more on the growth and development of consumer culture among the working class in the early twentieth century, see Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵ Cohen, 120-121.

⁶ Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 96-102. Questions posed to newly arrived African Americans to Chicago that explored their first impressions of Chicago, whether or not they felt greater freedom in the city, and if so, where, and if they were able to enjoy more leisure activities because of the higher wages they now earned were answered with phrases that pointed to the “better places of amusement” that were more accessible due to shorter hours of work and “more leisure time.”

first of these factors was the development of black owned and operated film companies and places of entertainment that accommodated black patrons.⁷ By the middle of the decade, Noble and George Johnson organized the Lincoln Motion Picture Company in Los Angeles, Peter P. Jones and William Foster opened their respective eponymous film studios in Chicago, and Charles Turpin owned both the Booker Washington Theater and the Turpin Film Company in St. Louis.⁸ These black film pioneers, among a handful of others including Oscar Micheaux, staked their reputations and incredible financial sums to build the black film industry up from nothing. Once vaudeville theater owners realized the potential profit in film and joined the fray by installing the necessary projection equipment, a popular culture phenomenon exploded.

By the 1930s, Chicago's Black Belt boasted seventeen black theaters offering a total of 15,551 seats, most of which were located along the State Street "Stroll." The proliferation of theaters that catered to black customers was not limited to Chicago, however, evidenced by Baltimore's fourteen theaters offering 9,424 seats, Washington, D.C.'s twelve theaters offering 7,243 seats, Detroit's eight theaters offering 6,082 seats, Richmond's seven theaters offering 5,311 seats, Cleveland's seven theaters offering 5,028 seats, and New York City's eight all-black theaters offering 8,811 seats, with another 25,023 available at the city's twenty-two integrated theaters. Movie houses catering to black audiences prospered in southern cities as well, most notably in Atlanta, Miami, Memphis, and New Orleans, each locale being able to accommodate more than 2,000 patrons at their theaters.⁹ And these statistics were supplemented by the

⁷ Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 124.

⁸ For a thorough analysis of the founding and growth of the early independent black film companies, see Sampson, 130-198.

⁹ Sampson, 634-640; Cohen, 131.

countless instances where films were shown in local churches, gymnasiums, and armories that were temporarily converted into makeshift theaters for the evening.

The second force propelling the black film industry forward was a much-needed answer to D. W. Griffith's paradigm of white supremacy, *Birth of a Nation*. Griffith's portrayal of black militiamen during the Civil War as brutish, uncivilized, and licentious spurred vociferous protest from black community leaders, and black audiences to demand more realistic representations of blacks on screen.¹⁰ These base depictions of African Americans on film were standard in the industry's first decade and a half, when productions for black audiences were still controlled solely by whites.¹¹ Early African American filmmakers and production companies recognized the common, and debilitating effects of these stereotypes—the Mammy, Sambo, and the Black Beast Rapist, among others—and sought their redress as a founding goal.¹² Riding the wave of patriotic fervor during the World War I years, black filmmakers, occasionally with the aid of white investors and the United States War Department and CPI answered the call, churning out more than a dozen films glorifying the image of the black soldier between 1914 and 1922.

But despite the motion picture craze in black popular culture, the relationship between the elite black production companies and theater owners and their working-class patrons was often quite contentious. Black producers in northern cities, for example, wanted to use the medium to instruct working-class viewers, especially those recently arrived from the South, on the benefits

¹⁰ NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-196 (Emmett Scott to Maj. J. E. Springarn, Re: "The Birth of a Nation"); *Cleveland Gazette*, April 10, May 1, 8, 1915, January 22, March 11, 1916; *Chicago Defender*, March 13, 20, October 23, 1915.

¹¹ Gerald R. Butters, Jr., *Black Manhood on the Silent Screen* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 14-40.

¹² Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 122-124.

of respectable behavior and a good work ethic.¹³ Any white viewers would also hopefully leave the theater with the impression that African Americans were progressing toward a white, middle-class concept of civility. If the film was too “preachy,” however, it would not draw well and the efforts would be fruitless. Movies depicting African Americans in a positive light were certainly in demand, but black spectators, more than anything else, wanted to be entertained at the theater. Many of them saw the ten cent price of admission as their ticket to escape reality and step into some fantasy, action, or romantic scene. A delicate balance satisfying the needs of both parties was absolutely necessary for the survival of the black working class’s most popular form of leisure activity.

Control of the overall message presented in early black film was not the only issue elite and working-class African Americans wrestled over in the late 1910s. The theaters themselves soon emerged as a contested space where the coarse public behavior of black laborers chafed the reserved manners of their social betters. Black elites would have preferred attending the modern and opulent movie “palaces” in the white leisure districts, but discriminatory practices by theater owners there made the moviegoing experience either inconvenient and degrading by escorting the well-heeled black patrons to segregated “Jim Crow” sections of the theater, or refusing to admit them altogether.¹⁴ And so with the theaters commensurate to their social standing uncomfortable or off limits, elite black patrons crowded into the theaters closer to home, and closer to the behavior they tried to avoid.

The geographic focus of cheap entertainment in urban centers in the early twentieth century was ideally placed for working-class black bachelors. Vice districts in most cities usually

¹³ Baldwin, 117-130; Stewart, 189-192.

¹⁴ Baldwin, 95-98.

sprang up where property was cheapest—the black neighborhoods—and saloons, gambling halls, houses of prostitution, and a growing number of movie theaters all developed within walking distance of each other.¹⁵ The Stroll along Chicago’s South States Street serves as a prime example of one such district, and black elites often warned the “better” citizens, women, and children to avoid the low culture entrapments there, if possible.¹⁶ The urban landscape was still clearly marked by ethnic and gender boundaries, and the Stroll remained the stomping ground for young black men for much of the first two decades of the twentieth century. As the black film industry grew and moviegoing became more popular, theater owners sought to establish some modicum of respectability and legitimacy. This was achieved by refurbishing run-down theaters, constructing new movie palaces that were welcoming to women and children, and by showing films suitable to a more general black audience, all done while keeping the cost of admission at a low average of between five and ten cents per ticket.¹⁷

Once seated inside the theater, black moviegoers in the 1910s and early 1920s were presented with a somewhat narrow selection of film genres. The first general theme dominating the black silent film era were dramatic “uplift” films centered around black achievement and the chances for a better life through hard work, good behavior, and thrift. Chicago’s Royal Gardens Film Company’s drama, *In the Depths of Our Hearts* (1920), is one such example where tensions between the parents of a light-skinned young black woman and her darker-hued suitor are eventually trumped by true love.¹⁸ The dramas produced by the Lincoln Motion Picture

¹⁵ Cohen, 120-131.

¹⁶ *Chicago Defender*, May 2, 1914; Stewart, 116-118, 133-138.

¹⁷ Stewart, 168-186.

¹⁸ Sampson, 188, 254-255; Baldwin, 135-136.

Company also reflected the elite black belief in uplift, especially in their first two releases in 1916, *Realization of a Negro's Ambition* and *The Trooper of Company K*. The former plots the success and upward social mobility of a Tuskegee graduate who strikes it rich drilling for oil and settles into a lavish home after marrying his sweetheart. The latter follows “Shiftless Joe” as he learns discipline and bravery in the army, a transformation that wins the heart of his admirer, Clara Holmes.

The other wildly popular genre of black film in the late 1910s and early 1920s were war-themed films. These productions, however, bore little resemblance to *The Trooper of Company K*'s tale of romance and uplift. World War I was conveniently situated in the center of this golden age of black silent film, and production companies used the image of the black soldier as an authentic representation of black manhood in newsreels and cinematic anthologies of the better-known black regiments. As long as black troops were parading in the streets and fighting on foreign battlefields, filmmakers had material that the public would pay to see. By the mid-1920s, however, new footage of black soldiers in action had been exhausted and the poorly funded small independents failed to keep pace with the technologically and financially superior white studios in Hollywood.¹⁹ But during the ten-year window from 1915 to 1925, the decade prior to the collapse of many of the independent black film companies, images of modern black manhood were commonly projected on the silver screen.

Chicago proved to be a hotbed for the black motion picture industry in the 1910s, especially for films featuring black soldiers. The city possessed the four essential components for making such films: vast sources of black capital, a growing population of working-class patrons, a widely read black newspaper to publicize upcoming productions, and the nation's longest

¹⁹ Daniel J. Leab, ““All Colored”—But not Much Different: Films Made for Negro Ghetto Audiences, 1913-1928.” *Phylon* 36 (3rd Quarter, 1975): 338-339.

tenured black National Guard regiment, the 8th Illinois. One of the first entrepreneurs to recognize the potential in Chicago's film market was Peter P. Jones, a Michigan native who moved to the Windy City in 1908. In the five years between his arrival in Chicago and the incorporation of the Peter P. Jones Photoplay Company in 1913, the film pioneer established a reputation as one of the city's most technically skilled photographers, having worked with the likes of W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, actor Bert Williams, and Franklin A. Denison, Colonel of the 8th Illinois among many other notable Chicagoans. Jones's abilities translated well to the new motion picture medium, where he incorporated photo collages into the film as an effective storytelling device.²⁰

After two somewhat successful releases in 1914 (a film of a Chicago Shriners' parade and the uplift comedy *The Troubles of Sambo and Dinah*), Jones ventured into his first war film, *For the Honor of the 8th Illinois Regiment*. The studio owner enlisted popular poet and songwriter T. Alfred Anderson to write and direct the film with Colonel Denison assisting for the battle scenes. With the *Chicago Defender* reporting that the cost of the production reached an exorbitant sum of \$25,000, it was clear that Jones was willing to spare no expense in bringing the "pride of Illinois" to the silver screen.²¹ The film debuted before a packed house at the Pekin Theater on Saturday, September 5, 1914, where black Chicagoans were riveted by scenes recreated from the regiment's involvement in the Spanish-American War as they captured enemy strongholds. The film also featured Illinois Governor Edward F. Dunne reviewing the troops as

²⁰ Baldwin, 117-118; Sampson, 183.

²¹ *Chicago Defender*, September 5, 1914.

they paraded, which contributed further to the authenticity of the film as a realistic and positive representation of black men on film.²²

The success Jones enjoyed from *For the Honor of the 8th Illinois Regiment* resulted in his production of two more martial films over the next two years, *Negro Soldiers Fighting for Uncle Sam* (1915) and *Colored Soldiers Fighting in Mexico* (1916). It is unclear whether or not the former was released as a stand alone two-reeler, but Jones certainly included the footage as part of his massive compilation titled *Dawn of Truth*, released in early April, 1915 at the Lincoln Theater. In this celebratory film honoring the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil War's conclusion, Jones included *Negro Soldiers Fighting for Uncle Sam* along with *For the Honor of the 8th Illinois Regiment* and a variety of other films depicting the advances made by African Americans since 1865.²³ With the 8th Illinois once again called to action in 1916, Jones released the newsreel *Colored Soldiers Fighting in Mexico*, detailing the exploits of the regiment as they secured the border during the United States' hunt for Mexican rebel Pancho Villa.

As Jones was hard at work keeping films of 8th Illinois in Chicago's black movie houses, black theater owners across the country were yearning to book quality films that presented African Americans in a positive light. Charles H. Turpin, owner of the Booker Washington Theater in St. Louis, Missouri, was so disappointed with the Afro-American Film Company's first release west of the Mississippi River, *Lovie Joe's Romance*, in 1914, that he soon began his own studio, the Turpin Film Company. One of his first cinematic endeavors was capturing the events celebrating the African American soldiers of the 92nd U.S. Infantry Division from St. Louis on April 14, 1917. The newsreel titled *In Honor of the 92nd Division* featured a speech by

²² *Chicago Defender*, September 12, 1914; Sampson, 588; Baldwin, 118; Butters, Jr., 99.

²³ Baldwin, 126.

Major Otis B. Duncan of the 8th Illinois followed by a parade of the local troops through the principle streets of the city. Turpin cashed in on the success of this newsreel two years later when the same regiment returned to St. Louis on March 14, 1919, as battle-hardened war heroes in the film *Ninety-Second Division on Parade*.²⁴

A handful of other short newsreel documentaries were produced during and immediately after World War I that projected martial imagery on the silver screen. If, for example, black Chicagoans were unable to attend the parade welcoming the 8th Illinois home, or wanted to relive the revelry, the Grand Theater at the intersection of South State Street and 31st Street showed the film footage of the event for two solid weeks.²⁵ The regiment's popularity and the commemorative film were not limited to the greater Chicago area however. Black Kansans could celebrate the homecoming of the 8th Illinois from the seats of the Grand Theater in Topeka over a five-day period beginning Monday, March 24. Local audiences were encouraged to come out to see "the crack Chicago Regiment who pushed the Huns back across the Rhine and sent the Kaiser into oblivion."²⁶

²⁴ Sampson, 259, 596, 608.

²⁵ *Chicago Defender*, February 22, March 1, 1919.

²⁶ *Topeka Plaindealer*, March 21, 1919.



Figure 32. Advertisement for Chicago's Grand Theater's showing of the welcome home parade for the 8th Illinois National Guard. *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919.

The 8th Illinois was not the only regiment to be immortalized on celluloid. Footage taken of the 367th U.S. Infantry Regiment during their training exercises on Long Island before the troops set off for France was released in 1918 under the title *Our Boys at Camp Upton*. The newsreel was shown at the Lexington Opera House on February 15, and when paired with the regiment's quartet and a collection of notable orators, the evening served as a fine fundraiser for the regiment under the auspices of the Upton Thrift Committee.²⁷ With reserved seats going for seventy-five cents and general admission tickets only marginally cheaper, the location and cost seem to indicate this being an affair for the wealthy, but working-class African Americans also spent generously when it came to supporting their troops.

Similar footage was shot of the African American draftees in the 368th U.S. Infantry while stationed at Camp Meade near Baltimore in the spring of 1918. More than 3,000 feet of

²⁷ *New York Age*, February 9, 1918; Sampson, 609.

film was taken as the men trained and paraded before a reviewing stand that included President Woodrow Wilson.²⁸ The footage was packaged along with a variety of other scenes depicting black achievement as part of the mammoth cinematic compilation titled *Loyalty of a Race*. The film was said to tell “a consistent story of the valor and loyalty of our people in the war, [and] of our progress in education and industry in peace.”²⁹ The film also specifically celebrated the loyalty and work ethic of African American women during the war.³⁰ Variety films such as this, and the aforementioned Peter P. Jones release, *Dawn of Truth*, were a popular method of attracting a wide range of spectators to the theater since they offered something of interest for everyone in attendance. More importantly, *Loyalty of a Race* was filmed under the auspices of the National Colored Soldiers Comfort Committee, with the organization’s stated goal being the raising of the lofty sum of \$2,000,000 in relief funds for the families of African American servicemen and improving race relations by displaying black progress to white viewers.³¹

In early April, 1918, the two-reel sensation *Doing Their Bit* premiered at the Lincoln Theater in Harlem to glowing reviews. The film was conceived at the same Lenox Avenue address that produced a number of other iconic pieces of popular culture celebrating black martial masculinity—the studios of Jennie and Ernest Touissant Welcome. To further bolster the reputation of both the studio and this particular film, the Touissant Motion Picture Company advertised that *Doing Their Bit* had been approved by the Committee on Public Information.³²

²⁸ *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 5, 1918; *Chicago Defender*, April 20, 1918.

²⁹ *Savannah Tribune*, January 19, 1918.

³⁰ *Cleveland Advocate*, February 2, 1918.

³¹ Everett, 130.

Engagements were booked across the country by summer, reaching the Booker Washington Theater in St. Louis in April, and the States and Elba Theaters in Chicago by August.³³



Figure 33. Audience attending the midnight showing of *Doing Their Bit* at the Booker Washington Theater in St. Louis, Missouri. *The Crisis*, May, 1918, 26-27.

Doing Their Bit was a grand undertaking, as Touissant planned on releasing a two-reel chapter on the first of every month for an entire year. The serial chronicled both the activities of black soldiers in training before going to war in France, and the economic advancement of blacks on the home front during the war, with the first installment devoted exclusively to the activities of African American soldiers.³⁴ Footage from the initial release included coverage of the 367th U.S. Infantry's New York City parade and the regiment receiving their stand of colors on March 23, 1918, black troops training at Camp Upton and Camp Dix, and a boxing match in France

³² Evidence of the film's acceptance by the CPI has not been confirmed in archival records.

³³ *The Crisis*, (May, 1918), 26-27; *Chicago Defender*, August 24, 31, 1918.

³⁴ Sampson, 186; Butters, Jr., 100.

between black light heavyweight and American Legionnaire Bob Scanlon and a French soldier. The *New York Age*'s enthusiastic review of the April release declared that *Doing Their Bit* "is the most creditable film ever gotten out in the interest of the colored American, and certainly the most inspiring."³⁵

Even in productions where black soldiers played a positive, albeit marginal role in films from white-owned studios, marketing agents for black theaters could skew a plot to draw in black audiences. When, for example, the emerging giant Fox Film Corporation released *Why America Will Win* in October, 1918, the war in Europe was all but over. William Fox capitalized on the patriotic fervor that had swept the nation with this "gigantic super-production" celebrating the military career of perhaps the United States' most recognizable war hero of the previous two decades, General John "Black Jack" Pershing. In order to make the film more appealing to African American audiences, however, the *Chicago Defender* placed a weighty emphasis on the roles played by the black soldiers who fought alongside Pershing in Cuba, Mexico, and now in Europe. Booked at three of Chicago's State Street theaters for nearly one month solid, and for the "first time at popular prices," *Why American Will Win* was transformed from a white-produced film honoring a white general to a motion picture marketed to working-class black audiences that glorified the recent martial history of black men in uniform.³⁶

³⁵ *New York Age*, April 6, 1918.

³⁶ *Chicago Defender*, October 19, 1918.

WM. FOX PRESENTS

OUR COLORED BOYS 'OVER THE TOP'

IN

"Why America Will Win"

A GIGANTIC SUPER-PRODUCTION THAT SHOWS

The Secret of Gen. Pershing's Success

SEE THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND GEN. PERSHING IN **SEE**
A CHARGE WITH THE FAMOUS FIGHTING TENTH
AND OUR COLORED BOYS "OVER THE TOP" FIGHTING THE BOCHES



ONE OF THE REASONS "WHY AMERICA WILL WIN"

THE GREATEST OF ALL WM. FOX CREATIONS

ADULTS 20c, CHILDREN 10c

SHOWN AT THE FOLLOWING THEATERS

States Theater <small>3507 STATE ST.</small>	OWL THEATER <small>4653 STATE ST.</small>	Lincoln Theater <small>3132 STATE ST.</small>
5-DAYS-5	3-DAYS-3	2-DAYS-2
WED., THUR., FRI., SAT., SUNDAY, Oct. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27	FRIDAY, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, October 25, 26, 27	SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 17
CONTINUOUS FIRST SHOW, 2 P. M. LAST SHOW, 11 P. M.	CONTINUOUS FIRST SHOW, 2 P. M. LAST SHOW, 11 P. M.	CONTINUOUS FIRST SHOW, 2 P. M. LAST SHOW, 11 P. M.
ATTEND MATINEE AND AVOID THE CROWDS	ATTEND MATINEE AND AVOID THE CROWDS	ATTEND MATINEE AND AVOID THE CROWDS

DIRECT FROM LOOP RUN. First Time at Popular Prices

Figure 34. Advertisement for Fox Film Corporation's *Why America Will Win* emphasizing the importance of African American soldiers. *Chicago Defender*, October 19, 1918.

In the four years prior to African American troops landing in France, black moviegoing audiences developed a deep appreciation for seeing their men in uniform on the big screen. But up to that point, all the footage shown in movie houses in black neighborhoods had either been recycled footage from previous wars or choreographed studio productions. As news of the heroics exhibited by black soldiers in Europe reached them, these audiences clamored for actual footage from the battlefields. That footage would not be available until the war was over and cameramen from the War Department and CPI returned home with their precious canisters of film.³⁷ African American film production companies including the Downing Film Company, the

³⁷ See NA, RG 111-H, items 1181 (Port of Disembarkation, New York Harbor), 1210 (Colored Boys Doing Their Bit for Us), 1211 (Training of Colored Troops), 1331 (Occupation of

Frederick Douglass Film Company, and the Touissant Motion Picture Exchange reached agreements with the War Department to use that footage in films honoring the black troops. Historian Gerald R. Butters, Jr. claims that because black audiences had to wait for actual footage from France to see realistic representations of black soldiers on film, the military-themed documentary remained popular far longer among black moviegoers than among whites, who essentially disregarded the genre as “dead material” by the beginning of 1919.³⁸

Over the next three years, a handful of documentaries were distributed to countless black theaters in an attempt to inspire patriotism and manhood in their male viewers. The first such film to include actual footage from France was titled *Our Colored Fighters*, released by the Downing Film Company in conjunction with the CPI, in December, 1918.³⁹ The *Baltimore Afro-American* raved that the film “pictorializes the enlistment and training of the colored soldiers in the cantonments and also shows them in action in some of the most thrilling combats overseas.”⁴⁰ Premiering as the featured attraction at the Grand Peace Jubilee and Military Ball at the Manhattan Casino on Friday, December 6, *Our Colored Fighters* was initially released as a fund-raiser for various war relief agencies. By mid-December, however, the film was in open circulation and drawing well, especially in Baltimore, where it played for consecutive weeks at the Regent, Dunbar, and Carey Theatres.⁴¹ *Our Colored Fighters* thus began a string of films that

the Marbache Sector), 1383 (Occupation of the Afrique Subsector), 1384 (Post-Armistice Training 93rd Division), 1423 (Meuse-Argonne Offensive), and 1437 (Post-Armistice Training 91st and 92nd Divisions); NA, RG 111-M, item 93 (Miscellaneous Signal Corps Film).

³⁸ Butters, Jr., 100.

³⁹ NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-unnumbered (Film of “Our Colored Fighters” to be Released), pg 539.

⁴⁰ *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 29, 1918.

could be billed as a “U.S. Official Film” or the “Only Official Picture of Colored Troops,” carrying with them an added sense of authenticity and evoking deeper feelings of race pride.⁴²

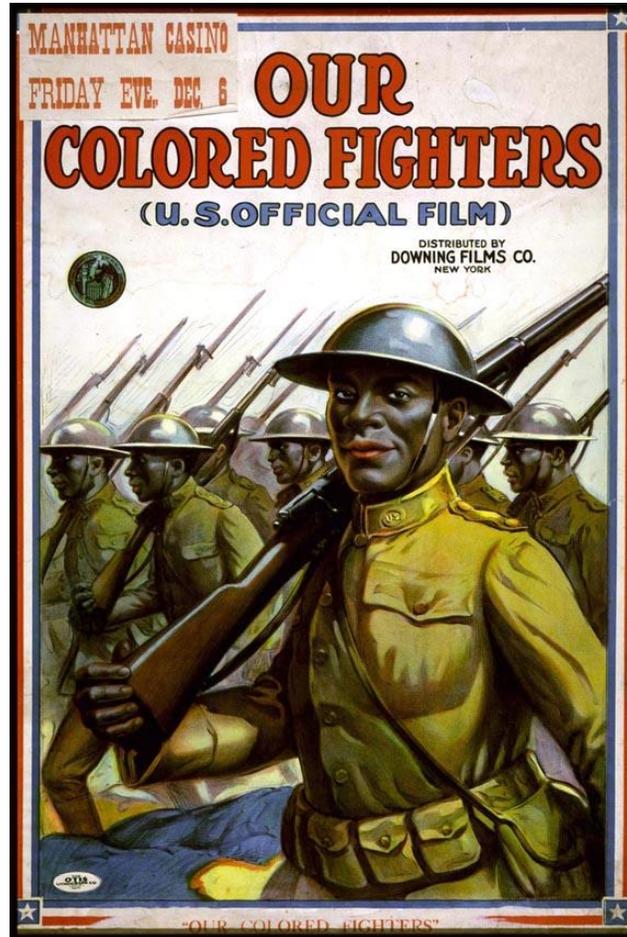


Figure 35. Official movie poster for the Downing Film Company’s *Our Colored Fighters* (1918). Courtesy of John Kisch, Separate Cinema Archive.

The War Department and CPI also provided the bulk of the footage for the Frederick Douglass Film Company’s March, 1919, release titled *Heroic Negro Soldiers of the World War*. The film shared many of the same themes with the other postwar documentaries featuring African American soldiers, from their enlistment and training, to scenes of actual combat in

⁴¹ *New York Age*, November 23, 1918; *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 20, 27, 1918, January 3, 1919.

⁴² *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 29, December 20, 27, 1918, January 3, 1919.

Europe, and culminating with coverage of their triumphant return. *Heroic Negro Soldiers of the World War*, however, obtained footage from the majority of the black combat regiments including the “Hell Fighters,” the 367th “Buffaloes,” the 370th “Black Devils” from Illinois, and the 372nd “Red Devils” from Ohio. By including material from such a wide array of black regiments, the film generated enormous public appeal throughout the nation, evidenced by its booking and warm reception in New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Michigan, Delaware, and the District of Columbia.⁴³ And while one of the Frederick Douglass Film Company’s goals was to “bring about a better feeling between the races,” one has to consider the extent to which the showing of the film at the Atlas Theater in Chicago less than one month before the city’s five-day orgy of violence contributed to the heightened militancy expressed by black Chicagoans.

Military-themed documentaries were still quite popular among black audiences in the years following the war’s conclusion because of the ongoing public desire to see positive representations of black men on the silver screen. The success of *From Harlem to the Rhine* at the Lafayette Theater in Harlem on May 15, 1920 led to numerous additional bookings in the subsequent weeks. The film, for example, packed the Putnam Theater in Brooklyn on Sunday, May 30, and brought “unbridled pride” to African Americans in Kingston, New York, some 90 miles upstate, when the film was exhibited at the Franklin Street Zion AME Church on August 17.⁴⁴ The parade of cinematic endeavors showcasing black soldiers in combat continued a year later with the release of *Our Colored Boys Over There* at the Atlas Theater in Chicago in late-July and early August, 1921. This riveting collection of war footage supplied by the War

⁴³ *New York Age*, May 24, 1919; *Chicago Defender*, June 21, 28, 1919; Sampson, 182.

⁴⁴ *New York Age*, May 22, 1920; *Kingston (New York) Daily Freeman*, August 16, 1920.

Department detailed “the Colored Doughboy and the Marines as they turn the tide of battle at Chateau Thierry” among “a thousand other gripping scenes.”⁴⁵

In addition to the newsreel and documentary productions that featured African American soldiers were a series of fictional war dramas that attempted to redefine black manhood on film. One of the first dramas depicting a working-class black war hero was *The Trooper of Company K*, released by the Lincoln Motion Picture Company in late 1916. The film combined a romantic subplot with historical elements from the 10th U.S. Cavalry’s battle against Pancho Villa’s forces in Mexico in June, 1916. The destitute and disheveled “Shiftless Joe,” played by black leading man and studio owner, Noble M. Johnson, was hopelessly hung up on Clara Holmes (Beulah Hall), a middle-class black woman who saw Joe as a charity case. Upon her urging, Joe enlisted in the army, and after some initial difficulties adjusting to the regimented and disciplined lifestyle in the military, Joe became a model soldier, heroically rescuing his white officer in the midst of a heated battle. He returned home triumphantly where Clara, who had followed his exploits in the newspapers, welcomed him with open arms.⁴⁶

Trooper was well-received by black audiences across the country, and according to the *Defender*, it was “a common thing to see these plays booked for a solid week and theaters which have always refrained from booking any attraction for longer than two days have fallen in line and have been convinced that these are the kind of productions that our people want to see.”⁴⁷ The demand for *Trooper* and Lincoln’s first film, *Realization of a Negro’s Ambition*, was so

⁴⁵ *Chicago Defender*, July 30, 1921. Harry T. Sampson also cites the release of *The Fighting Fifteenth Colored Regiment* by the Dunbar Film and Theatrical Company in 1921, but little other record of the film could be found. See Sampson, 587.

⁴⁶ *Chicago Defender*, October 14, 1916; Stewart, 204-207; Butters, Jr., 114-116.

⁴⁷ *Chicago Defender*, February 3, 1917.

great, that copies were shown on makeshift projectors in town halls and auditoriums that were filled to capacity. One such example was the showing of *Trooper* and *Realization* in Tuskegee, Alabama, to some “1400 students, 200 teachers with their families and friends, and many people from the town of Greenwood” that perceived the films as a “revelation.”⁴⁸ Riding the success of the locally released *Realization*, the film company established leasing offices in Omaha, Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans, Atlanta, and Philadelphia. Because of this heady business decision by Noble Johnson’s brother and company booking manager George, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company did not suffer from the typical problems distributing their movies that many of the smaller black film companies encountered in the late 1910s.⁴⁹

The success of *Trooper* in 1916 is also important because it marks a transition away from earlier films that capitalized on the negative tropes of African American behavior. Historian Davarian Baldwin attributes the film’s popularity among theater owners and booking agents to its “old settler respectability” and themes of uplift commonly found in the productions from the Lincoln Motion Picture Company.⁵⁰ In many ways, *Trooper* reflects the same conservative, middle-class ideology that appeared in examples of inexpensive prewar artwork such as E. G. Renesch’s “Colored Man Is No Slacker.” Depictions of black manhood in various types of popular media in the years leading up to the war often incorporated images of African American soldiers as model men but lacked the ferocity and violence exhibited during World War I, and the popular and print productions thereafter. *Trooper* certainly contained the requisite number of action scenes necessary to draw in the young black bachelor crowd, and so the takeaway

⁴⁸ *Chicago Defender*, March 24, 1917.

⁴⁹ *Chicago Defender*, February 3, 1917.

⁵⁰ Baldwin, 129.

message presented by *Trooper* was most likely a combination of martial heroism and racial uplift.

Postwar cinematic dramas featuring martial heroism echoed similar sentiments, with the added brutality of World War I combat. The white-owned and managed Democracy Film Company also released a wildly popular black war drama in August, 1919, titled *Loyal Hearts*.⁵¹ This film presented the story of Irene Waterloo (Thias Nehli-Kalini), a light-skinned African American woman of society, who by passing as white, went to France during World War I as a Red Cross nurse. In danger of being raped by a German soldier, she was heroically saved by George Preston (Sidney P. Dones), her black butler from home who had enlisted in the army. He was badly wounded during the ensuing conflict, but she nursed him back to health, and the couple “sail into the peaceful valley of love and content.”⁵²

The advertisement is a rectangular poster with a double-line border. At the top, it reads "BIGGEST, BRIGHTEST AND BEST COLORED PICTURE!" in bold. Below this, in smaller text, is "PAUL STONE AMUSEMENT COMPANY PRESENTS". The main title "Democracy Film Company's Super-Special Feature 'LOYAL HEARTS'" is prominently displayed in large, bold, serif font. Underneath the title, it says "Featuring Sidney P. Dones and an All Star COLORED CAST". A central slogan reads "6,000 FEET OF REAL ACTING EASILY THE BIGGEST AND BEST COLORED PICTURE EVER PRODUCED". The bottom section is divided into two theater listings: "OWL THEATER 4633 STATE STREET" and "STATES THEATER 3507 STATE STREET", both showing dates and times. To the right of the main text is a separate box for "BOOKING" information, including "BOOKERTEE FILM EXCHANGE" and the address "201 WILSON BUILDING LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA".

Figure 36. Advertisement for *Loyal Hearts* playing at the Owl and States Theaters in Chicago, in late April and early May, 1920. *Chicago Defender*, April 24, 1920.

According to the *Defender*, *Loyal Hearts* was equally successful as a box office draw, where, “In every theater where it has been shown attendance records have been broken. In New

⁵¹ *Loyal Hearts* was originally released as *Injustice* west of the Mississippi River. Promoters changed the film’s name for Eastern markets. Sampson, 211.

⁵² Sampson, 255-258; *Chicago Defender*, April 24, 1920.

York, Philadelphia and Washington thousands were turned away nightly, the picture creating a veritable sensation.”⁵³ The *Los Angeles Leader*, a white newspaper, even acknowledged the appeal of the film for black audiences, claiming that *Loyal Hearts* was “a frank appeal to the emotions of colored folk to revolt against the social handicaps which have been imposed upon them.”⁵⁴ The *Leader* also noted that such a strong emotional appeal could have reignited the bloody race riots that marred Washington, Chicago, and many other cities that summer, had the film been given a national release. Luckily, the paper claimed, the black population on the west coast where the film premiered was not so inclined, and the film did not reach the east coast until the following spring when tensions had cooled.⁵⁵

Loyal Hearts shared many thematic similarities with the earlier *Trooper*, most notably, the elevation of a working-class black man to a soldier, hero, and acceptable husband. There are, however, some significant differences between the two films that validate the changes in acceptable black male behavior made popular by the war. Issues of discrimination and white-on-black sexual assault are essentially absent from the earlier *Trooper*, but play a critical role in the plot of *Loyal Hearts*, marking the shift from emphasizing uplift and self-help to actively confronting racism in a public forum. Even more telling is the celebration of George Preston’s actions during the film’s climax—the use of violence in defense of black womanhood by a working-class black man. And while the heroes of these two films earned the hearts of their leading ladies through battlefield heroics, Shiftless Joe’s noble feat was saving his *white* officer’s life and George Preston’s was saving the virtue of a black woman. The enemy in the latter had

⁵³ *Chicago Defender*, April 24, 1920.

⁵⁴ *Los Angeles Leader*, August 5, 1919; Sampson, 256-257.

⁵⁵ *Los Angeles Leader*, August 5, 1919.

become a rapacious white man. By the summer of 1919, attitudes had changed, and the evidence was in bold print in the promotional literature for *Loyal Hearts*: “GET UP LIKE A MAN...AND DO YOUR DUTY.”⁵⁶

Black filmmakers certainly had a difficult task during these formative years of the film industry. Creating commercially viable films that provided examples of African American success and the opportunity for uplift while appealing to a working-class black audience and avoiding censorship and opposition from white viewers proved to be quite a challenge. Historian Jacqueline Stewart suggests that this task was often too difficult, highlighting the paradox between the victories seen on the silver screen and the reality of ongoing racial violence and oppression confronting African Americans after the war. Citing the wave of race riots that swept the nation in the immediate postwar years and the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan as evidence of the failure of these war films to change the way whites in power viewed black citizenship, Stewart downplays the effect the films had on their primary audience—African Americans. The extent of her analysis on how these motion pictures were received by black viewers was that they were able to “address and inspire African Americans audiences across the country by documenting Black contributions to the war effort.”⁵⁷ These black war films, when studied in conjunction with the wide variety of martial imagery in other popular and print media more than likely had a significant effect on black moviegoers, especially on black men in the audience.

World War I helped redefine manhood for millions of African American men. As many moved north during the Great Migration, they welcomed an environment that allowed them to embrace and emulate the more aggressive brand of masculinity typified by the black veteran they

⁵⁶ Butters, Jr., 194.

⁵⁷ Stewart, 216.

were so accustomed to seeing in film and print media, and on the streets of their cities. This did not signal the death of the respectable black officer and enlisted man. In fact these images remained quite viable in black popular culture during and after the war, evidenced by the popularity of films such as Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates*. But a rapidly growing number of black men now endorsed a more aggressive set of gender norms by the time the combat-hardened veterans returned from war in early February, 1919.

The war was transformative for both black culture and the way black men understood class and gender. The conservative pathway to citizenship and domestic tranquility espoused by many older black elites was slowly being met with greater opposition and aggression from a frustrated youth. But the urgency, violence, and recklessness in the name of preserving democratic ideals wrought by World War I immediately gave credibility to the forcefulness of the "New Negro." Nowhere was this more noticeable than among the men who went overseas. They were husbands, sons, friends, and neighbors when they left for France—but these men returned as role models setting an example of unyielding ferocity in defense of equality and full citizenship. As their glorious homecoming in the spring turned to a summer marred by racial violence and bloody rioting, the traits of the black World War I soldier served as a literal call to arms for the millions of African American men that lived under the constant threat of attack and were willing to do something about it.

CHAPTER 6: A More Equal Fight: The Expression of Martial Masculinity in Postwar Race Riots

When Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts were first mentioned in the July, 1918 edition of *The Crisis*, their names had already become synonymous with martial heroism and masculinity. Over the previous month, weekly black newspapers had no trouble embracing the aggressive nature of the soldiers' actions, but the editor of the NAACP's monthly magazine *The Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois, found himself trapped by his own conservative wartime position. In that same issue, Du Bois released his infamous "Close Ranks" editorial, where in a matter of two short paragraphs, the black leader found himself aligned with a version of the accommodationist tactics he so ardently rejected when proposed by his rival, Booker T. Washington.¹ Du Bois asked roughly twelve million African Americans to forget their "special grievances" and put the pursuit of equality and a full measure of civil rights to the side while the nation was at war.² Despite considerable criticism from more aggressive civil rights advocates, Du Bois defended his stance in the September issue of *The Crisis*, stating that in comparison to the sacrifices demanded of all citizens in a time of war, other personal or group grievances were "subsidiary" and must patiently wait for redress.³

¹ Du Bois had been offered a position as an officer in the U.S. Army, with the support of long-time friend and white civil rights activist Joel E. Spingarn under the condition that Du Bois retract his antiwar stance. He acquiesced, the result being the "Close Ranks" editorial. For more on the development of this editorial, see David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009), 362.

² W.E.B. Du Bois, "Close Ranks," *The Crisis*, (July, 1918), 6.

The position Du Bois took during the war was somewhat of an aberration from his traditional stance on active and forceful protest in pursuit of civil rights, and reflected the distinctive pressures facing the influential editor during the war to present a loyal and united front. With this notable exception, Du Bois revealed an unwavering belief in one right in particular—the right to defend one’s home and family with deadly force. This philosophy was put to the test during the 1906 riot in Atlanta, where Du Bois called home while serving on the faculty of the all-black Atlanta University. Whites wreaked havoc in the city’s business district and on the street cars, “but the mob, who are always cowards at the core, never for once ventured into large Negro settlements. They knew better.”⁴ The professor and leader of the Niagara Movement was noted for toting a Winchester double-barreled shotgun and two dozen shells filled with buckshot to protect his wife and home.⁵ Recalling his feelings later, Du Bois wrote that “if a white mob had stepped on the campus where I lived I would without hesitation have sprayed their guts over the grass.”⁶

In the immediate postwar years, Du Bois would return to this endorsement of armed self-defense, most clearly affirmed in two editorials in *The Crisis*. The activist shed his brief courtship with accommodationism in the powerful May, 1919 column titled “Returning Soldiers.” Here, the editor cataloged the litany of racial inequities still plaguing the country despite the service and sacrifice of black soldiers and civilians alike. His suggested course of

³ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Our Special Grievances,” *The Crisis*, (September, 1918), 7-8. For criticism of the “Close Ranks” editorial, see *Chicago Defender*, July 20, 1918; *Cleveland Gazette*, September 14, 21, October 26, 1918.

⁴ Max J. Barber, “The Atlanta Tragedy,” *The Voice* 3 (November, 1906), 478.

⁵ Timothy Tyson, “Robert F. Williams, ‘Black Power,’ and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of American History* 85 (September, 1998), 545.

⁶ Tyson, 545.

action was to “marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, and more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.” The message voiced by Du Bois and so many other African American leaders was heard loud and clear: “*We return. We return from fighting. We return fighting.*”⁷

As Du Bois explained, the armistice in 1918 may have concluded the struggle for democracy and equality abroad, but it also marked the beginning of a more concerted effort to secure these rights at home. The immediate postwar years witnessed an even more fervent assault on racism that resulted in a greater willingness by African Americans to defend themselves and their access to civil rights. In his second editorial, titled “Let Us Reason Together,” Du Bois urged black men to defend themselves, their homes, and their families against lawless mobs of vigilantes. He declared that “when the murderer comes, he shall no longer strike us in the back. When the armed lynchers gather, we too must gather armed. When the mob moves, we propose to meet it with bricks and clubs and guns.”⁸ Du Bois issued a word of caution, however, warning that the line between “just resistance and angry retaliation” was very thin and easily crossed. The activist emphasized the unmistakable distinction between these two actions, signifying the care taken in defining this new vocabulary. His endorsement of self-defense was further reinforced in this editorial by his assertion that a man’s right to protect himself at all costs was divinely granted. All men, regardless of color or nationality had this right; and for Du Bois, making his audience aware of this was one way to uplift the race.

It is within this timeframe bracketed by the Spanish-American War and the shooting that occurred in front of Dr. Ossian Sweet’s Garland Avenue house in Detroit in 1925, that defining

⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Returning Soldiers,” *The Crisis*, (May, 1919), 12.

⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Let Us Reason Together,” *The Crisis*, (September, 1919), 6.

moments of both modern black masculinity and the tradition of armed resistance to racism took shape. The hyper-masculine atmosphere created by the United States' involvement in foreign wars directly resulted in a more aggressive African American population. In *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*, historian William Tuttle, Jr. points out that the changing economic and social landscape, when coupled with “the ghetto-based ‘subculture of violence,’ itself a promoter of riots, fosters an acceptance of violence as normal in everyday life.”⁹ And while the social and economic changes suggested by Tuttle, Jr. may have added to the tense conditions of urban America, our understanding of the rash of postwar race riots would be incomplete without focusing on the influence that examples of martial masculinity had in shaping African American behavior. Without the growing tradition of militancy and armed self-defense, these events would simply be massacres or cases of racial cleansing.

There are numerous illustrations of individual accounts of armed resistance by African Americans scattered throughout the historical record, but only recently have historians begun to explore the emerging aggression exhibited by black men as a response to racial violence and discrimination during this thirty-year period.¹⁰ Yet reports of armed resistance by black men during the Jim Crow era appear too frequently not to warrant a full reevaluation of the black freedom struggle in the early twentieth century. The notion that “red hot lead is the best cure in the world for mobs” was not just a wishful suggestion dreamt up by militant black leaders.¹¹ It

⁹ William Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 264.

¹⁰ For a thorough examination of the race riots that erupted the summer after World War I ended, see Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2011).

¹¹ “Uncle Sam’s Retreat from Brownsville,” *The Voice of the Negro* 3 (October, 1906), 398.

was suggested by those who lived in the battle zones of American cities everyday, modeled after the men who were trained by the government to dispense that “red hot lead” overseas, and practiced by men desperate to secure their rights and safety. Such overheated rhetoric was not simply the expression of frustration among disgruntled black leaders, it was increasingly consumed by black men and shaped their behavior in the years to come.

As the conservative, accommodationist tactics of older black elites grew out of favor with many black men, a new directive filled the void. In the years prior to World War I, a number of black community leaders voiced their displeasure with the older set of gender norms. Militant editor of the *Cleveland Gazette*, Harry Smith, explained to his readers in 1917 that over the previous fifty years, the passive tactics employed by the likes of Booker T. Washington had resulted in the race losing ground because of a failure to vigorously defend themselves and their rights. It would be “aggressive men” that would lead them forward.¹² By the mid-1910s, an increasingly significant, although not yet dominant component of black manhood became one’s willingness to embrace violence in the form of armed self-defense.¹³ Enter the fêted image of black combat troops in the summer of 1918, whose physical force and uncompromising attitude intensified these characteristics amid the hyper-masculine atmosphere surround World War I.

Fierce job competition among hundreds of thousands of returning soldiers by the summer of 1919 and urban overcrowding led to escalating tensions in American cities, but this fact alone does not explain the emerging quality of assertive masculine behavior among African American men that resulted in a more spirited defense of their rights. The aggressiveness that was

¹² *Cleveland Gazette*, March 24, 1917.

¹³ For numerous examples of the connection between one’s manhood and embracing armed self-defense in the black press, see *Chicago Defender*, May 8, October 23, December 18, 1915; *Cleveland Gazette*, August 16, 1919, March 20, 1920.

becoming a common trait among black men was crystallized by popular culture's growing fascination with aggressive black soldiers such as Henry Johnson. After more than a year of closely following the exploits of the unyielding black combat soldier in film, art, text, and commemorative celebrations, past notions of submission or flight waned in black public opinion. The influence of African American soldiers left an indelible mark on black responses to racial violence in the years immediately following World War I.

In the decade leading up to the United States' involvement in the Great War, it was becoming increasingly clear to more assertive civil rights activists that the traditional, conservative approach to securing equality was ineffective and often times viewed as detrimental. In introducing an editorial originally from the *Atlanta Independent*, titled "Cowardice on the Platform and in the Pulpit," *Gazette* Editor Harry Smith flayed the tactics of Booker T. Washington, calling them a "doctrine of surrender."¹⁴ The reprinted editorial goes on to critique such accommodationist policies claiming that they bred moral and intellectual cowards who had little ability to command respect from blacks and whites alike.

Men who failed to physically respond to affronts to their manhood also received public reproach in the press. The *Chicago Defender* reprinted a letter under the sarcastic heading "The Brave Men of Troy" which it had received from an anonymous source in southern Alabama. The article described a vicious assault on a black woman resulting in the four white attackers "knocking out her right eye."¹⁵ A group of roughly forty of Troy's "stalwart [black] men" who witnessed the crime failed to intervene and scattered by the time the authorities arrived, leaving the unnamed black woman defenseless. Judging from these public critiques, among many others,

¹⁴ *Cleveland Gazette*, December 12, 1914. The original editorial appeared in the *Atlanta Independent* on October 31, 1914.

¹⁵ *Chicago Defender*, April 4, 1914.

by the mid-1910s, the black press was urging its male audience to take a more firm stance in the face of discrimination and racial violence.

On occasion black men did make such a stand, as in the case of Robert Harris of Rocky Ford, Colorado. On the evening of July 4, 1911, two local police officers, Jesse B. Craig and Jacob Kipper arrived at the Harris residence intent on arresting the occupants for disturbing the peace. According to Harris's testimony, the officers forced their way into the home without a warrant, and proceeded to beat Harris and his elderly parents with their clubs until the younger Harris wrestled a handgun away from Craig and shot and killed both officers. Robert Harris was hastily convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to death, and his father, 83-year-old Joseph Harris, was found guilty as an accessory to murder and subsequently sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor. After serving nearly thirty months in the Colorado State Penitentiary, the younger Harris appealed to the *Cleveland Gazette* for financial and legal assistance. And while Robert Harris's sentence was eventually reduced to life in prison, which ended rather unceremoniously when he died in his cell on December 30, 1926, the *Gazette* steadfastly proclaimed his innocence and lauded him for his true exhibition of manhood by defending his home and parents.¹⁶ The editor thundered that "a man's home is his castle" and any man who fails to protect it "to the extent of his life is unworthy of the respect that true manhood...always demand[s], and, indeed would be no man at all."¹⁷

¹⁶ *Cleveland Gazette*, January 3, 1914, February 7, 1914. These pleas from both Robert Harris and his mother, Clara, were reprinted in each of the January and February editions of the *Gazette*. For a full account of Judge S. Harrison White's decision to reduce Harris' sentence see *The Pacific Reporter: Containing All the Decisions of the Supreme Courts of California, Kansas, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Montana, Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Courts of Appeal of California and Colorado, and Criminal Court of Appeals of Oklahoma*. Volume 135 (October 20-December 1, 1913) (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1914), 785.

The language used in the *Chicago Defender* to define appropriate masculine behavior was even more aggressive, as staff writers continually prompted readers that “when the mob comes and you must die, take at least one with you.”¹⁸ The flagrant governmental negligence for the protection of more than twelve million African Americans constantly living with the daily threat of lynch mobs left the black population with seemingly no other choice but to arm themselves and prepare to go down fighting. When, for example, an angry white mob approached the home of Will Clark near Valdosta, Georgia, the black farmer opened fire, slaying Barney Newsome. In typical fashion, the *Defender*’s flamboyant staff writers revealed two telling facts about Clark. First, and most predictably, he was a frequent reader of the nation’s largest black newspaper and had eagerly adopted the “take one with you” philosophy. Secondly, after investigating the hero’s home, it was reported that Clark had been preparing for this affray for some time, as he “had enough ammunition in his house to blow up Mexico.”¹⁹ At this early stage in the shift toward a full public embrace of aggressive behavior it was evident that some individual black men were willing to step forward.

If the endorsement of armed self-defense was to truly be confirmed by public opinion, however, entire communities would have to band together and vow to protect each other and fight as a united front. The headline on the cover page of the *Chicago Defender* on August 6, 1910 suggests such a trend when it blared “200 WHITES KILLED AND MANY MORE WOUNDED IN RACE WAR IN TEXAS.” Tensions rose between the black population of Slocum and surrounding white communities in East Texas over growing black economic

¹⁷ *Cleveland Gazette*, January 3, 1914.

¹⁸ *Chicago Defender*, January 23, 1915. Some form of this phrase appears repeatedly throughout the *Defender* over the next decade.

¹⁹ *Chicago Defender*, March 18, 1916.

prosperity and the promotion of a black foreman on a road construction project.²⁰ According to the *Defender* account, mounting animosity turned into outright violence, and the black residents “fought a pitched battle, 300 Negroes against 1,500 whites. The Negroes entrenched themselves and 1,500 could not have taken those entrenchments had their ammunition not have gave out.”²¹ In a final act of racial solidarity and brotherhood, the single black men vowed to hold the line while the married men could escape capture and return to their wives and children.²² For African Americans around the nation reading the *Defender*’s coverage of the violence in Slocum, this appeared to be a significant victory and an inspirational tale that black men could emulate when confronted by white vigilantes.

As is the case with many of the *Defender*’s sensational claims, there are concerns regarding the accuracy of these facts and statistics. If more than 200 whites actually perished as the result of a race riot, the news from Slocum would have saturated every media market in America, and white ruffians and vigilantes from every state would have converged on Texas, shotguns in tow. According to numerous white newspapers from Texas and elsewhere in the Midwest, the death toll was closer to eighteen blacks and three whites.²³ Furthermore, the majority of the African Americans that perished were unarmed, in sharp contrast to what the black papers printed.²⁴ The larger point of emphasis, however, remains that the *Defender* story made it into print and was widely read by black audiences as their only source of news. Without

²⁰ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, February 27, 2011.

²¹ *Chicago Defender*, August 6, 1910.

²² *Chicago Defender*, August 6, 1910.

²³ *Janesville Daily Gazette*, August 1, 1910; *Oxford Mirror*, August 4, 1910; *Fort Wayne Weekly Sentinel*, August 3, 1910; *Galveston Daily News*, August 4, 1910.

²⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, August 1, 1910; *Fort Wayne Weekly Sentinel*, August 3, 1910.

any contradictory, and therefore factually accurate coverage, hundreds of thousands of African Americans were provided evidence of the efficacy of armed self-defense.

One of the more successful examples of an African American community arming themselves to protect one of their own from a lynch mob occurred in Muskogee, Oklahoma on December 27, 1915. There, more than 1,000 rifle-toting black men and women openly and defiantly marched to the local jail vowing to stop a mob from taking Willie Williams from his cell. Williams was being held on charges of murdering police officer Samuel Neal after the latter attempted to apprehend the former in connection with a hardware store robbery. Williams was eventually convicted and executed on April 13, 1917. Once again, the *Chicago Defender* staff writers carefully crafted their coverage of the affair, choosing to completely omit any detail of the original crime, only commenting on the successful repulsion of the white mob by heavily armed black Muskogeeans. In keeping with its habit of self-promotion and stress on the need for blacks to respond to violence with violence, the *Defender* claimed that more than two thirds of the black men in Muskogee read the paper and their community-wide embrace of such behavior was acquired from the paper's editorial stance on openly confronting racial violence.²⁵

The tidewater years preceding the war provided African Americans with diverse examples of acceptable male behavior. The older generation, still desperately clinging to the helm of black social and political leadership, continued to plead for patience, submission, and non-violence. The 1910s, however, marked the groundswell of young, assertive civil rights activists, that, prior to the war, agitated for the day “when the colored people do come to their senses, and in holding their ground find it necessary to mow down with the shotgun” white lynch

²⁵ *Chicago Defender*, January 1, 8, 1916.

mobs and rioters.²⁶ That time would come in the five years following the end of World War I. Horrific race riots tore through Washington, DC, Chicago, Knoxville, and Elaine, Arkansas, in what was dubbed “the Red Summer” of 1919; in Tulsa in 1921; and in Rosewood, Florida, in 1923. In all of these massive disturbances, the historical influence of the black combat soldier, and black popular and print culture’s celebration of his aggressiveness in pursuit of liberty during and after the war, resulted in a growing acceptance of violence in defense of one’s home, family, and community.

The men most capable of fully embodying the aggressiveness demanded by the era were the returned black veterans themselves. The degree to which these former soldiers should actually return fighting, however, caused heated debates between black leaders. *Defender* Editor Robert Abbott chided Tuskegee President Robert Russa Moton for suggesting that African American soldiers returning home should revert to an attitude of humility and meekness. Instead, the fiery editor barked that “the same fighting spirit which you displayed on the battlefields of Europe is needed in the titanic struggle for survival through which we are passing in this country today.”²⁷ William S. Scarborough, president of Wilberforce University, called the effects of the war on returning black soldiers “providential” for creating a New Negro that “will no longer quietly submit to former conditions without a vigorous protest.”²⁸ For the conservative-minded Scarborough, however, this new attitude needed to be tempered, especially in the wake of the summer’s outbreak of riots. The editor of the *Richmond Planet* had an altogether different conclusion following the violence in the nation’s capital, confirming many of the fears racist

²⁶ *Chicago Defender*, March 27, 1915.

²⁷ *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1919.

²⁸ *Cleveland Gazette*, September 13, 1919.

whites had regarding the military training given to 400,000 black men in preparation for war. In a rather terse editorial note, John Mitchell, Jr., proudly claimed that the direct result of their martial education was a greater propensity to take up arms in self-defense as a civilian.²⁹ From these men appeared a clear, forceful, and resolute model of manhood that defined a new gender identity and acceptable public behavior for those black men who were willing to follow—advocates of the qualities embodying the New Negro. Those who clung to the increasingly outdated accommodationist tactics became further isolated from popular black sentiment as the Red Summer wore on.

By the Washington riot in late July 1919, the defense of the black community was once again a major priority. For nearly seven years, dating back to the election of Woodrow Wilson, black commentators such as *Gazette* Editor Harry Smith feared the growing influence of southern representatives in the nation's capital, that race relations there were in steady decline, and that violence could erupt at any moment.³⁰ In June and July of 1919, nearly all of the white daily newspapers in Washington ran headlines sensationalizing a series of alleged rapes committed by black men on white women, ratcheting up tension within the city. Those tensions boiled over on the evening of Friday, July 18, when the wife of a white Naval Aviation Corps employee claimed to have been accosted on her way home from work.³¹ The anger among white

²⁹ *Richmond Planet*, July 26, 1919.

³⁰ Military Intelligence Division agent Walter H. Loving suggests that during the riot, South Carolina Congressman J. W. Ragsdale attempted to lead an assault on a group of black rioters on the evening of July 22, and was mortally wounded. See NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-350 (Memo for the Director of Military Intelligence from Major J. E. Cutler. Re: Race riots in Washington, DC.), pg 7.

³¹ For a thorough account of the riot from the perspective of the U.S. military, see NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-350 (Memo for the Director of Military Intelligence from Major J. E. Cutler. Re: Race riots in Washington, DC.).

soldiers, sailors, and marines was allayed, at least for the time being when a black man was quickly apprehended. Fueled by the following morning's news coverage recapping the previous evening's alleged sexual assault, a blood-thirsty mob took to the streets and randomly attacked black passer-bys. For the first forty-eight hours of the riot, blacks were brutalized outside the boundaries of their own neighborhood—one was even beaten and left to die in front of the White House, where President Wilson failed to intervene.³²

After two days of patiently waiting for some form of police or government authority to stop the white mob, black Washingtonians struck back. The first salvo came at roughly 11:00 a.m. Monday morning as four black men in a “terror car” opened fire on the guards and patients outside the Navy Hospital in southeast Washington.³³ Historian Richard Slotkin marked this moment specifically for its departure from “the traditional pattern of interracial violence since 1880” defined by a submissive black population too afraid to defend themselves. Black Washingtonians also noted this difference, evidenced by the remarks made by a speaker at the John Wesley Church shortly after riot abated, remarking that “between mob violence and race riots, I prefer race riots. In mob violence one party laughs while the other cries; and in race riots both parties may cry.”³⁴ The scale of the aggressive African American response was not the only significant feature of the Washington riot, as Slotkin asserts that the black combatants “did not

³² A bout with dysentery effectively incapacitated the president, and when coupled with his somewhat tempered southern sentiments on race relations, Wilson only moved to act on Tuesday, July 22, the fourth day of the riot. For a more comprehensive account of the causes of the Washington riot and the failure of local police and civic authorities to quell the riot, see McWhirter, 96-113.

³³ *Christian Science Monitor*, July 22, 1919.

³⁴ Walter H. Loving to Director of Military Intelligence, August 10, 1919 in NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-350 (Memo for the Director of Military Intelligence from Major J. E. Cutler. Re: Race riots in Washington, DC.), pg. 8.

represent the whole community: the middle class stayed out of the violence and disapproved of it.”³⁵ The extent of the black elite’s involvement during the affair was merely “collecting data and information” on the riot and working behind the scenes in an attempt to urge a reluctant police force to intervene. Working-class black men, on the other hand, were in the streets fighting to defend their homes, families, and rights.

Martial heroism was on the minds of the staff writers for many of African American newspaper and magazines in their coverage of the riot in Washington. Topeka’s black paper, the *Plaindealer*, focused primarily on the first two days of the chaos when unimpeded white mobs dominated the storyline. Thousands of African American veterans from the 92nd U.S. Infantry had recently returned to Kansas, and, in recognition of their new role as defenders of African Americans in the nation’s heartland, the *Plaindealer* wished that “ten thousand of the Kansas City boys were in Washington” to crush the mob spirit.³⁶ Little did they know, there were actually more than 5,000 black veterans in the District, some of whom were Croix de Guerre recipients. By Monday evening, a number of these returned heroes took up positions on rooftops with sniper rifles, while others helped create a perimeter around Howard University.³⁷ The *Baltimore Afro-American* reported that an unnamed black soldier shot a white motorist causing the vehicle to crash into a nearby telegraph pole.³⁸ The tactics and mettle learned in Europe would, from this point forward, be a common trait among African Americans in the race riots that marred the upcoming years.

³⁵ Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005), 436.

³⁶ *Topeka Plaindealer*, August 1, 1919.

³⁷ McWhirter, 97, 103.

³⁸ *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 25, 1919.

Even the rhetoric describing the riot in the black press was rife with references to martial heroism and masculinity. In perhaps the most vivid military-themed account of Monday's action in the Washington riot, the left-leaning magazine, *Crusader*, illustrated the surge of black retaliatory violence as follows:

But even the United States regulars seemed to have been unable to stop the long-suffering worm that at last had turned upon its persecutors; and Negroes, at first quiescent, later on the defensive, were now on the aggressive in true "Hell Fighters" style, and were carrying the war into "the enemy's country," speeding through the streets of the white quarters in improvised tanks and leaving deadly leaden souvenirs behind.³⁹

One week after the riot, the *Richmond Planet* reported that "Colored men have learned to shoot in defense of white men. In doing this, they have learned to fire in defense of themselves."⁴⁰ By early August, few could argue that "the compulsory service of 360,000 Negroes in the United States Army...has had no influence upon them or the mass of their people at home."⁴¹ But just as order was being restored in the nation's capital, another melee broke out pitting white and black Chicagoans against each other for five brutal days of bloodshed.

Conditions in Chicago were such that a race riot was imminent that summer. As the black population swelled with migrants fleeing the South, housing demands could not be met and the city's black belt soon began spilling into the surrounding white neighborhoods. In June, a series of bombings rocked black homes in these contested border neighborhoods, and with no appreciable police response, African Americans felt pressured to defend themselves. Furthermore, according to historian William Tuttle, Jr., the majority of the black migrants moving into the city were single, working-class black men between the ages of twenty and forty-

³⁹ Cyril V. Briggs, "The Capital and Chicago Race Riots," *Crusader* (September, 1919), 4.

⁴⁰ *Richmond Planet*, July 26, 1919.

⁴¹ *Cleveland Gazette*, August 2, 1919.

four. And this population, Tuttle, Jr. points out, embraced the ideology of the New Negro, and promoted aggressiveness and uncompromising demands for immediate redress of the city's inequality and discriminatory practices in the housing, labor, and judicial arenas. Even more significant, however, is that Tuttle claims that it was this demographic in particular that engaged in the bulk of the self-defense and retaliatory violence exhibited by black Chicagoans during the riot.⁴²

In addition to the disproportionately high prevalence of young, single black men in Chicago, the presence of a martial atmosphere in the city's black neighborhoods contributed to the ferocity of the African American response during the riot. Race pride and the embracing of soldierly images and actions was especially high in African American communities that sent large numbers of young men to Europe—Chicago being a prime example. “Photographs of the 8th Illinois adorned shop windows in Chicago's black belt, and surrounding the pictures were the helmets, rifles, and canteens that the troops had sent back from France.”⁴³ The result of this support was a black community armed with the values, weapons, and leadership of black soldiers.

The combination of these two factors prompted black Chicagoans to a greater willingness to defend their homes with deadly force.⁴⁴ The five-day riot broke out on Sunday, July 27, when

⁴² Tuttle, Jr., 215. For a more thorough examination of the economic and social conditions in Chicago leading up to the riot, see Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922); Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and McWhirter, 114-126.

⁴³ Tuttle, Jr., 218.

an African American boy, Eugene Williams, was knocked from his raft on Lake Michigan and drowned. Whites along the shore pelted Williams and his friends with rocks because they crossed the imaginary line extending out from 29th Street separating the white and black bathing areas.⁴⁵ Black beachgoers became incensed when police officers refused to arrest George Stauber, the man accused of casting the fatal stone, and word spread to black and white neighborhoods that both sides were arming for a race war.⁴⁶ Gangs of Italian American youths roamed the streets dividing the black belt and their neighborhood to the west, mercilessly assaulting any African American unlucky enough to cross their path. Black men and women were pulled from streetcars and beaten. In the black belt, African Americans responded with similar tactics, slaying innocent white store owners and street vendors. When a driving rain and the deployment of 6,000 state troopers on Wednesday and Thursday brought an end to the violence, thirty-eight people lost their lives and hundreds more were injured.⁴⁷

In the wake of the riot the black press documented the changed attitude of young black men. Commenting on the newfound assertiveness that was clearly visible following the Washington and Chicago riots, the *Defender* declared, “The Black worm has turned. A Race that has furnished hundreds of thousands of the best soldiers that the world has ever seen is no longer content to turn the left cheek with smitten upon the right. The younger generation of black men are not content to move along the line of least resistance as did their sires.”⁴⁸ It was the modeling

⁴⁴ *Savannah Tribune*, August 2, 1919; *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 8, 1919; *Richmond Planet*, August 9, 1919.

⁴⁵ *Chicago Defender*, August 2, 1919.

⁴⁶ McWhirter, 129.

⁴⁷ For a thorough account of the riot from the perspective of the U.S. military, see NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-353 (IQ-CD to DMI reports. Re: Race Riots in Chicago).

of black manhood in the image of the fearless soldier that some newspaper editors saw as the key to ending mob violence.

When black veteran Robert Hill helped organize the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America in Phillips County, Arkansas, he knew he was wading into dangerous waters. The booming war economy had elevated cotton prices so much so that even black sharecroppers along the banks of the Mississippi River were able to achieve some small taste of economic prosperity. In the first few postwar months, however, tensions in that east Arkansas county became equally elevated over the apparent attitude of the New Negro, the northward migration of tens of thousands of black field laborers and the potential labor shortage it would cause, and fears of socialist agents infiltrating African American communities.⁴⁹ Local whites saw Hill's farmers union as a direct threat to the economic system that kept African Americans "in their place" and responded with unparalleled force in an attempt to crush the organization and its leaders. At just after 11:00 p.m. on September 30, 1919, gunshots tore through the cool night air and then the Hoop Spur church where the Progressive Farmers and Household Union was holding its meeting.⁵⁰ After a volley was returned by the armed guards stationed outside the church, W. A. Adkins, a white security officer for the Missouri-Pacific Railroad lay dead, practically ensuring the formation of a vigilante mob bent on retribution.

⁴⁸ *Chicago Defender*, August 2, 1919.

⁴⁹ Military intelligence suspected that the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), a popular socialist organization, had infiltrated the region and targeted African American sharecroppers. NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-372 (C of S Forwards Letter from Mrs. M. C. Duncan, Bernie, Missouri, to Sec. of War. Re: Uprising in Fargo, Arkansas).

⁵⁰ For a more thorough examination of the economic and social conditions in Phillips County leading up to the massacre in Elaine, see Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice that Remade a Nation* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008), 19-81; McWhirter, 208-215; Walter White, "Massacring Whites in Arkansas," *The Nation* (December 6, 1919); and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Arkansas Race Riot* (Chicago: Ida B. Wells-Barnett, 1920).

Among the black families living in the Elaine and Hoop Spur area were a number of veterans who emerged as community leaders helping organize not only the union with hopes of securing their future, but also the black response once the shooting started. In addition to Robert Hill, veterans Frank Moore and brothers Leroy and Gibson Johnston served their country the previous year. When morning broke on October 1, the white mob began moving through the diffuse collection of rural black homes laying low any African American man or woman thought to be associated with the farmers union. Hearing the distant sound of gunshots, the armed men that had gathered at Frank Moore's house set out to meet the mob and assist anyone trying to escape their wrath.⁵¹ Despite this courageous rescue attempt, the black population of Elaine and Hoop Spur either fled to nearby towns, surrendered themselves to white authorities, or were shot down by the posse and heavily armed white soldiers called in from Little Rock. The arrival of the nearly 600 federal troops on October 2 proved to be a pivotal moment in the affair, turning what was an organized resistance to the white mob into an all-out massacre of hundreds of African Americans.⁵²

Most of those lucky enough to avoid the fate offered by the mob and white soldiers were arrested and interrogated. In total, roughly 500 local African Americans were questioned by authorities, often revealing information regarding the farmers union only after being tortured. Eventually twelve men including Robert Hill and Frank Moore were sentenced to death after a trial that amounted to little more than a formality. At the time of sentencing, however, Hill was

⁵¹ Whitaker, 90, 93.

⁵² Military reports from white officers on duty claimed that the black sharecroppers in Phillips County were well prepared and "with a little more leadership the whites in my estimation would have been massacred" had the army not been called in. Edward P. Passailaigue to Assistant Chief of Staff G-2 3rd Division, October 7, 1919, in NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-372 (C of S Forwards Letter from Mrs. M. C. Duncan, Bernie, Missouri, to Sec. of War. Re: Uprising in Fargo, Arkansas), pg. 12.

still on the run until he was captured in Kansas. The subsequent debate over whether or not Kansas Governor Henry J. Allen would honor the state of Arkansas' request to have him extradited drove a wedge between local and national black leaders along philosophical lines.⁵³ Three conservative black college presidents from Little Rock (J. M. Connor of Shorter College, J. M. Cobb of Philander Smith College, and Joseph A. Booker of Arkansas Baptist College) signed the extradition paperwork essentially agreeing to send Robert Hill back to Arkansas to his death.⁵⁴ Critics of these “cringing,” “truckling,” and “toadying” black educators such as Reverend William A. Byrd and Robert S. Abbott cited this as a betrayal to the Race, and that white southerners were “using cringing Negro educators” to “crush out the “war manhood”” which now defined black men.⁵⁵ And so even in the shadow of such a horrific event, evidence of the social and cultural rift between the supporters of martial masculinity and passive accommodation is clearly visible.

The violence that many historians now label the “Elaine massacre” marked the end of the Red Summer of 1919. It is impossible to know whether the practice armed resistance by African Americans actually prevented future outbreaks of racial violence in those particular locations, or

⁵³ *Cleveland Gazette*, January 31, 1920.

⁵⁴ The three black college presidents agreed to Hill's extradition in an attempt to barter with Arkansas Governor Charles Brough for the timely release of dozens of other alleged rioters still held in custody. Governor Allen ultimately refused to send Robert Hill back to Arkansas, citing a lack of faith in that state's past ability to prevent the lynching of a high profile black prisoner. Hill remained in custody in Kansas until Arkansas dropped its attempt at extradition at the urging of U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer in October, 1920. The remainder of the Elaine riot prisoners would also eventually be released, with significant assistance from NAACP attorneys pressing appeals up to the U.S. Supreme Court. See *Moore v. Dempsey* (1923).

⁵⁵ *Cleveland Gazette*, March 20, 1920; *Chicago Defender*, February 14, 1920. More extreme black activists went as far as mailing death threats to “several prominent negroes[sic]” who signed the petition to extradite Hill. NA, RG 165-M1440, file 10218-372 (C of S Forwards Letter from Mrs. M. C. Duncan, Bernie, Missouri, to Sec. of War. Re: Uprising in Fargo, Arkansas), pg. 40.

if the conditions that bore those riots never again reached critical mass. What can be gleaned however, from nearly every popular black news outlet in the wake of that summer's bloodshed was the wholehearted endorsement of armed self-defense as both an undeniable expression of manhood and as a successful deterrent to white mobs. When reformer Robert Thomas Kerlin completed his 1919 study of what he claimed to be the entire black press over a four-month period succeeding the Washington riot, he essentially came to that same conclusion, citing only one source, *The Western Review* (Sacramento), that did not applaud self-defense.⁵⁶ After that summer, countless editorials, articles, and printed speech transcripts point specifically to the actions of black men in Washington and Chicago who they credit with ultimately halting the white mobs, one going so far as to say that the respect now earned by African Americans there had made these cities better places to live.⁵⁷

The other undeniable outcome wrought by World War I and confirmed by the assertiveness of black men during the summer of 1919 was the arrival of the New Negro and demise of the Old Negro. No writer of the period captured the final chapter of this thirty-year transition with as much force and focus as Cyril Briggs, the militant editor of *Crusader* in his October, 1919 editorial, "The Old Negro Goes: Let Him Go In Peace":

The old Negro and his futile methods must go. After fifty years of him and his methods the Race still suffers from lynching, disfranchisement, jim-crowism, segregation and a hundred other ills. His abject crawling and pleading have availed the Cause nothing. He has sold his life and his people for vapid promises tinged with traitor gold. His race is done. Let him go.

⁵⁶ Robert T. Kerlin, *The Voice of the Negro, 1919* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1920), 23. For this compilation, the author drew upon two dailies, twenty-four magazines, and nearly three hundred weekly black newspapers, making his study the authority on the black press reaction to the racial violence during the summer of 1919.

⁵⁷ *The Union* (Cincinnati), May 21, 1921; *Cleveland Gazette*, August 30, 1919, February 7, 1920.

The New Negro now takes the helm. It is now OUR future at stake. Not his. His future is in the grave. And if the New Negro, imbibing the spirit of Liberty is willing to suffer martyrdom for the Cause, then certainly the very least that the Old Negro can do is to stay in the background for his remaining years of life or to die a natural death without in his death struggles attempting to hamper those who take new means to effect ends which the Old Leaders throughout fifty years were not able to effect.

Can the Old Leaders deny that there is more wholesome respect for the Negro following the race riots in Washington, Chicago, Knoxville and other places than there was before those riots and when there were only lynchings and burnings of scared Negroes and none of the fear in the white man's heart that comes from the New Negro fighting back? They cannot deny it, so let them go their way. The future is the New Negro's. It should have come to us safeguarded. But the Old Leaders have failed ignobly. Ours now is the task of safeguarding that future and of giving it to our children secured for all time. For us the future and all the great tasks that lie ahead. For the Old Leaders *Requiescat en Pace!*⁵⁸

Around the country, black leaders recognized that “the time for cringing [was] over.”⁵⁹ The old ways men earned respect—thrift, respectability, and moderation had been supplanted by force, action, and physicality. The advocacy of armed self-defense and militancy had grown in popularity throughout the 1910s, and by the end of the Red Summer, the fighting spirit born in war and sold to black men had become fully ingrained.

That fighting spirit would manifest itself again less than two years after the Washington riot, this time in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in early June, 1921. When the smoke of burning Tulsa finally lifted, the damage would amount to America's most destructive race riot prior to World War II. The shouts of excitement and screams of pain and terror reported on June 1 drowned out the constant tinkling of spent .30 caliber shells hitting the street pavement and sidewalks. Local blacks and whites unloaded thousands of rounds, the volleys lasted long into the night. Victims fell for both sides, the bodies of the perished cluttered the streets, and the wounded made their

⁵⁸ Cyril Briggs, “The Old Negro Goes: Let Him Go In Peace.” *Crusader* (October, 1919), 9-10.

⁵⁹ Kerlin, 77.

way to hospitals that were rapidly reaching capacity. By dawn, thousands of blacks were homeless and entire blocks of houses and businesses lay in ruins.

Trouble in Tulsa started with the alleged attack of Sarah Page, a white elevator girl, by Dick Rowland, a black shoeshine. News of Rowland's apprehension on May 31 reached both the white and black sections of town. By dusk, cries for summary justice filled the air surrounding Tulsa's jailhouse.⁶⁰ Eight lines of poetry written by A. J. Smitherman, the editor of the *Tulsa Star* (the city's most popular black newspaper), captured the atmosphere and emotion of many of Tulsa's young black men that evening.

“They are trying to lynch our comrade,
Without cause in law defy;
Get your guns and help defend him;
Let's protect him, win or die”

‘Twas the cry of Negro manhood,
Rallying to the cause of right,
Ready to suppress the lawless,
Anxious for a chance to fight.⁶¹

Black and white Tulsans clashed through the night, with sources claiming more than 1,000 armed combatants per side, close to 200 deceased, and more than \$1.5 million lost in property damage to what many called “the Negro's Wall Street.”⁶²

⁶⁰ The issue of jail and prisoner security during the Jim Crow era was a problem that black communities dealt with on a regular basis. Members of lynch mobs were notoriously skillful at talking their way past jailors, and when given access to certain desired prisoners, these vigilantes often acted as judge, jury, and executioner. Black men and women occasionally armed themselves and assumed the role of prison guard until threats of mob violence dissipated, the imprisonment of Henry Delegal in Darien, Georgia, on August 23, 1899 serves as a prime example. See *New York Times*, August 24, 1899; *Atlanta Constitution*, August 24, 1899.

⁶¹ Smitherman's poem, *The Tulsa Riot and Massacre*, appears in segments throughout Alfred L. Brophy's *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

According to the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, the economic success experienced by black Tulsans provided the motive for the destruction of nearly every African American business along Greenwood Avenue. This version of the story, originally distributed by the Associated Negro Press, stated that the riotous mob “sought to wipe out the colored people and their section of the city for the simple reason that their prosperity and intelligent development was becoming too evident to suit the wishes of a certain element of whites.”⁶³ In this case, the nationally-disseminated article celebrated the economic accomplishments of black Tulsans, and claimed that jealousy for these advances was the inspiration for the local white’s ferocity during the riot. This report also suggested that Tulsa Police Chief John Gustafson called out the state militia because the local blacks “made a stand so valiant and death dealing,” and that his request was not to simply restore order to the city.⁶⁴ Black press coverage of the Tulsa riot attempted to deflect the accounts of devastation by highlighting the economic achievements of the local African Americans prior to the fracas and the valor that they displayed during their community’s darkest hours.

And yet a great number of the prosperous business owners did little in defense of all they had worked so tirelessly to build. One of black Tulsa’s wealthiest men, O. W. Gurley, watched the white mob setting black stores and places of business on fire from a comfortable room in the

⁶² *New York Times*, June 2, 1921; *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, June 4, 1921; *Wood County Tribune*, June 1, 1921; Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 15. For a more comprehensive analysis of the Tulsa riot, see Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland* and Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*.

⁶³ *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, June 11, 1921. For more on the American Negro Press and its founding in 1919 by Claude Barnett, see Lawrence Hogan’s *Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1919-1945* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984).

⁶⁴ *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, June 11, 1921.

hotel he owned. When he and his wife, Emma went downstairs to survey the scene, they witnessed a black man gunned down on Greenwood Avenue. Emma fell, and thinking she too was dead, O. W. Gurley abandoned her and ran for the safety of a crawlspace beneath the local black school.⁶⁵ The evening prior, when tensions had not yet boiled over, Gurley, with assurances from Sheriff William M. McCullough that Dick Rowland would be safe in the hands of local authorities, attempted to dissuade a group of armed black men from making their way toward to jail when one pointed his rifle at Gurley and threatened to “shoot out his heart” for believing what they felt was the sheriff’s boldface lie.⁶⁶ The division between Tulsa’s black elites and the rest of the black population became fully evident on that fateful spring night.

One shining counter-example, however, to elite black submission during the riot was that of John Williams, owner of the Dreamland Theatre, a confectionary, and an auto repair garage. Williams and his wife Loula built their businesses from next to nothing over the previous fifteen years and relied solely on the burgeoning black community as patrons. Having spent his early adult life working blue-collar jobs, and without significant business relationships with white Tulsans, Williams bore little resemblance to the old elites like O. W. Gurley. So while a glance at his bank statement may imply his belonging to Tulsa’s elite black class, his actions reflected his working-class background. During the riot, for example, Williams positioned himself as a sniper defending the Greenwood business district on at least two occasions, first from his second-floor apartment and later from the second floor of Hardy’s Pool Hall. On the fiftieth anniversary of the riot, John Williams’s son Bill explained his father’s actions to a collection of young black Tulsans stating that “it was pride that started the riot, it was pride that fought the

⁶⁵ Ellsworth, 57.

⁶⁶ Brophy, 27.

riot, [and] it was pride that rebuilt after the riot.”⁶⁷ John Williams was among the men who vowed to protect Dick Rowland the night violence erupted in Tulsa.

Joining Williams was a group of black men that Gurley held almost completely responsible for causing the riot, but that the black press praised for their “defence [sic] of Negro honor and manhood” —the scores of World War I veterans now living in Tulsa.⁶⁸ Led by O. B. Mann, who Gurley called a “tall, brown-skinned negro...[who] has come back from France with exaggerated ideas about equality and thinking he can whip the world,” three carloads of heavily armed veterans converged on the Tulsa courthouse and jail where Rowland was being held.⁶⁹ After the ensuing melee, the white mob advanced and the veteran-led black resistance fell back to strategic defensive positions inside and behind train cars along the Frisco railroad tracks and in the buildings that marked the boundary of the black part of town while “the whites, on the contrary, were attacking in the open and in idiotic mass formation.”⁷⁰ The black Tulsans held out until morning, when federal troops promising to restore peace disarmed only African Americans, allowing the white mob to pillage and burn what they pleased.

The final race riot in this string of postwar disturbances occurred in Rosewood, Florida, on an uncommonly warm night on January 4, 1923.⁷¹ On that evening, however, the cause of the radiant heat was not a lingering sunset. Instead, the rising temperatures resulted from the raging

⁶⁷ Ellsworth, 3-6, 106.

⁶⁸ “The Tulsa Riot,” *The Crusader* (July, 1921), 6; *Chicago Defender*, June 4, 1921.

⁶⁹ Brophy, 32-33.

⁷⁰ *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, June 11, 1921; “The Tulsa Riot,” *Crusader* (July, 1921), 6.

⁷¹ For a more complete analysis of the Rosewood riot and efforts to have this tragic history recovered, see Michael D’Orso, *Like Judgment Day: The Ruin and Redemption of a Town Called Rosewood* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1996).

flames that engulfed the houses of local blacks. Hours before their community was set ablaze, entrenched black men and women exchanged gunfire with a mob of whites from the nearby town of Sumner. The bodies of two white victims, C. P. Williams and Henry Andrews, “laid all night where they fell, no one would venture to rescue them, so hot was the fire from behind the barricade.”⁷²

Trouble began in Sumner three days earlier when Fannie Taylor, a young white girl, publicly broadcast news that she had been raped by an unidentified black man. The alleged rape of a young, chaste, and untainted white girl was quite possibly the most egregious crime a black man could commit anywhere in America before 1955.⁷³ Lynching the accused perpetrator was occasionally not enough to satisfy the bloodlust of the enraged white masses; and the residents from Sumner were one such example. Aaron Carrier and Sam Carter were the first to fall victim to the mob, who initially sought Jesse Hunter as the desired criminal. Word soon reached Rosewood, and local blacks began the scramble for arms and leadership.⁷⁴

When the Rosewood story rolled off its printing presses on January 13, 1923, the *Chicago Defender* had already established itself as America’s leading black newspaper and was the self-proclaimed “World’s Greatest Weekly.” By the early 1920s, the *Defender* presses were

⁷² *Newark Advocate*, January 5, 1923.

⁷³ This year marks the lynching of Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi. The Till murder was one of the first nationally covered lynchings since the popularization of television, allowing Till’s mother to broadcast the open-casket funeral across the country. The shock of the event alerted many unsuspecting or heretofore ignorant northern whites of the continued practice of lynching in the South in the 1950s.

⁷⁴ For a full analysis of the Rosewood massacre, see Florida Board of Regents, “A Documented History of the Incident Which Occurred at Rosewood, Florida, in January 1923,” by Maxine D. Jones, Larry E. Rivers, David R. Colburn, R. Tom Dye, and William R. Rogers. December 1993.

churning out 180,000 thirty-two-page newspapers and sending them across the country.⁷⁵ The paper's coverage of Rosewood revealed an extraordinary series of events and also introduced a man who was nothing short of a savior. He was a World War I veteran from Chicago with an impeccable service record from the front lines in France. His leadership skills, so valuable overseas, were just one of the many assets he brought with him to Florida. He was the kind of black man that Southern whites had been trying desperately to keep out of the military because of his strength, intelligence, determination, and ability to inspire those around him. His name—Ted Cole.⁷⁶

The article in the *Defender* devoted more ink to explaining the relationship between the young veteran and the older, more conservative farm workers than it did actually covering the riot. Cole labored at first to gain the acceptance of the older generations of black men in this small, north-central Florida town, but he finally won them over by appealing to their disgust for the white vigilantes that were across the county planning a raid as he spoke. Under the guidance and instruction of Cole, these men and women held off the mob throughout the night, and when the whites ran out of ammunition, the armed African Americans mounted their offensive. The repulsion of nearly “1,000 bloodthirsty Southerners” by the armed black men and women of Rosewood, under the leadership of Cole, appeared in the pages of the *Defender* to be a momentous victory built on the postwar legacy of martial masculinity and the use of armed self-defense. Eventually, the black citizens of Rosewood abandoned the city, but the active defense of their homes in the face of vigilantism shows both the influence that returning veterans had on the

⁷⁵ James Marten, *Encyclopedia of African-American Civil Rights*, ed. Charles Lowery and John Marszalek (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 98-99.

⁷⁶ *Chicago Defender*, January 13, 1923.

militancy of their black neighbors and that armed defense could be successful, at least during immediate threats of racial violence.⁷⁷

There is one very serious journalistic problem with the story told by Eugene Brown on the front page of January 13, 1923's *Chicago Defender*. Ted Cole was an invention. In fact, Ted Cole was no more real than Jay Gatsby or Holden Caulfield. There was no veteran-savior in Rosewood on that evening. Only one other newspaper hints at the presence of veterans among the ranks of the Rosewood blacks—the *Baltimore Afro-American*, which was the second-largest, nationally-distributed African America paper. The extent of their coverage was that “Negro ex-soldiers put their knowledge and experience gained in France to use in the service of the Race, and an effective defense was soon organized.”⁷⁸ Not even the faintest whisper of Ted Cole appears in any other paper, black or white. In the following week's coverage, the *Defender* barely makes mention of the actual outcome from the riot. The *Defender* ignored the fact that the entire black population was run from town, and every building (save one church) was put to the torch.

The most comprehensive study of Rosewood was completed in 1993 by a team of Florida historians.⁷⁹ The report was presented to the Florida Board of Regents on December 22, and was titled “A Documented History of the Incident Which Occurred at Rosewood, Florida, in January 1923.” The analysis included biographical studies, interviews, press coverage, and statistical data over its 91-page span. The study did mention Ted Cole, only briefly, concluding that the only reference to Cole's existence can be found in the *Defender* article written by Eugene Brown, who

⁷⁷ *Chicago Defender*, January 13, 1923.

⁷⁸ *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 12, 1923.

⁷⁹ These researchers included Maxine D. Jones, Larry E. Rivers, David R. Colburn, R. Tom Dye, and William R. Rogers.

was never actually at Rosewood to cover the story firsthand. Furthermore, there is no other written record of Cole being present in the village, and none of the interviewed survivors mentioned a man named Cole or anyone fitting his description.⁸⁰

Why, then, would a newspaperman go through the trouble of writing this story based half on fact and half on fiction? Why create a character that more closely resembled a mythic hero than the men everyone in town already knew? Perhaps it was because a mythic hero was what staff writer Eugene Brown thought African Americans needed. After decades of violence and unrest, writers and editors for the black press began twisting the bleakest grizzliest riot stories in such a way that the resulting accounts turned out to be ones of hope—ones that gave young black men someone to idolize. By 1923, black readers did not need another Rosewood story. What they needed was a character in the form of Ted Cole to continue to reinforce the notion that violence in pursuit of safety, equality, and civil rights was a not only viable, but also justified.

As the actual details of the Rosewood riot unfolded over the subsequent days, a second black hero emerged from the ashes. The news of James Carrier transcended the color line and was recounted in numerous black and white papers. Having witnessed the slaying of his mother and brother at the hands of the mob earlier that week, Carrier was himself abducted and taken to the freshly-dug graves of his relatives by these same vigilantes.⁸¹ When he refused to reveal the names of the African Americans that participated in the riot, they riddled him with bullets and left him to die next to his kin.⁸² The papers choosing to cover the Carrier story all portrayed him

⁸⁰ Florida Board of Regents, “A Documented History...”

⁸¹ Conflicting reports list Sarah Carrier as James’s mother or sister, but most point to her being his mother.

⁸² *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 19, 1923; *New York Age*, January 13, 1923; *Indianapolis Star*, January 7, 1923.

as a tragic hero, evoking sorrow but also admiration from their audiences. If the heroic stature of Ted Cole grew from his mythical greatness, then the heroic nature of James Carrier sprung forth from his belief in honor and brotherhood and his eventual martyrdom. Ultimately, both men served the same purpose—the celebration of their actions and values in national and local presses provided young, black men with models of resistance that would guide them toward new notions of masculinity.

In the winter of 1926, almost three years after the Rosewood massacre, Robert Harris passed away in the Colorado State Penitentiary, his courageous stand to defend his home and elderly parents was all but forgotten. During his fifteen-year incarceration, however, public and judicial opinion about black men using force to protect themselves and their communities had changed dramatically. Within a few months of Harris's death, for example, the cases against ten African American defendants charged with first-degree murder while protecting the home of Dr. Ossian Sweet were dropped by Michigan prosecutors.⁸³ Sweet and company, including two veterans from the First World War, were compelled to defend the residence that the doctor and his wife had just moved into from a mob of more than 500 angry white residents. The Sweets' new house sat in the heart of a white working-class community, whose residents did not take kindly to the idea of the Sweets ruining their lily white neighborhood.⁸⁴

The new home owner anticipated trouble from the first, but felt compelled to move in despite numerous threats of “race trouble.” Regardless of these warnings, Ossian Sweet spent most of September 8, 1925, unpacking boxes in his new home. During his breaks, however, he was in constant contact with friends and relatives securing guns and the men willing to use them

⁸³ *Chicago Defender*, July 30, 1927.

⁸⁴ *Ironwood Daily Globe*, May 14, 1926.

in case trouble arose.⁸⁵ While attending Wilberforce University as an undergraduate, Sweet enrolled in the cadet corps, the only on-campus military training program at a black college authorized by the War Department at that time. The daily drills in small-arms fire and tactics, along with the pride in wearing the uniform of his country came rushing back to Sweet as he watched a restless crowd begin to gather in the street in front of his house.⁸⁶

With the addition of veterans William Davis and John Latting, the collection of men at Sweet's Garland Avenue home that evening was disciplined, well-trained, and heavily armed. As darkness washed over the neighborhood, the cover of night granted anonymity to those who planned on hurling more than racial slurs. Local police offered protection outside the Sweet residence for the majority of the afternoon, and as the day stretched on, more law enforcement officers were dispatched to prevent the impending chaos. Dr. Sweet was aware of this, but when the first chunks of stone destroyed the windows overlooking Garland Avenue, he knew the authorities would provide no such assistance. The preparations made by Sweet in anticipation of the riot show that he had greater trust in the abilities of his closest friends to keep his family and home safe than he had for the officers stationed 50-feet away from those shattered panes of glass.⁸⁷ The sound of rocks ringing off the side of the house and crashing through the ground-floor windows was all the Sweet party needed to justify their return fire. Moments later, Leon Breiner was dead in the street.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 26-29.

⁸⁶ Boyle, 77.

⁸⁷ *Mexia (Texas) Daily News*, September 10, 1925.

⁸⁸ *Mexia (Texas) Daily News*, September 10, 1925.

The entire party inside Sweet's home was almost immediately arrested and taken to the Wayne County Jail. After two trials and legal representation by a team of the NAACP's finest attorneys, including Clarence Darrow of recent Scopes Trial fame, Sweet was eventually found not guilty.⁸⁹ The Sweet case marked the culmination of a turbulent period that witnessed the broader embracing of aggressive activism and armed self-defense as traditions in the ongoing freedom struggle. It took a combination of forceful masculine behavior on the part of Sweet and company defending their home and the careful legal activism provided by the NAACP to carry the day and secure this natural right for African Americans in the 1920s. Black men could always choose to protect their homes with force if necessary, the Sweet case now provided them with legal protection in the wake of such an event.

Life after the trial, however, was not particularly kind to Ossian Sweet. The physician stoically moved on, engaging in numerous successful business ventures in Detroit catering to the African American population living in the city's Black Bottom district. But where Sweet seemingly made gains financially, his personal life completely fell to pieces. His two-year-old daughter, Iva and his wife Gladys both died of tuberculosis within 18 months of their acquittal, with the latter probably contracting the disease while incarcerated in the fall of 1925, according to historian Kevin Boyle.⁹⁰ Over the next thirty-five year, Sweet grew increasingly abrasive and distant, apparently haunted by the loss of his wife and the violence that defined his early professional and personal life. On March 20, 1960, Ossian Sweet took his own life at the age of sixty-four.

⁸⁹ *Chicago Defender*, November 14, 21, 1925.

⁹⁰ Boyle, 344.

Nearly every interested historian, commentator, or observer since the spring of 1919 has noted a fundamental change in the behavior of African American men as a result of World War I. Many have linked these new masculine traits to an increased determination among black men to fight for equality, civil rights, and an end to the horrific practice of lynching. But nearly all of these claims have been implied as the obvious and simple product of the prevailing socioeconomic factors in the United States during the concurrent Jim Crow and World War I eras. In so casually dismissing these changes without fully exploring exactly how the war influenced and inspired black men to embrace such behavior, and what, if any, limiting factors existed preventing certain groups from endorsing and participating therein, these commentators have failed to sufficiently investigate a pivotal moment when gender identities and conceptions of acceptable public behavior among black men diverged greatly.

The martial imagery produced specifically for, and accessed by the black masses advocated an increasingly popular, masculine response to racial violence and discrimination based on representations of men like Henry Johnson in editorial cartoons, inexpensive art, war literature, film, and commemorative public events. This mass-media martial imagery stood in stark contrast to tactics of submission or flight still popular among older black elites. Bound by the expectations of both their social equals in the black community and of their white business and political partners, many conservative black elites found it much more difficult to fully incorporate the behaviors shaped by modern masculinity into their civil rights agenda. This fluid and evolving class and gender dynamic is where the richness and complexity of the age resides, and thus the role played by the black soldier of the First World War in defining New Negro masculinity deserves its just attention.

EPILOGUE: Ninety Years of Black Martial Heroes in Popular Culture

When Mark Whalan published *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* in 2008, he set out to understand and explain how World War I fomented a sense of empowerment among black elites that led to “new political formations, new experiences, and new subjectivities” typified by the cultural productions of those who participated in movements such as the Harlem Renaissance.¹ By the author’s own admission, however, this significant work exploring the development of black male identities focused almost exclusively on the Talented Tenth, or the New Negro as defined by Alain Locke in 1925, and their fascination with the complexities facing African American officers that so closely mirrored their own social and political constraints. Whalan then suggested that an analysis of “more demotic forms of culture and the people who produced them” remained largely unfulfilled.²

The challenge of this work, then, was to reveal the cultural forces shaping the concepts of manhood embraced by the Neglected Ninetieth, the masses of black men during the World War I era. These years marked the development of a range of class-specific black masculinities, with working-class men typically gravitating more toward the unrelenting physical dominance and assertiveness exhibited by the black combat soldier. Celebrated in popular film and inexpensive artwork, cheered at commemorative parades, and presented as a force for change in editorial cartoons, the black combat soldier of World War I—and the masculine qualities he

¹ Mark Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), xix.

² Whalan, xv.

represented—became an acceptable guide for black men in general, as these images became domesticated during the war. In short, the war and how it was presented to the black masses played a significant role in inspiring a generation of black men to more forcefully, aggressively, and recklessly at times, defend themselves and their place in American society.

And yet uncovering the details of this history can be rather elusive. Little had been written about the events that took place in Rosewood for more than sixty years since that fateful January night in 1923. All that remained of the abandoned community was a signpost along Florida State Highway 24 hidden by decades of overgrown vegetation and a collection of horrific memories. Survivors and their descendants were reluctant to discuss the violence from the days, months, and years that followed as they attempted to hide their grief and distrust of whites behind a code of silence. When Gary Moore, a reporter for the *St. Petersburg Times* began to piece together the details in 1982 a floodgate of information, news coverage, and emotion seemingly burst open. The popular television news program, *60 Minutes*, further investigated the massacre a year later. The Florida Board of Regents commissioned a more historical inquiry in the early 1990s, and Michael D’Orso’s 1996 monograph titled *Like Judgment Day: The Ruin and Redemption of a Town Called Rosewood* laid bare the stories from those scarred by the event.³

The release of John Singleton’s film, *Rosewood* (1997), also helped reclaim the history of the town that was essentially wiped off the map. The official trailer billed the movie as the “extraordinary story of how one town faced fear with courage, fought hate with dignity, and risked their lives to defend their home.”⁴ Singleton’s cast included Ving Rhames playing the part

³ Michael D’Orso, *Like Judgment Day: The Ruin and Redemption of a Town Called Rosewood* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1996), 70-99.

of Mann, a veteran of the World War I who was passing through town just prior to the eruption of violence. Said Rhames of the importance of his character:

I like the fact that it's historical. I also like the fact that you don't really see this type of character that often in the person of an African American male. He's a World War I veteran trying to find his place in the world...And then, when things start happening in Rosewood, his first impulse is to leave...But something draws him back and he does what he has to do as a man, as a soldier, as a human being, to help save the town.⁵

Some credit for the success of *Rosewood* should be attributed to Eugene Brown, the author of the 1923 article on Rosewood that appeared on the front page of the *Chicago Defender*. This was the article from which Ted Cole was created, and this was the model that Singleton more than likely used to create the role of Mann. The art of creating mythic heroes—perfected by the writers for the *Defender* and other black publications during the Jim Crow era remains in practice. The value of these historical “inaccuracies” was, and still is, exceptionally important for the bolstering of black male identities.

Since the release of *Rosewood*, a number of other major motion pictures detailing the exploits of African American soldiers have been released to critical acclaim and broad public interest. *Men of Honor*, released in 2000 by Twentieth Century Fox, relates the struggles and eventual triumph of Carl Brashear, who was attempting to become the first African American rescue diver in the U.S. Navy despite persistent institutional racism. Famed director Spike Lee's 2008 film, *Miracle at St. Anna* chronicled the activities of four black soldiers in the U.S. Army during World War II and the stresses they felt in the following decades. Most recently, Fox

⁴ The official movie trailer can be accessed at:
<http://www.warnerbros.com/movies/home-entertainment/rosewood/76aaaf88-58ae-4a68-b7ea-f0b04d76015f.html> (accessed March 20, 2013).

⁵ *Rosewood: About the Production*,
<http://www.filmscouts.com/scripts/matinee.cfm?Film=rosewoo&File=productn> (accessed March 20, 2013).

released *Red Tails* (2012) highlighting the combat heroism of the Tuskegee Airmen in 1944. The three films combined to gross over \$108,000,000 in the United States alone, suggesting that films portraying African American soldiers as brave combatants and strong men remains a viable genre among U.S. audiences.⁶

But films are not the only popular medium that bears the legacy of African American soldiers. Historical accounts of the black soldiers that fought in World War I appeared on the small screen as well. A one-hour special titled *Men of Bronze* aired on New York public television numerous times between its 1977 release and the early 1980s. The program recounted the history of the 15th New York, Harlem's Hell Fighters, told through interviews with three veterans from the regiment, Hamilton Fish, Melville Miller, and Frederick Williams. Shown on the screen over the veterans' narration was a collection of photographs and film footage of the Hell Fighters and a three-minute description of the Battle of Henry Johnson by an exuberant Melville Miller and the displaying of William Allen Rogers's cartoon, "Two Real Americans."⁷ A second television documentary, *The Other Battle*, aired on the nationally syndicated *Tony Brown's Journal* on February 24, 1982, and provided further commentary on the struggles facing African Americans in the military and their constant devotion and patriotism.⁸

Public events commemorating the African American regiments of World War I also continued to play an important role in reinforcing the tradition of black military participation and reminding the general public of the social and political conditions in which that participation

⁶ Box office statistics were retrieved from the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com), and represent the gross earnings as of April 24, 2013.

⁷ *Men of Bronze*, Television. Directed by William Miles (New York: WNET/Thirteen PBS, 1977).

⁸ *New York Amsterdam News*, February 27, 1982.

occurred. While the men aged and retired from military service, many of the regimental designations, mottos, and insignias remained in use when the nation once again sounded the call to arms. Seeing regiments like the Hell Fighters and Illinois Black Devils in action again in the 1940s certainly refreshed the memories of those who lived through the World War I era. By the late 1970 and early 1980s, the civil rights movement and Vietnam War had gone from being current events to recent history, and joined the collective memory of the African American freedom struggle. Glimpses of the black soldiers who served in the Great War resurfaced from time to time, sparked by an important anniversary or the dedication of a long-overdue public monument. In 1982, for example, the United States National Guard honored the three black regiments mobilized for combat in 1917, marking the sixty-fifth anniversary of the nation's entry into World War I. Events were thrown in Washington, D.C., Reading, Massachusetts, Baltimore, Chicago, Columbus, and New York City between March and May celebrating the sacrifice of these soldiers.⁹

It has become increasingly difficult for both white and black Americans to fully understand the heated struggle for identity that marred the first quarter of the century looking backward through the lens of the monumental civil rights achievements of the 1950s and 1960s. The Jim Crow era remains one of the more complex periods in the history of the United States, as whites worked to fortify their social and political dominance, and African Americans grasped for options that would bring them equality and a full measure of civil rights. Where these contests took place, and who the spokesmen and spokeswomen were for these movements was constantly shifting. The ability to inspire change and progress could come from anywhere as the nation's vast expanses were shrunken by modern technologies and mass media. It was under

⁹ "Looking Back with Pride, Marching Forward with Honor," *The On Guard* (1982), 22.

these fluid and evolving conditions that a new model of black manhood was developed and endorsed. The physical prowess and unyielding drive for equality possessed by the black World War I soldier had soaked into popular culture, and became a template for those who chose embrace such characteristics. The black combat soldier of World War I was more than a patriot defending democracy, he was the definition of modern manhood for millions of black men living in a most challenging time.

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Henry Browne Farmer (U.S. War Department, 1944)

The Negro Soldier (United States War Department, 1944)

Men of Bronze (1977-TV)

Glory (1989)

Tuskegee Airmen (1995)

Rosewood (1997)

Men of Honor (2000)

Deacons For Defense (2003)

Miracle at St. Anna (2008)

Red Tails (2012)