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Coming from Battle to Face a War: The Lynching of Black Soldiers in the World War I Era

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COMING FROM BATTLE TO FACE A WAR: THE LYNCHING OF BLACK SOLDIERS IN THE WORLD WAR I ERA

By

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ABSTRACT

As Emmett J. Scott and W.E.B. Du Bois put aside their personal and political differences and advocated a call to arms to their black constituents, the United States quarreled with the question of how a militarily trained "negro" would shape and change the established view of white superiority. As violence swept across the United States many cities witnessed race riots and at the local level many African-Americans faced the terror of the noose as lynching prevailed as the common form of "justice." Among those lynched were African-American soldiers. Even while still wearing their uniforms these soldiers were victims of shootings, beatings, and even burned alive.

This study will investigate the return of the African-American soldier; the violence unleashed on African-American soldiers; and finally, the emergence of a new mentality within the black community.

INTRODUCTION

Southern whites lynched hundreds of black citizens for a wide variety of alleged offenses to frighten them into remembering their proscribed role in society and into obeying white supremacist codes. Often the victim's innocence was moot; his tormenters still believed that someone else of the same race committed the crime. To the man who held the rope it did not matter if the victim was guilty. White citizens, local law enforcement agents and even members of the federal government defended lynching as a fair and appropriate way to administer justice in the South.

In 1890, Baltimore native Charles J. Bonaparte stated that:

> Judge Lynch may make mistakes…but if the number of failures of justice in his court could be compared with those in our more regular tribunals, I am not sure that he need fear for the result. I believe that very few innocent men are lynched, and, of those who had not committed the past offense for which they suffer, a still smaller proportion are decent members of society. It is, of course, an evil that the law should be occasionally enforced by lawless means, but it is, in my opinion, a greater evil that it should be habitually duped and evaded by means formally lawful…it [lynching] is not to violate, but to vindicate the law.[1]

Bonaparte's opinion is indicative of those who defended lynching and it was his governmental position that strengthened an already pivotal statement. Bonaparte was named Secretary of War by Theodore Roosevelt, and he served until 1906 when he became the United States Attorney General, serving until the end of President Roosevelt's term.

Writers have addressed the phenomenon of lynching in a wide variety of ways. Ida B. Wells chronicled the horrific accounts of lynching in her paramount work *Southern Horrors: Lynch Laws in All Its Phases* (1892) as an attempt to combat these acts of murder through political protest in print. Page after page, Wells described an institution that claimed hundreds of lives in the name of white supremacy in the United

[1] David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 79.

States. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Muckraker journalist Ray Stannard Baker studied race relations in the South and came to the conclusion that the fear of violence had entered every citizen's psyche, regardless of color. Baker described a society in which white women feared being raped by black men, white men vowed to protect their wives by any means necessary and every black citizen he met voiced his or her fear of falling victim to the lynch mob.[2]

In 1929, Walter White criticized society at large for condoning widespread murder and mutilation. White's *Rope and Faggot* (1929) asserted that so many citizens had grown accustomed to lynching that they were becoming desensitized:

> [Society had] degenerated to a point where an uncomfortably large percentage of Americans can read in their newspapers of the slow roasting alive of a human being in Mississippi and turn, promptly and with little thought, to the comic strip or sporting page.[3]

These earlier works addressed the effect that lynching had on the black community, but sadly, later historical accounts conveniently omitted the black community from their studies.

For the first half of the twentieth century, the most widely read white historians subscribed to the tragic view of reconstruction, in which northerners exploited the south and freed blacks brutally attacked the white community until the average white southerner (usually in the hooded garb of the Ku Klux Klan) avenged his race and reclaimed his forefather's racial superiority. Epitomizing this school of thought was Wilbur J. Cash who stated that lynching was based on real fears: that black men had raped white women which had caused the entire white female population of the south to fall into a nervous, if not hysterical, fervor. Cash argued that Yankee intrusion accelerated these acts of vigilantism and the institution of lynching. According to current

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[2] Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color line: An Account of Negro Citizenship in the American Democracy* (New York: Double Day, 1908), 7. Baker additionally wrote for such publications as *McClure's* Magazine and the *American Magazine*.
[3] Walter White, *Rope and Faggot* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), viii.

historian Joel Williamson, Cash basically "explained lynching the way lynchers would have explained lynching."[4]

As the modern day Civil Rights movement changed the way that all citizens viewed race, historians and their craft were no different. In his work, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (1971) George M. Frederickson condemned lynching. Published during the post-Civil Rights wave of Black Nationalism, his work called attention to the southern racist psyche and a society that created these violations against humanity in a quest for racial domination and white supremacy.[5]

Just as Frederickson's work revisited the sentiments of Ida B. Wells and Walter White, in that lynching was part of an overarching scheme to keep blacks in a position of inferiority, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall explored the impact that lynching had on gender. In her work *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching*, Hall states that as white racists spread rumors of black men raping white women, white females were also kept in a state of fear. Just as a lynch mob could strike anywhere at any time, the fear of rape reduced white women to a subordinate status.[6] Hall's feminist tone echoed the sentiments of Walter White expressed half a century earlier:

> Although lynching served primarily as a tool of economic and social terror, the myth of the black rapist allowed white men to violently police a status quo aimed at the social and economic subjugation of both black men and white women. Under the name of southern chivalry and for her own protection, the white woman found herself confined to housekeeping and child bearing, "a chattel of her husband and owner as precisely as a Negro slave was before the Civil War."[7]

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[4] Joel Williamson, "Wounds Not Scars: Lynching, the National Conscience, and the American Historian," *The Journal of American History* 83, no.4 (March 1997): 1243; W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1941).
[5] George M. Fredrickson *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 272-276.
[6] Jacquelyn Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 141, 153.
[7] White, *Rope and Faggot*, 160.

J. William Harris, writing in 1995, addressed the role that lynching had on not only gender but male "honor" in his article "Etiquette, Lynching, and Racial Boundaries in Southern History: A Mississippi Example."[8] Harris described a society where white males defended the honor of the white female, against rape, miscegenation, or any physical contact with black men:

> The most important of all rules of purity involved sexual contact. As both the progenitors of whiteness and the special repositories of white purity, white women had to be protected from defilement through contact, however slight and indirect, whether from a plate, a touch, or a glance, with "unclean" black men and women. The home, as women's "place," especially needed protection, and "protecting" the purity of women enforced simultaneously the boundaries of gender in the white world and the boundaries of race. Sexual contact between black men and white women was an extraordinary symbolic threat precisely because it occurred at the point where systems of race and gender intersected in the southern cultural matrix.[9]

The next approach to the study of lynching focused on the specific psychological effect on the black community. The historians Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck use the gruesome specifics of lynching to represent the negative effect on the community that was victimized. In their work, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930*, the two writers described that even by the "most conservative estimates," a black citizen was lynched once a week in the South from 1882 to 1930 to the point that an entire race was psychologically tormented by the news that accompanied these murders.[10] Philip Dray also spoke of the horror that lynching instilled in the mentality of the black man, woman and child. In his work *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* Dray describes how lynching often affected the entire community and not just the victim. Aside from persecution and fear, Dray questioned a

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[8] J. William Harris, "Etiquette, Lynching, and Racial Boundaries in Southern History: A Mississippi Example." *The American Historical Review* 100, no.2 (April 1995): 387-410.
[9] Ibid., 392.
[10] Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), xi, 23-24.

system that undermined both the democratic virtues of the United States, and the faith that the black community held in the justice system:

> Is it possible for white America to really understand blacks' distrust of the legal system, their fears of racial profiling and the police without understanding how cheap a black life was for so long in our nation's history?[11]

Most recently, historians have used a multidisciplinary approach to analyze various forms of popular culture as a way to celebrate those that fought back against lynching. The literary critic and historian Trudier Harris analyzed black writers confronting lynching in their fictional writing. It was Harris's 1984 book, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* that inspired Anne P. Rice to create a compilation of authors of all genders and races who also resisted lynching through prose.[12] In her work *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond*, Rice asked her audience to listen to what these anti-lynching "crusaders" had to say as they combated lynching through literature.[13] Through a collection of poems, plays and short essays Rice's collection proves that literature was not only for entertainment but an important educational vehicle:

> The writers in this volume devoted their lives to preserving a different memory of lynching. Through their journalism, poetry, essays, and fiction, they worked to ensure that we would remember lynching not as a manly response to an epidemic of black rape, but as the preventable eruption of racist oppression and violence that had been building since the days of slavery and that continues to trouble our society today.[14]

Another writer who used alternative sources to explore the history of lynching was Dora Apel. Instead of using print, Apel defined both the participants of lynching as well as those who protested these heinous acts through critiquing two and three dimensional artwork. Apel's *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women and the*

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[11] *Philip Dray. At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America (New York: Random House, 2002*), xi.
[12] Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).
[13] Anne P. Rice, *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 3.
[14] Ibid.

Mob explores photographs, paintings and sculptures to better understand the impact of lynching in society. Apel combines both social and gender history to analyze a "visual history that had been too long suppressed."[15] The entire work concentrates on representing a brutal racist society through the image of the black body; but often these mediums shift the attention away from the victim and towards the victimizer. The work was originally inspired by the traveling expedition "Without Sanctuary" that forced the audience to dissect an exhibit of many photographs of lynching, as the rise in the medium of photograph added to the sensationalism of lynching. Slide after slide the viewer can not only see the unfortunate victim but also visualize the mob itself as these white men and women stare triumphantly into the camera's lens. Through postcards and photographs, more advanced technology allowed the lynch mob to share its conquests with a larger part of the population, but these cultural artifacts, usually never meant for a non-white audience, created a lasting image of the mob. In an era when the total number of lynchings decreased, photographs and other images allowed lynching events to reach a much larger audience each time a lynching occurred, as Rice quotes historian Grace Hale's insightful observation: "Representations of lynchings worked almost as well as lynchings themselves."[16]

Apel's study is an additional reminder that one did not have to bear witness to the physical assault of lynching to feel the effect of the lynching. Rice concluded, "lynching was certainly not the affair of the victims alone—it was a struggle with the concept of racial and national identity that affected everyone in the country."[17] This observation is validated in the famous author Richard Wright's recollections on lynching:

> The things that influenced my conduct as a Negro did not have to happen to me directly; I needed but to hear of them to feel their full effects in the deepest layers of my consciousness. Indeed, the white brutality that I had

[15] Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women and the Mob* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2004), xi.
[16] Orginally stated in Grace Hale's *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1998), 44; Analyzed in Rice, *Imagery of Lynching*, 227.
[17] Rice, 1.

> not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I knew.[18]

Aside from the wide effects of lynching, Apel tackles the controversy of using the image of the lynching, a visual that is often gruesome and shocking:

> Despite the residue of sadistic voyeurism they carry, which may feed the appetite for sights of mutilation and degradation, they also powerfully evoke revulsion and outrage, which not only remind us of what horrors people are capable of visiting on each other, but a specific history that must not be forgotten.[19]

Although Apel was referring specifically to the images in her work, the same can be said of the necessity for a general study of lynching: to provide a better understanding of the society that unleashed lynching, all the victims, and those who resisted the reign of white supremacy.

The Addition of the Lynched Soldier to the General Historiography

The study of the lynching of black soldiers is a relatively new topic. Surprisingly, this subject is a popular addition to historical accounts but is never thoroughly addressed. Works often tease with such announcements as "…at least ten soldiers were lynched" or "…some still wearing uniform," yet fail to include the specifics. Take for instance Walter White's proclamation:

> The far South tangibly demonstrated its gratitude to Negro soldiers for helping make the world safe for democracy by lynching ten of them, some in the uniform of the United States Army, during the year 1919; two of the ten were burned alive. Mississippi and Georgia mobs murdered three returned Negro soldiers each; in Arkansas two were lynched, in Alabama and Florida one each.[20]

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[18]Reprinted in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 139. Originally printed in Richard Wright, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
[19] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 2.
[20] White, *Rope and Faggot*, 112.

A renewed search of existing secondary sources with the inclusion of pivotal prime documents reveals the history of what these soldiers and the larger black community faced.

Just as the modern day Civil Rights movement brought a new approach to the studies of slavery and antebellum society, so have contemporary historians revisited the pertinent historical events and figures of both lynching and the black soldier. The study of the contribution of blacks to this country's wars has been a popular topic in the last half of the twentieth century.

The historiography includes several general studies of black soldiers within the United States, and while they provide a useful point of introduction to the black soldier, they fail to approach the details of the violence black soldiers faced; specifically, following World War I. Emmett J. Scott's *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* was one of the first studies to discuss the role of African-Americans in the First World War.[21] The Tuskegee production was a well needed infusion of pride for those who sacrificed during the era. However, the publication offered praise and congratulations to the nation and stayed away from the negative aspects that both the soldiers and African-American community faced. The author, a special assistant to the Secretary of War and former personal secretary to Booker T. Washington, briefly mentions discrimination in the armed forces, but avoids most of the vicious racist attitudes, events, and violence.

Histories of the black soldier have been chronicled largely in collections that summarize the role of the black soldiers in more than one war. Since Scott's study, a multitude of sources have focused on the role of the black individual in the wars that involve the United States. While comprehensive regimental and sectional histories of African-American troops are rare, the recently published work by Stephen L. Harris, *Harlem's Hell Fighters: the African-American 369th Infantry in World War I* pays particular attention to the First World War and the 369th Infantry.[22]

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[21] Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (Chicago: Homewood Press, 1919). For a more recent large scale account of the commitment of African-American military personnel, see Gail L. Buckley's American *Patriots: the Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001).

[22] Stephen L. Harris, *Harlem's Hell Fighters: the African-American 369th Infantry in World War I* (Washington D.C. :Brassey's Inc, 2003).

Another source that offers a specialized approach to the First World War is Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri's *The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I*.[23] This source at least mentions specific lynching victims, but rarely fleshes out the topic. Most recently, Chad Louis Williams' study "Torchbearers of Democracy: The First World War and the Figure of the African American Soldier," appropriately places the returning veteran as a symbol of hope in the greater black community.[24] Williams particularly addresses the oppression that black soldiers faced upon their return and provides the names, the alleged crime, and the locations of where a black soldier was lynched. But Williams is also quick to insist that black soldiers were not merely victims but often inspired pride in the larger black community as "symbols" and "ideological creations" of strength.[25] Williams's dissertation provides much more information, with regard to the violence that the black soldier faced, than other works that delve into the subject. But this approach could go further. The lynching of black veterans was certainly a component of the violence in U.S. society after the armistice, but often the black veteran was deliberately targeted. Furthermore, the federal government's role in assisting the white supremacists should also be stressed. The compliance of local, state, and federal governments to aid and assist white racists South should not take away from the attention of those members of the black community who resisted. If anything, it makes their fight that much more important and heroic.

This work is not intended to be a history of the first World War, nor is it a history of the black soldier, as many other works have already addressed this topic effectively. This study will instead raise several questions crucial to understanding not only the black soldier but the racial issues of the United States following the First World War. As the war's end grew closer and armistice was assured, the question arises, what was the sentiment of the United States with regard to the return of its soldiers? The United States applauded its white soldiers and even had parades for veterans regardless of race, but an uncertainty loomed as to how the country, and particularly the South, would welcome the returning black infantry men. How would the black soldier return to civilian society?

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[23] Arthur E. Barbeau and Henri, Florette, *The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974).
[24] Chad Louis Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy: The First World War and the Figure of the African American Soldier" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2004).
[25] Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 2, 28.

Would a man who had just faced death in Europe still accept the policies of Jim Crow, the Ku Klux Klan and white Supremacy? How did average black citizens feel about the return of their brethren? Did they fear for their safety or welcome a new possible militancy? While the spectrum of political opinions did include liberal possibilities of acceptance, who was listening to the threats of violence from such noted senators as James K. Vardaman of Mississippi? Was the United States military aware of the forthcoming violence; and if so, did they attempt to intervene or even investigate?

After the parades and confetti had faded, most white Southerners wished to retain the racial hierarchy that existed before the war. Some resented the idea of a black soldier who reminded the community of his service by self congratulatory remarks or the continued wearing of his uniform. How did the South react? What sort of threats and acts of violence did the average soldier encounter? How many were lynched? Why did the lynching occur? How did the community react? How did the U.S. military react? This study will also address the specific case of Sergeant Edgar Caldwell, who shot a white citizen while defending himself on a streetcar in Anniston, Alabama. Eventually, the state of Alabama executed Caldwell. This "legalized lynching" will demonstrate not only the unwillingness of the U.S. military to intervene on the behalf of these soldiers, but the federal government acting as the executioner when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the earlier court's decision.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the soldiers and the larger black community did not sit idly by during the events but often spoke out and fought back leading to a new voice known as the "New Negro."[26] Particular attention will be devoted to writers of this new mentality crediting the black soldier's efforts and bravery both on the battleground and at home. The final chapter of this study analyzes both the symbolic role of the abused soldier during the riots of 1919 and the introduction of the black veteran who was lynched into the realm of popular culture. Several authors included the black soldier in fiction, poetry, and plays of the post war era and subsequent decades.

[26] Alain Locke, *The New Negro (*New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., 1925). The term the "New Negro" was common in many intellectual circles of the era, as well as in a multitude of secondary sources that have been published. Most have pointed to Locke's assertions and philosophies as the vanguard of the movement.

The Historian's Dilemma: the Dearth of Sources

When historians accumulate sources on the returning veteran from the first World War, they should gather government documents and military personnel records. The records of high ranking personnel are easily attainable through the Library of Congress, the National Archives and the United States Army War College library housed in Carlisle, Pennsylvania; but for the average enlisted man at the turn of the century, the historian must also turn to the National Personnel Record Center, Military Personnel Records in St. Louis, Missouri. Unfortunately, I ran into an unforeseen dilemma—the loss of records. Although I gathered information about a few of the veterans who were lynched, time and again I encountered the reply "The military record needed to answer your inquiry was located in the area that suffered the most damage in the fire that occurred at this Center on July 12, 1973."[27] While I hoped that this only applied to a few of my inquiries, I again received the ominous citation but with the addendum:

> The record needed to answer your inquiry is not in our files. If the record were here on July 12, 1973, it would have been in the area that suffered the most damage in the fire on that date and may have been destroyed. The fire destroyed the major portion of records of Army military personnel for the period 1912 through 1959…complete records cannot be reconstructed.[28]

An already trying task became more difficult with the knowledge that seldom are there written records from a lynching as these murders were rarely tried in a courtroom.

The next logical source is newspapers that chronicled these acts of violence. News reports and editorial summaries portray the views of the newspaper. They are intended to characterize quickly not only the ideology of the editorial staff but hopefully

[27] Dana Netherton, Archives Technician to Vincent Mikkelsen, September 23, 2005, Correspondence from National Personnel Record Center, Military Personnel Records, St. Louis, Missouri.

[28] Ann M. Tolley, Archives Technician to Vincent Mikkelsen, September 23, 2005, Correspondence from National Personnel Record Center, Military Personnel Records, St. Louis, Missouri. According to the National Personnel Record Center's website of eighty percent of the records from those men who served in the U.S. Army from November 1, 1912 to January 1, 1960 and whose information was housed in St. Louis perished in the fire of 1973. Additionally, although the Freedom of Information act has made the task of accessing personnel records easier, often the NARA will only distribute records to immediate family members or those that ascertain a next of kin waiver form.

augment or influence their readers' own thoughts and opinions on a particular subject. By attempting to change the consumers' opinion editors transcended from journalism to persuasion or propaganda under Leonard W. Doob's definition: "intentional propaganda is a systematic attempt by an interested individuals (s) to control the attitudes of groups of individuals through the use of suggestion, and consequently, to control their actions."[29] For some reporters and editors, the newspaper was a tool to call attention to the injustices faced during these lynchings; but for others the actions of the mob validated white supremacy.

Ida B. Wells used her newspaper *The Free Speech* to combat lynching, but other editors in her home town of Memphis, Tennessee, like the Memphis *Daily Commercial Appeal*, referred to this antilynching crusader as a "scoundrel."[30] In another instance, the Georgia publication, *The Dublin Courier Herald*, remarked that if the NAACP really wanted to help the black citizens of Georgia, it should "shut its filthy mouthpiece and organs of racial equality and die in a grave filled with hog slops."[31]

Richard M. Perloff's article, "The Press and the Lynchings of African Americans," discusses some of the dilemmas researchers may encounter when using periodicals as a source; for instance, even when white editors wanted to criticize a lynching they ran the risk of bodily harm. Perloff referred to the peril that a publisher encountered if he were too critical of a lynching that came as the result of a sex crime involving a female member of a wealthy or a reputable family.[32]

Aside from the generalities of the lynching, such as the location and the victim's name, newspaper columns often provided a bevy of specifics ranging from the technique employed to the torture that often accompanied these acts. Perloff insists that by the late 1800s, these tales of gore were often used to increase both the sensational nature of the report as well as a business principle to increase sales.[33]

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[29] Leonard W. Doob, *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique* (New York: Henry Holt, 1935), 89.
[30] Richard M. Perloff, "The Press and Lynchings of African Americans," *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no.3. (Jan., 2000): 323-324.
[31] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia*, *1880-1930*, 361.
[32] Perloff, "The Press and Lynchings of African Americans," 322.
[33] Ibid., 321. For more information on the rise of commercialism and the popular press, Perloffs recommends G.J. Baldasty's *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

These reports can provide valuable information to flesh out the machinery and ideology behind a lynching, but the reader should be cognizant of the newspaper itself and its target audience. One particularly fascinating case study of the press's account of lynching is the Vicksburg lynching of Lloyd Clay in May 1919. This lynching attracted hundreds of observers and was covered by a large number of newspapers as well. On May 15, Lloyd Clay was hanged and then burned after he allegedly assaulted a local white woman. The *Baltimore Daily Herald* covered Clay's murder in a general fashion as even the more salacious details are told in a matter of fact style:

> Lloyd Clay was dragged from his cell, trampled upon and brutally mistreated in a truck which took him to the fashionable residence street, Cly [Clay] Street, to be tortured to death, Sheriff Frank Scott, Chief of Police R. G. Groome, and fourteen armed policemen registered surprise," as 1500 citizens broke into the jail and removed Clay in a frenzy of howls and delight….
>
> "No, No…let him die slow!" yelled someone.
>
> Coroner Crichlow's jury, haunted at the prospect of indicting 1,500 citizens 'of all classes,' found that Lloyd Clay met his death by mob violence, 'the said mob being unknown to this jury.'[34]

Although the writer implied political corruption and the eagerness of the community to kill a man, his report was a far cry from the one in the Chicago *Whip*.

The *Whip* reported a hellacious scene that even today's most notable authors of horror would envy. Using such romantic passages to describe the crime as "the white human skull uncovered before sympathetic blood drew her crimson veil," the *Whip*, contested that the Southern thugs forced "prominent Colored citizens to view the crime," and then went into a report of romantic imagery and sheer carnage. The account included a story that they claimed all other newspapers had "muzzled," that dealt with the burying of the victim neck deep in soil, a strange iron cage, and blood thirsty pit bull. After apologizing for the story's graphic nature, the journalist then described a scene that could

[34] *Baltimore Daily Herald*, June 17, 1919 reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 14/314.

only equal the Roman tyrant Nero "who used human beings as torches in his garden."[35] One would never know that the two newspapers were commenting on the same lynching. Their use of gratuitous violence to sell newspapers, may also have horrified the general population enough that they took action against lynching.

One can see the many differences between the two accounts of the lynching, but both shared a commonality when they refused to follow up on the lynching and the effect that the murder had on the local community. To say that the local racists applauded the murder while the black community abhorred the lynching is too simplistic; and furthermore, it undermines the complexities of a society that lived with lynching. Only the NAACP investigators uncovered the fact that some members of the local white community were shocked and repulsed at the lynching, to the degree that the citizens of Clay and Farmer streets demanded the removal of the tree on which Clay was originally hanged. The dialogue between local resident Mrs. Ida M. Keefe and a white resident of Vicksburg exemplifies the differences in the white community as Mrs. Keefe stated "I am sure I don't want the tree standing there [near her home] after what happened last night," to which the white man replied "Madam, that tree is a monument to the spirit of the manhood of this community."[36]

Aside from differentiating the intent behind headlines and the reasoning for the tone of each individual newspaper, the historian is also faced with another problem: the federal government's attempt to silence the press. This dilemma is intensified during the war era, as when in June 1917, the United States Congress passed the Espionage Act authorizing the Postmaster General, Albert Sidney Burleson, to ban any material labeled as seditious or treasonous in nature from the national mail system. Later in March 1918, Congress amended the act to include any utterance deemed disloyal as punishable by law. What was originally proposed as a law to weaken support for enemies of the United States soon included any individual or group that protested the current society in the nation, including those who defied the conventional view on race. For many racists the Espionage Act created a new way to silence those who dared to dissent. Until the Espionage Act, many white supremacists relied on earlier statutes, such as the Code of

[35] NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 14/315. Originally printed in the Chicago *Whip*, specific date not give in NAACP files, yet a hard copy of the article remains in the NAACP investigative collection.
[36] NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 14/271.

Virginia, to silence the black community if they voiced their anger at oppression. In the state of Georgia any black who vocally resisted could be jailed on the charge of insurrection.[37] The suspicion of the black community was not confined to the South, as the federal government also worried that blacks could be targeted by German spies. In June 1918, George E. Creel, the head of the Committee on Public Information, expressed his concern about the possible subversion of both black citizens and blacks in the military.[38]

In his work "Closing Ranks and Seeking Honors" Mark Ellis addresses this national suspicion stating:

> The Military Intelligence Branch classified all incoming information on race under the heading "Negro Subversion," on the assumption that blacks were potentially disloyal and especially receptive to the propaganda of enemy agents. Intelligence on blacks was often inaccurate. It was usually gathered by white officers who were hostile to the growing demand for equal rights.[39]

The federal government's supposition was based on the racist ideology that black citizens were incapable of fighting back without the assistance of some sort of foreign catalyst. Historians have often argued that those in power refused to admit when the oppressed wanted to resist. The historian Michel Rolph Trouillot has addressed this predicament when studying the components of the Haitian revolution. The similarities are present when correlated with the United States during the beginning of the twentieth century: "To acknowledge resistance…is to acknowledge that something is wrong with the system."[40] The federal government not only refused to admit that racism played an integral part in its society, but refused to admit that black defiance arose from within the minds of black leaders and intellectuals. Basically, its theory rested on the idea that blacks had to be told that they were unhappy in order to react defiantly.

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[37]Mark Ellis, "Federal Surveillance of Black Americans During the First World War," *Immigrants & Minorities* [Great Britain] 12, no.1 (1993): 4, note 10.
[38] Wray Johnson, "Black American Radicalism and the First World War," The Secret Files of the Military Intelligence Division," *Armed Forces and Society* 26 (Winter 1999): 28.
[39] Mark Ellis, "Closing Ranks and Seeking Honors: W.E.B. Du Bois in World War I," *Journal of American History* 79, no.1 (1992): 102.
[40] Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 84.

During the war era, the federal government had the ability to curtail or shape what the press wrote. Robert Abbott, the editor of the *Chicago Defender*, was warned that he was under surveillance after he wrote an article on lynching that the Wilson administration believed might stifle black patriotism.[41] The Solicitor for the U.S. Post Office William H. Lamar warned Abbott:

> Anything that tends to destroy this harmony and to cause friction between the two races, and that tends to create in the minds of members of your race, the idea that they have no part in the struggle against the Imperial Government and that they are being just as badly treated by the whites of America as they should be treated by the whites of Germany tends to interfere with the cause of the United States in the war against Germany and should have no place in a loyal newspaper.[42]

On a separate occasion, the mayor of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, objected to the *Defender* writing about a lynching in his city. The *Defender's* circulation was later banned by a court order in Pine Bluff.[43] The residents of Lincoln County, Arkansas, were unable to read the *Defender's* criticisms when a black soldier, Clinton Briggs, was lynched in August 1919, in nearby Star City.[44] The black community eventually heard of the returning soldier being chained to a tree and shot to death, but the censoring of the black press did not allow these black citizens to know that their brethren in the North shared their concerns and horror over the incident.

Baltimore's *Afro-American* was also heavily scrutinized by the federal government. The *Afro-American* defiantly stated when it felt threatened by the censoring of military officials. On June 26, 1918, the *Afro-American* informed its readers of what they, as well as other black newspapers dealt with:

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[41] Theodore Kornweibel, *"Seeing Red": Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 39.
[42] Lamar to Abbott, 13 June 1918, B-47522, RG 28, PO, NARA. Reprinted in Kornweibel, . *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 128.
[43] Ibid., 45.
[44] *Crisis,* November 1919, 349; *Crisis* February 1920, 183-186; *Shreveport Journal*, September 3, 1919; *Shreveport Times,* September 3, 1919; *New York Sun,* September 4, 1919; *New York World,* September 4, 1919; the Chicago *Whip*, September 13, 1919.

> Word has reached this city that the editor of the *Crisis* has been warned on several occasions for speaking out too loudly on the race question. The *Crisis* has a muzzle on it just as the *Afro-American* and all other colored newspapers. The N.A.A.C.P. can organize and on the informational side give wide publicity to lynchings, disfranchisement and other wrongs afflicting colored people, but for the period of the war [the NAACP] must quit agitating. It is sensible to recognize that the colored publications must leave many things unsaid until after the war. Meantime, no one can afford to sit down with his hands folded and wait until it is over.[45]

In retrospect, it is amazing and heroic that these publications continued to confront racism in their day; especially when they were covering the many accounts of black veterans returning to the United States only to be physically assaulted and even lynched.

No other individual or organization received more speculation and attention than W.E.B. Du Bois and the NAACP. Although Du Bois was certainly not the most militant member of the black community during the war era, he was seen as an immediate threat because the NAACP was embraced by both blacks and liberal whites, and in larger numbers than his more defiant colleagues. Captain Harry A. Taylor of the Military Intelligence Bureau described the *Crisis* as "extremely radical and antagonist in tone" and stated that Du Bois and the NAACP published it for the "sole purpose of creating antagonism and race prejudice with a view to inciting the colored race to acts of violence against the whites."[46]

Beginning as early as 1916, the War Department begin keeping a file on Du Bois's editorials that dealt with comparisons between German atrocities and racism in the United States; specifically, labeled as dangerous were the *Crisis's* comparison between German atrocities and the lynching of black citizens in the South.[47] Despite that Du Bois had always separated himself from any German bias, the *Crisis* was labeled as an instrument of German propaganda, and as early as May, 1918, the assistant United States

[45] *Afro-American*, June 26, 1918.
[46] Ellis, "Closing Ranks and Seeking Honors," 114.
[47] William Jordan, "'The Damnable Dilemma.' African-American Accommodation and Protest During World War I," *Journal of American History* 81, no.4 (1995): 1589.

attorney in New York warned Du Bois that his publication was being monitored in violation of the Espionage Act.[48]

At first, the federal government resisted relying on the Espionage Act of 1917 and questioned the *Crisis's* material based on local obscenity laws. When the *Crisis* covered the savage 1918 lynching of Mary Turner in Valdosta, Georgia, the lead censor for the federal government, Robert A. Bowan, investigated whether Du Bois had gone too far. Du Bois reported that Turner, who was eight months pregnant had been burned alive and her unborn child was then crudely ripped from her womb; yet the federal government deemed Du Bois's commentary as obscene and not the act itself. Historian Theodore Kornweibel addressed this debate in his work . *"Investigate Everything": Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I* and summarized the government's hypocrisy:

> Although the *Crisis* used discretion in describing this unimaginably brutal act, the Translation Bureau questioned whether the obscenity statute had been violated, not because the lynching itself was obscene, but because its description seemed to be.[49]

Meanwhile, the postmaster in the rural town of Dunnellon, Florida, refused to deliver the *Crisis* and another postmaster in Denison, Texas, sent for review the June issue of the *Crisis* and its story of Turner to the Solicitor for the U.S. Post Office, William H. Lamar.[50]

Lamar, a native of Alabama, stated officially that although the editorial was badly timed it did not violate the Espionage Act. Unofficially he referred the topic to Federal Attorney Charles E. Boles who drafted the memo that would be the guiding policy towards the *Crisis* and other potentially harmful publication of the day:

> This issue is a fair sample of many issues of this publication and all other negro publications published in various parts of the country which have been brought to the attention of this office. Most of them play up in startling head lines all reports of violence against negroes at the hands of

[48] Jordan, "The Damnable Dilemma," 1579.
[49] Kornweibel Theodore,*"Investigate Everything": Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I (*Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 146.
[50] Kornweible, *Investigate Everything*, 127, 146.

> the Southerners and other whites. In the narratives the publications rarely, if ever, mention the provocations furnished by the victims and if such provocations are mentioned they are usually discredited. The victim is always characterized as an innocent victim of race prejudice or race hatred. Such articles can have but one effect on the negro and that is to cause him to hate the whites and the "white man's government." Any good that might be accomplished by matter of a loyal nature carried in these papers, is offset by this rotten race-hatred breeding stuff. The fomenting of race hatred among negroes at this time is extremely unfortunate and flavors strongly of German propaganda.[51]

The years 1918 and 1919 witnessed scores of black citizens lynched, as well as almost twenty black veterans. Although horrific in its detail, if Mary Turner's lynching could bring down the full weight of the federal government any large scale resistance from the black press when a soldier was lynched would be deemed as especially treasonous, and surely lead the protestor to the penal system. This was also the atmosphere and era that led to Du Bois's most controversial editorial "Close Rank." Although accepted by the federal government, his editorial was scorned by many in the black community.

In July 1918, Du Bois addressed the readers of his organization's flagship publication, the *Crisis*:

> We of the colored race have no ordinary interest in the outcome. That which the German power represents today spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom and democracy. Let us not hesitate. Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly with our eyes lifted to the hills.[52]

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[51] Charles E. Boles to Lamar, 13 June 1918, B-47522, RG 28, PO, NARA. Reprinted in Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything*, 146.
[52] *Crisis*, July 1918, 311.

When "Close Ranks" was published the War Deparment found the editorial "very satisfactory."[53] However, many members of the black community felt personally betrayed by Du Bois's sentiments and the controversy has since been addressed by historians.[54]

Historians Elliot M. Rudwick and Julius Lester have been hypercritical of the "Close Ranks" affair often considering it a "colossal blunder," but more recent approaches have seen the editorial as a pragmatic and understandable solution to a precarious predicament.[55] Most notably, historian William Jordan dismisses the idea that Du Bois's decision to print the editorial was not for political gain, as some historians have argued that he appeased the federal government to gain a military appointed position, but rather as a way to work from within the system:

> Du Bois did not write "Close Ranks" to qualify for a commission. Rather, he wrote the editorial for the same reason he sought the military appointment. He believed that greater accommodation—a tactic he had embraced in the past—would bring the most progress with the least risk.[56]

And his tactic worked as he was still under suspicion, but "Close Ranks" enabled the *Crisis* to continue to speak out when acts of injustice and brutality were unleashed on blacks in the United States during, and immediately following, the Armistice. The ability to report on the lynchings that occurred after "Close Ranks" and throughout 1919, has created numerous citations and sources that help historians flesh out when and how black veterans were attacked upon their arrival home.

The best source to accompany these journalists' views is the official correspondence of both the intellectuals as well as high ranking military and government personnel. Perhaps the most important source for this dissertation is the careful and determined actions and investigations of the Tuskegee Lynching Files and the NAACP.[57]

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[53] Jordan, "The Damnable Dilemma," 1580.
[54] The specifics of the debate and outcry from the black community will be further addressed in Chapter One of this study.
[55] Elliott M. Rudwick, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Propagandist of the Negro Protest* (New York: Antheneum, 1960) and Julius Lester (editor) in "Introduction," in *The Seventh Son: The Thought and Writing of W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: Random House, 1971); Jordan, "The Damnable Dilemma" 1564.
[56] Jordan, "The Damnable Dilemma," 1581.
[57] Unfortunately, the archives that house Tuskegee's Antilynching Files were currently undergoing renovations during the creation of this dissertation. When Tuskegee reopens the collection, they will serve as a strong source to strengthen the evidence already used throughout this study. Tuskegee hoped to reopen

The official Papers of the NAACP in both their *Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, 1918-1955* and *Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1953*, serve as crucial sources in both the further exploration of the era as well as in providing a voice to the community. These papers provide government documents and field investigations, and lend a voice to the many citizens of the local community. These files often include personal correspondence from private citizens who fear not only for their own safety, but also inquire into the whereabouts of missing relatives or the actions that led to a community member's lynching.

Leading the charge against a suspected new militant black was Mississippi Senator James K. Vardaman who openly voiced his opinion to the *Vicksburg Evening Post* when he advocated that whites in Mississippi organize and confront "French-women ruined negro soldiers."[58] It was this cry for white vigilance that led to the lynching of at least nineteen black soldiers. A careful examination of Vardaman's own periodical, *Vardaman's Weekly*, will show not only the Senator's views but those of his constituents who eagerly purchased the propaganda.

While most of the blame is justifiably laid on the local level of government in the segregated South for failing to prosecute those who lynched blacks, the federal government should not be labeled as benevolent or even the milder commonly used word—neutral, with regard to its attitudes toward the civil rights of its black citizens. The United States government refused to intervene, even against the sentiment of some of its own high ranking military personnel, who feared white resistance to the homecoming of its black soldiers and advocated intervention. In 1986, the National Archives made available the federal government's surveillance of black citizens during the war era. These documents have since been preserved and organized in the microfilm collection *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925): The First World War, the Red Scare, and the Garvey Movement.*[59] These files provide an important source into the Bureau of Investigation, high ranking military officers and the office of the President's

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their collections during the fall of 2006 or by 2007. Fortunately, Monroe N. Work collaborated with the NAACP during this era, and his investigations are also included in the papers of the NAACP.

[58] *Vardaman's Weekly*, May 15, 1919. Formerly titled *The Issue (1908-1918)*, Vardaman renamed the periodical in 1919.

[59] Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925): The First World War, the Red Scare, and the Garvey Movement, Editorial Advisor Theodore Kornweibel. (University Publications of America: Frederick, MD, 1985).

Chief of Staff. These official documents, investigation files, and federal correspondence provide an inside look into the U.S. government that dismissed lynching as only irregularities and continued to let southern society govern itself as white supremacists deemed necessary.

Court transcripts provide another instance of how the U.S. Government not only ignored but condoned and upheld the South's policies of white deference and Jim Crow segregation immediately following the first World War. Court records from the United States Supreme Court case *Caldwell v. Parker* (252 U.S. 376) will chronicle the case of how the U.S. Army refused to try Sergeant Caldwell, who defended himself on an Alabama streetcar, and allowed the state to perform a "legal lynching." Edgar Caldwell's execution, or murder, was not only an indictment of his person, but all black men. It was a message to the outer black community: a warning and reminder to uphold the tradition of segregation and deference.

Another tool that can provide both insightful and relative information is the internet. While one should certainly be wary of the multitude of questionable, if not blatantly invalid websites, genealogical and other databases can be used as an integral historical source. The on-line service Ancestry.com warehouses over a million documents such as certificates of births and deaths, marriage licenses, court transcripts, United States census records, and property records. Aside from civil records, the site also serves a source for such military records as World War I Draft Registration Cards. Ancestry.com digitally photographs all documents but does not attempt to analyze the material. The interpretation of the document is left to the historian.

Finally, a valuable source is the work of actual participants who lived during this time period. Aside from letters to the editor, many writers resisted lynching through art and literature. By dissecting and evaluating works of the imagination, researchers can better grasp those that fought back through the court of public opinion. As Anne P. Rice stated on the significance that literary ventures had on bringing attention to lynching: "Literature plays a crucial role in the mourning of catastrophic events, particularly when there has been a radical forgetting in other areas of communication and in the preservation of history."[60] Poems and short stories were regularly published in the

[60] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 23.

periodicals of the day and the decades that have followed have furnished numerous other works of literature, such as poems, novels, and plays that confronted the institution of lynching and when the black soldier tried to return home.

CHAPTER 1
GOING TO WAR

On March 5, 1770, Crispus Attucks, the lone black man, and at least fifty other seamen and dockworkers gathered in the cobblestone streets to protest the presence of British troops in colonial Boston. Hours later, Attucks and four of his brethren lay dead in a night that is remembered as the Boston Massacre. This violence was part of a chain of events that led to the Revolutionary War. While many blacks were in bondage, Attucks sacrificed his life for the greater good of his soon to be country.

Even before the United States broke away from Britain and formally became a sovereign nation, blacks played a role in the military. Peter Salem and Salem Poor also contributed as Patriots during the Revolutionary War. Salem served with valor at the Battle of Bunker Hill and managed to kill Major John Pitcairn with an excellent shot from his long rifle. Poor's experiences at Bunker Hill earned him the reputation of not only a great fighter but a leader. Fourteen officers issued a petition of gallantry on Poor's behalf in September 1775. Free blacks and slaves enlisted in regiments of all of the colonies, and many colonies granted emancipation when a slave enlisted. Colonel Christopher Greene exclusively recruited members of Rhode Island's slave population to form the First Rhode Island Regiment. Benjamin Quarles in his work *The Negro in the American Revolution* chronicles the role that blacks played in the Revolution. Military service created opportunities for black men, as Quarles states: "To be a soldier, with all its discomforts and dangers, was likely to be a step forward, as the Negro saw it."[61]

Blacks have always participated in the U.S.'s conflicts. Black men defended the U.S. and participated in the military during the War of 1812, the Mexican American War, and the U.S. Civil War. Black soldiers fought for their own individual freedom as well as for the freedom of all slaves as they knew that a northern victory would abolish slavery in the United States. After emancipation many freedmen and their descendents believed that military service would earn black men respect among their white peers. E.E. Cooper, editor of the Washington *Colored American*, hoped that black commitment to the

[61] Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961) 10-11, 78; Richard B. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: MacMillan, 1986), 10-11.

Spanish-American war would create "an era of good feeling" across the country and "cement the races into a more compact brotherhood through perfect unity of purpose and patriotic affinity."[62] Black commitment to the nation during times of war continued throughout the nineteenth century.

From the Massachusetts 54th, the first regiment composed completely of free black men who fought in the Civil War, to the Buffalo Soldiers who saw combat in the American West and Cuba, black soldiers have served in the U.S. military. This trend would continue into the twentieth century. Unlike his white counterpart, the individual black soldier shared every accomplishment and mistake he made with other black military personnel.

Success on the battlefield earned soldiers honor and respect, but with valor came a price. As black citizens gained pride and achieved some rights, white racists feared they would lose their power at the same time. In the southern states, many whites, accustomed to deference, were shocked at the new found demeanor in black citizens, and especially "negro" soldiers. Georgia Bryan Conrad, writing in 1901, recalled her family's feelings following the Civil War, as she retrieved a childhood memory of jumping off a sidewalk and into the gutter to avoid a "huge" black soldier. As the soldier rushed past and out of sight, her father's only comment was the solemn warning, "My child, you must expect that and many things beside."[63] Upon reflection, Conrad realized that if a black man could be rude to her without her father openly resenting it then her world "had indeed turned upside down."[64] Other white men were not as accepting or prophetic as Conrad's father and often resorted to violence while expressing their resentment. [65]

Violence against black citizens occurred in many communities in the United States and particularly in the South. Locales near military bases were especially rife with

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[62] As quoted in Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 64.
[63] Georgia Bryan Conrad, "Reminiscences of a Southern Woman," *Southern Workman* (July 1901): 410.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Beulah Amidon Ratliff, "In the Delta: The Story of a Man-Hunt," *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1920): 1381. Reprinted in the NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 13/1089-1094. Aside from the system of segregation and educational inequalities that were used to discriminate against black southerners socially, beatings and whippings were prevalent—even fifty years after the abolition of slavery. Amazingly, even decades after the end of the Civil War white southerners used the lash in an attempt to discipline black citizens. Ratliff wrote into the *Atlantic Monthly* describing a local white, "Mr. Tom," who was famous for catching blacks, accused of crimes, and was known to have "a way with the niggers." The writer then described that Mr. Tom procured confessions from local black men and women by beating and whipping them.

racial animosity and acts of violence. One military city that became synonymous with racial violence at the turn of the century was Brownsville, Texas. On August 13, 1906, a riot broke out near Fort Brown. For over ten minutes, white and black assailants emptied their rifles and pistols in the club district of Brownsville. Café and dance hall patrons hid behind counters and tables as the bullets tore the social district to shreds. During the chaos, the violence killed a white bartender and wounded a white police officer. Local law enforcement agents claimed that the actual shooters were unknown and no specific individuals were linked to the crimes. Local whites thought that black soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment had started the gun fight in retaliation to numerous attacks they received from the white community. Conversely, the black soldiers alleged that they had no participation in the event and they believed that it was a white mob who had once again resorted to violence to settle a dispute.[66] After a formal investigation into the matter, the U.S. Army sided with the local white community; furthermore the military concluded that as no black soldiers had come forward to confess, or accuse anyone else, the men had created a "conspiracy of silence" to protect their own.[67]

Upon presidential review, Theodore Roosevelt concurred with the military's findings, subsequently dishonorably discharging all three black companies of the Brownsville regiment. Booker T. Washington, an unofficial advisor to the president who was already scheduled to have lunch at the White House, was shocked when the president informed him of his decision. Washington pleaded with Roosevelt, but the stern president refused to change his mind. Shortly after this announcement, Roosevelt left the country aboard his presidential yacht to oversee the construction of the Panama Canal. Washington and Oswald Garrison Villard continued to reach out to the federal government and even enlisted the aid of Secretary of War William Howard Taft. With the assistance of Taft, Washington attempted to have President Roosevelt delay his final decision on the matter until after his return from South America. Again, Roosevelt stubbornly refused by correspondence, stating:

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[66] Ann Lane, *The Brownsville Affair: National Crisis and Black Reaction* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1971), 79. With regards to Booker T. Washington's role in the matter see Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 309-311; regarding W.E.B. Du Bois, David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 330-333. For a more detailed account of the Brownsville affair see John D. Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid* (New York, W.W. Norton 1970).

[67] Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee*, 1901-1915, 309.

> I could not possibly refrain from acting as regards those colored soldiers. You can not have any information to give me privately to which I could pay heed, my dear Mr. Washington, because the information on which I act is that which came out in the investigation itself.[68]

For Roosevelt, the matter was closed; consequently, one hundred sixty-seven soldiers, who only years prior were fighting Filipino guerillas, were officially thrown out of the U.S. Army. Three white officers were spared.[69]

The likelihood that at least one black soldier from Fort Brown added to the violence on August 13, 1906, was not only possible but probable. Even Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois believed that at least a few of the Brownsville soldiers were involved in the affair, but the difference between these noted black leaders and President Theodore Roosevelt was that Roosevelt, like many whites of the era, could not distinguish between the culpability of an individual and that person's race.[70] Roosevelt interpreted the crime as indicative of the alleged black soldiers' race and not a defect in that particular individual.

Roosevelt's misconception was evident when he addressed Congress during his annual message in December of 1906, as the president led off his discourse with the subject of rape, stating: "The greatest existing cause of lynching is the perpetration, especially by black men, of the hideous crime of rape…the most abominable in all the category of crimes even worse than murder."[71] Although Roosevelt stated that these fears led to individuals being lynched under less severe accusations, and many of the victims were innocent, the implied message was still that: black males, and not black criminals, desired to rape white women. Roosevelt's message concluded when he advocated that blacks not harbor known criminals and that the only remedy to improve the character of the entire race was vocational education.[72]

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[68]Ibid., 310.
[69] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 331.
[70] Regarding Washington and Du Bois's suspicions see Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, 312; Lane, *The Brownsville Affair,* 79; and W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* (New York: Shocken Books, 1968), 55.
[70] Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, 309.
[71]Ibid., 319.
[72] Ibid. Harlan claims that Roosevelt's referral to harboring blacks was an indirect referral to the Brownsville affair and the soldiers that did not come forward.

Aside from the solicitation for Washington's Tuskegee Institute, four other major effects were created by the Brownsville riot. First, at least five black administrators, including Boston's William Lewis, were quickly promoted to federal positions in the government.[73] Secondly, black bandmasters were selected to replace white bandmasters in all black regiments. Emmett J. Scott, an administrator for the Tuskegee Institute sought the advice of Walter H. Loving, an extremely talented and confident black captain of the Constabulary band, to weigh in on the subject. Loving, a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music, served in the U.S. Army from 1893 to 1901, and had organized and conducted the all-Filipino band of the Philippine Constabulary. Aside from being promoted to second lieutenant Loving had also received the honor of being invited to perform with the Philippine Constabulary at the 1904 St. Louis World Fair.[74] Loving was not named as the replacement because this would have been a demotion in pay; nevertheless, he stayed on in an advisory role. He suggested that the man should not be from within the regiment, but rather a civilian with impeccable talent should get the job. Eventually, in the fall of 1907 the military named James A. Thompson, a veteran of the Army, chief musician of the Ninth Cavalry and placed Tuskegee's own bandmaster, Elbert Williams, in charge of the Twenty Fifth Infantry band in 1908.[75]

A third outcome was an increased effort to create regular black artillery units. Booker T. Washington supported this idea but felt that he already had "too many" other items to discuss with President Roosevelt; therefore, he placed his subordinate Scott in charge of this particular debate.[76] Washington removed himself from the project, but he did privately advise Secretary Taft that the creation of black artillery units would be a good way to "stop much of the senseless and useless criticism that is now in the air."[77] Like many aspects of Washington's life, it is unknown if this statement was a pragmatic decision to prey upon Taft's political nature or represented Washington's indifference in

[73] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 333. Lewis dismisses these as mere tokenism and political gifts, stating that the positions were not important but merely "honorific."
[74] Walter Howard Loving (Obituary). *The Journal of Negro History* 30, no.2 (April 1945): 244-245; Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, 313-314. Eventually Loving will named to the Military Intelligence Bureau. His role and philosophies in this Bureau will be thoroughly covered in Chapter 2.
[75] Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, 313-317.
[76] Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, 315.
[77] Ibid.

the Brownsville debate contradicting Washington's earlier efforts to protect the discharged soldiers, either way the statement personified Washington's conservative and political nature. When Scott finally met with Secretary Taft he attempted to combat earlier suppositions that black soldiers lacked the necessary intelligence to make successful artillerymen, as he prefaced his argument: "Many of the men at present in the army are especially intelligent, alert and ambitious fellows. They do most, or all, of the clerical work of their regiments."[78] Although the attempt to secure black artillery units failed at that juncture, the entire procedure set the stage for artillery regiments that were used two decades later during World War I. The process also provided necessary experience for Scott, who would eventually be appointed as an advisor to the War Department after he was not chosen to head Tuskegee after the death of Washington.

The fourth and final outcome of the Brownsville Riot was a rift between black intellectuals and white liberals and the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. Many questioned the government's investigation and specifically the president's decision. The *New York Times* argued that despite a lengthy investigation into the matter, the federal government failed to prove the guilt of any particular soldier in the 24th Infantry Regiment.[79] The New York *World* called the entire affair an "executive lynch law."[80] Harlem's Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., argued that Roosevelt had fallen from grace stating that the president was "once enshrined in our hearts as Moses….Now enshrouded in our scorn as Judas."[81] Black voters were especially angry when they went to the polls, to the point that Republican politicians, usually notorious for wooing black audiences, steered away from large black crowds.[82] David Levering Lewis, Du Bois's most prominent biographer, claims that Roosevelt's decision created a temporary rift between black voters and the Republican Party, especially any candidate tied to the president. Lewis claimed that if Roosevelt's decision has been made public only a few days earlier it might have cost a few Republicans their seat in Congress, especially Roosevelt's son-in-law, Nicholas Longworth who narrowly edged out his Democrat rival.[83]

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[78] Ibid.
[79] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 332.
[80] As cited in Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, 311.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, 336.
[83] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 332.

The federal government's reaction to Brownville was only the beginning of a long list of offenses against the black soldier during the war era; the next two decades would prove to be a nadir for the black soldier. The 24th Infantry was once again the center of controversy and violence, when in August 23, 1917, violence again shook the state of Texas. This time the site was Houston but the description was eerily similar to Brownsville.

Earlier that day Corporal Charles W. Baltimore, a military police officer, had been beaten and arrested for inquiring about a fellow member of the 24th who had been jailed while protecting a local black woman who was being attacked by a white citizen. Later that night Corporal Baltimore and the men of the 24th decided to take matters into their own hands. More than one hundred black soldiers marched from Camp Logan into downtown Houston. The men descended on a police station and then took out months of frustration on the building and any unfortunate individual who was in the way of the gun fire. Soon, a large group of armed whites joined the local police force and the city streets turned into a war zone. After the smoke finally cleared, two black citizens, four black soldiers, and sixteen whites (including five police officers) lay dead.[84]

While the Brownsville riot led to the end of 167 black soldiers' military careers, the members of the 24th Infantry faced a more fatal punishment. After the military secretly rushed sixty three black soldiers through hearings, twenty four men were sentenced to death by hanging—without right of appeal. Woodrow Wilson reduced the number to nineteen, but nineteen men were sent to the gallows to appease the appetite of white supremacists.[85]

Some members of the 24th were guilty, but other than Corporal Baltimore the identities of individual soldiers involved with the shooting were never revealed. Those who were executed were turned into martyrs and the *Messenger* referred to each death as a "legal lynching," as Editor A. Philip Randolph wrote:

> The Negro is probably the best and most loyal soldier in the Untied States. He does his duty in a fine, manly, courageous way. But the Government

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[84] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 540-542. For a more detailed account of the Houston riot see Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 90-101.
[85] Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 104-106.

> has failed too often to do its duty by the Negro soldier….Do not expect the supernatural from the Negro soldier. He has feelings, race pride and ambitions like other men. If you prick him, he bleeds. If you tickle him, he laughs. In a few words, the Negro soldier is just human.[86]

As with Brownsville, the black citizens of the United States were outraged. Du Bois penned a thoughtful editorial in the *Crisis*, praising the soldiers' defiance but mourning the outcome:

> For one of Negro blood to write of Houston. Is not the ink within the very wells crimsoned with the blood of black martyrs? Do they not cry unavenged, saying—Always WE pay; always WE die; always whether right or wrong.[87]

While Du Bois's sentiments were solemn, they pale in the comparison to the more militant message he delivered one year later. Once again Du Bois eulogized the nineteen executed soldiers, but additionally commented on the scores of black men and women who had been attacked, and even lynched since the government murdered the members of the 24th Infantry:

> We raise our clenched hands against the hundreds of thousands of white murderers, rapists, and scoundrels who have oppressed, killed, ruined, robbed and debased their fellow men and fellow women, and yet, today, walk scot-free, unwhipped of justice, uncondemned by millions of their white fellow citizens, and unrebuked by the president of the United States.[88]

The white press was not in agreement about the executions. Some condemned the decision, while others applauded it. The Lexington, Kentucky, newspaper *The Herald* stated that discrimination against black soldiers would create racial animosity and would be detrimental to the country:

> There could be no greater damage done than to foment between the races inhabiting this country an unfriendly or hostile spirit. Unfortunate,

[86] *The Messenger*, November 1917. Note that the term "Negro" is capitalized. The term was often capitalized by black intellectuals and leaders during this era as a component of black pride and militancy. When the term is used by whites it is rarely capitalized.
[87] *Crisis*, October 1917, 14.
[88] "The Black Soldier," *Crisis*, June 1918, 60.

> criminality unwise, has been the policy of some of the public officials of the Southern states in drawing a distinction between the white and colored troops.
>
> If any community cannot so regulate and manage its own affairs, as to prevent what seems to be the unjustifiable attacks on individual soldiers by the peace officers of Houston, that community is not representative of the American ideals of American purpose.[89]

Other Southerners echoed the idea that trouble was yet to come, but their message had a more ominous tone. The Mississippi publication *The Issue* described that the violence witnessed in Houston would be trivial compared "the magnitude of the problems which the white man of the South will be called upon to solve."[90] After the war, white mobs solved these problems as four black soldiers were lynched in Mississippi alone.

Brownsville and Houston were examples of what white supremacists feared most—trained black soldiers fighting back against years of oppression and violence that all black citizens faced. These fears were magnified as thousands of black men joined the war effort in 1917 and 1918.

Conscription and Vigilance

The federal government utilized conscription when the United States began to mobilize for the war in Europe. The Selective Service Act of 1917 made all eligible men, regardless of race, sign up for the oncoming draft. As black men were not excused from this process, the War Department required all enlistees to indicate their race on their draft registration card in order to segregate troops after the men were called up.[91] Although this decision was made mainly to appease Southern politicians, who insisted on separate training facilities based on race, some Southern senators were still not satisfied. After the Houston Riot many southerners feared the addition of more black troops in their region. Senator James K. Vardaman of Mississippi demanded that during the mobilization all

[89] *Lexington Herald*, as reprinted in *Crisis*, November 1917, 33.
[90] *The Issue* (Mississippi), September 13, 1917.
[91] James Mennell. "African Americans and the Selective Service Act of 1917," *The Journal of Negro History* 84, no.3 (Summer 1999): 276.

black troops be trained in the North, a request that Secretary of War Newton D. Baker denied. Black troops would be trained where it was most convenient, regardless of Southern fear.[92]

TABLE 1: BLACK SOLDIERS WITHIN THE CAMPS, JANUARY 1919[93]

Camp	Site	Troops From	Number of Black Troops
Beauregard	Alexandria, Louisiana	Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas	3,178
Dix	Wrightstown, New Jersey	NY (excluding New York City) and Northern Pennsylvania	2,753
Dodge	Des Moines, Iowa	Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota	1,672
Funston	Fort Riley, Kansas	Kansas, Missouri and Colorado	5,706
Gordon	Atlanta, Georgia	Georgia and Alabama	1,454
Grant	Rockford, Illinois	Illinois	7,139
Greene	Charlotte, North Carolina	Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut	10,219
Jackson	Columbia, South Carolina	Tennesee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida	2,949
Lee	Petersburg, Virginia	New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and District of Columbia	2,093
Meade	Annapolis, Maryland	Southern Pennsylvania	2,767
Pike	Little Rock, Arkansas	Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi	2,854
Sherman	Chillicothe, Ohio	Ohio and West Virginia	5,042
Taylor	Louisville, Kentucky	Indiana and Kentucky	3,120
Travis	Fort Sam Houston, Texas	Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma	3,990
Wadsworth	Spartanburg, South Carolina	New York	1,392
Wheeler	Macon, Georgia	Georgia, Alabama and Florida	927
Sheridan	Montgomery, Alabama	Ohio and West Virginia	1,025
Shelby	Hattiesburg, Mississippi	Indiana and Kentucky	1,872

[92] Mennell, "African Americans and the Selective Service Act of 1917," 278, note 12.
[93] All statistics provided in "Memorandum to Emmett J. Scott," Papers of the NAACP: Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, 1918-1955," Robert L. Zangrado, editor. (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1987), Reel 1/ 160.

Specific camps housed black soldiers, but others remained exclusively white. Eighteen military camps contained black soldiers by 1919. Camp Greene in Charlotte, North Carolina, had the highest number of black soldiers at 10,219, in second was Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois, with 7,319 followed by Camp Funston in Riley, Kansas, with 5,706 and Camp Sherman in Chillicothe, Ohio, at 5,042.[94] Camps in the Deep South did not contain as many black soldiers as northern camps, but their presence still caused racial animosity and led to violence. Camp Pike in Little Rock, Arkansas, housed only 2,856 members of the 8th Infantry, but it became the center of several racial incidents, including a case where white soldiers openly disobeyed direct orders, refusing to compromise their beliefs of white supremacy and racial segregation. Many racists turned to James Kimble Vardaman for political support.

Vardaman's family history paralleled the history of the South. His grandfather, Jeremiah Vardaman, a Swedish immigrant, had served in the Mississippi militia during the war of 1812 and had achieved success through farming. James's father, William Sylvester Vardaman, moved the family to Texas, purchased over one thousand acres and nine slaves, and capitalized on the success of Cotton. But after the Civil War, the family returned to Mississippi without their slaves or their fortune. James not only grew up poor but injured his right hand in a farming incident involving a corn sheller. He compensated for his physical impairment through education. Vardaman became an attorney, newspaper editor, and politician. Throughout his life he was inspired and mentored by Confederate veteran and social critic Dr. B. F. Ward who intensified Vardaman's racist ideology. Ward became a father figure as one contemporary stated:

> Vardaman had a brilliant political career opening before him until he became the blind disciple of that aged, bitter old man of Winona, whose every though of the past, present and future seems brewed on race and sectional gall.[95]

James K.Vardaman was elected both a governor and United States senator who ran on the principles of progressivism for farmers and white supremacy. He denounced equality for black citizens, stating that black education was a waste of white taxpayer's dollars; he

[94] Ibid.
[95] William F. Holmes, *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 7-8.

justified lynching when black men were accused of raping white women; and he advocated segregation between the races at all costs.[96]

On March 27, 1918, Captain E.C. Rowan wrote to Senator Vardaman and complained that he and his fellow white soldiers were being forced to be subservient to blacks:

> Colonel F. B. Shaw ordered negro soldiers to march together. I refused for my company. I am under arrest awaiting court martial. Each day white and negro soldiers are forced to stand retreat in same company shoulder to shoulder. White-privates are forced to cook for negro soldiers. Has this officer the rights to force white and negro soldiers to drill together? The soldiers are from Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. [97]

Vardaman's response, printed in the Mississippi newspaper the *Sentinel*, was a formal letter to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker. Writing on the behalf of all Mississippians who had sons serving with black soldiers, Vardaman asked for Baker's "earnest and immediate attention" in the matter and then followed with:

> I realize also, the fact that proper discipline in the army is very necessary for its efficiency, but I also recognize the fact that the pride, and spirit and pluck of the white soldier is vitally essential if we would win this war. Kill the pride of the soldier and you deal a death blow to our arms….If he [the white soldier] shall be subjected to the humiliating treatment by his superior officers, approved by the government, which some of the white soldiers have been subjected to at Camp Pike, if the statement of Captain Rowan is true….And if you find the statement true or the conditions described by Captain Rowan to exist, that something be done to correct the mistake, or someone put in command of that division of the army who

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[96] Ibid., xi, 3-5.

[97] Federal Surveillance Papers, MID Files, 10218-151. The original letter was published in the *Sentinel* (Pontotoc, Mississippi). A copy was sent from E.T. Winston to the Bureau of Intelligence (predecessor of the FBI). Winston was the owner and publisher of the *Advance* (Pontotoc, Mississippi), a rival paper of the Sentinel. Winston also attached the following message to the copied article: "The political "dope" indicated on the newspaper page here with enclosed is more insidious in its demoralizing intent and effect than any form of German propaganda that could be circulated in this section. This, by way of explanation, for the intense race prejudice that has been engendered by certain political interests."

> is familiar with the disposition, traits of character, the habits of thought of white soldiers of the Southern States.[98]

Vardaman described race relations such as these as "abhorrent to every normal Anglo Saxon beneath the stars," and concluded with "I again implore you to look this matter squarely in the face, take counsel of men who understand the peculiar situation in the South and do the thing needed in all circumstances."[99]

The U.S. Army court martialed Rowan and eventually discharged him from duty. The action had nothing to do with equality between the races but rather that Rowan had knowingly and willfully disobeyed a direct order. To stifle these disturbances, Major Samuel D. Sturgis, the camp commander at Camp Pike, prohibited any of his commanders from placing black and white men in the same formations.[100] Major Sturgis's decision was one of many in a long list of the military surrendering the rights of black soldiers to pacify the southern white supremacist.[101]

Southern politicians and business leaders faced another dilemma when they realized that not only did they have to deal with an increase of northern blacks in their regions, but they also risked losing their main source of labor. The United States military did not exclude black sharecroppers from the Selective Service Act, and at least sixty-five percent of all black enlistees came from the rural areas of Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia and South Carolina. The Governor of South Carolina, Richard Irvin Manning III, was outraged when the federal government drafted 66,902 black soldiers from his state.[102] Although white Southerners felt temporarily defeated, they committed themselves to making sure that black soldiers manned more shovels than guns during their stay in the military.

The NAACP had serious concerns about the segregated camps, but they did not put its full might behind attempting to change the military's decision. Joel E. Springarn,

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[98] Federal Surveillance Papers, MID Files, 10218-151.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001): 85-86.
[101] Camp Pike was involved with numerous instances of discrimination against black soldiers. Camp Pike's offenses will be further explored in Chapter 3.
[102] Jeanette Keith, "The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance, 1917-1918: Class, Race, and Conscription in the Rural South,." *Journal of American History*, 87 (March 2001): 1341-2; *New York Age*, July 19, 1919; I.A Newby. *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973): 187-188.

a wealthy white professor and the first chairman of the New York branch of the NAACP, believed that contesting segregation was a lost cause as the United States military had always separated its troops and would not change this policy during the war; furthermore, Springarn confessed that blacks should make the most of the possible advancement that the camps provided. Writing in the *Crisis* W.E.B. Du Bois concurred with Springarn's decision to make the most of the situation:

> We must choose then between the insult of a separate camp and the irreparable injury of strengthening the present custom of putting no black men in positions of authority….Give us the camp. We did not make the damnable dilemma. Our enemies made that.[103]

The NAACP received support from publications such as the *Washington Bee* and Virginia's *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, but not all members of the black press supported Springarn and Du Bois's resolution.[104] Robert S. Abbott of the *Chicago Defender* defiantly responded with " 'Jim-Crow' Training Camps—No!" and Harry Smith of the Cleveland *Gazette* accused Du Bois of turning his back on blacks and had "About faced" on equal rights.[105] Smith's Cleveland *Gazette* also reminded its readers of the recent success of the D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, a film that was currently distorting the sacrifice that many black soldiers made during the Civil War.[106]

Other black editors and columnists stated that black men should not enlist in the army until the federal government addressed violence, and specifically lynching against black citizens. The Baltimore *Afro-American* spoke of the hypocrisy, insisting that every black individual who died at the hands of the lynch mob should receive equal mourning as every American killed by an unprovoked U-boat. The editors claimed that numerous blacks had been "Lynched Without Warning" since black soldiers fought in the Spanish-American War.[107] Hubert Harrison, the outspoken black leader and President of the

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[103] William Jordan, "'The Damnable Dilemma.' African-American Accommodation and Protest During World War I," *Journal of American History* 81, no.4 (1995): 1572; *Crisis*, April 1917, 270-271.
[104] Jordan, "The Damnable Dilemma," 1572.
[105] *Chicago Defender*, April 7, 1917; *Cleveland Gazette*, April 28, 1917.
[106] *Cleveland Gazette*, April 14, 1917. The film *Birth of a Nation* defines the tragic view of Reconstruction, where the South was ravaged by "barbarous" black politicians, and greedy Northern "Carpetbaggers" until the Ku Klux Klan supposedly rode in to save the white southerners. It defamed all members of the black race. The film was both a financial and critical success.
[107] *Afro-American*, April 7, 1917;

Liberty League of Negro Americans, wrote to the *New York Times* decrying the United States' hypocrisy:

> They are saying a great deal about democracy in Washington now, but while they are talking about fighting for freedom and the Stars and Stripes, here at home the whites apply the torch to the black man's homes, and bullets, clubs, and stones to their bodies.[108]

Tragically, while newspapers were calling attention to a war-fueled wave of violence, average white citizens were creating their next fear—the black man who secretly followed the Kaiser. Numerous stories and stereotypes were circulated of German spies infiltrating and corrupting the black community. Southern white newspapers ran story after story of how easily the black population had turned against the United States. The *Florence Daily Times*, from South Carolina led off its column with "Teutons Try Yankee Trick of Making Negroes Rise in Rebellion Against Whites," and the *Macon Telegraph*, in Georgia warned that a large number of blacks in their region were allegedly supporting Germany.[109] The Associated Press reported on plots against the United States in the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.[110]

Du Bois not only dismissed these rumors as unfounded but confronted the allegations as nothing more than propaganda by white southern racists to defame blacks in the United States:

> Any tale or propaganda by which the Bourbon South can get the country to believe the Negro is a menace would play straight into the hands of the slaveholders…but the Negro is far more loyal to this country and its ideals than the white southern American.[111]

While Du Bois attempted to defuse suspicion, President Woodrow Wilson fanned the fires of discontent by creating additional fear and advocating citizen vigilance. On June

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[108] *New York Times*, July 15, 1917
[109] *Florence Daily Times*, April 5, 1917; and *Macon Telegraph*, reprinted in *Literary Digest* 54 (21 April 1917): 1153.
[110] Mark Ellis, "Federal Surveillance of Black Americans during the First World War," 4. Ellis describes as in each state white vigilantes accused the minority population of espionage; specifically, in Texas local whites believed that blacks, Mexican-Americans and Native-Americans were aligning against the United States in an attempt to reclaim land for Mexico.
[111] *Crisis*, May 1917, 8.

14, 1917, during his Flag Day speech, Wilson warned that "vicious spies and conspirators" sought to destroy the United States," and concluded by stating "Woe be to the man or group of men that seeks to stand in our way."[112] Wilson's speech echoed the same sentiment as his 1915 proposal to Congress when he asserted that all disloyal men must be "crushed."[113] From 1915 to the end of Wilson's presidency a number of vigilance leagues sprung up in the United States, groups with such jingoistic names as the American Defense League, the Boy Spies of America, the Sedition Slammers, the Terrible Threateners and the American Protective League, which had over two hundred and fifty thousand members.[114]

The war era created a society of ultra-patriotism and symbolic gestures meant to raise nationalist spirit and degrade any thing German as inherently wrong, if not evil. Germans were "Huns," but prejudice went beyond nationality and into ethnicity. German immigrants and German-Americans were viewed as potentially harmful on U.S. soil. Politicians banned the teaching of German in public schools and one Iowa politician went so far as to state: "ninety percent of men and women who teach the German language are traitors." Radio stations disallowed the playing of Mozart and Beethoven over the airwaves. Even cuisine suffered the effects of the rampant anti-German frenzy as *Hamburgers* became "Liberty Sandwiches," and *Sauerkraut* was renamed "Liberty Cabbage."[115]

The nation's pumped up patriotism did not merely stop at rhetoric. Human lives were in peril as nativist mobs seized and attacked anyone viewed as disloyal, or believed to be a spy. In Georgia, the *Albany Journal* cheered its citizens to take the law into their own hands:

> If you ever, on the street or in a trolley car, should hear some soft-shell pacifist or hard-boiled but poorly camouflaged pro-German, make seditious or upatriotic remarks about your Uncle Sam you have the right

[112] Christopher Capozzola , "The Only Badge Needed is Your Patriotic Fervor: Vigilance, Coercion, and the Law in World War I America," *Journal of American History* 88, no.4 (2002): 1360.
[113] David M. Kennedy, *Over Here*, 67.
[114] Capozzola , "The Only Badge Needed," 1361-1362. Capozzola's asserts that not one German spy was unocovered during World War I, and much of what these groups did were symbolic, "ineffectual," or "even absurd."
[115] Kennedy, *Over Here*, 54, 68. According to one urban legend the era was so anti-German that *Dachshunds*, now renamed "Liberty Dogs" were sometimes stoned in the streets.

> and privilege of taking that person by the collar, hand him over to the nearest policeman or lese [sic] take him yourself before the magistrate. You do not require any official authority to do this and the only badge you need is your patriotic fervor. The same thing applies to women. Every American, under provisions of the code of civil procedure, had the authority to arrest any person making a remark or utterance which "outrages public decency.[116]

Citizen arrests led to beatings, whippings, and even murders were common as these mobs sought to uncover and punish anyone sympathetic to Germany. A group of men quickly swarmed upon a German immigrant who made the mistake of toasting the Kaiser, and uttered *Hoch Der Kaiser.* The mob then garroted the man, and only as he began to slip into unconsciousness did they release the noose. Only after the crowd forced the man to kiss the U.S. flag, did they finally let him go. Assaults led to lynching. One of the more infamous murders of the era was the Illinois lynching of Robert Prager. On April 5, 1918, ruffians accused Prager of making statements against the American way of life. They strung their victim to a tree and dropped Prager three times as the crowd chanted "one for the red, one for the white and one for the blue."[117]

Almost four months later, President Woodrow Wilson spoke out against mob violence. On July 26, 1918, after months of advocating extralegal behavior, Wilson wrote against vigilantism in his "Statement to the American People":

> I say plainly that every American who takes part in the action of a mob or gives it any sort of countenance is no true son of this great Democracy, but its betrayer, and does more to discredit her by that single disloyalty to her standards of law and of right than the words of her statesman or the sacrifices of her heroic boys in the trenches can do to make suffering peoples believe her to be their savior.[118]

Despite Wilson's condemnation violence continued. For many, the violence against people of German ethnicity became an excuse to act out against any one deemed an enemy of the state. Women and minorities who dared to challenge their proposed role in

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[116] *Albany Journal*, April 17, 1918.
[117] Capozzola, "The Only Badge Needed," 1355; Kennedy, *Over Here*, 68.
[118] Capozzola, "The Only Badge Needed," 1354-1355.

society were in danger of being attacked, or worse—murdered. A voter in Albion, Nebraska, worried that women who engaged in premarital sex with soldiers would destroy the moral fiber of the U.S. Army and the country at large. D. J. Poynter wrote to Secretary Baker and proposed: "Shoot the lewd women as you would the worst German spy; they do more damage than all the spies."[119]

Black citizens were also in great danger. Spy accusations and rumors of anti-American speech gave the lynch mob yet another reason to murder. In York, South Carolina, five men lynched the local black minister, Reverend W.T. Sims, for making "reckless utterances about the war." In Birmingham, Alabama, law officers rescued a black man from a lynching. His accusers claimed he was manipulated by the Germans and was encouraging American soldiers to desert their position.[120]

Such acts of violence led William Monroe Trotter to establish the National Equal Rights League. Trotter insisted that the federal government protect the legal and civil rights of blacks. Realizing that the situation would only get worse Trotter used newspapers to deliver his message, as read in the *Cleveland Gazette*:

> There is need no longer of subjection of Americans to the race prejudices of fellow Americans. In the presence of a common danger and a common obligation, with a war devastating Europe caused by racial clannishness and racial hatred, under Almighty God let the United States of America and the people thereof give up race proscription and persecution at home….Now is the time for all in authority to declare for the abolition of all racial discriminations and proscriptions and for all to join in our unhyphenated Americanism for victory under the favor of the God of all mankind. [121]

Trotter's statement was correct, 1918 and particularly 1919 saw an increase in violence towards blacks, as black civilians and soldiers fell victim to the lynch mob.

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[119] Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 135.
[120] Theodore Hemmingway, "Prelude to Change: Black Carolinians in the War Years," *Journal of Negro History* 65, no.3 (1980): 217; Mark Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance: African Americans and the United States Government During World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 67.
[121] "League Asks for Full Manhood Rights," *Cleveland Gazette*, May 19, 1917.

On July 23, 1918, Dr. John A. Miller became the victim of a brutal assault in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Miller, was well educated and had attended Howard University and earned a medical degree from the University of Michigan in 1900. He had twice upheld the community's rules against miscegenation by publicly chastising two black women known to have had sexual relations with white men. Whites deemed him an enemy.[122] A mob dragged Miller from his home and performed the painful ritual of shame—tarring and feathering. His tormenters accused him of making anti-war comments and refusing to buy Liberty Bonds.[123] The attack on Miller, while similar to the violence that blacks faced in 1917, is significant because though, while not a lynching, itrepresented the white community's propensity for violence. Historian J. William Harris argues that in the few years before the war, many southern cities attempted to reduce lynching, as they worried about losing workers to the North. Lynching statistics defend this stance. Mississippi had averaged more than fourteen lynchings a year from 1900 to 1909, and eight per year from 1910 to 1915, but these numbers decreased to only three reported lynchings in 1916 and 1917 combined.[124] The entire nation witnessed an increase during the war. This rise can be explained by southern vigilance and fear of the rising number of black soldiers in the U.S. military.

By 1918, as over 367,000 blacks had been drafted into the military and over 200,000 were fighting in Europe, white mobs lynched at least sixty-four black citizens. Lynching was not confined to the South. Lynching also occurred in northern and western states. Illinois, Oklahoma, California, and Wyoming each recorded a lynching in 1918. On September 3, 1917, a white mob lynched three black men outside of Philadelphia in Chester, Pennsylvania.[125]

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[122] J. William Harris, "Etiquette, Lynching, and Racial Boundaries in Southern History: A Mississippi Example," *The American Historical Review* 100, no.2 (April 1995): 396-397.

[123] *Vicksburg Daily Herald*, July 24, 1918; Harris, "Etiquette, Lynching, and Racial Boundaries in Southern History: A Mississippi Example," 401. Dave Cook, a white man, was also tarred and feathered on the same day as Miller. Cook had stated "he would see the United States government in hell" before he would allow his sons to join the military. Both his sons were mulattos as he lived openly with a black woman. Cook also stated "there would be no race distinction after the war is owned by Germany and the negro and white children will be sent to the same schools."

[124] Harris, "Etiquette, Lynching, and Racial Boundaries in Southern History: A Mississippi Example," 398.

[125] *Crisis*, February 1918, 183-184; *Crisis*, February 1919, 180-181; the victims in Illinois and California were white. On December 10, 1918 Edward Woodson was lynched in Wyoming after he was charged with killing a railroad switchman. Mennell, "African Americans and the Selective Service Act of 1917," 285.

Unfortunately, Americans did not stop suspecting their neighbors of unpatriotic actions after the armistice. Private citizens continued to watch their fellow citizens but now the fear of German espionage or un-American rhetoric or activities was replaced with local resentments and fears. In the years immediately following the war the activist and social critic Walter Lippmann commented on this mob mentality, as he asserted that at the "present time a nation too easily acts like a crowd."[126]

This mentality translated into acts of violence. Lynching in 1919 increased. The *Literary Digest* commented on this year of bloodshed and attributed the rise in violence to the post-war psyche of the United States:

> Lynching continues to hold its place as the great American sport….
>
> The year has been one of unusual lawlessness and crime, following as a kind of reaction from the excitement of war, and the increase in crimes that excite lynching and the increase in disposition to disregard the regular processes of law are attributable to the same influence. Let it be hoped that we shall all calm down, and come to recognize that in a country of law—of our own law—we must learn to respect the law.[127]

Lynching had seen a decrease in the first years of the twentieth-century, but by 1918 it had returned with a vengeance. Among the scores of reported lynchings was the case of Lloyd Clay who was lynched after a white woman alleged that he attacked her. More than 1500 people descended on Vicksburg to reclaim the dignity of the white woman. The crowd dragged Clay from his cell, stomped him in the street and eventually hanged him in public.[128]

Only a year removed from the attack on J.A. Miller, one can see that the racial animosity in this Mississippi city had increased dramatically. Historian J. William Harris concludes that the difference stemmed from the climate of violence in the country during the war years: "Yet this lynching, even more than the tar-and-feather attack of the year before, rather than reestablishing order and reinforcing white solidarity, ultimately served

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Mennell concludes that this violence resulted from "a growth of black pride consequent to the significant number of African-Americans who served their country in such as an honorable way."

[126] Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920). Reprinted in Capozzola, "The Only Badge Needed," 1381.

[127] "Lynchings in 1919." *The Literary Digest* 64. no. 3 (Jan. 17, 1920): 20.

[128] *Baltimore Daily Herald*, June 17, 1919. Reprinted as part of the NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 14/314.

to reveal and deepen class cleavages in white Vicksburg."[129] Harris contends that whereas Miller's attack was a "ritual of shaming," so impressive in its own right that any black man in Mississippi could merit enough honor to receive this torment (instead of just lynching him), Clay's lynching implied no shaming from the white community, other than instant death—and a reminder to all blacks to remember their place in society.[130]

As in the case of Clay, returning black soldiers were rarely welcomed and honored by the South, and certainly never by white supremacists. And as with Clay, four black soldiers in Mississippi suffered the same fate—they were lynched. Post war anxieties led the *Vicksburg Evening Press* to attempt to soothe its readers "high tensions" by dismissing local rumors that black soldiers were returning from overseas with the hope of marrying white women. Violence, however still reigned.[131] Only three months after the *Evening Press* assurances, on July 15, 1919, Robert Truett, a recently discharged black soldier from the army, was lynched in nearby Louise, Mississippi. The mob had accused Truett of greeting a white woman with "indecent proposals."[132]

Onto the Front

Despite the renewed violence in the United States, a large percentage aimed specifically at black citizens, Du Bois remained patriotic and advocated that blacks commit to the nation's war effort. In the controversial editorial "Close Ranks" Du Bois suggested that blacks put aside their complaints against the nation and put their energy into fighting the Germans. In July of 1918, Du Bois addressed the readers of his organization's flagship publication, the *Crisis*:

> …Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy….[133]

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[129] Harris, "Etiquette, Lynching, and Racial Boundaries in Southern History: A Mississippi Example," 407.
[130] Ibid.
[131] *Evening Press*, March 22, 1919.
[132] *Shreveport Times*, July 17, 1919 reported in the NAACP Anti-Lynching files, Reel 13/1011; *Advertiser*, Montgomery, Ala. July 18, 1919; *Crisis,* February 1920, 183-186.
[133] *Crisis*, July 1918, 311.

Sensing a growing movement against his decision, Du Bois once again went to the *Crisis* to defend his decision in August of that same year:

> …This is Our Country: We have worked for it, we have suffered for it, we have fought for it; we have made its music, we have tinged its ideals, its poetry, its religion, its dreams…. Our country is not perfect. Few countries are. We have our memories and our present grievances….We must fight, then, for the survival of the Best against the threats of the Worst….We want victory for ourselves—dear God, how terribly we want it—but it must not be cheap bargaining, it must be clean and glorious, won by our manliness, and not by the threat of the footpad….

While it can be successfully argued that perhaps Du Bois made these conciliatory statements to alleviate the federal government's suspicions of him as an instigator or threat to the nation, or that "Close Ranks" was a pragmatic decision to work from within the system, Du Bois had been making these statements even before the United States was formally engaged in the European war. As far back as November of 1914, Du Bois had set a precedent for "Close Ranks" as he insisted that a Germany victory in the war would be devastating to blacks:

> An allied victory would only ensure that "the plight of the colored races no worse than now. Indeed, considering the fact that black Africans and brown Indians and yellow Japanese are fighting for France and England it may be that they will come out of this frightful welter of blood with new ideas about the essential equality of all men. A German victory means the triumph of every force calculated to subordinate darker races….[134]

As when the NAACP accepted segregated military camps, many black intellectuals, and this time, even members of Du Bois's organization openly disagreed with his stance. The members of the Washington branch of the NAACP confessed that they loved their country to the point that they were unwilling to forego the constitutional right of equality:

> Be it Resolved, That we, the members of the District of Columbia Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,

[134] *Crisis*, November 1914, 28-30.

> hereby express our opinion that such an appeal as this is not timely and is inconsistent with the work and spirit of the Association….WE HONOR OUR COUNTRY AND FLAG…but at the same time, we see no reason for stultifying our consciences by pretending or professing to be ignorant of, or indifferent to the acts of indignity and injustice continually heaped upon us, or by admitting that they are to be excused or forgotten until they are discontinued.[135]

From that same branch, William H. Wilson, also announced his displeasure:

> I am utterly astounded and confounded by the leading editorial of the July CRISIS. In no issue since our entrance into the war am I able to find so supine a surrender—temporary though it be—of the rights of man….[136]

Hubert Harrison, a political rival of Du Bois, ridiculed the editorials stating that the stance was the equivalent of blacks consenting to be lynched during the war and "submit tamely and with commendable weakness to being Jim-crowed [sic] and disfranchised."[137] After Harrison's dissent, and an interrogation of Harrison by the federal government, the Military Intelligence Bureau rejected the idea that Du Bois was completely trusted by all of his peers.[138]

Even after the formal end of the war, some black intellectuals were still outraged with Du Bois's compromise. *Half-Century Magazine*, a monthly periodical out of Chicago that advertised itself as the medium for middle-class blacks, stated that Du Bois had become merely a mouthpiece for the federal government. In February 1919, *Half-Century Magazine* stated that men like Du Bois were "blown the way the white man wishes them to be blown, they constitute nothing less than carbuncles on the race."[139]

While black leaders were debating the issue of whole-heartedly joining the war effort, black citizens were also far from a monolithic group. Average black citizens'

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[135] *Crisis*, September 1918, 218.
[136] *Crisis*, September 1918, 219.
[137] Mark Ellis, "Closing Ranks and Seeking Honors: W.E.B. Du Bois in World War I," *Journal of American History* 79, no.1 (1992): 115.
[138] Ibid. The administrator specifically named in this conclusion was Major Loving. Loving's role in the MIB will be further addressed in Chapter 2.
[139] Ellis, "Closing Ranks and Seeking Honors," 121-123. Ellis concludes that even Du Bois admits that he had made a mistake. Du Bois's own letters and correspondence state that he believed he had abandoned his intent by supporting the system of Jim Crow: the world had gone "utterly crazy…and I with it," and he had been "swept into the national maelstrom."

opinions on the war ranged from stringent patriotism to ambivalence to dissent. Enthusiastic responses ranged from Liberty Loan drives, Liberty parades and many black men and women contributed to the labor force of the Red Cross. Newspapers across the country applauded black patriotism, and one Midwestern publication, the *Farmers Mail and Breeze* from Topeka, Kansas, stated that black commitment had eclipsed white citizens:

> …on the whole the Negroes of the United States have responded more universally and cheerfully to the call of the government than the white men…."[140] For many black men, entering the military way was an avenue to equality and earn the respects of whites, as one black recruit described his enlisting as a "god sent blessing.[141]

Not every soldier was as excited as the aforementioned patriot, and some enlistees simply joined because they thought they were required to do so. Nate Shaw, a farmer from Alabama, confessed that he did not even know why the nation was at war.[142] Other soldiers confessed their ignorance in song:

Jined de army fur to git free clothes,
What we're fightin' 'bout, nobody knows[143]

Even soldiers who were decorated with prestigious medals stated that their motives were not so valiant. Croix de Guerre recipient Isaac Freeman enlisted merely to avoid being placed in a labor unit.[144]

Many blacks supported the war, but at the other end of the spectrum other black community leaders advocated against joining the military. Local authorities jailed Rev. J.I. Graham of Knoxville, Tennessee, for six months for advising members of his congregation not to report for military duty.[145] The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* also ran the story of Rev. Jesse Payne, who was tarred and feathered for his anti-war rhetoric:

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[140] *Farmers Mail and Breeze*, reprinted in Crisis, June 1918, 68-69.
[141] Kennedy, *Over Here*, 29.
[142] Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers: the Life of Nate Shaw* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 169.
[143] Theodore Kornweibel, "Apathy and Dissent: Black American's Negative Responses to World War I," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 80 (Summer 1981): 327.
[144] Kornweibel, "Apathy and Dissent," 328.
[145] Kornweibel, "Apathy and Dissent," 330. Kornweibel follows this account with the conclusion that a precise census of black conscientious objectors is impossible as no distinction was made between those sent to prison for religious ideas or any number of crimes.

> Rev. Jesse Payme [sic], pastor of the colored holly [sic] roller church in the southeast suburbs of this city, was given a coat of tar and feathers last night as a result of alleged seditious remarks for some months concerning the president, the war, and a white man's war.
>
> Earlier in the evening the preacher is alleged to have said something about the Kaiser being as good a man as the president, and the Kaiser did not require his people to buy his bonds and some one landed a solar plexus on him sending him into the ditch, from which he got up running.
>
> The negro has been giving the officers no little concern for some months owing to remarks attributed to him among the negroes and his non-assistance in the Red Cross and war work, but it is difficult to get the negroes to testify against him. The preacher protested his innocence.
>
> [After being tarred and feathered] he repeated the soldier's oath, and promised to talk Liberty bonds and Red Cross to the end of his life and the end of the war.[146]

The African-American journalist George S. Schuyler stated that he had personally met with many black citizens who publicly supported the war, but privately held reservations against the United States. According to Schuyler, these malcontents believed that the Germans could not treat blacks any worse than southern whites, and what the United States really needed was "a good whipping."[147] A. Philip Randolph insisted that the majority of black citizens did not support the war, and only the black leadership of the NAACP supported the war in the black community. Randolph argued that while meeting halls in major U.S. cities such as New York and Philadelphia were filled with men and women who did not support the war, the "leaders" of the black community were afraid to attend.[148]

Randolph might have exaggerated the percentage of the black masses that were against the war, but many black citizens felt betrayed when news began to surface that black soldiers were not being treated fairly. In May of 1918, the military forced Colonel

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[146] *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 18 April 1918.
[147] George S. Schuyler, "Our White Folks," *American Mercury* 12 (December 1927): 386.
[148] Kornweibel, "Apathy and Dissent," 336.

Charles Young, the highest ranking black officer in the U.S. Army, into retirement. As Colonel Young returned to his home in Ohio, the NAACP voiced its concern that a backlash against black soldiers would only intensify those black citizens who were currently against the war effort—and Du Bois did not want to regret his stance in "Close Ranks." Du Bois penned an editorial in the *Crisis* titled "The Negro and the War Department" in which he argued that over twelve million black citizens disagreed with the military's decision to place Young on inactive duty. Du Bois concluded the article by restating the black man's willingness to fight but warned against animosity towards the black soldier: "As Negroes, we propose to fight for the right no matter what our treatment may be; but we submit to the public that intentional injustice toward colored soldiers is the poorest investment this nation can make just now."[149]

Unfortunately, neither the nation, nor its military, heeded Du Bois's plea. Acts of discrimination against black soldiers were rampant on military bases and the southern communities they bordered. At Camp Merritt, New Jersey, racial violence broke out at a Y.M.C.A. when white soldiers from Mississippi tried to eject black soldiers from the establishment. The violence left one black soldier dead and five wounded.[150] Black sergeants of medical units were not allowed in certain areas of southern cities. When the sergeants complained the U.S. Army sided with the locals and stated that black soldiers "should refrain from going where their presence will be resented."[151]

Fear continued to mount when the military placed black troops next to units that contained southern whites. The military created a number of potential remedies to prevent future acts of violence. While almost all of the suggestions were aimed at subduing black soldiers—labeled as the true threat—some were offensive strategies that played on the stereotype that all black men were lascivious and primal in nature. The military believed that black men might be less provoked to anger, and therefore violent, if they were sexually satisfied. The racial expert of the Morale section of the Military Intelligence Bureau (MIB) suggested that the U.S. Army employ black women, who would enter the barracks disguised as male troops, to service black soldiers. The military

[149] *Crisis*, May 1918, 7.
[150] *Crisis*, October 1918, 297.
[151] *Crisis*, May 1918, 8.

did not carry out the suggestion as a "more conservative" administrator from New England frowned upon the idea.[152]

Stereotypes and fear of black soldiers also translated into the men's training for combat situations that they would face on the front. Some black soldiers were not even allowed to train with weapons, and many more were forced into labor units.[153] This was especially present at Camp Des Moines, in Iowa, where even colored officers were given no formal artillery training. The men were primarily illiterate farmers, without mechanical skills, who were placed in the artillery units after the draft. Not only were the men ill prepared for the war, but they were not provided with the same courses of study as soldiers at white camps, courses that would have readily prepared the men for life after the front. Nevertheless, by October 15, 1,250 men were sent to France as soldiers of the 92nd Division.[154]

The idea that the military could only use black soldiers for labor continued into the war as numerous black soldiers were forced to handle shovels instead of guns. Black soldiers made up one-third, an estimated 160,000 troops of the Service of Supply labor units.[155] These units ranged from general laborers clearing away debris in war torn Europe to the burying of dead soldiers back at home. Leonard Pitts, who had acquired years of military experience as a member of the 24th Infantry, spent his war years in the 341st Service Battalion handling and burying dead soldiers.[156]

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[152] "Special Bulletin—the Negro Problem in the Army," Discrimination in the Armed Forces, Reel 1/248. In an interview between NAACP officer J.R. Shillady and the 92nd Division's Captain, Shillady reports that Captain Wright substantiated this claim. Black prostitutes were to enter the quarters to sleep with the black soldiers and raise their morale. Shillady claimed that the idea was shot down by a more conservative University professor from New England. Wright was quick to add that venereal disease was low amount his men in the 92nd, at less than ½ of one percent.

[153] Wray Johnson, "Black American Radicalism and the First World War," The Secret Files of the Military Intelligence Division," *Armed Forces and Society* 26 (Winter 1999): 30.

[154] *Crisis*: May 1918,7; Lewis PART I, 542-543.Instructor George Schuyler, of later social commentary reputation, complained that the men were not given the same courses of study provided to soldiers at white camps' and Wray Johnson's Black American Radicalism, 39. Johnson claims that the men's training had a negative effect on their fighting: "…the 92nd Division, poorly led and trained, was hurriedly sent to France, where it acquired a reputation as incompetent and prone to cowardice in battle."

[155] Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I*,
(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 103.

[156] Chad Louis Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy: The First World War and the Figure of the African American Soldier," (Ph.D. diss. Princeton University, 2004,) 129.

Southern politicians and white supremacists surely applauded the military's decision to use blacks as laborers instead of fighters, but this was not the only story of the black soldier. Black troops were not merely the workers of the war, but played an active role in combat. The men were not just laborers, or incompetent fighters, or white supremacists would not have been as threatened by the black soldier and his return. Soon, tales of honor and valor involving black soldiers were being widely circulated in Europe and the United States.

Before the black soldier from the United States received his accolades members black African soldiers were being complimented for their fighting prowess. The *Southern Workman*, published by Hampton University, first praised and applauded African soldiers fighting in Europe. The *Southern Workman* stated that blacks were excellent with the bayonet and spoke of the bravery of the Senegalese who retook Douamont. The article admired the African soldiers and concluded: "not only are the Senegalese troops brave and efficient, but they have the physical strength which enables them to undergo constant fighting with but little food and rest."[157] Ironically, the author's praise chose biology as the justification for the soldier's ability to fight, as if black soldiers had a higher endurance for pain or an ability to go without water for a longer period of time. The article praised the Senegalese soldiers, but many racists in the South began to question: What if the black soldier—now trained to kill whites—was returning to the United States, instead of Africa?

Black soldiers from the United States joined the troops from Senegal as men who fought heroically in Europe. Sixty-eight black soldiers received the most prestigious medal from the French military, the Croix de Guerre, and twenty one received the American Distinguished Service Cross. Sadly, in an effort not to insult southern politicians, the U.S. Military refused to issue the Congressional Medal of Honor to any black soldier during the war.[158]

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[157] *Southern Workman*, reprinted in *Crisis*, November 1917, 33.

[158] Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History*, 230; and Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 142. In 1991, President George Bush presented the family of Corporal Freddie Stowers with the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroism during World War I. President Bush admitted that the medal was long overdue. No black soldier was ever awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor until Private Milton Olive and medic Lawrence Joel received the honor for their valor in the Vietnam War.

Black soldiers proved their ability to fight and shared their effort and accomplishments through tales in print. J.S Cotton, Jr. dedicated a poem to his brethren of the 92nd Infantry. The *Crisis* printed the proud soldier's sonnet in its June 1918 issue:

They shall go down unto Life's Borderland,
Walk unafraid within that living Hell,
Nor heed the driving rain of shot and shell
That round them falls…
And from their trembling
lips shall swell
A song of hope the world can understand…
When age-long Faith, crowned with a grace benign,
Shall rise and from their blows cast down the thorn
Of prejudice. E'en though through blood it be,
There breaks this day their dawn of liberty.[159]

The poem transcended into the battle field as many black soldiers acted out the message behind Cotton's poem. The 380th Infantry Regiment, earned the moniker "The Black Devils" from German soldiers during an offensive which resulted in capture of 1,900 German prisoners in August 1918.[160] Perhaps the regiment that received the most notoriety was the 369th Infantry, nicknamed the "Harlem Hell Fighters." The Regiment fought for one hundred ninety-one days without losing any ground to the German army.[161] No one soldier personified the Hellfighters more than Private Henry Johnson.

In May 1917, Henry Johnson single-handedly fought off scores of German soldiers. Coming to the aid of a fallen friend he emptied his rifle and after running out of ammunition did he resort to hand-to-hand combat. Using his knife and fists he managed to tear through the remaining Germans. Finally, after surviving such an ordeal, Johnson, soaked in blood, spared the life of the last remaining German. The French military gave Johnson the Croix de Guerre and black newspapers in the United States labeled him as

[159] J.S. Cotton, Jr. " Sonnet to Negro Soldiers," *Crisis*, June 1918, 64.
[160] Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 142.
[161] Ibid., 143.

their hero. The *New York Age* gloriously depicted Johnson's experience as the personification of honor and grit on the battlefield.[162]

When Henry Johnson came back to the U.S., the black community paraded its hero through the streets as a shining example of black manhood. A description the white community put up with until he challenged the average white soldier of the American army. Johnson's speech began with high praise for the U.S. military and specifically the conduct and fighting of his fellow black troops, but then it focused on racist American soldiers who refused to fight in the same trenches as the 369th. In front of a "large and enthusiastic crowd" Johnson turned away from nationalistic pride, stating that white U.S. soldiers "retreated in the face of enemy fire" only to be replaced by the French who did not mind sharing "the honors of the battlefield with them [Johnson's fellow members of the 369th]." [163]

The event created enough turmoil that white soldiers demanded an arrest warrant for Johnson on charges of slander. White marines were outraged that Johnson labeled them as "cowardly" and that he had stated that the "war was won by black soldiers." Only after Johnson promised to retract the charges in a formal statement did the deputy marshals defer the arrest. Because the establishment often sided against black soldiers who attempted to give their side of the battlefield, the true accomplishments of black soldiers were often overlooked or ignored by the society at large and historians.[164]

As white southerners dealt with the fear that black soldiers were proving their manhood on the battle front, another dilemma crept into the white supremacist's psyche. Aside from tales of valor, tales of acceptance and equality from the French were reported from France. Social interaction with French women was of particular concern for both white soldiers and white citizens in the United States. To combat potential acceptance, and even praise, from French citizens, some white soldiers attempted to alter the opinions of the French citizens by spreading rumors that their black comrades were rapists and

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[162] *New York Age*, March 1, 1919; Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 143-144; Walter Dean Myers *The Harlem Hellfighters: When Pride met Courage* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 197-204.
[163] *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1919.
[164] Ibid. For a more detailed investigation of racism on, and after, the battlefield, see Gail Buckley's *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* New York: Random House, 2001), or Walter Dean Myers' *The Harlem Hellfighters: When Pride met Courage*.

murderers. These attempts were not only wide-spread but descended into absurdity as some men attempted to convince the French that black soldiers had tails.[165]

Every black soldier of the 92nd Infantry had to be present at hourly checks from reveille to 11:00 p.m. The officers then created a written record and men were immediately questioned and disciplined if they were not in attendance. Additionally, soldiers were not allowed to stray more than one mile from their base and passes to leave that circumscribed area were only granted to men of "known reliability."[166]

Despite an attempt by the U.S. Army to stop social interaction between the two groups, equality existed between French civilians and U.S. black soldiers. When French men, and more importantly French women, mingled with black troops, some white soldiers attempted to take matters into their own hands. One night in Vannes, angry white soldiers confronted Private Charles Houston, of future Civil Rights fame, and three other black soldiers, found in the company of French women. A white officer "yelped" about "niggers forgetting themselves" and that it was the duty of him and his fellow white soldiers to remind the black soldiers of their proper "place" before they returned stateside, or "otherwise the United States would not be a safe place to live in after they got back."[167] The officer's ominous statement proved to be an accurate prediction as at least four black soldiers were lynched for social interactions with white southern women in 1919.

The opinion of the four soldiers who accosted Charles Houston were shared by the highest levels of the military's administration. Du Bois publicly scorned a General from Georgia "who openly and officially stigmatizes his black officers as no gentlemen by ordering them never to speak to French women in public or receive the spontaneously offered social recognition."[168] Perhaps the most crucial decision came from General John Pershing's office, in the form of a secret memorandum that urged the French to eliminate any treatment towards black soldiers that may have a detrimental affect on race

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[165] Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America*, 103.
[166] Barbeau and Henri, Unknown Soldiers, 141-145.
[167] Charles H. Houston, "Saving the World For Democracy," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 21, 1940; Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 223.
[168] Julius Lester, editor, The Seventh Son*: The Thought and Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: Random House, 1971) 116.

relations in the United States upon the men's return. On August 7, 1918, an unofficial order from the U.S. Army to the French High Command urged the French:

> 1. To prevent the rise of any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers;
>
> 2. Not to eat with blacks, shake hands, or seek to meet with them outside military life;
>
> 3. Not to commend black troops too highly in the presence of white Americans.[169]

The black soldiers' experiences in France were a watershed period in the history of race relations in the United States. Black soldiers witnessed a world of equality, where actions and not skin color were important, only to be betrayed by the very country they were defending. When news of this acceptance abroad reached the oppressed black masses in the United States, they were incensed, as Du Bois poignantly reflected:

> On the Negroes this double experience of deliberate and devilish persecution from their own countrymen, coupled with a taste of real democracy and old-world culture, was revolutionizing. They began to hate prejudice and discrimination as they had never hated it before. They began to realize its eternal meaning and complications. Far from filling them with a desire to escape from their race and country, they were filled with a bitter, dogged determination never to give up the fight for Negro equality in America.[170]

The historian John Hope Franklin has also summarized this new found militancy from black Americans, by stating that many would "meet their would-be oppressors with a new-found spirit of resistance."[171] Unfortunately, the would-be oppressors were waiting, and with a vengeance.

The war years created both a new nation and a new public. The United States had been energized by suspicion and violence, and many questioned how the country would embrace its returning veterans—especially its black soldiers. While black citizens hoped

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[169] Theodore Hemmingway, "Prelude to Change: Black Carolinians in the War Years, 1914-1920," *Journal of Negro History* 65, no.3 (1980): 215-216.
[170] Lester, *The Seventh Son: The Thought and Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 130.
[171] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 2000) 352.

for a new chance at equality, white supremacists desired a return to the deference of the past. The *New Republic* addressed this quandary as early as when black men were first being drafted into the military. On October 1917, the editor warned the South of what might be to come: specifically, the changes that war would surely create in the psyche of the black veteran.

> …But what chiefly disturbs the South is the probable effect upon the Negro population of the return of the men who have served their campaigns. Will the Negro be the same kind of man when he is mustered out as he was when he was mustered in? Will he accept the facts of white supremacy with the same spirit as the formerly? Or will he have acquired a new sense of independence that will make of him a fomenter of unrest among his people?
>
> There are some indeed who dismiss southern anxiety as quite groundless…But this is to ignore all the teaching of experience. The South is quite justified in its belief that war will affect the habit of mind and the behavior of the men who engage in it.
>
> …After facing death in its most hideous forms on the field of battle, will a man cower before a black look, shrink from a threatened blow?....There is a type of southerner who swears that the proper function of the white man is to keep the fear of God or Devil in the breast of the black. There is another type of southerner who conceives the function of the white man as that of guide and protector of the black man. The Negroes of the South, we may well believe, are better off than they would be in a black republic. It does not follow that they are so well off as they ought to be. It does not follow that the whites are performing to the full the obligation they owe….American factory owners will have to give more. This is a necessary consequence of a war that stirs democracy to its greatest depths.[172]

Other publications concentrated less on the southern white and focused more on the changing mentality of the black citizen. The *Charlotte News* warned its audience to

[172] *The New Republic*, October 1917.

deflect possible rebellion from black men and women by giving the black troops the respect they deserve:

> …that he will unstintedly and unselfishly toss himself into the oceans of anguish whose waves are rolling through Europe. He must be dealt with as a patriotic citizen. From the people of this community who will make exactions of him he has a right to take a toll of respect and wholesome regard. If he is treated otherwise, he will keenly feel the pangs of it, and disorder and discord and mutiny may arise. If he is insulted and made to believe that he is unworthy of the uniform his government has clothed him with, naturally enough, there will be resentment which is the first flame of revolt. The obligations entailed by the incident are many, and they rest more heavily, we are of a mind to believe, upon the white man than upon the negro.[173]

While the editor of the *News* was addressing his readers during conscription, these feelings were only accentuated after actual combat experience and the black soldier's experiences in Europe.

Despite these pleas from both northern and southern newspapers, many white southerners refused to abandon white supremacy. For many whites in the South the idea of the returning black veteran, trained to fight with possible expectations of equality—was a threat. Racists prepared for the arrival of these black soldiers and were determined to assure these men that there was no chance of acceptance at home. For men, like Senator James K. Vardaman, it was impossible to repress the memory of hearing black men with white French women, and he vowed that the occurrence, nor any crime, would not be repeated in the state of Mississippi. Vardaman used his publication, *Vardaman's Weekly,* as a vehicle to reach the public:

> *Every community in Mississippi ought to organize and the organization should be led by the bravest and best white men in the community*. And they should pick out these suspicious characters—these military, French-women-ruined negro soldiers and let them understand that they are under

[173] *Crisis*, November 1917, 33.

> surveillance, and that when crimes similar to this one are committed take care of the individual who commits the crime.[174]

Vardaman was recruiting soldiers for the army of white supremacy. Black soldiers were coming from battle, they were about to face a war.

[174] *Vardaman's Weekly*, May 15, 1919.

CHAPTER 2
COMING HOME

As the war was drawing to a close, the United States began to plan for the arrival of its returning soldiers. Men who had sacrificed their own well being to protect democracy abroad were returning with the visions of what they missed most while they were in Europe. Letters were no longer needed to express their thoughts, hopes, and desires, because soon they would be reunited with mothers, wives and friends they had not seen in months. For returning black veterans, it was all of these emotions and more: a hope that perhaps the social climate of the United States had favorably changed in their absence. Many African Americans believed that the war victory would lead to a newfound respect. What they experienced instead was that, if anything, support for white supremacy had strengthened.

In early November 1918, as Germany negotiated an armistice with the allies in Ferdinand Foch's railway carriage, Southern politicians in the United States were far from pacified. While the ink was drying in Compiegne, Mississippi, Senator James K. Vardaman envisioned trouble if the wrong policies—and men—were placed to deal with the arrival of black soldiers to Mississippi and other areas of the South. Vardaman expressed these concerns on Armistice day:

> Now that the war is over, we shall soon be face to face with the military negro [sic], and if this country is to be spared much trouble we shall need men in office who can realize the truth that where the negro constitutes any appreciable percentage of the population, he must be kept separated from the white people. Unless that policy shall be pursued, the result will be disastrous for the negro and unfortunate for the white man.[1]

Although the war officially ended at 11:00 on November 14, 1918, many Southerners prepared for a different battle. For returning black soldiers, the idea of safety and peace was miles away—and only in Europe.

[1] *The Issue*, November 14, 1918.

The Federal Government's Policies Concerning the Return of Black Soldiers

The United States military had two major concerns regarding black soldiers as the war came to an end: first, the susceptibility of blacks, both in the military and at home, to subversive rhetoric and behavior; and secondly, the influence of favorable treatment by the French on black troops, and more specifically, by French women. Ironically, both of these concerns could have been erased if the military had simply reviewed their own policies. The War Department, as well as the federal government, ignored lynching, disfranchisement, and the policies of Jim Crow as destructive to the black citizen's morale, instead believing that the propaganda of the Germans and Bolsheviks was sabotaging an otherwise contented race of people. Historian Wray Johnson asserts that the military's own actions were the fuse that ignited the new defiance in blacks. Johnson states that as equality in France made the "discriminating restraints of America more galling," and that the War Department "brought no redress or relief"; rather, it intensified the discontent by sending a confidential circular in 1918 requesting that French officers not praise black soldiers, which strengthened the men's feelings of abandonment.[2]

Theodore Kornweibel's *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I* addresses the government's actions toward black dissenters during the war era. Kornweibel contends that although "New Crowd Negroes" were certainly shaking up the racial status quo, black threats to national security were exaggerated; any voice of discontent against the U.S.'s policies on race relations was viewed as unpatriotic and subversive.[3] The military resisted any chance at social change and reverted to suspicion and dissemination of stereotypes as Kornweibel states: "Rather than learning positive lessons about blacks during World War I, the army instead reconfirmed its already deeply entrenched stereotypes and racial perceptions."[4] The

[2] Wray Johnson, "Black American Radicalism in the First World War: The Secret Files of the Military Intelligence Division," *Armed Forces and Society 26* (Winter 1999): 27-54, 41-44.
[3] Theodore Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 9.
[4] Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything*, 124. Kornweibel confesses that even when certain members of the Military Intelligence disagreed with the consensus, they were overruled by their superiors. For example, Military Intelligence Branch Chief Marlborough Churchill originally thought that black defiance was not due to German propaganda but growing racial consciousness. But he eventually accepted the opinions of his superiors. See note 95, 267.

federal government decided that maintaining the status quo, although detrimental to blacks, was what was best for the nation.

The federal government had previously viewed disgruntled blacks as a potential threat to national security and the rise of the NAACP during the war era intensified these suspicions. In 1917, the Military Intelligence Branch (MIB) and Bureau of Investigation (BI), the forerunner to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, began to infiltrate black organizations with paid confidential informants (CI). One of the first CIs was Hallie Queen, a young, well-educated black woman whom MIB Director Major Herbert Parsons interviewed and then placed into the black community. Queen reported potential trouble stemming from the migration of southern laborers to the North, and she paid particular attention to two educators: Nannie Burroughs, the head of a "well-known industrial [arts] school" in Washington DC; and Dr. Archibald Grimke, president of the Washington branch of the NAACP and member of the Board of Trustees of Howard University. Queen concluded her report by stating that blacks wanted to fight back and as soon as possible.[5]

While Queen reported to the MIB, Major Walter Howard Loving had the largest impact on the MIB's racial policies. Major Loving had gone from bandmaster of the Philippine Constabulary Band in 1906 to be the only black person in the MIB when Joel Springarn, an executive officer of the NAACP, joined the division in June 1918.[6] The military morale section needed the right man (of color) to investigate the rash of complaints from the black soldiers as well as soothe worried white politicians and administrators. As part of what might have been a power struggle, Queen originally found Loving suspect and informed Parsons of her negative opinion. Parsons carefully weighed her scrutiny but eventually assigned Loving to advise the military on race matters, as he assured other bureaucrats: "the man [Loving] is better than Miss Queen indicates."[7] Loving quickly achieved the support and admiration of his superiors. MIB

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[5] Johnson, "Black American Radicalism in the First World War: The Secret Files of the Military Intelligence Division," 33-43; and Mark Ellis, "Closing Ranks and Seeking Honors," 115

[6] Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything*, 8. Mark Ellis, "Closing Ranks and Seeking Honors," 115. For more on Loving's Career see: Richard E. Greene's, *Black Defenders of America*, 1775-1973 (Chicago, 1974). For more on Loving's role in promoting the first black bandmaster in the wake of the Brownsville affair see chapter 1.

[7] Personal correspondence of Parson and J.W. Jenks, November 1917. Reprinted in Johnson, "Black American Radicalism in the First World War: The Secret Files of the Military Intelligence Division,"35.

Chief Brigadier General Marlborough Churchill described him as not only loyal but "one of the best types of the 'white man's negro.'"[8]

One of Loving's first tasks was to continue the investigation of Burroughs whom Queen had earlier placed at the center of black radicalism in the nation's capital. Loving disagreed with Queen's assertion that Burroughs was dangerous, and instead sought the help of a white colleague, Captain Harry Taylor, to develop new ways to promote Burroughs as the epitome of "black patriotism."[9] Only a few years later Burroughs was traveling the country to discuss self help agencies for the black community and had become a member of various war councils and women's associations.[10]

Loving's main concern was the Dean of Howard University, Kelly Miller, who had aroused the suspicion of the government with the publication of his anti-war pamphlet *Disgrace of Democracy*.[11] The government believed that Miller's feelings had been swayed after a lengthy interview session with Loving, yet, once again he challenged the government's racial policies in a speech at a YMCA in San Antonio, Texas.[12] Upon hearing this news, the General staff of the MIB contacted the YMCA Activities Control Committee requesting a list of all Miller's future engagements pertaining to this issue. This scrutinizing came even though one year earlier Miller had voluntarily warned President Wilson of potential problems regarding race and new assertiveness in the black community. On August 4, 1917, Miller wrote Wilson with the ominous news that: "Negroes all over the nation are aroused as they have never been before…[they now

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[8] Johnson, "Black American Radicalism in the First World War: The Secret Files of the Military Intelligence Division,"43.

[9] Johnson, "Black American Radicalism in the First World War: The Secret Files of the Military Intelligence Division," 34-35.

[10] "White Soldier a Hero," *Afro-American*, May 16, 1919. The *Afro-American* printed a lengthy essay that praised a white soldier who chastised another white who had berated Burroughs aboard a train from Washington to Baltimore. As Burroughs was coming to Baltimore to discuss the Self Help and the work of the War Work Council of New York a white soldier was "accosted" by a white patron who resented the white for giving Burroughs his seat. The white rudely asked "Is that the best you can do, give your seat to a nigger woman?" The white solder replied: "I am an overseas fighter. While slackers like you were at home, thousand of the men of the race represented by this woman did as much to achieve history in France as white soldiers did. Some of them were better men than I am, and they are still in France. We left them over there. It would have been a heap sight better, if we could have taken such men as you over there and left them." It is not known how much influence Loving, or the military, had in the printing of this article, nor is it known if Loving had any connections with the staff at the *Afro-American*.

[11] Kelly Miller, *The Disgrace of Democracy*, (Washington, DC, 1917), 6 reprinted in *Crisis*, July 1918, 124.

[12] Ellis, "Closing Ranks and Seeking Honors," 116.

possess] a determined purpose that this country should be made a safe place for American citizens to live and work."[13]

Aside from surveillance of black citizens, Loving was employed to begin a propaganda campaign designed to win back the hearts and minds of black soldiers and citizens. Loving and the MIB further distanced themselves from critical black intellectuals such as Miller, W.E.B. Du Bois, and A. Philip Randolph by naming Roscoe Conkling Simmons, Booker T. Washington's son in law and a member of the Tuskegee political machine, as the key figure in a nationwide morale tour.[14] Loving and Simmons created a powerful force as they preached patriotism across the east coast. Loving calmed veterans and citizens alike by refuting earlier rumors that black soldiers were used as fodder on the front, or as "Shock Troops"; on a later occasion, interdenominational ministers accompanied Loving when he debunked the myth that a hospital in Columbia, South Carolina, contained over 200 black soldiers who had their eyes gouged out by Germans.[15]

Ironically, during these early patriotic tours Loving came uncomfortably close to the violence of the South and experienced a racial awakening. Loving's tour was postponed as he entered Tennessee and witnessed firsthand events that challenged his own view of his government. In Memphis, Ell Persons was lynched, and his ears, nose and lower lips were taken as souvenirs before his assailants launched his severed head onto Beale street. If the anatomical souvenirs were not ghastly enough, photographs of Persons' remains were converted into postcards and sold for a quarter. [16] A second Tennessee lynching demanded Loving's attention. On December 2, 1917, the charred remains of Ligon Scott were found in Dyersburg. A white mob lynched the resident in Dyersburg after they accused him of attacking a local white woman. Shocked by this event Loving wrote then Chief of MIB Van Deman and listed lynching and other forms of persecution as the principal causes of unrest among those of his fellow race. Loving

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[13] Johnson, *Black American Radicalism*, 38; Ellis, "Closing Ranks," 116; Jonathan Rosenberg, "For Democracy, not Hypocrisy: World War and Race Relations in the United States, 1914-1919," *International History Review* [Canada] 21, no.3 (1999): 592-625, 607. See also Kelly Miller's own words in his work *The Everlasting Stain* (New York, 1924).
[14] Johnson, *Black American Radicalism*, 38, note 43. Ellis, "Closing Ranks," 116.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Mark Ellis, *Race, War and Surveillance*, 60.

suggested that federal assistance and action, instead of propaganda, should be used to gain the support of the black community:

> We are seeking and preaching loyalty among the negroes [sic] in all sections of the country, yet we are now confronted with another hideous crime….Is there not some way which we may assure the colored people of the section that the government will take steps to bring justice to the perpetrators of this awful crime? I have no more sympathy for a man who is found guilty of a criminal assault on a woman, than I have for a lawless mob that will burn to death a human in a public square, rather than let the law take its course which would naturally mean death to the former.[17]

Despite Loving's renewed racial solidarity, he did not distance himself from future assignments that might hamper blacks' chances at equality. Surprisingly, his superiors did not reprimand him for his brash comments but instead gave him more authority with regard to the reintroduction of black soldiers into society. It was Loving who stated his views about integration abroad, who proscribed a potential remedy to deal with this dilemma at home, and who issued a final warning to the government that a new black ideology was growing despite the government's continual efforts to win support and patriotism in the black community. The federal government and the chief of the MIB often asked for Loving's opinions; however, they rarely heeded his advice and generally disregarded his continual warnings.

As reports continued to swell of acceptance of black troops by French civilians and military officers, the U.S. military's suspicions and fear also grew. Despite a blatant attempt by the U.S. government to prevent social interaction between the two groups, the French embraced black soldiers as equals.

Eager to stifle potential incidents such as this abroad and curtail future violence at home, the United States military consulted Loving on this issue and asked for an analysis of the mindset of black soldiers. On November 18, 1918, Loving sent a detailed summary of his perceptions and issued a warning to Brigadier General Churchill:

> The American white man is not unmindful of the fighting value of the negro soldiers, and will fight with them in the trenches and on battlefields,

[17] Ibid., 71.

> but when it comes to meeting the negro [sic] at social functions and other places of amusement where the latter comes in contact with white women—it matters not to what race they belong—the white man draws the line….Colored soldiers, like any soldiers, will seek diversion when the fighting tension to which they have been subjected is relaxed, and with them diversion and women are synonymous. No American white man, whether he comes from the north or from the south, wants to see colored men mingling with white women in sporting houses and other questionable places, no more than a colored man would want to see a white man enter the house of a respectable colored family and claim one of the race's best to serve him as a mistress –a practice which is in vogue at this late date in the south. If colored and white soldiers meet under the circumstances above mentioned, I cannot see anything but an American race war in France.[18]

Loving then offered a remedy:

> First—That no discharge be given to colored soldiers in France; Second—that all colored soldiers now in France be shipped home with the least possible delay; [and] Third—That strictest measures be taken to keep colored and white soldiers from meeting in places of prostitution while waiting for transportation home.[19]

Before the military accepted Loving's suggestion, the government recruited the services of Tuskegee Principal Robert Moton. President Wilson sent Moton to France to boost morale and quietly remind the soldiers to accept accommodation as a solution to white supremacy practices upon their return to the United States. Moton congratulated the men on a job well done but asked that they keep a "low profile" in America. He told the troops they must "exercise self-control while still overseas and look for jobs—better yet, settle down as farmers—as soon as they got back to the states." Moton, as well as many associated with Tuskegee, worried that any sign of pride might be interpreted as

[18] Walter H. Loving to Malborough Churchill, November 18, 1918, 10218-256, Files of the Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives; Johnson's *Black American Radicalism*, 41.
[19] Ibid.

braggadocio and lead to violence. He concluded his mission exclaiming: "I hope…no one will do anything in peace to spoil the magnificent record you have made in war."[20]

Reports of social interaction between black soldiers and French women led many Southerners to ask if sexual relations had occurred. They feared that these "indecencies" might make their way across the Atlantic. In France, these consensual relationships were usually blamed on the more promiscuous or "loose" women of France; in the United States, to spare or promote the dignity of white women, most relationships between black men and white women were interpreted as rape. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker was especially worried about sexual assaults by black troops after allegations surfaced that a group of black soldiers from Camp Grant gang raped a local white woman. Baker feared that events such as this created animosity towards the military within the local community and led to "bitter resentment" from the white community.[21] This fear historian Mark Ellis attributes to stereotypes of black soldiers' experiences in France: "He (Baker) may thus have been predisposed to accept as true some of the uglier characterizations of black troops as they prepared to return from France, but he was also well aware that if whites in the South came to regard these veterans as lawless and corrupted, many African Americans could suffer terribly."[22]

While the intent behind Baker's fears can be questioned, certainly the military government often colluded with local southern policemen to uphold local policies regarding miscegenation and other forms of social interaction as when for instance local authorities arrested Phillipe Mayes when he passed through Birmingham, Alabama. While purchasing various fruits, Mayes struck up a conversation with a local white woman and became so friendly that he attempted to hold her hand. Local police officers Hollums and McDonald who were near the produce section claimed that Mayes additionally asked for the woman's address. Hollums, McDonald, and two other

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[20] Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri. *The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I*, 179; William Jordan "'The Damnable Dilemma.' African-American Accommodation and Protest During World War I," *Journal of American History* 81, no.4 (1995): 1583. For further information regarding Moton's trip see the article "With the Negro Troops," *Southern Workman* 48 (January 1919): 87; as well as Moton's own work, *Finding a Way Out*, 262-263.

[21] Secretary Newton D. Baker to Woodrow Wilson, June 26, 1918, December 20, 1918. Papers of Newton D. Baker, Reel 6, Library of Congress.

[22] Ellis, *Race, War and Surveillance*, 207. Ellis states that although Baker was convinced that a rape had taken place, he did not advocate that the black soldiers receive the death penalty.

policemen arrested Mayes for "showering attention" on the young lady. Upon the arrest, Mayes' white lieutenant, simply stated that "I told these men how to act when they got to Birmingham and as this one disobeyed my instructions, I'm glad you got him."[23]

Sadly, the arrest, while unjust, could be a welcomed alternative to the more vicious and terminal form of justice—lynching. While assault was the most prevalent accusation against a lynched victim, offenses such as insulting—or even looking at a white woman—led mobs to hang, beat and burn their victims. The question is to what degree did the military and the federal government know the extent of the white South's commitment to maintaining white supremacy?

Private citizens, newspapers and both Major Loving and Secretary Baker had their concerns regarding the safety of black soldiers, but the strongest plea surprisingly came from a white Southerner. Captain Frederick Sullens was the progressive former editor of the *Jackson Daily News* who wrote sympathetic articles about black sharecroppers who struggled against the political structure of Mississippi.[24] Although Sullens felt empathy for local blacks, he did not view them as equals. He was simply eager to distance himself from the political agendas of men like Theodore G. Bilbo and James K. Vardaman. In a publicized feud during an election year, Bilbo described Sullens as a "degenerate by birth, carpet bagger by inheritance, a liar by instinct, a slanderer or assassin of character by practice, and a coward by nature," to which Sullen retorted if Bilbo were elected governor, the golden eagle on the Capitol's dome should be replaced by a "puking buzzard."[25] Sullens was eager to spar with Southern politicians and apparently loved enraging them, but he was unwilling to commit social and economic suicide by advocating the equal rights of blacks in Mississippi. Though Sullens disagreed with many Southern politics he was no ally of the NAACP. He viewed Du Bois as a Northern trouble maker who only wanted to punish the Southern white to appease his own psychological problems. Sullens claimed that Du Bois was merely "…a Northern Negro who hates the South and everything Southern. He is brilliantly educated but has a warped

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[23] *Birmingham News*, July 14, 1919. Eventually, General Order No. 40 (passed on December 26, 1919) gave unlimited authority to military police to provide additional discipline to black soldiers to prevent them from addressing or holding conversations with women in the towns they were stationed in or near, as read from Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 200. The first names of Officer Hollums and McDonald are never revealed in the investigation files.
[24] Ellis, *Race, War and Surveillance*, 207.
[25] Ibid., 297, note. 90.

mind. He is perhaps the most vicious, vindictive, volatile, and uncompromising hater of the Southern white man who ever lived."[26]

Either out of legitimate, although paternalistic, concern for the arriving black troops or his hatred of vicious racists such as Vardaman and his ilk, for their racist beliefs and actions, Sullens wrote a three page letter to the MIB on November 30, 1918, stating his fears. His warning began:

> I refer specifically to the matter of converting the negro soldiers into civilians once more, and the strong probability that there will be numerous racial clashes in the south unless this matter is properly handled, and a campaign of preparedness diplomatically conducted.[27]

Sullens claimed that his summary was not his lone opinion, but he had talked to many other Southerners, men who were not "alarmists," and they all believed that the federal government should intervene:

> It is needless to point out that the negro soldier returning from France will not be the same sort of negro he was before donning the uniform. The Military Intelligence Division is well acquainted with the new ideas and social aspirations our negro troops have gathered in France, and particularly from his association with the French demi monde. Obviously, if he attempts to carry those ideas back in the south---and some of them unquestionably will---an era of bloodshed will follow as compared with which the history of reconstruction will be mild reading, indeed.
>
> I am advised that in at least one Southern state, Alabama, steps are already being taken to meet this problem; that the Governor of that state recently called a secret conference of citizens for its discussion, and that the A.P.L. is to take an active part in the program being formed. As to just how Alabama intends to deal with the question, I am not advised….
>
> Any person familiar with the South, and its ever-present race problem need not be reminded that the negro soldier strutting about in uniform three months after his discharge will always be a potential danger,

[26] Ibid., 207.

[27] Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925): The First World War, the Red Scare, and the Garvey Movement, (hereafter named Federal Surveillance Files), OG 10218-289.

> especially if he happens to be of the type inclined to impudence or arrogance. It is needless to discuss the "rightness or wrongness" of the Southern white man's attitude towards this type of the black. That is an established condition, and cannot be dealt with as a theory….
>
> To defer action on this matter would be akin to locking the stable door after the horse has been stolen. If those in authority wait until the negro troops have been actually returned and demobilized, it will then be everlastingly too late…I feel that it would be a gross injustice to the race to turn the negro soldiers loose without some precautions being taken, both for their restraint and their protection. They went into the army willingly, and have served faithfully….Also, it should be borne in mind that thousands of these negroes who return home will not be trouble-makers, yet they are likely to become the innocent sufferers for the ignorance, arrogance and wrong aspirations of others. They were ready and willing to sacrifice their lives in time of war. Certainly, they should be protected in time of peace.[28]

As Sullens waited for a response, it was not beyond hope that the military might intervene on the behalf of its black soldiers. While it was doubtful that the military might campaign for an anti-lynching bill, precedent had been set, since in mid-1918 the Military Intelligence Division sponsored an anti-lynching bill designed to protect individuals associated with the armed forces. The proposed bill would have made it a federal offense to kill anyone in the military service, anyone subject to being drafted, or any close relative of such individuals. Despite expert testimony from the military and the NAACP the bill died in committee and was never passed.[29]

The military officials offered no such hope in 1919 as they distanced themselves from Sullens' plea. Military Morale Section chief James Cutler stated that the MIB had no jurisdiction in the matter, and due to the "political angles," the office of the Secretary of War was hesitant to intervene, as well:

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Theodore Kornweibel. *Investigate Everything*, 267.

> My understanding is that under the orders now in effect this lies entirely outside the province of the army….But this is a somewhat difficult proposition—one with political angles to it etc.—and I am not at all sure that they could be persuaded that the army has any business meddling with it.

Furthermore, the military offered a reply that showed whom it considered to be the real threat in the matter when they ordered colored YMCA secretaries in France, along with Moton, to be on the lookout for potential danger *from* the black troops.[30] Not only did the military fail to protect black soldiers, they deemed them a threat. As the MIB finalized its decision not to intervene in the policies of the South, it decided to ignore the possibility that Southerners were the aggressors and again focused its suspicion on the returning black troops. Intelligence officers in East Coast ports were ordered to take every precaution to ensure that all black troops were unarmed upon their arrival.[31]

After Sullens' proposal, the military, once again, sought the advice of Major Loving. It was now Loving's job to interpret the mindset of the average black soldier, to define the "new negro," and to indicate if racial violence could ensue. Loving's final report represented what many black citizens had been saying for years: that disillusionment, disgust and racism were destroying the morale and patriotism of the black community. Loving's Final Report on Negro Subversion reads like a bold warning:

> Until about four years ago radical sentiment among Negroes was of a moderate character and confined to denunciation of lynching, disfranchisement, jimcrowism [sic], etc. For the most part it consisted of editorials in the Negro press and speeches by Negro orators aimed directly at the perpetrators of each offense. Although the government was frequently criticized for permitting various forms of oppression exercised against Negroes, there was no disposition at that time to attack the foundations of the Government system. It was early in 1915 that a number

[30] Memorandum from J. Cutler to F. Sullens, December 9, 1918. Federal Surveillance Files, OG 10218-289.
[31] Edward A. Stillman to Newton D. Baker, Newton D. Baker Papers, November 7, 1918. Library of Congress.

of young Negroes of high intellectual attainments abandoned the beaten path of older conservative Negro leaders and boldly took up the torch of Socialism. Their advent into the Socialist party marked a new epoch in the political and social history of the American Negro and took place at the very time best calculated to appeal to the popular mind—when a bitter struggle was being waged in this country between the forces that favored entering the war against Germany and those favoring continued neutrality. Under the agitation and suspense attending the uncertainty of that period, these able young Negroes flashed their new message to the receptive minds of a people conscious of their wrongs. The results were rapid. Many Negroes, especially the young element, flocked to meeting halls and street corners to hear these young men of their own race expound a new philosophy and attack the very foundations of our Government, upon which they placed the responsibility for existing political, social, and economic evils suffered by both races.

I do not believe I exaggerate conditions when I say that unless there is some quick and radical departure in the present policy of the Government on questions affecting the welfare and rights of its Negro citizens, the time is not far distant when greater numbers of Negroes will be converted to Socialist doctrine….In my opinion the Government should not place too much reliance in the soothing words of the older conservative Negro leaders who are persona non grata with the masses and who, in some cases, paint bright pictures in the hope that by pleasing those in power they may reap some personal advantage. I consider it more honest and patriotic, and more advantageous of the Government, to tell the truth and give a warning of an impending danger that demands urgent remedial action to alleviate the conditions that are driving Negroes to Socialism and other radical activities.[32]

[32] Final Report on Negro Subversion, August 6, 1919, Federal Surveillance Files, OG 10218-365. This document could also play an important part in the historiography of the relationship between the military and the Tuskegee machine. The military chose to affiliate itself with the Tuskegee constituents and distance itself from the NAACP and Du Bois. It may be more than a coincidence that Moton and Loving,

Although Loving's report incorrectly predicts mass conversion to socialism, the message is otherwise poignant concerning his take on the black community. Many black intellectuals grew more militant with time, and it is during this era that the image of the meek and accommodating black will be transformed into Alain Locke's New Negro of the 1920s.

The federal government made no attempt to improve the racial atmosphere of the United States after reading Loving's report, but the MIB did admit that there was a changing consensus within the black community as Major Cutler sent the following confidential memo to MIB Chief Churchill: "…beyond a doubt, there is a new negro to be reckoned with in our political and social life" and the "present situation seems…to constitute a critical juncture in the history of the colored race in [the United States.][33]

The military acknowledged racism was destroying the morale of the black community, yet the United States refused to change its policies towards race relations. By the end of 1919, the federal government had admitted that the experiences in France had shaped a new mentality within both the black community and white supremacists in the South. But even before the first major wave of soldiers left Europe the military had conceded that the safety of its black troops would be left under the jurisdiction of the Southern states and their politicians in a region bent on maintaining the traditions of racial separation and white supremacy. Now that the U.S. Army had once again allowed the South to dictate racial policy as it deemed fit, what would happen to the black soldiers as they arrived home?

The Boys Come Home

On the surface, the United States appeared to welcome all of its returning veterans. Major northern metropolitan areas such as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston showered their returnees with ticker tape parades and greeted "the boys" as they stepped

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both use the term *persona non grata* when referring to Du Bois, as Moton confided to Hubert H. Harrison, the editor of the *New Age*, stating "Our methods seem to be prevailing. Our friend Du Bois seems to be persona non grata with his own people," as quoted in Ellis' "Closing Ranks," 122. Ellis claims that radical dissent from Du Bois's "Close Ranks" affair led Loving to "demolish" the argument that Du Bois should have been recruited into the MIB. Clearly there was open dialogue, if not a clique, between the military, Harrison and Tuskegee. Notice that Loving is now capitalizing the term "Negro."

[33] Wray Johnson, *Black American Radicalism*, 43.

off the boats. Regardless of race, the fighters were championed. Rhode Island's black soldiers were welcomed home at the State Armory, and in Providence, over 4,000 people cheered their arrival after a lengthy street parade.[34] Additionally, the *New York Age* proudly reported the celebration that commenced upon the arrival of the 369th, gallantly nicknamed the Harlem Hell Fighters. The *New York Age* proclaimed that the 369th's return "should live long in the hearts and minds of the people" and no one "could deny that this colored regiment made history for the nation, state, and the city: for colored and white alike."[35] James Weldon Johnson poignantly stated that these men personified the race's struggle for acceptance and the continued fight against those who deemed blacks as inferior: "We wonder how many people who are opposed to giving the Negro his full citizenship rights could watch the Fifteenth on its march up the Avenue and not feel either shame or alarm? And we wonder how many who are not opposed to the Negro receiving his full rights could watch these men and not feel determined to aid them in their endeavor to obtain these rights."[36]

Not to be outdone, the South also publicly celebrated both their white and black soldiers. Receptions, picnics and banquets for returned soldiers of all races and ethnicities were held in Nashville, Selma, and Birmingham; and Atlanta's parade included Georgia Governor Hugh Manson Dorsey and Atlanta's own Mayor Asa Griggs Candler among the thousands who "applauded negro soldiers."[37] In Savannah, black soldiers were permitted to participate in a homecoming parade. More than 5,000 residents congregated in the Southern port city to celebrate the procession of soldiers, floats and a brass band. Black reporters from the *Chicago Defender* carried the joyous news to their northern readers:

> The parade led by three commissioned officers marching in squad formation many of whom were wearing citation cords for bravery, were the subjects of much favorable comment. Their presence typified the true

[34] *Crisis,* November 1919, 349.
[35] *New York Age*, February 22, 1919.
[36] Ibid.
[37] *Crisis*, March 1920; *Crisis*, June 1918. 69; *Birmingham News*, August ,1 1919; *Birmingham News* May 4, 1919, 23, commented on how ministers for various churches welcomed between 1,000 and 2,000 negro soldiers from the 167th infantry in Birmingham.

> spirit of a world democracy, and indicated the possibilities of what may come in the great struggle for the complete freedom of mankind.[38]

Despite these tales of harmony, some signs of discontent were beginning to show. Under the façade of racial harmony, several incidents suggested that the old problems of racism were still present. In Albany, Georgia, local women created a service flag bearing a star for every "white Albanian" who had entered the U.S. military. Challenging this practice the *Herald* reminded its readers, along with the flag creators, of the commitment of black Albanians:

> So we hope we will not be misunderstood when we suggest that a service flag for Albany would not be complete unless there were placed in its field a star not only for every white soldier or sailor who has entered our country's service from Albany, but a star for every Albanian…The first employee of the Herald to join the National Army was a Negro, and the first star on the Herald's service flag is his star….[39]

Another controversial event occurred in Missouri, when Victoria Clay Haley invited Croix de Guerre recipient Henry Johnson to address the African-American community at the Coliseum in St. Louis. Johnson praised French soldiers who accepted both he and his fellow black troops and criticized when white U.S. soldiers clung to segregation and compromised the greater goal of defeating the Germans.[40]

Johnson's bravado exemplifies the assertion that black veterans would no longer keep quiet in order to maintain the status quo. Many white and black citizens of the U.S. began to question how the veteran would act upon his reentrance to the nation. The common view was that veterans would surely have a new approach and outlook on life, but the question that concerned many was how would these experiences effect race relations in post-war society?

Mainstream white publications assumed that the average soldier, even when exposed to horrible conditions, had been given a broadening experience. The *Florida Times-Union* described the military at war as a great institution that shaped all soldiers' thoughts and would certainly lead to better citizens upon their arrival:

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[38] *Chicago Defender*, May 10, 1919.
[39] As stated in *Crisis*, June 1918, 69.
[40] *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1919.

> The experience has meant a broadening of the minds of the men…they come back to us older, however young, soberer, more thoughtful, more imaginative than they went away. They have seen terrible things. The wickedness they have seen must be a lasting memory in our boys who come back….The men are coming home proud of their country, convinced that it is the best in the world, and determined to defend it against all harm—internal and external. But they are also ready to use the information gathered, the thousands of new ideas will be tried and plans formulated for greater progress. Within a very short time these men have stored up knowledge and information that must be of immense value, not only to their home towns, but the states and the whole country. Their influence will be tremendous, and it will be beneficial.[41]

Ironically, this sentiment completely overlooked how different races might synthesize these experiences differently. W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, stated that any soldier who had experienced equality in Europe would hate, and therefore fight, racism upon his arrival to the U.S.:

> On the Negroes this double experience of deliberate and devilish persecution from their own countrymen, coupled with a taste of real democracy and world-old culture, was revolutionizing. They began to hate prejudice and discrimination as they had never hated it before. They began to realize its eternal meaning and complications. Far from filling them with a desire to escape from their race and country, they were filled with a bitter, dogged determination never to give up the fight for Negro equality in America.[42]

Black editors, veterans, and private citizens also shared this sentiment.

A. Philip Randolph, who had often disagreed with Du Bois, concurred in his publication, the *Messenger*. In a piece entitled "The Star Spangled Banner," Randolph solemnly spoke for the returning black soldier who he believed was disenchanted with the military: "Many of the black soldiers were divested of the little patriotism they

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[41] *Florida Times-Union*, March 18, 1919.
[42] Julius Lester, ed. *The Seventh Son: The Thoughts and Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: Random House, 1971), 130.

possessed on their return from France. Their hearts sank as they moved in sight of these shores. The only reason for their joy in seeing America was the fact that it meant speedy discharge from a brutal military system and a meeting with home folks and friends…." Randolph then described how the veteran could use his training to create a better society for the race, as thousands of trained soldiers would "demonstrate their right to self-defense against Southern encroachments and lynch-law" in a "new war" in the Southern states of Georgia, Mississippi, Texas and Alabama. The piece concluded with the promise that the next war for "democracy" would be in the land of "The Star Spangled Banner."[43] Baltimore's *Afro-American* agreed when they warned that although some returnees would willingly "plod along in the old ways" many were "not prepared to accept the former positions in life, those of cowardice, cringing and servitude."[44]

Black veterans did not make liars out of men like Du Bois and Randolph as they distanced themselves from mainstream organizations designed to help veterans and joined organizations dedicated to the advancement of their fellow citizens. Although Second Lieutenant J. Steward Davis of the 351st infantry, as well as First Sergeant Harvey Young, attended the Caucus of the American Legion in St. Louis to make sure that the voice of black soldiers was heard, other black officers disaffiliated with their veterans group.[45] After being offered an invitation to join "American Officers in the Great War," one anonymous black officer agreed to join only under the pretense of equality, as he objected to being defined by his race: "If I can be received as a 100 per cent American with no hyphen, and no modifiers, I shall be glad to join the Association; if I cannot be thus received, I shall be just as glad to stay out." The "patriotic" organization responded with a thankful, yet obtuse, reply:

> Your very courteous and thoughtful letter of January 9, has been received, in which you declined membership in the American Officers of the Great War.
>
> Thanking you for your expression of interest and of goodwill toward the Society,
>
> I remain, Yours very sincerely,

[43] *Messenger*, August 1919, 24-25.
[44] *Afro-American*, March 7, 1919.
[45] *Afro-American*, May 9, 1919.

(Signed) F.B. Ainger, Jr

The organization had missed the point.

Many veterans began to seek organizations that had taken up the cause of demanding rights for the race. In his work *We Return Fighting: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age*, Mark Schneider claims that black veterans played a great part in the growth of the NAACP. The NAACP's membership increased from 9,200 in 1918 to 62,200, in 1919.[46] Others turned to militancy or created their own self-help organizations. One anonymous veteran responded to the iconoclastic publisher and orator of the *Crusader*, Cyril Briggs. Briggs, an immigrant from the West Indies and predecessor to the more famous Marcus Garvey, created the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), a small but determined group to re-establish black pride and demand full equality in society. And Briggs proudly published the veteran's request:

> I have noted your call for enlistments in the African Blood Brotherhood for the redemption of our fatherland, and hereby rush to enlist. Please enroll me and send me any information you care to on the subject. I am ready for any call, to the limit or beyond. I fought in the world war for democracy, and I am willing to do anything you say for the liberation of my people.[47]

Rumors also swirled among the military's elite about secret groups founded by black veterans to instill social equality. Military Intelligence was especially concerned as reports surfaced that members of the 370th Infantry were mobilizing behind a Colonel Duncan to create a self-help agency. The group's premise and platform consisted of the following:

> To watch over and protect the interests of the colored race.
>
> To combat collectively any effort upon the part of the whites, especially in the south, to re-establish white ascendancy.

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[46] Mark Robert Schneider, *We Return Fighting: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 17.

[47] *The Crusader*, December 1919, 30-32. Many historians have compared Briggs' ABB to the paramilitary Irish groups of the IRA and Sinn Fein. Although the ABB and Briggs' life are clouded in mystery many prominent works have approached the idea of the militant movement before Garveyism and the Nation of Islam. For an extensive look at the role of the militant veteran of WWI, consult Chad Louis Williams's dissertation "Torchbearers of Democracy: The First World War and the Figure of the African American Soldier."

To secure equal intellectual and economic opportunity for colored with the whites.

To maintain and strengthen the social equality between the races as established in France.[48]

Colonel Duncan's "secret" organization, the ABB, and even the NAACP were often labeled as unpatriotic and potentially seditious. Many officials in the military, as well as national and state governments, ignored racism as the motivating factor for their formation and were unsympathetic to those who thought their service in the war was in vain. In a scathing editorial, A. Philip Randolph predicted future violence and attacked those, specifically Du Bois, who believed that serving in the war would improve the status of blacks:

> White and colored soldiers are returning covered with glory and praise and honor: bedecked with the Croix de Guerre and other insignia for bravery. The public is astir with interest in decorating stores, hanging flags, preparing chicken and turkey dinners, in appreciation of the heroic deeds of valor….Will they be jim crowed (sic), in the South, while returning to greet, to embrace the "old people?"….Will they be lynched and burned for speaking correct English or for wearing the Croix de Guerre? Some lean and hungry-looking creature asks these questions, and is forthwith branded a Bolshevik and cut to pieces with cruel, assassinating glances.
>
> When you [African Americans] condemned lynching during the war, you were dubbed pro-German and jailed. But, now, that the war is over, if you inquire whether the government is going to be patriotic to the soldiers as the soldiers have been patriotic to it; the hands of the lip-service patriots, profiteers and parasites are thrown up in holy horror and speculations as to the sanity of the inquirer are immediately made….Discontent will grow

[48] Letter from A. Moreno, G.S. AEF, Lt. Col to Churchill, Federal Surveillance Files, OG10218-311. Moreno, the Assistant Chief of Staff, stated that the military was also attempting to infiltrate and investigate members of the 369th and 371st Infantries. The MI sent additional requests to all officers to report any suspicious activities within their men.

> among the soldiers, both black and white. Negro soldiers, especially, are asking: "How are things going to be with us now?" This, of course, is dreadful, for we know that things will not only not be any better, but they will, unquestionably, be worse….Your big negro leader only wants you to be considered 100 per cent Americans after the war, whatever that means. Of course, if being lynched, during the war, is what is meant by being 100 per cent Americans we understand….[49]

Randolph's defiance may have registered concern, and even some sympathy, among the whites of Harlem, but as this ideology began to make its way south of the Mason-Dixon line, it was sure to create resistance and violence. The anger of returning to a society unwilling to accept blacks as equals was not isolated to the northern communities; soon black citizens in the South began to take on this new mentality. As black communities began to assert themselves in South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana,and the entire South, many prepared for a racial war.

The historian I.A. Newby describes a veteran returning to "find his white fellow citizens ready to hang him without a trial on the limbs of the pines of his native state if he made the slightest signs of resisting 'the old order," yet still he moved on in defiance.[50] Eventually after a long and bloody process, the black community achieved more economic and social possibilities, and took, as Newby states, "a giant stride toward psychological emancipation." [51] This transition did not come quickly, or without bloodshed.

Many black citizens asked for safety for those who served in the war. D.W. Cannon, a "colored man," wrote into the *Atlanta Constitution* requesting fair treatment from his fellow Georgians:

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[49] "Returning Soldiers," *Messenger* March 1919. Randolph concluded the piece with the phrase "Returning soldiers must put their thinking caps on. For Now is the time to use brains, not bullets." It is unclear to whom he is referring, but a sensible answer may be the rhetoric of the outspoken Cyril Briggs. The conclusion might also be one more insult to Du Bois who advocated using bullets as soldiers in the war.
[50] I.A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press*, 1973), 185-190.
[51] Newby, p. 185. Newby states that both former soldiers as well as the members of the larger black community rallied in terms of economic and political means. Success came from following the Rev. W.D. Chappelle of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, who advocated abandoning the utter allegiance to the Republican party; Richard Caroll's dedication to achieving black appointments on local school boards; and a larger voice with regard to Jim Crow accommodations in public transportation.

> But I ask that you be as careful to admonish the white people of this community that these soldiers are human and know when they are treated right and feel as keenly as anybody else an unnecessary insult. Also, remind the white people that in some crisis across the sea, these same black boys, whom they fear and the wisdom of whose presence they question, may eventually have to save the shattered remnants of some company of their own white sons who may have fallen into some trap set by the wily and resourceful Germans.
>
> Treat the Negro soldiers right! And you will have no more trouble with them than you will have with white soldiers.[52]

While this plea, or veiled threat, was asking for peace, some white supremacists asked themselves anxiously what would happen if they refused to treat black citizens fairly? Vigilantes in Georgia were not willing to take any unnecessary risks; they lynched six black soldiers by the end of 1919.

The New Orleans chapter of the NAACP paid tribute to the returning vet in its local publication *The Vindicator*. The column titled "Prepare for the Home Coming of Our Boys," championed one soldier's role in the war and stated that his battle should include the entire race, with every citizen attempting to organize, work and fight:

> Surely the sturdy manhood that has helped to make such a nation, is capable of preserving it. There can be no doubt about the outcome…There is hardly a family in this country that is not represented in some branch of services. Hence everyone should be interested in the interest of the Race locally in these conditions.
>
> While our husbands, brothers and some are giving their lives, their all to make the world safe for democracy, shall we not do our bit to help this Association to make democracy safe for them and their duration in this country? Here is where we certainly cannot afford to be slackers.
>
> But no one is simple enough to believe that our soldiers would be anything but dead failures over there or anywhere else if they were not united and organized into an army. Just so it is with us in our great civic fight, we

[52] *Crisis*, November 1917, 33. Originally published in the *Atlanta Constitution*.

> can not hope to succeed without uniting into a strong well dressed and well sustained organization.
>
> While America is fighting for Democracy, the Negro is fighting for Freedom and Democracy….His race is lynched, burned flogged and shot down in day-light, not even an investigation made by the officers of the law.[53]

Only days before this edition went to press, the burned remains of Lucius McCarty, a discharged soldier, was found tied to a pole. He was lynched after a local woman accused him of attempted rape.

McCarty's lynching was the most extreme reaction to the returning black veteran, and the response to the returning black soldier was not always negative. Sentiment ranged from empathy to naïve paternalism. The New York *Evening Post* warned that unless the city's black population was agitated, violence would be a non-factor: "He has come into our northern cities in growing numbers. Treat him well, and we can laugh at tales of violent propaganda, as we laughed at those of German propaganda; treat him unjustly, and no propaganda will be needed to arouse him."[54] On a separate occasion, the *Evening Post* printed a letter to the editor that spoke of the injustices that returning men faced. James M. Boyd described a situation in which he witnessed a black being refused a meal in South Orange, New Jersey. Boyd later wondered: "The Negroes are good enough to cook, nurse, fight and die for us, but cannot sit at a table and eat with white people. I wonder if this Negro had been in uniform if that would have made a difference?"[55]

Letters to the editor provided a range of perspectives within the nation's white population, from open support (as seen in the aforementioned letter) to a lively debate between a northern citizen and a soldier of the 142nd Field Artillery fresh from the battlefield of France. On October 9, 1918, Alexander Fishman wrote the sympathetic

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[53] "Prepare for the Home Coming of Our Boys," Vindicator, September 3, 1919, p.6. NAACP Papers of the NAACP, Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939. Series A: the South. Editorial Advisors John H. Bracely, Jr. and August Meier (Bethesda, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1991), Reel 14/0212.

[54] Crisis, September 1919, 248. Originally printed in the New York *Evening Post*.

[55] "White Man Says Colored Folks Good Enough to Fight With Good Enough to Live With," Afro-American, March 14, 1919. Originally printed in New York *Evening Post*, February 27, 1919.

article "Jewish Sympathy for Negroes," in which he described the oppression and injustices that black soldiers faced and suggested that equality was the answer. Two months later on December 7th, Lieutenant William D. Harris retorted in a letter to the editor that began with naïve paternalism but quickly descended into anti-Semitism and the rights of the Southern states:

> Mr. Fishman is ignorant of the real problem of the Negro. My life has been spent in several southern states—Virginia, the Carolinas, Alabama and Georgia….When I return home from France no one will receive me more joyously than Aunt Anne the cook and "Mary Susan" the washer-woman….I've never had any trouble with Negroes and have found most of them deserving of a square deal.…I will not tolerate a solution by the Jews of your city, or by any non-southerners…the belief and necessity for white supremacy is demmed [sic] as fundamental as any political theories…the white man must be the guardian, at least for many years." The problem can be "solved better by the stock that produced Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Marshall—modern political thinkers—than by the stock that has recently given the world a Lenine [sic] and a Trotzky [sic].[56]

For Harris, equality would be granted only when the Southern states deemed it necessary.[57] The letter is also representative of southerners who either ignored or were ignorant of the true thoughts and feelings of their black neighbors, yet, gladly spoke on their behalf because of their presumed "first hand knowledge." These acts of paternalism irritated blacks, particularly veterans. The sentiment of returning black veteran Stanley B. Norvell best summarized the feelings of many blacks:

> The white man of America knows just about as much about the mental and moral caliber, the home life and social activities of this class of colored

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[56] Papers of the NAACP: Part 9A Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces 1918-1955, Robert L. Zangrando, editor. (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1987) Reel 1/174, hereafter cited as Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces.

[57] Ibid. Harris's letter also received a lengthy response from Madame C. J. Walker who reminded the readers: But how about the 300,000 black men—also over there, on the same business for Uncle Sam. Does he imagine that their blood shed on the battle-fields of Europe is any less precious to the God who gave them life, than any one of the Southerners he mentioned? Or does he consider their sacrifice of their country any less important?…These individuals are trying to escape the horrible existence forced upon them thru prejudice, race-hatred and Jim-Crowism and are endeavoring to secure for themselves and their children the privileges of freedom enjoyed by other peoples."

> citizens as he does about the same things concerning the inhabitants of the thus far unexplored planet of Mars…. He is just a "nigger" and he takes him for granted.[58]

Blacks in the United States hoped that their service in the armed forced would open new avenues for equality. Tales of an egalitarian Europe combined with reports of courage and bravery from the battle front would inspire an entire race. In a symbolic gesture the black community would channel the role and spirit of their veterans. A war for justice and civil rights was about to commence. Unfortunately, many Southerners were also ready and willing to prepare for battle. Individuals like Vardaman stated that only special men and agendas could properly deal with these new "negroes." Other Southerners greatly endorsed this sentiment. The article "The Greatest Hour of Peril" for *The Issue* by Icey W. Day warned of violence and a return to the days of Reconstruction:

> In my opinion, the people of the South will be confronted with the most critical situation that any race of people has ever been called upon to deal with. I believe that the horrors of reconstruction days will be relegated to the back-ground by some of the situations which we will be called upon to meet and cope with in the new reconstruction of this war. The negro has always been, and will always be, I take it, a disturbing factor in the civilization of the SOUTH…Only a few days ago, in the town of Winoana [sic], one of the new brand of war-negroes made a speech in which he voiced the sentiments of his race, who are being called upon to do military duty. The negroes who come back from this war will be trained and disciplined soldiers, who have lost their horror of death by constant association with it, and who are free from all the superstitions that figured so prominently in the lives of the ante-bellum negro. It will take a more powerful factor than a Ku Klux Klan to deal with these negroes.[59]

What and who was Day referring to when he called for a powerful factor to confront these "trained and disciplined" soldiers? And by what means would this

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[58] Stanley B. Norvell and William M. Tuttle, Jr. "Views of a Negro During 'The Red Summer' of 1919." *The Journal of Negro History* 51, no. 3 (July 1966): 209-218, 212.
[59] *The Issue*, October 10, 1918.

"factor" be able to re-establish the horrors of fear in the black citizens of the South? Day's "soldiers" were white vigilantes, their tactic would be lynching.

The South Rises Yet Again: White Backlash to Racial Equality

Although ostensibly welcoming all returning service men, the South was actually a community divided. Emotions ranged from uncertainty to fear, as white Southerners debated what to do with black soldiers returning from war. Jackson, Mississippi's, the *News* admitted that planning was for yesterday and the present called for action. Under the guise of justice, the newspaper recommended the complete removal of whiskey from the South accompanied by the concluding statement: "We are confronting a fact, and not a theory, in dealing with the colored residents of this state. They are here, and we must solve with the best thought available, the problem of looking after them in the fairest and most just manner possible."[60] The *Jackson News* concluded with the idea that although the war was fought for the "little people" and the "underdog," it was the South's right to decide how the outcome of the war affected its citizens.[61]

Some white Southerners claimed that all southern citizens had inalienable rights that were only abridged when men became criminals. As one Alabamian stated: "Every decent Negro in the South is as safe in his life, his liberty and his property as the decent white man. It is only the vicious Negro who is unsafe in the South."[62] A citizen who wrote into the *Abbeville Scimitar* repeated, and elaborated this point: "If a Negro should insult me, as a white man, the community would expect me to forcibly resent it…if he resisted and fought back they would kill him…it will be the same with any other Negro in any community who dares to raise his hand against white men. No matter what the immediate cause."[63]

White racism and fear were exacerbated by rumors of trained black soldiers who were empowering other black men with pride and defiance. Baltimore's *Evening Sun* warned their readers: "soldiers returning from the war inflamed their people with stories

[60] "Negroes and the War," *Jackson News*, reprinted in *The Issue*, December 12, 1918.
[61] Ibid.
[62] *Crisis*, November 1917, 33.
[63] Ibid.

of race equality in Europe, especially the lack of discrimination in social intercourse."[64] Although from the same city of Baltimore, the *Afro-American* attempted to reach a different demographic by reprinting an article found in the *Birmingham News*:

> It is to be feared that a new cause of friction is liable to arise in the south between the two races. There is an opinion prevalent among many white people to a greater or less degree that these colored soldiers have come back with their heads turned: that they believe themselves to be worthy of the greatest consideration in all respects, and that they are inclined to insist upon such a consideration and upon recognition in ways they did not urge before their service in the army.[65]

Citizens also raised their concerns to each other in private correspondence. A white resident of New Orleans wrote his friend with allegations that black men were "insolent," and dared to demand higher wages after being spurred on by tales of acceptance in France:

> Sometimes I very much fear that the return of the negro soldiers is going to be followed by trouble in the South . . . The negroes show a growing hostility and insolence to the whites, quite apart from their refusal to work for wages which we can afford to pay. This will probably be worse when the troops come home, flushed with the praises that they have received for their work in France.[66]

Many white Southerners leaned towards suspicion, fear and anger. Although a war had just ended, many still clung to the central elements of war: surveillance, aggression, violence and rage. The entire country had grown accustomed to violence and tales of butchery. No one knew the violence of the battlefront better than the soldiers themselves. Historian David M. Kennedy has explored the notion that the climate of war shapes society, concluding that the battlefield gave men the excuse to lash out and give into rage that must be contained in civil society.[67] But what about when "civil" society

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[64] *Crisis*, September 1919, 247-248. The *Crisis* reprinted the *Baltimore Sun's* editorial and stated that often social intercourse was code for miscegenation.
[65] *Afro-American*, March 7, 1919.
[66] John S. Kendall to Lella Stuart Vaughn, January 5, 1919, OG 10218-301, Files of the MID, Record Group 165, National Archives; Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 296.
[67] David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, 29.

allowed itself to revert to those impulses? Some southern white soldiers wanted to use their talents to wage war on black citizens. Military intelligence intercepted a letter stating this desire. As Frank S. Dickason, a member of the 50th Artillery, proudly confessed that he was "itching" to join the Klan and create violence in Tennessee:

> …It would be Heaven itself to become one of the instructors in the school of differentiation of the two colors. I would like to shoot down just a few to see them kick, they are getting too egotistical and important to suit me.[68]

Ordinary citizens also reflected this need for violence, some reached back into history to cite the "horrors" of Reconstruction and call for a renewed vigor from the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. B. F. Ward, a close personal friend of Vardaman and a contributing columnist for *Vardaman's Weekly* directly referred to lynching as the remedy to suppress any militant movements from the black community. In Ward's opinion, there was a direct cause between black pride and the raping and murdering of whites in the South:

> When Butler issued his infamous order threatening to turn loose his brutal soldiers upon the beautiful and refined women of New Orleans with license to "treat them as women of the town plying their vocation," he lynched the oldest and most sacred moral code in the annals of mankind…No well informed man will now deny that the Ku Klux Klan delivered the Southern States out of the hands of the negro, the Northern thief and the Southern traitor—that "rankest compound of villainous scent that ever offended the nostril," yet when authority had been restored to its rightful hands, the Ku Klux Klan disappeared in an [sic] night like the vision of a dream. Lynching will go the same way the moment that rape and murder by the negro take the route of their polluted progenitor—carpet bag rule.[69]

Rape was a constant fear for Southern whites. The idea of black men attacking white women not only upset the region's racial hierarchy but directly challenged the masculinity of the white male. Southern lore developed a common and intriguing

[68] Ellis, *Race, War and Surveillance*, 222.
[69] *Vardaman's Weekly*, July, 8 1919.

formula: black soldiers and assumed equality led to rape. Often, publications such as *Vardaman's Weekly* carried stories of black pride in the North and the rise of the NAACP in one column only to be followed by a report of an alleged attack on a Southern white female. Also accompanying these articles were accounts of the returning black soldiers to communities in the North and the South. All of these ingredients usually led to the vindication of a local lynching, or the justification when a lynching occurred.[70]

Southern periodicals reminded their readers of black atrocities globally as well as domestically. Southern papers printed news of men of color fighting in the Congo, South Africa, or Egypt as an ominous sign of things to come in Georgia, Mississippi or Maryland. Horrific accounts detailed African black soldiers attacking white U.S. soldiers in the city streets of South Africa.[71] An article contributed by Ed Morel for *Vardaman's Weekly* described scenes that were identical to the recently released motion picture *Birth of Nation*. He reported that Negro troops were "attacking women and girls, spreading disease, murdering inoffensive civilians, and often getting completely out of control."[72] As Morel wrote:

> There have been many suicides of women after being attacked by negroes. Those who are responsible for installing the black barbarians in European communities knew that these results were inevitable. As a distinguished soldier said to me: "Were I a German, I would forgive everything—but this, never![73]

Reading Morel's reports one cannot help but to imagine the screen performance of Lillian Gish's character jumping to her death to escape the black soldier in *Birth of a Nation*.

These fears of race mixing were increased as prominent members of the black press chose to stress the adoration and affection that the French people, and specifically French women, displayed toward black troops. The *Chicago Defender's* story entitled

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[70] While it is dangerous to give Vardaman too much credit in this subliminal propaganda, it was no secret that many Southerners equated social equality and black pride to interracial mixing and eventually rape. In the Southern psyche, black pride led to courage and courage led to attacks on the white community.
[71] *Vardaman's Weekly*, May 9, 1919. Adversely, the black press portrayed these events as stances against oppression and racism. As on the same day, May 9, the *Afro-American* reported that "Uppish Soldiers were beated by South African Blacks," after the U.S. troops were using "usual U.S. strong arm" tactics" of keeping blacks oppressed.
[72] *Vardaman's Weekly*, May 6, 1920.
[73] Ibid.

"Why French Girls Adore Our Men," grabbed the reader's attention with the suggested title but strayed away from lurid tales of lasciviousness. Instead, it discussed that since French females did not show racism, it did not allow [as one French man stated] "…their souls to be filled with what is known in America as 'Nigger hatred.'[74] The *Defender* proudly quoted the French citizen's praise of black troops, while criticizing their white equivalent:

> But why should they hate Negroes as such? Or why should they even ignore them for no other reason than their color? The Negroes' very polite, sincere manner, their exemplary conduct among the French civilians and their reckless, brave and courageous conduct on the firing line won the hearts not only of the French women, but also of the French people as a whole….Many French girls will testify that they received more courtesy and better treatment from the American Negroes than from the whites. No Negro ever referred to a French woman as a "jane" or with any other slurring epithet….If the failure on the part of the French women to hate and discriminate against American Negroes merely because of race or color be regarded as a fault, then French women are proud of such a fault.[75]

The *Afro-American* also printed an account of Mademoiselle Boyer corking her face and hiding aboard the *Turrialba* to come to the U.S. to marry a black soldier who she met in France.[76] While these tales upset Southern white men, interracial relationships in the United States infuriated white supremacists. One white veteran was outraged on his return to discover that not only had blacks been promoted to bureaucratic positions but were associating and even flirting with their white subordinates. An anonymous letter to the *Baltimore Sun* complained that:

> In every Government Department in Washington there are Negroes who are holding high positions, and when a soldier, or allow me to say a

[74] "Why French Girls Adore Our Men, Frenchmen Praises Native Women for Ignoring Color Line," *Chicago Defender*, September 27, 1919; *Crisis*, March 1920. Southern papers reprinted stories from Northern publications, as well as articles from the Black Press, *The Issue* was especially critical of the *Washington Bee*, the *Chicago Defender, Crisis,* and the *Afro-American*.
[75] "Why French Girls Adore Our Men, Frenchmen Praises Native Women for Ignoring Color Line," *Chicago Defender*, September 27, 1919.
[76] *Afro-American*, April 25, 1919.

> veteran, of this great war, who has spent sleepless nights, days, weeks and months going down to the depths of hell in those horrible trenches of France, and who upon return to his home country happened to walk into a Government Office in Washington on crutches and there to his astonishment see a Negro hugging a white girl whom he was dictating a letter to as she was seated in his lap, do you wonder why some people are prejudiced against Negroes?[77]

The aforementioned writer only used pen and paper to voice his displeasure with society. Others called for more direct measures. No other individual added to the air of violence and a call for arms to white citizens more than James K. Vardaman. Using his political connections, as well as reaching the masses in his weekly publication, Vardaman, a former U.S. Senator, stated that he had predicted that the trained black soldier would be a major problem for the South and challenge white dominance. Vardaman reminded his constituents that even before the Armistice, he had printed the following: "I maintain that compulsory military training will leave a problem in this country more difficult of solution, more disastrous, I fear, in its consequence than the sudden emancipation of the slave a half century ago."[78]

But it was Vardaman's stance after the war ended that would have the largest impact on the future of race relations in the South, and the safety of the average African American of the era. Vardaman's editorial "White Men Should Organize to Prevent the Necessity of the Mob," summarized the climate of the time and the mindset of those who participated in lynching:

> Just as we go to press the news from the Hill City…of the lynching of a negro charged with attempted rape, thrills the electric wires.
>
> It is hypocritical for you to denounce it. You may regret it, but if it were your daughter who had been outraged you would lead the mob.
>
> It is said that the young woman assaulted was not able to definitely and surely identify the man who was killed as the man who had made the attempted assault on her. But negroes have been guilty of a series of

[77] *Crisis*, September 1919, 247.
[78] *The Issue*, August 15, 1918.

> crimes of this character and the infuriated mob demanded a victim upon which to wreak their revenge.
>
> *Every community in Mississippi ought to organize and the organization should be led by the bravest and best white men in the community*. And they should pick out these suspicious characters—these military, French-women-ruined negro soldiers and let them understand that they are under surveillance, and that when crimes similar to this one are committed take care of the individual who commits the crime.[79]

This article is vital for the study of lynching for a number of reasons. First, it is the battle cry that encouraged whites to organize and seek vigilante means to punish those who attempted to defy the era's laws of racial hierarchy. Secondly, it was not necessarily the suspect who committed the supposed crime, but his or her race. To the man who held the rope, it did not matter if the victim was guilty. Lynching was designed to punish a race and not just an individual. Finally, it was this mentality and the call for arms that led to the deaths of at least nineteen black American soldiers.

Vardaman's ideology and the changing times were not lost on black citizens of the day, as S.J. Young, of Columbus, Ohio, wrote into the *Ohio State Journal*:

> Are we to see again the reconstruction days, only in a worse form, that were the aftermath of the Civil War—the rehatching of the Ku Klux Klan?...What are his enemies afraid of that they should organize such a diabolic society, when all the world is seeking peace and the pursuit of happiness? He has never borne arms to protect his rights, nor slain to strike terror in the hearts of others. He is not anarchistic, but oppression may bring it about; not a Bolshevist, but hunger may make him so; not disloyal, but inactivity of the central government may cause it. He only asks the rights and privileges of an American citizen without any restrictions. Grant him these; denied these (in this day with the spirit of liberty in the air no man will tolerate an abridgement of his right), who cannot foretell a divided country…? Has it ever occurred to you that a

[79] *Vardaman's Weekly*, May 15, 1919.

man that has died so often for freedom of others may die for freedom for himself? [80]

Unfortunately, Young's opinion was a minority voice in the United States, and in the South it was shared predominantly by black citizens. Thousands of white citizens across the South endorsed Vardaman's message as the United States witnessed an increase in lynching. Federal Bureau of Investigation agents filed reports from eight different southern states warning that private citizens were forming their own armed militias against the threat of black conspiracies. Vardaman's home state of Mississippi was certainly one of the key states and, was not surprisingly, a vocal one. A concerned citizen wrote President Wilson: "We do not want to be awakened by a "Black Uprising", unless we are PREPARED FOR IT."[81] In another instance, a Bureau agent referenced Sharkey County, where blacks outnumbered whites fourteen to one, as being a locale where hostility was inevitable. The agent reported that "the white people there are not going to take any chances if trouble starts; they are simply going to murder or massacre the negros [sic] until the trouble is quieted."[82] The federal government refused to intervene, and months later Robert Truett, recently discharged from the army, was found hanged from a local bridge outside of Louise, Mississippi, only five miles from the Sharkey County line. His murderers accused Truett of making "indecent proposals" to a white woman.[83] Truett was just one of the many victims who were terrorized by private groups that the Bureau of Investigation was investigating. No other armed militia was more synonymous with murder or massacre, after the war than the Ku Klux Klan.

The war era was defined by the rise of the new Ku Klux Klan, an organization designed to instill terror and maintain white supremacy by any means necessary. From 1915 to 1944, the Klan's membership rose dramatically. Not only farmers, grocery store clerks and errand boys, but teachers, policemen, and even high ranking government officials were members of the klan.[84] All states involved with the lynching of black

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[80] *Crisis*, April 1918, 291.
[81] Ellis, *Federal Surveillance*, 9.
[82] Ibid.
[83] *Shreveport Times*, July 17, 1919. Papers of the NAACP, Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1953, University Microfilms, Robert Manning Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee, hereafter named Papers of the NAACP: Anti-Lynching Files, Reel 13/1011.
[84] Kenneth T. Jackson. *Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1967), 83. Klan members were voted in as governors, congressmen, and senators. Additionally, Hugo Black, attorney

soldiers had large and substantial Klan membership during this time. Klan recruiters, or Kleagles, were successful in their recruiting efforts as indicated by the figures below:

TABLE 2: ESTIMATES OF KLAN MEMBERSHIP FROM 1915-1944[85]

Georgia	65,000
Florida	60,000
Alabama	55,000
Louisiana	50,000
Tennessee	35,000
Kentucky	30,000
Arkansas	25,000
Mississippi	15,000

One of the first revised Klan chapters was created in Macon, Georgia. Identified by occupation, Macon's Klan consisted of two salesmen, a barber, and a municipal clerk; and its leader, Dr. C.A. Yarbrough, a prominent dentist, managed to recruit seven policemen into their circle as well. It was reported that one of the charter members confessed that the new Klansmen were created in part out of concern that "Negro soldiers returning from the war might be a threat to white supremacy."[86] In Montgomery, their secret affiliation, ordered "loose" women to stay away from all soldiers, especially any blacks, at Camp Sheridan.[87]

W.E.B. Du Bois was well aware of the growing Klan numbers and added fuel to the proverbial fire by mocking the groups and calling for further black resilience:

> …does the South actually suppose that the Negro soldier, after facing German gas and German barrage, is going to be seriously intimidated by a lot of silly, masked cowards? The war has not changed black skins to

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for the Klan, was eventually named to the U.S. Supreme Court. Black was a member of Birmingham's Robert E. Lee Klan no.1, which contained over 10,000 members.

[85] Ibid., 237. Jackson states that these figures are personal estimates derived from the claims of William Joseph Simmons (Imperial Wizard) and other high ranking members plus claims from periodicals of the era. The figures are based on formal initiation into the Klan, and do not include affiliates of official members nor splinter groups.

[86] Roger K. Hux, "The Ku Klux Klan in Macon, 1919-1925." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 62, no.2 (Summer 1978): 155-168, 156. Hux specifically calls attention to the violence and terrorism used against white citizens that were sympathetic to their black residents. Local whites were viewed as immoral or unethical if they went against the Klan's racial ideas, as seen when Robert Mills, a white podiatrist was whipped in front of his family after he was caught allegedly spying on Yarbrough's Klan.

[87] Jackson. *Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930*, 7.

white but it has taught their owners to face a danger and see it through. It is just as "sweet and fitting to die" for Democracy at home as abroad![88]

Comments like this earned Du Bois further infamy in the eyes of Southern editors. The *Macon Telegraph* accused the *Crisis* of encouraging violence and warned that if "a really serious race clash should break out there that the blood will be on its [the *Crisis's*] head." The *Telegraph* concluded that the NAACP exaggerated the troubles in the South by concentrating on a few murders, only roughly "one-tenth of one percent" and ignored the remaining ninety-nine and nine-tenths "of continued and growing organization on a better basis for both races."[89] Du Bois retorted with:

> So too, when the *Crisis* attacks lynching, it does not forget that of the 1,200,000 Negroes in Georgia, in 1918, only nineteen were lynched. But the Crisis remembers that a single human being illegally done to death by a mob in any state is an indictment of government so severe as to call for protest and agitation. It is perfectly true that most white Southerners are not lynchers, but it is just as true that most of them will not consent to the one step which will stop lynching—punishment of lynchers.[90]

Du Bois found an ally in *Jim, Jam Jems*, which echoed his sentiment. The North Dakota paper was against the rise of the Ku Klux Klan.

> In the thirty years last past upwards of three thousand American Negroes—citizens of this land—have been brutally mutilated, tortured, butchered, unsexed, burned and lynched.... Why visit barbarities with fire and sword overseas and tolerate them in our own land? Most American Negroes are poor; but who stole their toil for generations and still pays them but a pittance?
>
> If American Negroes are good enough, brave enough, courageous enough, patriotic enough, to fight—as they have fought like dusky demons—in every American war, aren't they good enough to be protected at home?

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[88] *Crisis*, April 1918, 291.
[89] *Crisis*, January 1920, 110.
[90] Ibid.

> …American Negroes having battled—against fearful odds within and without their ranks—heroically abroad for freedom, to return home to battle against a resurrected Ku Klux Klan? We say NO!"[91]

Unfortunately, the black community had to deal with a resurrected Ku Klux Klan not only in the South, but across the United States. Even citizens who were not cited as members of the Ku Klux Klan agreed with the group's racial ideology and the preferred punishment of lynching. A Georgia native, P.N. Pittenger wrote to the *Atlanta Journal* not only defending lynching parties, but accusing returning black veterans as being arrogant, and therefore the cause of violence. Pittenger claimed that it was the private citizen's job, to redeem the South, when the judicial system had failed.

> To the Editor:
>
> Lynchings seems to be on the increase again, and such a fact undoubtedly points to a bad condition of affairs somewhere, but your editorial, "Blood Lust," in the issue of August 26, does not indicate a true analysis of the situation with a view to finding the real cause and suggesting the real remedy.
>
> How many of us would have put up with, five or six years ago, things we have to submit to from Negroes in our daily lives now? They are becoming more impudent, arrogant, and independent all the time.
>
> The courts have failed to put a stop to rape, so why assume that type can help the situation any further in the future? The men who have conducted the recent lynching in North Carolina have undoubtedly realized that, unless something is done to put a check on the wave of Negro arrogance that is sweeping the country, we will soon be at their mercy. Do you not realize that all the newspaper talk so piously deploring lynchings, and thereby taking stand on the Negro's side, merely encourages the Negro to further daring?
>
> I do not presume to assign a cause to the attitude that the Negroes are taking. It may be, in part, from the manner of equality in which our Negro

[91] *Crisis*, September 1919, 248. Du Bois referred to the Jim Jam Jems as " freak journal" published in North Dakota, and usually "rabidly anti-Negro" but in this case had gotten down to the "rock-bottom truth."

> soldiers were treated in France but, whatever the cause, the fact remains that it is a serious menace.
>
> The sooner we put the Negro back where he belongs, the sooner, and not until then, will this problem be solved. Lynchings are wrong, the courts have failed—what are we going to do about it.
>
> P.N. Pittenger[92]

It is the words of Vardaman which best define the mentality of those who lynched during this bloody era. Vardaman claimed that he was no racist and did not "hate" the black Mississippian, but stressed that if blacks continued their role of subordination violence was sure to cease, but if black arrogance continued, and whites felt threatened, then the lynch mob was the only "sane" solution.

> There is no doubt the evil effects upon the negro's mind of his experience in Europe during the war….Now, if the negro is content to occupy the position he has occupied since '65, and the place God Almighty intended he should occupy in a white man's country, he will be kindly treated; aye, more, he will be generously treated by his white friends. But when he begins to put on airs, demand social and political equality, right then and there the trouble will begin, and the negro is going to be hanged, shot or otherwise regulated….
>
> The advice I am giving to the white people and the negroes in this instance, is not born of hatred for the negroes…Just as long as negroes foully murder white men, just as long as they invade the sacred precincts of the white man's home and perpetrate crime against the female members of the white man's family, just so long will mobs hang negroes. There is no other remedy.[93]

This fear went back much farther than Vardaman's referral to the year of 1865, but rather to the days of slavery. Just as whites feared the slave revolt and the pike of Nat Turner, so too did they fear the black soldier of the twentieth century. What had once been a renewed vigor to tighten the reins on slavery, now descended into the tightening of

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[92] "The Soul of a Lyncher," *The Competitor*, no.2 (Spring 1920): 192. Surprisingly, Pittenger chose to capitalize "Negro" throughout his letter.
[93] *Vardaman's Weekly*, May 8, 1919.

the structure of Jim Crow, disenfranchisement, and the policy of lynching. While the southern white supremacist may have used the excuse of an "untamed" or "incorrigible" black, the larger threat came from the effects of racism and oppression: when a group is oppressed it will hold resentment and naturally fight back. No other group personified a threat to white manhood more than the black soldier. In the attempt to confront this threat, countless blacks were lynched in the South, including nineteen black soldiers. The stories of these fallen soldiers are paramount to this study, and in the next chapter they will be told.

CHAPTER 3
THE VICTIMS

Black troops suffered from persecution abroad and at home. Even before the soldiers faced a resentful society in the South, they faced discrimination on the part of the military that had profited from their service. After the armistice, soldiers awaiting discharge encountered many hardships. The NAACP discovered numerous accounts of labor violations as well as the neglect of wounded veterans across the United States. The Boston branch of the NAACP investigated allegations about Camp Devins, at which soldiers were allegedly used for menial labor long after they were eligible to be discharged, and in Schenectady, New York, a soldier reported that men were forced to work nine hours a day every day of the week even when ill. Soldiers also complained of verbal humiliation by Southern white officers and being denied furloughs when family members were sick or dying. [1] Additionally, black soldiers were sent into hostile local communities to apprehend or discipline thugs, as one citizen of Waco, Texas, reported to the NAACP on February 12, 1919. The witness described an incident where white officers watched when black soldiers, armed only with clubs, were shot to death by white vigilantes outside Camp MacArthur.[2]

Black soldiers also complained about unsanitary conditions on military bases. In Newport, Virginia, Charles H. Harris stated that he and his fellow black troops at Camp Stuart had to wash their mess kits in the same water as soldiers with venereal diseases.[3] Wounded veterans encountered obstacles when they sought medical treatment. Black citizens wrote to the NAACP demanding that the organization, as well as "Negro ministers," atone for the neglect of black soldiers. One outraged citizen described Walter Reed Hospital's treatment of black veterans:

> …our Negro soldiers are cruelly and brutally treated…by a white nurse, who insolently refuses to prepare or order a prescribed diet for a Negro soldier who had his insides burn out by gas in France and otherwise

[1] Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reel 1/147.
[2] Letter from W.B. Lawson to the NAACP, February 12, 1919. Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reel 1/221.
[3] Papers of the NAACP: Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, Section A, Reel /147.

> afflicted [in] his country's battles. He was forced to lie all during the day of December 16th in Ward 35 without care, medicine, food or nourishment for no other reason than he is a Negro and proud of it. The soldier protested his inhuman treatment and asked the white patient to witness, when the white soldier in the ward threatened to come to his bed and club his brains out if he dared protest again.[4]

The NAACP investigated additional reports about hospitals in Illinois, Indiana, New York, Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia, and other venues across the nation, from local forms of transportation to dining facilities[5] The discrimination led many black intellectuals to speak out, as did the president of Wilberforce University, a historically black college in Xenia, Ohio, who wrote numerous newspapers with the sentiment: "Will not the American white people come half way—put aside their prejudices and play fair with these people that had done so much to help win this war?"[6]

More injustices were to come for the black veteran as he left the "safety" of the U.S. army. From the moment he stepped out of his camp, not only was he labeled a threat, but the white power structure began to erase any indication that he had ever even been a soldier. He was forced to remove his uniform upon entering the city limits of southern communities. To pacify white southern fear, local governments stood idly by as white citizens harassed and even attacked him. One city that stood out as the epitome of this practice was Vicksburg, Mississippi. On September 3, 1918, J.A. Miller, a leading member of the black community, wrote NAACP administrator, Walter White, and described these humiliating practices. According to Miller, even black officers at the rank of First and Second Lieutenant were forced to publicly divest themselves of their military attire. In one such case, vigilantes brutally assaulted Lieutenant Saunders after he refused to take off his uniform. Saunders later had to leave the city disguised as a civilian to escape a mob. The white citizens of Vicksburg were given a powerful ally with white soldiers who joined in to attack their fellow black soldiers. Although Miller seemed to applaud the integrity of one white officer, a "Colonel Hoskies" of the 155th who directed

[4] Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reel 1/197.
[5] *Crisis*, March 1920.
[6] Capozolla, "The Only Badge Needed is Your Patriotic Fervor," 1375.

his men to stop the violence, he also admitted that "the city authorities would not venture to arrest a white soldier for giving trouble to the Negroes."[7]

Lieutenant Saunders escaped, however, others were not as fortunate. Harassments, assaults, even beatings paled in comparison to the carnage about to occur. Refusing to shed one's uniform was one of a long list of offenses that lynch mobs across the South used as an excuse to apply the rope. Returning black veterans were murdered following not only allegations of assault, murder and the raping of white women but also of less severe charges such as speaking back to whites or writing letters to white women. Walter White's study of lynching during the era concluded that:

> The far South tangibly demonstrated its gratitude to Negro soldiers for helping make the world safe for democracy by lynching ten of them, some in the uniform of the United States Army, during the year 1919….[8]

But the veteran was not just another victim; he was specifically targeted because of who *he* was—a man trained in self-defense, who represented the greatest threat to white supremacy. He had been successful on the battlefield and came back to tell his tales of equality in France. His uniform alone represented potential in a race that southern white society continued to emasculate. Black intellectual and historian Carter G. Woodson summarized this unfortunate scenario: "To the reactionary the uniform on a Negro man was like a red flag thrown in the face of a bull."[9]

The Lynching of Charles Lewis

Only a month after the armistice, the first recorded lynching of a black veteran took place in Hickman, Kentucky. Private Charles Lewis was formally discharged from the U.S. Army on December 14, 1918. Upon receiving his separation papers, Lewis, like his comrades, went about the business of preparing to return home. Unfortunately, unlike the others of Camp Sherman, Lewis never made it there alive.

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[7] Letter from J.A. Miller to Walter White, September 3, 1918. NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, reel 14/037, and 043. Although Miller had been a voice of reason and ethics, and had been labeled as a friend to the "community" as he advocated that black soldiers avoid alcohol and other vices, he was tarred and feathered on July 24, 1918, and later jailed for remarks the city found unpatriotic.
[8] Walter White, *Rope and Faggot*, 112. This study proves that the number well exceeds ten.
[9] Carter G. Woodson, *Negro in Our History* (Washington DC: Associated Publishers, 1922), 528.

December 14 began as a joyous occasion for Private Lewis; he had successfully received his honorable discharge from the military and purchased his train ticket to Alabama. Before the southbound train left Fulton, Kentucky, the local officers entered the train, and began questioning passengers regarding two black citizens who had just been robbed of their possessions. Upon reaching the portion of the car that contained Lewis, as well as other discharged uniformed black soldiers, Deputy Alvin Thomas ordered the men to empty their pockets and surrender their personal luggage for inspection. Lewis refused the request, pointed to his uniform and stated that he was a soldier of the U.S. Army, honorably discharged and had never participated in any crime. Moreover, he provided documents from his commanding officers at Camp Sherman that referred to his excellent record and stated that he was up for promotion at the time that the order for demobilization went into effect. Witnesses later reported to the *Washington Eagle* that Deputy Thomas's limited response was "Shut up, nigger, and open up your baggage." [10] At that moment, Lewis exited the train into Tyler Train Station, leaving his luggage behind. Despite the fact that they found no contraband, the officers followed Lewis.

After a lengthy chase through the black neighborhoods of Fulton, Deputy Thomas claimed that he heard something in one of the "Negro Shacks," which led to the discovery of the suspect and supposedly another anonymous soldier in uniform.[11] When Thomas attempted to arrest Lewis and this accomplice, the two overpowered the deputy, Thomas claimed, and then pushed him outside of the shack. After the confrontation, Deputy Thomas managed to call for reinforcements from nearby Hickman. Half an hour later, with the help of Sheriff Swayne Walker, the Chief of Hickman Police, Albert S. Hambley, and Deputy Chief Joe Wall, as well as a large group of white citizens, Thomas reentered the black community and successfully apprehended his suspect. Deputy Thomas claimed he needed all of this assistance because Lewis had entered into an area

[10] *Crisis*, February 1919, 181-182; *Lexington Herald*, December 17, 1918, 2; Federal Surveillance Files: OG 10218-274. With the exception of the *Crisis*, most newspapers contended that Lewis had robbed two "negroes,"; however, according to Bureau of Investigation, witnesses claimed that the officers never even mentioned any robbery and instead were searching for liquor.

[11] Although Thomas's report to the federal investigators claimed that two men beat him, the mysterious accomplice was never named and this detail never surfaces again. It is likely Thomas created the second man to save face, as his manhood had been challenged by being beat by only one man—and a black man—Lewis.

"inhabited chiefly by negroes, who gambled and drank, and bootlegged across the line from Tennessee and into Kentucky."[12]

After the arrest, Thomas and his posse led Lewis back to Tyler Station but had to wait until 7:00 p.m. to move the discharged soldier to the Fulton county jail in Hickman, Kentucky. Meanwhile, a large and rowdy crowd had begun to congregate at the train station. As Hickman is only twenty miles east of Fulton it remains a mystery why the law enforcement agents did not simply drive Lewis to the jail, but as time progressed and the mob grew, officers Hambley and Thomas calmed the crowd enough to let them take Lewis to Hickman. Upon reaching Hickman the officers waited for the train to empty and then personally moved Lewis by automobile to the Fulton County Jail.

A Saturday night in winter usually offered little excitement for the inhabitants of Hickman, but on this weekend the town was abuzz. Although the Fulton mob had supposedly been calmed they had merely moved eastward with the train. Local police reported seeing a large number of "strangers" downtown that night and soon a mob of over one hundred gathered in front of the jail. As the local police force was debating on how to handle the newly arriving and restless "masked" crowd, the mob's anger grew. The commotion reached a crescendo when the people rushed the jail, smashed the outer doors with sledge hammers, and then made their way to the area that contained Private Lewis. As they reached Lewis's cell, they realized that their might, and their sledge hammers, were no match for the iron bars and combination locks that secured their prey. This was until they managed to "force" the jailer's brother-in-law to show them the combination, thus allowing them access to Lewis.[13]

What began as the last day of Charles Lewis's military life had become something much more important since he was now fighting for his life. After twice fleeing from an arrest, he now found himself face to face with a mob determined to kill him. Lewis had earlier proven his might against a lone Deputy, but he now realized his odds as the group entered his cell. Lewis used all of his military training to kick, fight, and clutch at the

[12] Formal investigation into Charles Lewis From Agent Werner, January 21, 1919, Federal Surveillance Files, 10218-274.

[13] Ibid. The question remains why the brother-in-law was even there. If he was a jailer then why not simply state jailer? Note the words "forced" him to show them the combination, which placed the blame with the mob and the moment and not the individuals; nevertheless, someone from within the correctional system allowed the mob to reach Charles Lewis.

masks of the men who jumped upon him that Saturday night but to no avail. His tormenters removed his beaten body from the jail. Lewis was then taken outside of the city limits and ten miles into the country.[14] The murderous crowd left Lewis's corpse swaying from the blood soaked rope. Private Charles Lewis had survived the dangers of the battlefront, but on December 15, 1918, he fell victim to the lynch mob's noose while still wearing his uniform.[15]

It was Kentucky, not one of the more vilified southern states that gave birth to the first post-war lynching of a black veteran. Kentucky had a history of vigilante justice, but the state also had a history of progressivism; specifically, the anti-lynching sentiment of the Governor who had deplored the mob in the past. Governor August O. Stanley had in 1918 personally prevented a lynching when he calmed down a potentially homicidal crowd and led the black suspect to safety.[16] The Lexington *Herald* had a history of championing the rights of black soldiers against persecution. In 1917, it was the *Herald* that chastised the federal government's decision to execute black soldiers in Houston when they were accused of creating the civil unrest that led to the deaths of white soldiers and citizens.[17] Yet, now that a lynching had occurred in Kentucky, did the *Herald* rise to the defense of Charles Lewis? Only two years after pleading for the safety of black soldiers, the paper distanced itself from this mob violence. The *Herald* only briefly reported the lynching and the editor refrained from making any scathing indictments against the citizens of Fulton County.[18] In the days following the murder of Lewis, the only reference to any killings were that of a corpse discovered in Bowling Green, and only two days after Lewis's murder, witnesses discovered the burned remains of Samuel Mottley two counties over. Especially insulting was that aside from the lack of any empathy for Lewis's situation, the *Herald* ran a story entitled "Negro Soldiers Real War Fun Makers." The article, originally printed in the *Birmingham Age Herald*, contained

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[14] *St. Louis Dispatch*, December 16, 1918. The Dispatch claimed that "Charlie" Lewis was lynched at nearby Tyler, Kentucky ten miles outside of Hickman, after a fight with Deputy Al Thomas "who was badly beaten" while resisting an arrest on charges of highway robbery.
[15] *Crisis*, February 1919, 181-182; *Lexington Herald*, December 17, 1918; Federal Surveillance Files, 10218-274; *St. Louis Dispatch*, December 16, 1918.
[16] *Independent* 89, February 25 1917, 347-348; *New York Times*, March 9, 1919, sec. 3. p.1, the *Times* also championed Stanley as a voice of reason claiming that he displayed "great energy and personal courage.
[17] *Crisis*, November 17,1917, 33.
[18] *Lexington Herald*, December 17, 1918. The paper simply stated that Lewis was hanged after beating Deputy Thomas.

numerous racial stereotypes and lampooned the commitment of black soldiers. The author claimed that black soldiers provided levity for white troops, shot craps, were constantly seasick and added one story of how a sleepy and confused black soldier awoke and upon seeing the ocean, presumably for the first time, mistakenly exclaimed: "Oh, Lawd, de levee am bust." [19]

While the white press downplayed the Lewis affair, black citizens went on the offensive. Immediately following the lynching, a private citizen, a Professor Joseph, requested the services of the NAACP, stating that Lewis, a soldier in uniform and a "friend to the race," posthumously needed assistance.[20] The NAACP understood the gravity of the situation and attempted to reach out to Governor Stanley. Less than forty eight hours after Lewis's death, the professor's request had managed to reach the upper levels of the NAACP administration when Secretary John R. Shillady penned a letter to Kentucky's governor, recounting Lewis's role in the military, as well as Stanley's own stance against lynching:

> …this lynching has a tremendous significance in that the victim, Charles Lewis, had at the request of the government entered the service of the United States Army where he was prepared, if necessary, to lay down his life to see that the ideals of democracy were perpetuated and that America was free from the danger of being subjugated to German domination….The association recognizes the stand of Governor Stanley against lynching by reason of the fact that in January, 1917, he personally prevented a mob at Murray, Ky., from lynching a negro.[21]

After two days without a response from the Governor, a presumed ally, the NAACP subsequently released the letter to newspapers on December 19. The *New York Evening Sun* enlightened its readers about the affair by summarizing Lewis's murder and the NAACP's stance. The *Sun* concluded by suggesting that a biracial community in the North should confront any future acts of violence:

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[19] *Lexington Herald*, December 18, 1918. There was no reason given for this lynching other than Mottley had left to go 'possum hunting with a "considerable" amount of money on his person. Strangely enough Samuel Mottley's brother was also emolliated five years earlier.

[20] NAACP Anti-Lynching File, Reel 11/918-919. The citizen lived outside of Hickman, but other than his occupation little is known of the requester.

[21] NAACP Anti-Lynching File, Reel 11/920.

> Mr. Shillady urges the attention of all law-abiding people to the circumstances, disclaiming any apology for Lewis's crime, if he had committed a crime, but declaring that this negro, who had served in the American army, was lynched for an offence which would have brought him only a slight punishment had he been a white man. And the point is made that every loyal American negro who has served with the colors may fairly ask: "Is this our reward for what we have done?"
>
> In this request all decent men, white and black, ought to join without hesitation….However great the difficulties attendant upon the daily life of two races side by side in the South. It is clear as light that every lynching of a negro intensifies these difficulties and creates an atmosphere so hostile to betterment of existing conditions that nothing whatever can justify or even excuse its perpetration.[22]

At the same time that the State government of Kentucky had no public statement about the matter, behind the scenes the federal government was investigating the case. Major Walter H. Loving confidentially wrote to the chief of Military Intelligence John M. Dunn, in which he expressed that the murder was disastrous for race relations in the South and the morale of the black community.[23] Two days before Christmas, Loving reiterated his claim that a militant movement was growing among the black community.[24] Loving warned that the practice of lynching, specifically the hanging of a soldier, in the South reflected poorly on the United States internationally. And he added that because a hundred black delegates were preparing to travel to France to lend their voice to the rebuilding process, the MIB should attempt to work with a race already "filled with excitement:"

> The fact cannot be denied that at this particular time there is a growing feeling of unrest among the negroes all over the United States. This

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[22] NAACP Anti-Lynching File, Reel 11/922, originally printed in the *New York Evening Sun*, December 23, 1918; *Lexington Herald*, Dec 19, 1918. The *Lexington Herald* simply stated that an appeal was presented before Governor Stanley, it chose not to elaborate on the details of the case nor did it lend its own opinion. This is one more example of how the *Lexington Herald* did not confront injustice when it struck closer to home.

[23] Federal Surveillance Files, 10218-274.

[24] Refer back to Loving's warning in Chapter 3.

> condition seems to have arisen since the signing of the armistice. Negro journals all over the country are asking "What will be the negro's reward for helping to win the war for democracy?
>
> …The startling news came to the attention of the convention holding session in Washington that a negro soldier had been lynched in Hickman, Kentucky, while dressed in the full regalia of a soldier in the United States Army. The reading of the message brought tears to the eyes of some of the delegates present. The Washington convention was still in session and before the indignation which its members felt so keenly over the lynching of the negro soldier had subsided, another sad message bore intelligence of the lynching of four more negroes in Alabama, two brothers and two sisters.
>
> Not since the East St. Louis riots have the colored people been so worked up as they are today. While their brave soldiers are absent on foreign soil answering the call of their country, their wives, brothers and sisters are being lynched and murdered in their own country while the government stands by and offers them no protection…something serious is going to happen unless the government takes some steps to protect the families of those negro soldiers who lost their lives while fighting on foreign soil for democracy which offers their families no protection at home. The lynching of that soldier is entirely within the jurisdiction of the military authority, and the most rigid investigation should be conducted so that the guilty, who are well known to the Kentucky officials, may be brought to justice and punished to the fullest extend of the law.[25]

The Justice department elected to appease the black community by investigating Lewis's case, as Loving's superior John M. Dunn wrote to A.B. Bielaski in the Justice

[25] Major W.H. Loving to Director, Military Intelligence John M. Dunn.
"Spirit of Unrest Among Negroes," December 23, 1918, Federal Surveillance Files, 10218-274. Loving also suggested that the federal government should carefully examine any individual traveling to France. Loving was also concerned that if the federal government did not attempt to curtail lynching, militant black groups would grow in numbers leading to race riots in metropolitan areas.

Department: "It is believed that it would be advisable for the Department of Justice to send a reliable man to make a thorough investigation."[26]

The Bureau sent Agent Werner from the Evansville, Indiana, field office to investigate the Hickman lynching. On January 18, 1919, Agent Werner arrived in Fulton, Kentucky. One of the first men Werner interviewed was the local postman, J.R. Graham, who stated that he knew very little of the incident and had only heard of the attack through newspaper accounts. Graham insisted that the agent talk to the County Judge, Elvis Star, who was "very reliable and trustworthy."[27] When approached, Judge Star gladly cooperated and gave an account completely different from what many black citizens were saying. Star corroborated Agent Thomas's testimony, defended the city's attempt to protect Lewis, and recanted reports from December 14 that alleged Deputy Thomas had gone to Tyler Station to arrest Lewis who had supposedly taken a gold watch and money from two unnamed blacks. Yet Star, as well as the police department, did not know who reported this robbery nor the amount of money taken, and he had never released the names of the victims. Star then quoted Police Chief Hambley as noticing a number of men getting on the train at Fulton but he (Hambley) was too busy with the prisoner to pay attention to it, as his only desire was to get Lewis safely to Hickman. When the agent inquired as to Lewis's safeguarding at Hickman, Star asserted that the officers he spoke to were somewhat "apprehensive because they noticed a good many strangers in town," upon Lewis's arrival. Star quickly added that he was not present at the jail, as he was unfortunately ill, but when Sheriff Swayne Walker contacted him and broached him on the subject, he (Star) suggested that the officers organize some of the citizens to help protect Lewis. But before this new posse could be formed, the masked mob rushed the jail. Judge Star concluded that all the men "had done everything they could to prevent the lynching, excepting to use force, which they realized would be useless considering the number of men," and that "no member of the mob could be recognized."[28]

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[26] Ibid. It can be argued that the Department of Justice intervened not to appease the black community but out of Loving's suspicions of black militants.
[27] Federal Surveillance Files, 10218-274. Agent Werner's first name does not appear in the investigation records.
[28] Ibid.

Werner never asked Hambley, Walker, or Thomas to describe these "strangers" who surely were members of the lynch mob, and Agent Werner was satisfied with Judge Star's testimony, although he paid one final visit to Deputy Alvin Thomas before finalizing his report. Werner spoke with Deputy Thomas as well as other members of the Hickman police force and reported that Lewis had had no altercation with Thomas on the train, that earlier reports involving a search for whiskey were false, and that Thomas had adequately protected Lewis:

> the officers had done everything they could to prevent the lynching, and that Lewis was arrested not because he had objected to having his baggage inspected for whiskey, and that the trouble between Thomas and Lewis had not occurred on board a train when Lewis was on his way home after being discharged from Camp Sherman.[29]

On January 20, Agent Werner submitted his final report to the Justice Department siding with the findings of both Judge Star and Deputy Thomas. Werner added that the true culprits of the lynching, according to Thomas, were out of state men from Tennessee who were vindicating an earlier offense by Charles Lewis:

> I understood from these officers that Lewis was considered a very dangerous character and that before he went into the army he had killed a negro in Tennessee...and that he had given a great deal of trouble in that County, and because of Lewis's attack on himself, [Thomas] they used it as a pretext to get rid of him for good….
>
> So far as I could ascertain the officers did everything they could to prevent the lynching, and did their full duty in protecting their prisoner….
>
> I could find no one who would contradict the information furnished me by the officers.[30]

It is unknown what attempts Agent Werner took to find anyone to contradict these accounts, but what is certain are the numerous questions that can be asked upon reading this report. Questions that were never asked by the Justice Department: such as, by what means did Deputy Thomas come to learn about Lewis's prior life in Phillippi, Tennessee?

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

Why were these white men insistent on lynching Lewis if he killed a "negro" in Tennessee? How did the men from Tennessee even know that Lewis was in the area? And what role, if any, did Deputy Thomas play in informing these men, miles from Fulton, of Lewis's arrest and transportation to Hickman? A competent investigation would have not only answered these questions but also possibly removed the actions of Deputy Thomas from speculation. Despite numerous inconsistencies and uncertainties, the Justice Department was satisfied with their reliable agent's "thorough" report, as Acting Chief M.D. Atler responded to Dunn in the military: "As far as this office is concerned, the case is regarded as closed."[31]

Less than two weeks after Lewis's lynching, another discharged soldier was attacked in Texas. On December 28, 1918, white citizens beat Roy J. Warren, still in uniform, on a city sidewalk in Bartlett, Texas. Warren was one of the 3990 black soldiers stationed at Camp Travis fortunate enough to receive his separation from the military in time for the holidays. Three days after Christmas, Warren traveled to the small community of Yoakum, Texas, to meet his friend John W. Neal and the family of his former professor Dr. Cooper. The entire group traveled to Bartlett to enjoy the day together. As the friends walked and reminisced, they encountered a lone white man who refused to move and Warren brushed shoulders with the man. Warren contended that at that moment the man shoved him and began to shout as he attacked the fallen soldier. Before long, a large group of white men joined in the fray, attacking Neal and commencing to beat Warren and Dr. Cooper. Cooper's wife and niece looked on in horror as the mob kicked, beat and stabbed their mates. Eventually two police officers entered the fight and arrested Warren, who was held in the county jail from 2:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m., fined $15.70 and finally smuggled out of town under the cover of night to his father's house in nearby Troy, Texas.[32]

Again the federal government investigated into the matter. Coincidentally, as Agent Werner prepared his report for the federal government in Kentucky, special agent Louis De Matte, from the San Antonio office arrived to investigate the crime. On

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Federal Surveillance Files, 343326; Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reel 1/197. Statistics found in Letter to Mr. Scott, Special assistant to the secretary of War from P.C. Harris the Adjutant General, January 11, 1919, Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reel 1/160. Warren attended Sam Houston College in Austin, Texas, but it is unclear if Dr. Cooper instructed at the institute as well.

January 17, 1919, almost a month after the initial beating, Agent De Matte met with the still visibly bruised and beaten Warren:

> When at this office his face and head showed signs of having been bruised and beaten. His eyes were discolored and there were wounds on the top of his head and on his cheeks and neck. He smelled like a walking drug store from the amount of iodoform and antiseptics he had on him.[33]

Despite the physical impairments of Warren, and hearing the story first-hand, the Agent remained satisfied that no crime had been committed, and if anything, it was probably the discharged soldier who was at fault: "My opinion is that these negroes got "biggety" and tried to shove the white man off the sidewalk, whereupon the white man and his friends retaliated and beat up the negroes."[34]

These reports are just two of the many reminders that the federal government refused to assure the safety of blacks during the era. If protection was to come, it would have to come from the state government or the private sector. As news of violence spread across the country, many black citizens began to ask who would protect them? Myrtle F. Cook, the treasurer of the Kansas City, Missouri, branch of the NAACP, asserted that the NAACP should come to the aid of not only the black community, but specifically the black soldier:

> We hoped that America would determine to treat these black boys with greater consideration when they bring back to her the glory of their Croix de Guerre. Already there have been instances to the contrary, when even the uniform of Uncle Sam has not saved the life of its wearer from the lynch-murderers. The question wells up—"Must some be martyrs before the iniquitous, unjust, unreasonable American prejudice abates?"
>
> …the President has delegated Dr. Moten to instruct the boys to be submissive and unassertive on their return, would it not be well for our Association to offer its organizing strength to back up in an effective manner the demand of our boys for "Democracy" at home?[35]

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[33] Federal Surveillance files, 343326.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Letter from Myrtle F. Cook, Treasurer of KC, MO branch of NAACP to JRS, January 29, 1919, Discrimination in Armed Forces, Reel 1/199.

Secretary of the NAACP, John R. Shillady took this plea to heart as it was his voice and energy that fought for justice when the next soldier was lynched. On March 13, 1919, a lynch mob burned Bud Johnson at the stake in Florida.

The Burning of Bud Johnson

It was with bitter irony that the military continued to assure its black soldiers that an Honorable Discharge was "sure worth working for," as the YMCA's newspaper the *Trench and Camp* proudly stated. The weekly publication offered soldiers encouragement as the military stated that men armed with "better minds and better ideals" translated into "better jobs."[36] Conversely, the military warned that these jobs should be ascertained in each soldier's hometown as large Northern cities were becoming too populated and jobs were scarce:

> If your home is NOT in one of the big industrial cities DON'T GO THERE after you are discharged.
>
> New York, Boston, Bridgeport, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles and other "popular" cities are worrying over what is to be done with soldiers whose home are in other sections and who have gone to those cities to find work after release from the army or navy.
>
> Most of these men are jobless, because there aren't enough jobs for them. The employers of those cities want their old men back not strangers; and they are holding the jobs of their former men. Besides, in all these cities there are large numbers of men temporarily without work owing to the shutting down of war manufacturing.
>
> GO TO YOUR HOME TOWN! There you will find a real job and a real welcome. Take this advice if you don't want to find yourself stranded and out of work and luck.[37]

It was this very plan that Bud Johnson was carrying out en route to his boyhood town of Allenton, Alabama. Johnson had just buried his father in Jay, Florida, said his

[36] *Trench and Camp*, January 15, 1919, no.17, 3; *Trench and Camp*, Jan 20, 1919, no.16, 2.
[37] "Keep Away From the 'Popular' Cities!" *Trench and Camp*, January 15, 1919, no.17, 3.

goodbyes to his mother Eva in Pensacola and had planned to travel by steam boat from Milton, Florida, to his home state of Alabama.[38]

On Wednesday March 12, 1919, Bud Johnson anxiously waited for the small steamer, the *Helmar*, to depart for its destination up the Blackwater River. The morning air was surprisingly cold as the forecast called for the temperature to be in the high 40s, luckily Johnson had grown accustomed to uncomfortable conditions during his service in the U.S. Army.[39] As Johnson and the other passengers tried to remain warm, the distinctive sounds of barking were heard by the dock. Soon the sounds were accompanied by the sight of a number of blood hounds and a mob of angry men, all led by County Sheriff Harvell.[40] Harvell and the mob seized the thirty-six year-old Johnson from the steamer and transported him back to the Pensacola jail on the charge of attempted rape.[41] A white woman, who remained unidentified, reported that she was attacked the night before in Pace, Florida, roughly fifteen miles east of Pensacola. The black man fit the description of Bud Johnson.[42]

As word spread through Pace that Johnson had been returned to Pensacola, a large crowd began to form in front of the jail Wednesday night. However, no harm fell to Johnson as at the last moment Marines from the naval station were called in to stand guard throughout the night. It is unknown who sent for the Marines as Santa Rosa County Sheriff Van Pelt and Chief of Police Ellis both stated that they had not requested the military aid. Both men guessed that an unknown caller must have informed the naval station.[43] Johnson remained in the jail overnight, and despite the fact that he had still not been positively identified by his accuser, Harvell returned at noon the next day to

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[38] Ancestry.com. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-18 [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2002. National Archives and Records Administration. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918. M1509, 4,277 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration; Montgomery *Emancipator* (AL), March 22, 1919, reprinted as part of the NAACP Anti-Lynching Files, Reel 8/813; *Cleveland Advocate*, March 20, 1919, reprinted as part of the NAACP Anti-Lynching Files Reel 8/812; Deposition of H.A. Bryan, NAACP Anti-Lynching Files, Reel 8/86.

[39] Weather forecast found in *Tampa Tribune*, March 13; and *Florida Times Union*, March 13. All three newspapers listed the specific temperature and weather for Pensacola.

[40] NAACP Anti-Lynching Files, Reel 8/812-813. No where in the investigation, or newspaper accounts is Sheriff Harvell's first name disclosed.

[41] *Crisis*, March 1919, 37; *Crisis*, February 1920, 183-186. The *Birmingham News* additionally reported the story on March 14, 1919, but referred to Johnson as Hubert.

[42] Ibid.

[43] *Florida Times Union*, March 15, 1919.

transport the suspect to Jacksonville, Florida, for safe keeping. Mysteriously, Harvell took a circuitous route to his destination and elected to take Johnson by automobile through the countryside to the north. Allegedly, Harvell desired to mislead any potential mobs by traveling northbound and hoped to eventually catch a train at some point in Alabama. Not surprisingly to anyone in the NAACP, a group of men foiled the Sheriff's plan when they intercepted the Sheriff's car just miles north of the Alabama-Florida line, near Castleberry, Alabama.[44] By midday Thursday, Johnson was no longer in the custody of local law enforcement, but rather left to the mercy of the mob.

It is unknown what horrors Johnson endured from his captors as he was held for hours, but at some time before early Friday morning, Johnson "confessed" to the attempted rape.[45] Johnson was then taken by the mob back to Pace and finally identified by his alleged victim. Though the woman was not a resident of Pace, she was still in the area as she had come to see her daughter "Minnie Lee," who was attending a local Florida school. Under the full moon, the mob had received the answer they had been waiting on for days: a lynching was about to take place.[46]

Moments before sunrise on March 14, Bud Johnson began to take his final steps on earth. The combination of fear and a rise in the temperature created a river of sweat across the discharged soldier's forehead and into his brown eyes.[47] The temperature grew even higher as Johnson approached a stake planted in the ground surrounded by eager looking men with torches. The stake was large, as Johnson was a tall man.[48] It took a number of men to control him as he began to struggle. Eventually the crowed restrained him with a rope. At this moment, the morbid pageantry of the lynching began

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[44] Ibid.
[45] *New York Globe*, March 14, 1919; *New York Times*, March 14, 1919, *New York Post*, March 14, 1919.
[46] NAACP Anti-Lynching Files, Reel 8/812-813. Strangely the victim's daughter's name was released to the newspapers and not the mother's. However, the surname of both individuals was with held; http://timeanddate.com/calender/index.html?year=1919&country=1 .
[47] Ancestry.com. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-18 [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2002. National Archives and Records Administration. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918. M1509, 4,277 rolls. Washington, D.C. Unlike the physical descriptions of many African American soldiers reported on the Draft Registration Card, Johnson's eye color was listed as brown and not black. Weather reported in, *Tampa Tribune*, March 15, 1919 *and Florida Times Union*, March 15, 1919. The temperature had risen from 48 degrees on March 13, to a low of 62 for Friday, March 14.
[48] Ancestry.com. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-18 [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2002. National Archives and Records Administration. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918. M1509, 4,277 rolls. Washington, D.C.

as the group began a ritual used to humiliate, demean and torture. The crowd went through his pockets and gleefully distributed their findings as Johnson's sixty six dollars was an unexpected treat. Next, he was chained to the stake as men and women began to apply their torches.[49]

A few local black citizens were on hand to witness the ghoulish event. The local pastor, H.A. Bryan, was later interviewed by the NAACP. He testified that an elderly white Baptist preacher proved to be the exception and pleaded for the soldier's life. The preacher insisted that the mob should only whip Johnson, but the crowd denied the old man's request stating that burning the soldier was the only appropriate punishment for this "saucy" and "sullen" soldier. Bryan claimed he heard Johnson defiantly question the mob's patriotism as he reminded these people that it was he who fought for their safety stating: "Would that I had died in Germany rather than come back here and die by the hand of the people I was protecting."[50] Other accounts claimed that Johnson's pleas for mercy were met with mocking laughter from the crowd and at one time the once proud soldier begged that someone would shoot him and take him out of his misery.[51] When Johnson finally succumbed, the mob began its tradition of collecting souvenirs from their massacre. The "parched" skull was crushed with a hatchet and pieces were distributed to the grasping hands of the onlookers. What was left of his corpse was finally discarded in the nearby swamp. His relatives had the terrible ordeal, of competing with vermin and alligators, in the collecting of his remains.[52]

While Johnson's loved ones were dealing with their loss, society began to wrestle with, or ignore, the latest act of brutality coming out of the South. The *Birmingham News* calmed its readers by simply stating that after the mob dispersed, "everything has

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[49] *Chicago Defender*, March 22, 1919. Women were often active participants in a lynching. Tales of women assisting and adding to the violence were common. Although fictional in its account, James Baldwin's "Going to Meet the Man," portrays the inclusion of the female in lynching. Women often prepared elegant meals for their entire families for these occasions.

[50] NAACP Anti-Lynching Files, Reel 8/811-818. Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy", 303; Deposition of H.A. Bryan, NAACP Anti-Lynching Files, Reel 8/861. Although Bryan's accounts of the lynching were validated by the NAACP, other portions of his deposition were questioned. Bryan claimed that Johnson was lynched so the local white community could steal the family's land, and he concluded by alleging that some whites were punished for the crime. Neither of these findings were substantiated by the local authorities, the NAACP, or the press.

[51] *Chicago Defender*, March 22, 1919, reprinted as part of NAACP Anti-Lynching File, Reel 8/807. The *Chicago Defender* also argued that Johnson and the alleged victim were lovers.

[52] Ibid.

been quiet today."[53] In the days that followed the *Birmingham News* completely avoided the topics and instead chose to print a scathing report on how the state of Alabama disregarded civil rights with regard to search and seizures of alcohol in the area.[54] Others, however, were not so quick to disregard the lynching as private citizens, the NAACP, and even other southern states wanted Florida to repudiate its vigilante ways. Florida had an infamous record regarding lynching, lynching more blacks than any other state in proportion to its black population.[55] Statistically, over one quarter of all blacks lynched in Florida, from 1889 to 1919, shared the charges against Johnson of rape or attempted rape.[56]

A rare voice of concern emerged from the southern state of Tennessee as an editorial from the *Nashville Banner* criticized Florida's record on race relations and its continued support of the lynching machine:

> The constitution of all civilized states and countries, that of Florida included, provides against "cruel and inhuman punishment" for crime, and this Florida mob overthrew not only the constitution, but all principles of advanced civilization and returned to savage practice when they burned this prisoner taken from the custody of the law.
>
> The South must, for its own good, for the reputation of its people and the place it desire to occupy among the progressive and advanced civilization of the earth, stop this barbarous practice of lynching Negroes and show its capacity for enforcing its own laws.
>
> The lynchings with savage accompaniments are classed as simple atrocities in Europe and other parts of the world where they are reported. The people who commit them are looked on as we do Turks and Kurds. The intelligence of the South should awaken to this fact and cultivate a sentiment that will condemn mob violence for any course, and that will insist on the strong and just enforcement of the law.[57]

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[53] *Birmingham News*, March 14, 1919.
[54] *Birmingham News*, March 16, 1919.
[55] Robert P. Ingalls, "Lynching and Establishing Violence in Tampa, 1858-1935." *Journal of Southern History* 33. (November 1989), 613.
[56] NAACP, *Thirty Years of Lynching in U.S. 1889-1918*. (New York: Negro University Press, 1919), 53-56.
[57] *Nashville Banner*, March 15, 1919, reprinted in files of the NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 8/810.

Additionally, the *Baltimore Daily Herald* printed private citizen Dr. W.A. Byrd's Letter to the Editor denouncing Florida as well as Florida Governor Sidney J. Catts:

> The lie so often sent forth that colored men are lynched in the south to avenge wrongs against white women, has long since been exploded. The governor of Florida knows that he is dishonest and is trying to justify a state of barbarism in the south that such man as he and the lynchers have brought on.
>
> The federal government has winked at the atrocities of the south for fifty years and under this national sanction the south has become a section of disgrace to American civilization.
>
> Every lynching in Florida and every other state in America, is proof positive that America is unfit to form a League that will govern the world when it is powerless to govern civilly its own country.[58]

Byrd demanded that safety must come to black men and women in the South, and the practice of lynching should be eliminated. Byrd concluded that if the state government would not intervene that the U.S. military should be called in for protection, or average blacks should protect their own:

> …[even] if every soldier in the American Army has to be placed there as the Allies are now policing Germany. The white race in America should veil their faces as the barbarous conditions of the south loom up before the world and the reason for its due to a policy of America allowing the South to do as it pleases, because colored people live for the most part in this section. This second reconstruction must enthrone law and order in America and we colored people must help.[59]

The Baltimore *Daily Herald* and the *Nashville Banner* were not alone during this time as other southerners also criticized the practice of lynching. A movement began in El Paso, Texas, that called for an amendment to the state constitution to debar "any lyncher from holding any public office of honor, trust or profit."[60] Also in Texas, the

[58] *Baltimore Daily Herald*, April 9, 1919, reprinted in the NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 8/817.
[59] Ibid.
[60] *Afro-American*, March 7, 1919.

Houston Post stated that the time had come to take the authority over lynching out of the state's hands:

> …the half-century old lynching problem is about to pass from the jurisdiction of State authority into the domain of Federal action. Surely, in the light of a half century of lynching, in which the victims have numbered thousands, the failure of the States must be confessed….Federal action would be less hampered in dealing with the peculiar difficulties surrounding mob violence than the State processes have been.[61]

The NAACP echoed the sentiment of editors and private citizens when Secretary John Shillady challenged Florida's inability to protect its citizens. Shillady sent a telegram to Governor Catts that asked for his understanding of the episode. The NAACP demanded that criminal charges be filed against those who lynched Johnson. Eventually Governor Catts issued a formal response that not only sided with the mob but labeled Johnson's race as being the cause of those situations in which whites took matters into their own hands:

> I was called up at midnight and told about the crime committed by this man and had him carried to Pensacola and put in jail there; next morning the sheriff of Pensacola called me up and stated he was not safe there and I ordered him taken to Montgomery and sent down to Jacksonville for safe keeping, but Sheriff Harvell was overtaken and the man punished by death at the hands of an infuriated mob from Santa Rosa county.
>
> You ask me to see that these lynchers are brought to trial. This would be impossible to do as conditions are now in Florida, for when a negro brute, or a white man, ravishes a white woman in the state of Florida, there is no use having the people, who see this man meets death, brought to trial, even if you could find who they are; the citizenship will not stand for it.
>
> Your race is always harping on the disgrace it brings to the state, by a concourse of white people taking revenge for the dishonoring of a white woman, when if you would spend one-half the time that you do, in giving

[61] *Houston Post*, quoted in *New York Times*, March 9, 1919.

> maudlin sympathy, to teaching your people not to kill our white women, you would keep down a thousand times greater disgrace.
>
> I have tried to be fair to your people at all time but I do not believe in such maudlin sentiment as this. If any man, white or black, should dishonor one of my family he would meet my pistol square from the shoulder, and every white man in this south, who is a red-blooded American, feels the same as I do.[62]

Governor Catts had chosen to respond with great emotion and seized the opportunity to appeal to white constituents and potential white voters under the guise of white supremacy. But the Governor's sentiments were more than just political posturing as it was no secret that many white politicians advocated violence and Catts had personally been linked to at least one murder in Alabama before moving to Florida.[63]

Shillady, the NAACP officer, immediately responded to Catts and then chose to publish the entire correspondence in numerous papers across the United States. He began by addressing Harvell's incompetence:

> Do you not think that when you ordered the sheriff of Pensacola to take his prisoner to Montgomery in order to have him sent down to Jacksonville for safe keeping, Sheriff Harvell should have known, as an experienced and responsible officer of the state, the mind of the citizenship of whom you speak in your letter and would have been prepared with sufficient officers to protect any prisoner at the hands of the mob, no matter how infuriated? [64]

While the NAACP did not completely rule out Johnson's own culpability they stated that all citizens were entitled to a fair trial and that the greater crime was Catts' indifference to the situation and the state's inability to ensure justice to all:

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[62] Letter to NAACP from Governor Sidney J. Catts, March 18, 1919, NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 8/818.

[63] Allen Morris, *The Florida Handbook*. (Tallahassee: Peninsular Publishing Company, 1987), 309. Morris claims that Catts shot to death a black man in Alabama before moving to Florida.

[64] Response from Shillady to Catts, March 28, 1919, NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers Reel 8/818. Press release by NAACP April 10: Reprinted in *Key West Citizen* and *Detroit Leader*, among others on April 16, 1919.

> You speak a good deal about the horror of the crime. We think the crime is horrible, but we insist, as we believe all right-minded citizens of the United States are coming more and more to insist that it is a greater crime for the governor of a state or the sheriff of a county to stand by and see the laws made by the people ignored or flouted.[65]

Shillady concluded his indictment by criticizing Florida's public education system as well as pointing out Catts' own ignorance:

> You suggest "that our association spend time reaching wanton, reckless negroes. May I remark that as governor of the state you yourself take up the task of providing proportionate school facilities for the education of negroes in your state.
>
> …the relative per capita expenditures in Florida are…teaching white children, $11.50, and for the colored children $2.64.
>
> Incidentally, though it is not a point of importance, may I remark that I do not happen to be a negro myself, as you seem to assume throughout your letter.[66]

Governor Catts did not respond again, but the black citizens of Santa Rosa responded in their own way when they used democracy to attempt to prosecute white members who attacked one of their own. On July 9, in Pensacola, whites dragged Miss Rosebud Spann, a "young colored woman" from her buggy and attacked her in the woods. No lynching followed, but the "colored community" issued a reward of 250 dollars if it led to the arrest and conviction of her assailants.[67]

Private citizens and the NAACP argued that the government should provide for the safety of both black citizens as well as black soldiers. The connection to the military, either by uniform or reputation, had led to two murders in the South. While the U.S. Army was not willing to intervene on behalf of its soldiers, it did issue a new policy with regard to the wearing of the uniform by discharged soldiers. Although race was not mentioned in the statement, the military began to advocate that discharged soldiers not

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] *Crisis*, October 1919, 309. The *Crisis* did not provide specifics regarding the attack.

wear their uniforms after separation. The popular soldier publication *Trench and Camp* informed its readers of these new policies under Section 125 of the National Defense Act:

> The general impression that a soldier is entitled to wear his uniform for three months after discharge from service has been dissipated by a ruling from the Department of Judge Advocate, who holds that officers should discard their uniforms immediately, when possible, but enlisted men have a certain leeway in which to return to civilian garb….What shall constitute reasonable time must depend up on the facts in each case….
>
> In no event should more time be allowed, however, than will be required for an officer to close up his business or relations with the Government and return to his home. If he is able to provide himself with civilian clothes at the place of discharge or dismissal it would be his duty to do so, and a proper appreciation of the properties involved would make such actions mandatory on his part.
>
> If not able to provide himself with civilian clothes at the place of discharge or dismissal, he should be allowed to wear his uniform until he reaches his home if he proceeds to return there without delay, when the uniform should at once be removed.
>
> There is no authority for the suggestion that the right to wear the uniform might, in certain cases, continue for a period of three months after discharge or dismissal.[68]

While it is unclear whom Section 125 was attempting to protect, clearly, the military was willing to augment and amend its own policies during the time, if they chose.[69]

By the Spring of 1919, despite the fact that two black veterans had been lynched, many Southerners argued that race relations were improving south of the Mason Dixon line. Even as the *Chicago Defender* ran an announcement "alerting" black veterans that

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[68] *Trench and Camp*, March 17, 1919, no.24, 3.

[69] Many in the government claimed that the changes were made to prevent discharged soldiers, as well as grifters and "Con men," from exploiting the uniform for military gain; *New York Times*, March 18, 1919, p.10.

they might be disrobed by white mobs in Southern railroad stations, a Southern educator wrote to the *New York Times* exclaiming how peace had once again found the South.[70]

Virginia native, James H. Dillard proudly presented a different side of the South. Dillard stated that he had just finished touring the Deep South for three weeks; and after visiting such noted cities as Montgomery, Selma, Jackson, and Memphis, he reported that despite isolated incidents both races informed him that things were improving:

> The white people and colored people are evidently thriving pretty well….People in the South know that the race problem is there; know from time to time, in this place or that, some feel or feels of one race or the other will act according to their folly and make trouble.[71]

Dillard admitted that in a few cases blacks had made some complaints against accommodations, but for the most part the two races were living harmoniously. One progressive white farmer stated that after blacks had helped in the war, no one should object to the race achieving the right to vote. Dillard confessed that blacks were making huge strides in the classroom as well as the workplace, and he reflected upon the legacy of Booker T. Washington as he concluded: "when we consider the unwise things that have been done the relation between the races was surprisingly good. I think he [Booker T. Washington] would say this even more emphatically were he living today."[72]

Dillard's letter of hope could not have been ideologically further from the climate of hate in Mississippi. Dillard's white informant remained nameless, but one infamous individual known to all was James K. Vardaman. It was Vardaman, who instructed his readers to use force, if necessary, to maintain white supremacy in the South. In the spring of 1919, Vardaman continued to unleash his rhetoric that described a world where pompous black soldiers demanded equal rights and social interaction between the races would, according to the ex-Senator, surely lead to rape. Vardaman argued that lynching was the only solution:

> Lynching is horrible—in fact…but there are some instances where nothing else will take its place. Lynching will continue as long as rapes, and foul

[70] *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1919; and *New York Times*, April 13, 1919.
[71] Letter to the Editor from James H. Dillard, from Charlottesville, Virginia. *New York Times*, April 13, 1919.
[72] Ibid.

> murder is committed by negro brutes. I may be somewhat pessimistic, but I look for more of it in the immediate future than we have ever had in the recent past in the Southern States. Negroes are demanding social and political privileges which, prior to the war, they were apparently content to do without. A few days ago a Pullman palace car out of Washington, DC, passed through Jackson with four negro (sic) soldiers occupying the car with white people. The Blacks were placed in sleeping cars with white women…above the white women, without the consent of the white women.[73]

The next lynching of a soldier occurred in Pickens, Mississippi. In early May, a soldier and an anonymous woman were both murdered for merely writing an "insulting" note to a white woman.[74]

Lynching in Mississippi and the role of James K. Vardaman

A black soldier in uniform and his unnamed black accomplice were both found hanged on the outskirts of Pickens after the soldier allegedly paid the woman twelve dollars to write a note for him. While the name of the intended recipient of this "insulting" letter was never released, her race was surely white, and that was enough to send the lynching machine into action. Even the exact location and date is unknown as only a local horse trader reported seeing the gruesome site on his way into the city limits of Pickens. When no bodies were ever discovered, local citizens claimed that no lynching had even occurred. But upon closer scrutiny, evidence substantiates the story. The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* investigated the lynching in their expose entitled "Pickens Produces Lynching Mystery."[75] W.E. Leach, the acting town Marshall, reported that he had heard all about the "note episode," and validated the story. Leach also asserted that a "negro, about 25 years old," had been arrested and put in the

[73] *Vardaman's Weekly*, April 24, 1919.
[74] *Crisis*, February 1920, 183-186; Crisi,s February 1920, 183-186; *New York Telegram*, May 9, 1919; *Shreveport Times,* May 9*,* 1919.
[75] *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, May 9-10, 1919; *Crisis*, February 1920, 183-186; *NY Telegram*, May 9, 1919

"calaboose" about dark, but his accomplice had not been taken into custody. The *Commercial Appeal* printed the rest of Marshall Leach's testimony:

> Along about 1 o'clock a gang of fellows came up and told me that they wanted this prisoner….They said that they wanted this fellow. So, after they got the keys they took him and went off south and that's the last I've heard of it, I guess he got clear away. A couple of days after a horse trader came to town and said he heard a Pickens negro had been hung down in the 'swamp near the railroad, and some folks from town rode down through there to see what they could learn. But they didn't find anything. No, I haven't heard of any lynching.[76]

The Marshall's testimony is suspect at best, and although the Memphis newspaper ruled the case a mystery, the facts state otherwise. Despite the passive voice in the phrase "they got the keys" and when Leach claimed "they took" the soldier, in fact, he was the one handing the man to the mob who lynched him. Only when the culprits, or loved ones, moved the bodies, did the Marshall claim that nothing happened.

Despite denials, inconsistencies and a general deficiency of details, the Pickens' affair created a firestorm of attention and debate. Local southern newspapers criticized the murders and called for attention; but again, as in Florida, the state government not only condoned the lynching but celebrated it.

The *New Orleans Item* questioned the severity, if any, of the soldier's alleged crime stating "the most the victim was guilty of, if he was guilty, was writing an insulting note."[77] But to the reactionary lynch mob that was enough to merit murder. Vardaman immediately challenged the *New Orleans Item's* stance on the crime in his own article, "The only Remedy is the Rope," in which, he defended the murderers and advocated that any other "decent" men would do the same:

> What else would a decent white man do to an infernal black scoundrel who was guilty of writing an insulting note to his wife or daughter but kill him? Would the Item be satisfied with simply hitting the brute with his visiting card…or would the Item advise a suit for damages? I am opposed

[76] Ibid.
[77] *Vardaman's Weekly*, May 8, 1919. The contents of the note were never made available to the public. To the white supremacist, any correspondence from a black male to a white woman would be an insult.

> to mob law, but I am more opposed to negroes "writing insulting notes" and committing rape on white women.
>
> It's unfortunate that the situation calls for such a remedy, but there is nothing as good for the rapist as a rope…
>
> We have no right to complain of bolshevism or anarchism or socialism, bomb throwing or any other acts of lawlessness, as long as these plutocratic gentlemen are permitted to go unwhipped of justice.[78]

No rape had ever even been alleged in the Pickens situation, but in Vardaman's ideology, rape could not be divorced from the equation. Even attempted social interaction between the soldier and a white woman was tantamount to rape in Vardman's view. The writing of the note encouraged confidence and to Vardaman's interpretation, pride inevitably led to rape.

When the *Vicksburg Herald* condemned lynching and any one who supported these acts, Vardaman scolded the editor as simply being an "unscrupulous enemy" of Mississippi and went on the defensive. Vardaman contested that he was the only true friend to the black man:

> I am going to do in the future as I have always done in the past—the things I believe to be in the interest of the people of Mississippi. I love America, her history and traditions, but I love Mississippi more.
>
> I am not an enemy of the negro. The fact is, as I have said many times before, I am the best friend he has. I would save him from the inevitable wrath to come.[79]

Vardaman then felt compelled to elaborate on the Pickens situation, but this time he asserted that affection from French prostitutes fueled the arrogance of the black soldier:

> Near Pickens, Miss., about a week ago a negro boy " who had seen service overseas" and enjoyed the lascivious embraces of the French prostitutes, wrote or procured a negro woman to write an insulting note to a refined young white woman of that community. As usual, the good white men of the Pickens neighborhood went forth with rope and guns in hand and

[78] *Vardaman's Weekly*, May 8, 1919.
[79] *Vardman's Weekly*, May 15, 1919.

> dispatched the aforesaid negro soldier and his accomplice to that distant country from whose bourne no rapist has ever returned to write "insulting notes" or preach social equality. The remedy is horrible but what else can we do?[80]

Only days later in New York Colonel William Hayward, who led the Harlem "Hell Fighters" in France, registered his anger after hearing of the lynching in Pickens: "If that report is true all the Huns are not in Germany by any means, and the quicker we get rid of those here the better off we will be."[81] While addressing the members of the Republican Country Committee in New York, Colonel Hayward addressed the current "ingratitude" towards his fighters at home when he stated: "The thought occurred to me…that in view of the sacrifices the negro soldiers made in this war to make the world safe for democracy it might not be a bad idea to make the United States safe for democracy."[82] Hayward concluded that the United States could learn from the French people who "thought more of whether a man's heart was white or black than they did as to his skin."[83]

The *Chicago Defender* also criticized the mentality of the average white Mississippian and pointed to the irony and inconsistencies of the fear of men like Vardaman, who feared miscegenation:

> Isn't it pathetic to note how this same nine-tenths of the population endeavor by law and otherwise to keep their women from falling prey to the wiles of the black man? Are we to infer they [white women] have not the strength of character to care for themselves, are they weak minded, or do they find charms in the black man they do not find in the white man? And what of the colored girl, should we not pass laws to keep the white man from using her as his prey? Inconsistency, thou art a jewel![84]

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[80] Ibid.
[81] *New York Evening Sun*, May 18, 1919.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] *Vardaman's Weekly*, May 22, 1919. Ironically, in the same edition Vardaman ran the story entitled "Let Us Take Care of Returning Soldiers," which the editor stated that it was all right to express love and courtesies to returning soldiers, and then proposed extra pay for returning soldiers, resumably, if they were white.

An outraged Vardaman decided to reprint the *Defender's* stance that insulted white women and mockingly challenged the sexuality of the white male. The *Defender* had provided the perfect ammunition that Vardaman needed to prove his theory on race consciousness and rape. The *Defender's* tone was defiant, if not cocky, and to Vardaman symbolized the returning veteran entering a society where equality could lead to an attack on whiteness. On the very same page, *Vardman's Weekly* published numerous accounts of when white women were said to have been raped by "Negro Brutes." The paper called for surveillance and violence: "This difficulty cannot be met by mere moral suasion. The brute is never amenable to such influence alone. Take no chances. But be on the alert all the time."[85] *Vardaman's Weekl*y illuminated all of the necessary factors that led to a lynching: returning soldiers, black pride, miscegenation, rape, white patrols and violence.

For Vardaman, it was not solely the black race that should be blamed; a sympathetic white society that often misled blacks with false hopes of equality should also share the blame, as seen in his article "More Race Troubles":

> When the writer called attention in 1917 to the dangers involved in teaching the negro the science of war and the use of fire arms, I was speaking from a knowledge of history and familiarity with the race and the peculiarities of the negro.
>
> God Almighty in his infinite wisdom never intended that the negro should share sovereignty and dominion in the white man's country.
>
> Why not give the negro to understand what he may expect? Why not handle the matter as it should be handled? Do it now and forever?
>
> You may have made foolish speeches during the war to the negroes in order to induce them to buy bonds, thereby protecting the profiteers from just taxation, but you cannot afford to continue that sort of conduct. In the language of a great editor in dealing with this question: "He who dallies is a dastard, and he who doubts is damned."[86]

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[85] *Vardaman's Weekly*. May 22, 1919.

[86] Ibid. The article was followed by the captions "Shook With Nervousness," and "A Lady Was Flat on Her Back," and although this was merely and advertisement for a blood strengthener, it begs the question, was this merely coincidental irony or careful placement?

After an entire month of debate and open defiance from white supremacists, Secretary Shillady wrote to Governor Theodore G. Bilbo to take action on the matter or at least investigate the case.[87] The request was in vain as Bilbo never responded to the NAACP's letter.

The current Governor refused to enter the discussion on lynching, but former Governor Andrew Longino advocated for the rights of the victim's family following a lynching. *Vardaman's Weekly* ran a full page dissent of Longino's shocking proposal that individual counties in Mississippi compensate the victim's family.[88] If this proposition had gone into effect it would have helped hundreds of individuals including the family of Robert Truett, a discharged soldier, who was lynched for allegedly greeting a white woman with "indecent proposals."[89]

On July 15, 1919, Robert Truett, recently discharged from the army, was lynched at Louise, Mississippi. A large group of men seized Truett, who was only eighteen, after he allegedly insulted a married white woman, after supposedly forcing his way into her bedroom.[90] It is unclear as to the relationship between Truett and his accuser, but surprisingly the community refrained from calling the incident an attempted rape. Local law enforcements avoided using specific terms such as trespassing or breaking and entering. It is possible, if not probable, that the two had a consensual relationship and only when the accuser's husband, or some other party known to her, entered the home did an accusation take place. Sheriff O.G. Turner verified that he found Truett's lifeless body hanging from a local bridge. Turner admitted that no arrests were made, but attempted to minimize the idea that Truett was a discharged soldier. Turner denied that Truett was a soldier, asserting that the only evidence that validated Truett's claim was another black soldier stated that he had just returned from the military with his friend Robert Truett.[91]

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[87] NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 13/1048.
[88] *Vardaman's Weekly*, June 5, 1919. Longino and Vardaman had been political enemies since Longino was governor at the turn of the century. Longino earned the wrath of many Democrats after he hunted with then President Theodore Roosevelt.
[89] *Shreveport Times*, July 17, 1919 reported in the NAACP Anti-Lynching files, Reel 13/1011; *The Advertiser*, Montgomery, Ala. July 18, 1919; *Crisis* February 1920, 183-186.
[90] *The Advertiser*, Montgomery, Ala. July 18, 1919.
[91] Ibid.

Neither the local press nor the NAACP responded strongly to the Truett lynching, and as the nation turned its attention to the Chicago race riots, Robert Truett's story became marginalized by mass arrests and violence grabbing the headlines. Violence erupted in Chicago's Black Belt district after whites stoned a local teen, only years younger than Truett, after he swam into the white section of a segregated public beach. When officers refused to arrest the white suspects, blacks demanded justice and openly, and even physically, expressed their anger. Any members of the opposing race found on the streets were left to the mercy of the mob. Such was the unfortunate case for Frederick Smith, a twenty three year old black Chicago native, recently discharged from the Canadian army. Non-commissioned officers in the area rescued Smith after he sustained a vicious beating at the hands and clubs of his assailants. Although bloody, he had survived the ordeal after his rescuers took him to the Clark street medical facility to address and treat his injuries. En route, he shouted to a passing reporter: "I don't see why they wanted to bother me, a fellow like me…I did all I could to help make this old country safe for just men as these. I call this a pretty poor welcome home."[92] Compared to Charles Lewis, Bud Johnson, and Robert Truett he was lucky.

The riots left over thirty dead, hundreds maimed, and countless homeless, but the riots also gave the South, and specifically Mississippi, an accomplice with regard to crimes against blacks. Mississippians reminded blacks that race violence was prevalent across the United States, and in many sections it was allegedly worse. One citizen wrote to the *Jackson Daily News* stating that the North was not the racial paradise portrayed by the NAACP:

> And now, the trouble is apparently about to reach a crisis in Chicago, it is to be hoped that it will receive proper attention from the American Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the other negrophiles of the nation; that they will vent some of the spleen that has been directed at the South on the people of the Windy City. In the meantime, the decent, hard-working, law-abiding Mississippi negroes who were lured to Chicago by the bait of higher wages, only to lose their jobs, or forced to accept lower pay after the labor shortage became less acute,

[92] *Afro-American*, August 15, 1919.

> are hereby notified that they will be welcomed back home and find their old positions awaiting them. Mississippi may lynch a negro occasionally when he commits the most heinous of all crimes, but we do not blow up the innocent with bombs, or explode sticks of dynamite on their doorsteps.[93]

Aside from misidentifying the NAACP, the writer failed to deduce when "the most heinous of crimes" dwindled into the area of written and verbal insults.

The writer declined to comment when the next lynching occurred in Clarksdale, Mississippi. White supremacists charged L.B. Reed with "intimacy with a white woman." On September 10, 1919, ex-soldier L.B. Reed suffered the same fate as Robert Truett, as he too was found at the end of a rope under a local Mississippi bridge.[94]

The Mississippi River Delta was no stranger to vigilante justice as hundreds of victims had found the same fate as Reed. Historian Christopher Capozzola described the Delta as a region "where patient appeals to law and fairness were ignored by white listeners." Apparently, the white citizens' patience ceased when rumors spread that Reed engaged in a consensual relationship with a local white woman.[95] Though rape, or even attempted rape, was never an issue, Reed's demise was imminent.

Formal charges were never brought against any one in connection with Reed's murder; one month later a former white soldier wrote to the *Memphis Commercial Appeal,* unveiling the sentiment of those who murdered Reed. Former Major T.G. Dabney from Clarksdale, Mississippi, stated that he held no sympathy for Reed, or anyone lynched, but warned that if the Negro would quit committing crimes, lynching would stop.[96] The former Major believed that the crimes committed by blacks were based on their inherent biology, as they were predisposed to barbarity and not even their commitment to the war would help:

> Nature consumed some millions of years in developing the negro into what he is; it is vain to suppose that in a few generations nature's work

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[93] William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Antheneum, 1970), 25-29; *Jackson Daily News*, July 29, 1919, reprinted in *Crisis*, July 1919, 155.
[94] *Crisis* December 1919, 82.
[95] Capozzola, "The Only Badge Neded is Your Patriotic Fervor,"1376; *New York Age*, October 4, 1919; William, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 302.
[96] *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, August 23, 1919, reprinted in *Vardaman's Weekly*, August 28, 1919.

> can be undone and an entirely different product be created by white man's laws.[97]

Dabney concluded his letter by denying that black soldiers had contributed anything to the war effort while he was in France as he stated:

> While demands have been made that the negroes shall receive consideration for their military services in the great war, there has been a noticeable absence of specific reference to their military achievements.[98]

Dabney's opinion of black soldiers was not unique, as even Mississippi's Senator, John Sharp Williams denied that black soldiers had fought well:

> I never expected them to do any great service, and I rather pitied than blamed them when I found out they had not. The whole thing after all was a "white man's fight" in which the negro was not interested. If I had had my way, I would not have had a negro soldier in the entire army except behind the lines in transport and communication service….[99]

Major Dabney and Senator Williams created an ironic scenario. Black soldiers were being lynched in the south as potential warriors; their deeds of the battlefield were being dismissed as nothing more than trumped up fallacies and false braggadocio from black soldiers. While it was fear that labeled black soldiers as both cowards and villains, hate created the lynch mob.

The Lynch Mob moves to Arkansas

Little Rock, Arkansas, was not only known for its Capitol but also as the state center for white supremacy in the post war era. Seventy-eight hundred of Arkansas's twenty-five thousand Klan members resided in Little Rock and pledged allegiance to Little Rock Klan No. 1. Under the control of their "Exalted Cyclops" James Al Corner, the chapter managed to infiltrate the city government of Little Rock, as well as Pulaski

[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid. Vardaman was happy to hear of Dabney's conversion, but stated that he needed more men like Dabney in 1917, when he was defeated for the Senate.
[99] Ellis, *Race, War and Surveillance*, 216.

County. But its influence did not stop there as racism found its way behind the military walls of Little Rock's base, Camp Pike.[100]

In April 1919, a wounded soldier complained to the *New York Age* of how he was mistreated, insulted and physically threatened in both the capital of Little Rock as well as Camp Pike. In an anonymous letter, the veteran described being refused food by the Red Cross, insulted by white nurses and constantly berated by white soldiers. During one threatening episode, a more vocal white soldier pointed to the black soldier's uniform and remarked, "I guess he will be one of these oversea negroes we will have to kill."[101]

The anonymous soldier lived to tell his tale of deprecation, but the fear of violence from the community, as well as from white officers and soldiers, was a constant for the 2,854 black soldiers stationed at Camp Pike.[102] Two soldiers who were not as fortunate as the writer to the *New York Age* were Frank Livingston and Clinton Briggs. Both were lynched after they were discharged from Camp Pike to re-entered society as civilians in Arkansas.

Frank Livingston, left Little Rock to begin his new life in his native home of Union County, Arkansas. Livingston was born in Union County on November 1, 1892. Born and raised in Shuler, Livingston migrated ten miles to the South to work as a farm hand in Wesson.[103] On June 15, 1917, when he registered for the U.S. Army, he asserted that he was not a sharecropper like so many of his acquaintances but an employer for local farmers in the area.[104] For the next two years he was stationed at Camp Pike. After avoiding a trek to Europe and leaving the racism of Little Rock, Livingston returned home. Tragically, it was not the German army but his own neighbors who murdered this returning soldier.

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[100] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*: 1915-1930, 83. With regards to Camp Pike's early racial problems see the case of Captain Rowan in Chapter 1.

[101] *New York Age*, April 5, 1919; see also Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces 9A, Reel 23/231. Altercations between soldiers were not rare and even led to murder. In one instance, a Corporal Duff shot and killed Fred Douglas Kelly on January 20, 1919. The Corporal was outraged when Kelly, a black soldier, was proud enough to wear his Gold and Silver Service Chevron medals. Also see the case of Frank Dickason (Chapter 3) who eagerly waited his return to join the Klan and kill black soldiers.

[102] Letter to Mr. Scott, Special assistant to the secretary of War from P.C. Harris the Adjutant General, January 11, 1919, Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reel 1/160.

[103] Ancestry.com. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-18 [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2002. National Archives and Records Administration. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918. M1509, 4,277 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

[104] Ibid.

Having no family of his own, the twenty-six year-old Livingston returned to the life he knew and went to work on the property of a white farmer, Robinson Clay. Tuesday, May 20, began as any other day on the farm. Johnson did his daily chores and was about to retire for the day when a lively discussion with his employer over the livestock turned violent.[105] Although no one witnessed the fight nor the actions that led to the deaths of both Clay and his wife, Livingston was the reasonable suspect in the double homicide. Only when neighbors saw Clay's home on fire did a pursuit of the employee, Livingston, take place.

Local police claimed that Livingston set arson to the farmhouse in an attempt to hide his crime after brutally murdering Robinson Clay with an axe and then used the butt end of a rifle to bludgeon to death the farmer's wife, who had presumably come to the aid of her fallen husband.[106] Hours later, the group, now even larger, found their short and stocky suspect hiding in a nearby home.[107] Sometime between midnight and the early morning, a tired and beaten Livingston confessed to the mob's accusations. The mob then entered the woody countryside to begin their lynching. Hours later Sheriff Craig and a small posse, followed into the rural area South of Wesson.

By noon of Wednesday, May 21, a group of over one hundred and fifty whites and blacks congregated in a cleared area to lynch Frank Livingston. Burning alive was the elected method of murder agreed on that day, as well as the similar fate of ten other black men that year, including two other soldiers. According to later reports, the sheriff and his posse arrived only minutes after Livingston perished to the flames.[108]

While Livingston's case seems to indicate more criminal evidence than other cases of lynching, some inconsistencies and questions remained. For instance, the police reported that Livingston axed to death Clay and then bludgeoned the farmer's wife with a

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[105] Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 297.
[106] *Shreveport Journal*, May 22, 1919, reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 8/305.
[107] Ancestry.com. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-18 [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2002. National Archives and Records Administration. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918. M1509, 4,277 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. Livingston was physically described as short and stout.
[108] *Crisis*, March 1920, 243. Fourteen victims were eventually burned at the stake, eleven of which were still alive. *New York Post*, May 23, 1919, reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers Reel 08/306; *Shreveport Journal*, May 22, 1919, reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 8;305; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 22, 1919, reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers: Reel 8/307; Crisi,s February 1920, 183-186; *Arkansas Gazette*, May 22,-25 1919. Frank Livingston joined Bud Johnson and Lucius McCarty of Louisiana, as all three ex-soldiers perished to emoliation.

rifle butt, but how did they verify these conditions, especially after both bodies were damaged by the fire? Furthermore, why did the killer, or killers, choose to change their methodology for the second victim? If they possessed a rifle, why not simply shoot the wife? Perhaps the details were fabricated to create a more sinister crime where a shot was never fired; rather mindless savagery took the lives of the two white victims.

The second uncertainty relates to the role that the black community had in the lynching. How many blacks were present at the lynching? What was their role and how did they feel to watch anyone, especially another black citizen, burned alive? Was it an interracial lynching, or were blacks forced to be present? Blacks were often forced to watch a lynching, and in some cases, forced to assist in the apprehension and murdering of members of their own race.

Other questions arose as well. For instance, under what condition did Livingston confess? What was the role of the local law enforcement and what action, if any, did Governor Charles Hillman Brough take on the issue? The northern newspaper, *The Sentinel*, of Ansonia, Connecticut, wanted all of these questions answered. Even though *The Sentinel* questioned Livingston's innocence, they requested that the people of Arkansas use the justice system to punish these crimes:

> Perhaps this Negro was guilty of the double murder. However, we all know that "confessions" alleged in the dispatches telling of such crimes, may be extorted by means of torture, or fabricated to serve as an excuse for the crime. If he was guilty, where was the penalty of the law for him. The question of his guilt has nothing to do with the case….The arriving too late of the sheriff, or his inability to check the mob, is the rule in such cases. For that, surely the sheriff cannot offer excuse. The plain fact is that the sheriff made himself an accessory to the crime, after the fact at least. Will Governor Brough, of Arkansas, act? Presumably he has power to remove the sheriff for failure to perform duty. As long as lynchers go unpunished, and officers of the law who protect them are immune from consequences which they ought to be made to suffer there will not be an end of such disgrace to the United States.[109]

[109] *Ansonia Sentinel* May 22, 1919; NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 8/309.

The NAACP also wanted a formal inquiry into the lynching and began to rally their organization. On May 22, while Walter White was on business in Cincinnati, Ohio, he had the horror of reading about the Livingston lynching in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. White immediately sent a telegram to Robert Reed Church, the Secretary of the Memphis Branch of the NAACP. White equated the lynching to the infamous killing of Lloyd Clay at Vicksburg and requested that local chapters send individuals into the region to investigate.[110] Realizing the gravity of the situation, Church contacted the national NAACP headquarters and informed John Shillady of the events.[111] Although, Shillady was still in New York, he agreed that investigators should be used and offered his own assistance. Later that evening, from his Fifth Avenue office, Shillady penned a letter requesting that Governor Brough use his power to deter these events. Shillady's request was a reminder of the governor's oath to protect "all" Arkansas citizens and at least a formal condemnation might curtail future violence from mob rule:

> National Association for Advancement of Colored People, speaking in behalf of its two hundred ten branches and fifty-four thousand members of both races in thirty-nine states, respectfully requests information concerning steps being taken or proposed by Arkansas authorities to deal with lynchers of Frank Livingston, Negro, recently discharged from United States Army who, according to press dispatches, was tied to a tree and burned to death by mob near Eldorado, Arkansas….Press dispatches state that Sheriff Craig of Union County arrived a few minutes too late to prevent the lynching but that no arrests were made.
>
> This is the second lynching to occur in your state within thirty days, in both of which cases the crime charged was murder for which the laws of Arkansas provide ample punishment. May we suggest that you as a professed leader of Southern liberal opinion, as former President of the Southern Sociological Congress which ten days ago passed strong resolutions against lynching, and as former chairman of the Southern University Race Commission which also condemned lynching, have a

[110] White to R.R. Church, NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 8/298.
[111] R.R. Church to J.R. Shillady, NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 8/300.

special duty as a man no less than as Governor to proceed energetically in defense of the law of your state and in condemnation of the barbarity which is increasingly disgracing America.[112]

Shillady's plea remained unanswered and Governor Brough never took action to bring Livingston's murderers to justice. In May of 1919, Charles Hillman Brough, like Sidney J. Catts and James K. Vardaman, refused to demand justice for returning black veterans. Arkansas joined Florida and Mississippi as states that knowingly allowed their citizens to murder African American ex-soldiers.

By late summer a second veteran fell into the hands of the lynch mob when Clinton Briggs was murdered for allegedly "insulting a woman." On August 3, 1919, Clinton Briggs was lashed to a tree and shot continuously by the residents of Star City. Like Frank Livingston, Clinton Briggs had been recently discharged from Camp Pike as a decorated veteran of the U.S. Army and was enroute to his native Yorktown, Arkansas, just in time for Christmas. Upon his arrival his neighbors swelled with pride: one of their own had come home with a World War I Victory Medal and World War I Victory Lapel Button pinned to his uniform.[113] This would be Briggs's last Christmas.

Not everyone was happy to see Briggs as many whites in the community believed that a black soldier returning to the community might mean trouble. In September, Briggs had returned to sharecropping and worked on the land owned by "Mr. Alex." On September 1, Briggs went into Star City to run errands for the upcoming week. As he was walking down the sidewalk he encountered a white couple, his employee's daughter and her male companion. As he moved, only slightly, to let the girl pass she hissed "Niggers get off the sidewalk down here." Outraged at the comment, Briggs spat back that it was a free country and he would walk where he pleased. At that moment, the white male grabbed him and the two began to wrestle. After Briggs gained the upper hand he managed to get to his feet, but not before a large crowd of white men surrounded

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[112] Shillady to Governor Charles Brough, Little Rock, Ark. May 23, 1919, NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 8/300-304.

[113] *Crisis,* November 1919, 349; *Crisis* February 1920, 183-186; Kerlin, *Voice of the Negro*, 104-105; *Shreveport Journal*, September 3, 1919; *Shreveport Times,* September 3, 1919; *New York Sun,* September 4, 1919; *New York World,* September 4, 1919; *The Chicago Whip*, September 13, 1919; *Unknown Soldiers*, 177; the *Crisis* mistakenly referred to Briggs as Flinton, and many historians have continued to use the misnomer. NA FORM 13164 Clinton Briggs 3-270-871, National Archives, St.Louis, Missouri. Briggs served from June 19, 1918 to December 17, 1918 in the United States Army.

the two grapplers. It took quite a few men to seize Briggs, as he was no small individual. After a heated battle, the gang threw the ex-soldier into a vehicle and the rest of the "white hoodlums" followed in as many as four vehicles to the site of the lynching.[114]

As the automobiles arrived into the wilderness of Lincoln County, the processional stopped near Cane Creek, and as it was now night, only the car's headlights lit the surrounding area. In their haste to exit Star City, the mob failed to realize that they had no rope to hang Briggs, so they improvised and chained him to a nearby tree. After securing their prisoner, the men opened fire sending forty to fifty rounds from revolvers and rifles into the body of Clinton Briggs. Sparks flew as the bullets ripped through the chains and into the head, chest and limbs of the victim. Days later a local farmer discovered the hellish site and notified the authorities. No arrests were made and the Star City coroner merely ruled that death was caused by "gunshot wounds inflicted by unknown persons." Clinton Briggs, decorated soldier, was only twenty-six when he was buried in the local cemetery of Tarry, Arkansas.[115]

When word spread to the local black community, many expressed their desire to move North and specifically to the city of Chicago. The *Chicago Whip* reported that many black farmers either "voiced their intentions of leaving or had already left" because of the death of their fallen soldier.[116]

Lynching in Louisiana: The Lucius McCarty Incident

Louisiana has had a long history of violence and racial discontent, but it has also experienced periods when the various races disregarded their social differences and worked together. In the summer of 1919 New Orleans Bishop Wilbur Patterson Thirkield of the Methodist Episcopal Church invited citizens of all colors to come together and build a better community. The NAACP wrote to the clergyman and applauded his commitment. Secretary John R. Shillady wrote on June 17, 1919: "It has occurred to me since I last wrote you that an account of what you are doing to bring together white men

[114] *The Chicago Whip*, September 13, 1919.
[115] *Shreveport Journal*, September 3, 1919; *Shreveport Times,* September 3, 1919; *New York Sun,* September 4, 1919; and *New York World,* September 4, 1919; Service Records NA FORM 13164 Clinton Briggs 3-270-871, National Archives, St.Louis, Missouri.
[116] *The Chicago Whip*, September 13, 1919.

and colored in Conferences, industrial and otherwise might make most interesting reading…."[117]

Earlier that year, in Bogalusa, Louisiana, white and black labor organizers fought side by side against "white hoodlums" determined to keep unions, and biracial organizations out of their community. The *Messenger* summarized these efforts when three white workers in the lumber industry came to the aid of one of their black co-workers. Three men sacrificed their own lives to prevent "a mob of white hoodlums of a so-called 'loyalty league bent upon lynching him." A. Philip Randolph concluded his editorial by praising what he considered a progressive change in Louisiana:

> All hail to the white workers of Bogalusa! You are learning! You are on the right road. Your enemy is the Southern white employing class, not the Negroes. Your only weapon is the solidarity of the working class, black and white. Only class conscious, militant labor can change the South.

Unfortunately, Randolph's joy was premature as Bogalusa's racist community rose again and led the lynching of ex-soldier Lucius McCarty, who on August 31, joined Bud Johnson and Frank Livingston and was burned at the stake.[118]

August 30 was a Saturday night and Winifred Stewart had just settled down for the evening. Although her husband worked on the railroads and was away, she was not nervous and fell easily asleep. Steward claimed that at 3:30 in the morning, she awoke to a strange man whispering "hush" into her ear.[119] Unbelievably, the startled woman managed to throw her attacker off of the bed, grab her gun, and even fire a few shots at the fleeing black male. When Stewart began to scream into the night, her neighbors came to her rescue. Soon a group of men, joined by Chief of Police Magee and a number of his officers, assembled for the chase. Finally, the hunting party was ready when B.L Gant and his bloodhounds arrived from nearby Crystal Springs. The dogs began to follow the

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[117] Letter from John R. Shillady to Wilbur Patterson Thirkield, June 17, 1919, NAACP Anti-Lynching File, Reel 12/016.

[118] *Messenger*, January 1919; *Crisis,* October 1919, 309; *Crisis,* February 1920, 183-186; *Times-Picayune*, Sep 1, 1919. p.1; *Shreveport Times*, September 1, 1919; *Galveston News*, September 1, 1919; *Brooklyn Standard Union*, September 1, 1919; *New York Tribune*, September 1, 1919; *New York Times* September 1, 1919; *Mobile Register*, September 1, 1919; *Birmingham Age-Herald*, September 1, 1919; *Afro-American*, Sept 5, 1919; *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1919, reported that the lynching occurred in "Goagulsa"; the furthest account from the site, geographically, came from the Phoenix, Arizona, *Tribune,* on September 13, 1919. The *Crisis* reported that fourteen people were burned in 1919, three more than the previous year.

[119] *Afro-American*, September 5, 1919; and New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, September 1, 1919.

man's scent, after they were provided with the man's shoes (somehow in the middle of the commotion the "attacker" lost both his shoes). By 7:00 Sunday morning, the mob had made their way into Poplar Quarters, the black neighborhood of Bogalusa. Eventually, the dogs settled on one particular house which contained the recently discharged soldier Lucius McCarty, as well as six other unidentified black men. All seven suspects were taken back to the Stewart residence. [120]

Back at the scene of the crime, the police blindfolded Winifred Stewart and then forced each man to whisper "hush" into her ear. Finally, Stewart was convinced that McCarty's whisper most resembled her alleged attacker's and the mob, hell bent on revenge, was satisfied with her answer. The other six men were released and McCarty was to be taken to the city jail. But the mob was not willing to lose their prey and soon Chief Magee and his officers were "powerless" against the blood thirsty group who easily overpowered the police force.[121] As the group dragged their suspect onto the front porch and into the morning sun, a large ruckus commenced, and someone somewhere in the crowd shot and killed McCarty. The tragic gunshot proved to be a blessing in disguise as almost all of McCarty's wounds were post-mortem. At this point the real carnage began.

After numerous other men, carrying rifles and pistols emptied their weapons into McCarty's lifeless body, someone provided a length of rope. While one end was secured around the corpse, the other end was tied around the rear bumper of an automobile. The car then dragged the mob's trophy through the dusty streets as scores of bystanders cheered, chased, and followed the vehicle back to the site of the proposed burning. Hundreds of people avoided church that Sunday and instead flocked to the front yard of the Stewart residence, which now contained a large pile of pine limbs and one large stake reaching toward the heavens. The corpse was then tied to the stake and the entire community watched as it burned.[122] As with many cases of lynching, it was not until well after the massacre that additional law enforcement officers arrived. Almost one hour after the pyre was lit, Sheriff Bateman arrived from Franklinton, but no suspects were on hand as the crowd had dispersed. The *Afro-American* informed its readers of the final moments of the lynching and the miscarriage of justice:

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[120] *Times-Picayune*, Sep 1, 1919; *Shreveport Times*, September 1, 1919.
[121] Ibid.
[122] *Afro-American*, Sept 5, 1919.

> The mob had dispersed and the only sign of disorder he [Sheriff Bateman] found was the pile of hot ashes. The coroner [Dr. Brock] arrived still later and ordered buried a piece of body he found. He was unable to determine who was responsible for the lynching. The chief of police is said to have made no effort to protect the prisoner and prominent white citizens remarked the suspected man got what he deserved.[123]

No arrests in connection with the lynching were ever made; in fact, no formal investigation ever commenced. Conversely, local newspapers informed their readers of the condition of the accused "victim" Winifred Stewart and claimed that the black community supported the lynching. The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* assured its worried readers two days after the incident:

> No further trouble has occurred here since the lynching Sunday of Lucius McCarty….The black's intended victim is slowly recovering from the effects of her terrible experience. There has been no demonstration against other negroes, and the latter apparently indorse the summary punishment meted out to McCarty by the mob.[124]

Although distorted, the *Times-Picayune's* account was an anomaly as more newspapers refused to cover lynching. By the second half of 1919, lynchings were still common; yet details and support from southern newspapers on the subject was dwindling. Du Bois called specific attention to the lack of support from Georgian newspapers and the utter disregard for the law by the state officials. Du Bois claimed that President Woodrow Wilson's "denouncement" of lynching had no effect on Georgia, and in fact, was an utterly useless speech:

> It is asserted by our informants that the only apparent effect in Georgia of the President's lynching pronouncement of July 26 last has been an evidently concerted agreement on the part of the press and authorities to keep all news regarding lynchings out of the Georgia press. Lending some color to this charge is the fact that no Georgia daily has at any time since May, 1918, published any account of the investigation made by the

[123] Ibid.
[124] "Negro's Intended Victim Recovering From Shock," *Times-Picayunne* September 2.

> Association of the fact that seventeen names of mob leaders were put in the hands of Governor Dorsey, despite the considerable comments in the press of other states.[125]

Georgia proved to be especially difficult in substantiating reports of discharged soldiers lynched within its borders. While the NAACP called attention to when a veteran or ex-soldier was lynched, important details were scarce and often remained missing. The year 1919 contained some mysterious cases of lynching, a few that were hard to validate, and the rare case of Daniel Mack, who cheated death.

Discrepancies and a Lack of Information

Only occasionally, was adequate information regarding lynching available, and at times the northern press had to decipher, if not imagine, what actually occurred. Wilbur Smith, a "negro and former soldier" was shot to death near Legrand, Alabama, on March 12, 1919. Other than the name of the victim and the lone gunman, Frank Robinson, little else is known about the case.[126] Before Robinson took justice into his own hands, he accused Smith of molesting a local six year old white girl. The NAACP investigated the murder but failed to find conclusive evidence. This does not make the matter fictional but the lack of other accomplices as well as a public execution, two crucial aspects of lynching, may have played a role in the *Crisis* choosing not to mention the incident in their summary of lynching for the year 1919.

A second lynching, this time in Georgia, coincidentally involving another ex-soldier named Wilbur, was the beating of Wilbur Little. A number of northern newspapers reported that Little, recently discharged from the Army, was lynched after he wore his uniform too long after his separation from the military. The *Crisis* claimed that Little was from a prominent family in Blakely, Georgia, the site of the lynching and that white members of the community were offended as he continued to wear his "Khakis" weeks after he returned. After several anonymous death threats, Little continued to defy social consensus that he should shed his uniform. Upon one April trip into town, he was

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[125] *Crisis*, February 1919,182

[126] *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1919. *Cleveland Advocate*, March 20, 1919, reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 7/0965.

arrested for wearing his military uniform "too long," and told to strip at the police station; however, as he had no civilian clothes with him he was allowed to return to his home. Later that evening, a member of the black community found Little beaten to death, still in his uniform.[127]

One month later, the town of Blakely vehemently denied that any attack ever took place. The Editor of the *Early County Times*, wrote to the *New York Sun* and accused the paper, as well as the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* and numerous other northern publications of slander. W.W. Fleming denied any attack and demanded a retraction as the story "vilified" the city. Fleming concluded by stating: "Inasmuch as the story is absolutely untrue I would thank you to secure from your correspondent his authority for publishing this slander upon our people."[128]

Fleming's denial held enough merit that the NAACP investigators changed their original findings. On June 7, 1919, Monroe N. Work sent a Western Union telegram to Shillady that simply stated: "Have investigated report. Blakely, Georgia, lynching does not appear to have occured [sic]."[129] Work never justified why he dismissed the earlier charges. It is unknown who, if anyone, Work questioned in the Blakely incident, but after the local paper refuted the charge, Work advocated dismissing the allegations. In July, almost three months after the attack, the *Crisis* chose to run the story in full.[130] The *Crisis* postponed the report because the local white paper denied it, but eventually it agreed with the *Chicago Defender*, used local accounts from the black community and included Little's lynching in the yearly summary for 1919.[131]

One month later, Charles Kelly was lynched in Georgia for "failure to yield the road" to a white automobile driver.[132] In the weeks following the Chicago Riots, the South had been abuzz with the news of the violent nature of the North. Many white southerners stated ironically that the South was a peaceful place compared to Chicago, but many reactionaries feared that the militant nature of the blacks who fought back in

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[127] "Army Uniform Cost Soldier His Life," *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1919; *Crisis* July 1919, 155*; Crisis* February 1920, 183-186.
[128] *New York Sun*, May 28, 1919, reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 10/323.
[129] NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 10/319.
[130] *Crisis*, July 1919, 155.
[131] *Crisis*, February 1920, 183-186.
[132] *Crisis*, November 1919, 349; *Crisis* February 1920, 183-186; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*, 19-20, 278.

Illinois might migrate to the South. White Georgians specifically sought any evidence of defiance in the black communities. By mid-August two black citizens were lynched after acting in a fashion deemed arrogant or impudent. A Chicagoan visiting his family, in Cochran, Georgia, was overheard boasting that "Negroes had cleaned up in Chicago, and that they were going to do the same thing down here."[133] The prediction led to a man being seized and subsequently lynched. Only days later, Hugh Sams shot Charles Kelly.

Kelly, had served his country during the war, and had returned to his native Georgia and the city of Woolsey. August 3 was a Sunday, and it was customary for Charles to drive his father Ranse, a local Reverend, to his church to get an early start for that week's sermon. Little did Charles know, but this would be the last day he would perform this act. The day began as any other; Fayette County was predictably hot and humid as the two drove through the familiar narrow Woolsey city streets.[134] A few blocks away from Rev. Kelly's Church, the Kelly's car faced an oncoming vehicle and its white driver. As was customary in Woolsey, Charles began to turn out of the road to allow the white driver to pass, but apparently not "soon enough" to "suit" the teenager.[135] The white driver remained quiet, watched Rev. Kelly exit the automobile, and then he followed Charles to the home of Ophelia Almond. While Charles was visiting Ophelia and waiting to return to the church, the driver went home and enlisted the help of his father, Hugh Sams, as well as his siblings. Moments later, the group, stormed onto the Almond porch. The driver's father, Hugh Sams, demanded to know why Kelly did not turn out of the road sooner; then he brandished a revolver to emphasize his question. Seeing the gun, Kelly tried to flee but his escape was cut short as a bullet ripped through his back.[136] Charles Kelly never heard his father's sermon that day.

When Kelly's mother Mary and three sisters Clara, Agie, and Nellie came to the Almond residence, they were horrified to find his lifeless body lying in the yard and his murderer still on the property.[137] Although, Hugh Sams threatened the lives of the entire

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[133] Letter from George A. Towns to John R. Shillady, NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 10/551.
[134] *Atlanta Constitution*, August 4, 1919. The weather reported was humid in the Atlanta areas, in the high 80s and showers.
[135] Letter from George A. Towns to John R. Shillady, August 8, 1919, NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 10/551.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ancestry.com. *1920 United States Federal Census.* [database on-line] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2001-. Indexed by Ancestry.com from microfilmed schedules of the 1920 U.S. Federal Decennial Census.*1920*

Kelly family if any of them said anything to anybody about the murder, word managed to make it to the local chapter of the NAACP in Atlanta, Georgia. Despite the Chairperson of the Atlanta Branch, G.A. Towns, personally traveling to see Governor Hugh M. Dorsey, Sams was not arrested for the murder. Even after Governor Dorsey was "cordial," dictating a letter to the sheriff of Fayette Country and promising his support in the matter, Charles Kelly never received justice.[138]

Eleven days later, in Pope City, Georgia, another returning soldier was lynched. On August 14, 1919, a white mob hung veteran Jim Grant for allegedly shooting at Lee Gammage and Gammage's young son.[139] Witnesses claimed that Grant was coming to the aid of a friend, who the Gammages had accused of theft. While few details exist, reports state that Grant's assailants captured him in nearby Richwood while trying to leave Wilcox County by train. His captors returned Grant to the scene of the alleged shooting and in a rare case, his family was also persecuted when his father was sent for, whipped, and ordered to leave the community. A witness found Grant the next morning, hanging on a telephone pole.[140]

Georgia was not alone in cases that created more questions than they answered, and in some cases, lynching in the Peach state offered more detail and evidence than reports from North Carolina, Arkansas, and Alabama. In May, the NAACP was left with few answers regarding a supposed lynching in North Carolina. The only lead was a newspaper clipping sent to their New York offices from the District of Columbia's *The Star*.[141] The headline stated "Soldier Taken from N.C. Jail By Mob and then Lynched," but the article offered no specific details, other than that the War department refused to intervene when a soldier in uniform was lynched:

United States Federal Census. [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2001. Data imaged from National Archives and Records Administration. 1920 Federal Population Census. T625, 2,076 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

[138] Letter from George A. Towns to John R. Shillady, August 8, 1919, NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 10/551. John R. Shillady and other NAACP administrators refrained from writing Governor Dorsey, as Towns had earlier asked that they not get involved while he was personally traveling to see the Georgia Governor. This was the last entry with regards to the Kelly lynching in the NAACP Anti-Lynching files.

[139] Crisis, October 1919, 309. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 278.

[140] *Atlanta Constitution*, August 15, 1919; and *Mobile Register*, August 15, 1919. It is unclear if Gammage and his son were killed, or even injured in the shooting, as all accounts merely stated that Grant "fired" at the two.

[141] *The Star*, May 26, 1919, reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching files, Reel 15/563.

> The judge advocate general gave an opinion that the War Department had no power to aid in, the investigation of that case. He said that the fact that the discharged soldier was permitted to retain and wear his uniform subsequent to his discharge from the military service and actually was in uniform at the time of the lynching did not operate to bring his case within the jurisdiction of the military authorities.[142]

The NAACP vowed to continue to look into the lynching, but no other accounts were ever published. North Carolina never brought the lynch mob to justice, even in a state where Governor Thomas W. Bickett denounced lynching continuously and even offered rewards to private citizens who came forward in other acts of vigilante justice.[143]

North Carolina was again the center of confusion when Carl Green a local African American was shot dead by a theater owner in Franklinton, North Carolina. The Raleigh *The News and Observer* claimed he was a discharged soldier; however, no other sources can substantiate this claim. Additionally, the NAACP thoroughly investigated this murder in their Anti-Lynching files and not one of their reports validated Green's service in the military. The *News and Observer* took an active position against returning black soldiers and blamed any militant ideology in the black community on returning veterans.[144] The editor's labeling of Green as a soldier probably had more to do with its stand against returning veterans than any military document or testimony stating otherwise.

In another case of one newspaper being the sole identifier of a lynched victim as a soldier was that of Leroy Johnston of Arkansas. When Johnston murdered a deputy sheriff in Elaine, he soon joined the alleged victim when a posse of white men gunned him down later that day.[145] To the *Chicago Defender*, Johnston was a martyr who defied the Jim Crow justice system of the South. As only the *Defender* labeled Johnston a veteran, it is likely that they joined the *News and Observer* in using titles and specifics to justify their own cause.

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[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] *News and Observer*, December 29, 1919; and Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy", 307.
[145] *Chicago Defender*, October 11, 1919.

The final case of returning soldiers being lynched arises from the convoluted events that occurred on October 3, 1919, in Montgomery, Alabama. In a twisted tale of murder and revenge, Ben Miller and Robert Creskey were lynched after they were associated with the shooting of a local police officer, John Barbare. Earlier that week John Temple allegedly shot John Barbare. Temple disappeared from the region, so the lynch mob sought any suitable replacements to face their wrath. Angry citizens beat and shot Miller, a former soldier and an acquaintance of Temple, in broad daylight in downtown Elaine. [146] After one scapegoat had already been found and murdered by the mob, those avenging Barbare's death looked for still more victims. Two men held in custody and set for questioning into the whereabouts of Temple were Robert Creskey and Miles Phifer. Both Creskey and Phifer were to be transported to the state prison in Wetumpka. Following the shooting of Miller, a group of white males, now numbering in the twenties, intercepted the officers and "took" the two suspects from county officials. After the mob drove the men five miles into the rural countryside, they surprised their victims by allowing them to run into the woods. The proposed escape was merely a ruse as both men were found with numerous bullet holes in their backs. Although the *Crisis* reported the same story, only the *Chicago Defender* labeled Creskey (named Grosky, in their article) as a discharged soldier; additionally, the *Defender* reported that Miles Phifer died instantly but Robert "Grosky" lived for several hours after he was shot.[147]

Details of lynchings are often difficult to establish. Those perpetrating the violence were rarely charged with a crime and even less frequently placed on trial. Both the state governments and the press often condoned, or suppressed the facts about lynching. Entire communities were accomplices by assisting, hiding the identities of assailants, or refusing to admit that a lynching even took place. The victims' families were powerless to stop the events and either refused to come forward to investigators or left the region entirely. While some members of the black community refused to challenge white supremacy, others took a more proactive stance and fought back through subversive tactics. This was the case when those closest to the lynched victim, Daniel Mack, played the role of mourners, but secretly saved his life.

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[146] *Chicago Defender*, October 4, 1919; *Crisis,* November 1919, 349.
[147] *Chicago Defender*, October 4, 1919.

The Man Who Got Away: the Lynching of Daniel Mack

Like many of his fellow soldiers, Daniel Mack returned home after serving in the U.S. Army. The familiar sites of Worth County, Georgia, were a far cry from the landscapes that he left behind in Europe. After serving overseas, Mack, now twenty two years old, returned to his hometown, Shingler, to continue working as a sharecropper on the land of G.H. Nelson.[148]

It had been almost two years since Mack had last seen his friends, and on Saturday April 5, 1919, Mack and a mate made plans to venture into Sylvester to run errands and rekindle old friendships. Pride probably filled Mack's dark brown eyes as he took one last look at himself in the mirror. The uniform fit perfectly on his tall, stout frame, and his medals were illuminated by the afternoon sunlight filling the room.[149] As the two men entered the city limits, the streets and sidewalks were filled with many people from nearby counties who shared Mack's intentions, but not necessarily his enthusiasm. It was as if Mack's presence was a beacon for trouble when one white pedestrian, Samuel Hannan, struck the soldier's massive chest. Shocked by the collision the two men exchanged curses but then Hannan struck Mack and attempted to throw him off of the sidewalk. Some of Hannan's friends jumped into the conflict, and eventually the local police were called in to restore order and arrest Mack. As the authorities handcuffed Mack and dragged him from the scene, witnesses claim they heard him protest that this was no way to repay a veteran.[150]

Mack spent the next two days in a jail cell, waiting for his arraignment. On Monday morning, he met with R.B. Pollard, Justice of the Peace and Recorder in the City Court. Mack pled guilty to the charge of "disturbing the peace," but asserted: "I fought

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[148] Ancestry.com. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-18 [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2002. National Archives and Records Administration. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918. M1509, 4,277 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

[149] Discrimination in Armed Forces, 9A, Reel 1/443; Ancestry.com. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-18 [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2002. National Archives and Records Administration. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918. M1509, 4,277 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. Mack's physical description was listed as tall and stout with dark brown eyes and black hair.

[150] *Chicago Defender,* May 10, 1919.

for you in France and to make the world safe for democracy. I don't think you treated me right in putting me in Jail and keeping me there, because I've got as much right as anybody else to walk on the sidewalk," to which an indignant Pollard reprimanded him and reminded him sharply "…This is a white man's country and you don't want to forget it." [151] Pollard sentenced Mack to thirty days on the chain gang without the alternative of paying a fine, and Mack was then carried out, still in uniform, with double shackles on both his wrists and ankles.

Upon hearing the news, the black community of Sylvester was outraged and began to organize a formal petition. Reverend Flanders of the Pinson Methodist Episcopal Church began to assemble a defense team that would hopefully fight for Mack and restore dignity to the black community. A.L. McDonald, an insurance agent and leading black citizen of Atlanta, lent his support and affiliation with the NAACP. After McDonald visited Sylvester and attempted to mobilize the citizens, he eventually had to return to Atlanta where at least four death threats had already been delivered by couriers and were waiting for him upon his return.

On April 14, as dusk fell on Sylvester, a crowd began to congregate outside of the jail that held Mack. The night watchmen, C.E. Hall, unexpectedly became sick, and an Officer Samuels replaced the usual guard. At this point, investigators from the NAACP claim that Chief of Police E.J. Hancock opened the jail doors and allowed the white mob to seize their prisoner. Hancock confessed that he was overpowered by at least four men who then beat Mack unconscious with sticks "as large as a man's wrist."[152]

Mack was then carried about two and half miles out of town between Sylvester and his home town of Shingler. The former soldier was thrown out of the vehicle and while still manacled, was beaten without mercy by the four unidentified men. Blows from axe handles and rifle butts rained down on Mack until his shouts and curses stopped and the only audible sound was the sickening thud of the weapons striking wet flesh and bone. The satisfied mob left their carnage and eventually H.C. Sanders, the acting town

[151] Discrimination in Armed Forces, Reel 1/443.
[152] *Chicago Defender,* May 10, 1919.

marshal claimed that Mack's terribly mutilated corpse was missing, presumably claimed by his kin.[153]

No members of the mob were ever punished, nor were any officials implicated in the crime. Chief of Police Hancock blamed the lynching on the white community and "a very bitter feeling against colored soldiers because of the supposed friendly treatment shown to them by the French people while in Europe."[154] Hancock then justified the hatred by using distorted statistics regarding the rape of French women by black soldiers:

> …There were over three hundred proved cases of rape among soldiers of the 92nd Division, and that 'the 92nd Division had to be sent home as soon as it reached France because the white officers were unable to control the lust of the black troops.[155]

In this case the rape allegations crossed the Atlantic Ocean proving there was no distance too far for an accusation to travel in claiming a victim. The citizens of Georgia lynched Daniel Mack because they were protecting the image they had created of white women everywhere.

While Mack was certainly lynched, his story does not end there; neither did his life. Miraculously, Mack was not dead as his mob had believed but only beaten into unconsciousness. He was abandoned in the woods but knew the area well as he had spent his childhood there. Mack awoke and crawled to a nearby house, where the black residents saved his life, and began his journey out of Sylvester. After his stay in an Atlanta hospital, he began a new life over one hundred and fifty miles east of Sylvester. In August of 1919, an investigator from the NAACP confirmed that Mack was living in the household of Mrs. Anthony of 310 Albany Street in the coastal city of Brunswick.[156]

The NAACP suggested a follow up inquiry into Mack's situation, but no other references to Mack's condition or his life were registered with the NAACP. While it is not confirmed, certain individuals can reasonably be credited with having some part in Mack's disappearance. On the Sylvester side, Rev. Flanders and A.L. McDonald

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[153] Discrimination in Armed Forces, 9A, Reel /443; *Chicago Defender,* May 10, 1919.
[154] Discrimination in Armed Forces, 9A, Reel 1/443.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, 9A 1:443. It is unknown if the *Chicago Defender* knew of his escape and were attempting to keep Sylvester locals off of his trail, or if the *Defender*, like the racist community of Sylvester believed he was dead.

probably aided in his departure from Worth County and were most likely assisted by the black community of Brunswick. While the only name officially associated with Brunswick was the aforementioned Mrs. Anthony, she was probably assisted by members of Brunswick's NAACP local chapter, notably President R.N. Jackson and Secretary Mrs. L.B. Burroughs.[157] All speculation aside, what is known is that two years after the brutal attack, Mack was alive and well in Glynn County, Georgia. According to the 1920 Census for Glynn County, Dan Mack, now twenty five years old, rented a room in Brunswick, Georgia, from Carrie E. Deloach and her daughter Hattie. Mack and thirteen other lodgers all left the Deloach residence each morning to work as factory workers and chauffeurs in the city of Brunswick. Among that list also included Dan Mack and his friend Charlie Singleton, both gainfully employed by the Railroad industry.[158]

As late as 1921, A.L. McDonald was still being threatened for his role in attempting to help Mack. As unpleasant as the death threats were, McDonald must have hidden a smile knowing that the end result was the safety of Daniel Mack, the man who got away. After hearing of McDonald's dilemma, John R. Shillady, once again asked for assistance from the state of Georgia. On February 10, 1921, the NAACP sent a formal letter to the Governor's mansion stating that in Worth County, local African Americans still could not get a "fair deal."[159] The black community realized that as the state government followed the precedent of the federal government, and neglected its black citizens, safety and fairness were left in their own hands.

The last discharged soldier officially lynched in the year 1919 was Charles West in Smithville, Georgia. As with many of Georgia's lynchings the details and specifics are vague at best. On December 21, 1919,West was accused of murder. That night, four days before Christmas, a group of private citizens formed a mob and lynched the veteran.[160]

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[157] Papers of Individual Branches of the NAACP, Reel 11/0546. The previous year, R.N. Jackson and the Brunswick chapter made repeated attempts to combat lynching and raise money for the families of those who were lynched.

[158] Ancestry.com. *1920 United States Federal Census.* [database on-line] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2001-. Indexed by Ancestry.com from microfilmed schedules of the 1920 U.S. Federal Decennial Census.*1920 United States Federal Census*. [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2001. Data imaged from National Archives and Records Administration. 1920 Federal Population Census. T625, 2,076 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

[159] Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, 9A, Reel 1/550-553.

[160] *New York City World*, December 22, 1919; *Crisis*, February, 1920, 183-186; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 278.

The *Brooklyn Eagle* condemned Georgia's action, and called for action against the perpetrators of the crime:

> A Smithville, Ga. mob is first to lynch a Negro veteran who fought bravely in France. Will the American Legion speak out on such an outrage? Silence may be golden, but it isn't always wisdom.[161]

Although the *Eagle's* intentions were sound, Charles West was certainly not the first veteran to perish after reaching U.S. soil, but unfortunately he was not last either.

Sergeant Edgar Caldwell's fight began only a few days before the lynching of Charles Lewis but would span over nineteen months when he was finally executed by the state of Alabama on July 30, 1920.[162] The United States Supreme Court upheld Alabama's decision to execute the black soldier on the charge of murder. The state of Alabama legally lynched Sergeant Edgar Caldwell and the United States federal government condoned the act.

[161] *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 1920, reprinted in *Crisis*, March 1920, 261-71.
[162] *Crisis*, October 1920, 282.

CHAPTER 4
THE "LEGAL" LYNCHING
OF SERGEANT EDGAR CALDWELL

Sergeant Edgar Caldwell's story spans from December 13, 1918, to July 30, 1920. After an altercation on a public street car in Anniston, Alabama, that left one white person dead and another seriously injured, Sergeant Caldwell was arrested on the charge of first degree murder. Over the next twenty months debates ensued over ending or saving the soldier's life throughout the judicial system as well as in the court of public opinion. Two contradictory forces fought to either end or save the soldier's life. While the state of Alabama defined the case as an unruly black passenger defying social laws of segregation and murdering a white conductor, the NAACP used Caldwell's predicament as a springboard for national attention. Caldwell's case was eventually tried before the United States Supreme Court, becoming one of the first precedents for the NAACP's use of the federal court system to counteract injustice in the South.[1] The NAACP argued that Caldwell, still a member of the U.S. Army, should have been subject to a court martial and that if the federal government agreed with the earlier courts' decisions it "would be nothing short of lynching" Caldwell.[2] This "legalized lynching" demonstrated not only the unwillingness of the United States military to intervene on a soldier's behalf, but the federal government acting as the executioner when the United States Supreme Court upheld the lower courts' decisions.

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[1] For more information of the beginning years of the NAACP as well as their first cases tried before the U.S. Supreme Court, see David Levering Lewis's *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race 1868-1919* (New York: Holt, 1993), 438, 483; Charles Flint Kellogg; *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: Volume 1 1909-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), 205-206. Two earlier cases that were argued before Caldwell were *Buchanan v. Warley* and *Guinn v. the United States*. These two specific cases involved the right to buy land and the abolition of the Grandfather Clause, in regard to voting in Oklahoma.

[2] Cobb to James Weldon Johnson, November 21, 1919, Papers of the NAACP: Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System. Series A: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1910-1939. John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier (Editors). (Bethesda, Maryland: University Public of America, 1988), Reel 4/693 (hereafter Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System).

The Incident and trial

Sergeant Edgar Caldwell, a decorated soldier in the 24th Infantry Regiment of the United States Army, had already served in the Philippines for two years by 1912. Having acquired an unblemished record and an award for sharp-shooting, he returned to the United States, voluntarily joining the military again where he was stationed at Camp McClellan in Anniston, in the 157th Depot Brigade. The last few years had been especially rewarding for Edgar C. Caldwell; he got married and was promoted to the rank of Sergeant.[3]

Friday the 13th proved to be an ominous day for the Sergeant. On December 13, 1918, he traveled into Anniston, boarding the Oxford Lake streetcar. On their own merit, these actions were not remarkable, what occurred inside the car was: Caldwell and the white conductor, Cecil Linton, began to argue over the fare. Caldwell insisted that he paid the fare, but Linton claimed the contrary. Aside from the monetary issue, Linton was outraged that the black soldier had seated himself in the white section of the car. Linton ordered him off of the train and attempted to manhandle his passenger into compliance. During the struggle Caldwell resisted, shoving the conductor into a glass divider with enough force to rain slivers of glass over both men, as well as nearby passengers. Next, Linton enlisted the assistance of the car's motorman, Kelsie Morrison, and the two men attempted to throw the soldier off of the train. As the men fought, Caldwell was punched twice in the face, before all three tumbled out of the street car, and then into the city street. Caldwell landed flat on his back, his adversaries managed to remain upright; but instead of exiting the scene and continuing with their car's route, they elected to beat Caldwell. Morrison, the Motorman, kicked the fallen soldier in his ribs and stomach until his victim, who was facing up, unsheathed his service revolver and deliver two rounds from his prone position. The first shot fatally wounded Linton and the second, a neck wound, left Morrison in the hospital for weeks.[4]

After the smoke cleared and the startled passengers had registered what had just occurred, a group of citizens held the beaten Caldwell until Military Police (MPs) from

[3] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/591, 738-740.
[4] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/626; *Crisis*, January 1920, 131-134.; *Cleveland Advocate*, December 21, 1918.

Camp McClellan arrived.[5] Although Caldwell was still an active member of the U.S. Army, the MPs surprisingly surrendered their fellow soldier to the civil authorities, an act that would prove vital in the NAACP's defense strategies. Caldwell's defense team argued that Caldwell should have been left in the hands of the military to face a court martial. Despite this potential error in protocol, Caldwell was placed in the County jail to await his fate. For the next twenty days the United States Army Sergeant awaited his appearance in Calhoun County's Circuit court. Locals claimed that a Yankee soldier had come down South to start trouble, and many citizens called for a lynching to rectify the situation.[6] Yet Caldwell lived to appear in court before Judge Hugh D. Merrill. Caldwell had no ties in the area, but the local black community rallied behind him and employed Basil M. Allen, from Birmingham for his defense.[7] Despite having adequate council, it took less than two hours for an all-white jury to find the soldier guilty of murder in the first degree and Judge Merrill sentenced Caldwell to death by hanging.[8]

Anniston's black community was outraged at the swift decision and began to implore the assistance of the NAACP's national headquarters in New York. Only recently had prominent black businessmen joined with high ranking members of the church to create Anniston's own chapter of the organization. The core power structure consisted of James A Ballard, President; Rev. James Brown, Chairman Legal Committee; and Rev. R.R. Williams, Treasurer. The group also enlisted the help of Rev. E.E. Edwards, the Pastor from Mt. Zion Baptist Church, and the haberdasher Thomas J. Jackson, was named the branch Secretary[9]. Anniston's NAACP claimed Caldwell was denied a fair trial because the sentiment of racism permeated every aspect of the case and specifically the jury: "…the men free from race prejudice were easily struck by the state, because there were few of them. He had a jury that was fully under the influence of the race prejudice then excited to a very high pitch."[10] Reverend R. R. Williams added that Caldwell's case was also unique as Caldwell was a soldier and should not have been tried in the civil court. On Christmas Eve, Rev. Williams wrote an emotional letter to Oswald

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[5] *Crisis*, January 1920, 131.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Rev. R.R. Williams to J.R. Shillady, January 17, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/600; *Birmingham News*, July 12, 1919; Schneider, *We Return Fighting,* 93-94.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/642; *Crisis*, January 1920, 131-134.
[10] *Crisis*, January 1920, 131-134.

Garrison Villard, a founding member of the NAACP, exclaiming that Caldwell was a soldier, not discharged, and had volunteered to protect the United States.[11]

Only a few days later while opening his usual assortment of holiday greeting cards, Williams was surprised to find that the national headquarters had already received his correspondence and responded in kind. Despite the expedited reply, Secretary John R. Shillady's advice was not promising. Shillady informed the Reverend that he was already aware of Caldwell's situation via newspaper clippings, but after he had consulted with the Chairman of the NAACP's legal committee, Charles H. Studin, their advice was to "endeavor to secure a good lawyer." Shillady downplayed his ability in the matter asserting that his interaction might actually do more harm than good: "In this case we are afraid that if we try to communicate with the Governor the effect might be to prejudice Sergeant Cardwell's [sic] case rather than help it, as he is accused of committing murder." Shillady concluded that Williams was better off seeking the help of other chapters and included the contact information of Robert Reed Church in Memphis.[12]

Williams proved his resilience as he once again contacted the New York office, as well as Emmett J. Scott, now working within the War Department.[13] Two weeks later, Williams wrote to Shillady but this time stressed that Caldwell was not given a fair trial due to the jurisdiction of the court. Williams reasserted that Caldwell was a soldier of good character, had been promoted several times and most importantly should have never been tried in a civil court: "We believe the War Department should see to it that this man get a fair trial; we find that he was, and is now, on roll in the camp at camp mcclellan [sic]. The executive officer, Col. Lewis admits that, and said it was an error in the M.P. to have in giving him to the civil officers."[14]

Williams' persistence paid off when Shillady decided to write to United States Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and ask for his assistance in the matter.[15] Unfortunately, two months had passed between the two letters. Caldwell's defense now

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[11] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/591.
[12] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/592. It is not known if the Secretary misspelled Caldwell's name out of haste or ignorance.
[13] Williams to Shillady, January 17, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/600; and Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 93. Scott was in charge of Negro Affairs at the War Department.
[14] Williams to Shillady, January 17, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/600.
[15] Shillady to A. Mitchell Palmer, May 17, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/611.

had less than four months to save his life as he was set to be executed on August 15, 1919. Perhaps Shillady was aware of this mistake as on the same day he wrote the Attorney General he replied to Rev. Williams informing him of the news and apologizing for the delay. Shillady claimed that the NAACP was "unable to give the matter attention because of the pressure of other affairs," and in addition to being overworked, he claimed that the organization was under funded.[16] Shillady's letter concluded with a summary of their current fiscal situation and an apology:

> The amount of money that is required to carry this case on is a great deal. Because of other matters needing funds, we cannot at this time make a general appeal throughout the country for assistance. We are now trying to ascertain what our Alabama branches can do, and will let you hear from us again. None of these branches is very strong as the Alabama people have not yet learned the necessity of working together in one organization. We are taking the matter up with the Attorney General at once and are very sorry that it was not done earlier.[17]

Shillady's response reflects the philosophy of the high ranking members of the NAACP. As the NAACP was still in its beginning years and had only been in existence less than a decade, it was forced to prioritize requests that it might champion. Either because of the lack of funds or because it originally considered Caldwell's case a lost cause, it diminished its importance. While the organization may have simply been pragmatic, it was also gambling with Caldwell's life.

Williams and his newly appointed NAACP officers of Anniston had reason to believe that Caldwell's case had a chance. Shillady had now shown interest in the case. Furthermore, that Charles D. Kline, a former state senator, agreed to serve as Caldwell's attorney for an appeal, provided additional hope.[18] Williams realized that persistence had gotten them this far so once again he pushed the high ranking officers in New York into action when he wrote Moorfield Storey, the Chief Legal advisor to the NAACP. Rev. Williams' letter summarized the case so far and emphasized that the matter was so important that it led him to work on the Sabbath:

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[16] Shillady to Williams, May 17, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/613.
[17] Ibid.
[18] *Birmingham News*, July 2, 1919.

> Will you kindly get busy at all hazard and see what is being done in Washington by the Attorney-General's office and wire me at once.
>
> The case goes to the Supreme Court on the second day of June which is just eight days off and I have written the N.A.A.C.P.'s office twice in the last tow [sic] weeks and did not get a satisfactory answer therefore I am writing you personally because I know if the information can be gotten you can get it….
>
> Please don't lay this letter aside but act at once in the name of "The Race" and humanity or Human rights, which we have fought for in the world war. I have broken my rule on the Lords day (in writing this letter) but the matter is os [sic] I feel that I am clear.[19]

While Williams was desperately trying to enlist the help of other high ranking members of the NAACP, those already affiliated with the case were uncertain to whom they should protest. On May 28, Shillady confessed to Archibald Grimke, the head of the Washington, DC NAACP chapter, that a letter was mistakenly sent to Attorney General Palmer, and that the correct recipient should have been sent to the Judge Advocate General's office (JAG).[20] The NAACP was unsure as to Caldwell's military status, if he was in the Army, the correct person should have been the JAG, but if not, the Attorney General's office had to be reached, and quickly, as Caldwell's execution date was now less than two months away.[21] The case still had to go before the Alabama Supreme Court, almost everyone expected the higher court to uphold the Calhoun County Circuit Court's decision. Shillady realized that the organization had to move cautiously as it hoped that a appeal court would throw out the first verdict on a technicality and not concentrate on the crime committed by Caldwell:

> The last legal step proving vain, if an examination of the record discloses such unfairness in the trial of the case as to make it possible for us to seek Caldwell's pardon without being placed in the position of condoning the

[19] Williams to Moorfield Storey, May 25, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/617.
[20] Shillady to Archibald Grimke, May 28, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/619.
[21] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/635.

> commission of a crime, we might seek a pardon or a commutation of sentence.[22]

Shillady believed he needed assistance, and brought the case to the attention of Walter White. On June 19, Shillady brought White up to date and concluded that Caldwell "was and is now on roll in the camp at Camp McClellan."[23] White proved to be the right man to increase efficiency; within days he enlisted Attorney James A. Cobb, the chairman of the Legal Committee of the Washington Branch of the NAACP, to assist as part of the defense team. Cobb immediately centered the argument around the role of the War Department's decision to turn the soldier over to the civilian court. While Cobb admitted that the War Department had every right to take this action, he also asserted that it was its duty to ensure that the soldier was given a fair trial as anything less would be the equivalent of a legalized lynching. In a letter to James Weldon Johnson, Cobb voiced these concerns:

> The War Department need not have turned Caldwell over to the civil authorities, but having done so it is the duty of that Department to see that he gets a fair and impartial trial. Otherwise, the Department has a right to interfere. If the facts be as reported to me, to hang Caldwell would be nothing short of judicial murder, as the highest offence that could have been committed by Caldwell under the circumstances would be manslaughter.[24]

The addition of Cobb had raised both the manpower and spirit of Caldwell's defense team, the inevitable occurred on July 1, 1919, when the Alabama Supreme Court upheld the earlier sentencing of Judge Merrill.[25]

While Caldwell and his supporters in Anniston were saddened but not surprised by the decision, the Birmingham *News* reported to its anxious readers that justice had prevailed and that Anniston's white citizens were greatly satisfied by the State Supreme Court's sustaining of the lower court's rendering. The Birmingham paper portrayed Assistant Solicitor James F. Matthews and Attorney Neil P. Sterne as heroes who had

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[22] Ibid.
[23] E. Morton to Walter White, June 19, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/626.
[24] James A. Cobb to J.W. Johnson, June 21, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/639.
[25] *Birmingham News*, July 1, 1919.

triumphed over a black soldier who "viciously" attacked the conductor and his fellow employee. The paper also stated that scores of letters had flooded local authorities, including death threats against Judge Merrill, allegedly sent from "friends" of Caldwell.[26]

Only two days after the State Supreme Court upheld the verdict, a black soldier was shot and killed on a Virginia train. The Associated Press reported that "while choking Conductor J.R. Wilson, of a Southern Railway freight train at Maddox, Virginia, last night, an unidentified negro soldier was shot and killed, by Brakeman J.E. Spicer."[27] It was alleged that the soldier was earlier thrown off the train, but somehow managed to crawl through an open window, attack the engineer and force the train to stop. After the train came to a halt, the engineer and brakeman claimed that the unidentified soldier began to choke Wilson until Spicer "emptied a shotgun load" into his head.[28]

The account in the *Birmingham News* of the Virginia affair warned of events to come if segregation laws were relaxed (behind every corner lurked a potential black brute waiting to attack white citizens). Caldwell's case became paramount for a society attempting to uphold white supremacy. These fears would certainly be intensified if whites did not "protect" themselves or if Caldwell was not appropriately punished for the killing of Cecil Linton. The white citizens of the South were shocked on July 11 when their worst fears came true: Caldwell's hanging was postponed. The State Supreme Court had already rejected Caldwell's appeal, but protocol ruled that a stay of execution must be granted when Kline and Allen filed an application for a second hearing.[29]

Southern newspapers soothed their readers stating that first, the matter was only a formality and any rumors of a reversal were "mere conjecture"; and second, that since the crime, Caldwell had awakened to Christianity. Newspapers in both Birmingham as well as New Orleans stressed that "the negro ex-soldier is not relaxing his religious fervor or his preparations for death because of the apparent new lease of life given him," and added that Caldwell was frequently visited by Captain Dallas B. Holder of the Salvation Army

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[26] *Birmingham News*, July 2, 1919. The *Birmingham News* stated that friends of Caldwell from St. Louis threatened the life of the judge after they heard of the Caldwell's fate. The *Birmingham News* claimed that it was "said" that Caldwell lived in St. Louis before he became a soldier. This is the only inference to Caldwell's Missouri background and is probably incorrect. Most accounts claim that Caldwell hailed from Chicago or a northern city.
[27] *Birmingham News*, July 3, 1919.
[28] Ibid.
[29] *Birmingham News*, July 12, 1919.

who was acting as his spiritual advisor.[30] Although the newspapers comforted the readers with images of the convict reading the Bible and praying everyday, they concluded with the warning that Caldwell's wife was touring the Southern states soliciting aid for her jailed husband and "that a more determined fight is to be made to save the negro's life."[31]

The Role of the Federal Government

While Caldwell's wife was speaking on behalf of her husband, the private correspondence of the NAACP was what ultimately succeeded for the defense. Shillady's letter to Attorney General Palmer, originally labeled a mistake, motivated the Attorney General to reach out to the White House. Woodrow Wilson intervened and requested a formal investigation into the matter.[32] While technically Caldwell had already been granted a stay of execution due to his attorney's request for a rehearing, Wilson's request inspired Caldwell's supporters. As Caldwell's defense team was challenging both the Executive and the Judicial branches of the federal government, Emmett J. Scott was working almost entirely behind the scenes. It was Scott who had discussed the Caldwell's case with White House Secretary Joseph P. Tumulty.[33] On August 2, Tumulty wrote to Scott explaining how the Attorney General was investigating the entire Caldwell affair and would certainly "make a recommendation" to the President in a timely manner for Wilson to act, if necessary, on behalf of the imprisoned Caldwell.[34] After Scott shared this news with the NAACP, Kline was immediately ordered to Washington to present the Attorney General with all of the records of the case.[35] Author and NAACP officer, James Weldon Johnson, paved the way for Kline's arrival by first sending Cobb to meet with the Attorney General. He wrote to Rev. Williams of the new hopeful developments:

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[30] *Birmingham News*, July 14, 1919; and Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/657.
[31] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/657.
[32] *Crisis*, January 1920, 120-124. Schneider, *We Return* Fighting, 94-95.
[33] J.W. Johnson to Cobb, August 2, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/651.
[34] Ibid.
[35] *Crisis*, January 1920, 120-124.

> I wrote to Mr. James A. Cobb, 609 F Street, N.W., Washington D.C. , who is the chairman of the Legal Committee of our Washington Branch, and asked if he would see the Attorney General and have him withhold his recommendations on the Caldwell case until the attorneys have had a chance to present their bill of exceptions. I myself expect to go to Washington the latter part of next week or the first of the following week and at that time I shall take the matter up personally and do whatever is in my power.[36]

Despite the promises of a meeting with Palmer, Caldwell's defense team would never sit down personally with the Attorney General as all subsequent meetings were held with the Assistant Attorney General Harry Stewart. Nevertheless, by the end of August the Assistant Attorney General met with Caldwell's entire defense team: Charles Kline and James Cobb were now joined by Emmett J. Scott, and from the Washington Branch of the NAACP Lafeyette Hershaw and William Houston.[37] The defense team covered Caldwell's case, extensively arguing that at most the charge should be manslaughter, and finally brought Assistant Attorney General Stewart to their point that "while the State had jurisdiction it only had that jurisdiction by virtue of the fact that the United States Government had surrendered Caldwell to it."[38] Cobb concluded the meeting with a final plea to Stewart:

> …it was incumbent upon this Government to see that he got a fair and impartial trial, and that the record disclosed beyond peradventure that a fair and impartial trial had not been granted to Caldwell.[39]

Cobb left the meeting with mixed feelings. Though he admitted that Stewart had been fair, he wrote to James Weldon Johnson insisting that their mission would succeed only if the National headquarters put additional pressure on President Wilson:

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[36] James W. Johnson to RR Williams, August 2, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/650. Only months after the Caldwell case James Weldon Johnson was named Secretary of the NAACP. Johnson was the first black man to hold the position of Secretary.
[37] John R. Shillady to A. Mitchell Palmer, August 29, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/659.
[38] James A. Cobb to JWJ, August 28, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/662.
[39] Ibid.

> The Assistant Attorney General seemed to be impressed with our point of view and asked that the Brief on the rehearing be telegraphed and sent to him at once, and said that he was of the opinion that he would file a Brief in the Supreme Court of the State of Alabama on behalf of the United States as *amicus curiae*….The National Association [should] send a telegram urging the President to intervene in the matter….The attorneys are doubtful of a favorable outcome unless strong pressure is brought to bear on that court.[40]

In Cobb's opinion, although a good foundation had been created, much more had to be done in order to save the life of Edgar Caldwell.

August 15 had passed and Caldwell was still alive brought relief to those fighting for him, but as summer became fall Caldwell's camp became frustrated. His attorneys anxiously waited for a rehearing in the Alabama Supreme Court as well as any word from the Attorney General's office and hopefully even the White House. October proved to be a pivotal month with the state Supreme Court of Alabama finally reaching its decision, but the month also provided two events that while they did not directly involve Caldwell's case certainly added to the racial climate of the region and affected the court's decision. Once again the public transportation system witnessed violence when a black man shot a police officer on a Birmingham street car and in the same city a white conductor was found not guilty of killing a black soldier.

On October 10, a white passenger on a street car attacked a local black man, alleging the man had not paid his fare. Local policeman Jack Newby attempted to intervene as onlookers watched the white assailant beat the black victim. Before Newby could arrest or even subdue either of the two men, the black man pulled out a gun and shot the police officer, which led another person with a revolver, who "fired one time—the bullet passing through the heart of the negro."[41]

A federal investigation commenced, but neither the assailant nor the victim's name was ever listed in the Bureau of Investigation's (BI) report, but it was not the crime

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[40] James A. Cobb to J.W. Johnson, August 28, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/663.

[41] Report filed by J. Reese Murray: Birmingham, Ala. October 11, 1919 "Investigation: Alleged Fomenting Race Trouble—Birmingham," Federal Surveillance Files, OG 245295.

that interested the BI but rather the racial climate of Birmingham. The BI wanted to know if a black man arguing on a street car meant that a rebellion was forming in the black community. Special Agent J. Reese Murray was called in to investigate the situation and calm down any militancy that may have been organizing. Murray elected to use paid informants to enter black neighborhoods, interview the locals, and infiltrate any organizations if necessary. The confidential informant (CI) chosen for the BI was "special employee" W.L. Hawkins.[42]

Hawkins was instructed to make a "careful and quiet investigation" of Birmingham's black community and report back to Murray any indication of any resentment or militant ideology. Hawkins reported that he went to the corner of 18th street and 4th Avenue where he encountered Edgar Benson, and other black men, "hanging out" and socializing. When asked if people were outraged or planning any response to the murder, Benson a self appointed representative of the larger community claimed that he had not heard of anything, and according to Hawkins stated that "if such were the case, he [Benson] is in a position to know all about it." Benson's response was confirmed by C.M. Harris, who resided on 1704 4th Avenue, when he too related that nothing was unusual and that he too "would know." Content with his surveillance to this point, Hawkins decided to meet with U.G. Mason "one of the best known physicians among the colored race of Birmingham." Hawkins described the meeting: "Being a physician, naturally Dr. Mason comes in contact with a large number of his race of all classes, and he unhesitatingly stated that, to his knowledge, the people of his race are doing nothing to bring about trouble between the races."[43]
As Hawkins was convinced, he and Mason both met with Murray who was also satisfied with Hawkins' investigation and called off any further surveillance of the matter.

The federal government had cleared Birmingham as a potential source of racial unrest; however, it was anything but a city of equal opportunity and had a history of being inhospitable to black soldiers. A Birmingham policeman once arrested and jailed

[42] While Hawkins's race is never listed he was most likely black. Aside from Hawkins's ability to enter the black community and mingle with the locals "quietly", it is his title of "special employee" that is most indicative of his race. African Americans were often used as paid employees but not granted Agent status until the 1920s when the BI infiltrated Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association.
[43] Report filed by J. Reese Murray: Birmingham, Ala. October 11, 1919 "Investigation: Alleged Fomenting Race Trouble—Birmingham, " Federal Surveillance Files, OG 245295.

a black soldier for merely speaking to a Greek girl whom he mistakenly perceived as an acquaintance.[44] As unjust as the anonymous soldier's imprisonment was, it paled in comparison to the treatment of Sergeant Major John Green, who was shot and killed by J.D. Summerlin when he asked for his change while exiting a Birmingham street car.

On June 15, 1919, aboard the outbound Pratt-Ensley car line, John Green began to make his way to the back of the street car, but first stopped and asked the conductor for his change. Witnesses claimed that the soldier had already made two failed attempts to receive change after he gave the conductor, J.D. Summerlin, a quarter for his fare. The third time Green asserted "Captain, give me my change for I have to get off at the next stop," to which Summerlin did not vocally respond but instead brandished a pistol and shot Green three times in the head, a fourth shot missed the target but struck another black passenger in the leg.[45] By the time the authorities arrived at the scene, Summerlin was nowhere to be found, but instead a large number of concerned black citizens had gathered around the two victims.[46]

Monday morning, June 16, Summerlin surrendered to the authorities. After Sheriff Chris Hartsfield took the initial report he then turned the conductor over to Coroner R.T. Rives who promised to investigate the story. It is almost impossible to believe that Rives was not already aware of a situation that involved a public murder in which a white man shot a black soldier. Summerlin was allowed to leave the police station.[47]

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[44] *Crisis*, March 1920, 248. The soldier was later assisted by the NAACP and released from jail. Aside from the persecution of the soldier, this event is important in defining a society's views and perception of what was commonly considered white for a given region. Although the soldier was found in violation of the city's views on approved social interaction between races, many of the era debated if people of the Mediterranean were, in fact, white. The controversial Johnson-Reed act of 1924 used quotas to regulate immigration as many countries viewed as inheritantly "not white" were systematically and negatively affected by the Act's ruling. Aside from Italians, Austro-Hungarians and people of Eastern European Jewish descent, Greeks were also hindered by this act of institutional prejudice. Ironically in Birmingham, when confronted by a black soldier the community felt obligated to defend the honor of this "white" woman, despite that in less than five years many of her ethnicity would not be allowed to legally immigrate to the United States.

[45] *Crisis*, October 1919, 282; *Birmingham News*, June 14, 1919; *Afro-American*, June 27, 1919; *Birmingham News*, June 14, 1919. The other passenger Bernard Green was not related to the soldier.

[46] Ibid.; the Birmingham News also stated that the black citizens made threatening comments to the officers, if Summerlin were to return. This report is contrary to the *Afro-American's* report that claimed Summerlin calmly waited for the police and arrogantly smoked cigarettes, blew large clouds of smoke into the faces of witnesses, carelessly discarded the body in the street and then finished his route.

[47] *Birmingham News*, June 14, 1919.

The local black community rallied around their fallen hero. The law firm of Edward L. Snyder, where Green was employed before his military service, publicly mourned his death and exhibited photographs of Green during the war. Additionally, Green's grandmother swore out a warrant charging the conductor with murder in the first degree. The warrant forced Rives to return a verdict of unlawful homicide against Summerlin. He was arrested and placed in jail but immediately released on a bond of twenty-five hundred dollars.[48]

As the community prepared for Summerlin's trial, circulars signed by black pastors attempted to rally the black community to contribute to a fund to prosecute the conductor. Unfortunately, the pastors later "changed their minds" and ordered the circulars cancelled. On October 23, the case was tried before Judge William E. Fort, Summerlin was acquitted in only eighteen minutes.[49]

If black soldiers could not find justice in Birmingham it was unlikely that the state Supreme Court in Montgomery would grant a third appeal for Caldwell's quest. This possibility came to fruition when on the same day as Summerlin's acquittal the state Supreme Court refused to hear Caldwell's case.[50] Caldwell was now scheduled to be hanged on December 5, 1919.

Rev. Williams solemnly wrote to James Shillady as he reflected on the court's decision and concluded that their only chance was to take the case to Washington, but feared that a "considerable amount of expenses had to be met if this effort is matured."[51] Aside from financial problems Caldwell's defense suffered a more significant hurdle—the likelihood that the federal government would disallow a southern state the right to govern as it deemed fit on race issues.

For the next two weeks the NAACP debated its next move. It was the anniversary of the armistice that finally moved Cobb to act swiftly. On November 12, Cobb waged his own battle fighting for the life of Sergeant Caldwell as he planned in detail a line of attack to defend his client and penned a six page letter to the Secretary of War Newton D. Baker. Cobb began by mentioning that he had already gathered some support from

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[48] *Afro-American*, June 27, 1919; *Birmingham News*, June 22, 1919.
[49] *Birmingham News*, October 23, 1919.
[50] *Birmingham News*, October 23, 1919; and Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/666.
[51] Williams to Shillady. October 24, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/666.

Attorney General Palmer, and then he included a summary of Caldwell's case and the assertion that to hand over Caldwell "upon the facts disclosed by the record will be nothing short of judicial murder."[52] Next, Cobb presented a careful defense strategy using certain sections of the Articles of War, as well as a precedent in which a soldier was removed from the civilian authorities and put back under the jurisdiction of the military. Cobb included the full text of both Articles of War No. 92 and No.93 to contend that the state authorities were without jurisdiction to try the case:

> Art. 92. Any person subject to military law who commits murder or rape shall suffer death or imprisonment for life, as a court-martial may direct; but no person shall be tried by court-martial for murder or rape committed within the geographical limits of the States of the Union and the District of Columbia in time of peace.
>
> Art. 93. Any person subject to military law who commits manslaughter, mayhem, arson, burglary, robbery, larceny, embezzlement, perjury, assault with intent to commit any felony, or assault with intent to do bodily harm, shall be punished as a court-martial may direct.[53]

Cobb asserted that even if the state government had continued to try the case, which legally they had no right to do so, the federal government should have made sure that Caldwell received a fair trial based on specific Selective Service Cases:

> Selective Service Cases, 245 U.S. 366. The United States so completely withdraws him from civil life as to cause the United States to assume the burden of providing for his housing, clothing, medical, and other requirements. In belief, the soldier dwells in a realm of unusual exactions and discipline, subject to laws and tribunals exerting no authority elsewhere. Thus the United States becomes truly the soldier's *parens patriae*. It will not suffer a wrong or an injustice to be done him, for in the last analysis its protection over him is not only merited by his restricted and exacting life, but the measure and the effectiveness of his service

[52] Cobb to Secretary of War Baker, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/673,
[53] Ibid.

> depend in large degree upon his being accorded that treatment which shall keep his mind 'staid' upon his task.[54]

Cobb then changed tactics when he challenged the specific verdict of murder stating that the facts of the case clearly indicate a charge of manslaughter:

> Turning to the record, and applying to the evidence therein set forth the tests adopted in the cases cited to this court by counsel for the defendant, and in the cases herein after referred to, it is respectfully urged that this court carefully reconsider whether the trial court did not commit reversible error in permitting the jury to return a verdict finding the defendant guilty of murder. With a record so pregnant with evidence tending to establish the offense, if any, of manslaughter, it seems difficult to reach the conclusion that the charge of murder can be said to be established beyond a reasonable doubt.[55]

Finally, Cobb returned to the question of jurisdiction when he presented the precedent of the case of George King, a white soldier who had murdered a white man in Kentucky. On July 11, 1918, Private George King, a soldier in Company C, Second Kentucky Infantry National Guard, shot and killed a police officer in the city of Newport, Kentucky, in an act that had no connection to his military role. King was originally turned over to the civil authorities and indicted by a grand jury until almost two weeks later General Roger D. Williams, "commander of the brigade to which King belonged, filed an intervening petition praying that the prisoner be delivered to the military authorities to be tried by a court-martial on the charge of murder."[56] Although the commonwealth of Kentucky resisted the military's request the District Judge sided with the United States military, and the defendant was surrendered to the military authorities. Cobb eluded that the only difference in the two cases was the color of his client's skin, and it was now the federal government's duty to act when Caldwell's commanding officers had failed.

Caldwell's defense team then sent a duplicate copy of the entire letter to Attorney General Palmer with the concluding plea:

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[54] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/674.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/675-676.

> It is earnestly urged that the record herein justifies the Supreme Court of the State of Alabama in granting a new trial to the defendant, for the reason, that the crime of murder was not established under the evidence, but, at most, the crime committed by the defendant was manslaughter in the first degree. The homicide herein was an unlawful killing, without malice on the part of the defendant, committed while in the sudden heat of passion, excited by sufficient provocation.[57]

Two days later, on Friday July 14, Cobb followed his letter to the office of the Attorney General when he and Kline met with Assistant Attorney General Stewart. Cobb later wrote to James Weldon Johnson and summarized his meeting with Stewart. Cobb admitted that Stewart "seemed to be sympathetic," but the developments that followed were not promising as he and Kline were led from administrator to administrator in a bureaucratic maze of half promises and innuendos.[58] When Cobb stressed the Kentucky case as precedent, Stewart stated he would be "willing to go forward" if Caldwell's attorneys could persuade the War Department to formally request the Department of Justice to "test the matter through the courts on the question of jurisdiction. The NAACP followed up the aforementioned six page letter with James Weldon Johnson also writing to Secretary Baker simply stating that "Because of his race it was impossible for him to secure [a] fair trial in that site. Our further contention is that Caldwell should have been tried by regular court martial since he was a soldier."[59]

Next, Cobb and Kline were sent to meet with the Acting JAG, who along with five of his assistants openly admitted their ignorance of the case and attempted to persuade Cobb and Kline to seek another method of defense, to which Cobb replied that if Caldwell were executed, it would go against the very virtues of the United States' legal system:

> Caldwell was cast in that position by no election of his and that it was much better for the perpetuity of our Government and for Caldwell himself as well that if the State was without jurisdiction for Caldwell to go

[57] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/677.
[58] Cobb to J.W. Johnson, November 21, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/692.
[59] Ibid.; Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/681.

> free than for him to be executed upon a sentence without legal standing, which would be nothing short of lynching him.[60]

Despite this passionate plea, the JAG still advocated that the request should not be made.

Outraged and left with nothing from the entire day's maneuvers, Cobb called on the service of Emmett Scott who personally took the matter back to the White House. Cobb had to wait until Monday when he received the news that Scott had not only managed to meet with Wilson's secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, but that the White House had sent the following memo, specifically marked as PERSONAL:

> My Dear Mr. Cobb:
>
> Referring to your recent letters, I beg to say that the Attorney General advises me that I have instructed the United States Attorney for that district to appear on behalf of the United States as amicus curiae [sic], and suggest the question of jurisdiction and present authorities touching the subject so that the court may be fully advised.[61]

Once again, Caldwell was forced to wait on an intervention from the federal government.

Only a few days later, the attorney general reneged on his recent proposal to submit an *amicus curiae* on Caldwell's behalf.[62] Attorney General Palmer wanted to politically distance himself from the Caldwell case. Assistant Attorney General Stewart wrote to Kline informing of the decision and officially removed his office from any further discussion:

> Mr. Cobb called at the Department some weeks ago and was told at that time that the Department did not feel there was anything further that could be urged on behalf of the United States and that the appeal would have to be carried through by the appellant. You are therefore advised that the

[60] Cobb to J.W. Johnson, November 21, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/692-693.
[61] Ibid. Usually the phrase *amicus curaie* would be in italics but since the memo was sent via telegram, this formalized style was omitted from the correspondence.
[62] The *amicus curiae* when translated in Latin means "friend of the court." It is filed when someone who is not directly related to the case vouches for the defendant, in this case Caldwell. The brief is designed to bring attention to some oversight or new information that the issuer of the brief defines as relevant and needed by the court.

> Department does not expect to file any brief in connection with this case, or take any part in the argument thereof.[63]

Kline then forwarded Stewart's letter to the NAACP and when it finally reached Anniston Rev. Williams frustratingly wrote in the margin: "This is what Political influence has done to defeat justice, we must bring every possible pressure to win out in March, must do it at once; our lawyers must get to Washington."[64] In a letter to Shillady, Cobb blamed the retraction on political hypocrisy and openly expressed his disgust with Palmer:

> The Attorney General, of course, can interfere and take charge of any case he so desires, but in this instance he took it out of Mr. Stewart's hands, the Assistant Attorney General, [R.P.STEWART] who was working seemingly in perfect sympathy from our viewpoint. It is to be noted that the Attorney General of the State of Alabama, together with other influential men of the State, called on the Attorney General and urged that he withdraw the interests of the United States in the case and take no further part. In my opinion, the Attorney General, being desirous of not in any wise offending the South, as he is seeking the Presidential nomination, sidestepped the matter by turning it over to the United States Solicitor General, Mr. King, who is from the State of Georgia and I believe in perfect sympathy with what was done in Alabama in this particular case.[65]

This sentiment was echoed by Williams who wrote Shillady stating "I feel like this is a test case of what is coming to us after the war."[66]

Sergeant Caldwell had lost the support of the Attorney General but all was not lost as the Federal Court issued a certificate of reasonable doubt, which entitled Caldwell to an appeal before the U.S. Supreme Court—and saved his life, for the time being.[67] As this news surely raised the hopes of Caldwell's defense team, it would assuredly bring concern, if not rage, from those in Anniston wishing for the soldier's death. Rumors of

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[63] Assistant Attorney General Stewart to Charles Kline, January 30, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/716.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Cobb to Shillady, February 14, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/718-720.
[66] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/700.
[67] James Cobb to Mary White Ovington, December 3, 1919, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/697; *Crisis,* January 1920, 134.

lynching had circulated after Caldwell first killed Linton and the possibility that a lynch mob might surface was apparent, so the authorities moved Caldwell out of Anniston to Birmingham under the cover of night.[68]

James Cobb, James Weldon Johnson, and Walter White had all been tirelessly assisting the Anniston branch for the last six months, but it was not until after the announcement that the case would be tried before the highest court in the country, that the NAACP began to market the case publicly. On January 1920, more than a year after Caldwell's arrest, Du Bois wrote a detailed editorial in the *Crisis*, summarizing Caldwell's incarceration and subsequent trials. Du Bois told his readers that Caldwell was safely in Birmingham awaiting his trial in Washington and concluded by insisting that: "Our readers will appreciate what has been done to save Caldwell and to secure for him a new trial in which prejudice will not play so large a part. Much will be accomplished if a fair and impartial trial is at least secured for Sergeant Caldwell."[69] Caldwell's case was one of the first cases where the attorneys of the NAACP used national exposure and the Supreme Court to call attention to the plight of all blacks, and demand social changes via the court system.

Aside from informing the readers of the *Crisis* of Caldwell's predicament, the NAACP also used the publication to campaign for the monetary resources needed to continue to defend Caldwell. So far, the brunt of the financial responsibility had fallen on the Anniston branch, which had successfully managed to raise eleven hundred dollars from the Alabama branches of the NAACP. It had received only three hundred dollars from the National office.[70] Williams wrote to Shillady inquiring about whether the NAACP should seek to employ other attorneys before the U.S. Supreme Court heard the case, and attached an inventory of their expenditures. Shillady devised a plan to raise funds. On February 2, 1920, Shillady sent a telegram to Anniston and asked Rev. Williams to rush a photograph of Sergeant Caldwell in uniform to their office, so they could recruit *Crisis* readers to assist in the matter.[71] Because the *Crisis* would not reach readers until the end of the month, Shillady followed Anniston's request with a donation

[68] Ibid.
[69] *Crisis*, January 1920, 134.
[70] Anniston NAACP Inventory of Costs, Jan 23, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/709.
[71] Shillady to RR Williams, February 2, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/711.

as he stated: "We are sending you our check for two hundred and fifty dollars notwithstanding the fact that the Association has almost no money in its general fund." Shillady concluded the letter by stating that hiring additional lawyers was not practical but Cobb could look into the matter.[72]

True to his word, Shillady contacted Cobb and inquired if it would be "at all practical or advisable" to attempt to recruit any prominent white lawyers in Washington.[73] On Valentine's Day, only one day after Williams' request for additional council, Cobb informed both Shillady and Williams that he had secured the assistance of Mr. Henry E. Davis, and that fortunately the financial matter could be delayed:

> …I beg to say that the matter has been taken up with Honorable Henry E. Davis, ex-United States Attorney and a very great lawyer, to the end that he is cooperating with me and will present the case with me to the Supreme Court of the United States. I have not made any arrangements with him relative to any fee, but he was willing to go forward with me in the matter leaving the question of fee for me to settle later.[74]

Davis joined Cobb and Kline when Caldwell's defense team met with the Assistant Attorney General. During the meeting, Davis more "forcibly" asked for Stewart's honest opinion and ideas regarding Caldwell's fate.[75] Once again, Stewart waffled regarding his role in the matter, stating that he was inclined to agree with the events that had already taken place, but he was willing to file some sort of memorandum that might assist in the matter. It was at this point that Caldwell's defense team severed ties with Stewart. Cobb wrote Shillady and informed the secretary of the decision to eliminate an insincere politician:

> After finding out his disposition in the premises I very frankly let him know that I thought it best that he not argue the case, because I wanted the case argued by someone whose head and heart were at one that this man had not been fairly dealt with….The case will be properly addressed

[72] Shillady to RR Williams, February 13, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/713.
[73] Shillady to Cobb, February 13, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/712.
[74] Cobb to Shillady, February 14, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/718-720.
[75] Ibid.

presented to the Supreme Court of the United States and you will be good enough to notify Rev. Williams to that effect.[76]

Cobb and his fellow attorneys believed it was better to lose the case, while giving one hundred percent, than allow someone else to lose it, or worse—sabotage it, without passion.

Cobb, Kline and Davis finally met before the U.S. Supreme Court during the first week of March, 1920. On Thursday March 4, and Friday March 5, the defense team carefully argued why Edgar Caldwell's life should be spared. Throughout the two days they passionately opposed the representatives for the State of Alabama, headed by Attorney Neil Stearne, who represented Electric Power Company of Alabama. After the court session ended, Cobb wrote Shillady that if someone had challenged the authority of the civilian court earlier, perhaps Caldwell's chances would have improved drastically: "Whatever the outcome may be we can be conscious of the fact, that we have done our full duty. We all are agreed that had the question of jurisdiction…been raised at the threshold there would not have been the slightest trouble in having Caldwell surrendered to the Military Authorities."[77] While Cobb may not have been placing the specific blame on anyone, or any organization, the fact remained that in his opinion the city of Anniston and the state of Alabama had neglected his client.

March was the month in which many of the readers of the *Crisis* first saw Edgar Caldwell. While the subscribers of the NAACP's newspaper were familiar with his story, his fight became more personal when they finally laid eyes upon a young man proudly wearing his army uniform. The photograph that Shillady had requested from Rev. Williams was printed in the March edition with the caption "Do you want this boy to be hanged?"[78] The editorial then seized the opportunity to gather donations stating: "We want 500 Negroes who believe in Negro manhood, to send i*mmediately* one dollar each to J.E. Spingarn, Treasurer of the N.A.A.C.P., 70 Fifth Avenue, New York City, for Caldwell's defense."[79] As the NAACP waited for responses from its readers, one of the first replies came from an unexpected source—Edgar Caldwell himself.

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Cobb to Shillady, March 6, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/725.
[78] *Crisis,* March 1920, 233.
[79] Ibid.

Up to this point, Caldwell had been mostly unheard from, his supporters in Anniston had personally met with the soldier, but no one outside of Rev. Williams' immediate circle had ever corresponded with the man. That changed on March 26, 1920, when Caldwell wrote a letter of appreciation from his jail cell. Although not as famous as another letter later penned from the Jefferson County jail, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter From a Birmingham Jail," Caldwell's letter spoke of hope in a time of personal crisis and in an era of racial discontent:

> My Dear Sir,
>
> I take the greatest of pleasure in writing to you to ask all of the members of the N.A.A.C.P. to please prayer for me for I am praying. Every hour in the Day, and I have plenty of Faith that Heaven is above and just as sure as god sit on his thrown, I am going to out come [sic] this little trouble for it is not going to amount to _____ in sight of our God. So I will ask you all to pray for me, for I am a child of God and I haven't never been discharged from U.S. Army, yet, so I am asking God to go into President Wilson Heart and give me another chance here on Earth. I can't comprehend where you got that photo of mine at? Of course that photo was taking just about the month after I had landed in the Philippines Islands, in the year of 1912, of course where I saw it I can't sure make it out as just ….So I am so to say that I have got a Little wife and she come to see me just as often as she can that is twice a week, or more, and those are the best…
>
> So please don't forget to prayer for Mr. R.R. Williams…
>
> And I will ask you to read this letter to your church, as anytime I'm praying for you all. In I will come to a close, bying [sic] good bye to you and all from Sgt. E.C. Caldwell
>
> …and please tell the church to pray for my little wife.[80]

Shillady wrote back to Caldwell stating that National headquarters of the NAACP appreciated receiving this "personal word" from Caldwell. They assured the soldier that

[80] Caldwell to Shillady, March 6, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/739-741. The letter does note flow smoothly because it is transcribed directly from the original prose penned by Caldwell.

they were doing all that could in his behalf and "trusted" that the court's decision would be "favorable." The letter included the postscript: "You may be interested to know that some $2,700 has been spent and authorized for your defense." [81]

Shillady's letter would have provided more inspiration for Caldwell if it had included news of the donations the NAACP was receiving from private citizens. From Washington DC, to as far away as New Mexico, contributions began to arrive during the months of March and April. T.H. Driskill, from Cape May, New Jersey, stated that he "believed in Negro Manhood" and was proudly sending in a donation to help the cause; furthermore, he stated that he had a friend who also wanted to assist in the cause. These donations were not simply collected, but immediately responded to, by high ranking NAACP administrators. Shillady personally responded to Driskill, and in another case Walter White wrote a letter to Washington DC, to thank C.P. Dam for his donation to the Edgar Caldwell fund.[82]

Especially encouraging was the show of support from veterans and servicemen who not only sent donations but eagerly inquired as to Caldwell's situation. The Post Adjutant from the American Legion in Harrisonburg, Virginia, sent a personal donation and requested that the *Crisis* immediately print any results, as he was "hoping to hear from them favorably."[83] Members of Caldwell's military company, the Twenty Fourth Infantry, were extremely interested to help and raise collections to benefit their comrade. Sergeant Allen Brown and Corporal Henry W. Willis responded to the NAACP from Hachita, New Mexico, stating that they had both served with Caldwell and were eager to assist in any way possible.[84]

Those who inquired as to Caldwell's fate unfortunately had to wait until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the case. The six week process must have been especially frustrating for James A. Cobb and Henry Kline and others working on the case; and specifically Caldwell, who had the most to lose if the decision was not favorable. As all interested parties continued to wait, Arthur B. Springarn, and the Board of Directors of the NAACP wrote Cobb and his fellow counselors and thanked them for their dedication

[81] Shillady to Caldwell, April 1, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/738.
[82] Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/730-732.
[83] B.H. Newman to Springarn, March 29, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/736.
[84] Corporal Henry Willis to NAACP, April 27, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/748.

and service. Cobb responded in kind by heartily thanking the board, adding that the "beautiful expressions" of their letter would certainly "carry" him "over the hard places" that were to follow.[85] The wait ended on April 19, 1920, when the U.S. Supreme Court finally rendered a decision.

The Finale

Despite the diminutive odds, the NAACP had high hopes that the U.S. Supreme Court might side with their defendant. The court had its share of Southern sympathisizers and ex-Confederates, but it had recently sided with the NAACP. In 1915 the decision of *Guinn v. the United States* had nullified an Oklahoma law that gave preferential treatment to white voters.[86] Furthermore, Du Bois believed that Judge Louis Brandeis was an ally. Du Bois described Brandeis as "a modern man," and praised him when President Wilson nominated Brandeis to the Supreme Court, stating that it was a lone exception in a presidency usually filled with negative decisions concerning black folk.[87] With these hopes, Caldwell's defense team arrived in Federal Court on April 19, 1920, and awaited the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Caldwell v. Parker*.

The court addressed the legality of the jurisdiction of the first trial, specifically targeting the defense's plea that during a time of war Caldwell should have been handed over to the military authorities. The court ruled that a crime had been committed by a person in the federal military service while the nation was at war, but it disagreed with Cobb, stating that Caldwell's crime upon a civilian occurred in a state "where hostilities are not present and where martial law has not been proclaimed."[88] The court acknowledged that the previous Articles of War addressed a state's capability to govern, under a state of martial law. The court then stated these specific Articles which originated in 1776:

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[85] Cobb to Captain Arthur B. Sprinarn, March 13, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/729.
[86] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 483.
[87] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919,* 522.
[88] *Caldwell v. Parker*, Sheriff of Calhoun County, Alabama 252 U.S. 376; 40 S. Ct. 388; 64 L. Ed. 621; 1920 U.S. Lexis 1516.

> Whenever any officer or soldier shall be accused of a capital crime, or of having used violence, or committed any offence against the persons or property of the good people of any of the United American States, such as is punishable by the known laws of the land, the commanding officer and officers of every regiment, troop, or party, to which the person or persons so accused shall belong, are hereby required, upon application duly made by or in behalf of the party or parties injured, to use his utmost endeavors to deliver over such accused person or persons to the civil magistrate; and likewise to be aiding and assisting to the officers of justice in apprehending and securing the person or persons so accused, in order to bring them to a trial. If any commanding officer of officers shall willfully neglect or shall refuse, upon the application aforesaid, to deliver over such accused person or persons to the civil magistrates, or to be aiding and assisting to the officers of justice in apprehending such person or persons, the officer or officers so offending shall be cashiered.

But Chief Justice Edward Douglas White argued that after the war, the country redefined these acts to empower each individual state, and the Articles of War were now a moot point with regard to Caldwell's case in the modern era:

> Immediately following the war this rule was challenged in *Ex part Milligan*, 4 Wall. 2, when the court then ruled that "that a state of war, in the absence of some occasion for the declaration of martial law or conditions consequent on military operations, gave no power to the military authorities where the civil courts were open and capable of performing.
>
> It follows, therefore, that the contention as to the enlargement of military power, as the mere result of a state of war, and the consequent complete destruction of state authority, are without merit and that the court was right in so deciding and hence its judgment must be and it is *Affirmed*.

In a unanimous decision justices McKenna, Holmes, Day, Van Devanter, Pitney, McReynolds, Clarke, and Brandeis concurred with White and affirmed the earlier courts' decisions.[89]

The justices believed that any other opinion would have stripped the individual state of its power to govern. The court believed that to side with Caldwell would potentially give the federal government too much power and undermine the ability of the Southern state to govern as they deemed fit.

The Civil War had been fought over half a century ago, but the political argument of states' rights was still very much alive in the ideology of southern politicians. The guiding principals and ideologies of the Confederacy still lingered in the United States, and many citizens still clung to the romantic images of secession and the war that followed. Every year, on the anniversary of the battle of Antietam, Chief Justice White, a Louisiana veteran of the Civil War, presented Union veteran and fellow justice Oliver Wendell Holmes with a rose.[90]

Caldwell's last hope clung to the faint chance that Governor Thomas E. Kilby would appeal the execution. Shillady wrote to Cobb and recommended that all principal Alabama branches write to the governor and ask that he spare Caldwell's life. Shillady did not completely rule out the chances that the governor might intervene, as he stated that he had previously met the governor and found him "to be an approachable gentleman, much beyond the ordinary" and "quite decent."[91] Shillady next wrote Rev. Williams and suggested that the best plan was to seek the support of any prominent whites in the community. Shillady mentioned that Rev. James Brown, the Chair of Anniston's NAACP's Legal Committee, and Miss Sybil Moses had alliances with certain influential white men and women in Anniston, and could specifically reach out to Mrs. Knox and Mr. Tyler who seemed sympathetic to Caldwell.[92]

Meanwhile black reporters from various northern newspapers kept their readers informed about Caldwell's final days. The *Crisis* regretfully informed its readers that the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled against the soldier but that both the National headquarters

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 96.
[91] Shillady to Cobb, April 29, 1920, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Reel 4/758.
[92] Shillady to Williams, May 1, 1920, Papers of the NAACP: Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939. Series A: the South, (Bethesda, Maryland: Univeristy Publications of America, 1991), Reel 1/0238.

as well as the Alabama branches were appealing to the governor to commute the sentence to a life term of imprisonment. The *Crisis* then thanked its readers for their donations which totaled $359.15, but also included that they had expended over $900 in Caldwell's behalf.[93]

In another account, a reporter from the Chicago *Defender* traveled to Anniston and met with Caldwell in his Jefferson County cell. The *Defender* stated that as the death hour neared, Caldwell still had hope that his death might be averted, but Caldwell also confided to the paper that as sorrowful as his situation was, he rejoiced in the fact that the experience had awakened his faith in Christianity:

> The Lord had a hand in getting me into trouble in order to save my soul. The devil made me kill Linton…and I would have been lost forever if I had been executed immediately after the killing. I was converted on Feb. 29 and God has revealed to me that He would save me from the hangman's noose.[94]

Despite Caldwell's hope of divine intervention he was sent to the gallows on July 30, 1920. Shillady's hopes that the approachable and "decent" Governor Kilby might commute the sentence were also dashed as the governor was not even in the country. Kirby was enjoying a summer tour of the northwest regions of Canada. Acting Governor, Nathan L. Miller decided that the execution would be carried out as planned.[95]

Even Caldwell's death symbolized the country's fractionalization as people used the execution as a political platform to express their views on race relations. The *Crisis* described the execution as an event of martyrdom as even in his last mortal moments, Caldwell defiantly opposed racial injustice in Alabama as well as the United States. Du Bois wrote on what the case meant to the NAACP, the race, and Caldwell himself:

> Sergeant Caldwell is dead, but the efforts to save him are not lost. No person who is conversant with the facts in his case feels that he was guilty of a crime when he fought to save his own life. No red blooded person would have done otherwise. Caldwell has been sacrificed on the altar of

[93] *Crisis,* June 1920, 90.
[94] *Chicago Defender*, July 24, 1920.
[95] *Chicago Defender*, July 24, 1920.

> prejudice. His death means but one more addition to the long list of crimes which have been done in the manner of color prejudice.
>
> Caldwell's last words, spoken just before the noose was placed around his neck, express his feeling toward the country that had accepted his services in battle and repaid him by a legal lynching. They close Caldwell's life history but who knows what part his death may play in the ending of the regime that caused his death?[96]

Du Bois concluded his editorial by providing Caldwell's final words only moments before the trap doors flung open and he fell to his death:

> I am being sacrificed today upon the altar of passion and racial hatred that appears to be the bulwark of America's civilization. If it would alleviate the pain and sufferings of my race, I would count myself fortunate in dying, but I am but one of the many victims among my people who are paying the price of America's mockery of law and dishonesty in her profession of a world democracy.[97]

It is doubtful that Caldwell ever spoke these words and interjected such phrase as "bulwark" or "altar of passion and racial hatred." To Du Bois, Caldwell's life personified the injustices that blacks had suffered.

On the other end of the political spectrum, southerners also used poetic license and created their own account of Caldwell's final moments before death. As a reminder of social obedience and morality, the *Memphis Appeal* described a scene where before a crowd of over twenty five hundred onlookers, Caldwell gave a twenty minute talk warning against the effects of whiskey, cigarettes and carrying firearms, to which Du Bois's only retort was "What can be gained from so pitiful a lie?"[98]

It can be debated which newspaper's accounts are valid as the actual final words were never officially written down. There was no court ordered stenographer to authenticate his final message, but based on Caldwell's religious fervor, as read in his

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[96] *Crisis*, October 1920, 282.
[97] Ibid.
[98] *Memphis Appeal* reprinted in Crisis, November, 1920, 28; *St. Louis Dispatch*, July 30, 1920, despite that the *Birmingham News* stated that Caldwell had social ties with St. Louis this is the only comment given to the Caldwell's entire process from streetcar to the gallows in the *St. Louis Dispatch*.; and *Crisis* November, 1920, 28.

letter to the NAACP and his testimony to the *Defender*, it is doubtful that Caldwell played the role of martyr or that of servant to white obedience. Perhaps the *Anniston Star's* simple summary of Caldwell's final actions that most closely resembles the truth: the soldier read the 23rd Psalm, sang two songs and prayed.[99]

Edgar Caldwell lost both his life and his battle with the judicial system in July of 1920, but the black citizens of the South continued to fight against the system of segregation. Less than a month after Caldwell's execution, those who defied the system of Jim Crow were handed an unlikely ally when several white street car conductors in Atlanta walked away from their jobs. The four men cited an unjust system that created not only inequality but an element of violence, as it was their job to separate the races and inflict these "insulting" conditions upon the black men and women of the South. As originally told to a reporter from the Continental Press, one conductor, who wished to remain anonymous, stated that his life was more precious than any job. Despite the possibility of violence the conductor did not hold ill feelings to those who defied the "severe and brutal" system of segregation: "I cannot blame decent and respectable people from revolting against the way they are treated here. It's enough to drive them crazy."[100]

While these four conductors were in the minority among their white brethren in the public transportation sector, the *Chicago Defender* seized the opportunity to magnify the situation as representative of a larger problem in the South. The *Defender's* article cited several fights that had broken out when white conductors had to yank men, and even women, out of their seats. Segregation negatively affected more than just the black victims forced to concede to segregation in that the white workers were expected to enforce the law. One conductor described that he felt he had to arm himself to secure his safety while carrying out his job:

> When I leave the car barns in the morning I prepare to fight my way through the day's work….Most all of us carry arms, but this is not generally known among the officials. We have to. I have been identified with the car company here for five years, and it has been a source of terror

[99] Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 97; and Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 328.
[100] *Chicago Defender* Aug 21, 1920.

to keep going daily, but I am married and my education is limited, so you see I have to work somewhere.[101]

Eventually this employee had had enough and decided that his occupation was no longer worth risking his personal safety, as he and three other conductors handed in their resignation letters and looked for work elsewhere. The *Defender's* article concluded with the white men blaming their superiors, as well as the politicians, for creating policies that other men had to enforce: "It is all right for some guy to sit in a nice office and tell us what to do here on the cars and how we must put the 'nigger in his place,' but they don't have to do it, and it's mighty easy to give orders, anyway."[102]

It is unknown if Cecil Linton and J.D. Summerlin shared these same feelings towards the system of segregation they were forced to uphold, but they too were armed, and believed that it was their duty, or right, to uphold the role of white supremacy. In Summerlin's case enforcing segregation led to the death of Major John Green and the possibility, although remote, of losing his own freedom; for Cecil Linton the penalty was greater as defending white supremacy cost him his life, and also led to the execution of Sergeant Edgar Caldwell.

On July 30, 1920, the state of Alabama "legally" lynched another black soldier. The public execution of Caldwell was sponsored by the state and it served the same message as any lynching conducted by white vigilantes. A black man was publicly hanged as a reminder to all that they needed to recognize the power of white supremacy and the possible consequence to anyone who defied the system of Jim Crow.

[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE
FIGHTING BACK: MILITANCE AND LITERATURE

By the spring of 1919 the black community had witnessed countless acts of violence. Even after black citizens committed to the war, discrimination and violence continued against them. With the war over and the soldiers home, racism still reigned in the United States and Du Bois re-opened the issue of black discontent. In May 1919, Du Bois returned to the *Crisis* to address equality in the post-war era. Du Bois's editorial "Returning Soldiers" began with a description of current offenses against blacks:

> We are returning from war!....We fought in far off hope; for the dominant southern oligarchy entrenched in Washington, we fought in bitter resignation. For the America that represents and gloats in lynching, disfranchisement, caste, brutality and devilish insult—for this, in the hateful upturning and mixing of things, we were forced by vindictive fate to fight also….
>
> This country of ours, despite all its better souls have done and dreamed, is yet a shameful land….
>
> It *lynches*….
>
> It *disfranchises* its own citizens….
>
> It encourages *ignorance*….
>
> It *steals* from us….
>
> It *insults* us….[1]

Du Bois described the black soldier's commitment to the war and then vowed to take the fight to the federal government:

> This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return. This is the fatherland for which we fought! But it is *our* fatherland. It was right for us to fight. The faults of *our* country are *our* faults. Under similar circumstances, we would fight again. By the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that the war is over, we do not marshal

[1] "Returning Soldiers," *Crisis*, May 1919, 1.

> every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our land.
>
> We *return.*
>
> We *return from fighting.*
>
> We *return fighting.*
>
> Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.[2]

As one of a growing population who used the symbol of the black soldier to reflect a new ideology in the black community, Du Bois advocated that all black citizens channel the fighting spirit of those black soldiers who fought in the war. No longer would black men and women idly sit by and allow white supremacists to persecute their people.

William N. Colson, a former Lieutenant in the U.S. Army and correspondent for the *Messenger*, believed that the role of the black soldier should go beyond mere symbolism but rather each returning veteran had to play a specific role in demanding equality. In the article "The Immediate Function of the Black Veteran," Colson called on all returning black troops to defy white supremacy at home through political, economic and physical means if necessary. The article called into attention segregation as well as lynching:

> The returned soldier, by reason of his military training, can do more to stop lynch-law and discrimination in the United States than many Americans want to see. He is accomplishing it by a resolute demonstration of self defense and a growing desire to lose his life in a good cause…It is conceded that the greatest benefit the Negro soldiers received from the war was their revolutionary appreciation of social values…the function of the returned soldiers with their new appreciation of social values, straightway to appropriate the desire to either revolutionize or destroy every evil American institution which retards their progress….Let them neither smile nor sleep until they have burned

[2] Ibid.

into the soul of every Negro in the United States an unquenchable desire to tear down every barrier which stops their onward march.
But each black soldier, as he travels on jim-crow cars, if he has the desire, can act his disapproval. When he is insulted, he can perform a counter-action. When he is exploited economically he can strike.[3]

In the post-war years, both black soldiers and black citizens rallied to the call of defiance. Each group spurred the other on to protest any persecution that violated the black person's body or the black community's psyche. Black veterans formed clubs and agencies to promote pride and demand equality. Black rioters angry at the treatment of black veterans fought back in cities such as Chicago and the nation's capital. While some black writers specifically commented on the assaults on black veterans as a cause of civil unrest, other artists expressed their dissent in literary ventures. Poets, playwrights and novelists all paid specific tribute to the black soldier who returned home only to be lynched. For these writers literature was not only used for entertainment but an important educational vehicle. Artists used literature to heighten the reader's awareness of the experience of lynching, to create an alternative reality, and provide the audience with a new understanding of the socio-historical picture.

Mobilizing the Masses: Agency and Open Resistance

As black soldiers were returning home, some black officers believed that it was their duty as soldiers to protect blacks upon their arrival to the United States. These veterans wanted to establish private organizations that demanded equality, and so they created societies in the states to attempt to equal the fair treatment that the black soldier experienced in France. Military intelligence intercepted a flyer designed to recruit other black soldiers of the 370th Infantry regiment into a secret organization. The Military Intelligence Department circulated the document among its highest officers. What may have been construed as a self-help agency was deemed as rebellious, and therefore dangerous. The federal government began an investigation into groups that defied conventional views on race relations at home.

[3] William Colson, "The Immediate Function of the Black Veteran," *Messenger*, December 1919, 19-20.

One group that gained specific attention from the federal government was the League for Demoracy (LFD), based in Harlem and led by former Lieutenant Osceola E. McKaine. McKaine had first received scrutiny when he wrote an editorial in the publication *The Outlook* in the spring of 1918. The piece articulated McKaine's disgust with racism in the United States, having witnessed equality in France. After forming the LFD, McKaine once again expressed his dissatisfaction with the United States when he wrote into *The Independent*, January 1919, calling France "a terrestrial heaven where they could forget that they were sinners simply because they were black….France had no man made laws governing social equality…America suffered by comparison."[4] As the LFD grew in reputation, McKaine's role becomes unclear, as either splinter groups or other groups adopting the name, began to emerge on the East Coast. Cities across the country contained their own chapters of the League for Democracy spanning from New York and Boston in the Northeast to St. Louis in the Midwest. While these affiliations were rare in the South, federal investigators did find recruiting documents in Virginia, Atlanta and Tallahassee.[5]

For the most part, these organizations concentrated on racial pride and paid homage to the men who fought in the war. New York's LFD stated that it was committed to both the advancement—and protection—of the soldiers and their families who fought in the war, but the organization's paper *The Veteran* rarely implied violence. Lieutenant Aiken A. Pope, president of the New York LFD, instead chose to pay tribute to the various divisions and regiments of black soldiers, as the *Veteran* published and sold the insignias, patches and pins of black infantries. For a small price a reader could buy and wear the 92nd's Buffalo patch or the 93rd's Rattlesnake.[6] Other chapters suggested open defiance.

In the nation's capital, an unnamed citizen submitted a pamphlet entitled "Lest We Forget" to the Bureau of Investigation (BI).[7] The LFD distributed the pamphlet to the black community of Washington DC, and it received immediate scrutiny by MID

[4] Mark Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance*, 214-215. For a complete study of Lieutenant Osceola E. McKaine see Miles Richards, "Osceola E. McKaine and the Struggle for Black Civil Rights: 1917-1946," (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1994).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Federal Surveillance Files, OG10317-337.
[7] The BI is the forerunner to the later, and much larger, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Assistant Director Franke Burke, who grew worried as he read the militant message of the material:

> Lest we forget the Democracy for which our men fought and died; lest we forget to strike our enemies the death blow when the lives of our mothers, fathers, wives, sweethearts, sisters and brothers are sought by the white intruder; lest we forget the vile, insidious, propaganda directed against us in this the Nation's Capital by infamous Pseudo-Americans and the press; lest we forget vows and oaths made and taken to right our wrongs without fear and without compromise after the war…
>
> …to expire together in one common cause…Mothers and fathers, we are ready to protect you at any cost.[8]

Federal investigators were additionally concerned when an attorney from Accomac County, Virginia, mailed in the poem "Where will the Next Battle Be Fought?"

> We have been ill-treated and
> Ignored by all but Christ,
> Tell us where will the next battle be fought
> The mothers gave their sons
> They were sent across the seas,
> Oh! where shall the next battle be fought.
> There are lynchings and oppressions
> Of a black and helpless race,
> Christians where can the next battle be fought.
> We must ask God to increase our faith.
> He'll tell us where will the next battle be fought.[9]

The LFD did not publicly respond to the poem, but the *Messenger* answered the anonymous poet's question with a defiant declaration that the next battlefield would be on U.S. soil.[10]

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[8] A.B. Cone to Franke Burke, August 18, 1919, Federal Surveillance Files, OG 372102.
[9] Federal Surveillance Files, 372504.
[10] Although the BI believed that the LFD, or one of its members, issued the poem no formal evidence proves this theory.

In the column "The Star Spangled Banner," in the *Messenger* William Colson relied on his experiences in the military to describe how black officers had inspired their trainees to kill Germans and how the demeanor could easily transfer to the white supremacist:

> When black officers taught black men bayonet practice they substituted a picture of the rabid white Southerner for that of the Hun….The sentiment was that with the Huns of America over there the incitement necessary to proper dash and courage would be forthcoming. They would be fighting to make America safe for all class….next war for 'democracy' would be in the land of the "Star-Spangled Banner."[11]

The *New York World* also predicted a backlash from the black community when addressing the issue of lynching:

> Who is foolish enough to assume that with 239,000 colored men in uniform from the southern states alone, as against 370,000 white men, the blacks whose manhood and patriotism were thus recognized and tested are forever to be flogged, lynched, burned at the stake or chased into concealment whenever Caucasian desperadoes are moved to engage in this infamous pastime?[12]

While organizations such as the LFD and the NAACP frowned upon violence, individual returning soldiers were not as reluctant to admit if and when violence was necessary. The *Brooklyn Eagle* quoted Paul Filton, a soldier from "over there," who confessed:

> Is that a straw showing which way the wind is going to blow hereafter for the Negro? It has also been brought to my attention that the "Ku Klux Klan" are having new robes made, are polishing their rifles and getting ready to resume "night riding." Why? Is it because these returning black soldiers, newly enfranchised by the war, may claim to be part and parcel of that "Democracy for which they fought and for which many have died?" We are not asking favors. We are demanding our rights. If the

[11] *Messenger*, August 1919, 24-25.
[12] Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I*, 184.

> bigots are counting upon still relegating us to the back door of public hostelries, hat in hand, they are reckoning without their host. If that modern "Ku Klux Klan" thinks that these hard fighting, straight-shooting veterans of the World War are the same timid field-hands, crouching in terror, they have another "think" [sic] coming.[13]

The next warning came from the pulpit when Reverend W.S. Carpenter reflected upon the mentality of the men with whom he served with in Europe and wrote to the *Brooklyn Standard-Union*. Rev. Carpenter stated that while he did not feel that black soldiers were vowing vengeance, violence would ensue if equality was delayed:

> We helped carry "Democracy" to France. On the return trip home Negro officers were not allowed to eat in the same places with the other officers in their regiment…In different parts of the South the Ku Klux Klan is reorganizing. All right. I predict that when they have a roll call after some of their contemplated rides, some of their riders will be enjoying the sleep which has no earthly waking….I do not believe that my men who are returning home from France are seeking to make trouble anywhere. But I do believe that never again will they without a struggle, submit to the indignities under which they have suffered since birth. We have a country and we have a flag. We seek under the flag we carried to live in peace. And we are going to get justice under this flag—or pay the price which justice demands. Under God lynch law must cease.[14]

Just as black soldiers were willing to fight for the black community, many black citizens were willing to reciprocate and call attention to the lynching of black veterans.

Atlanta resident, Ernest Hall, included lynching in a long list of offenses against the community. After being ignored by other Georgia newspapers, the *Atlanta Independent* printed Hall's response to white politicians who questioned the intelligence of black voters. Many black citizens were often disenfranchised in the South, but the few that did vote in Atlanta were being slandered by the Democratic party as being easily manipulated by white Republican candidates and ignorant to the political discourse of

[13] Brooklyn *Eagle,* reprinted in *Crisis*, May 1919, 29.
[14] *Brooklyn Standard-Union*, reprinted in *Crisis*, May 1919, 30.

Atlanta; the Democratic party of Atlanta had criticized black voters for favoring a tax increase that would have assisted public education.[15] Hall argued that it was Georgia racists who had oppressed, lynched and burned black men instead of creating informed citizens. Hall argued that if the Democratic Party wanted to reach the black citizens they should provide civil rights, starting with the safety of black veterans:

> The blood of Georgia Negroes mingled with the blood of white Georgians in the last war, as your President says, for Democracy. They were both intelligent enough to let Negro soldiers in that fierce contest, and strong enough to fight off the white men, not only in America but throughout the world, that they might have chance to participate in the affairs of the government under which they live. Many of these men, who fought for you and your home, have returned to Georgia with clean records, only to be murdered because they wore the American uniform. And what do you say in their defense? Just the other day in Atlanta, a Negro filled with German bullets, unacquainted with the custom of the South, was nearly murdered because he asked for a glass of soda water, for which he wanted to pay.
>
> …I will tell you how to secure every Negro vote…build some decent schools, build and support a library for the Negro public…stop destroying our churches…treat us like we're citizens and human beings, and there will be no division in sentiment or in the ballot casting. Then and only then, all will be well and all will go well with the Government and the race.[16]

Other black southerners were not as polished or as patient as Hall and advocated the use of a bullet instead of the ballot.

In Mississippi, a local black citizen was so outraged after hearing that a white mob had lynched a black veteran that he threatened to seek revenge on the white community. A sheriff received an anonymous letter entitled "Fighting Fire with Fire." In

[15] *Atlanta Independent*, April 26, 1919, reprinted in Papers of the NAACP: Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939. Series A: the South, Reel 9/755.
[16] Papers of the NAACP: Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939. Series A: the South, Reel 9/756-757.

the letter a man, who referred to himself as only Fire Bill, vowed to destroy anything in his path if lynching continued in his region:

> Say lynch or burn a Negro in Mississippi again, and we will burn up the state and poison every horse, mule an[d] cow in it. We are tired of the way you are treating the Negro. We expect to give you hell from now on. No harm if you treat us right. We begged you to stop, but from now the burning will take place.[17]

After the sheriff made the correspondence public, the *Afro-American* printed the letter immediately followed by the details of Wilbur Little, of Blakely, Georgia, who was murdered for wearing his uniform too long. The newspaper concluded its coverage of lynched black soldiers with a detailed account of how racists temporarily forced Booker T. Washington Jr. from Alabama after he telegraphed the War department that a black veteran had been lynched in his native state.[18]

Widespread violence from the black community did not occur after Fire Bill's threat, but other sections of the United States did witness rioting when the local black community reacted to years of oppression and injustice. Black citizens unleashed pent up anger on the streets of Chicago in the summer of 1919. The writer and social activist Carl Sandburg traveled to Chicago and reported on the unrest that he witnessed. Sandburg, a volunteer in the Spanish American War who served in Puerto Rico during the summer of 1898 could not separate the image of the black soldier as a symbol of inspiration from those that rioted.[19] He described a city where newly arriving southern blacks merged with a population committed to the war effort. Sandburg quoted statistics, such as Local draft board No. 4 in the black district of State Street and 35th Street contained over 25,000 black residents, over one quarter of whom had registered for the draft. By the day of armistice the specific black community had 7,832 black men who had passed their physical examinations and were ready to be called into service.[20] Although these men were never sent to Europe, it was Sandburg's conclusion that they

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[17] *Afro-American*, April 11, 1919.
[18] Ibid. The account did not give the name of the lynched soldier. Even though the lynching may have never been formally reported, nor investigated, it may have been the murder of Bud Johnson, who only weeks before had been seized in Alabama and then taken to Florida and lynched.
[19] Anne P. Rice, *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond*, 171.
[20] Ibid., 173.

transferred their vigor and hope into a different call of duty—the demand for equality in Chicago. Sandburg described a scene where every day black men and women walked past helmets, canteens, and photographs of black regiments in the windows of barber shops and cigar stores only to eventually make their way to their destination. Finally, upon reaching a job for which they were overqualified for and yet underpaid, or a segregated beach on the weekend, the average black Chicagoan had had enough and resisted through violence. The citizens of Chicago, not just veterans but attorneys, physicians, machinists and day laborers were fighting in the spirit of the black soldier for Democracy at home:

> We made the supreme sacrifice…our record, like Old Glory, the flag we love because it stands for our freedom, hasn't got a spot on it; we 'come clean' now we want to see our country live up to the constitution and the declaration of independence.[21]

Stanley B. Norvell, a black veteran wrote a letter to Victor F. Lawson, the editor of the Chicago *Daily News*, in which he gave his insight into why the violence occurred.[22] It stated that it did not take a special commission to investigate the reasoning behind black discontent, as Norvell could immediately refer to social disparity, racism and the abuse of the returning black soldier as the cause of the rioting. Black citizens had channeled the inner-strength of the black veteran and now refused to accept a society that labeled them as inferior:

> Today we have with us a new Negro. A brand new Negro, if you please….You will find that "Uncle Tom" that charming old figure of literature contemporary with the war of the rebellion is quite dead now and that his prototypes are almost as extinct as is the great auk, the dodo bird, old Dobbin and the chaise, and the man who refused to shave until William Jennings Bryan was elected…it is a very difficult thing for him to get it into his head that he is inferior to anybody…..I believe that the mental attitude of the Negro that went to war is comparable in a certain

[21] Ibid.
[22] Stanley B. Norvell and William M. Tuttle, Jr. "Views of a Negro During 'The Red Summer' of 1919," 210. Norvell's letter was edited and published by historian William M. Tuttle, Jr. Tuttle stated that the letter mirrored what the black community was thinking.

> degree to the mental attitude of most of the Negroes throughout the country; so far as the awakenings are concerned.[23]

Norvell asserted that it was the neglect and lynching of black veterans that damaged the psyche of a people who were economically discriminated against:

> Try to imagine, if you can, the feelings of a Negro army officer, who clothed in the full panoply of his profession and wearing the decorations for valor of three governments, is forced to the indignity of a jim-crow car and who is refused a seat in a theatre and a bed in a hotel.
>
> Try to imagine the smouldering hatred within the breast of an overseas veteran who is set upon and mercilessly beaten by a gang of young hoodlums simply because he is colored. Think of the feelings in the hearts of boys and girls of my race who are clean, intelligent and industrious who apply for positions only to meet with the polite reply that, "We don't hire niggers.[24]

The veteran predicted future violence if racism was not abolished and equality granted:

> As soon as the white man is willing to inform himself about the true status of the Negro as he find him today, and is willing to take off the goggles of race prejudice and to study the Negro with the naked eye of fairness, and to treat him with justice and equity, he will come to the conclusion that the Negro has "arrived" and then voila, you have the solution to the problem.
>
> We ask not charity but justice….We have surely proven by years of unrequited toil and by constant and unfaltering loyalty and fealty that we are worthy of the justice that we ask. For God's sake give it to us![25]

His premonitions proved to be correct as 1919 had a number of riots. At least twenty communities in the United States witnessed violence during the post-war years. Two of the most violent outbreaks of unrest were in the aforementioned Chicago and Washington

[23] Ibid., 213-215.
[24] Ibid., 217.
[25] Ibid., 218.

DC. Both cities rioted in July which led to James Weldon Johnson naming the season "the Red Summer."[26]

Similar to the reports from Chicago, newspaper writers called attention to the relationship between the citizen and the soldier. A writer from South Carolina described that:

> …the relatives of returned Negro soldiers were beaten and killed on the streets of Washington, right in front of the White House, under the dome of the capitol of the greatest Republic on earth—a Republic that went to war to beat down injustice, and make the world safe for democracy. Has the head of this nation uttered one world of condemnation of the mob? If so, we have failed to see it.[27]

The critic referred to the federal government's refusal to intervene on behalf of the black veteran and his family; however, the writer overlooked the fact that the black community was finally fighting back. This observation was not lost on one black woman who wrote to the *Current Opinion* emotionally recalling her pride and fervor when she learned that blacks had not once again solely played the role of victim:

> The Washington riots gave me the thrill that comes once in a lifetime. I was alone when I read between the lines of the morning paper that at last our men had stood like men, struck back, were no longer dumb, driven cattle. When I could no longer read for my streaming tears, I stood up, alone in my room, held both hands high over my head and exclaimed, "Oh, I thank God, thank God!" When I remember anything, after this, I was prone on my bed, beating the pillow with both fists, laughing and crying, whimpering like a whipped child, for sheer gladness and madness. The pent-up humiliation, grief and horror of a lifetime—half a century—was being stripped from me.[28]

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[26] James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York: Viking Press, 1935), 341. For a more detailed account of the violence that transpired see the government publication *Antilynching Hearings* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 42-48.

[27] Charleston *Messenger*, reprinted in Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I*, 185.

[28] Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I*, 182. The *Current Opinion* article is originally studied in Francis J. Grimke, *The Race Problem* (Washington DC: 1919), 8.

James Weldon Johnson's investigations into the Chicago and Washington riots led him to conclude that there was a noticeable difference in blacks:

> When we reached the Northwest Section of the city, I found the whole atmosphere entirely different. I had expected to find the colored people excited and, perhaps, panicky; I found them calm and determined, unterrified, and unafraid….
>
> I returned disquieted, but not depressed over the Washington riot; it might have been worse. It might have been a riot in which the Negroes, unprotected by the law, would not have had the spirit to protect themselves.
>
> The Negroes saved themselves and saved Washington by their determination not to run, but to fight—fight in defense of their lives and their homes….As regrettable as are the Washington and the Chicago riots, I feel that they make the turning point in the psychology of the whole nation regarding the Negro problem.[29]

A sentiment of resistance and frustration that began in the psyche of the black soldier in Houston in 1917 had now been transferred to the private citizens of the inner city. By 1919 the black community, which had been betrayed by the federal government for decades, had taken on the mentality and role of the soldier. The citizen and soldier both defied racism and fought back.

Reports of Lynching: Reality or Entertainment?

Aside from bloodshed in the streets, other activists found more subtle ways to resist oppression, discrimination and violence in society. Writers began to create scenarios where black men no longer idly stood by and let their loved ones fall victim to physical abuse. Lynching had always been a sensational topic that grabbed the attention of the reader. While white racists validated the institution as an effective way to defend the honor of white women or restore the social hierarchy of the South, those who abhorred lynching added grotesque, if not gratuitous, violence to call attention to the

[29] *Crisis*, September 1919, 243.

topic. During these accounts of lynching, the death of the black soldier played a pivotal role.

White supremacists often found the black veteran especially threatening and James K. Vardaman called on his fellow Mississippians to remind the returning black troops that the equality experienced in France would not cross the Atlantic. As oppressive measures, including lynching, were advocated by Vardaman to ensure superiority for the white race, other communities occasionally balked at the idea that their white citizens had lynched a black soldier; for instance, the editor of the *Early County Times* accused northern papers of slander when they reported that Wilbur Little was lynched in Blakely.[30] W.W. Fleming wrote to the *New York Sun* and demanded that the northern press and the NAACP strike Little's name from the lynching statistics of 1919.[31] Eventually the *Crisis* disregarded Fleming's statement and sided with the black community's claim that Little had been murdered for refusing to take off his military uniform.

One may ask why the debate from the citizens of Blakely occurred? In a society that refused to condemn lynching, and often supported, if not encouraged, the practice, what was the intent of Fleming's defensive letter? Why the scorn? Perhaps, the white community of Blakely did not want to revisit a similar situation that allegedly took place half a year earlier, when northern newspapers reported that returning black soldiers had fought back, murdered white attackers, and demoralized white supremacy in Georgia. The *Pittsburgh Courier* boasted that a new defiance was emerging in the southern black ideology as they published their January article, "American Huns Meet Stiff Opposition in Midnight Attack on Home of Colored Men in Small Georgia Town."[32]

The *Courier* described Blakely, "along the Georgia and Florida Railroad" as a community where "colored people" owned their own land and even had access to the best acreage of fertile soil. One such family that had taken advantage of this scenario was the Bryants, who had lived in good name in Early County for the last four decades.

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[30] Refer to chapter three and the lynching of Wilbur Little, 49-50.
[31] *New York Sun*, May 28, 1919, reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 10/323.
[32] *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 18, 1919, reprinted in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 10/320; additionally, reprinted in the *Afro American* on January 24, 1919. This source is rare, as very few copies of the *Pittsburgh Courier* from 1919 exist today. Both the Pennsylvania Newspaper Archives, as well as the Library of Congress have no existing copies of the *Pittsburgh Courier* press runs from the year 1919.

According to the *Courier*, the problems began when the daughter of a local white family, the Hightowers, became "infatuated" with Henry Bryant, the younger of the two Bryant boys. Reportedly, the young girl "about twenty years of age" gave Henry a substantial gift worth five hundred dollars and attempted to convince him to move to another town, where she would follow. Allegedly, Bryant did not reciprocate the affection; yet he took the gift before he entered the military and went to fight in the war.[33]

Only days after the armistice, Henry returned to Early County in time for the Thanksgiving holidays. On Saturday night, Henry Bryant, still in uniform, had just sat down to dinner with his parents and older brother, when a knock came at the door. Before opening up, the Bryants inquired as to who was outside and the answer came back with a sharp "Don't matter a damn, open up!" When the Bryants gave in to the order, they saw a large number of white males congregated outside the home. The *Courier* reported that the two Bryant boys "took no chances," as the mob outside of their house, surely "spelled danger," and soon a gun fight began. After many shots were fired, the returned soldier and his older brother managed to make the mob retreat hastily. Henry Bryant escaped through the floor boards, but his brother perished as the rejoined "mob battered down the door and took their victim and he passed away his last minutes dangling from a limb." At this point, the story takes on mythic proportions as the defiant soldier, not only fought back but endured injuries that would have proven fatal to the average mortal: "The younger Bryant boy was shot twice, a bullet glancing his head and one entering his side but not doing him any serious harm." The *Courier* argued that the sheriff, Ed Black, "has not as yet made any arrest which is in keeping with the unwritten law in that section." The report concluded as the *Courier* stated its confusion as to what started the violence as there was no rape, nor allegations of an attack on the white girl: "These savages of the American Southland must every now and then appease their appetite by killing some innocent colored man, whether there is a reason or not."[34] But to the reign of white supremacy a reason had occurred—many reasons: affluent black citizens, "affection" displayed towards a black male from a white girl, and the defiant action of the returning black soldier, all were potent ingredients that led to a lynching.

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

The *Pittsburgh Courier's* article is peculiar as no other reputable source substantiated the claim that a black soldier had fought back and killed whites only to escape into the night. The *Chicago Defender*, which usually gravitated towards these pieces, was curiously absent in reporting on the heroism of Henry Bryant, and the *Crisis* did not provide the soldier's saga nor the lynching of Bryant's brother. Other than a copy of the *Courier's* article and the note that the *Afro-American* ran the same story, no other reference to the entire episode is covered in the NAACP's investigative files; furthermore, the fact that no southern politician or paper covered the story is especially strange. While it is probable that white supremacists would have been embarrassed, when two outnumbered black men fought off a white mob, and a cover up was possible, it is certain that a man-hunt would have ensued. Even if Henry Bryant had not been found, some other unfortunate substitute would have been lynched to appease racists who demanded "justice." Yet a victim never surfaced.

Perhaps a mob did lynch a man and it was never reported, but it is more likely that a resident who visited or migrated to the North from Georgia embellished or created the story; either way, those who advocated for white superiority would have wanted any story of a gallant black soldier suppressed. Or perhaps Bryant and Little were the predecessors of the a new militant mentality shaping the black community during 1919. Months before armed black men took to the streets and rioted, the hope of resistance was forming in the black psyche.

A second piece of writing that claimed to be authentic, yet remains unsubstantiated if not fictional, was a letter sent to the *Atlantic Monthly*. In the April 1920 issue of the periodical, the editors printed a letter from Drew, Mississippi, without alteration. A young white woman living in Mississippi told the story in "In the Delta: The Story of a Man-Hunt." Beulah Amidon Ratliff described a society hell bent on revenge and excitement when a lynching came to her community.[35]

Ratliff's testimony began as she wrote to her father and apologized for not writing for several days as the entire town had been upset with a "nigger chase." After a black man, Will Lane, shot a white man, the county relied on "Mr. Tom" to catch the culprit

[35] Beulah Amidon Ratliff, "In the Delta: The Story of a Man-Hunt," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1920: 456-461. Reprinted whole in NAACP Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 13-1089-1094.

and bring justice back to Fitzhugh, Mississippi. Mr. Tom told Ratliff that the hunt "was no place for a lady," but she demanded to go along and eventually he gave in to her wishes.[36] Throughout the story, Ratliff describes local black citizens providing shelter and resources for the suspect only to be outsmarted or beat into informing on Lane's most recent whereabouts. Eventually the story ends as the white mob brutally punishes the black community for assisting Jess and lynches their suspect, with Ratliff pontificating:

> I don't suppose I can ever forget that broad field before dawn, and the screech-owl and the convict in stripes and the cocked guns and Mr. Tom's low, pleasant voice, telling about the whipping and the torture and the screaming negro…or the six-foot strap that Mr. Tom told me, 'stung mighty sharp.'[37]

The story ends as Ratliff's elder, a "Mrs. Clara," advises her younger friend: "Don't be so squeamish, Beulah,' Mrs. Clara advises; 'remember you've come to live in the delta."[38] The story is full of dramatic inclusions such as owls screeching, hound dogs being brought in from other local areas, and ghoulish violence, but it is also indicative of the events and mindset of the culture of lynching.

Neither age nor gender deterred the white cast from cheering Mr. Tom and the mob in their chase. Mr. Tom's son, Jimmy, age six, bragged "dirty nigger gonna' get his if Daddy has to chase him for a week," and other members of the posse made competitive and gleeful boasts such as "If we could trail him all day today and all night, and catch him in the morning, we'd have had a good chase," and "Deer-hunting' has its excitement, but there's nothin' as excitin' as chasin' a man. He's worth outwittin." A woman from the nearby community of Blaine, Mississippi, who stopped her car and inquired into the mob's "progress" savagely quipped, "They'll get him, and I hope they torture him a couple of hours before they hang him."[39]

Ratliff does not see the irony of the white mob ignoring its own shortcomings; aside from the obvious fault of having to prove one's manhood through murder, the white

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[36] Ratliffe, "In the Delta," 456. Even the suspect's name is questioned as Ratliff refers to him as Will Jess and Will Lane.

[37] Ibid., 461.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 460-461.

mob often rationalizes its own failures as when Lane continues to escape their pursuits. Ratliff states: "Not a shot was fired after him. Excellent reasons were given, but the fact remains that six of the dominant race, with rifles, did not stop one hunted nigger."[40] In another instance Ratliff confessed: "Once they actually saw Lane in a lot, trying to catch a mule, 'but didn't shoot for fear of killing the mule.' This was accepted as perfectly legitimate."[41]

Aside from poignant quotes, the events that unfold during the story also lend an inside look into the organization of a lynch mob. Mr. Tom and his accomplices whip and torture black citizens and even lynch a man by the name of Martin, all of whom were never even charged with a crime. But perhaps the sections that most indict the local southern white culture were those showing the cooperation between the mob and the local law enforcement. As stated in numerous cases, often the officer or jailer said he was "overpowered" by the mob, or the police stated "they got the keys," but did not explain who gave them the keys (or how they got them). The author boasted as the county sheriff stated to the white mob: "If we catch him up here I'll phone you all and bring him down on the train. You can meet me and overpower me at Doddsville."[42] This was most likely the way it was done in many other lynchings, as in the case of Charles Lewis when a supposed mob from Tennessee mysteriously appeared in Hickman, Kentucky. In another instance, a white citizen turned Lane over to the sheriff of Sunbriar County, and the sheriff and Mr. Tom confided that they would notify the people of Blaine what train Lane was taking, so the suspect could be "met and overpowered en route."[43]

Ratliff's letter shows the degree to which the subject of lynching had entered the mainstream as a piece of entertainment or a medium of popular culture. If accurate, neither the author nor the community had any reservations about violating the rights of black citizens or about a corrupt law enforcement agency that substitute lynching for a judicial system. While the letter and or article can be viewed as merely fictional (no formal investigation ever led to uncovering the murder of Will Lane or his alias Will Jess, nor the earlier mentioned Martin, who was murdered for assisting Lane), it was real to the

[40] Ibid., 458.
[41] Ibid., 460.
[42] Ibid., 460.
[43] Ibid., 461. While the text names Sunbriar County, the locale in question may be Sunflower County. There is no Sunbriar County in Mississippi. These inconsistencies question the account's accuracy.

black citizens of the South who constantly wrestled with the emotional horrors of lynching.

For one reader who read the April edition of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Ratliff's letter triggered an emotional response as a young woman from Mississippi believed the victims were returning black soldiers, and later wrote into the NAACP and asked for an investigation. The reader stated that in her community of Ruleville, Mississippi, a "colored soldier was lynched in that place," and "another one was taken from a jail and put to death."[44] It is unclear if the events that unfolded were accurate, or in actuality ever occurred, but for one individual it was too real. Ratliff never identified the victim as a soldier nor mentioned Ruleville, but the dates and region are close enough to merit speculation. J.R. Shillady and R.R. Church, of the Memphis NAACP investigated the lynching and never found any additional leads. The story portrays the white perspective of Ratliff's community who condoned, created, and celebrated the lynching and the black community who immediately thought of their fallen black soldier.

Both black and white artists and writers alike have expressed their sympathy and outrage on behalf of the black soldier who returned to the United States only to be neglected, hunted, attacked and murdered. From 1919 to more recent artists, writers have put pen to paper in poems, plays, short stories and novels on behalf of the victims of lynching—and especially the black soldier that fell victim.

Ink: Lynching of Black Soldiers in Literature

In the years that followed the war, lynching was rampant; but with the exception of a few southern newspapers and the northern liberal press, most notably the *New York Times*, many publications that were distributed in the white communities of the United States avoided the subject of lynching, or worse celebrated it. As periodicals like the aforementioned *Atlantic Monthly* only presented lynching from the white point of view, W.E.B. Du Bois pointed to how sources such as the *Crisis* were far outnumbered at the newsstand and many citizens only heard one side of the accusations and the eventual lynching. Du Bois pointed to an unfair equation where the victim was often not

[44] NAACP, Anti-Lynching Papers, Reel 13/1089.

represented: "when propaganda is confined to one side while the other side is stripped and silent."[45]

In the decades that followed the war, more and more writers told how lynching affected the black community. Trudier Harris's work *Exorcising Blackness* is a critical analysis of how black writers historically addressed the issue of lynching to understand and critique the greater society that allowed such a horrific institution to occur and how the black community dealt with the violence unleashed upon its people. In another important study *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond*, Anne P. Rice, through history and literary interpretation, continues Harris's study and evaluates anti-lynching activists "who waged war on two fronts—in the legislature and at the bar of public opinion."[46] Rice pays tribute to those who fought back through print: "Literature plays a crucial role in the mourning of catastrophic events, particularly when there has been a radical forgetting in other areas of communication and in the preservation of history."[47] The issue of lynching can be read in a number of mediums, from poems to plays, with artists like Claude McKay graphically displaying the violence found in the act and the effect that the phenomenon had on all members of society.

Claude McKay read accounts of lynching in the black press and then personally experienced fear for his own safety while traveling through the South. Born in Jamaica, he earned accolades as a promising writer from those at the Jamaican Institute of Arts and Sciences, before coming to study in the United States. After attending the Tuskegee Institute as well as Kansas State University, he was employed during the war era as a laborer on the railroad. A former police officer in Jamaica, he was familiar with violence and he needed those experiences as he and his armed companions traveled the United States:

> Our Negro newspapers were morbid, full of details of clashes between colored and white, murderous shootings and hangings. Traveling from city to city and unable to gauge the attitude and temper of each one, we Negro railroad workers were nervous….We stuck together, some of us armed, going from railroad station to our quarters. We stayed in our quarters all

[45] Anne P. Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 2.
[46] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*,1.
[47] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 23.

through the dreary ominous nights, for we never knew what was going to happen.[48]

It was during these experiences that McKay penned one of his most famous poems "If We Must Die." McKay remembered a summer of riots, the emotion and sentiment "exploding" from him as he wrote of fighting back:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us, though dead!
Oh, kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us still be brave.
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back![49]

After McKay's poem had been privately circulated among his co-workers and other members of the black community, Max Eastman's *Liberator* published the poem in July 1919.[50] Three years later Mckay wrote "The Lynching," describing a society in which white women and children eagerly pushed through a crowd to observe the lynching:

The women thronged to look, but never a one
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;
And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.[51]

McKay in heightening experience wanted to inspire social action.

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[48] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching* , 13.
[49] *Messenger*, September 1919, 4. Originally printed in the July issue of the *Liberator*, 1919.
[50] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 189.
[51] Claude McKay, *Harlem Shadows: The Poems of Claude McKay* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), 51.

Another poet who dealt with the white woman's involvement in the lynching of a black man was Jean Toomer's "Portrait in Georgia" (1923). The poem combined sensual imagery and graphic violence, as feminine features took on the components of a lynching:

Hair—braided chestnut,
coiled like a lyncher's rope,
Eyes—fagots,
Lips—old scars, or the first red blisters,
Breath—the last sweet scent of cane,
And her slim body, white as the ash
of black flesh after flame.[52]

Rice analyzes the poem with the insightful comment: "the body of the southern belle dissolves into the body of a lynched black man, the union between the two collapsing at the instant it occurs into the violent ritual meant to prevent it"[53] By fusing the two cultures in the lynched body, Toomer's play presents readers with a deeper understanding of how literature is used to illuminate life and provides a new way of imagining.

Other works of art continued to confront lynching but included the black soldier as an ingredient to the topic. The writer Dan Block submitted his poem "When the Colored Troops Got Back," to the *Messenger* in the spring of 1919.[54] Block held hope that despite the violence that black soldiers endured, the United States would eventually find peace between the races:

When the colored troops got
back,
And the whites 'joined in' with
them
In the hurricane of laughter.
Which stirred the city to its
depths
And thrilled all hearts with pater

[52] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 13.
[53] Ibid.
[54] *Messenger*, May-June 1919, 25.

nalness,
felt—if only for a moment—
"The Great International Spirit
of Brothers"….

I see the victims of the crow-bar,
and the lawless mobs
Pressing forward in 'restless'
steadiness.
To challenge the pitiless judge,
Who has condemned them—with-
out just cause—
To a life of slavery, and made
them to suffer
The pangs of a birth of insolence
and ridicule.
And I see the Dawn 'father' our
colored brothers
Into a world of Free Men, proud
of their heritage.

In the look of those troops face,
—Faces worn by sufferings en-
countered in the struggle,
—Faces beaming—hiding the
'Marks of Slavery'
beneath the 'Joys of Victory'—
I felt the heavy gaze of a noble
and heroic race
Lighten up. And in the sunlight
of that smile,

The wrongs against Our Colored

brothers,

Will melt into acts of kindness.[55]

Other poets were not so hopeful and instead only focused on racists lynching black soldiers. The *Afro-American* published the poem "A Burnt Offering to Demoracy," which called into attention the hypocrisy and racism of the United States:

How can a nation dare dictate to men

Of foreign climes what their conduct should be,

In dealing with their weaker subjects, when

Their own are lynched with all impunity;

Restricted of every right,

Because they were born black, instead of white?[56]

The suffragist and advocate for racial equality, Carrie Williams Clifford also fought for the returning black soldier. Clifford was married to William H. Clifford, an attorney and member of the Ohio legislature, but she left the comfort of her social status to critique a society that condoned lynching. She founded women's clubs for racial equality and served as an editor of the *Cleveland Journal*, but she used her own periodical the *Widening Light* to address black veterans being lynched in the United States.[57] Clifford dedicated the poem "The Black Draftee From Dixie" to black veterans who had returned home only to be lynched. She began with statement that "twelve Negro soldiers who had served overseas were lynched upon their return to their homes in the South":

Upon his dull ear fell the stern command;

And though scarce knowing why or whither, he

Went forth prepared to battle loyally,

And questioned not your faith, O Dixie-land!

And though the task assigned were small or grand,

If toiling at mean tasks ingloriously,

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[55] *Messenger*, May-June 1919, 25. Organization and format design copied directly from the *Messenger*.
[56] Mark Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance*, 222, note 146. Originally published in the *Afro-American*.
[57] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 218.

Or in fierce combat fighting valiantly,
With poise magnificent he took his stand!

What though the hero-warrior was black?
His heart was white and loyal to the core;
And when to his loved Dixie he came back,
Maimed, in the duty done on foreign shore,
Where from the hell of war he never flinched,
Because he cried, "Democracy" was lynched.[58]

Other than poetry, the performance arts became a vessel for artists to express their feelings towards racism and brutality in the United States. Another social critic who paid specific attention to the role of the returning black veteran was Mary Powell Burrill. Burrill, a native of Washington DC had close ties with the Washington branch of the NAACP and had committed her work to assisting in equality for people of all races and gender.[59]

For Burrill, the returning black soldier not only faced violence and the threat of being lynched but served as inspiration for the black community. In her play *Aftermath* the black soldier is symbolic of the new mentality of resistance within the black community. The *Liberator* first published the play for mass consumption in April 1919.[60] The members of the Krigwa Players Little Negro Theater and the Worker's Drama League later performed *Aftermath*.[61]

Aftermath begins as John Thornton has returned to his family's cabin in his native South Carolina. In the opening scene, the audience can see that his family has proudly hung a service flag in the window. Millie, a younger black woman, is bragging to "Mam

[58] Originally printed in 1922 in *Widening Light*, reprinted in whole in Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 219.
[59] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 178. Rice states that Burrill was a close companion of Angelina Weld Grimke, the daughter of Archibald Grimke who headed the Washington DC NAACP. Burrill had earlier completed a play about birth control entitled *They That Sit in Darkness* which was featured in Margaret Sanger's publication *Birth Control Review*, but turned her attention to racism. Margaret Sanger was the leading spokesperson for birth control as a means to empower women in the United States.
[60] Originally printed in the *Liberator*, April 1919, 10-14, reprinted in whole in Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 179-187.
[61] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 170-172.

Sue," an elder member of the family, about John's service record and that he had acquired medals while in Europe:

> (Brightening up) MILLIE: Oh, yes, we got a lettah day befo' yestiddy f'om John telling us all erbout it. He's won de War Cross! He fought off twenty Germuns all erlone an' saved his whole comp'ny an the gret French Gen'rul come an' pinned de medal on him, hisse'f.[62]

Millie then describes Paris as a place where black men are respected and the equal of the white citizens of France. It is implied that equality will follow the black soldier to the United States only with the assistance and due diligence of the soldiers themselves. The author portrayed the soldier as a symbol of hope, and the potential savior for Mam Sue, and the black community as well:

> MAM SUE: (Crooning):
> O, yes yonder comes mah Lawd,
> He's comin' dis way
> Wid his sword in his han'—
> (To Millie) Millie, bettah light de lamp, it's gittin' dark.
> He's gwine ter hew dem sinners down
> Right lebbal to de groun'
> O, yes, yonder comes mah Lawd—[63]

Burrill presents the soldier as a man who has fought in Europe, but will hopefully encourage the black community to resist oppression at home.

Finally John arrives on the stage, he is played by a tall and handsome actor, as he represents a "good soldier and a strong man."[64] He is dressed in full military attire, accompanied by the Croix de Guerre and service chevrons which he earned from being wounded during combat. The soldier is happy to be at home and quickly embraces the two women. Aside from the medals, the scene foreshadows future violence as John removes two service revolvers from his bag and places them on the kitchen table. When

[62] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 181. The play is quoted as Burrill wrote it, with assumed dialects, it has not been altered. Surprisingly Burrill only described the women by age and not by family distinction.
[63] Ibid., 183.
[64] Ibid.

he is asked if they are his, he proudly states: "One of' 'em's mine; the other's my Lieutenant's. I've been cleanin' it fu' him. Don' tech 'em—'cause mine's loaded."[65]

Burrill epitomizes the black soldier as the symbol of black manhood and the beginning of a new era in which black citizens no longer will accept injustice and abuse at the hands of white supremacists. Next, John delivers a passage which is representative of the passing of the torch to the next generation and defiance:

> …I've done a tall lot o' thinkin' sence I've been erway from here. An' I b'lieve it's jes like this—beyon' a certain point prayers ain't no good! The Lawd does jes so much for you, then it's up to you to do the res' fu' yourse'f. The Lawd's done His part when HE's doen give me strength an' courage; I got tuh do the res' fu' myse'f![66]

The time has come to act and not wait for equality. John, indicative of the greater black community states that black individuals should not wait for the government nor whites to intervene; they should fight back.

The play takes an ominous turn when John begins to ask for his father. He believes his father died of an ailment, but the truth is that his father was murdered by a group of local whites—a detail his family is hiding from the soldier. Eventually, the truth is revealed to John that a white mob lynched his father after he got into an argument with a "Mister Withrow" regarding the price of cotton. Upon hearing the news, the son is outraged, he wants to know why no other black men helped his father and then questions where the local government was after the murder. Burrill describes her protagonist as "gradually assuming the look of a man who has determined to do some terrible work."[67] As his loved ones try to intervene, John slowly walks across the room and retrieves his revolvers:

> JOHN: (Bitterly) I've been helpin' the w'ite man git his freedom, I reckon I'd bettah try now to get my own!
>
> MAM SUE: (Terrified) Whut yuh gwine ter do?
>
> JOHN: (With bitterness growing his voice) I'm sick o' these w'ite folks doin's—we're "fine, trus'worthy feller citizens" when they're handin' us

[65] Ibid., 184.
[66] Ibid., 185.
[67] Ibid., 186.

> out guns, an' Liberty Bonds, an' chuckin' us off to die: but we ain't a damn thing when it comes to handin' us the rights we done fought an' bled fu'! I'm sick o' this sort o' life—an' I'm goin' to put an end to it![68]

John does not want to wait any more. He is outraged that he and his fellow black comrades risked their lives in the war only to return home and face discrimination and suffering:

> JOHN: (His speech growing more impassioned and bitter) This ain't no time fu' preachers or prayers! You mean to tell me I mus' let them w'ite devuls send me miles erway to suffer an' be shot up fu' the freedom of people I ain't nevah seen, while they're burnin' an' killin' my foks here at home! To Hell with 'em!
>
> (He pushes Millie aside, and, seizing the revolvers, thrusts the loaded one into his pocket an begins deliberately to load the other.)
>
> MILLIE: (Throwing her arms about his neck) Oh, John they'll kill yuh!

As John plans to do the unspeakable, he recruits Lonnie, a young male, who has just recently entered the scene:

> JOHN: (Defiantly) Whut ef they do! I ain't skeered o' none of 'em! I've faced worse guns than any sneakin' hounds kin show me! To Hell with 'em ! (He trusts the revolver that he has just loaded into Lonnie's hands.) Take this, an' come on here, boy, an' we'll see what Withrow an' his gang have to say!
>
> (Followed by Lonnie, who is bewildered and speechless, John rushes out of the cabin and disappears in the gathering darkness.)[69]

John has symbolically passed the proverbial torch to the next generation and the two exit the stage. As the curtain falls, it is left to the audience's own imagination to settle John and Lonnie's fate, or at least that was Burrill's intent; unfortunately, the militant integrity of the play was compromised when the white producers changed the ending, adding a tragic conclusion: as John exits the scene the audience hears a loud gun shot, and he

[68] Ibid., 186-187.
[69] Ibid., 187.

staggers back to die onstage, thus becoming another victim and joining the other black veterans who returned home to be beat, murdered or lynched. [70]

Whereas, the play was supposed to end with mystery and the symbolic arrival of the "New Negro," John is simply reduced to another victim at the hands of white supremacists, a reminder to audiences that it was better to remain conservative and work from within the system than to defy racism and fight back.

Another literary source that, like Burrill, linked the abuse of black soldiers to a new mentality in the black community arrived decades later when James Baldwin wrote the novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1952).[71] Baldwin's setting is the beginning of the twentieth century, and he will use the soldier to symbolize white society's betrayal of the black community. Gabriel, is psychologically altered after witnessing the lifeless body of a black soldier who had recently been lynched. Baldwin examines the era of the First World War from a more recent perspective. His literature deepens our thinking about lynching and the rise of dissent in the black community. In Baldwin's novel, the chapter "Gabriel's Prayer" symbolizes the post-war era as the bridge from deference to militancy and the initial stages of the modern day civil rights movement.

Gabriel is a pastor who attempts to resist the temptations of life: lust and hate, lust for women and hatred of what life has dealt both him and black males. Throughout the story, Baldwin presents Gabriel's predicament as mirroring the greater problems that blacks were facing as well. As he is always told that he is inferior, his racial identity is taken away from him. One might ask if Gabriel's shame is an individual dilemma or indicative of his race? Baldwin explores the psychological question of the black male dealing with shame as he writes "her skirts above her head, her secrecy discovered."[72] His women having been raped repeatedly or taken from him (the black man) and used, thus taking away his manhood. Because of his shame, he looks at his woman as inferior too. Her beauty and body are taken away from her—or diminished—by his shame. He begins to view her as unattractive "…in that moment saw, as though for the first time,

[70] Ibid., 179.
[71] James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (New York: Knopf, 1952).
[72] Baldwin, *Go Tell in on the Mountain*, 106.

how black and how bony was this wife of his, and how wholy undesirable."[73] His commitment to her lapses or is weakened as a result.

Throughout Gabriel's life his commitment to himself and his own race begins to diminish. There is a correlation between the ministers and those who are unwilling to risk their own safety or well being for the betterment of the race, or as the "New Negro" might state—the demeanor of the old guard. Gabriel wrestles with his station in life and the other ministers who have become too "fat" or too settled in their conservative nature. Baldwin asks if these men who claimed they were for equality might only be going through the motions where routines replaced spontaneity, comfort replaced courage, and status replaced sincerity.[74]

Baldwin also tells the story of two different generations competing one against the other. As the war approached, young black men enlisted for military service, while the older generation questioned their judgment. These new recruits included Gabriel's son, Royal, who joins the Army against his mother's will, as she states: "Well, you know that's the way the young folks is….You can't never tell them nothing—and when they find out's too late then."[75] In one dialogue the older individual states, "won't none of these young men be satisfied till they can go off and get themselves crippled or killed."[76] Although these quotes refer to the perils of the battlefield in Europe, they strike an eerie reflection on those individuals castigated by the younger generation for refusing to fight back.

Gabriel's dilemma reaches a turning point when he encounters the corpse of a lynched victim—a soldier who has been murdered in uniform:

> …a day he was never to forget….There had been found that morning, just outside of town, the dead body of a soldier, his uniform shredded where he had been flogged, and, turned upward though the black skin, raw red meat. He lay face downward at the base of a tree, his fingernails digging into the scuffed earth. When he was turned over, his eyeballs stared upward in amazement and horror, his mouth was locked open wide; his trousers,

[73] Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, 115.
[74] Ibid., 103-105.
[75] Ibid., 139.
[76] Ibid., 139.

> soaked with blood, were torn open, and exposed to the cold, white air of morning the thick hairs of his groin, matted together, black and rust-red, and the sound that seemed to be throbbing still. He had been carried home in silence and lay now behind locked doors, with his living kinsmen, who sat, weeping, and praying and dreaming of vengeance, and waiting for the next visitation.[77]

The soldier is lynched physically but the black man or woman who witnesses lynching, or finds the victim, is lynched psychologically. While wrestling with his mortality, Gabriel is faced with another problem when a local white citizen questions his manhood as well as his own commitment to blacks:

> Someone spat on the sidewalk at Gabriel's feet, and he walked on, his face not changing, and he heard it reprovingly whispered behind him that he was a good nigger, surely up to no trouble.
>
> …he prayed, as his mother had taught him to pray, for loving kindness; yet he dreamed of the feel of a white man's forehead against his shoe; again and again, until the head wobbled on the broken neck and his foot encountered nothing but the rushing blood.[78]

Just as Gabriel's prayer transcended militancy, off in the distance he notices his son, Royal, also coming home from the battlefield. As their eyes lock he sees his son, his very own image only twenty years ago, perhaps before he had become a part of the establishment; yet the son does not recognize him. The two were from different mindsets created by time and society, yet both were part of the history that led to the militancy of the modern day civil rights movement.

[77] Ibid., 141.
[78] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The year 1919 saw countless acts of violence against black citizens. Many cities experienced race riots and at the local level, lynching prevailed as the common form of "justice." From April to October over twenty two locales witnessed riots and at least seventy four black victims were lynched; these statistics led NAACP official James Weldon Johnson to label these months as "the Red Summer."[1] By 1921, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) issued a pamphlet chronicling the violence. ACLU writer and social activist, William Pickens paid particular attention to the rise in lynching:

> It is instructive to note where most lynchings take place. In thirty years, the seven states which led in lynching are in the order of their evil eminence: Georgia, Mississippi, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Along with Alabama, Georgia, and Texas, therefore, we have the great southern Mississippi Valley, a region which might be termed "the American Congo."[2]

Among those lynched were black soldiers. Every state that comprised Pickens' "American Congo" also held the dubious dishonor of a physical attack on a black soldier. Even while still wearing their uniforms, these soldiers were victims of shootings, beatings; and some were even burned alive.

But the veteran was not just another victim; he was explicitly targeted because of who *he* was—a man trained in self-defense, who represented the greatest threat to white supremacy. He had been successful on the battlefield and came back to tell his tales of equality in France. His uniform alone represented masculinity in a race southern white society continued to emasculate.

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[1] Johnson, *Along this Way*, 341.
[2] Rice, *Witnessing Lynching*, 211.

TABLE 3: BLACK SOLDIERS LYNCHED 1918-1920[3]

Date	Victim	Location	Alleged Crime
December 15 , 1918	Charles Lewis	Hickman, Kentucky	Robbery
March 12, 1919	Wilbur Smith	Legrand, Alabama	Child molestation
March 14, 1919	Bud Johnson	Pace, Florida	Attempted Rape
April, 1919	Wilbur Little	Blakely, Georgia	Wearing his uniform for an extended period of time
April 14, 1919	Daniel Mack	Sylvester, Georgia	Assault
May 1919,	Unnamed Soldier	North Carolina	Unidentified
May 9, 1919	Unnamed Soldier	Pickens, Mississippi	Writing an insulting note
May 21, 1919	Frank Livingston	Wesson, Arkansas	Murder
July 15, 1919	Robert Truett	Louise, Mississippi	Attempted Rape
August 3, 1919	Charles Kelly	Woolsey, Georgia	Failure to yield the road
August 3, 1919	Clinton Briggs	Star City, Arkansas	Insulting a white woman
August 14, 1919	Jim Grant	Pope City, Georgia	Murder
August 31, 1919	Lucius McCarty	Bogalusa, Louisiana	Attempted Rape
September 10, 1919	L.B. Reed	Clarksdale, Mississippi	Intimacy with a white woman
October 3, 1919	Robert Creskey	Montgomery, Alabama	Murder
October 17, 1919	Leroy Johnston	Elaine, Arkansas	Murder
December 21, 1919	Charles West	Smithville, Georgia	Murder
December 28, 1919	Carl Green	Franklinton, North Carolina	Murder
July 30, 1920	Edgar Caldwell	Anniston, Alabama	Murder

Black soldiers were lynched for a number of reasons. Whether contesting unfair economic decisions or merely resisting brutal treatment at the hands of a local white citizen, their acts sometimes led to lynching. Another common allegation was an improper relationship between the black soldier and a white woman, from the act of simply writing a white woman a note to the more severe accusation of sexual intercourse. The allegation of rape crossed the Atlantic Ocean proving there was no distance too far

[3] Charles Lewis: *Lexington Herald*, December 17, 1918; Wilbur Smith: *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1919; Bud Johnson: *Florida Times Union*, March 15, 1919; Wilbur Little: *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1919; Daniel Mack: *Chicago Defender,* May 10, 1919; Unnamed soldier at North Carolina: *News and Observer*, December 29, 1919; the Pickens lynching: *Crisis*, February 1920, 183-186,; Frank Livingston: *Arkansas Gazette*, May 22,-25 1919; Robert Truett: *Advertiser*, Montgomery, Ala. July 18, 1919; Charles Kelly: *Crisis*, February 1920, 183-186; Clinton Briggs: *Crisis,* November 1919, 349; Jim Grant: *Atlanta Constitution*, August 15, 1919; Lucius McCarty: *Messenger*, January 1919; L.B. Reed: *Crisis* December 1919, 82; Robert Creskey: *Chicago Defender*, October 4, 1919; Leroy Johnston: *Chicago Defender*, October 11, 1919; Charles West: *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 1920, reprinted in *Crisis*, March 1920, 261-71; Carl Green: *News and Observer*, December 29, 1919; Edgar Caldwell: *Crisis*, October 1920, 282.

for an accusation to travel in claiming a victim. The lynch mob was bent on preserving the image they had created of white women everywhere.

The fear of social interaction between white women and black men was often the primary justification, if not the excuse, for a lynching. Beginning as early as the days of slavery and reconstruction, the fear of sexual assaults and the vindication of white honor continued to be a powerful political concern in the South at the turn of the century. Rebecca Latimer Felton, the first woman to sit in the United States Senate appeased the white racist's hunger for violence in her "Tybee Island Speech" of 1897.[4] Felton deputized the white male as the sole protector of her gender, stating that the white men of Georgia "should lynch a thousand blacks a week if it became necessary to save their purity from hedonistic and barbaric black rapists."[5]

It is unclear if Felton felt personally threatened by potential black rapists or if she was merely pandering to voters on behalf of the Democratic Party; nevertheless, white southerners exploited the image of the white woman's "honor" by implying that every black male was a thuggish rapist who needed to be segregated and punished. This myth of the white woman's honor was not lost on many black citizens and even on white women. Even as *Vardaman's Weekly* advocated that white men rally and lynch returning black veterans, one white woman spoke against her assigned protector. Annie Laurie Alvis wrote from New Wilson, Oklahoma, asserting that white women who resided in the same locales as black men should be allowed to carry firearms. Alvis's statements went beyond whiteness, as she wanted to empower women:

> There is no reason for her being at the mercy of any man. The Southern man (I am a Virginian) is gallantry itself. He cries, "Lynch! Lynch!" We want more than that, I continue to insist that a dead woman cares nothing for results. It is those still safe that must be kept so, and lynching will never do it.[6]

Alvis and many white women living in fear asked what good was lynching a suspect if the white woman had already been attacked? Alvis condoned extralegal violence;

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[4] Felton's seat in the senate was primarily a symbolic gesture as she briefly replaced Tom Watson (GA) after his death.
[5] Williamson, "Wounds Not Scars": 1236.
[6] *Vardaman's Weekly*, June 16, 1919.

however, she spoke of the hypocrisy of lynching and how it did not protect the white female, nor her womanhood, but only secured the psyche of the white male. Arming white women would have also continued the effort to maintain white dominance, but it would have stifled the white male's role of savior.

Black soldiers and citizens fought back even during these times of violent oppression. The NAACP published reports of occasions during which black soldiers resisted discrimination. The NAACP's *Branch Bulletin* described the situation of black troops returning to the United States and fighting back:

> A group of colored soldiers, fresh from fighting, went to a Y.M.C.A. hut to get food. They were told to step aside while the white men were first fed…the ideal of white supremacy first fed German prisoners. There were many heads broken in interracial fights that night, but, of much greater consequence, there were many colored men who gained an unforgettable sense of injustice, a belief that American democracy was a sham, and that their country masqueraded under false colors.[7]

Black veterans did not lose their pride, nor their anger when they returned to civilian life. In Paris, Texas, Herman and Irving Arthur refused to continue to live in the cyclical poverty of debt peonage and confronted their employer J.H. Hodges over their financial state. In early July, 1920, an argument ensued and violence replaced discussion, gun shots rang out and Hodges and his son were killed. Herman and Irving fled the state to Oklahoma, but four days later a large group of white vigilantes tracked down the brothers and forcibly brought them back to a jail cell in Paris. Within hours, a mob of over one hundred white men stormed the jail, seized their victims, dragged the two men into the street and shoved the brothers into waiting vehicles. On July 7, 1920, thousands of white men, women and children gathered to watch two men burn alive. Governor W.P. Hobby requested that the federal government not intervene in the matter, that the state of Texas, alone, would investigate and punish its citizens, and no individual was ever held accountable for the lynching.[8]

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[7] *The Branch Bulletin*, April 1919. Papers of the NAACP: Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939. Series A: the South, Reel 11/0543.

[8] *Chicago Defender*, July, 17, 1920; NAACP press release, August 26, 1920, reel 19/233-4, Anti-Lynching Files, NAACP Papers, LOC; Governor W. P. Hobby to James Weldon Johnson, July 16, 1920, Reel

The post Armistice years were among the most violent that the United States has endured. Additionally, the period created defiance within the black community. According to the historian Theodore Kornweibel, the era that followed the First World War was the most militant era of black history until the 1950s and the emergence of the modern civil rights period. Kornweibel also concludes that those who defied white supremacists were outmatched by a "far better organized…more powerful," and "more ruthless" federal government, which blocked the black community's militancy "by making the maintenance of white supremacy part of the nation's security agenda, thus legitimizing the suppression of racial activism."[9] Unfortunately, this decision compromised the rights of black citizens and the safety of returning black soldiers. The federal government's siding with white supremacists intensified an already hostile atmosphere and left nineteen black veterans in the hands of the lynch mob.

These vigilante groups met black defiance with physical violence. This form of social and political control is addressed in Steven Hahn's Pulitzer price winner, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration.* Hahn describes how white politicians exploited racial animosity when advocating for violence against rebellious black citizens, but he also stresses how and when black organizations resisted oppression and white supremacy. This perseverance is found in those soldiers and black leaders who continued to persevere, even when black soldiers were being lynched.[10]

Organization proved an effective way for black leaders to combat the injustices of the World War I era, and many returning soldiers joined the NAACP. Charles H. Houston resisted the urge to resort to violent confrontation and channeled his energy into fighting the system from within. Houston had served with the 103rd Pioneer infantry in

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19/228, Anti-Lynching Files, NAACP Papers Their Own Color,. in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Williams, "Torchbearers of Democracy," 299. Only the *Chicago Defender* stated that the brothers were associated with the military. The *Defender* stated that Herman served eighteen months in France and Irvin was stationed at Camp Travis. The Arthurs were not included in the previous sections of this study because their lynching occurred well after the Armistice and no where in the newspaper accounts or investigations did the mob ever elude to the brothers military service as being a cause for the lynching. However, their deaths are significant as it represents the clear militant feeling of veterans, as well as the *Chicago Defender's* insistence to label the two as such.

[9] Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything*, 276.

[10] Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003), 266.

France, and as a combatant in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, he and his fellow troops were under attack for twenty two days. Aside from avoiding injury from Germans, Houston was threatened by white American officers who resented any black soldier socializing with French white women. Upon his return to the United States, Houston dedicated his life to mending race relations as a member of Chicago's Race Relations Commission and fighting for the rights of blacks as a leading activist and attorney. He challenged Franklin D. Roosevelt during the New Deal, and demanded additional benefits for black citizens during the depression. He became the Dean of Howard's law school and the first salaried attorney for the NAACP. Houston, along with Thurgood Marshall, represented the NAACP in the pivotal court case, *The University of Maryland v. Donald Gaines Murray* (1936). Tried before the U.S. Supreme Court, the NAACP successfully argued that Murray be allowed to enter the all-white graduate program at the University of Maryland because the community offered no black substitute. The case set a precedent against *Plessy v. Ferguson's* "separate but equal" clause and paved the way for the later, but more famous, *Brown v. Board*, 1954.[11]

Even when returning black troops did not personally intervene, their experiences and ideology carried over to average citizens. When Floridian white ruffians attempted to prevent black voters from entering Election Day polls in 1920, the black community openly defied them. Walter White described an instance of the Jacksonville chapter of the Ku Klux Klan trying to intimidate black voters outside of voting venues. White stated that the old "colored woman of the antebellum type" was disappearing as he overheard one black woman defiantly state, "White folks, you ain't done nothin'. Those German guns didn't scare us and I know them white faces ain't goin' to do it now."[12]

Black pride grew significantly during this era. Thousands of native New Yorkers and West Indian immigrants marched down Lennox Avenue in Harlem as members of the UNIA. Defiant chants and slogans rang out on the streets of black communities across the nation or read in the pages of black newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and fliers. Literature also echoed the sentiments of Garveyism and the "New Negro" when

[11] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 320, 328. For the court's decision see Editorial Comment, "*The University of Maryland v. Donald Gaines Murray*, 169 Md. 478," *Journal of Negro Education* 5, no.2 (1936): 166-174.
[12] *Crisis*, January 1921, 106.

the Harlem Renaissance emerged during the years following the Armistice. Nathan Irvin Huggins described this cultural transition in his work *Harlem Renaissance*:

> It was commonly thought, in those decades around World War I, that culture (literature, art, music, etc.) was the true measure of civilization. Harlem intellectuals, sharing in that belief and seeing themselves as living out the moment of their race's rebirth, naturally marked off their achievement by such artistic production.[13]

Huggins describes an era in which mainstream white publications attempted to erase, forget, if not forgive, the institution of slavery, but black writers refused such a request as merely representative of "servility."[14] Many black artists looked to the days of slavery and beyond to capture the personality and history of true "African Americans." Langston Hughes referred to the geography of Africa to capture the psyche of black men and women. His poem the "Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921) describes a black poet envisioning Africa as well as the United States for inspiration. Zora Neale Hurston incorporated traditional African religion, combined with American religions, to create the new African-American culture, and the painter Aaron Douglas presented the three dimensional qualities of indigenous African masks when he painted. Douglas's painting *The Creation* (1935) depicts his ideology about his culture, from African Pharaohs to black factory workers in the inner-city of the U.S. Huggins described Douglas's intent as wanting "to interpret what he understood to be the spiritual identity of the Negro people. It was a kind of soul of self that united all that the black man was, in Africa and in the New World."[15]

This era of pride and racial awakening affected millions of black citizens, including Major Walter H. Loving. During the 1920s Loving attended rallies by both Garveyites, as well as the followers of A. Philip Randolph. Loving also had private meetings with high-ranking members of the NAACP. In the decades that followed World War I, Loving softened his stance on Kelly Miller and even befriended Archibald Grimke and W.E.B. Du Bois. The final years of Loving's life were both a paradox and a tragedy. Major Loving continued to serve in the U.S. military and returned to the Pacific during

[13] Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 9.
[14] Ibid., 143.
[15] Ibid., 171.

the Second World War. A Japanese soldier beheaded the officer in the final weeks of the war. Upon hearing the news, Du Bois's wife, Nina, discussed with her husband Loving's fate, concluding with the words that Loving had become "a friend" to the family.[16]

Loving's career, life, and even death needs further attention. This man was potentially as political and pragmatic as Booker T. Washington, and Loving even had ties to the Tuskegee political "machine" when he was first promoted into the Military Intelligence Bureau. But his intentions and true philosophy are as murky as the Tuskegee leader. Loving certainly accommodated the federal government, working from within the system, but also showed empathy towards the predicament and position of black people in American society. Studying his papers, housed at Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, could help flesh out the specifics on this individual. A biographical approach to Loving's life would provide a much-needed addition to the study of the black role in the military, the legacy of Booker T. Washington, and the decades that followed World War I.

* * *

As seen in this study, the lynching of black soldiers during the World War I era demonstrates the white racist's determination to retain the racial hierarchy that existed before the war. Writers warned that the arrival of black veterans would be met with violence. Black soldiers returned from France with tales of equality, but southern whites resorted to violence to prevent equal opportunity at home.

Chapter 1 discussed when black intellectuals believed that the progressive Roosevelt would elevate the status of blacks, but the Brownsville riots and the betrayal of the black soldier that followed changed their minds. After the Brownsville affair, the possibility for black citizens to gain upward mobility through the military diminished again, only to resurface as the United States entered World War I. During the war, black soldiers trained at home and others were called upon to assist in combat overseas. Of those that did serve in Europe, they returned with accounts of equality and heroism.

Chapter 2 argued that white society stifled any chance at acceptance at home. Aside from the individual and the mob, the larger society played an integral role in lynching. Despite warnings from within its own ranks, the U.S. Army did not attempt to

[16] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 560.

assist in the soldier's transition to civilian life. Southern politicians advocated violence and endorsed lynching as the proscribed remedy for what they deemed as black arrogance; as a result, at least nineteen black soldiers were lynched in 1919.

Chapter 3 addressed the victims. It was the overarching intent of this study to flesh out the stories behind these murders. Although many historians have used black veterans as a symbol of the racism in the U.S. and the violence unleashed on the black community, the details are often absent. This study has examined the specifics behind each lynching and some of the characteristics of these individuals. But aside from personal information and the details of each particular murder, these lynchings also define the local communities and the larger society that either endured, condoned or confronted lynching. While this study has begun the discussion, future projects could further analyze each local community to see how these lynchings affected the victim's family and the general population.

As argued in Chapter 4, local authorities often condoned and even assisted in lynching, but the federal government allowed the states to govern themselves. From Brownsville in 1906 and the executions of black soldiers in Houston in 1917 to the saga of Edgar Caldwell, these incidents indicate how the federal government sided with white supremacists and betrayed the black soldier and citizen. The federal government refused to protect black soldiers, actually endorsing their punishments, which gave racist citizens the opportunity to carry out their own design for the fate of black men and women.

Chapter 5 illustrated when black citizens and artists attempted to resist violence and oppression. Many black citizens channeled the fighting spirit of the black soldier into their own ideology and were creatively fueled by the brutality and persecutions that these veterans experienced.

The lynching of black soldiers stands as an example of the power that white supremacy had in both the South and the United States in general, but it also serves as a reminder of when soldiers and the larger African-American community spoke out and fought back.

AFTERWORD

Lynching declined in the 1920s. The number of black citizens lynched decreased from seventy-six in 1919 to seven a decade later; however, 1929 marked the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange and the opening of the Depression era. Financial instability created an increase in lynching.[17] Twenty one victims were lynched in 1930, and of these, twenty black citizens were murdered in the South. Jesse Daniel Ames and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) demanded that women take the lead in the fight against lynching and the men who killed for chivalry.[18] Unlike the NAACP, the ASWPL favored State's rights in abolishing lynching and advocated that the federal government not intervene: "The Association of Southern Women does not support and never has supported federal legislation to eradicate lynching. The association believes that the slow process of educating society…is the only sure way to stop lynchings."[19] The ASWPL refused to join the NAACP's advocacy for a federal anti-lynching bill; however, lynching decreased because of these two group's protests. There were only seven recorded lynchings in 1932 and the South went twelve consecutive months without a lynching. Walter White and others continued to fight for anti-lynching legislation, but in 1934 congress failed to pass the Costigan-Wagner Bill, which would have authorized the Justice Department to investigate mob violence and impose heavy fines on any state that did not assist in the matter. The number of lynchings had decreased, but the psychological effect still devastated many black citizens. The media sensationalized each murder and the graphic images reached thousands of black

[17] Schneider, *"We Return Fighting,"* 192-193; Schneider asserts that economic stability and the black migration to the North led to the decrease in lynching. White fear of a labor shortage forced many whites to denounce lynching. Schneider also states that other forms of entertainment replaced lynching in the psyche of whites and changed the culture of the South.

[18] Henry Barber, "The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, 1930-1942," *Phylon* 34, no.4 (1973): 378; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Second Thoughts: On Writing a Feminist Biography," *Feminist Studies* 13, no.1 (Spring 1989): 22.

[19] Barber, "The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, 1930-1942," 385.

viewers across the country. Lynching continued throughout the World War II era and once again returning black veterans were murdered when they arrived home. [20]

As the United States entered the war against the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan, black citizens once again prepared for military service. Many black intellectuals believed that by showing their commitment to the country, the United States would repay the favor and issue equal rights for all citizens. Black intellectuals, such as A. Philip Randolph, proposed that the war would lead to a "Double Victory" at home for black citizens. To accentuate this point, Randolph called for a march on Washington as an opportunity for black men and women to show their resolve and demand economic and judicial equalities. On the eve of the March, June 24, 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt appeased Randolph's militant stance, signing the historic Executive Order 8802 banning discrimination in employment in defense-related industries. This order gave new hope to black citizens and implied that this era, and this war, would be different from World War I.[21]

During this hopeful time, a disgruntled white person shot a black soldier on a public bus in Durham, North Carolina. On July 8, 1944, twenty-nine year old Booker T. Spicely, an employee of the Tuskegee Institute and member of the U.S. Army was visiting Durham. Spicely boarded the bus, and was immediately told to move to the colored section at the back of the bus. At first, the soldier denied the request but then vacated his seat, but not before uttering "I thought I was fighting this war for Democracy." He then followed the statement with a stinging insult to the driver's own commitment to the war effort. Spicely immediately apologized, but the white driver Herman Council, thirty-nine years old, removed a .38 caliber pistol from his person and approached his target. Council fired two shots in the unarmed victim. Booker T. Spicely died in uniform moments later.[22]

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[20] Ibid., 387-388; Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-196*3, 349. Congress defeated every anti-lynching bill proposed. Not until the 1990s did President Clinton sign the Hate Crimes Bill into effect.

[21] Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-196*3,468-469. Lewis claims that Executive Order was more than mere symbolism, but does admit its shortcoming as Walter White was denied a seat on the FEPC, a committee headed by a white southerner.

[22] Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 19; *Durham Sun*, July 8, 1944; *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 22, 1944.

In only twenty minutes, an all white jury found Council not guilty of first degree murder. Although the response of the local government was similar to a time when black soldiers were murdered in 1919, the black community's response was decidedly different. For the next three days, the black citizens of Durham, North Carolina, rioted. By the end of the third day, over one thousand black men and women watched the servicemen from Camp Butler extinguish the remaining flames that had once engulfed their community. The federal government investigated the murder, but similar to the case of Edgar Caldwell, refused to assist. The investigators claimed that because the incident occurred on a bus owned by a private company, it was not in their jurisdiction to intervene.[23] Christina Greene has commented on this incident as a deciding factor in the rise of the Civil Rights movement of Durham. In her work *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*, Greene states this was the bridge between the era of the 1920s and the modern day Civil Rights movement. It was the murder of a black soldier in uniform that "sharpened the discord between proponents of the more conservative, accommodationist black politics of an earlier era and the new, more militant protest politics."[24] The murder of the black soldier directly led the black community to resist white supremacy and continued to motivate the black men and women of Durham to organize. While Greene's study provides a remarkable causal relationship with regard to central North Carolina, other local histories could provide additional information of how the killing or lynching of black soldiers invigorated the black community of that particular region.

Throughout the 1940s, the U.S. Army once again refused to intervene when soldiers faced discrimination in the United States. NAACP administrator Roy Wilkins questioned if the 1940s would simply be a repeat of the experiences that blacks faced in 1919. In his article "The Old Army Game?" Wilkins asked if once again black members of the military would fall victim to the federal government's betrayal:

> Maintaining this basic theme stubbornly [in 1919], the Army soon had more racial trouble than it imagined could occur. There were beatings,

[23] Greene, *Our Separate Ways*, 19, 61, 240-241 note 19.
[24] Ibid., 18, 239 note 45. Greene adds that Spicely's brother was particularly active in the Civil Rights movement, and was so motivated that he returned to Alabama to organize the Tuskegee Branch of the NAACP.

> shootings, riots and killings all over the South where most of the Negro troops were in training. Bus drivers, civilian police and military police had a field day beating and killing Negroes in uniform. The War department stood by inactively while these outrages took place. It did nothing to make the Negro soldiers feel that the uniform and the cause of which he was being trained to fight were of any importance beside the fact that he was not white. In fact, the Army helped to impress upon him the fact that he was not an American soldier, but a *Negro*.[25]

But Wilkins concluded by adding that while the demeanor and response of the military remained the same, the black community had dramatically changed:

> The encouraging difference between this and the last war is that there is a thousand times more protest against conditions, that there is more alertness and awareness among Negroes themselves, and that there is among the gold braid and brass hats a body of opinion that would cheerfully break with tradition and give the Negro a better deal. If Negroes in uniform are not to be victims of the "old Army game" the protests and pressure must increase….For the goal of this struggle is not merely fair treatment for the Negro fighter, but an improvement in the status of Negroes as citizens.[26]

The black citizens of Columbia, Tennessee, personified Wilkins' premonition when they fought back against a white mob. On February 25, 1946, Gladys Stephenson and her son entered the Castner-Knott Electric Appliance Store. Mrs. Stephenson's son, James, recently discharged from the U.S. Navy, accompanied his mother on this errand. After their arrival the two got into a heated discussion with the radio repairman, also recently discharged from the U.S. Navy, which ended in violence when the white repairman slapped Mrs. Stephenson across the face. Responding to the assault, James grabbed the worker and shoved the man through the store's front plate glass window. As the two fell onto the sidewalk a passing police officer attacked James and then arrested

[25] Ibid., 131.
[26] Ibid., 145.

both men. Later, both James and his mother were moved forty-two miles away to Nashville for safe keeping.[27]

That afternoon, a group of seventy-five whites congregated in front of the county courthouse and demanded to know the whereabouts of the Stephensons; members of the mob were brandishing a rope and shouting that a hanging was going to occur. By this time the Stephensons had not only left Columbia but the state of Tennessee and were headed to Chicago, whereas the lynching party, unaware of these events, ventured into Mink Slide, the black section of the city. The mob set upon the neighborhood, destroying property with reckless abandon.[28] When the policemen arrived without sirens, nor any flashing lights, the black community feared that the mob was growing, and they resisted violently. The black citizens opened fire upon the approaching cars, killing four officers. As violence raged throughout the night, an additional five hundred highway patrolmen, were called in for reinforcements. By the end of the evening, the district suffered thousands of dollars in damages to business and private homes, dozens of citizens were injured and over one hundred individuals were taken into custody. All those arrested were black.[29]

Many black citizens around the country paid homage to their fellow citizens in Columbia. The *Crisis* informed its readers that Columbia represented a new ideology that even when outnumbered, blacks "did not intend to sit quietly and let a mob form, threaten and raid their neighborhood." The *Crisis* stated that the black citizens of Columbia were painfully aware that within the last twenty years, two of their own had fallen victim to the lynch mob. These black individuals vowed that a third would not occur without resistance. The *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that, in an act that closely resembled Nazi Germany, the police not only condoned the violence but assisted in the destruction of the black community. The *Courier* added that if the neighborhood was inhabited by whites, the federal government would have protected them; but the black community was forced to resort to self-defense: "we must pay for what we want and need and should not depend on others to fight our battles and provide the sinews of war."[30]

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[27] "Terror in Tennessee," *Crisis,* April 1946, 105.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 106, 111; *Crisis*, August 1946, 250-252.
[30] *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 16, 1946; *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 9, 1946; *Crisis*, April 1946, 105.

Even as early as the summer of 1946, the resolve of the black community was tested when Maceo Snipes returned from the Pacific theater only to be lynched in Butler, Georgia. On July 18, 1946, Snipes set a historical landmark as the first black person to vote in Taylor County since the days of Reconstruction. His family claims Edward Cooper shot him because he was the only black man to enter a polling booth in the Rupert district of Taylor county; however, the local government declared that his assailants, led by Edward Cooper, acted in self-defense when the group of white men went to the Snipes' residence to collect a financial debt. Cooper claimed that after he approached Snipes, the former soldier pulled a knife and lunged at the group. Two days later the veteran who had escaped the perils of the Pacific died in Georgia from gunshot wounds. Snipes' mother, Lulu Snipes, stated that the murder occurred as a message to blacks, that voting was reserved for whites only.[31]

For over half a century, the federal government refused to intervene. Only recently, has the case resurfaced as Georgia NAACP officials and members of the Prison & Jail Project, a prison advocacy and civil rights group, are currently requesting that the case be reopened. The victim's cousin, Felix Snipes, spoke on the effect the murder has had on his family, the event having "wrecked" their family when relatives needed to relocate as far north as Ohio; and even today "the older generation still doesn't want to talk about it."[32] Further attention should be given to this protest as the story develops. The family's current request has been mailed to Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez. If the federal government re-opens the case, it could lead to additional studies of Snipes and other victims of World War II, and perhaps of the sixteen lynched victims from 1919.

Less than a month after the shooting in Butler, fishermen on Dorcheat Bayou found the decomposing remains of the former army corporal, John C. Jones, on August 14, 1946. The white citizens of Minden, Louisiana, accused the black soldier of attempted rape after he supposedly tried to break into a local white woman's home. On August 8, 1946, Sam Mettrick and a group of white men seized Jones and his cousin, seventeen year old Sonny Harris and dragged the men into the rural areas of Minden. A

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[31] *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 3, 1946; "Probe Sought in 1946 Killing of Black Man," *Charleston Daily Mail* (West Virginia) February 13, 2007.
[32] "Probe Sought in 1946 Killing of Black Man," *Charleston Daily Mail* (West Virginia) February 13, 2007.

sordid scene unfolded involving an acetylene torch, a meat clever, a heavy belt and a knife. Although the younger Harris managed to escape with only a deep laceration to his head, his twenty-eight year old cousin, a decorated and honorably discharged veteran, suffered death at the cruel hands of the lynch mob. Harris stated that Jones was murdered not because of an attempted rape but instead because Sam Mettrick created the story after the two men had argued about a souvenir from Europe. (Mettrick fancied a German luger that Jones had brought back from the front and when the veteran refused his request, only then did the white man fabricate the alleged sexual assault on Mrs. Mettrick.) The story managed to gain the white community's support and a mob lynched a black veteran because of sympathy—and the fear of the black solider. Despite an FBI investigation, the authorities never charged anyone in connection with the murder.[33]

In September, 1946, the *Crisis* printed the terrible saga of the brutal blinding of Isaac Woodard, a twenty-seven year old black veteran. Woodard had just returned from spending fifteen months in the Philippines and New Guinea with the 429th Port Battalion. After being formally discharged, the veteran boarded a Greyhound bus in Atlanta to reach his wife in Winnsboro, South Carolina. The two had planned a trip to New York to visit Woodard's parents. Somewhere between Atlanta and Aiken, South Carolina, the driver denied Woodard a "comfort stop." The driver then stopped the bus, and the Batesburg police arrested Woodard for "causing a disturbance." In the article "Southern Schrecklichkeit," the *Crisis* reported that "the police pummeled and beat Woodard until he was unconscious, crunching out his eyes with the end of a billy [club]."[34]

The next morning the victim appeared before the court. The judge ordered Woodard to either pay a fifty dollar fine or serve thirty days of hard labor. Only then did Woodard receive medical treatment, but the doctors' "clumsy" attempts did not treat his vision. Although he never had to serve his sentence, the soldier stayed in the Veterans hospital in Columbia, South Carolina, for two months before he left in the custody of his family.[35]

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[33] *Crisis*, September 46, 277; *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 7, 1946; and *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 24, 1946.
[34] *Crisis*, Sept 1946, 276; *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 24, 1946.
[35] *Crisis*, Sept 1946, 276.

The NAACP filed a complaint to the federal government, and despite a promise from Howard C. Peterson, Assistant Secretary of War, that the governor of South Carolina, the Veteran's Administration and the Justice Department were all dedicating their services, no one was ever convicted in the attack. Even after Ethel S. Epstein, the former Secretary of Labor of New York under Fiorello La Guardia, and Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis raised money for the blinded veteran, Woodard never received justice.[36]

Unfortunately, the cases of Maceo Snipes, John C. Jones and Isaac Woodard were overshadowed when a lynch mob in Monroe, Georgia, lynched two black couples including two women and George Dorsey, a recently discharged veteran. On July 23, 1946, Dorsey his date, and another black couple were traveling to the farm of Loyd Harrison, to pick up their friend Roger Malcolm. Harrison had just recently provided the bail money to have Malcolm released from the county jail after being charged with stabbing a white man a few weeks earlier. Upon arriving at Harrison's property, a group of unmasked white men intercepted Dorsey and his comrades. Harrison, who survived the ordeal, described that the leader of the group, dressed in a wide brimmed straw hat and wearing a brown suit stated, "We want those niggers," referring to the apprehension of Malcolm who was not with the group at that moment. Upon hearing the demand, one of the females recognized the leader and mistakenly yelled out his name. At that moment, all four were led into the woods and shot to death.[37]

Harrison, an ex-convict, feared for his freedom and his life, and did not come forward to name the criminals. While he remained silent, other members of the black community rallied to assist in the matter. The NAACP offered a ten thousand dollar reward for any information that led to the conviction of the guilty party, a figure that was not only matched by private donations but by the Governor of Georgia, Ellis Arnall. President Harry S. Truman ordered the FBI and Attorney General Tom Clark to investigate the murders. Protests, letters, and marches in major cities continued to weigh in on the subject. In San Francisco an integrated group of veterans marched with a sign that read "Guadalcanal' 42; North Africa '43; Germany' 44; Okinawa '45; Monroe, Ga.,

[36] Ibid. Joe Louis sponsored a benefit for Woodard at the Lewisohn Stadium on August 16, 1946.
[37] *Crisis*, September 1946, 277.

'46"!" Hopes were high at first, when on September 21, the *Pittsburgh Courier* printed that the odds were even that the "G-Men" would solve the Georgia lynchings, a small army of FBI agents having descended on the region. But by October 5, the same confident paper regretted that not one suspect had been apprehended. Grim reality set in as the *Courier* came to grips with the fact that racists had once again gotten away with murder:

> Not a single person has been arrested or indicted for this crime, and it now begins to look as if none will be….
>
> How is it that men who could catch the most elusive criminals in the world are unable to track down a few back country Georgia murderers. It all seems very strange, and we suggest that J. Edgar Hoover cancel some of his scheduled speeches on suppressing crime and give his undivided attention to solving this one.[38]

Even when the federal government showed signs of assistance, white racists continued to evade punishment. The remedy would have to come through the continued perseverance of the black community at-large as well as a change in the judicial system. The criminals still were not punished, but justice came close when at least those who were wrongfully imprisoned, or charged with a crime, were found innocent.

Attorney General Clark failed to bring those who murdered Dorsey and his friends to justice, but he continued to work on an earlier pledge to see if the civil rights of those imprisoned in the Columbia riot had been violated. In April 1946, an all-white jury handed down twenty-five indictments of blacks, twenty-three of which were facing charges of attempted murder or inciting others to murder.

The case had been moved to Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, and although a change of venue motion usually helps the defense, in this case, the NAACP still faced an all-white jury but additionally, the defense had to drive a considerably further distance. The NAACP assigned Thurgood Marshall as primary attorney in the case with the goal of, at the very least, freeing those with less severe charges or the cases that seemed to lack

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[38] *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 5, 1946; Apel, *Witnessing Lynching*, 170; *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 21, 1946;. *Crisis*, September 1946, 277; Lewis, W.E.B. Du Bois: *The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 522; Activist and entertainer Paul Robeson asserted that the war had changed little, veterans were still being lynched and the federal government still refused to intervene. Robeson petitioned for a federal anti-lynching bill during this era.

sufficient evidence. Marshall, accompanied by Chatanooga Attorney Maurice Weaver, had already seen many of their motions overruled and now questioned if their entire case was doomed. Judge Ingram threw out over two hundred and thirty statements from black witnesses and even when Marshall fell ill and could not stand for the trial, the court ordered that the case continue in his absence. But on October 4 the unexpected occurred. Surprisingly, twenty-three of the defendants accused of attempted murder were acquitted. The NAACP had managed to once again use the court system to circumvent the reign of white supremacy in the South, but this time with a local court and a southern jury. The *Crisis* admitted "that the shouts of rejoicing were premature" when two more defendants, separated on a technicality, remained in jail, but the win was a hopeful sign of change.[39]

While the outcome was certainly a joy for the defendants who were released, some members of the black press pointed to the mixed outcome of the trial. The *Pittsburgh Courier* stated: "The jury must have felt that it simply could not let all of the defendants go scot-free, but must take at least two hostages to racial supremacy, just to save the face of the white community." Roy Wilkins spoke on the debate in the November issue of the *Crisis*:

> The Optimists have seen a "new day" in the verdict, a sign that democracy is here for the Negro in the rural South. The cynics say the jury was just trying to wash its hands quickly of the Columbia "dirt." But the truth would seem to be somewhere in between. The first round has been won.[40]

The two convicted remaining defendants, John McKivens and Robert Gentry were granted a new trial date by Circuit Judge Joe M. Ingram. The motion for a new trial was granted by Judge Ingram only ten minutes after it was presented by NAACP attorneys, but the two remaining defendants were not retried due to a lack of evidence.[41]

Less than two years later, the federal government officially integrated the United States armed forces. On July 26, 1948, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which declared "that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons

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[39] *Crisis*, August 1946, 251; November, 329.
[40] *Crisis*, Nov 1946, 330; Dorothy Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia, Tennessee, February 25-27, 1946," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39 (1980): 60-61.
[41] Ibid.

in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin." [42] Black soldiers in the U.S. Army could become officers more quickly than black citizens could become "bosses" or upper management of private companies or even other government positions. Military service created opportunities for black citizens—something that all black patriots had been hoping for since Crispus Attucks attacked a British officer in downtown Boston on March 5, 1770.

As the United States entered the era of the modern day Civil Rights movement, some certainties remained. Equality could not be granted, it had to be taken: segregation and voting rights were achieved with the combined effort of the federal government and the insistence of the Civil Rights workers themselves. Jim Crow would not go away quietly, nor peacefully: the fight for equality was a long and bloody struggle.

Southern politicians, an exclusively white group petitioned that the federal government not intervene in racial issues, white citizen councils were strengthened, and the Ku Klux Klan mobilized. In 1946, Tennessee Klan recruiter Jesse B. Stoner from Chattanooga argued that World War II had made "the niggers too sassy and that they'd [blacks] better be thinking about getting back to the cotton patch in a hurry so that white men who fought for their country can have jobs."[43] Other Klan chapters advocated that white veterans could train Klansmen in hand-to-hand combat, but still others believed that white citizens of the United States could learn from the nation's enemy during the war. One Klud (a single Klansman) from Leander, Texas, believed that the United States needed "a Hitler" to clean out "the kikes and niggers." On May 9, alone, the Klan initiated 277 new members "in the glow of five fiery crosses" at Stone Mountain, Georgia.[44]

These recruits, accompanied by thousands of other racists, met the civil rights workers head-on spilling much blood on the busses, lunch counters and city streets of the southern states. While those who fought back in the 1920s and the Second World War era certainly showed courage with physical retaliation, the modern day Civil Rights movement went a step further by confronting foreseen violence with non-violence. Arthur I. Waskow's work *From Race Riot to Sit-In: 1919 and the 1960s* contrasts the

[42] As quoted in Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 242.
[43] Harold Preece, "Revolution of the Right," *Crisis*, July 1946, 202.
[44] Ibid.

different philosophies of the "New Negro" and those who used civil disobedience in the 1960s. Waskow contends:

> Violence has over a period of time been replaced by other means for the pursuit of conflicting political ends. Racial conflict in the United States is an example of one arena in which a major effort has been made to replace violence by other means of carrying on conflict, and the effort has partially succeeded.

While Waskow assures his readers that the Civil Rights movement succeeded in its goal of ending segregation and ensuring other crucial rights, such as abolishing voting disenfranchisement, he asserts that violence did not stop. Those individuals were simply permitted to rely on violence. Waskow states that by the 1960s, the federal government's opinion was that it alone had the right to resort to physical might:

> In 1919 American political authorities and police had been deeply ambivalent over their role in dealing with private violence; by the 1960s that ambivalence had almost disappeared, and Americans tended very much more frequently to act as if the government in Washington ought to have, and did have, a monopoly of legitimate violence.[45]

The black leaders of the 1950s and 1960s understood the federal government's position and used it against white supremacy.

After the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and various groups from the Civil Rights movement ended segregation and helped assure more rights for blacks, the Black Power movement demanded additional rights in the realm of economic justice for all blacks; specifically, those outside of the South. Malcolm X, Huey Newton, and Bobby Seale demanded economic and social justice for all races and all nations affected by white supremacy. By the time of the Vietnam War, for the first time, not every leading black intellectual and leader was championing military service as a way to elevate the race's social status. Martin Luther King, Jr. began to question a war that took the nation's attention away from social issues at home, and other more militant members of the black community, like the aforementioned Newton, saw the war as merely white

[45] Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In: 1919 and the 1960s* (New York: Double Day, 1968), x, 219.

dominance over other non-white regions. In 1970, at the zenith of the Black Power movement, Muhammad Ali, now a member of the Nation of Islam, refused induction into the U.S. Military; but other more conventional organizations also challenged the nation's stance in Southeast Asia. In November 1970, the *Crisis* reprinted Roy Wilkins' article "The Old Army Game?" as a reminder that neither World War I, nor World War II, had assured true equality for black citizens. Once again, the black community was fighting for equality but had not forgotten those black soldiers who returned only to face death at the hands of other U.S. citizens.[46]

Individual acts of racism are still found in the military, but the U.S. armed forces were one of the first sections of society that reverted away from institutional racism. The military's integration policies created possibilities previously denied to black men and women. By the 1970s the military was the most integrated institution in the country, producing men such as Daniel "Chappie" James (1920-1978), the first black Four Star General, and Colin Powell, a potential candidate for U.S. President. James, a native of Pensacola, Florida, was born one year after Bud Johnson was burned alive. Without the sacrifices of all the black soldiers who had served before him, James would have never become a pilot in the Tuskegee Airmen, much less reach the highest level of the military's officer corps. Both the soldiers who served, and the black community who fought for each soldier's rights as citizens, created the possibility of equality in the United States for all men and women regardless of race. In 1979, Hazel Winifred Johnson became the first Black woman brigadier general; six years later, Sherian Grace Cadoria followed. These appointments demonstrate that the military addressed gender inequality and race.[47]

[46] *Crisis*, November 1970, 349-351.
[47] For more information on James consult James R. McGovern's *Black Eagle: General Daniel 'Chappie' James, Jr.* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985).

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