THE BLACK AMERICAN PRESS: THE INTERSECTION OF RACE, DEMOCRACY, AND WAR; 1914 - 1919

Austin R. Van Nest

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Committee:

Douglas Forsyth, Advisor

Nicole Jackson

Richard Fogarty

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ABSTRACT

Douglas Forsyth, Advisor

By the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Black Americans were restrained from enjoying democratic principles. Black American editorials combatted these discriminations by exaggerating France as an egalitarian nation that provided principles of equality, liberty and fraternity to its colonial subjects.[1] Often, Black journalists contrasted the experiences of Africans in the French army with Black Americans' inequalities. While Great Britain and Germany willingly deployed African troops in Africa, they refused to use Africans on the European continent, but France was different. The incorporation of French Africans into the French army compensated for its declining birth rate at World War I's outbreak by providing essential manpower for the war effort. As a result, journalists displayed France as appearing to provide egalitarian principles to its African soldiers. However, it was not to show the appearance of social advancement but rather to create a haze of social equality that hid France's cultural and biological racism.

This paper addresses how the Black press interpreted the incorporation of French African colonial subjects into the French army in 1914 - 1915 and how these perceptions redefined American racism, equality, white supremacy, and American democracy. Black journalists used the appearance of social advancement for French Africans serving in the French army to initially display the differences between French and American society. As a result, editors noted the shifting mentality of Black American communities from various parts of the United States and how it impacted their perception of American society. Journalists were biased in their approach,

[1] Mark Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 52.

understanding that they influenced the reader's interpretation through written or visual imagery by shaping how Black Americans interpreted the world around them. As the war raged on, they saw the war as an opportunity to criticize American democracy, demonstrate the inequalities experienced within a "white" American society, and gain civil rights.

To my friend Michael L. Payden; may he rest in peace.

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INTRODUCTION

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 showed many of the inequalities Black Americans endure in the United States. For several weeks, the media broadcasted and documented this tragic scene bringing Floyd's murder to life for their readers and viewers. The media spurred Americans and raised the awareness of numerous activist groups such as the Black Lives Matter movement by interviewing members and showing protests. American society is intertwined with the media because it influences society's interpretation and circulation of events. Similar to the internet today, newspapers in the past allowed the circulation of information about events, in which communication is presented through interpretation. In war, these editors are critical to a nation's war machine, drafting them not for military service, but to promote nationalism amongst the population by creating a sense of unity and loyalty. The purpose is to create a collective identity by constructing a government-censored vision of society and the present conflict.

During World War I, the government had a vested interest in maintaining national support to secure its goal. Arguably, the best way to reach a vast number of people quickly was by enlisting newspapers to promote loyalty and patriotism. In addition, it wanted to control how people interpreted the government or the war itself. However, what happens when a society is not united? When a portion of society is discriminated against, and a government demands its loyalty? The United States continually rejected egalitarian ideals for Black Americans despite their support and loyalty throughout history. They fought in every war throughout American history, believing that equality would be provided after serving in the military. Most scholars identify that as a result of continued rejection before World War II, Black Americans went from peaceful protests to active resistance in the war's aftermath. World War I saw the continuation of discussions over social advancements where journalists considered how to receive recognition

for the failings of American democracy. While American racism has roots back to the nation's founding, World War I connected American and European racism and showed the impossibility for Black Americans to move freely and enjoy democratic principles.

World War I was the first time in history where vast numbers of colonials, in this case non-Anglo-Saxons, served in Europe. Many European nations believed that the conquest of Africa and Asia was doing God's will to civilize or exterminate lesser peoples.[2] It was also the first time the United States sent military forces outside its Western sphere of influence to Europe. The result was a clash of racial and national identity that saw white supremacy challenged by African and Black American service members. Above all else, race was important to Americans and Europeans, impacting political and military decisions. Rank and deployment were based on race, determining who was worth "saving" and who could be "sacrificed." Both Great Britain and Germany refused to use Africans on the European continent in combat roles, but France appeared different. During and after the war, the Black American press challenged American inequality by depicting French republican principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.[3] Often, Black editors addressed inequalities within Black American communities by focusing on Africans' incorporation into the armies fighting World War I and their treatment by Europeans, contrasting this with their experiences of inequalities at home. They identified that France appeared to provide egalitarian[4] principles to its African soldiers. Journalists used the French ideals of *egalité, liberté,* and *fraternité* to challenge Black Americans to consider their role in

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[2] John H. Morrow, "The Imperial Framework," In *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. 1, Edited by Jay Winter (London: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 406.
[3] Mark Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 52.
4 I define egalitarianism as the principles of a society or group of people who believe in equal rights and opportunities.

American society. Such depictions of French equality impacted how they understood American racism at home versus conditions abroad.

Black editors exaggerated the appearance of French African social advancements in the French army to display the differences between French and American society. The incorporation of French Africans into the French army compensated for France's declining birth rate at World War I's outbreak. Despite the casualties of white Frenchmen and French Africans being relatively the same, French military authorities were more willing to sacrifice colonial troops. Robert Abbott, the editor of the *Chicago Defender*, quoted Frank Kane, who spoke of France's willingness to sacrifice its colonial troops. Kane stated, "any place the commanders find hard they soon send the African troops."[5] As a result, journalists were strategic in their approach, understanding that they influenced the reader's interpretation through written or visual imagery by reshaping the world around them. Black Americans knew that France was not a perfect egalitarian state, but depicting white Frenchmen and French Africans serving and dying together in France allowed editors to chastise American democracy. As the war raged on, Black editors saw the war as an opportunity to demonstrate the inequalities experienced within a "white" American society and gain civil rights. It was not to show the appearance of social advancement as editors displayed, but instead, they created a haze of social equality that hid France's cultural[6] and biological[7] racism. Such images were exaggerated to show the possibility for civic advancement in a society that used white supremacy, Jim Crow Laws, lynching, segregation, and discrimination against Black Americans.

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[5] "A Letter From the European Trenches," *The Chicago Defender*, March 24, 1917, 1.
[6] I identify cultural racism as the prejudices applied to cultural differences between two or more societies.
[7] I identify biological racism as the prejudices applied to people deemed inferior and based on one's appearance. It is typically used to justify the superiority of either a group of people or ethnicity over another.

In 1914, the French allowed a native Senegalese man named Blaise Diagne into the Chamber of Deputies. He successfully convinced the chamber to grant citizenship and voting rights to the *originaires* of the Four Communes of Senegal: *Saint-Louis*, *Dakar*, *Gorée*, and *Rufisque,* in 1916. The expansion of African rights concerned many in Europe and the United States, who feared providing rights and incorporating Black people into a predominately "white man's" war would upset the hierarchies of white supremacy. The United States' entry into the war on April 6, 1917, brought a segregated military force to the European continent. Initially, General Foch believed that American forces would be incorporated into the French and British armies, but President Wilson and General John J. Pershing wanted to maintain an American force. However, France's desperation in 1918 and Black American soldiers' desire to fight pressured Pershing to act. Facing pressure from the French Military High Command led Pershing to transfer the 93rd Infantry Division (an all-Black American division) to French command. By doing so, he satisfied three objectives: maintaining a white American military force; second, pacifying French needs; and lastly, satisfying the demands of Black Americans.

The incorporation of Black American soldiers into the French army was fundamentally different from the deployment of Black Americans in the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F.) or African soldiers in the French army. While Africans experienced less racial discrimination by the French populace than they were accustomed to in the colonies, Black American soldiers in France after 1917 found more egalitarian treatment in France than they had experienced in the United States. Black editors identified these differences in French and American society and used them to address the racial inequalities within the United States. Overwhelmingly, Black Americans felt closer to white Frenchmen than white Americans at home. Furthermore, these inequalities led them to challenge American democracy and highlight

national differences by using African and Black American experiences as examples to broaden their critique of American racism in an internationalist and diasporic context.[8] The differences in French and American society caused some Black Americans to move to France in the war's aftermath. At the same time, a large portion became involved in political activism in the United States.

While knowing that France and the United States used racism to suppress people who were non-Anglo-Saxon, Black Americans saw differences in the two nations' racial hierarchies. This thesis argues that Black editors were strategic in encouraging political activism by acknowledging these differences through discussing the incorporation of French African colonial subjects, and later Black Americans, into the French war effort to redefine American democracy. It analyzes their portrayal from roughly July 1914 to January 1920, focusing on the social implications while using the war to provide context and argument development. Over time, their goals and messages shifted from internal to external pressure within the United States. White Americans detested Black troops' incorporation into European and American armies. The Black American press challenged the meaning of American democracy, including its social hierarchies and infusion of white supremacy. The European war and Blacks' presence abroad placed race at the media's forefront.

This study will primarily focus on various newspapers published during World War I. These newspapers include but are not limited to; *The Chicago Defender, Baltimore Afro-American,* and *Philadelphia Tribune*. Specific terminology is vital for describing different Black American communities. Primary and secondary sources define "Africans" based on the argument's context. Sources indicate France branded some African recruits as "Turcos" unless

[8] Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 153.

explicitly specifying the geographical location of their recruitment rather than an overarching name. For example, the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* typically identified the recruitment of Africans from French West Africa, but dark-toned people who served in France came from across the African continent and nearby islands. For this study, specific terminology will address particular groups such as the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, "French Africans" to describe those from the French colonies or the surrounding islands of the African continent. This paper uses "Blacks" for global communities and "Black Americans" or "Black American communities" to address those from the United States. Also, during World War I, American society had roughly 90 million people which 10% were classified as Black American, and the remaining roughly 90% were largely white Americans. As a result, the vast white American population, with an overwhelming influence from ex-Confederate soldiers, influenced government decisions to prevent the extension of democratic rights to Black Americans. This paper defines American democracy as the domination of white citizens and politicians who created an oppressive political and racial system targeting Black Americans. Further, it focuses on Black newspaper editors, but more specifically, Black American editors during WWI. At times, the paper uses "journalist" or "editor" to refer to a Black American editor(s) unless specifically stated otherwise.

Between 1914 and 1919, Black editors chastised the United States, but as racial and political tensions increased in this period, their approach shifted. Each chapter addresses how the conversation shifted to meet the changing climate. Chapter One, "Equality or Egalité?: 1914-1915," focuses on Black editors' initial interpretation of France and how it impacted Black Americans. It considers the differences in French and American racial hierarchies and how editors began developing egalitarian ideals of France. Initially, journalists focused on the failings of the United States by exaggerating a perception of an egalitarian France. This chapter

emphasizes that despite knowing France used biological and cultural racism to prevent the inclusion of French Africans as citizens, journalists discussed French republican principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. By highlighting these notions, it allowed editors to image France as an egalitarian state in its incorporation of French Africans into the French army. Such depictions placed the United States and France in dialectical opposition despite Black Americans' known views towards white supremacy. The goal of journalists in 1914 and 1915 was to strategically chastise American democracy and consider the greater possibility for civic advancement.

Chapter Two, "Over There: 1916-1917," looks at how Black editors identified growing racial tension and the drastic escalation when the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917. In 1916, growing hostilities between Germany and the United States pushed the nation to consider the possibility of war. Despite this growing reality, many hoped that the barrier the Atlantic Ocean provided would allow the nation to remain neutral. In this chapter, journalists are forced to reconsider their approach to American racial hierarchies as racial tensions and political policies targeted what white Americans considered untrustworthy. When the Espionage Act passed in May 1917, journalists could no longer directly chastise the United States because white politicians grew concerned about Black American disloyalty and the law declared outspoken discontent as treasonous. Black editorials targeted the oppressive, discriminatory, and segregated American society, but by the war's outbreak on April 6, 1917, the American government quickly acted to suppress freedom of speech. One of their main targets was journalists who spoke out against American racial hierarchies. This chapter identifies that Black editors went through a transition period between 1916 and 1917, redefining their approach to American racial structures after the passage of the Espionage Act in May 1917. After Black Americans arrived in France in

early 1918, the discussion shifted from addressing American democracy directly and focusing heavily on the notion of an equal French society. Therefore, speaking highly of France as an American ally created an indirect method to discuss American racism without breaking the law.

Chapter Three, "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: 1918-1919," studies how journalists used the experiences of Black American soldiers to emphasize the differences between French and American society. While going abroad, many Black Americans served with the French army and had different experiences with French society. Some noticed that France did not harbor racial feelings against them, while others disliked their experiences. In both cases, two general impressions came about France; first, it had a different form of racism based on cultural norms; second, France was not a perfect utopia but was more tolerant of Black Americans. Going abroad, these soldiers understood France had colonial racism, but its difference compared to the United States allowed journalists to depict a bond between white Frenchmen and Black Americans that terrified white Americans. The increase of racial intolerance within the United States and abroad pressured the French to uphold American racial hierarchies. However, the unwillingness of French authorities, over concerns for recognizing their racism, allowed French equality to be exaggerated further. The culmination of interactions, French government rulings, and the difference in French racism helped chastise American society further. With the return of Black Americans in late 1918 and 1919, soldiers began returning home with a new outlook on society. Terrified, white Americans wanted a return of the status quo. Black Americans, who demanded the end to lynching and discrimination, resulted in a string of racial violence known as the Red Summer of 1919. Journalists were vital in depicting the experiences of Black soldiers with French racism and how these interactions challenged American society and encouraged Black Americans to challenge American democracy.

The culmination of these three chapters shows how Black editors interpreted French society to redefine American democracy and its racial hierarchies. By no means were journalists or Black Americans unaware of France's colonial policies. They openly rejected French colonialism, but it was easy to find differences between France and the United States when considering American racial intolerance. The United States subjected Black Americans to racial profiling by determining them inferior to white Americans and justifying a segregated and discriminated society. While biological racism was present in France, it was not as prominent as cultural racism. The French sought to bar Africans from upholding French customs and laws, implementing policies that limited them from obtaining the opportunity for social advancement. What resulted in France was the idea that Africans were "little brothers" who needed protection by their "bigger and wiser brother." Despite these racial stereotypes, journalists could identify several differences in French society, even if they were not perfect examples. First, the *originaires* of the Four Communes of Senegal: *Saint-Louis*, *Dakar*, *Gorée*, and *Rufisque,* whom the inhabitants were granted citizenship and voting rights in 1916. In the United States, Black Americans were subjected to rigorous tests designed to prevent them from voting and therefore limiting them to second-class citizens. Second, France's sheer desperation for soldiers allowed white Frenchmen and Africans to fight together while remaining segregated. As the war raged on, the color-line would become harder to maintain. The United States introduced a segregated military to Europe that was fresh and well equipped. By late 1917, France was struggling to maintain and equip its tattered forces. Third, while able to receive the status of a commissioned officer and treated as such, they were not allowed to command units. French command required African soldiers to remain as subordinates under white French officers meaning that race trumped rank. In the United States military, Black Americans were barred from officer schools.

Fourth, when Black Americans arrived in France, the French viewed them as more civilized than African soldiers, who helped justify a less distinct racial policy. While this image supported France's image as "color-blind" in the post-war period, the French still used biological racism towards Black Americans. Lastly, France's sheer desperation in 1918 for reinforcements on the Western Front forced the nation to conceal some of its racial views. All these factors allowed journalists to exaggerate French egalitarianism and chastise American democracy.

Historiography

Studies of the Black press show that it has received recent acknowledgment by scholars, but not as much as other historical threads. By the early 2000s, scholars discussed many aspects of World War I from political, social, and cultural angles. In 2008, Mark Whalan published a book called *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro,* providing the reader with a brief discussion of the war in chapter one before transitioning into his argument in chapter two. Predominately, his focus is on the years following the war's conclusion in 1918, when political leaders sought to redefine the world after the Triple Entente's victory. The book emphasizes how Black American artists and writers depict the war's legacy while creating an easy-to-follow discussion with the necessary context for readers unfamiliar with the period. Within, Whalan examines the works of several scholars, including the thesis of Chad L. Williams from 2004. By 2010, Williams published his book, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era,* which discusses diversity, race, and culture during and after World War I by analyzing the meaning of peace and democracy.

Chad L. William's book, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era,* is highly praised for creating an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Black Americans. In a short section about the Black press during the war, he discusses the media's role

and how the French war effort influenced questions about race, equality, and American democracy. Williams mentions that the Black press frequently placed Africans fighting for France on the newspaper's front page. However, he argues the goal of the Black press "was not to celebrate African servicemen or glorify France as a uniquely democratic and racially egalitarian nation but to critique the U.S. government by positioning it in a dialectical opposition to France."[9] As a result, Black American experiences in France established an intimate connection with the French military and citizens by energizing their inspiration for democratic ambitions.

While the section was informative, the book's purpose was not the Black press, and therefore, William's discussion of its role was minor. Instead, he sought to "demonstrate the diversity of African American soldiers, their breadth of experience, and how the war shaped their lives and identities in ways large and subtle, negative and positive" from their involvement in the war.[10] As the number of Black American enlistees increased, the war department debated establishing Black National Guard Units. Racial tensions within the American South amongst the Black and white communities resulted in racial confrontations where Black Americans fought for their survival after enduring physical and psychological abuse.[11] The question of race and the impact of French colonial troops is a significant point of discussion for understanding the Black press's role in promoting democracy and patriotism within the United States.

In one section, William's discussed Richard Fogarty's book published in 2008, *Race & War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918*, about how race played an important role in France and the French Army.[12] The war exacted a devastating toll, with high

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[9] Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era,* 155.
[10] Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era,* 7.
[11] Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era,* 103.
[12] Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army*, *1914-1918* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013).

French fatalities in 1914. Fogarty explains that France historically gained a reputation for being color-blind towards Black Americans while discriminating against Africans. In his book, Fogarty seeks to address the "attitudes and policies that, first, induced French authorities to make use of *troupes indigènes* in Europe and then defined the role they would play in the war effort in the French nation" by analyzing "the tension between inclusion and exclusion that marked thinking in France about race, empire, and national identity in a time of war."[13] The French viewed Black Americans as civilized and through a haze of stereotypes. At the same time, the *Sénégalais* were seen as primitive and recruited as "cannon fodder." Unlike other European nations, France was more willing to incorporate conquered people into the military and deploy them against "white" people. Some believed that incorporating colonial subjects into the French army created an opportunity to assimilate Africans into French society. However, the questions of religion, sex, language and military hierarchy often barred many *troupes indigènes* from becoming citizens or obtaining equality.

The historiographical discussion between Whalan, Williams, and Fogarty demonstrates that scholars continually discuss Black Americans, France, the United States, race, and Africans from French West Africa in the World War I era. These are only a few scholars vital to analyzing the Black press within the United States during an era of political, social, and cultural unrest amongst Black American communities. World War I became a fight for democracy and against white supremacy for Black Americans. The Black press addressed these concerns in several articles, but one notably titled "Fighting For White Supremacy" by John Murphy addressed many of these ideas. He quoted Dr. Felix Adler who declared that the "underlying cause of this war is that all these nations [white European nations] in Europe are contending together to determine

[13] Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army*, *1914-1918*, 3.

which shall have the power to rule the black and yellow races of Asia and Africa."[14] He recognized that two different policies had formed against what he calls "weaker races." The first inherently is a preparation to prepare the nation for self-government. The second is establishing a perpetual government controlled by the conquering society or nation. Europeans followed the second policy in Africa and India. However, American policy in the Philippines allowed for self-government, but there were fears that the United States' policy could shift and follow similar European attitudes. Dr. Adler believed that to prevent this shift, "the white people of this country [the United States] must be better educated to make them realize that Negroes in America test our democracy. We can either prejudge them as an inferior race, and thereby permit our democracy to break down, or we can assume the more hopeful attitude."[15]

While there were protests about African and Black American involvement in the war, many recognized their role in developing and changing societies' perspectives. Furthermore, Africans did not build the autocratic empires of Europe but rather hoped to tear down these government constraints in France, Africa, and the United States. These elements create the groundwork that familiarizes this research with Black Americans, Africans, race, the United States, and France's war effort. Though scholars such as William Jordan recognized the significance of Black editorials, this paper seeks to communicate their importance in understanding the World War I era, race, and the role Black editors played in contrasting the United States' political, social, and cultural environment with what they believed to be greater possibilities for racial harmony embodied in the French war effort.

Historians have studied many aspects of the Black American communities during World War I, including their experiences, interactions, and the Black press. William Jordan's book,

[14] "Fighting For White Supremacy," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, December 12, 1914, 1.
[15] "Fighting For White Supremacy," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, December 12, 1914, 1.

Black Newspapers & America's War for Democracy, *1914-1920* wanted to shed "light on African American militancy, the role of black newspapers, in black protest and American life, and, most directly, the African American response to World War I."[16] It does not consider the intersection of French and American racism and its exaggeration in Black newspapers. Instead, he analyzes the quarrel between the government and prominent journalists considering primarily the war's outbreak, the entry of the United States into the war, and the immediate post-war years. His purpose was not only to consider the response of Black Americans but to show Black editors wanted to reach white Americans, too. However, along with Jordan's work, recent research has not analyzed how the Black American press interpreted the French war effort and its impact on race, Africans, Black American experiences, and its evolution during and in the immediate years after World War I. Instead, past scholars analyzed the Black press by addressing the American government's views, Black Americans' response, or arguing it was "radical," avoiding the exaggeration of an egalitarian French society and how it impacted their readers. This manuscript has several significant findings. First, it reconsiders looking at the United States by analyzing the impact of European nations on journalists. Second, it emphasizes that despite French racism, Black editors made strategic decisions to exaggerate images of French egalitarianism to chastise the failings of American democracy. Despite knowing that France used cultural and biological racism, these depictions allowed Black Americans to consider their social status in American society compared to abroad. Third, it shows that journalists' arguments were not complex but simplistic, evolving based on the racial and political atmosphere of the United States. This paper shows three different shifts; 1914-1915, 1916-1917, and 1918-1919. Lastly, it emphasizes that despite journalists placing France and the United States in dialectical opposition, France's

[16] William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers & America's War for Democracy*, *1914-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 5.

desperation in 1914 had social and cultural impacts domestically and internationally. Such ramifications of French domestic and colonial policies during World War I were essential to Black American experiences at home, abroad, and the argument of Black editors.

CHAPTER ONE. EQUALITY OR EGALITÉ? : 1914–1915

World War I was not just about those who fought but also about the people who constructed the weapons, funded the government, and made personal sacrifices for the nation's security. However, the people's sacrifices exposed them to the war machine that provided society the physical and mental tools to produce war materials, purchase war bonds, and influence individuals internally about the external struggle. One option for gaining the people's support was through the media. Before radio broadcasts or the evening news, most citizens received news from newspapers and journals. These media provided up-to-date information about current domestic and international events. The failings of the United States government in the American Civil War's aftermath allowed inequality to persist between ethnic groups. It caused the expansion of the Black American press that recognized the failings of American democracy and the treatment of Black communities domestically and internationally. By World War I's outbreak, roughly 150 Black newspapers discussed racial conditions, lynching, and the potential for race riots because of unequal treatment in American society. Journalists supplied readers with an interpretation of society and war that was easily accessible material for its reader base.

During World War I, the media targeted specific cultural values infused within an individual's identity that was unequivocally recognized amongst different ethnic groups. This shared identity allowed people to reveal similar positive and negative experiences. Historian Nina Mjagkij analyzed the experiences of Black Americans during World War I and the difficulty of living in the United States. She stated that on the eve of the war's outbreak, "African American lives were characterized by white economics, exploitation, intimidation, and violence as well as Jim Crow laws."[17] The failings of the American Reconstruction government and the

[17] Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: the African American Experience during World War I* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 22.

growing frustration within Black communities allowed for inequality, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and white supremacy to become discussion topics in the World War I era's Black American press. These cultural ideals of white Americans were embedded in Black American communities. Historian Chad Williams argued that the Black American press weaponized criticism of white American racial discrimination but focused on how the *Chicago Defender* had a specific agenda. He argues that the *Chicago Defender*'s goal was "not solely to celebrate the contributions of African servicemen or glorify France as a uniquely democratic and racially egalitarian nation but also to critique the U.S. government by positioning it in a dialectical opposition to France."[18] This was not always the case. While certainly Black editors such as Robert Abbott, editor of the *Chicago Defender*, recognized France was not egalitarian, the image of a perceived equal French society would impact how Black Americans viewed France compared to the United States. This chapter argues that journalists in the years 1914 and 1915 used France's incorporation of Africans into the French war effort to discuss the war's meaning for Black American communities by identifying the differences in American and French racial hierarchies.

Placing images of Africans in French society against images of oppression and segregation ignited discussions of racial injustice within the United States. Between 1914 and 1915, journalists identified different racial structures in the United States and France, creating an exaggerated depiction of an egalitarian, friendly France and targeting Black American communities' societal values. Historian Mark Whalan argued that Black editors decided to "see French as a language that had structured colonial hegemony, as a later generation of black intellectuals would argue, [but the] World War I era African American writers often chose to

[18] Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 155.

take the French political rhetoric of liberty, egalitarianism, and fraternity at face value."[19] By accepting these notions at face value, their depictions of Africans in French society and French republican ideals created an image of French equality. They understood that American society was flawed in its discrimination against Black American communities allowing France's image to be enhanced further. This ultimately affected how Black Americans viewed the white American political system compared to France.

Journalists were biased in their depiction of the United States compared to France. They had an intended audience that recognized the white supremacist views of American politics as oppressive against Black Americans, identified French Africa's societal achievements, and compared them to the United States. They sought to display how Black American communities could adapt and overcome white American supremacy. The war's outbreak in Europe on July 28, 1914, provided the Black American press opportunities to discuss France's Black colonial troops in military service. France's views of colonial forces affected how and where specific ethnic groups received military roles but created a unique image compared to the United States. It did not mean the French were a perfectly egalitarian society; journalists certainly recognized that France was not. However, they strategically influenced their reader's interpretation through written or visual imagery. These tactics complicated their role in society but created engaging and symbolic subjects that targeted the reader's cultural values.

The War's Outbreak

Austria-Hungary's declaration of war against Serbia on July 28, 1914, shocked the world and left many questioning whether the war would engulf much of the world. Christopher Perry, the founder and editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, questioned "whether England and France, the

[19] Mark Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 52.

other great western powers, would eventually side with Russia [as] a question of deep concern to all of Europe."[20] The Franco-Russian Treaty of 1894 unified the two nations, while Franco-German hostilities reminded French society of its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 – 1871. However, each major European nation had different reasons to participate in the growing global conflict. Russia was making technological strides in developing its infrastructure and weaponry while possessing a large population. Germany possessed a rapidly developing industrial complex with a rapid birth rate that outpaced much of Europe. France, however, had a declining birthrate and knew that by avoiding war for a few years, the nation would be overwhelmed in sheer numbers.

Germany's aggressive foreign policy at the outbreak of war led Perry to depict a hostile and prepared German state. In addition, German political and economic ambition created a negative image amongst European nations and Black American communities. In mid-August, Perry stated in the *Philadelphia Tribune* that:

> Germany has been in the past and in the present the constant and persistent enemy of the colored race; this had been shown in her treatment of the natives of South and West Africa, time and again, for many years up to a very recent period her actions toward the Republic of Haiti and Santo Domingo demonstrates her great love for the Black race in the many efforts she made to humiliate them and to despoil them of their territory, if it were possible.[21]

He recognized an enemy of Black Americans that did not respect what he identified as the colored race. His view of the war was an altercation between white European powers, which he felt should remain a "white man's war," believing global Black communities had nothing to gain from involvement. Clear opposition to a general European war would involve global Black communities, but their involvement resulted in American and European racial stereotypes during

[20] "Austria, Germany, and Italy versus Russia, Great Britain and France," *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 8, 1914, 1.
[21] "The Present European Conflict," *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 15, 1914, 4.

the war. White American hostility towards Black Americans remained high in the early twentieth century, where segregation, discrimination, and American democracy prevented societal advancement. Similarly, the French Empire's racial hierarchy was well established, exploiting its African colonies through economic and political domination. The outbreak of the war caused France to implement colonial policies that received specific attention from Black American editorials.

Black American Editors' Interpretations of Black Military Service and French Racism

It seemed difficult to imagine France not drawing Africa into the European conflict. Journalists recognized the native African soldiers serving in the French army. Algerians fought alongside white French forces in Upper Alsace during the early years of the war, creating a reputation that drew Black editors' attention. Robert Abbott, the founder and editor of the *Chicago Defender*, claimed that "there are no better soldiers in their way than the black and brown men … serving under the tricolor."[22] Africans' successes in previous conflicts assured France that its fighting capabilities in a European conflict would not come as a surprise. French authorities recognized the role colonial forces would play in a general European war, but they did not know how influential colonial forces would be in depicting different racial structures in global Black communities. Abbot recognized that French colonial policy allowed African service members to receive the authority of commissioned or non-commissioned officers but were not allowed to hold command over white troops. This racial bar meant that the "colonial subjects enjoyed neither true freedom, nor equality with their colonial masters, nor fraternity, since their inferiority and inability to rule themselves justified their subjugation," Abbott stated.[23] This meant that Africans in the French army appeared to have access to some social advancement

[22] "Native African Soldiers," *The Chicago Defender*, September 5, 1914, 1.
[23] "Black soldiers keep Germans out," *The Chicago Defender*, September 12, 1914, 1.

within the white French military hierarchy, but this was not the case. Despite its limitations, access to officer training showed a difference compared to white American military policy that debated and prevented Black Americans from becoming commissioned officers.

The white French military racial hierarchy placed white officers in command of Black military units. The reduction in the language barrier was necessary to comprehend the culture and customs of the two differing societies. Many Africans thought the opportunity to learn the French language and acquire skills through military service would translate to better opportunities upon returning to civilian life. However, the French high command's expectations barred possibilities for societal advancement. The French believed that placing experienced white Frenchmen in command who knew the customs and languages of Africa was an asset for gaining the respect of their men. As death tolls rose, finding soldiers who could satisfy these requirements became difficult. African elites were valuable to the French war effort in bridging the gap between language barriers. However, historian Richard Fogarty suggested that it proved difficult to entice African elites to join, forcing France to provide them with a higher rank and better pay. This enticement did not give them equal recognition in French society but allowed acknowledgment within the French military. Fogarty argued that those Africans who reached the rank of captain "were not allowed to take command of companies or exercise direct command over a unit of any size, merely serving as 'assistants' to their [white] superiors."[24]

There were two prevailing views on African military service in French society: first, Black advocates, such as Blaise Diagne, believed that using African troops in the French army would allow the colonies to gain more rights. John Murphy, founder and editor of the *Baltimore Afro-American,* wrote that many of Europe's colonies had indigenous people volunteering for

[24] Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918,* 127.

military service and that "in the French West Indies, which has two colored members in French Parliament, the same spirit is being manifested."[25] He was born into slavery and served as a Sergeant during the American Civil War. His military service allowed him to recognize the French military's goals of assimilation of Africans and how it created loyalty and civic obligation to the metropole. The second view upheld the white French military command's position on racial discrimination that the colonial forces should be used to defend white Frenchmen. They labeled colonials as either *races giuerrières* (warlike races) or *races non-giuerrières* (non-warlike races), which shaped their decision on recruiting indigenous people for military service. They identified that over 90% of those recruited in Senegal during WWI were *races giuerrières* who contributed half a million men to the French war effort.[26]

Christopher Perry, John Murphy, and Robert Abbott were concerned with Black American inequalities. They depicted African loyalty and willingness to serve in the French Army in France and the positive French recognition of Africans while masking colonial stereotypes. Before the war, in 1910, an influential French military commander named Charles Emmanuel Mangin published a book called *La Force Noire*. He argued that French colonial forces should be called to defend the metropole in the event of a general European war. Without hesitation, Mangin advocated using African troops in France because of their significant achievements in previous conflicts. John Morrow stated that Mangin believed these African troops "stood ready to repeat them [military service] for France."[27] After French military officials debated placing Africans in combat roles in Europe, the first divisions arrived in France in September 1914.

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[25] "Marooned in the European War District," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, August 8, 1914, 1.
[26] Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918,* 27.
[27] John H. Morrow, "The Imperial Framework," In *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. 1, Ed. Jay Winter (London: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 408.

Allyson Sweeney, a prominent journalist for the *Chicago Defender,* targeted France as the ideal nation for focusing Black American perspectives on what a white American society could become. On September 21, A. J. Haaga, a reader of the *Chicago Defender,* sent a letter to Robert Abbott. He was upset with how Black soldiers strangled to death three German soldiers. Haaga identified he was from the American south and that it "strikes a southerner with a peculiar sense of horror and disgust that in this terrible war, white nations in a white men's quarrel have seen fit to drag in blacks."[28] France had recruited and trained Africans in large numbers and had begun transporting them to France since September 1914. On their way to the Western Front, they marched through Paris along the Boulevard de Sebastopol, where the French populace and journalists acknowledged the presence of Blacks in the French army. On October 3, Abbott and Sweeney published articles and images depicting the positive reception of French Africans. Abbott published an image of the French Africans marching through Paris with the title "Detachment of African Troops That Set Paris Wild." He stated that these troops received "great admiration" as they marched through Paris.[29]

Frustrated with Haaga's letter, Sweeney published "French Women Embrace and Kiss Black Soldiers: Southern Belittles…" scolding Haaga for failing to consider the racial hierarchies and discrimination Black Americans faced in a white American democratic society. He suggested that the French populace had a positive reception of Africans in France, specifically in Paris. Sweeney's depiction challenged Haaga's white American views when he quoted John Ashton from the *Chicago Tribune* who stated that:

> These [Black] men are fearless and said to be irresistible in a bayonet charge. Cigarets [sic], wine, cordials, fruits, and refreshments of all kinds were showered upon them. Women wept with joy, and rushed repeatedly from the sidewalks to embrace the soldiers.

[28] "French Women Embrace and Kiss Black Soldiers: Southerner Belittles African Soldiers; Parisians Pay Him Glorious Tribute," *The Chicago Defender*, October 3, 1914, 1.
[29] "Detachment of African Troops that Set Paris Wild," *The Chicago Defender*, October 3, 1914, 1.

> Ever and anon, a soldier would dash into the throng and kiss some child in its mother's arms. Officers, mounted on beautiful Arab charger[s], raised their gloved hands in salute to the cheering masses. Pretty women dashed spontaneously to the cavallers's [sic] side, offering bouquets of flowers or holding aloft their hands to be kissed.[30]

Abbott and Sweeney used these depictions to construct a comparison between French and American society. Haaga's letter to the *Chicago Defender* encapsulated the failings of American democracy, oppression, and discrimination. Sweeney knew that Haaga's discomfort with French African soldiers would resonate with the inequality, oppression, and discrimination experienced by Black American communities. However, France's depiction allowed Black Americans to see the differing racial structures in a nation they called home versus abroad in France.

Colonel Mangin's impact on French military policy allowed incidents like this in Paris to influence depictions of France. The French military command willingly recruited thousands of Africans for military service in Europe. Journalists depicted French society as "equal," and many used similar wording to describe French military policy. "France told the world that … black[s] of merit could have an equal in her army and navy" in the current war, Abbott wrote in the *Chicago Defender*.[31] White French commanders, including former Colonel, now General Mangin, General Hippolyte Langlois, and General Henri Bonnal, spoke highly of Black service members.

Many African officers and loyal colonists willingly served in the French army throughout World War I. As the war progressed, Africa's role became more distinct as the Black editors portrayed France as praising the loyalty and support of French Africans. Robert Abbott stated that France demonstrated the "superiority of the educated [Black] sailor and soldier."[32] Black

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[30] "French Women Embrace and Kiss Black Soldiers: Southerner Belittles African Soldiers; Parisians Pay Him Glorious Tribute," *The Chicago Defender*, October 3, 1914, 1.
[31] "Black Soldiers Keep the Germans out of Paris," *The Chicago Defender*, September 12, 1914, 1.
[32] "The War Lord of Europe," *The Chicago Defender*, March 6, 1915, 1.

Americans in an unequal white American military and representation of equality in a white French military placed the two nations in dialectical opposition. Early in 1915, journalists called for the induction of Black Americans into West Point, but white American politics refused integration. American society ultimately segregated and discriminated against Black Americans, while in France, African soldiers could become commissioned officers. The oppressive nature of American society allowed journalists to acknowledge French racism but instead strategically focus on the positive recognition of French African soldiers.

American Racism and Discrimination and French Society

The French war effort's desperation and incorporation of Africans allowed Robert Abbott, Christopher Perry, John Murphy, and Allyson Sweeney to show Black American communities different perspectives of French and American society. The failings of the Reconstruction government to support Black Americans caused many to seek advancements in social, economic, and political society. By the war's outbreak in August 1914, over 76% of the nine million African Americans living in the American South were sharecroppers, a form of debt-slavery. These Black Southern sharecroppers were bound to white plantation owners' land by overwhelming debt and poverty that provided little hope for economic freedom.[33] As the war raged in Europe, southern cotton prices fell as the region lost access to European markets, and the destruction of crops from an infestation of Boll Weevils forced many to consider moving from the American South. The availability of northern jobs was one draw for Black American communities. The war-torn nations began purchasing manufactured defense goods from the United States, but immigration began dwindling because of loyalty to their respective nations, cutting off a vital source of labor to Northern industries, which slowly caused a labor shortage.

[33] Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era,* 17.

The shortage created the opportunity for Black Southerners to acquire better-paying jobs in Northern factories with a less pervasive racial structure than the American South.[34]

Backed by Black Northern newspapers, Black Southerners visualized the differing racial structures in the American North and abroad in France. Since August 1914, Abbott received news from New Orleans that Black Southern sharecroppers and their families were leaving for the West French Indies. He recognized the exodus of Black southerners and stated on September 19, 1914, that some 200 Black men, women, and children moved from various plantations in the southern United States to the countryside of French Martinique. Those who left the country for French dominions "were going to French possessions because of better treatment," Abbott stated.[35] His depiction encapsulated the oppressive and discriminatory nature of American democracy by suggesting that many Black Americans recognized French society as different. Many in Black American communities believed leaving the country for French colonies was an opportunity to escape the oppressive nature of white American society, but many were aware of French colonial racism that caused debates about the differences between the United States and France's racial hierarchies. Others went north hoping for a fair chance at less oppressive social measures than those found in the American South. Historian William Jordan argued that these movements allowed the Black American to discover a new location where "he does not feel that he has the force of the whole community, the whole country, the whole state and the whole section of the country against him."[36]

The European war raised the question of white American societal values and Blacks' participation in the French military. White and Black Americans viewed the conflict as a war of

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[34] Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: the African American Experience during World War I,* 24.
[35] "200 Colored Men and Women go to French West Indies," *The Chicago Defender*, September 19, 1914, 1.
[36] William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers & America's War for Democracy*, *1914-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 156.

white nations, but Blacks' impact abroad placed the question of race in the United States against traditional white American norms. White American communities rejected incorporating Black Americans into the military out of fear that arming them would unite them and lead to race riots. However, Black American communities saw that France's willingness to incorporate Africans into the military demonstrated the possibility for social advancement in American society.

Some military officials and numerous politicians, including James Vardaman, Coleman Blease, and Frank Park, deemed military segregation, like civilian life, a logical method of managing Black Americans in the armed forces.[37] In 1914, Congressman Frank Park (D-GA) introduced a bill that made Black American service members unable to receive promotions as commissioned or non-commissioned officers. Abbott quoted the *Indianapolis Star* in the *Chicago Defender,* stating that the "War Department is in danger of becoming 'embarrassed'… [where] the bill, on the face of it, is absurd and plainly unconstitutional."[38] Many Black Americans grew frustrated with America's politics since they had proven time and again their loyalty to the nation. "The army is the one bright particular spot where we have made an enviable record, loyal, able efficient and brave is the way that history records us" Abbott stated.[39] He argued that the French did not degrade the soldiers of Africa, unlike the behavior of the United States towards Black Americans; instead, "in the French Army the black soldier is held in high esteem. Napoleon's ideal army was based on the fact that in the knapsack of even the humblest private lay the potential marshal's baton. How much more should similar conditions prevail in the army of this [the United States] free republic."[40] French colonial policies received acknowledgment in Black American communities. However, Abbott's knowledge and

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[37] Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era,* 6.
[38] "Where We Stand," *The Chicago Defender*, August 15, 1914, 8.
[39] "Where We Stand," *The Chicago Defender*, August 15, 1914, 8.
[40] "Where We Stand," *The Chicago Defender*, August 15, 1914, 8.

willingness to provide an exaggerated depiction of French colonial policies created an image of France to which he opposed white American values.

Black American communities saw military service as an opportunity to display their loyalty to the United States. However, historian Chad Williams stated that the white hierarchy of American military doctrine forced segregation and discrimination upon Black American service members. He argued that Black editors believed that military service would allow social change upon returning to civilian life, but to "many white Americans, black [American] soldiers represented a distinct threat to prevailing social hierarchies and white supremacist visions of American democracy."[41] The United States' preparation for war resulted in Woodrow Wilson calling on 1,000,000 volunteers for military training. The European nations recognized that the United States was not prepared to engage in European-style warfare. The oppressive measures in American society provided little reason for Black Americans to support a nation that refused to protect their rights. Abbott noted the intensifying position in American and European politics and stated that "the Afro-American citizen is on the alert."[42] He stressed support for the president's call for volunteers but pressed the notion that the president's suggestion for a year-long training was unnecessary and claimed such training protocols discriminated against Black Americans. Many Black Americans served in previous wars and thought they deserved equal recognition for officer training. "If the government would stop discriminating against one part of its citizenship in times of peace and expect them to be up to the standard in the time of trouble," then they should "open the doors to West Point and let the nation have trained soldiers of all races," Abbott

[41] Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era,* 3.
[42] "United States May Be Forced into Great War," *The Chicago Defender*, February 27, 1915, 1.

stated.[43] His vision of white American supremacy created a distinct racial hierarchy dissimilar to France, placing the nations in dialectical opposition.

Like Black American service members, Black American women sought opportunities to achieve recognition in domestic and international society. The need for medical personnel in the European war was shaping American views. Many graduates of Chicago's Provident hospital in 1914 were multi-lingual and wanted to provide their service in the National Red Cross society. Many preferred supporting the French army, and many of the graduates believed they could "be of great service to foreign countries, especially the French. … One nurse who spoke three languages fluently said to a *Defender* reporter that 'she was ready to go.'"[44] The views of French society impacted American society. Journalists displayed Black American strides to support the French or move to French colonies where many imagined more opportunities existed for societal advancement. While they understood France used racism against its colonies, the opinion that France provided uniquely egalitarian principles was exaggerated to show the differences in the American and French armies and societies.

Journalists recognized the complicated nature of placing the French and American societies in dialectical opposition to one another. Historian Mark Whalan argued that Black editors "saw battle as prompting the most thoroughgoing changes that servicemen, black or white, would undergo in France, changes that had profound consequences for American racial politics."[45] Many white Americans openly objected to Blacks in the war, either abroad or at home. In Germany, several white Americans protested against France for using "African savages to fight their battles in Europe."[46] It was clear that white Americans drew a color line within

[43] "United States May Be Forced into Great War," *The Chicago Defender*, February 27, 1915, 1.
[44] "Trained Nurses offer Services to France," *The Chicago Defender*, August 15, 1914, 7.
[45] Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro*, 49.
[46] "Black Troops in the War," The Chicago *Defender*, December 12, 1914, 8.

American society that journalists willingly exploited. White Americans identified Black service members as a prevailing threat to the white supremacist hierarchies of American democracy, but some European nations questioned American racial politics. Abbott published in early October 1914 an article titled "U.S. GOV'T CAN NOT KEEP TURKISH ENVOY; TALKS ON LYNCHING" that discussed the Ottoman Empire's ambassador to the United States, Rustem Bey, who chastised white Americans for lynching Black Americans and personal discriminatory attacks. Bey's criticism shocked President Woodrow Wilson and Secretary of State William Bryan, creating political unrest and an international incident.

Bey was unwilling to renounce his views on American society. The American government sent the U.S. Navy to Turkey on reports of Ottoman persecution of Christians. Abbot quoted Bey stating that American involvement in Turkish affairs was unprecedented and that while "massacres had previously occurred in Turkey, they were the same acts as any people might commit under provocation. He cited the lynching of Negores and the 'water cures' in the Philippines as [an] illustration, reminding the American people of those incidents."[47] Wilson and Bryan viewed Bey's remarks as objectionable, asking him to refrain from expressing his views on American social values. Frustrated with United States' policies, he instead decided to request a leave of absence. Bey's acknowledgment of America's racial hierarchy was not the only external criticism against American society. Later in the war, France would chastise the United States for its political mistreatment of minority groups and the lynching of Black Americans, too.

Black American Editorials' Praise France for Black Social Advancement

Black editors compared the United States and French racial views against one another, often praising France for its differing views of Black communities. Abbott published an article

[47] "U.S. Gov't Can Not Keep Turkish Envoy; Talks on Lynching," *The Chicago Defender*, October 3, 1914, 1.

titled "German Frightened at Black Face" in September 1914 that discussed the role of Africans in the French military. He stated, "the French soldiers 'got wise' that the German troops feared the bravery, heroism, and daring of the African troops from Senegal and were unwilling to face the brave black volunteers. The French, acting like the Africans, yelled and danced as they charged, and the Germans became helpless with fright."[48] White French soldiers disguised as Africans created a clear image on the battlefield that race was a strategic military tool. At the same time, it pushed journalists to consider how French society recognized Africans in military service.

The Black American press discussed French recognition of African service members. They received "recommendations for decorations for bravery on the field of battle and for excellence in marksmanship," and the army contains "many cases of individual heroism unequaled in history," Abbott stated.[49] After impressing a white French officer, Pasquale Denoix, an African from West French Africa, received an education in Paris. Denoix continued his education, stunning his professors and receiving an appointment to the Government Military Academy at Bordeaux, France, by Deputy Theophile Lamouroux. After four years of study, he was assigned to the artillery branch. His experience in the French military received attention from all nations, including Abbott. Black French military members and their roles in the French Army allowed journalists to create positive imagery despite French racial hierarchies. The success of Denoix in French society showed the possibility for a societal change rather than accepting the oppressive nature of white Americans that refused to incorporate Black Americans into the artillery, to become commissioned officers, or allow them into West Point. However,

[48] "Germans Frightened at Black Face," *The Chicago Defender*, September 19, 1914, 6.
[49] "African Troops Make Record," *The Chicago Defender*, Jun 12, 1915, 1.

France's willingness to provide an illusion of equal rights to French colonials intensified the debate and differences between French and American society.

The election of a Black man from Senegambia as Senator and a Senegalese native, Blaise Diagne, to the French Chamber of Deputies in May 1914 created an image of political equality. Abbott wrote in October 1914 that "The French are inclined to believe if they [Africans] are given comparative equality in education and social advancement they will be fitted to participate in every sphere of national activity."[50] Recognizing the two societal differences allowed a more precise depiction of American and French society. It showed an unjust and unequal society within the United States while portraying the French as building an egalitarian society willing to provide fundamental rights to its colonies.

In July 1915, the French Chamber of Deputies debated a bill proposed by Blaise Diagne that extended France's compulsory military services to its colonial subjects. French colonials played a significant role in the French army, receiving numerous recognitions from a white French military command. On July 17, 1915, John Murphy stated that "unlike in the United States, colored and white soldiers serve in the same regiments."[51] Indeed, he acknowledged a portion of the truth. White Frenchmen and African colonials served together in similar regiments, but racial stereotypes ensured white French officers held command over African soldiers. This "denial" of a complete image depicted French racial hierarchies as equals rather than the understood colonial racism expected in France.

Journalists heard about the predominately white French Chamber of Deputies debating whether to provide rights to Africans serving in France. Murphy published on July 17, 1915, an article about the debate that occurred within a French legislative committee. Diagne introduced a

[50] "The African Colonies," *The Chicago Defender*, October 31, 1914, 8.
[51] "Army Rights for French Colonists," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, July 17, 1915, 1.

bill within the committee; Deputy Labroue stated his concern about French and colonial soldiers' different languages, religions, and social customs. He proposed an amendment to the bill, which provided the incorporated colonial troops' pensions and other rights of French citizenship.[52] Protests from the several African Deputies amid the debate led Murphy to quote the Chamber's President Paul Deschanel, stating that the "entire Chamber felt the same respect and love for all, whatever their race or religion, who are fighting under the folds of the tricolored flag."[53] After a short debate and Deputy Diagne's proposal for pensions for the widows of colonial troops, the Minister of War, Alexander Millerand, urged the bill's passing and it passed without any changes. Murphy acknowledged the positive image that white French Deputies willingly provided rights to France's African colonial forces.

French military command recognized Black American women serving in the Red Cross and the brutal conditions for Africans in the French Army, countering American white supremacy. The winter of 1914 devastated the French African colonial forces, but they gained important recognition in the white national media. The *New York Times* quoted Mrs. Harry Floyd, who visited the hospitals in France where the Senegalese had body parts amputated due to the cold. She noted that "the courage and heroism of these men are simply beyond belief. They never complain. They always urge the nurses to attend to others."[54] Similarly, Abbott noted France's recognition of a Black woman named Miss Ludia Barksdale. She graduated from Chicago's Provident Hospital and served with 500 nurses on the Belgium frontier. The French people acknowledged her valiant service and expected her to be decorated by the French division commander. Abbott stated in the *Chicago Defender* that "over [t]here – where color is no bar and

[52] "Army Rights for French Colonists," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, July 17, 1915, 1.
[53] "Army Rights for French Colonists," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, July 17, 1915, 1.
[54] "Troops From Tropics Suffer," *The New York Times*, December 21, 1914, 3.

where merit counts, Miss Barksdale has won herself a lasting memory in the hearts of every French man and woman in the Republic."[55] He exaggerated an image of French equality against the racial intolerance present within the United States.

Black American Editors: What are Blacks Fighting For?

Throughout 1914 and 1915, Black editorials published articles that questioned the purpose and role of Black communities in the war, white supremacy, and what they would gain for fighting in Europe. The European powers fought for imperial supremacy and control over Africa and other parts of the world. Images of German disdain for global Black communities in its connection to service in the French Army became a heated topic amongst journalists. In many ways, they placed Germany and France in dialectical opposition, while putting white American policies of inequality, segregation, and white supremacy at the center. Objections to German mistreatment of Africans and Black Americans by Black editors recognized that American and German society displayed similar racial structures, and therefore the United States needed to follow more closely Black racial advances in France.

Journalists discussed and displayed images to Black American communities of France's deployment of colonial forces and Germany's mistreatment of African captives and racial structures. However, they displayed more than an isolated conflict, but a truly global fight for democracy. Black Americans were concerned about receiving freedom and equality at the war's conclusion. In December 1914, Murphy in the *Baltimore Afro-American* published Dr. Felix Adler's views on the European war. He was a white German American who taught political and social ethics at Columbia University and believed that peace would not come with Germany's defeat but when governments provided equal representation to their citizens. Dr. Adler believed

[55] "France to Honor Chicago," *The Chicago Defender*, March 6, 1915, 1.

that "the deep, underlying cause of this war is that all these nations in Europe are contending together to determine which shall have the power to rule the black and yellow races of Asia and Africa."[56] He argued Europeans had two prevailing thoughts on what they called 'weaker races.' The first was to establish a temporary government that allowed these societies to acquire the right to self-government over time. The second notion was that Europeans established a government in perpetuity.[57] He suggested that the United States should be careful and avoid following European policies towards 'weaker races.' Such policies in the United States would shape government policies towards people of color. Adler argued the best way to avoid such instances was that "the white people of this country must be better educated to make them realize that Negroes in America test our democracy. We can either prejudge them as an inferior race, and thereby permit our democracy to break down, or we can assume the more hopeful attitude."[58]

By late 1914, the French viewed Africans as well suited for European warfare. Their willingness to serve abroad in Europe had Robert Abbot, John Murphy, Christopher Perry, and Allyson Sweeney, discussing how the war would end, with the toppling of monarchies, and how they hoped Black involvement would sway global political opinion about Africa. A journalist for the *Chicago Defender* asked an important question: "what are the darker races going to gain?"[59] He chastised both France and England for providing equality only when Africans were asked to die in defense of a nation. The British colonial system was particularly problematic to the editor because it defended the status quo and maintained Anglo-Saxons at the top of the racial hierarchy. His concern was the British Empire's willingness to exploit those deemed weak. "If

[56] "Fighting for White Supremacy," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, December 12, 1914, 1.
[57] "Fighting for White Supremacy," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, December 12, 1914, 1.
[58] "Fighting for White Supremacy," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, December 12, 1914, 1.
[59] "What are Darker Races going to Gain in European Battle," *The Chicago Defender*, October 24, 1914, 1.

England allowed the truth to reach India at this stage it would mark the beginning of her downfall," Abbott stated.[60] It appeared his view extended beyond Europe and into the United States. He stated that "The American papers are bad enough with their distortion of fact, but if we can believe what we hear Great Britain assuredly belongs at the head of the Ananias[61] class."[62] His acknowledgment of the white supremacist vision of American democracy led him to state, "having had to contend with the same sort of treatment here in America for the past half century, being misrepresented, having our failings distorted and our virtues minimized, … I only wish that we as a race were cemented as firmly together."[63]

Journalists showed to Black American communities that the racial hierarchies in France and the United States were similar but emphasized minor differences. France was not a perfect egalitarian state but appeared to be a more equal society, where Blacks and whites could function without the segregation, discrimination, and white supremacist views that dominated American society. On October 3, 1914, Allison Sweeney's article criticized A. J. Haaga's views on white American society's social and political ideals and Blacks in military service. He discussed that American democracy was inherently flawed in providing equal opportunities to Black Americans, stating that:

> The name "Haaga" would indicate him of German or Dutch extraction, who, no doubt at all in the world, at this very moment, and for years prior, had been given protection, the chance to live and prosper in this land that ten generations of BLACKS, our father, had toiled to build up, and whose blood and bones, left on a hundred battle spots, stretching from Lexington to San Juan Hill, was freely given that the nation of Washington and

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[60] "What are Darker Races going to Gain in European Battle," *The Chicago Defender*, October 24, 1914, 1.
[61] Ananias Class is a term that came from early Christianity describing someone who lies or was struck dead for lying.
[62] "French Women Embrace and Kiss Black Soldiers: Southerner Belittles African Soldiers; Parisians Pay Him Glorious Tribute," *The Chicago Defender*, October 3, 1914, 1.
[63] "French Women Embrace and Kiss Black Soldiers: Southerner Belittles African Soldiers; Parisians Pay Him Glorious Tribute," *The Chicago Defender*, October 3, 1914, 1.

> Lincoln, the asylum for the oppressed from everywhere, should not perish from the earth![64]

His call for justice in American society acknowledged the unequal societal values of the United States. Black Americans fought in numerous wars, suffered chattel slavery in the American South, and were responsible for building up the economic prosperity of plantation owners. European immigrants who arrived in the last several years received more opportunities to flourish in American society than citizens of color. Sweeney demanded that Black Americans be recognized for their role in society and receive the same treatment as immigrants.

On May 7, 1915, a passenger ship named the RMS *Lusitania* left Liverpool, heading for New York City, when a German submarine torpedoed and sank the ship killing 128 Americans. The naval protocols stated that non-belligerent ships were not considered legitimate military targets unless carrying war materials. The Germans claimed the *Lusitania* was carrying munitions destined for the war, making the ship a legitimate military target.[65] This was not the first time German attacks involved Americans. Many Black Americans lost their lives on neutral ships crossing the Atlantic where the "German mistreatment of Black Americans was a disgrace."[66] Abbott noted the bombardment of the ship *Armenian* that had several Black Americans who cried out for help. Unfortunately, many German sailors showed "no mercy …[and] after being kicked and kicked they finally sank to the bottom of the ocean."[67] Those Black Americans who used the lifeboats or rafts faced similar brutality, with Abbott calling it "the most horrible scene ever enacted on water."[68] German mistreatment and protests against

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[64] "French Women Embrace and Kiss Black Soldiers: Southerner Belittles African Soldiers; Parisians Pay Him Glorious Tribute," *The Chicago Defender*, October 3, 1914, 1.
[65] Jennifer D. Keene, "North America," In *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. 1 Ed. Jay Winter (London: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 515.
[66] "Germans Kick Race Men into Mighty Deep," *The Chicago Defender*, July 24, 1915, 1.
[67] "Germans Kick Race Men into Mighty Deep," *The Chicago Defender*, July 24, 1915, 1.
[68] "Germans Kick Race Men into Mighty Deep," *The Chicago Defender*, July 24, 1915, 1.

African soldiers in the French army caused attacks against Black Americans. The Wilson administration felt public pressure to act against German attacks on U.S. shipping and the death of Americans.

Many Americans were frustrated with German attacks and openly discussed American involvement. However, did this mean Black Americans should support the war too? It was apparent that American sentiment drew the nation closer to war, but not everyone was sure what its role would be if the U.S. went to war. On May 22, Christopher Perry stated in the *Philadelphia Tribune* that "if we should war with Germany – as has been and is the talk in all walks of American life, because of Germany's high-handed acts against American life and property upon the high seas, inconsistent with all law and precedent, and brutal and insolent to the last degree – what then?"[69] Perry questioned the role of Black Americans in the war. Should they fight for a nation that did not protect their rights and viewed them as second-class citizens? Abbott, Murphy, Perry, Sweeney, and numerous Black Americans likely thought it was their duty to support the president and the war if asked. They identified an opportunity to show their support for military action while discussing what they hoped to achieve at the war's conclusion.

By the end of 1915, Black editorial's influence on society prompted many Black Americans to discuss actions against the oppressive nature of American democracy. An unnamed male reader of the *Chicago Defender* expressed his concerns for Black American communities. He spoke of the United States' oppression as a "burning, leaping and flaming indignation the evil state of her own unsettled and uncivilized condition, a state of savage, cruel, unchangeable hatred such has never been exhibited by any nation or tribe of civilized or uncivilized people."[70] The writer called on the nation's failure to uphold the integrity and honor of Black American

[69] "If We Should War with Germany, What, Then?," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, May 22, 1915, 4.
[70] "Awake Oh Ethiopia Awake," *The Chicago Defender*, November 6, 1915, 3.

communities. Throughout numerous wars, the Black Americans served in the U.S. armed forces, but they believed it was for the "protection of the oppressor, the oppressor who is burning, hanging, lynching, maltreating and sending him deeper and deeper into degradation."[71] His call for action against a semi-slavery society received recognition by the *Chicago Defender*. Abbott criticized the man for not providing his name but supported his words against inequality, segregation, and white supremacist visions of American democracy. However, the writer knew that providing his name would lead to similar hate crimes addressed in the article, but to Abbott, it was "no disgrace to die with your shoes on."[72]

Conclusion

In 1914 and 1915, Black editorials sought to display the war in ways that benefitted Black American communities. The depiction of a relatively positive French society created a hopeful image amongst Black Americans that resisted white American ideals. Journalists targeted Black American communities by creating a foundation to discuss American inequalities, segregation, discrimination, and the white supremacist visions of American democracy. While Robert Abbott, John Murphy, Christopher Perry, and Allyson Sweeney recognized that France was not promoting egalitarian ideals, specific images and language pushed Black Americans to think deeply of their roles in the war and society.

An author named Evans Lewin published a book that encouraged the American acquisition of colonies in Africa. John Murphy of the *Baltimore Afro-American* discussed Lewin's book and European colonialism and its tyrannical, oppressive, and bloody subjugation of the native people of Africa, India, and China. He stated that France "alone deserves praise for her

[71] "Awake Oh Ethiopia Awake," *The Chicago Defender*, November 6, 1915, 3.
[72] "Awake Oh Ethiopia Awake," *The Chicago Defender*, November 6, 1915, 3.

just and enlightened African policies."[73] However, Murphy argued that all of Europe was to blame for the erosion of Africa's autonomy and wanted American politics to focus on the white supremacy of American democracy rather than concerning itself with controversies abroad. Abbott reported that a reader of the *Chicago Defender* named Osie Long believed that "the policy of this government is good, and, if it is ever carried out this will indeed be the land of the free and home of the brave."[74] Murphy, Abbott, and Perry created a unique portrayal of the United States. There was a clear understanding that American democracy did not uphold the rights of all people, but many Black Americans held hope for change. The impact of journalists on Black Americans' interpretations of France helped create hopeful communities. Long thanked the editors of the *Chicago Defender* for their work in showing that "we in the South can live more comfortable when we realize how well things are elsewhere."[75] Black editorials created a perceived image of an equal and just French society while emphasizing the enemy of the colored race in Germany. Abbott, Perry, and Murphy willingly recognized the failings of American democracy by acknowledging the advancements of African colonials in a white French society.

In 1916 and 1917, the growing hostilities between the United States and Germany would force the nation's declaration of war. However, the recognition of French African service members led many to believe that America's ultimate entry into the war on April 6, 1917, would lead to less racial discrimination and acceptance as Americans. Black American service members abroad in the French Army identified distinct racial stereotypes that left many questioning the principles of American democracy and influenced Black Americans' understanding of racial tolerance at home versus abroad. The next phase of the war would force journalists to consider a

[73] "The War and Africa," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, September 25, 1915, 6.
[74] "The Laws Should be Enforced," *The Chicago Defender*, October 9, 1915, 8.
[75] "The Laws Should be Enforced," *The Chicago Defender*, October 9, 1915, 8.

delicate balance between loyalty, racial discrepancies, and the initial clash of French and American military racial structures.

CHAPTER TWO. OVER THERE: 1916–1917

Between 1916 and 1917, the United States found itself in a precarious position that threatened American neutrality. In 1917, General Robert Nivelle of the French army found himself in a difficult position where French soldiers refused to go on the offensive but were willing to hold their positions on the frontlines. The Battle of Verdun in 1916 inflicted massive casualties on the French army's fighting capabilities and forced France to implement two measures. First, increase the number of colonial troops on the Western Front; and second, pressure neutral nations, such as the United States, into joining the war. At the time, many Americans and Europeans believed it was more likely that the United States would go to war with Mexico than join the European conflict. To many Americans, the Atlantic Ocean appeared as a great barrier that protected the United States from a German invasion and allowed the nation to maintain neutrality.

Though many Americans remained optimistic about remaining neutral, the federal government took precautions. In June 1916, the American government passed the National Defense Act, which increased the size of the army and navy and implemented federal tools to mobilize the economy while the prospect of war remained high. The government understood that Black editorials were vital to maintaining the loyalty of Black American communities and for growing American sentiment for war. Newspapers were essential for the government to establish its influence over society through political decisions, in this case, supporting American involvement. However, government officials were primarily concerned about the loyalty of Black Americans. They used journalists to encourage Black American communities to be loyal to the nation, but the government's lack of supporting equality increased racial intolerance. If the government lost the support of Black American communities, it believed it would jeopardize the

nation's war effort. Government officials understood that censoring Black editorials in 1917 would eliminate outspoken disloyalty, but they wanted recognition for social and political inequality.

On April 6, 1917, the United States officially entered the war against the Central Powers. Black editors supported the government but insisted that racial discrimination and violence, in the form of lynching, hurt Black American morale. The extent of inequality at home weakened the nation's military infrastructure and threatened national security. When the nation struggled for military recruits, the government turned to conscription. Supported by Woodrow Wilson, Congress debated incorporating Black Americans into the armed forces. Historian Nina Mjagkij discusses how Southern Democrats, who made up a large portion of President Wilson's party, sought to defeat the Selective Service Act. Southern Democrats believed the bill "would at best threaten white supremacy and at worst ignite a race war."[76] The Secretary of War, Newton Baker, and journalists found addressing inequality and American democracy difficult. Journalists targeted white American prejudices against notions of French equality through France's recognition and acceptance of French Africans. The exaggeration of egalitarian ideals in France provided an argument against the racial inequalities present within the United States.

Many journalists shifted from discussing African soldiers to Black Americans upon the United States entering the war. However, this did not entirely prevent them from discussing the different racial hierarchies in France and the United States. After the nation declared war in April 1917, the United States and France became allies. American officials were concerned about maintaining the American war machine and the positive attitude of their allies. This manipulation of alliances made it more acceptable to discuss France's racial hierarchies through the presence

[76] Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: the African American Experience during World War I* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 53.

of American support, soldier experience, and eyewitnesses without appearing disloyal or threatening the U.S. war machine. This chapter argues that Black editors, whether through images or written articles, encouraged Black American communities to consider their understanding of discrimination, inequality, segregation, white supremacy, and Jim Crow Laws against the interpretations and their initial encounters of French racial hierarchies. This chapter also examines how journalists reevaluated their approach to chastising the failings of American democracy.

The United States' entry into World War I forced Black editors to rethink their approach to American society's inequalities. The Wilson Administration grew concerned with those outspoken against America's racial policy. To combat them, government officials threatened journalists with censorship to maintain loyalty and reinforce the nation's sentiment for war. Their concern was that discussions of Jim Crow Laws, lynching, discrimination, segregation, or inequality, in general, would diminish the enthusiasm for war in Black American communities. However, journalists discussed how American society barred Black American communities from achieving equality. They argued that American society, with its prejudices, did not uphold the constitution's democratic principles and therefore pressured the government to address racial inequalities.

American politicians grew concerned with the loyalty of Black American communities as more white Southerners chastised journalists for speaking out against white American racism. In June 1917, Congress passed the Espionage Act that suppressed the First Amendment to the United States Constitution: freedom of speech, by censoring American newspapers with Black editorials in mind. It complicated the ability of journalists to discuss American prejudices and Jim Crow Laws by empowering specific branches of the government. The Justice Department

could arrest, prosecute, or give verbal or written warnings to Black editors while the Federal Post Office could revoke mailing privileges.[77] The government attempted to control what editors said about the United States' racial hierarchies and maintain the loyalty of Black Americans. A portion of the Black editorialists did not readily accept censorship, while others were watched extensively by the American government. For example, the American government kept records on the *Chicago Defender* and heavily criticized it for speaking out against the nation's racial structures. However, it did not wholly prevent journalists from discussing the ideals of American democracy against the images of an equal French society.

The Morality of an Internal and External Policy of "National Preparedness"

In 1916 and early 1917, many Americans believed the nation could avoid involvement in Europe. Christopher Perry, the editor of the *Baltimore Afro-American*, believed the government's decision to build an army and navy was unnecessary because of the nation's vast distance from the conflict and instead felt it should focus on internal affairs. More specifically, he believed that the nation needed to focus on the inequalities experienced within American society that failed to prevent discrimination, lynching, and Jim Crow Laws. The government concerned itself with military strength when "[t]he canker and the worm of national moral degeneration and decay are more dangerous than any foreign foe," Perry stated.[78] He recognized the importance of supporting the nation but demanded that the government correct society's crippling racial intolerance.

In February 1916, L. Johnson, an editor of the *Baltimore Afro-American,* asked a fundamentally important question: after the war – what? He recognized that the war would have

[77] William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers & America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 111.
[78] "Big Armies and Navies Sap the Life of Nations," *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 22, 1916, 1.

good or bad outcomes for different races worldwide. Instead of answering this question himself, he decided to pose this question to several religious leaders: John A. Johnson, who served as the Pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Harvey Johnson, who was the Pastor of the Baltimore Union Church, Levi J. Coppin, who was Bishop to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Pastor L. A. Johnson of the Madison Street Presbyterian Church. Each leader had varying responses. John A. Johnson believed it was an important question and hoped for an "earnest exhibit of that 'righteousness' that 'exalteth a nation,' civic, social and commercial."[79] Harvey Johnson and Levi J. Coppin turned to the Bible for answers. They believed that Christianity was not intended to resolve racial differences, but if nations could repent, then the Kingdom of God would advance. Pastor L. A. Johnson believed it would take a reworking of international and domestic policy to achieve a better future at the end of the war. "At its close, in the re-adjustment, the world shall have turned the corner on the final, if yet long, lap of the road to universal good," he stated.[80] All four of these men shared a similar understanding of the war: it would require sacrifice and determination for the chance at a racially tolerant society in the future. Black American communities hoped American racial hierarchies would become more accepting. Journalists wanted to show the failings and potential for American society.

The war in Europe decimated nations' treasuries because of the massive demand for vital resources for their armies and navies. Millions of soldiers and civilians had perished in the war by 1916, and the United States debated the creation of a national army. With European factories running at full capacity and the Western and Eastern Fronts requiring more strategic resources than they could supply, many European nations sought external avenues to meet their demands.

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[79] "After the War – What?": A Symposium of After Effects on the War By Leading Thinkers," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, February 5, 1916, 4.
[80] "After the War – What?": A Symposium of After Effects on the War By Leading Thinkers," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, February 5, 1916, 4.

The United States, with its extensive, industrialized economy, became an optimal trade partner. However, the need for soldiers in 1916 caused a shortage of foreign textile workers resulting in a mass migration of Black Americans into the Northern United States. During Wilson's tour around the country, he sought to convince Americans of his policy of national preparedness. Foreign trade and the development of industries would make it easier for the nation to mobilize in the event of war. While Black editors agreed that the nation needed the infrastructure to defend itself, Christopher Perry did not believe it faced any serious threats. Instead, he argued that the nation appeared more concerned about military armament than decreasing racial tensions. Perry stated that "[t]hey are too prejudiced, too greedy of balances of trade and the territories of the neighboring States" to maintain a policy of neutrality.[81] As a result, the Wilson Administration prepared the nation for war while failing to address white Americans' discrimination.

Robert Abbott, the editor of the *Chicago Defender*, described this period as representing Americanism. In the *Chicago Defender,* he described it as a complete patriotic devotion to the nation. An editor of the German-American newspaper called the *Milwaukee Sentinel* suggested that Americanism was unbalanced in American society. He asked, "[w]ill Americanism and patriotism become stronger by prejudices? … An Americanism which imposes duties upon one without at the same time extending to him corresponding rights is an impossibility. A humanity which makes differences between races is an insult to humanity."[82] The editor did not believe it was solely the government's fault but partially that of the Wilson administration. He believed it was up to the government to take appropriate action in rectifying the inequalities in American society. The American South created an unwelcoming environment filled with laws that

[81] "'Let Us Have Peace' Better than War Anyway," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, February 19, 1916, 4.
[82] "Color Prejudice American Specialty," *The Chicago Defender*, August 5, 1916, 2.

prevented equality. For Black Americans, moving North provided the opportunity for economic prosperity and less racism than experienced in the South. Black editors recognized that white American society sought to bar them from achieving equal rights in the military and society. However, such oppressive measures and censorship did not prevent them from expressing their loyalty in times of war and demanding equality.

The inequalities of American democracy were prevalent in the South. Jim Crow Laws, segregation, and discrimination prevented many Black Americans from accessing educational tools, yet white Americans expected them to support white institutions. In mid-1916, Robert Abbott published an edition of the *Milwaukee Sentinel* that discussed a Black American lawyer who refused to pay a library tax for an institution he could not access. Abbott stated, "[t]he real questions in the thoughts of Americans is that concerning which an educated citizen, because of his color, is not permitted to enter an institution of the kind above indicated."[83] Segregation and discrimination were among the leading issues for Black Americans in the early 1900s. The nation was dealing with external and internal pressure to join the war, stay neutral, or resolve racial tensions. However, the failings of the Wilson administration caused many questions during this period. Should Black Americans be asked to fight for a nation that failed to uphold their civil rights? Would supporting the nation allow their recognition? Despite government censorship, it was clear that many journalists published images and articles that recognized the inequalities within American society.

The policies of American democracy were to blame for discrimination against Black American communities. Some Black editors attributed these failings to Woodrow Wilson's administration. Abbott praised the editor of a Milwaukee, Wisconsin newspaper for chastising

[83] "Color Prejudice American Specialty," *The Chicago Defender*, August 5, 1916, 2.

President Wilson. He noted differing views between editorials controlled by Southern Democrats and the Northern press. "He [President Wilson] showed his littleness as a man and a president when he became 'Father' of Segregation," Abbott quoted.[84] He published an article from the *Milwaukee Free Press* that discussed how the President allowed segregation to dominate Southern cities and the inclusion of Southerners into his cabinet. It was only after the:

> President's indorsement [sic] of the segregation principle … Woodrow Wilson surrendered to 'lily white' prejudice in his administration and consented to drawing the color-line in the federal departments – where no one had dreamed or desired such a thing for half a century – one southern city after another enacted restrictive legislation designed to curtail the legal and civil equality of the black man which the Civil War was fought to assure.[85]

The editor specifically focused on St. Louis, suggesting Wilson's political incompetence took hold, but Abbott recognized that racial inequality was increasing across the country; St. Louis was only one example. He recognized that American democracy was concerned with only the prevailing racial hierarchy. It was an issue that plagued the South but appeared to spread North because of Wilson's stance on discrimination and inequality. Frustrated with increasing racial tensions across the United States, Abbott argued that white Americans held the principles "of this republic lightly, the guarantees of their constitution so vain, that they can cast them to the winds in order to feed fat their color prejudice."[86] The ordinance seen in St. Louis was one of several challenged in the United States and Missouri Supreme Courts. By Abbott quoting the editor of the *Milwaukee Free Press,* he agrees with the editor in believing that the cases in the Supreme Counts would put a "stop to all such laws designed to make the race feel the sting of civil inferiority."[87]

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[84] "Wilson, 'Father' of Segregation," *The Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1916, 1.
[85] "Wilson, 'Father' of Segregation," *The Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1916, 1.
[86] "Wilson, 'Father' of Segregation," *The Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1916, 4.
[87] "Wilson, 'Father' of Segregation," *The Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1916, 4.

Journalists knew that civil inferiority extended beyond American society and into the military framework during peace and war. For example, in San Francisco, California, an incident between thirteen Black American soldiers and a white Pullman received attention from Abbott. These soldiers were "forcibly removed from a Pullman car at West Berkeley and relegated to a car that was unfit for any humans."[88] The War Department took action against the soldiers and the Pullman Company, but these actions infuriated Abbott. The company hired "such white skunks that will eject men [wearing] the uniform of the United States government…," he stated.[89] Such incidents were not uncommon within the United States, where white American ideals clashed with Black American demands for equality. When these ideals clashed, they were often violent, sparking further unrest. In addition, industrial demands, military rearmament, and shifting American sentiment for war caused debates about Black American roles in society and the impending war.

Black Americans served in the military throughout the history of the republic, dating back to the American Revolution. However, the Senate debated their incorporation into the armed forces on April 14, 1916. It initially debated the increase of a national army when Black Americans in the National Guard were brought up. Senator James H. Lewis (D-IL) sided with Southern Democrats against creating several Black National Guard Regiments. Southern Democrats, including President Wilson, opposed their recruitment in the armed services. Historian Chad L. Williams summarizes Southern Democrats' views towards the incorporation of Black Americans into the military. Many believed "black soldiers represented a distinct threat to

[88] "13 Troopers Ejected From Pullman Car: Soldiers of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry are Forced to Walk," *The Chicago Defender*, August 12, 1916, 1.
[89] "13 Troopers Ejected From Pullman Car: Soldiers of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry are Forced to Walk," *The Chicago Defender*, August 12, 1916, 1.

prevailing social hierarchies and white supremacist visions of American democracy."[90] The thought of Black soldiers fighting in what appeared to be a white man's war concerned many Southerners and politicians.

Anticipating war, the House of Representatives discussed the rearmament of the United States army and navy. Christopher Perry noted the debate but appeared concerned that politicians were debating the introduction of a bill that prevented the recruitment of Black Americans into the military. He published an article discussing Senator Thomas Taggart (D-IN) and Secretary of War Newton Baker. Taggart sent the proposal to Baker for review; he opposed the bill and hoped it would not be approved. He noted that Baker disapproved of measures that prevented the enlistment of Black Americans in military service. Perry quoted Baker saying:

> Those who are familiar with the history of our country from the armies organized by George Washington in the American Revolution, down to the present day, know that brave and often conspicuously gallant service has been rendered by colored troops. In the most recent instance, at Carrizal, in Mexico, these colored troops conducted themselves with the greatest intrepidity, and reflected nothing but honor upon the uniform they wore.[91]

Baker appeared unwilling to accept discrimination and supported the recruitment of Black Americans, referencing their previous service as evidence. As a result, journalists recognized him or anyone who challenged the ideals of American democracy. However, Baker could do little to influence Wilson's policies. Ultimately, on February 22, 1917, Wilson instructed Baker to prepare for a national draft that included Black Americans.

On February 24, the British government provided the United States with a secret telegram between Mexico and Germany. It was sent in January 1917 by the Secretary of State, Arthur Zimmerman, to the German Minister in Mexico, where British cryptographers intercepted it.

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[90] Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 3.
[91] "Wants No Army Bar to Soldiers," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, September 16, 1916, 1.

Known as the Zimmerman Telegram, it proposed that Mexico reconquer the lost territory of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona in exchange for financial support by the German government. After dealing with revolution and civil war for the past seven years, Mexico was in no shape to begin a war with the United States. However, tensions were high between both nations as the United States invaded Mexico twice: first at Veracruz in 1914, second in 1916 - 1917, to capture Poncho Villa for raiding Columbia, New Mexico, and killing a dozen Americans. The German Foreign Minister hoped that using the animosity between the two nations would occupy American troops and keep them away from Europe. Instead, upon hearing about the letter, the American populace was infuriated, ensuring American support for the war.

By March 1917, the Zimmerman Telegram's impact on American war sentiment and Wilson's tone towards American armament intensified hostility towards Germany. The U.S. government's decision to pass new military-focused legislation allowed the creation of a larger standing army and navy. Simultaneously, the buildup of forces caused journalists to target the government's policies and its failure to address discrimination, segregation, inequality, and Jim Crow Laws. Christopher Perry published in March 1917 an article titled "In Time of War They are Called Fellow Citizens: But in Times of Peace are Lynched, Segregated, Jim Crowed and Disfranchised, yet We are Patriotic."[92] A Tennessee Congressman proposed the creation of a military school for Black Americans before Congress. Frustrated, Perry asked a series of questions about the intents of this school and suggested that Black American communities stand up in defense of the nation. He later stated, "[t]he colored man has stood up beside the best soldiers in the world, and he is more willing to fight for the flag than many [to] whom the flag

[92] "In Time of War they are Called Fellow Citizens," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, March 10, 1917, 1.

has meant more in privilege."[93] For Perry, Black American communities faced further discrimination in Wilson's rally for war.

America at War and Growing Frustration for Black American Communities and Black American Editorials

Unlike in 1916 when President Wilson ran for re-election on the slogan, "He Has Kept Us Out of War," in 1917, he took the appearance of leading a united nation to war. The government, Wilson Administration, and Black editors believed that Germany was waging war against the United States without a formal declaration of war. After outside pressure from the Allies, attacks on American shipping, and receiving the Zimmerman Telegram, President Wilson called for the reconvening of Congress for Monday, April 2. Christopher Perry quoted Wilson's address to Congress regarding the German Empire's hostile acts against Americans. "Germany has been making war on the United States by ruthless destruction of American lives and ships on the high seas in contravention of all the laws of nations and humanity," he quoted.[94] Despite Wilson's acknowledgment of German hostilities, many Americans were uncertain if a declaration of war would occur or if the country would act to protect Americans. To Perry, the President's call was not a direct call to war but the restructuring of American economic interests. He viewed the German attacks as forcing the United States to protect its interests but did not believe an actual state of war would come. By April 6, 1917, Congress voted for a declaration of war and the reorganization of the military; the vote was nearly unanimous.

The nation was ill-equipped to fight in Europe. It would take months before the nation could adequately train its forces, send them abroad, and station the army along the front lines. The Wilson Administration, government officials, and white Southerners almost immediately

[93] "In Time of War they are Called Fellow Citizens," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, March 10, 1917, 1.
[94] "Congress Called for April," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, March 24, 1917, 1.

grew concerned about disloyalty. Historian Theodore Kornweibel stated that some white Americans feared that "German enemies would try to influence the allegedly 'ignorant' black population."[95] The government considered options to combat claims of Black American disloyalty. Many journalists argued they were not disloyal to the nation; instead, they sought recognition for the inequalities American democracy represented. Editors like Robert Abbott "saw no connection between patriotism and acceptance of the racial status quo."[96] He was willing to discuss society's inequalities while remaining loyal to the nation.

Black Americans took President Wilson's proclamation of fighting for global democracy at face value, believing it included the United States upon the war's conclusion, but many were hesitant. Franklin F. Johnson, a journalist of the *Baltimore Afro-American,* stated that Wilson's fight for global democracy was a hoax. "[C]olored men and women of this country have noted the various declarations made by President Wilson in favor of the rule of the people everywhere. They know that it has not applied to their race in this country, and that instead of the condition of the Negro improving in a civic way during the Wilson regime, it has been retarded," he stated.[97] Growing discontent with the Wilson Administration hampered the willingness of many Black Americans to join the military. It was not because they were disloyal but because of their frustration with Wilson's social policies. Johnson stated, "the colored people generally do not believe they have been treated fairly since the Wilson Administration has been in the saddle. No one would be more loyal than the Negroes if they were treated fairly. Their disloyalty, if there is any, is not to the country or the flag but to the Wilson Administration."[98] Many within Black

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[95] Theodore Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Ensure Black Loyalty during World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 120.
[96] Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Ensure Black Loyalty during World War I*, 121.
[97] "German Agents Try to Start Rebellion," *The Afro-American*, April 7, 1917, 1.
[98] "German Agents Try to Start Rebellion," *The Afro-American*, April 7, 1917, 1.

American communities were reaching their limits with government officials, President Wilson, and white Americans.

Journalists and the government understood that incorporating Black American men into the military and where to train them was of considerable concern. The government suggested in the South, but the worst discrimination occurred there. Franklin Johnson stated that "[i]n the South, thousands of Negroes have been robbed [of] their suffrage by flimsy subterfuges or intimidation. Life there has grown almost intolerable for them under the Democratic rule."[99] He questioned the viability of training Black soldiers in the North or South, where white supremacy dominated society but varied in intensity. Johnson believed that if they fought for the United States, the nation needed to address the white racial hierarchies in civilian and military life. To support the nation meant that:

> If we [Black Americas] are good enough to stand shoulder to shoulder with our white comrades in the trenches; if we are good enough to lead the charges, as we have done many times in the past, that have brought victory to our forces; if we are good enough to lay down our very life for our country, our country where our rights are trampled upon and abridged, we are good enough to enjoy the fruits of our sacrifices.[100]

Black American military personnel experienced racial violence and discrimination. White political leaders prevented them from serving in combat roles and assigned them to labor units destined to unload ships or construct military outposts. In the American South, clashes between white and Black Americans turned the local areas of training centers into theaters of war. Yet, despite all the challenges they faced in preparing for the war abroad, Abbott recognized that:

> Americans have fought for the right of mankind to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that they are Americans. And our [Black Americans] place in the great struggle to keep the old red, white and blue from trailing in the dust is side by side with every man who has the welfare of his country at heart.[101]

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[99] "German Agents Try to Start Rebellion," *The Afro-American*, April 7, 1917, 1.
[100] "Our Position on the War Map," *The Chicago Defender*, September 15, 1917, 12.
[101] "Our Position on the War Map," *The Chicago Defender*, September 15, 1917, 12.

Though Black Americans and editors recognized the United States' racial inequality, their loyalty to the nation was profound. They did not hesitate to display American inequalities while supporting the nation.

For centuries, Black Americans used the military to show their loyalty to the nation. However, the inequalities within American democracy hampered their willingness to serve in the military. Their growing frustration left many questioning the nation's racial hierarchies. For example, Charles F. White, an alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania, was asked if he would join the military. Robert Abbott quoted him in the *Chicago Defender* as saying, "no, [he had] no desire to go to war for a country which refuses to protect his children."[102] Whites' views on the racial hierarchy of the United States recognized that the nation was not concerned with Black American social status. If being a civilian held inequalities for Black American communities, the military, where ideals of white supremacy were prevalent, was no better. Franklin Johnson, an editor of the *Chicago Defender*, stated, "the Negroes do not believe they would get a square deal if they joined the army. They think they will be sacrificed at every turn. … if the army were open to Negroes on an equal basis they would flock to the colors."[103] In many cases, very few federal agencies understood Black Americans' frustration, asking for their loyalty and support in a democracy that failed to uphold these ideals at home.

Black editors' outspokenness concerned many in the government for fear such discussion of discrimination would hinder the United States' fighting capabilities. In June 1917, the government passed the Espionage Act that allowed it to censor freedom of speech and charge anyone for creating discontent with the war. Specifically, it gave the Postmaster General the

[102] "Fuses to Shoulder Musket," *Chicago Defender*, April 7, 1917, 6.
[103] "German Agents Try to Start Rebellion," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 7, 1917, 1.

ability to prohibit mail distribution that it found critical of the government.[104] As a result, journalists balanced a delicate relationship between demanding racial equality and avoiding censorship. Government agencies quickly began keeping records on journalists that sought to combat racial inequalities and demand racial reform in a nation at war.[105] They cautiously wrote about American inequalities despite the looming threat of discussing them with the war. Before passing the Espionage Act, journalists discussed Black American inequalities within American society compared to the appearance of African soldiers' equality in France. After the United States entered the war and passed the Espionage Act, Black editors discussed inequality through images of loyalty. They were concerned about civic equality, citizenship, lynching, and participation in a predominately white military. The American government failed to recognize that journalists were not promoting hatred but exposing the flaws of white American ideals by targeting France's image as an egalitarian nation to enhance the call for civic equality at home.

Black American Editorials, the French War Effort, and Exaggeration of French Egalitarianism

Between 1916 and 1917, Black editors mindfully approached the inequalities of American democracy. They frequently looked at France's social and military policies as examples of Black advancement in the world's social and political systems, exaggerating minor differences between French and American racial hierarchies. Therefore, it was not uncommon to see them write or use photos displaying the interaction of Black Americans with France's differing racial hierarchy. Over time, these discussions changed as editors balanced a fine line between loyalty, the threat of censorship, and expressing their motives for recognizing discrimination against Black Americans. For example, Robert Abbott, the editor of the *Chicago*

[104] Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: the African American Experience during World War I*, 125-126.
[105] Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: the African American Experience during World War I*, .

Defender, dealt with numerous threats from the government and displayed photos as a result. However, it did not prevent Black editors from discussing French African soldiers in France or the experiences and interactions of Black Americans with Frenchmen, women, and the military. Before the United States entered the war, journalists freely discussed the appearance of African social advancement in the French army. Once the United States officially entered the war, they chastised American racism by exaggerating the perceptions of French egalitarianism.

Africans found that the French people of the metropole were more courteous and civil than white Frenchmen in Africa. Historian Martin Evans stated that the French in Paris appeared "more welcoming and much less racist," where African soldiers met other colonials from the French Empire.[106] The war enhanced the image of Africans in France: one that was unheard of in the United States. John Murphy, the editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, stated that "the negro will get great education out of this war. He will find less color line in France than anywhere else. He will find a grateful heart in the Frenchmen, such as he does not find at home."[107] However, this was a simplistic description of the relationship between Africans and white Frenchmen. African soldiers had fought with the French for nearly two years, distinguishing themselves on the battlefield. Historian John Morrow argued that this recognition allowed Blaise Diagne to extract "concessions from the French government for improved conditions in Africa and higher status for soldiers, including French citizenship upon request for distinguished *tirailleurs*."[108] The American government failed to provide Black Americans with democratic rights. Journalists depicted France as an equal society that did not discriminate based on skin tone.

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[106] Martin Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 44.
[107] "Negro After the War," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 22, 1917, 4.
[108] John H. Morrow, "The Imperial Framework," In *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. 1, Ed. Jay Winter (London: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 417.

Predominately, the *troupes indigènes* "were treated as Frenchmen, but the army attempted to prevent contact between the greater number of Senegalese *tirailleurs* and French women."[109] Even though French racial discrimination represented some similarities to white American treatment of Black Americans, Black American editors identified *troupes indigènes* as Frenchmen, suggesting they were citizens of France. In the United States, they noted the differences between Black Americans and French Africans. Black Americans may have possessed citizenship, but racial profiling certainly prevented them from achieving the civil rights promised within the constitution. French General Joseph Joffre, General Charles E. Mangin, and General Robert Nivelle recognized African soldiers' important role in the war. In France, the increasing number of French African soldiers serving in the French army in 1916 provided leeway for Diagne to demand civil rights from the French Chamber of Deputies. Though he successfully provided citizenship and voting rights to the *originaires* of the Four Communes of Senegal: *Saint-Louis*, *Dakar*, *Gorée*, and *Rufisque*, it did not guarantee rights for the entirety of the French colonial empire. Despite these limitations, journalists could argue that France provided social advancements for some African colonials. In the United States, Black Americans continued to be rejected from voting, and therefore, U.S. government officials made them the equivalent of second-class citizens.

Robert Abbott published an article discussing the personal experience of Frank Kane, a Black American who served in the French army in 1917. He was born in Senegal, Senegambia, West Coast Africa, and moved to the United States. When the war broke out, he returned to France to serve in the military, where he was "promoted to the rank of lieutenant for bravery…" in "France [that] knows no color."[110] Wounds and censorship characterized his experience in the

[109] Morrow, "The Imperial Framework," 414.
[110] "A Letter From the European Trenches," *The Chicago Defender*, March 24, 1917, 1.

French army. Kane argued that it did not matter where the fighting was; the war was difficult for all parties involved. Journalists spoke of the heroism of French colonial troops on the battlefield and France's recognition. Despite being recruited from across the French Empire, John Murphy spoke of these soldiers serving courageously in the French army. He stated, "A widely prevalent fallacy has charged the Negroes with savagery against their captives. Their [French] officers say this charge has been disproved time and again after fights at Verdun, in Champagne and North of the Aisne."[111] Though Nivelle wanted to recruit as many Senegalese soldiers as possible to save the lives of white Frenchmen, casualties amongst both Africans and white Frenchmen were relatively high.[112]

The first exposure Black American men had to France's racial hierarchy during World War I was enlisting in the American Foreign Legion. Tens of thousands of Americans and foreigners served in the Foreign Legion throughout the war, but the exact numbers of race and national identity are unknown. During the war, the *Western Kansas World* discussed the Legion's service in numerous areas, including the Western Front and Africa. These men typically came from all walks of life, consisting of Americans and other foreigners as volunteers in the American Legion. Their background or race did not matter; the French military command willingly incorporated anyone, including French colonial troops. Naturally, these images shaped Black American communities, in general, to believe that after the war, "[w]hen he comes back to America, whether our arms are victorious or not, he can never forget this lesson."[113] It was a lesson that interpreted France as possessing different racial structures than the United States. If

[111] "Native Soldiers Making Brilliant Ecords in War," *The Afro-American*, December 15, 1917, 3.
[112] Morrow, "The Imperial Framework," 415.
[113] "Our Men Fight Nobly in French Trenches," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, March 18, 1916, 4.

Black Americans served abroad in the French army, the contrast of life at home versus their service abroad challenged their acceptance of the American racial status quo.

In 1916, Christopher Perry acknowledged that the French colonial troops fought heroically in the trenches of France and "fought nobly and with valor equal to that of their white European brothers."[114] journalists used photos with small captions containing words such as courage, valor, or bravery when describing the successes of French colonial troops. Perry noted that the American Legion, consisting of Black Americans, set a record in France and received credit for its valiant effort. However, time and again, Black Americans supported the government. Robert Abbott published a photo in late 1916 depicting white Frenchmen and French Africans singing and dancing together. He argued that "the color line is not drawn" in France.[115] Discussions of the American Legion and images of racial tolerance in the United States created the perception of French equality amongst Black American communities.

Journalists were uncertain of the United States' entry into the war and its meaning for Black American communities. John Murphy stated that the United States' entry into the war on April 6, 1917, was a proclamation to protect and spread the principles of democracy. However, Murphy had mixed feelings about the United States' fight for democracy. Should Black Americans serve a country that failed to uphold democracy at home? He believed the government hid the truth about American prejudices. "Visiting commissions to this country have been told of America's benevolent intentions, and, as far as possible, have [been] kept in ignorance of the great handicaps that prejudice makes the American negro suffer," Murphy stated.[116] France appeared as a symbol of hope, which journalists recognized as a sign of global

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[114] "Our Men Fight Nobly in French Trenches," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, March 18, 1916, 4.
[115] "French African Troops," *The Chicago Defender*, October 21, 1916, 1.
[116] "Fighting for Democracy," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, July 7, 1917, 4.

social advancement. Murphy discussed the differences between the United States and France. He stated:

> This country is fighting for the equality of citizens of other countries, yet discriminates against its own. Unlike France, the beloved country of General Joffre, it [the United States] offers not the opportunity of fighting as other classes of citizens: it by practice, though not by law, excludes colored men from its military and naval schools, and only after a long fight establishes a 'Jim Crow' military training camp.[117]

The government's failings allowed editors to create such comparisons. Historian Tyler Stovall argued that in general, "French African soldiers did not encounter anything like the racism visited upon black American troops by white Americans on both sides of the Atlantic."[118] These depictions influenced how Black Americans viewed both nations. Africans appeared to receive equality and citizenship within a white French society, but in reality, French cultural racism was similar to American racism.

France by no means was an egalitarian nation with a vested interest in providing democratic rights throughout the world. Journalists discussed positive aspects of French society to criticize American discrimination towards Black American communities. In reality, they sought to unify Black Americans by avoiding discussions of French cultural racism. The French Revolution of 1789 tied together Republican ideals, the French language, and citizenship. Government officials believed that language, liberty, equality, and fraternity, were universal policies that unified French people and applied to all humanity. African colonial troops recognized that French authorities prevented them from having an equal basis with other Frenchmen, but many saw the French language and military service as opportunities for social and economic advancement. However, knowing the language also meant that Africans would desire citizenship. Some French authorities argued they should provide citizenship to African

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[117] "Fighting for Democracy," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, July 7, 1917, 4.
[118] Tyler E. Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 19.

colonial troops, but others objected. Those who objected argued that citizenship was guaranteed to those who were conscripted in defense of France and their homes. They suggested that African colonial troops were not obliged to conscription nor the defense of their homes and therefore not entitled to citizenship.

In the United States, Black Americans had citizenship but were prevented from accessing most democratic rights nor intermingling with white American women. Many recognized that the United States fought for democracy, but not its fundamental principle that provided power to all its citizens. Instead, America's entry represented a war to uphold a white view of American democracy despite Black Americans serving the nation. The same view was held by African colonial troops serving in France, and like Black Americans, hoped that military service would provide social and economic advancement. However, during World War I, French Republican colonial ideology saw language and the intermingling of white Frenchmen, especially women, and African colonial troops, as a challenge to France's colonial rule. As a result, French authorities' racism allowed a simplified version of the French language that reflected and reinforced racial stereotypes. As the number of African colonial troops in France increased, they had more opportunities to interact with French society and develop their linguistic skills. The Ministry of War grew concerned their access to the French language and white French women would upset the social order and colonial rule. To many, Africans' understanding of the French language and exposure to white French women would tarnish the national image and create a resistance to colonial rule. Black editors were aware of French racism but considered how the United States lacked social equality and how France appeared to provide equality.

In May 1917, the French Minister of Justice, René Viviani, visited the United States to urge the government to deploy in Europe hastily. Murphy noted his visit but spoke of how he

came from France, the "only country among the allies that knows how to treat its colored citizens."[119] Jim Crow Laws, segregation, and discrimination were embedded in American democracy and prevented Black Americans from becoming equal under the constitution. He noted that Africans received the same civil rights as white Frenchmen in France despite their race. This was not true as French authorities debated who was eligible to receive civil rights and used racism to limit African colonial troops' access to the French language and interactions within society. Black editors wanted to depict France positively despite its cultural racism. Murphy stated that Africans receive "the blessings of 'Liberty, equality and fraternity' which the French citizenry won in the memorable revolution of 1789 have been actually enjoyed by every Frenchman whether he is European or African."[120] The French practice of racial equality was more apparent than real. These rights were not guaranteed to all Frenchmen, but simply those they justified as *jus soli* meaning anyone in French territory, regardless of race or ethnicity, was entitled to French citizenship.[121] However, it forced people to embrace French laws and customs while sacrificing their cultural heritage, all while French authorities prevented full access to these laws and customs. In the United States, Black American communities served in the American army but received little recognition and faced similar discrimination to what they received as civilians at home. The United States appeared more concerned about identifying them as inferior. France created an image that everyone was "a Frenchman first and then afterwards white or black."[122] In the United States, the color of one's skin determined one's status in society.

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[119] "In America and in France," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 5, 1917, 4.
[120] "In America and in France," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 5, 1917, 4.
[121] Richard Fogarty, *Race & War: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013), 234.
[122] "In America and in France," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 5, 1917, 4.

Christopher Perry used Minister Viviani's image to place France and the United States in dialectical opposition. As Viviani visited the United States, Perry suggested that he came to determine if President Wilson intended to uphold democracy for all people, regardless of race, or specifically for white Anglo-Saxons. In an article called "In America and In France," Perry discussed whether Wilson's claim that the United States is fighting for global democracy meant the reevaluation of American democracy and the discrimination against Black American communities. U.S. discrimination appeared as the opposite of French racial hierarchies. Perry stated that instead of finding a nation that promoted equality, similar to what one found in France, Viviani "found that America had not yet settled the question as to whether one-tenth of its population was deserving of this same kind of freedom."[123] He believed that the United States needed to develop itself socially and consider its citizens. After fighting a war for democracy, Perry hoped that the nation would recognize its failings. He stated that Viviani "most likely … hoped that while the United States is teaching Germany international morality, France will utilize the prerogative of an ally in teaching the United States what real democracy means."[124] The willingness of journalists, including Perry, to speak out against inequalities during times of war quickly became recognized by white Americans and government agencies.

A committee was put together by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to report on the conditions of colored troops in France. The spokespersons suggested that Black Americans were willing to do their part in the war despite the German rumors. One delegate warned of the Germans' attempt to incite hatred among the different races through propaganda. A member suggested that it "sought to destroy the good feeling existing between the colored people and the French, and warned against placing faith in

[123] "In America and in France," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 5, 1917, 4.
[124] "In America and in France," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 5, 1917, 4.

stories of any mistreatment by the French."[125] Those devoted to protecting or gaining civil rights recognized that "Frenchmen had always been friendly to the colored races and were welcoming them now in a fight against a common enemy."[126] Black editors exaggerated French egalitarianism, knowing that socially, politically, and economically, France had its own racial hierarchies. Despite French racism, journalists provided an optimistic depiction of French equality that Black Americans hoped the American government would adopt and implement within society.

Conclusion

Between 1916 and 1917, Black editorials were challenged to balance demands for equality and supporting a nation preparing for war. President Wilson argued that the war was a fight for the preservation of global democracy, but Abbott wrote:

> It is our claim that we are fighting this war to make the world safe for democracy, democracy implies equality of privilege and equal obligation of service. If we fight for this for the world in general we ought to be prepared to practice it among ourselves, at present we mingle democracy with discriminations.[127]

Black American communities faced racial discrimination throughout the United States. While the war created a false depiction that Africans made social advancements in France, journalists increasingly became concerned about Black American involvement in the American army. The presence of Africans in Black editorials did not wholly disappear but shifted to considering how military service provided equal opportunities. The exaggeration of French equality showed to Black Americans that France appeared more egalitarian despite knowing it was not perfect.

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[125] "War Status of Negroes: Conference Warned Against False German Rumors," *The New York Times*, December 30, 1917, 4.
[126] "War Status of Negroes: Conference Warned Against False German Rumors," *The New York Times*, December 30, 1917, 4.
[127] "Race Prejudice and the War," *The Chicago Defender*, November 24, 1917, 12.

The entry of the United States did not mean that Black Americans received equality, though many hoped their participation in the war would be recognized. Robert Abbott hoped that by serving in the military, "these men and officers will enjoy under the flag an equality of status which they have never enjoyed before in many parts of the United States. Can we deprive them of that status when they are honorably mustered out? That is the problem which those of us who are most imbued with race prejudice might as well begin to face honestly."[128] Black Americans were aware of African achievements in the French army. Many were awarded the *Croix de Guerre* for their bravery and valor. These depictions impacted how Black Americans understood the United States and France's racial differences. Historian John Morrow stated that Blaise Diagne's political debates allowed him to express that "those who fall under fire, fall neither as whites nor as blacks; they fall as Frenchmen and for the same flag."[129] White American racial hierarchies were willing to let Black Americans die for the nation but wanted to ensure they remained segregated and discriminated against abroad or at home.

Journalists depicted a positive view of France influencing the perception of Black American communities by addressing the different racial hierarchies resulting in a more robust demand for equality within the United States. Some found it easier to discuss the racial status quo, such as the NAACP's monthly publication, which had several white officials. Despite many Black editorials receiving threats of censorship, they balanced advocating for equality and patriotism. The war appeared as a fight among white European powers, but the presence of French Africans in 1916 and the interaction of Black American soldiers, French soldiers, and French citizens in 1917 presented hope for the United States' social order in Black American communities. Through France's social and political policies, many Black Americans found

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[128] "Race Prejudice and the War," *The Chicago Defender*, November 24, 1917, 12.
[129] Morrow, "The Imperial Framework," 417.

positive images that manipulated their understanding of the status quo to one that applied democracy to all. Robert Abbott discussed the war, stating that "the government is telling all Americans that they have an equal stake in the war."[130] However, many recognized that American society was far from equal. France's image and Wilson's proclamation that the world must be made safe for democracy allowed Black Americans to envision a new world where white and Black Americans were equal.

In 1918 and 1919, Black Americans' interaction and first-hand experience of France's racial hierarchies fueled depictions of French equality. These discussions affected Black American communities at home and influenced their interpretation of French society in subtle ways. The unwillingness of white Frenchmen to accept white American prejudices and the French populace's acceptance of Black Americans allowed them to feel closer to France than the United States. Very few Black Americans saw combat in France, but many of those who did served in the French army. Their treatment and recognition by France helped foster an image within the United States that challenged the racial status quo. Such interactions concerned many white Americans about Black American demands for equality upon returning home. American society's racial intolerance prompted journalists to present France as an equal society. The war's conclusion and its aftermath ushered in a new era where Black Americans considered their social status domestically and internationally.

[130] "Race Prejudice and the War," *The Chicago Defender*, November 24, 1917, 12.

CHAPTER THREE. LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS: 1918 – 1919

For nearly three years, European powers devoted all their available resources in hoping to obtain victory. Some nations, such as the Russian Empire, collapsed under economic strain, political upheaval, and military failures. France, Germany, Great Britain, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire were near their breaking points. Germany's attempt to form an alliance with Mexico in the famous Zimmerman Telegram and America's growing unrest over neutrality drew the United States into the world war. A struggle that appeared in Europe as a stalemate gained a new combatant on April 6, 1917. The United States' involvement challenged Black editors with maintaining loyalty while expressing discontent with white racial hierarchies. Historian Adriane Lentz-Smith argued that Black editors were similar to Black American soldiers who served abroad as both acted as "emblems and agents" of change.[131] Their awareness of French and American racial hegemony helped reimagine Black American lives in the United States. Journalists were well aware of their audience acting as a line of communication relaying the experiences of Black American soldiers and civilians. They discreetly discussed the presence of racial hierarchies throughout American society.

While Black editors acknowledged the government's failings, many sought to inspire Black American communities. Before the United States entered the war, they discussed the presence of French equality through representations of French African soldiers. By 1918 and 1919, they portrayed French society as more politically and socially equal through a lens of personal experiences to avoid suspicion by American authorities. These images governed Black American interpretations of France, placing white American racial hierarchies further into question. It was not that Black Americans idealized France's racism; what journalists portrayed

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[131] Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 4.

in 1918 and 1919 was a bond between white Frenchmen and Black Americans. Many Black American soldiers abroad and Black American communities at home felt closer to France than the United States. Black American soldiers' presentation and firsthand experiences allowed an interpretation that white Frenchmen in France had fewer prejudices than their own countrymen. Over the past three years, reading and hearing about the perceived equality in France helped increase active participation at the war's outbreak in April 1917. Many in the community believed supporting the war would provide social advancements within the United States, with Africans in the French army in mind. Historian Adrianne Lentz-Smith suggested that Black American experiences in France "altered how these soldiers saw themselves as citizens, workers, heroes, and lovers and transformed how they interpolated those identities into their worldview."[132] This chapter argues that while French racism was apparent to Black Americans, their perception of American racial hierarchies was redefined into identifying France as the "promised land" of racial tolerance. This identification of the subtle differences between French and American racism and Black American soldiers' interactions with French society, encouraged Black Americans to challenge American democracy during the final year of the war and its immediate aftermath.

Early in 1918, Robert Abbott, editor of the *Chicago Defender,* published an article by W.M. Pickens arguing that white American racial structures had fundamentally changed since the war's outbreak in 1914. Initially, white racial structures governed Black American lives, preventing the basic principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness promised within the American Constitution. In addition, Black Southerners were oppressed by Jim Crow Laws that prevented them from participating fully in American democracy. However, when the United

[132] Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I*, 7.

States entered the war on April 6, 1917, the government expected all Americans, including Black Americans, to participate actively in the war effort. Pickens believed that Black Americans were a national asset and should support the nation in return for civil rights. Government pressure to maintain Black Americans' support and create a positive perception of France made balancing support for the nation and recognition for racial justice difficult. They understood that society was far from equal despite supporting the nation and required a more active, yet cautious, role in discussing France and the United States' racial hierarchies. John Murphy, the editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune,* stated, referring to white Americans in the United States, that:

> If our Caucasian friends value their human rights, their liberties, their freedom of the seas, their desire to purge the paths of peace and pleasure above the greatest gifts of God, their lives, then why not permit us [Black Americans] to enter protest when our rights are trampled in the dust and insults are heaped upon our heads, even while aiding in the strife.[133]

The war appeared as a fight for democracy's preservation to Pickens and Murphy. Journalists used inequality in American society and the perception of French equality to challenge American racial hierarchies.

Upon entering the war, the United States Army was small, and the Allied armies were tattered and tired after three years of war. British General Douglas Haig and French General Ferdinand Foch applied Napoleonic principles of large offensives routing the enemy and ending with a cavalry charge to demoralize and force a disorganized route. As the war reached its fourth year, these tactics and enormous French casualties eroded social barriers to colonial troops resulting in their access to a once restricted white French society. The United States army, led by General John J. Pershing, arrived with fresh soldiers and a strict white racial hierarchy. General Foch believed that American forces would be incorporated into the French and British armies.

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[133] "No Surrender," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, April 20, 1918, 4.

However, President Wilson and Pershing decided to maintain a white American force. However, France's desperation in 1918 and Black American soldiers' desire to fight pressured Pershing to act. He decided to reassign several Black American units to the French army, including the 369th, 370th, 371st, and 372nd Infantry, to pacify the demands of Black American soldiers and the French. These Black American soldiers integrated into the French army and identified racial similarities and differences in American and French society. W.M. Pickens stated in the *Chicago Defender* that "verily are the victories of peace and no less renowned than those of war. But after the war, let us say, in 1920 – What?"[134] Black editors found the discussion simplistic, targeting the failings of white American society and France's desperation that resulted in the perception of French equality.

The United States at War

President Woodrow Wilson's proclamation about making the world safe for democracy caused a shock wave throughout Black American communities. If the United States was fighting for democracy, did it mean the same ideal would be upheld at home? The government's economic and military preparations prepared the nation for war but decisively placed civilians in control of society. It prevented Black Americans' access to civil rights or protection under the law. Many believed that Wilson's proclamation meant the same democratic ideals would be provided to them. John Murphy was wary about these ideals suggesting that "…to reach the supposed cherished ideal to make the world safe for democracy, it should be borne in mind that it is not quite true that the cure for the evil of democracy is more democracy. What is really needed is better exponents of democracy…"[135] The United States' involvement suggested that it was for the security of democracy, but the real war was at home in the hearts and minds of the people.

[134] "The Moral Conquest of America," *The Chicago Defender*, April 27, 1918, 16.
[135] "To Make the World Safe For Democracy," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, August 10, 1918, 4.

Content would come when Black Americans received the rights and protections promised within the United States Constitution.

World War I pushed Black Americans to question U.S. and European democratic principles. Journalists understood that white Americans preached the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but they did not uphold them for all Americans. Worse yet, Wilson's proclamation of making the world safe for democracy was directed towards protecting the rule of whites, not providing democratic principles to those less fortunate. John Murphy wrote that "Democracy means the rule of the people."[136] In the United States during the 1910s, most white Americans subjected Black Americans to discrimination. However, subjection can lead to protest or retaliation. Murphy suggested that the French fought for similar principles in the French Revolution of 1789, where the lower classes asserted their rights over the ruling class. For the United States, the American Revolution was fought over the principles of a free democratic society, to not be governed by a single individual or ruling class, but instead run by the people, for the people. Despite suggesting that U.S. politics and society encompassed all people, it did not include everyone, leaving many people out, including Black Americans. For Murphy, the war presented a fight to modify American democratic principles to Black American communities. The success of France's revolution and the exaggeration of an equal society impacted how Black American communities identified racial inequality within the United States.

Many Black Americans believed the war would include their rights to democratic principles. Black editors wanted to maintain unity amongst the community. In the *Chicago Defender*, Robert Abbott discussed W. E. B. DuBois's criticism of his article in the *Crisis,* which suggested Black Americans should essentially accept the racial status quo. DuBois argued that

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[136] "To Make the World Safe For Democracy," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, August 10, 1918, 4.

Black American communities should forget their civic grievances with American society while the war lasted and take up arms with their fellow white Americans. Abbott stated that members of the Chicago National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) branch were infuriated and chastised him for working with the U.S. government and his appearance of surrendering to racial intolerance within the *Crisis*. To Abbott and Black Americans, it appeared as if civil rights did not matter to DuBois. The principles of fighting for democracy suggested he abandoned the struggle. At the committee meeting, Abbott noted that many described DuBois as betraying Black Americans' objectives "because of his 'Close Ranks' editorial in the last issue of the *Crisis*."[137] The attack on DuBois showed journalists that failing to uphold the principles of Black American communities could result in similar aggression. Abbott noted that the committee forced DuBois to determine where his loyalty lies. DuBois' action was not only recognized within the local NAACP Chicago branch but "the entire NAACP organization is greatly stirred over what many members claim was an abandoning of the Race by Dr. Dubois," Abbott stated.[138] Journalists understood they had to balance two delicate relationships. First, to avoid government censorship under the Espionage and Sedition Acts; and second, to maintain the struggle for civil rights.

The passing of the Espionage Act in June 1917 and the Sedition Act in May 1918 allowed the government to censor Black editorials' expressions of discontent with American society. However, it did not silence their calls entirely; instead it forced many to shift their discussion from conspicuous protests to a mix of pro-American sentiment and reinterpretation of American society. By 1918, they found ways to address American democracy without being blatantly obvious or attracting the attention of government agencies. In practice, balancing a

[137] "DuBois Editorial Causes Big," *The Chicago Defender*, July 20, 1918, 1.
[138] "DuBois Editorial Causes Big," *The Chicago Defender*, July 20, 1918, 1.

delicate relationship seemed challenging, but journalists systematically used Black American involvement at home and abroad to appease the government and Black American communities. By 1918, Black American communities had made numerous sacrifices to support the nation. John Murphy noted that many Black Americans "enthusiastically entered the fray to help make the world safe for democracy."[139] They provided economic, political, and physical support to the government to ensure its safety. However, white American prejudices made supporting a nation that failed to uphold Black American civil rights difficult.

Nevertheless, many Black Americans were willing to die and serve the nation. Christopher Perry, the editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, stated, "let the United States in fact and indeed, draw no color-line in the army nor in the navy, nor in any field of service or line of work, necessary to win this war and the American colored men and women will be found ready and willing to enter any and all parts of that service and in all lines of work; ready and willing by study and the most thorough preparation to fully qualify themselves to render the best and most efficient service…"[140] Many wanted the same democratic rights as white Americans and believed military service would provide them.

Military service, throughout American history has served as an avenue to display loyalty and patriotism, encouraging many Black Americans to serve in World War I. Journalists leveraged support for the war by suggesting the discrimination of Black Americans would be resolved once the war ended. For example, in 1918, John Murphy placed the war and society in a comparative perspective. He stated:

> The brave colored youths attired in the uniform of their country, who are today denied admission into moving picture places – respectable colored families, who today arouse opposition if they happen to rent or buy a house anywhere they choose to select; the thousands of colored children and the hundreds of colored teachers, who are forced into

[139] "To Make the World Safe For Democracy," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, August 10, 1918, 4
[140] "Our Part in the War," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 24, 1918, 4.

> Jim Crow school houses in order to obtain employment or try to secure an education – each and all of them indulge the hope that all such discriminations will fade away with the dawn of that halcyon day when the world has been made safe for democracy.[141]

The war for Black Americans was all-encompassing in their daily lives. They invested in the war, hoping that social outcomes would evolve into an equal American democracy. Unfortunately, military service did not provide access to civil rights as many likely hoped. Murphy discussed Black American soldiers fighting side by side with white Americans to suggest that "gratitude is not dead in the hearts of men."[142] Unfortunately, a simple hope proved farfetched from the reality of race relations in the United States. The War Department's growing demand for military recruits caused an increase in drafted Black Americans. These men were ultimately sent into the American South for military training, which increased southern racial tensions between Black and white Americans. These tensions, the influence of Black editors, and the presence of Black Americans in the military caused an increase in racial violence.

The rising tensions and the experiences of Black Americans in the French and American Armies encouraged a growing discontent at home. As a result, many Black Americans demanded more civil rights. John Murphy recognized the growing strain on race relations in 1918. As military policy slowly shifted to include the training of Black Americans as officers and their service abroad, white and Black Americans clashed. Some white Americans praised the service of Black Americans in the armed forces. However, John Murphy noted that it was not enough to rectify the civic inequality within the United States. He stated that:

> While the members of the Race appreciate the various compliments paid to the colored soldiers at various times, they would appreciate much better treatment by white Americans towards the wives, mothers, sweethearts and children of these same black soldiers who are making the great sacrifices for white and black alike. Deeds, not words, would be very much more appreciated.[143]

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[141] "To Make the World Safe For Democracy," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, August 10, 1918, 4.
[142] "What We are Fighting For," *The Chicago Defender*, October 5, 1918, 16.
[143] "Another Tribute to our Colored Troops," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 12, 1918, 3.

Journalists understood their position between Black American communities and the U.S. government. They did not want to jeopardize themselves but wanted to make a point that encouraged support for the government with the hope of recognition in the end. Wilson's proclamation for democracy became the rallying cry for many Black Americans. Robert Abbott used Wilson's proclamation to push support for the war by arguing that the war's conclusion would also bring democracy to Black American communities. He said:

> Our leader gave us the inspiring phrase when he declared that we are going across the ocean, 3,000 miles from East St. Louis and Memphis, to 'make the world safe for democracy.' I answer: 'Sir your order shall be obeyed and when that job is done—and let no threatening voice stay your purpose—we will then proceed to make his own country safe for the American Negro.'[144]

The growing tensions and demands for equality became more apparent as the war reached its final months in 1918. The consistent discrimination against Black Americans caused unrest and forced the government to address the frictions. By June 1918, the government sponsored a conference between leading editors, activists, and white Americans to resolve growing tensions.

Between June 19 and 21, 1918, Black editors, activists, government officials, including Secretary of War Newton Baker, Assistant of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, and two representatives of the French High Commission and French generals, were invited to a three-day conference in Washington D. C.[145] Those in attendance listened to government, military and activists speak on topics about Black Americans and the service of French African colonials. Historian Nina Mjagkij argued that Black editors and activists insisted "that lynching, and not German propaganda were responsible for the growing discontent among African Americans."[146]

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[144] "What We are Fighting For," *The Chicago Defender*, October 5, 1918, 16.
[145] Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: the African American Experience during World War I* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 132.
[146] Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: the African American Experience during World War I,* 132.

White Americans and the American government grew concerned about the impact of German propaganda on Black American communities believing it was creating disloyalty. However, journalists stressed the loyalty of Black Americans and their suppression of racial demands during the war in exchange for the government speaking out against lynching.[147] Upon the conference's conclusion, many editors felt the conference succeeded in expressing discontent within Black American communities. At the same time, some suggested the government lacked sincerity. By late July 1918, Woodrow Wilson publicly spoke out against the lynching of Black Americans.

Though President Wilson spoke out against lynching, it did not drastically shift white American opinion. Black editors recognized there were two groups of white Americans within American society. The first that John Murphy suggested was those who maintained white supremacy, and wanted to "put fear into the hearts of the colored men. Then they [Black Americans] will take and keep the place that belongs to them."[148] The second group, which he believed was a small minority of white Americans, understood Black Americans' difficulties within society and were more willing to provide them equality. The war reinterpreted how white and Black Americans viewed their return to civilian life. Many white Americans believed in returning to the status quo, but Black Americans came home with a different view of society. Despite the growing demands for civic equality and their acceptance as Americans, it did not mean that a dominant white American society was willing to accept these views. Murphy mentioned Bishop Bratton of Mississippi, who spoke of Black American service during the war at a meeting in Birmingham, Alabama. Bratton stated, "to a large white and colored audience

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[147] Theodore Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Ensure Black Loyalty during World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 125-126.
[148] "South Divided in Two Groups," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, February 14, 1919, A1.

that the black men who had risked their lives for democracy could not well be denied the democracy for which they had fought so bravely."[149] Some white Americans acknowledged the sacrifices of Black Americans, but the discrimination experienced during the war continued to radiate into American society. The exposure of Black servicemen to French culture signaled a shift in mentality amongst Black American communities.

Black American Editors' Presentation of France

The Espionage and Sedition Acts made displaying any discontent with the United States difficult. It labeled those individuals, editorials, or companies as disloyal and, therefore, a traitor. However, it did not prevent many Black editors from discussing the war in France and the differences between French and American society. They understood Wilson's principles and their emphasis on French egalitarianism played a dual role. First, it maintained support for the war; and second, it exposed Black Americans to the appearance of French equality. It was evident that Black Americans faced inequality, discrimination, segregation, lynching, and Jim Crow Laws that prevented them from being accepted as American citizens. By 1918, journalists balanced addressing white American supremacy and support for a nation at war. France appeared to provide some civil rights to Africans serving in the French army since the beginning of the war. Despite knowing that France did not allow egalitarian rights to Africans, Black editors addressed the demands within American society, building up a positive image of French society.

Photographs and carefully worded subheadings replaced lengthy articles that insinuated attacks against American racial hierarchies. For example, in 1918, Robert Abbott published a photo of two French African soldiers surveying German military positions. He attached the following subheading: "Both of these men have been made officers as a reward for their

[149] "South Divided in Two Groups," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, February 14, 1919, A1.

knowledge and bravery – France knows no color."[150] There are two important takeaways. First, before the United States entered the war, one of the many issues with the American military was its failure to train Black American officers. As recently as late 1917 and into early 1918, a small Black officer corps was trained within the United States armed forces. However, its members were segregated, faced discrimination and training was made extremely difficult to force Black Americans to quit. Also, despite their training as officers, they were still barred from officer schools at West Point and Annapolis that sought to maintain their statuses as white institutions.

France allowed Africans into its officer corps but placed them as subordinates under white officers and subjected them to racial discrimination. French authorities taught a simplified version of the French language, which allowed military officials to justify African officers' status under white French officers. Journalists rejected most images that acknowledged France's racism and instead focused on images that expressed the differences between French and American society. Second, the image of France knowing no color gained more recognition within American society as Black Americans at home read letters and newspapers about these differences. Certainly, the image of no color line in France was powerful for there was a clear color line in the American military and society, but this image of France was more apparent than real. Black Americans understood that French colonial racism impacted Africans just as much as Africans recognized the stark differences between the French metropole and their home. What journalists and Black editors identified was France, and the United States were similar, but France's desperation allowed for differences in intensity, which resulted in a wearing away of a colored line.

[150] "With the French Army," *The Chicago Defender*, January 26, 1918, 1.

Abbott published a photo in 1918 of French African soldiers marching towards the front. In the subheading, he wrote, "a convoy of French colonial troops on the march to lend aid to their French brothers in driving back the Huns. These troops are officered by men from their own ranks who are commissioned by the French government according to their ability and worth in military affairs and activities."[151] To call these soldiers as "brothers" to France is not entirely exaggerated. The French social structure viewed Africans as their "little brothers," showing a sense of collective identity that unified them as Frenchmen. However, this held specific racial connotations that emphasized that Africans needed France to be a wiser and older brother who guided Africa to become a civilized society. Within the United States, white and Black Americans could identify as Americans, but it did not mean they were given the same rights nor viewed as brothers.

Besides the images of Africans in the French army, Black editors discussed their achievements in the war. In the United States and France, the success of African soldiers in Europe created a positive image from the recognition of different nations. Robert Abbott stated that "intrepidity and abnegation have revealed them the worthy brethren in arms of the French *poilus*, who have won the admiration of the world on the different fronts."[152] African success in France challenged American democracy. Abbott went as far as saying that African successes "will certainly have a considerable repercussion on the black populations, as it will further disintegrate the 'family,' thus giving the *tirailleur* an even greater taste of individualism."[153] The idea of individualism considers that the people received the ability to be self-reliant or freed from the domination of other powers. Abbott suggested that as the war developed, Africans gained

[151] "French Colonial Troops going to Aid their Brothers," *The Chicago Defender*, September 14, 1918, 1.
[152] "Tribute to Black Troops of France," *The Chicago Defender*, August 3, 1918, 1.
[153] "Tribute to Black Troops of France," *The Chicago Defender*, August 3, 1918, 1.

"the qualities of civilization" to achieve acceptance.[154] The war was depicted as a just cause that would provide civil rights to all people, and France appeared as the most likely to uphold the principles of democracy. He stated in the "Tribute to Black Troops of France" that, "from the Arabs to the humblest blacks of the most remote tribes, all have unhesitatingly proved their allegiance to France, by sharing with all the other armies of Europe the vicissitudes, dangers, and glory of fighting for a good cause."[155] France's recognition of African soldiers and exaggerated racial tolerance intensified Black American demands for acknowledgment at home. While recognizing their support for the war, the appearance of equality in France by journalists and experiences abroad pushed Black Americans to consider their status within the United States.

Black Americans widely rejected the incorporation of the United States' racial tensions into France. One of the first ways to introduce American prejudices into France was through segregating hospitals. However, Black Americans did not take kindly in the United States to the spread of American segregation. As racial tensions rose in the United States, so did the acknowledgment of white Americans introducing these prejudices abroad. An editor of the *Denver Star* wrote that white American military officials "regard such Jim Crow hospital as something that may introduce the color-line in France, a country that has never yet drawn the color line."[156] He believed that the French government and military officials made their objections to white American prejudices clear despite this attempt. The editor suggested that African soldiers were "treated without discrimination" in French military hospitals.[157] Instead, the *Denver Star* emphasized that France would not deviate from its racial tolerance and would continue to recognize the achievements of Black soldiers.

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[154] "Tribute to Black Troops of France," *The Chicago Defender*, August 3, 1918, 1.
[155] "Tribute to Black Troops of France," *The Chicago Defender*, August 3, 1918, 1.
[156] "Race Will Not Stand for Jim Crow Hospital," *The Denver Star*, January 19, 1918, 1.
[157] "Race Will Not Stand for Jim Crow Hospital," *The Denver Star*, January 19, 1918, 1.

Black American experiences in France were drastically different from their experiences at home. Historian Richard Fogarty stated that in many cases, "African Americans were amazed that French people did not seem to harbor racist feelings against them."[158] Black American encounters and France's praise for their service in and under French military command displayed a grateful nation by the war's end. French Generals awarded Black regiments for their sacrifices in France. Harry C. Smith, the editor of the *Cleveland Gazette,* quoted Sergeant Rufus Pickney. Pickney served in the 372nd Infantry Regiment and reflected on his last encounter with his French commander. He spoke of the praise the regiment received extended beyond thank you, but many Black Americans returned home as veterans with fond memories of French racial tolerance. However, upon returning home, they were subjected to the same white supremacy that barred them from equality. After hearing or experiencing the notions of an equal French society, Black American veterans and Black American communities refused to accept discrimination, segregation, and Jim Crow Laws at home. Pickney noted French General Vincendon, who summed up how Frenchmen viewed their relationship with Black Americans. "The blood of your comrades who fell on the soil of France, mixed with the blood of our soldiers, renders indissoluble the bond of affection that unites us," Smith quoted.[159] Journalists used friendship and equality to manipulate how Black Americans' interpretations would influence their demands for a racially tolerant future.

Black Americans in France

In early 1918, several of the first American regiments in France were Black American soldiers. Many came with French principles of *liberté*, *egualité*, and *fraternité*. However, many

[158] Richard Fogarty, *Race & War: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013), 3.
[159] "Made Grand Record," *The Gazette*, February 8, 1919, 1.

were assigned to unloading ships, constructing depots, or building barracks upon arrival. By early 1918, four Black American regiments arrived in France: the 369th, 370th, 371st, and 372nd, which created the 93rd Division. As they arrived, there was a growing frustration with the military command that barred them from combat on the Western Front. Contemporary historian Mark Whalan stated that Black American support came from the "hope that black Americans would receive fair treatment at the hands of the military and would see rewards in the postwar U.S. racial policy, especially to address disfranchisement in the South and the widespread practice of lynching."[160] Restricted from combat meant they could not display their loyalty to the country. At the same time, French and British commanders pressured General John J. Pershing of the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F.) in Europe to reinforce their tattered divisions. He decided to transfer the 93rd Division to the French for two reasons. First, he wanted to keep a predominately white American army; and second, it satisfied the demands of French high command and Black American soldiers.

On March 10, 1918, the 93rd Division was brigaded with the French army. The French high command confiscated their American weapons and provisions and assigned them French military equipment. After a short period of training, they were split up and sent to different locations on the Western Front. Black American interactions with white Frenchmen allowed many to experience a different racial structure that appeared not to hold racial stereotypes against them. Their positive interaction with the French soldiers and citizens and France's appearance of racial tolerance infuriated the A.E.F. command.[161] Historian Tyler Stovall summed up how white Americans interpreted the relationship between Black Americans and white Frenchmen. He

[160] Mark Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), xiii.
[161] Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro*, 9.

stated white Americans believed that "the French were relatively color-blind and feared that African Americans in France would grow accustomed to being treated as equals and would then want the same treatment when they returned home."[162] The purpose of Black Americans serving was to receive recognition and a change in racial policy. They argued that France provided a unique twist on racial tolerance that impacted their views on American democracy at home.

Black editors discussed the war experiences of Black Americans at home, but what they found in French culture challenged American democracy. While Pershing wanted to maintain a white American army, France incorporated Africans into its army and, in 1918, included Black Americans. Their interaction with French soldiers and citizens allowed Black Americans to engrain a different image of American racial policies. In France, Black American soldiers were "acting in closest association with the French and practically are a part of the French army," John Murphy stated.[163] He sought ways to show recognition to Black Americans in service to their country. It often meant that positive images of France identified the achievements and recognition of African and Black American soldiers. In May 1918, Murphy published an article discussing two Black Americans in the French army who received recognition from the French high command. Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts successfully held back a German raiding party despite both sustaining multiple injuries, pushing back the attackers, and receiving the *Croix de Guerre* for their actions. Murphy identified an unknown French General who wrote to his superiors about the event. Within, he recognized "the American report is too modest. As a result of verbal information furnished me, it appears that the blacks were extremely brave, and this little combat does honor to the Americans," Murphy stated.[164] Murphy displayed France's

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[162] Tyler E. Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 14.
[163] "2 Brave Colored Soldiers Rout 24 Germans," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 24, 1918, 1.
[164] "2 Brave Colored Soldiers Rout 24 Germans; General Ballou Explains 'ORDER No. 35,'" *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 24, 1918, 1.

racial tolerance and appearing loyal to the United States government while addressing the inequalities experienced at home.

During the war, the intermingling of Black Americans with French citizens resulted in contact with French women. After the war, white Americans began verbally attacking French women for interacting with Black American soldiers and African soldiers. Robert Abbott published an article where he quoted a Frenchman named Jean Bolleau, who discussed the attacks on French women and Black American soldiers. "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," he said.[165] Black American soldiers' conduct in France and the creation of a relationship allowed journalists to show a form of brotherhood established between Black Americans and the people of France. Abbott discussed how Bolleau attacked white American racism by acknowledging that France possessed racism but, "the French people do not discriminate against their own colonials on account of their color. They honor and respect them. It was the mighty Senegalese who saved the day for their beloved France in the first battle of the Marne. And France is not ashamed to acknowledge her indebtedness to these conquering sons of Africa."[166] Bolleau presented the same ideas about the neglect of French women using racism towards Black Americans because they do not hold prejudices based on color. Abbott showed Bolleau arguing that "many French girls will testify that they received more courtesy and better treatment from the American Negroes than from the whites [Americans]."[167]

[165] "Why French Girls Adore Our Men," *The Chicago Defender*, September 27, 1919, 1.
[166] "Why French Girls Adore Our Men," *The Chicago Defender*, September 27, 1919, 1.
[167] "Why French Girls Adore Our Men," *The Chicago Defender*, September 27, 1919, 1.

The interactions with French soldiers and citizens allowed for a stark reality to the vastly different racial structures between France and the United States. Many Black Americans had the opportunity to experience firsthand the racial tolerance France presented instead of reading about it in the work of Black editors. Besides having American society challenged by France's appearance of a vastly different racial structure, Black editors discussed how their interactions abroad impacted Black Americans. John Murphy published letters home from Privates Monroe Moore, Cordonzo Piper, and Edward Johnson. While these men have different opinions of the French, he used these images to display the contrast between French and American society. Moore was more critical of France, stating that "France has government ownership. So far as I have been able to see I have not been favorably impressed with it."[168] However, his recognition of French African soldiers showed that he recognized "the Negro troops from North Africa known as the 'Senegalese,' have won great distinction in this war."[169] Indeed, Moore was somewhat antagonistic towards the French government, but he recognized that France's acceptance of African soldiers was more than the acceptance of Black Americans by white Americans.

Despite his views, Monroe Moore represented a minority of Black Americans who had a more negative outlook on France. Many Black editors sought to depict France positively to gain support from Black Americans by showing the differences in racial tolerance abroad versus at home. In the same article by John Murphy, Privates Cordonzo Piper and Edward Johnson discussed their interactions with French soldiers and citizens. Piper stated, referring to the French, that "one could not hope to meet better people than the people of this country, both

[168] "Two Letters From the Front," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, June 1, 1918, 4.
[169] "Two Letters From the Front," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, June 1, 1918, 4.

soldiers and civilians."[170] Johnson had a similar view of the French. He traveled the country, took in the scenery, and was exposed to French warfare serving in the 369th Infantry. He stated that "the French soldiers have lots of confidence in the American Negro soldiers, for we have proven true, and have walked nearly, all over France, and the farther I go, the more beautiful the scenery is."[171] While he noticed the beauty of French scenery, he also recognized the people. "They are a fine lot of men and just as brave as they can be," he stated, referring to French soldiers and citizens.[172] Such depictions of positive interactions between French soldiers and citizens and Black Americans generated a growing concern for white Americans. Black editors found discussions of the difference in racial tolerance vitally important for rallying Black American support at home for civil rights.

The influence journalists had on Black American communities was immense. They emphasized how a flawed American democracy failed to promote equality under the constitution and extend Black Americans' basic rights. Historian Mark Whalan discussed how Black American soldiers in France were often warmly welcomed. He stated that their experiences abroad "informed flexible and complex cultural strategies of resisting US national-racial parochialism."[173] Black editors used these strategies to discuss white American oppression, Jim Crow Laws, segregation, and lynching allowing editors to establish a positive image of France despite its colonial policies. To white Americans, the positive image journalists created and the firsthand experience of Black Americans serving abroad in the French army undermined white American supremacy. This concerned many white Americans about the expectation Black Americans would have upon returning home.

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[170] "Soldiers in France are well Treated," *The Chicago Defender*, July 6, 1918, 1.
[171] "With the American Expeditionary," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, August 31, 1918, 4.
[172] "With the American Expeditionary," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, August 31, 1918, 4.
[173] Whalan, *The Great War and the Culture of the New Negro*, xii.

In August 1918, after recognizing the positive interaction between Black Americans and white Frenchmen, Colonel Linard, the head of the French Mission to the A.E.F., drafted a pamphlet called the "Secret Information Concerning Black Troops." It explained to French officers how they should handle the interactions between Black American troops and French soldiers and citizens not to offend white American soldiers' sensibilities. However, the French General Staff withdrew it because it did not want to endorse American racism and bring attention to France's colonial treatment. When news of the pamphlet reached the French Parliament, it rejected the pamphlet and passed a resolution that reaffirmed its commitment to the equality of man.[174] It eventually ordered the destruction of the pamphlet. Some French commanders welcomed the fraternization between Frenchmen and Black American soldiers, hoping it would enhance their performance in battle.[175] In many cases, French civilians preferred the interactions with Black Americans over white Americans, which displayed a unique racial acceptance unfamiliar to Black Americans. To French commanders, the purpose of their racial tolerance might have been military-related, but to Black editors who wrote about the experiences of Black soldiers, the differences in racial stereotypes encouraged the demand for equality in American society.

Many Black editors, including Robert Abbott, John Murphy, and Christopher Perry, discussed France's lack of negative stereotypes towards Africans compared to those that characterized American society. White Americans were aware of the differences between the two nations. They often took action to maintain their prejudices in French society. Journalists noted instances where white Americans attempted to enlighten the French government or citizens about American prejudices. In the *Chicago Defender*, Robert Abbott acknowledged incidents

[174] Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*, 18.
[175] Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: the African American Experience during World War I,* 106.

where white American soldiers encountered Black American soldiers and white French women engaged in social events. He argued that the interactions between Black Americans and white French women infuriated white Americans. He said, "during the period of war soldiers of the 370th from Illinois and the 369th infantry from New York complained of the manner in which [white American] military police were harassing troopers while they were in company with French and English girls."[176] Despite being in France, white American soldiers sought to maintain white supremacy over Black soldiers even if French society appeared to resist using racial stereotypes against Black Americans. White American citizens, who had a strict racial hierarchy, often objected to the more relaxed social intermingling of races they found in Paris.

Black editors chastised white American fears of providing Black Americans equality. For example, John Murphy stated in the *Philadelphia Tribune* that white American soldiers told stories to the French that suggested they portrayed Black Americans as monkeys back in the United States. Infuriated with such remarks, he stated that:

> Time and time again they repeated their story and the result has been that thousands of white people in this country [the United States] religiously believe that the only thing to be done to remind the colored brother that the white people in the United States are united by opposition to social equality is to keep up racial friction with race riots, and in order to fan the flame into a lurid blaze to always make it appear from fake newspaper reports that some colored fellow has been accused with attempting to assault some white woman.[177]

Black Americans in France were exposed to the perception of equality, but white Americans at home barred them from the same rights experienced abroad. One soldier reported to Murphy that "had colored men not gone to France and mixed freely with the white folks there it is doubtful whether the present propaganda to create Race Riots would be known and so cowardly planned

[176] "African Troupers Battle Angry Yanks," *The Chicago Defender*, May 3, 1919, 1.
[177] "Determined that Those who Enjoyed Social Equality in France Must Know They are in the United States," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 18, 1919, 1.

and executed."[178] Black American interactions and Black editors' exposure at home helped to exaggerate to Black American communities that France appeared to possess no color line.

France, the War's Aftermath and Black Editors' Impact on Black Americans

After four years of war, on November 11, 1918, the Allies and Central Powers signed an armistice that marked the end of World War I. The armistice concluded that all hostilities would cease, and peace negotiations would begin with the understanding that the Central Powers lost the conflict. It marked a period of sorrow filled with hope for many. For others, the war suggested the failure of governments to uphold the people's interests. The views of individuals varied depending on social, political, and racial identity, and nowhere more so apparent than in American society. Many Black American soldiers returned home with new fond memories of their interactions with French *liberté*, *egualité*, and *fraternité*, but these ideals were vastly different from the racial inequality at home. Historian Adrianne Lentz-Smith suggested that Black Americans' exposure to these French principles fostered "bitterness about their treatment at the hands of their fellow Americans" at home. [179]

Unlike European nations who participated for the whole duration of the war, the United States was involved for nineteen months but did not participate in strength on the Western Front until early 1918. This meant the amount of time Americans participated in any significant combat roles was limited to nine to eleven months. American investment in the war was not the same as its allies, who manipulated their political and social identities to make themselves part of a nation at arms. For them, it was the understanding that the war was everything. This life-or-death situation could destroy one's fragile society. The United States' geographical distance

[178] "Determined that Those who Enjoyed Social Equality in France Must Know They are in the United States," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 18, 1919, 1.
[179] Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I*, 111.

helped the nation avoid European pressures and meant the war did not possess the same importance to Americans as Europeans. Americans did not believe the war would destroy the nation as experienced in Europe. The luxury of distance meant the nation could avoid war's destruction and mass casualties. What became a conflict of white supremacy ravaged by imperialistic gains and government demands was also a fight that would display democracy's failings if the Central Powers won.

President Wilson's declaration of war and his proclamation of making the world safe for democracy appeared to uphold the fear of democratic failure. A world torn by war and revolutionary ideas would indicate that democracy was doomed if the Allies failed. However, interpretations of democracy or Wilson's proclamation can have different means. How white and Black Americans interpreted democracy meant vastly different things based upon their social status and, more specifically, if they faced discrimination. White Americans were the majority of the U.S. population. They discriminated against Black Americans, and journalists willingly called out the inequalities of the community. Many Black Americans heeded Wilson's call to arms while Black editors sought ways to maintain government support and challenge a white racial status quo and its association with inequality.

Black Americans hoped the war would bring about changes within the United States after serving gallantly abroad. Black editors often discussed returning Black American soldiers as heroes and used their recognition in France to support their actions in the war. However, France's image in Black editorials regained momentum as a beacon for American inspiration that imagined a free and equal society where Black and white Americans could live in harmony. While serving in France, journalists depicted Black American soldiers interacting with white French soldiers and citizens. Such interactions encouraged an image and interpretation that

France was more racially tolerant than the United States, a nation where segregation, discrimination, and Jim Crow Laws governed the lives of Black Americans. The stories and personal experiences of Black American soldiers stiffened the positive image of France, which editors wrote and displayed to the American public. However, these same positive images increased racial tensions between Black and white Americans. It seemed that how Frenchmen versus white Americans treated Black Americans abroad and at home were vastly different despite French stereotypes.

Near the war's end, Black editors discussed the final interactions between Black American soldiers and Frenchmen. Christopher Perry published the letter from Colonel Hayward to William Pitzer, an old colleague of his, discussing how the French viewed Black Americans. Perry quoted Hayward stating, "the [French] people treat the American soldiers as fine as though they were heroes and had won the war."[180] To France, the war was everything. The nation devoted vast domestic and international resources to the war, and the assistance of Black Americans was one of many important elements. Despite the French viewing Black American soldiers through a haze of stereotypes and the remembrance of American racism, Historian Chad Williams stated that "African American soldiers relished their cordial and even intimate interactions with French civilians, encounters that served to reenergize their democratic aspirations."[181] Through the support of journalists, reimagining equality at home through the experiences and interpretations abroad, Black Americans viewed France as a nation of possibility.

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[180] "Says Boys are Fighting Like he," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, November 8, 1918, 4.
[181] Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 161.

When the war ended on November 11, 1918, French and American soldiers began different roles in the post-war years. France sent African soldiers to occupy territory gained from Germany known as the Saarland. The occupation by African soldiers was due to French officials being concerned about sending them home, fearing they would reject submitting to colonial rule and its racism. This was true, Africans saw their role in the French army as an opportunity for social advancement and many wanted to stay in France after the war. Black Americans were sent home but returned with a different look on the United States. In France, they experienced a different society that appeared not to judge them based on skin tone. The interpretation that white Frenchmen lacked racial feelings toward them encouraged a new outlook on American democracy. Black Americans did not want to return to the old status quo that was expected. Therefore, journalists discussed the interactions with white Frenchmen and expressed their views on Black American soldiers returning home.

By late November, Black editors began discussing returning Black American soldiers and their increasing presence in American society. Christopher Perry recognized that Black Americans from all across the country had served in the armed forces. This same experience abroad also meant that Black Americans "like their white companions in arms, are returning with a wider vision of life," he stated.[182] For many white Americans, the increasing number of Black soldiers returning to society terrified them as white and Black Americans possessed vastly different views on the racial status quo. In addition, many white Americans were aware of France's impact on Black Americans and viewed their return as a threat. This was not the case; however, Perry stated that "they are not returning with a spirit of hostility, but they are coming to their homes with the desire to become, as civilians, better and more useful men and to help

[182] "South Divided in Two Groups," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, February 14, 1919, 1.

promote the welfare of their respective communities."[183] Indeed, some white Americans acknowledged that Black Americans deserved acceptance into American society, but many blatantly refused.

It was not strictly American society that refused, but the American military command also acted out against Black Americans after leaving France. Robert Abbott wrote of an incident onboard the U.S.S. Olympic, where the 365th Infantry, an all-Black American regiment, had its regimental flag junked by Colonel George McMaster and faced segregated quarters for white and Black American officers. Frustrated and infuriated at white supremacy and the discrimination against Black American soldiers, Abbott stated, "there was no segregation on the battlefields of Europe. We all fought together as Americans through and through."[184] He recognized the role Black Americans played in the war and willingly challenged the continual pressure of white American supremacy. Black Americans served abroad, experienced different racism, and were forced to return to old racial hierarchies. What was the purpose of their involvement? It did not display President Wilson's ideals of going abroad to defend democracy because it was not upheld within the United States. Abbott suggested that "while it is very important to play a leading role in world government, it is much more important to practice at home the things preached to the other powers."[185] However, it would not take him much preaching to express his discontent with the social policies within the United States after the war. France's image maintained a strong presence in discussing the government's failings.

American racism had not changed as white and Black Americans clashed on U.S. ships and military officers reinforced the racial status quo. Nevertheless, these soldiers fought and died

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[183] "Southerners Could Not Stand," *The Baltimore Afro-American,* March 21, 1919, A4.
[184] "365th Infantry Lands at New York," *The Chicago Defender*, March 1, 1919, 1.
[185] "Keeping Us Out of Peace," *The Chicago Defender*, April 19, 1919, 20.

in Europe alongside white Frenchmen and encountered less racism than they were accustomed to at home. In May 1919, W.E.B. DuBois discussed how Black American soldiers felt and what they hoped would change upon returning from Europe. He saw their support as saving a "bleeding France and what she means and has meant and will mean to us and humanity and against the threat of German race arrogance."[186] His depiction showed that Black Americans felt they had saved France who appeared more racially tolerant than the Germans. They served abroad in defense of France but wanted President Wilson to uphold democracy at home. The war created racial tensions, but Dubois suggested that despite Black American support, American democracy:

> has organized a nation-wide and latterly a world-wide propaganda of deliberate and continuous insult and defamation of black blood wherever found. It decrees that it shall not be possible in travel nor residence, work nor play, education nor instruction for a black man to exist without tacit or open acknowledgment of his inferiority to the dirtiest white dog. And it looks upon any attempt to question or even discuss this dogma as arrogance, unwarranted assumption and treason.[187]

Many white Americans were unwilling to allow anything other than the return of the racial status quo experienced before the war. For this reason, discrimination and inequality experienced by Black Americans created a negative image of American society. However, Dubois noted the significance of lynching. He stated, "lynching is barbarism of a degree of contemptible nastiness unparalleled in human history. Yet for fifty years we have lynched two Negroes a week, and we have kept this up right through the war."[188] Black Americans fought in World War I for civic advancement in American society. They served in France to protect democracy and experienced a different racial atmosphere than in the United States. The combination of differing racial structures and the protection of democracy for a nation that failed to uphold it at home created a

[186] "Returning Soldiers," *The Crisis*, May 1919, 13.
[187] "Returning Soldiers," *The Crisis*, May 1919, 13.
[188] "Returning Soldiers," *The Crisis*, May 1919, 13.

struggle to redefine American democracy. These Black American soldiers fought to preserve a democracy that guaranteed civil rights, not prevented them, and they were willing to come home and fight for it, too. "Make way for Democracy!," DuBois wrote, "We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America."[189]

The increasing demand for equality and growing white American concerns caused an increase in race riots and lynching across the United States. In the *Chicago Defender*, Robert Abbott identified the growing frustration amongst Black Americans and the growing support organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), received within society. In the article, "100,000 to Fight Wrongs," he acknowledged that John R. Shillady, Secretary of the NAACP, began campaigning to increase the number of members within the organization to fight racial injustice. The organizational growth was contributed to Black American communities reacting to "lynching and other forms of violence and injustice to which the Negroes of the United States are being subjected."[190] After serving abroad and hearing and experiencing the differences between the United States and France, Black Americans demanded the same treatment at home. As a result, journalists developed a positive image of France that challenged the racial hierarchies within the United States.

By the summer of 1919, the largest wave of race riots in American history, known as the Red Summer, killed several hundred Black Americans throughout the United States. The riots typically began as attacks against Black American neighborhoods by young white men. As the violence spread, Black Americans organized to defend themselves. One notable riot occurred in Chicago in 1919 because of segregation and economic competition between white and Black Americans. Stunned by the riots, Robert Abbott quoted William Monroe Trotter, the Colored

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[189] "Returning Soldiers," *The Crisis*, May 1919, 13.
[190] "100,000 to Fight Wrongs," *The Chicago Defender*, May 24, 1919, 5.

Peace Conference Petitioner at Paris and the National Equal Rights League secretary. Abbott quoted Trotter as stating, "if the United States does not appreciate the colored laborer enough to let him work for his bread by the sweat of his brow unmolested, I know positively that the Republic of France, which knows no color line, will welcome the black American worker for the restoration of the devastated regions, especially unskilled labor."[191] To Abbott, the United States misled Black Americans when joining the war. The idea of fighting for the preservation of democracy was not the guarantee to all people but the protection of white American supremacy. The truth behind the exaggeration of French equality terrified white Americans, causing racial violence against Black Americans.

The Red Summer was heavily discussed by Black editors as a blatant target against Black American communities for their activism and failing to uphold the white racial status quo. It is true, journalists and soldiers expressed the vast differences between the United States and France and saw a potential ally in the French people. Many white and Black American soldiers were stationed throughout France during the war. Paris possessed a mix of white and Black American troops where "these white southerners witnessed with awe the freedom and association which colored soldiers enjoyed with French people and while they were in France did all in their power to try to put a stop to the freedom and joy by the blacks and in France" John Murphy stated.[192] Journalists blamed white Americans for the race riots occurring throughout the United States. Murphy suggested that the "ghost [of] social equality, which has haunted the mind of the white people in the United States, is responsible for recent race riots."[193] France was placed in

[191] "France Will Welcome Colored Laborers There," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, August 16, 1919, 1.
[192] "Determined that Those who Enjoyed Social Equality in France Must Know They are in the United States," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 18, 1919, 1.
[193] "Determined that Those who Enjoyed Social Equality in France Must Know They are in the United States," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 18, 1919, 1.

dialectical opposition to the United States and used as a guide that appeared not to bar Africans from obtaining at least partial civil rights. While this image was not the case, the little blurring of a colored line was more than could be said for Black Americans, who faced inequality, the suppression of rights, lynching, and Jim Crow Laws.

Many Black Americans felt France treated them, and its African soldiers, with far more decency than was the case in their interactions with white Americans. In an article called "Vive La France," W.E.B. DuBois wrote about a ceremony in France to honor the soldiers who served in the war. It credited white Frenchmen for their services but also depicted African soldiers wearing the uniform of a French army officer. DuBois noted that a French General approached the man and bestowed the Legion of Honor upon him, surrounded by other African officers and decorated soldiers. The French citizenry and present French soldiers rose from their seats and cheered. "It was France – almighty and never-dying France leading the world again. The day was given to honor the black men and yellow men who gave their lives for a country they are proud to call theirs and which is equally proud to claim them," DuBois stated.[194] He understood that while Black Americans could identify as American, they did not possess the same civil rights and recognition as white Americans. Yet, despite fighting for a nation that possessed colonial hierarchies, France appeared to recognize them as honored members of society. DuBois noted that "France 'le jour de gloire est arrivé,'[195] and the honor is yours Men of Africa! How fine a thing to be a black Frenchman in 1919—imagine such a celebration in America!"[196] Were Africans Frenchmen? France certainly looked down upon its colonies as inferior, but to Black

[194] "Vive La France!," *The Crisis*, March 1919, 215.
[195] The French translation equates to "The day of glory arrived."
[196] "Vive La France!," *The Crisis*, March 1919, 215.

Americans and editors, France appeared to appreciate African service, treated them as brothers, and, more importantly, citizens.

Despite France's colonial policies, Black editors found positive attributes in the months after the war. Robert Abbott viewed France's treatment of French Africans as vastly different from Black Americans' experiences in the United States. He viewed France positively, stating, "France, home of genius and art and the brotherhood of man—France, whose son[s] know neither slave nor color—France I knew had hundreds of blacks and mixed bloods among her officers, as well as spokesmen for her loyal sons of brown and black in no ordinary positions of state."[197] Abbott discussed the differences between France and Great Britain's domination of Africa and how American society compared to these nations. "Study, very careful, study of the colonial policies of both France and England, while not winning me over to colonization at all, had convinced me that France more than any nation, including my own, is, by temperament, by spirit and by experience, fitted best to operate governments for all not able to take care of their own household."[198] It was not that he accepted French colonialism as superior to all forms of government rule; it was an exaggerated message that French colonial policy represented more egalitarian ideals than American democracy. It was not difficult for journalists to display positive imagery of France when Black Americans visualized an equal French society for several years.

An American named Dorothy Canfield Fisher, who lived in France for several years, expressed her disappointment in America's racial status quo. In the *Chicago Defender*, Robert Abbott expressed Fisher's feelings about how France and Europe viewed the United States. She said, "the whole nation is discredited and disgraced and every word we say about human rights

[197] "Defender's Foreign Representation Writes of Racial Activities in Paris," *The Chicago Defender*, April 12, 1919, 20.
[198] "Defender's Foreign Representation Writes of Racial Activities in Paris," *The Chicago Defender*, April 12, 1919, 20.

and civilization is laughed at by Europeans who know of the lynching evil in our country."[199] Despite the assistance of Black American soldiers abroad, the ideals of American democracy were not free but governed by the fear of losing control over the white supremacy of American democracy. Journalists recognized this fear and found an ally through the French Empire to promote change.

France knew of the racial climate within the United States by reading and witnessing it during the war. Robert Abbott quoted *L'Avenir* stating that "The American prejudice against color is well known. … American Negroes came to France in thousands and mixed in our public and national life like any one else, entering cafes, where their business was solicited, and eating at whatever restaurants they pleased."[200] The French acknowledgment was not limited to the press. France created the Pan African Congress, and two African members of the French Chamber of Deputies spoke out against the mistreatment of Black Americans, creating examples of French racial tolerance and intolerance for American racism. French rejection of white American racism brought delight to many Black Americans.[201]

In France, Black Americans created a bond that Black editors interpreted as unification or brotherhood. Active military service under French command forced the interaction between Black Americans and white Frenchmen, creating a bond shared in the experiences of warfare. However, these bonds do not translate the same way within American society. Journalists had a specific agenda that Black American communities interpreted, in this case, how France and the United States possessed different racial structures. John Murphy published Sergeant Rufus Pinckney's experiences before leaving France. In Pinckney's encounter with an unknown French

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[199] "Europeans Laugh at the United States," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, November 1, 1919, 1.
[200] "French Give Opinion of Riot," *The Chicago Defender*, August 2, 1919, 1.
[201] Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*, 34.

General, Murphy showed how respect and brotherhood formed between Black Americans and the Frenchmen. He discussed Pinckney's encounter with the French commander, whom he described as having "tears in his eyes."[202] Whether amplified or not, the emotions indicated a connection between Black American soldiers and their French comrades. Pinckney quoted the French commander saying, "We love you. You are our brothers. We honor you as heroes of France, and I know that all of America will be proud of you when you arrive home."[203] Black editors identified and constructed a special connection between Black Americans and French soldiers and citizens. They used the positive appearance and experience of Black Americans in France to chastise the failings of American democracy.

Conclusion

In 1918 and 1919, the war's conclusion allowed Black editors to paint the interaction with French soldiers and citizens in a unique light that complicated the relationship between white and Black Americans. Many editors saw France's variation in racial hierarchies as vastly different compared to the inequality, segregation, and Jim Crow Laws that characterized American democracy. Since the beginning of the war, journalists portrayed France as racially tolerant, but Black American service abroad allowed them to construct France as the "promised land."[204] Many white Americans were concerned with France's racial tolerance. The editor of the *Barre Daily Times* noted that "Great Britain, the United States, and France all employed colored troops in the war zones. Among the French people there was an absence of social inequality as between races which our negro soldiers especially were quick to observe, in comparison with the social conditions at home."[205] Woodrow Wilson claimed that the nation was going abroad to make the

[202] "372nd Boys Take Much Booty," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, January 31, 1919, 1.
[203] "372nd Boys Take Much Booty," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, January 31, 1919, 1.
[204] Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I*, 129.
[205] "The Race Question Moral," *The Barre Daily Times*, August 5, 1919, 5.

world safe for democracy, but it failed to uphold these promises at home. Instead, the nation sought to show itself as an upstart power, one that was civilized and capable of upholding the principles it cherished. However, Harry C. Smith questioned these principles stating "for a civilized race that must descend to the worst excesses of savagery in order to support its pretensions to leadership and domination loses its moral capacity for being civilized, and gradually succumbs before the superior capacity of the 'inferior' race to endure suffering and persecution."[206] The domination of a white view of American democracy did not display its civility on the world stage but did display rejection of equality and acceptance of lynching, segregation, and Jim Crow Laws.

The sacrifices that Black Americans made at home and abroad for a nation unwilling to address the inequalities of American society were apparent to most in the community. Harry C. Smith, the editor of the *Cleveland Gazette*, discussed the experiences of a Black American soldier named Jason P. Campbell, who was injured in the final days of the war. When the war concluded, he was brought back to an army hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas, to finish his treatments. Campbell was the only wounded Black American soldier transported to the base hospital of all the soldiers. When the soldiers arrived, there was a clear distinction in how the white soldiers were treated compared to himself. Smith quoted Campbell stating, "the whites were loyally greeted by the Red Cross workers, who served food. At the hospital, he says, the only greeting he received was from a nurse who said, 'How do you feel now, little nigger?'"[207] Returning Black Americans found that their experiences abroad and journalists' influence shifted their views on American society. In some cases, their experiences abroad provided moments where Black American soldiers felt safer in France than in the United States. Campbell stated his

[206] "The Race Question Moral," *The Barre Daily Times*, August 5, 1919, 5.
[207] "Safer in the Trenches Than in the South," *Cleveland Gazette*, February 8, 1919, .

feelings about returning to the United States, where he "felt safer in the trenches than in Arkansas and I never expect to return home."[208]

After the war, Allyson Sweeney, an editor of the *Chicago Defender*, wrote a book that discussed his war perspective. He possessed a positive view of France despite its flaws. He stated, speaking of the brigading of the 93rd Division with the French army, that "the division was brigaded with the French from the start and saw service through the war alongside the French poilus with whom they became great friends."[209] A friendship guided by Black editors' presentation of France and their interpretation of Black American experiences allowed Black American communities to visualize France in a positive light. There was a certain freedom that Black Americans recognized in French society. The intermingling of Black American soldiers with white French soldiers and citizens "so galled the white soldiers that they felt sure that when the colored boys returned to the states they would return with swelled heads and entertain the thought that they would be permitted to do the same thing at home" Christopher Perry stated.[210] In this respect, white Americans correctly recognized that Black Americans possessed a new view on American racial hierarchies. Black American experiences abroad and the exaggeration of French equality bolstered journalists' arguments for American equality at home. As the lyrics for a song written by Aubrey Carpenter in the *Baltimore Afro-American* went, "Soldier boys he says they are strong. Their strength won't last so very long. When Uncle Sam with his million men. To the battle field he will send. Then we will win. Then we will win. The war the Negroes

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[208] "Safer in the Trenches Than in the South," *Cleveland Gazette*, February 8, 1919, .
[209] Sweeny, Allison. "History of the American Negro in the Great World War," In *The Basic Afro-American Reprint Library* Ed. by Clarence L. Holte. (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp, 1970), 76.
[210] "Determined that Those who Enjoyed Social Equality in France Must Know They are in the United States," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 18, 1919, 1.

will win."[211] The war was not only on the battlefield but also in the minds and hearts of Black Americans. Journalists grasped the opportunity to use France as an example of a promised land.

[211] "A War Song: Dedicated to our Soldier Boys," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, May 31, 1918, 4.

CONCLUSION

World War I was not the first or last time Black Americans questioned American democracy, but between 1914 and 1919, the United States' war effort encouraged the creation of nationalism amongst white and Black Americans. It was the first time that colonial forces were used in large numbers in Europe and therefore provided the first global conflict that journalists could analyze the treatment of colonials versus Black Americans. Also, it was the first time the United States left its Western sphere of influence to fight a major war, exposing many to different racial policies. Africans and Black Americans saw government support and military service as opportunities for civic advancement. However, neither France nor the United States wanted to deviate from the racial status quo, but France would have no choice compared to other nations. The declining birthrate in France forced French authorities to seriously consider their vast colonial possessions as potential soldiers for the war. What resulted was the incorporation of French Africans into the French army and their exposure to the metropole. The United States, with the Atlantic Ocean acting as a barrier, did not suffer the same horrific casualties as European nations. Where France showed changes in its racial policies because of its desperation, the United States upheld the racial status quo at home and abroad.

Throughout the war, Black Americans saw France's willingness to incorporate Africans into the military and the appearance of equal treatment as a possibility for better opportunities in American society. They grew frustrated with America's politics, believing previous military services had proven time and again their loyalty to the nation. When the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917, journalists had exaggerated French egalitarianism to such an extent that some Black Americans believed France had certain racial differences. While they undoubtedly were hesitant about their interaction with the French, many Black American service members felt

closer to white Frenchmen than white American citizens as the war progressed. The combination of Black editors' depictions of France and the experiences of Black American service members in France provided an image of a promised land. The perception Black editors manifested sought to unify Black Americans and create a shared cultural identity based on the United States' racial intolerance. They found France more racially tolerant despite France's known cultural and biological racism. While their approach varied based on the racial and political atmosphere within the United States, their argument widely stayed the same: American democracy valued equality for whites but not Black Americans.

The Black American press was a tool used by the government to develop loyalty and support for the United States' war effort in 1917. Black editors recognized their role in supporting the government and therefore backed the nation by discussing the support of Black American communities. While the United States government wanted to overshadow the calls for reconciliation, many journalists found ways to maintain loyalty and address how American racism suppressed their rights at home versus abroad. This reinterpretation allowed Black editors to fight against the government's domination while frustrating Black Americans' opinion towards the government and American society. As a result, Black Americans' experiences and circulation of racial differences showed the failings of American democracy. However, these journalists strategically challenged American society by considering the racial structures between the United States and France. It was not that they viewed France as an egalitarian state because they understood it certainly was not, but the purpose was to chastise the United States.

Black editorials balanced a delicate relationship between supporting the American government and receiving recognition for Black American inequalities. At the beginning of the war, French African soldiers allowed for reflections over Black American inequalities versus

interpretations of Africans in the French military and society. Black Americans understood that France had colonial racial policies that used cultural and biological racism to suppress its colonies. What journalists identified in France were small glimpses of egalitarian principles, even if they were not entirely perfect. Africans could become officers and allowed the respect of one, but were not allowed to command men and instead were placed directly under a white French officer. This meant that French authorities argued that race was more important than rank. The desperation of French authorities in 1914 allowed the intermingling of Africans and white Frenchmen which created an image of acceptance and citizenship. This was not the case. France's sheer desperation throughout the war resulted in the increase of African troops in France. The French revolution of 1789 established the principles of *liberté*, *egalité*, and *fraternité* but during World War I, did not want to provide these rights to colonials. In reality, authorities were concerned with maintaining colonial rule and barring Africans from learning French, gaining citizenship, or mingling with white French women.

Journalists openly rejected French colonialism, but when considering American racial intolerance, it was easy to find similarities and differences between France and the United States. The United States subjected Black Americans to racial profiling by determining them inferior to white Americans and therefore justifying a segregated and discriminated society. Biological and cultural racism were present in France. The French sought to bar Africans from upholding French customs and laws implementing policies that limited them from obtaining the opportunity for social advancement. What resulted in France was the idea that Africans were incapable of being civilized or creating sovereign states in Africa. Despite these racial stereotypes, some Black Americans left the United States for France or participated in political activism in the post-war years. Journalists created a collective that interpretation impacted their viewer bases'

understanding of domestic and international policies. Though France was not a perfect egalitarian nation and limited the inclusion of Africans in the military, journalists showed that a limited civic advancement was better than no advancement. In the United States, such representations of France affected how Black Americans sought to redefine and chastise American democracy.

In the United States, the failings of the American Reconstruction government in 1877 saw a sharp reversal where white politicians sought ways to bar Black Americans from achieving equality. The result was by World War I, the intermingling of white and Black Americans was life-threatening, especially when considering the intermingling of white women and Black men. Black Americans were unable to access officer schools at West Point or Annapolis. American society segregated people based on skin tone, implemented Jim Crow Laws, lynched, and discriminated against Black Americans. During the war, government officials viewed the military as similar to civilian life, segregating military units and placing white officers in command. The result created a society that allowed Black Americans to be "American" in regard to serving their country but prevented basic rights promised as U.S. citizens. When journalists discussed France compared to the United States, Black Americans understood France was not a perfect egalitarian state, but what they saw was a possibility for a racially tolerant future. The result allowed Black editors to exaggerate French republican principles of *liberté*, *egualité*, and *fraternité* that envision civil advancement no matter how big or small within the United States. The combination of a perceived joyful French citizenry at the presence of Africans, the praise by French commanders, the appearance of social and military advancement, and the portrayal of France as an advocate for Africans made it simple for Black American editors to exaggerate France's image as egalitarian.

During the war, President Wilson's proclamation to defend the nation's democratic principles was rooted in white supremacy. He failed to recognize that all Americans, regardless of ethnicity, protected the nation despite the racial hierarchies. This failure included white American politicians and citizens who failed to acknowledge how the perception of American democracy was dominated by white supremacy. In their failure, it allowed France to become romanticized by Black editorials and, ultimately, Black American communities to challenge American society. By the war's end, journalists resisted the government when President Wilson's proclamation failed to extend democracy to Black Americans. As a result, they continued showing support for France and its political system in the post-war years. For example, two Black editorials, the *Broad Ax* and *Monitor,* spoke of the Pan African Congress meeting in London and Paris in 1922. The editor of the *Broad Ax* believed France would support Black equality stating on February 4, 1922, that:

> France shall be our spokesman among white powers. When on the next occasion a colored nation, whether Asiatic or African, demands as a principle, say, of the League of Nations, the recognition of racial equality, and when Mr. Wilson, as the protagonist of democracy, chooses to oppose that principle, then France shall stand upon it.[212]

In the war's aftermath, journalists organized support for equal opportunities in the United States and abroad. As the news spread about the organization of a conference to achieve support for labor changes, France was inevitably brought up regarding how the French viewed Africans. The *Broad Ax* stated, "the French Negro is first a Frenchman and second a Negro."[213] The editor continued by suggesting that France "draws no color line."[214] Several white organizations supported the NAACP against the U.S. government's failure to provide promises during the war. Organizations such as the NAACP, the English Anti-Slavery Society, and the English Labor

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[212] "The Negro Conquest of France," *The Broad Ax*, February 4, 1922, 2.
[213] "The Negro Conquest of France," *The Broad Ax*, February 4, 1922, 2.
[214] "The Negro Conquest of France," *The Broad Ax*, February 4, 1922, 2.

Party united to prevent lynching and "the removal of the color line whether in England or any other country," the *Monitor* stated.[215]

The justice that Black American communities sought failed to receive attention from the U.S. government. The inequality experienced during and after the war left an unjust perception of American society. The nationalism the U.S. government demanded from Black editors only armed the nation with supporting itself, not addressing the demands of Black Americans. World War I allowed journalists to manipulate Black Americans' understanding of the racial hierarchies within a white American society by creating an exaggerated depiction of French egalitarianism. While they recognized that France was not promoting egalitarian ideals, specific images and language pushed Black American communities to think deeply of their role during and after the war in society. It is easy for American society to forget the war when the nation lost little in the conflict, but the scar it left on Black American communities was immense. Black editors wanted to use an exaggerated notion of French equality to challenge discrimination within a white American democracy, helping to encourage Black American activism in the post-war era.

[215] "Pan African Congress Will Uphold France," *The Monitor*, September 29, 1921, 1.

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