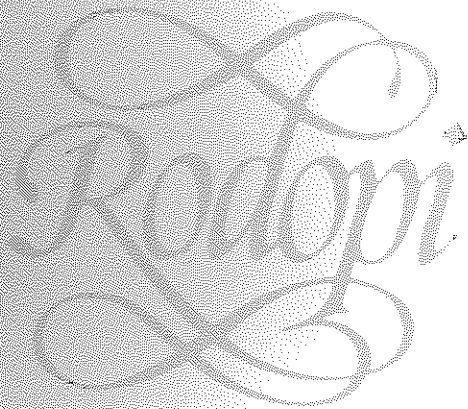


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FRENCH AND AMERICAN RACIAL STEREOTYPES
DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Jennifer D. Keene

ABSTRACT: Because of African-Americans' positive experiences in France during World War I, Americans came to believe that France was a country without racial prejudice. A quick look at the experiences of West African troops calls this conventional conclusion into question. Both the Americans and the French worried that the war would disrupt the racial status quo, and moved to limit the ability of their respective black populations to advance their civil rights during the war. The question still remains, however: why did the French treat African-Americans so well? The French had several stereotypes to choose from when meeting African-American soldiers. These stereotypes included their own view that West African soldiers were savage, child-like, and loyal; white American claims of African-American inferiority; the American view that France was a society without racial prejudice; and concerns about how America's wealth and power would affect France. Over time, the views of France as an egalitarian country and African-Americans as representing the best American qualities of bravery, courage, and wealth overshadowed the others. In large part, this transformation came about because of the paradoxical results of internal policing in the American Army. By heavily monitoring its black soldiers, the American Army unintentionally turned these troops into ideal visitors in the eyes of French civilians. These civilians, in turn, enthusiastically accepted African-Americans' claim that France was a color-blind society that (unlike the United States) lived up to its ideals of fraternity, equality, and liberty.

In 1919, the civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois heavily promoted France as the model color-blind society. 'For bleeding France and what she means and has meant and will mean to us [...] we fought gladly', Du Bois told readers of *The Crisis*, the journal he edited for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.¹ To dispel the criticism following his controversial 1918 editorial urging African-Americans to 'forget our special grievances and close our ranks' with white Americans for the duration of the war, Du Bois needed something

¹ *The Crisis* 18 (May, 1919): 13.

in the dismal war record of discrimination to justify his call to arms.² Their wartime service had indeed brought something important to the struggle for civil rights, Du Bois contended in 'An Essay Toward a History of the Black Man in the Great War'. For the first time, African-American soldiers 'saw a democracy which simply could not understand color prejudice.'³ African-American soldiers never wavered in their commitment to the war, despite the abuses heaped on them by white America. 'Why? Because side by side with this treatment on the part of their own countrymen came the courtesy, the kindness and the utter lack of prejudice among the French', Du Bois wrote in another article.⁴

Du Bois was voicing a conventional post-war conclusion. The contrast between a racist America and an enlightened France became the organizing principle for a myriad of African-American soldier memoirs as well as the popular book-length histories by Emmett J. Scott and Charles Williams.⁵ French citizens readily agreed with the sentiment that racial equality prevailed in their country. Facing their first anxieties about America's emergence as a world power, French commentators evaluating the American economic and cultural model never failed to remark the Americans were racist, the French were not.⁶ The view of a color-blind France gained strength as black intellectuals, artists, and musicians cultivated Paris as a refuge from American racism in the

² Ibid., 16 (July, 1918): 111. For defenses of 'Close Ranks' during the war see, 'A Philosophy in Time of War', *ibid.*, 16 (August 1918): 164-65 and 'Our Special Grievances', *ibid.*, 16 (September 1918): 216-17. For a recent controversy over Du Bois's motivation for writing this editorial see Mark Ellis, 'Closing Ranks and "Seeking Honors": W.E.B. Du Bois in World War I', *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 96-124. William Jordan, 'The Damnable Dilemma': African-American Accommodation and Protest during World War I', *Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995): 1562-1583. Mark Ellis, 'W.E.B. Du Bois and the Formation of Black Opinion in World War I: A Commentary on "The Damnable Dilemma"', *Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995): 1584-1590.

³ *The Crisis* 18 (June 1919): 65.

⁴ Ibid., 17 (March 1919): 218-223. See also, draft copy of 'The Black Man in the Revolution of 1914-1918', box 57, Du Bois Papers, Fisk University (hereafter, Fisk).

⁵ Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (Chicago, 1919). Charles H. Williams, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers* (Boston, 1923). For a list of personal narratives see Arthur Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I* (New York, 1996), 254-256.

⁶ Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (U of California P, 1993), 1-14.

twenties. Historians also have repeatedly attributed the positive experiences of African-American troops overseas to the lack of racial prejudices in French society.⁷

The wartime racial dynamic, however, reflected more than a simple meeting between racism and egalitarianism. An examination of stereotypes concerning West African soldiers quickly undermines the accepted explanation that racial prejudice had no place in French society. Instead, the French had a range of stereotypes to select from when coming into contact with African-Americans. These stereotypes included their own propaganda images of the West African soldier as savage, child-like, and loyal; warnings from white Americans of African-Americans' criminal tendencies; the American view that France was a society without racial prejudice; plus both generous and ungenerous French notions of how America's wealth and power would affect France. Over time, however, the views of France as an egalitarian country and African-Americans as representing the best American qualities of bravery, courage, and wealth overshadowed the others. A closer examination of the wartime experience reveals some surprising reasons for this turn of events.

The American declaration of war against Germany in 1917 created an opportunity for thousands of ordinary Frenchmen and Americans to meet, and stereotypical images understandably permeated the initial encounter.⁸ When American soldiers arrived abroad, they viewed

⁷ The classic works on the African-American soldier experience are Barbeau and Henri, *op. cit.* and Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York, 1986). The conclusion that French color-blindness alone explains African-American soldiers' positive experiences in France is also maintained in the standard American and French works on America's wartime experience including David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York, 1980); Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York, 1991); and André Kaspi, *Le Temps des Américains: le concours américain à la France en 1917-1918* (Paris, 1976). Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African-Americans in the City of Light* (New York, 1996) acknowledges the presence of racial prejudice in France, but argues that the French viewed African-Americans as wealthy, temporary visitors and therefore adopted a 'color-blind' attitude when dealing with Americans.

⁸ For a fuller discussion of the Franco-American wartime relationship see Jennifer D. Keene, 'Uneasy Alliances: French Military Intelligence and the American Army during the First World War', *Intelligence and National Security*, 13 (Spring 1998): 18-36.

themselves as the designated saviors of France. The American Army taught its new recruits that they came from the only nation capable of reversing the trench stalemate along the Western front. The public euphoria that greeted their arrival did little to dissuade them otherwise. Having suppressed the mutinies which swept through the French Army in 1917, French military officials built up flagging troop morale by pointing to the immense aid America was poised to offer.⁹ With satisfaction, French postal censors noted a new buoyancy in French soldiers' letters. 'More and more the Kaiser must curse Christopher Columbus's discovery', exclaimed one French soldier to his family as he enthusiastically awaited the Americans' arrival.¹⁰

On both sides of the Atlantic, however, raising expectations so high carried significant risks. Constant American propaganda focusing on the dire situation of France, warned a French official in Washington, might backfire and convince the Americans they had entered too late to make a difference.¹¹ On the French side, optimists unrealistically expected the American Army to take over the bulk of the fighting, thus giving French soldiers a chance to rest.¹² The romantic image of *vainant* American soldiers selflessly dying to re-pay France for her help during the American Revolution lost some of its luster as civilians and soldiers faced the reality of fighting the war together. Instead of thanking them, American soldiers complained, French civilians seemed more interested in extorting money from them. 'Life in France for the American soldier meant marching in the dirt and mud, living in cellars in filth, being wet and cold and fighting', the Chief of Staff of the 4th Division noted at the

⁹ 'Sujets des causeries que les officiers doivent faire aux soldats', June 5, 1917, série 16N, 2e bureau, Section de renseignements aux armées (SRA); Grand quartier général, carton 2404, Service historique de l'Armée de terre, Château de Vincennes, Paris, France (hereafter 16N, SHAT).

¹⁰ Commission de contrôle postal militaire, Sept. 1, 1918, 2° Armée, 16N1397, SHAT.

¹¹ Haut-Commissaire de la République Française aux États-Unis, Rapport sur l'organisation et l'activité de la Direction des Services d'Etudes et d'Informations, Jan. 21, 1918, série 7N, Bureau spécial franco-américain, carton 1717, Service historique de l'Armée de terre, Château de Vincennes, Paris (hereafter 7N, SHAT).

¹² Bulletin confidentiel #3 résumant la situation morale aux armées dans la semaine du 15 au 21 juillet 1917, 16N2405, SHAT. Les américains et la guerre, Oct. 28, 1917, série 17N, Mission militaire française près l'armée américaine, carton 47, Service historique de l'Armée de terre, Château de Vincennes, Paris (hereafter 17N, SHAT).

close of the war, 'He had come to help France in the hour of distress and he was glad he came but these French people did not seem to appreciate him at all.'¹³ French intelligence officers noted a distinct cooling of civilian opinion toward American troops as well. 'If the civilian population is enthusiastic upon the arrival of American troops,' reported one French intelligence officer, 'it isn't anymore after a few days of contact.'¹⁴ The gracious reception American soldiers received in Germany when the Allies occupied the Rhineland prompted even more unfavorable judgments about French civilians. The Germans, many soldiers attested, ungrudgingly offered them good meals and comfortable beds, charged reasonable prices for wine, and treated them like colleagues rather than unwelcome visitors.

The rioting which took place in Brest on June 28, 1919, the day Germany accepted the Versailles Peace Treaty, starkly illustrated the unraveling of the Franco-American relationship. In marked contrast to the American-flag waving crowds that had greeted American troops two years earlier, French sailors treated Second Lieutenant Charles Ryan to the cry, 'la guerre [est] finie, Americans get out tout de suite.' French sailors pulled down American flags in one section of town and the ensuing mêlée caused casualties on both sides. American soldiers attacked the French sailors, prompting residents to drop bottles and rocks on them from second-story windows.¹⁵

¹³ Acting Chief of Staff, G-2, 4th Division, to acting chief of staff, G-2, GHQ, May 17, 1919, file #10314-414 (25) and Naval Intelligence report, Feb. 26, 1919, file #10314-414 (11); Security Classified Correspondence and Reports, 1917-41 (Entry 65); Office of the Director of Intelligence General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165; National Archives, College Park, Md. Lieutenant Colonel C.H. Goddard, 'A Study of Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I', (July 1942), 6-7, file #7200-E pt. 2, Thomas File; Records of the Historical Section (Entry 310); War College Division and War Plans Division, 1900-42; Textual Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165; National Archives, College Park, Md. Memorandum for the chief of staff, Jan. 5, 1918, file #10124-83; General Correspondence, 1903-19 (Entry 296); War College Division and War Plans Division, 1900-42; Textual Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165; National Archives, College Park, Md. (Hereafter 296/165, NA).

¹⁴ Rapport récapitulatif pour la période du 1^{er} au 30 avril 1918, Service de Sûreté, Mission militaire française près l'armée américaine, 17N47, SHAT.

¹⁵ 2nd Lt. Charles Brady Ryan, June 29, 1919 diary entry, Charles Brady Ryan Papers, Bentley Historical Library, U of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Such brawls between Americans and French lay far in the future on the spring day that Jeanne DeBarges's village assembled to welcome their first contingent of American troops. The villagers, DeBarges recalled, were waiting anxiously when they finally perceived 'far off down the white road, the first ranks of the approaching allied troops as they march steadily nearer. They come out. Oh! What a surprise! They are blacks!'¹⁶ Their astonishment momentarily created a dilemma in the village over how to receive them. The village, DeBarges noted, knew there were African colonial troops in France. 'But these soldiers are from America [...] How can these dark faced troops come from America!', the villagers wondered. Their expectations of well-paid and vigorous American soldiers competed momentarily with images of African savagery. One woman told DeBarges 'she is beginning to feel sick at the stomach, with a smile I replied reassuringly to this lady, quiet, they don't eat human flesh.' The exemplary conduct of these African-American troops during their stay fulfilled DeBarges's prophesy and she happily noted in an article to a local French newspaper that 'the inhabitants are not only convinced that there is nothing of the savage about these men but on the contrary no soldier could be found who was more correct.'

These soldiers were fortunate to be the first Americans to enter the town. In the towns where white Americans preceded African-Americans, they often encouraged French villagers' fears by telling them that African-Americans would rape their daughters, had tails, and were heathens.¹⁷ Such warnings permeated every level of exchange between the two armies, from drunken enlisted men in village cafes to official meetings between General Staff officers in the finest château. Lieutenant Colonel Paul H. Clark, an American liaison officer assigned to the French General Staff, straightforwardly asked a French General Staff officer if he did not think 'that in having Black troops in your army of occupation that you run some danger. The Black man is more animal than we whitemen and is less likely to observe some of the

¹⁶ Du Bois, 'The Wounded World', unpublished manuscript, chapter 14, 67-68, box 57, Du Bois Papers, Fisk.

¹⁷ Louis H. Pomtock to Du Bois, April 26, 1919, reel 8/43, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, U of Massachusetts-Amherst (hereafter UM-A). Du Bois, 'The Wounded World', chapter 14, box 55, Du Bois Papers, Fisk.

conventions.'¹⁸ Southern American enlisted men delivered the same message when they advised French civilians to stay away from African-American soldiers who would interpret even a simple hand-shake from a French woman as an invitation to go to bed with her.¹⁹

White American officers and soldiers intended to instruct the French in the reality of racial differences, but as DeBarges's account reveals, they did not introduce an association between black skin and savagery into French culture. When West African troops arrived in France, the public enthusiastically welcomed the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as exactly the kind of ruthless fighters France needed.²⁰ 'Cut off the heads of the Germans', shouted one crowd to an arriving contingent.²¹ French Army officials were delighted to learn that African troops terrified German soldiers, who feared beheading and disembowelment if they fell into the hands of African troops.²²

The French métropole government did not fret openly over the possibility that their African subjects might use their military training to lead a future revolt against French colonial rule. Instead, the French intended to profit from the primitive warrior instinct that they attributed

¹⁸ Lt. Col. Paul H. Clark to Gen. John J. Pershing, Commander in Chief, American Expeditionary Forces, June 5, 1919, Paul H. Clark Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The French colonel replied that because the West African troops were well-disciplined, he doubted rape would become a problem. Moreover, it was their right as victorious troops to stand 'guard over the defeated enemy'.

¹⁹ Maj. Adam E. Patterson to Du Bois, quoted in 'The Wounded World', chapter 14, 69, box 57, Du Bois, Fisk.

²⁰ The French West African force totaled 200,000 troops during the war, including 161,000 conscripted between 1914-1918. Of these, approximately 140,000 troops came to France where 31,000 were killed. Only 7,200 were originaires (Senegalese who were French citizens), the rest were colonial subjects. Although all non-citizen troops were called *tirailleur sénégalais*, the soldiers came from all the territories—the countries today of Senegal, Mali, Niger, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, and Guinea - which collectively formed French West Africa. Joe Lunn, 'Les Races Guerrières': Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 34(4): 517-536.

²¹ Bakary Diallo, *Force Bonté* (Paris, 1926), 113.

²² Diallo, *ibid*, 123. Note de Service, Oct. 19, 1918, 100 Division Coloniale, 7N2121, SHAT. The German government protested the use of colonial troops in the European theater as contrary to the rules of civilized warfare. Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en A.O.F., 1914-1919* (Paris, 1982), 345-348.

to their African soldiers.²³ Testaments to the great West African military races often filled the halls of the French National Assembly to justify continued recruitment in the colonies.²⁴ In the view of the French General Staff, under the tutelage of white officers who understood them, the 134,000 West African troops who came to France 'were particularly suited for assaults and counter-attacks.'²⁵

In the United States, by contrast, Southerners publicly expressed fears about the domestic consequences of training large numbers of African-Americans to handle firearms.²⁶ They successfully convinced military officials that the risk was too great. The army subsequently revised its manpower plans and reduced the number of African-American men assigned to combat units. As a result, eighty percent of the 200,000 African-Americans who came to France were non-combatants.²⁷

The French view of the West African as a natural warrior persisted throughout the war, despite the efforts of colonial administrators to modify it. The Senegalese people had a violent history, the French Lieutenant Governor in Dakar acknowledged, but 'most of them suffered greatly from these internal wars of yesteryear: they are too happy today to be able to plant and harvest in peace and security to ever think of voluntarily becoming tirailleurs.'²⁸ This transformation into a peace loving people signaled the success of the French civilizing mission, the Lieutenant Governor from Côte d'Ivoire asserted, noting ironically 'it

²³ Note au sujet de l'utilisation des troupes coloniales indigènes, no date, 7N2121, SHAT.

²⁴ Proposition de loi sur le recrutement d'une armée indigène, Députés Pierre Masse, Maurice Ajan and Maurice Bernard, Sept. 16, 1915, 7N2121, SHAT. L'Inspecteur Général des Colonies Picanon, chef de la mission d'inspection en Afrique Occidentale Française (hereafter AOF), à Monsieur le Ministre des Colonies, Paris, Nov. 27, 1916; Affaires Politique (hereafter AP), carton 3036, dossier 1, Archives d'Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France (hereafter AOM).

²⁵ Présidence du Conseil, Office des Missions, à Commissaire Français, New York, June 18, 1918, 7N2240, SHAT. This statement was in response to an American request about how the French employed black troops.

²⁶ Memorandum for the secretary of war, Aug. 24, 1917, file # 8142-17; 296/165, NA.

²⁷ Another 180,000 African-Americans served in the United States during World War I. Nalty, op.cit., 112.

²⁸ Lieutenant Gouverneur du Sénégal à Gouverneur Général de l'AOF, Dakar, Sept. 10, 1915, 9; AP, carton 3034; dossier 2, AOM.

would be surprising if one reproached us for having worked too well in this connection.'²⁹ Rather than exciting the male population's assumed warrior nature, stories from returned war veterans created panic in villages near Ouagadougou during the 1917 recruitment drive. As they made their way back to their native villages, a circle administrator reported, former soldiers 'gave lectures on the war in Europe. Their terrifying accounts, full of poison gas, machine guns, monster cannons, devastating airplanes, were perhaps not well understood by the listeners, but they did little to incite the warlike enthusiasm of the young people called or likely to be called into service and after these talks many of them fled to the Gold Coast [a British colony] to escape the call.'³⁰ Inspector Picanon, who came as an unbiased observer with no ties to the colony or to the army, confirmed these conclusions after touring French West Africa. 'With rare exceptions, these populations have with regard to military service, contrary to what we had thought, a marked loathing' which, when coupled with the fear of leaving one's country and never returning, turned into 'an absolute horror, expressed through this exodus of inhabitants from entire villages when the next recruitment is announced', faking illnesses to avoid selection and numerous desertions among those taken.³¹

Because few métropole French questioned the warrior instincts of West African soldiers, these troops spent long periods fighting along the front lines of the West Front. When these troops were sent to the warmer Southern provinces to spend the winter months, they found French villagers taking precautions against the supposed savages suddenly thrust in their midst.³² Although considered valuable troops to have on the battlefield, no Frenchman wanted uncivilized barbarians roaming throughout his village. A range of commentators tried to assure the

²⁹ Lieutenant Gouverneur de la Côte d'Ivoire à Gouverneur Général de l'AOF, Dakar, Dec. 18, 1915, AP, carton 3034; dossier 5, AOM.

³⁰ Rapport Politique, Haut-Sénégal-Niger 3ème Trimestre 1917, AP, carton 534, dossier 1, AOM.

³¹ Picanon's report of Nov. 7, 1916 is quoted in July, 1917, Gouverneur Général de l'AOF, Dakar à M. Maginot, Ministre des Colonies, Paris; AP, carton 534, dossier 1, AOM. For similar sentiments, see also Nov. 27, 1916, L'Inspecteur Général des Colonies Picanon, chef de la mission d'inspection en AOF à Monsieur le Ministre des Colonies, Paris; carton 3036, dossier 1, AOM.

³² Lucie Cousturier, quoted in Michel, op. cit., 394.

public that they had little to fear from African soldiers, whose obedient and childlike natures made them easy to control. 'The order from a white, the order from a chief is summarized for the black in this fateful phrase which he repeats endlessly, "it is duty". When "it is duty", that is enough for him. He does not argue, he does not try to understand. He would kill his father, mother, wife, children to obey a received order. It is not his fault, a higher will bends his own', wrote Alphonse Ségé, a French officer who commanded West African troops during the war.³³ Another French officer admitted at first he found the West Africans repugnant, but found himself unable to resist their childlike appeal for long, especially after watching them buy the newspaper regularly like 'the grown-ups', and then study it intensely upside down.³⁴ Quickly, the prevailing stereotypical image presented West Africans as simple and unsophisticated, irrefutably devoted to France and eager to please.

African-American soldiers and commentators ignored the various French stereotypes of West African soldiers as savages or big children, but they embraced the celebrated image of the loyal African. 'It is not to be marveled at that they [Africans] died so bravely for France', noted Edward Snyder in his commemorative volume on the war experience entitled *Colored Soldiers in France*, 'for "they loved her, because she first loved them."³⁵ Their own political agenda and personal experiences in France gave African-Americans little reason to challenge French propaganda that emphasized the willingness of West African soldiers to spill their blood for France and the greatness of French democracy for giving them this chance. Moreover, African-Americans heard a steady stream of patriotic pronouncements from black deputies representing France's African and Caribbean colonies in the National Assembly, which attested to the love colonial subjects felt for France.³⁶

³³ Alphonse Ségé, *Les Noirs, d'après des documents officiels* (Paris, 1919), 26-35, quote from 39. Léon Bocquet et Ernest Hosten, *Un fragment de l'Épopée sénégalaise, les tirailleurs noirs sur l'Yser* (Brussels and Paris, 1918), 8.

³⁴ Léon Gaillet, *Coulibaly, les Sénégalais sur la terre de France* (Paris, 1917), 16-17, 26.

³⁵ Edward L. Snyder, *Colored Soldiers in France: A Pictorial Study of Their Part in the World War 1914-1918* (Copyright by Edward L. Snyder, nd), copy in box 63, Du Bois Papers, Fisk.

³⁶ For examples see debates over 1915 law recognizing originaire rights as French citizens in AP, carton 534; dossier 18, AOM and reports from Blaise Diagne's

Du Bois relied heavily on the Ségé memoirs for his own unpublished writings on West African soldiers. Without comment, Du Bois incorporated Ségé's stories of West African soldiers' stoicism when wounded, devotion to their officers, the sense of camaraderie whites and blacks discovered on the battlefield, their tenacity in battle, and their correct demeanor in French villages. In his memoir, Ségé also raised, then dismissed, the question of how a recently conquered people could be willing within a matter of years to fight and die for France. Du Bois relied on Ségé's conclusion that 'there was no mistake about the enthusiasm for the French cause, and this could only have been created by years of sympathetic French rule in West Africa'.³⁷ The notes and anecdotes that a research assistant took for Du Bois from Ségé, however, at best revealed a selective reading of Ségé's portrayal of African soldiers. The praise that Ségé bestowed on a French hospital director for curing wounded West African soldiers of the delusion that they had the same rights as white Frenchmen should have given Du Bois, or at least the research assistant, some hesitancy over unequivocally championing Ségé as an example of French egalitarianism. Exposed to an admiring French public and sympathetic French nurses in mixed-race hospitals, the troops in question, according to Ségé, 'expect to be treated like Europeans; they look at other blacks with pity, if not mistrust; they let their hair grow long, make a part on the side, and refuse to eat native cuisine [...] If one does not give them satisfaction, they do not hesitate to threaten to appeal to higher authorities. A sergeant went as far as to get the address of M. Poincaré [the president of the republic] with the goal of writing him!'³⁸ After these 'intoxicated' troops spent some time in an all-West African hospital in Menton, Ségé noted approvingly, the 'cure of re-senegalization' helped them quickly recover their native habits and attitudes.

The challenge to métropole claims that West African soldiers eagerly picked up arms to defend France came, not from African-Americans, but from French colonial administrators. 'We can not really ask these

1918 troop recruiting mission in West Africa in AP, carton 3036; dossier 11, AOM.

³⁷ Quote from translation of Ségé, 'The Senegalese at Berry-au-Bac', in notes for Wounded World draft, chapter 4, box 54, Du Bois Papers, Fisk. For original views, see Ségé, op. cit., 26-35, 47-48.

³⁸ Ségé, op. cit., 246-247.

people, who are not fighting like us for their home, their land, and who we send to die for their conquerors of yesterday and their present and future masters to express the same enthusiasm' as French citizens for the war, noted the Lieutenant Governor of Côte d'Ivoire.³⁹ These dissenting French administrators undoubtedly had their own reasons for criticizing continued recruitment – the desire to protect their workforce and their political control, and to fulfill their self-designated role as protectors of their African charges. Nonetheless, they raised important questions about the prevailing stereotypes surrounding West African soldiers. In reality, patriotic appeals rarely encouraged West African men to join the military. African men joined the army because they were conscripted, and the colonial administration used a mixture of force and monetary incentives to secure the cooperation of village chiefs in the recruitment process. When Blaise Diagne, the first African to represent the *originaires* (urban Senegalese with French citizenship rights) in the French Chamber of Deputies, undertook a recruiting mission for the French government in 1918, he went armed with a range of benefits to offer the new recruits selected by village chiefs to meet the required French manpower quotas. Despite his own rhetoric to the contrary, Diagne knew it would take more than love of France to head off resistance to the fourth recruitment drive in as many years. Instead, the French government gave Diagne bonuses to distribute to cooperating chiefs and recruits' families, exempted recruits and their families from serving on forced labor gangs, and promised generous veteran benefits.⁴⁰

African-Americans, however, did not question the motivation of West African subjects to participate in the war. Instead, African-Americans sought to identify with and benefit from the image of the valiant black soldier who fought for a society that knew no racial prejudice. After the war, Du Bois published an official French report that he believed revealed the efforts of white Americans to foul France

³⁹ Lieutenant Gouverneur de la Côte d'Ivoire à Gouverneur Général de l'AOF, Dakar, Sept. 4, 1915; AP, carton 3034, dossier 2, AOM.

⁴⁰ Décret par le président de la république française, Jan. 11, 1918, accordant des avantages pécuniaires aux indigènes appelés sous les drapeaux et à leur famille, AP, carton 533, dossier 1, AOM. Circulaire ministérielle relative au recrutement dans chacun des groupes des Colonies de l'AOF et de l'Afrique Équatoriale française, Jan. 14, 1918, AP, carton 3036, dossier 11, AOM.

with the poison of American racial prejudice. The document in question was an evaluation of Franco-American race relations, written by the French officer in charge of the French liaison mission to the American Army. 'The American point of view on the "Negro question" may appear questionable to the French mind,' Colonel Linard wrote to French Army Headquarters, '[but] American opinion is unanimous'.⁴¹ The large number of blacks in the United States, Linard explained, 'creates for the white race of the Republic a danger' that racial mixing would lead to racial mongrelization. 'As this danger does not exist for the French race, the French public has become used to treating the "black" with familiarity and indulgence.' In his analysis, Linard took care to note that American whites were particularly 'outraged by all public intimacy between white women and blacks'. For the sake of preserving American goodwill, Linard recommended that French officers and civilians maintain a social distance from American blacks. This analysis went to each commandant in the French Army, then the État-Major abruptly canceled it two days later with an order that contained the scribbled notation, 'get Linard'.

According to Du Bois, American officials obviously pressured Linard to make this outrageous request. '[N]o one for a moment supposes that he [Linard] was the author of it', Du Bois noted.⁴² The Senegalese Deputy Diagne, however, questioned whether the Americans bore sole responsibility for the attitudes expressed in the Linard circular.⁴³ Rather than accepting Linard's claim that he simply was advising the French Army to respect American racial prejudices, Diagne seized on Linard's comment that 'the familiarity between white women and black men is furthermore profoundly regretted by our experienced colonizers' who blamed such amicable relations for the 'considerable loss of the white race's prestige.' Diagne demanded an investigation and suggested Linard was 'hiding behind "a unanimous American opinion"' to slight

⁴¹ Au sujet des troupes noires américaines, Aug. 7, 1918. For original see 7N2257, SHAT. For version published in the United States, see *The Crisis* 18 (May 1919): 16-17.

⁴² Du Bois, 'The Wounded World', ch. 14, 74, box 57, Du Bois Papers, Fisk.

⁴³ Blaise Diagne, commissaire général des effectifs coloniaux à M. le Ministre de la Guerre, Nov. 16, 1918, série 6N, Fonds Clemenceau, carton 97, Service historique de l'Armée de terre, Château de Vincennes, Paris.

West African soldiers. This was not the first, nor the last, angry letter Diagne wrote during the course of the war to challenge racist statements from French officials he believed either directly or indirectly insulted the West African soldiers dying for France on the battlefield.

Diagne voiced a legitimate concern. Linard's memorandum reflected more than American racial attitudes, it also revealed the colonial prejudices Diagne understood so well. Throughout the war, colonial administrators and French military officials worried about the long-term effects of intimate social contacts between colonial troops and the métropole French population. 'Their outlook is altering as they live in our presence', the Minister of the Colonies informed the Governor General in Dakar and 'the prestige of whites does not seem to be the better for it.'⁴⁴ The Minister drew his conclusions from inspection reports that detailed how French women who 'amuse themselves by spoiling' West African soldiers were closing the traditional distance maintained between the races in the colonies.⁴⁵ In general, female nurses lavished too much attention on wounded colonial troops, complained Justin Godart, the under-Secretary for Military Health. French women, he noted, embarked on a dangerous path when they started exchanging letters, and even worse photographs, with their former patients. These relations, he claimed, gave rise to 'self-important arrogance, which manifested itself in numerous acts of serious indiscipline' and a reluctance among colonial troops to return to the front.⁴⁶ Thanks to this attention, these troops 'consider that all that is done for them is their due and persuade themselves they are truly, they alone, the heroes who saved France from this foreign invasion.'

To ensure that these inter-racial relationships remained only wartime adventures, the Justice Ministry secretly instructed mayors to impede marriages between French women and colonial soldiers or workers,

⁴⁴ Ministre des Colonies à M. le Gouverneur Général de l'AOF, Dec. 29, 1916, Série D, Affaires Militaire, sous-série 4D, personnel militaire (1779-1920) (hereafter AM, 4D), carton 70, Archives du Gouvernement Général de l'AOF, Archives Nationales, Dakar, Senegal (hereafter, ANS).

⁴⁵ Service de Surveillance & d'Assistance des Militaires Sénégalais des Camps de Fréjus, St. Raphael, Nov. 25, 1916, AM, 4D, carton 70, ANS.

⁴⁶ Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat du Service de Santé Militaire, l'état d'esprit des militaires indigènes musulmans, Dec. 7, 1915, AP, carton 3034, dossier 3, AOM.

which the military also did its best to discourage. '[F]or reasons upon which I believe it is useless to insist, they can only undermine our prestige among the natives,' the Justice Minister noted, before turning to the importance of protecting French women.⁴⁷ There was no reason, Justice Ministry officials agreed, for a French woman to ruin her life by marrying a man who undoubtedly would exercise his native right to accumulate other wives and would never earn enough money to support even the poorest European woman appropriately. Wartime sexual dalliances were one thing, but even if these liaisons produced children, the French government could see no good reason for marriages to occur.⁴⁸

Both Americans and the French officials feared the long-term political consequences of inter-racial contact. On the American side, General Dennis Nolan warned that returning African-American soldiers intended to combat 'any white effort, especially in the South, to reestablish white ascendancy' and to maintain 'the social equality between the races as established in France.'⁴⁹ On the French side, J.P. Trouillet succinctly noted in the newspaper *La Dépêche Coloniale*, 'our entire rule in the African continent rests on the prestige of the white race.'⁵⁰ The Americans resorted to heavy policing of their African-American troop population, then to racial riots and lynchings in 1919, to ensure that the racial status quo emerged unscathed from the war. The French worked behind the scenes more secretly and quietly to limit West African soldiers' exposure to potentially subversive influences by sending them to hospitals reserved for colonial troops without female nurses, restricting their leaves and isolating West African soldiers' winter training camps from civilian populations in the Midi and Gironde.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Le Garde des Sceaux, Ministère de la Justice (René Viviani) à M. Le Procureur Général, Feb. 2, 1917, AP, carton 192, dossier 5, AOM.

⁴⁸ Ministre de la Guerre, Direction des Troupes Coloniales, Service de l'organisation des Travailleurs Coloniaux en France, à M. Le Ministre des Colonies, Service de l'Indochine et Services militaires, June 16, 1917, AP, carton 192, dossier 5, AOM.

⁴⁹ Gen. Dennis E. Nolan, assistant chief of staff, G-2, AEF, Secret Order, Jan. 31, 1919, 17N46, SHAT.

⁵⁰ J.P. Trouillet, 'Un Nouveau Recrutement en Afrique Occidentale', *La Dépêche Coloniale*, Jan. 22, 1918, (Paris), AP, carton 3036, dossier 11, AOM.

⁵¹ Sous-Secrétariat d'Etat du Service de Santé Militaire, hospitalisation des militaires indigènes sénégalais, March 27, 1916, 7N144, SHAT. Note circulaire relative

Another episode that illustrated the interest of each side in maintaining the racial status quo occurred when the French and Americans discussed removing the black officers serving alongside white officers in one of the four American black regiments assigned to fight with the French Army. In keeping with the prevailing French views concerning West African soldiers, the French General commanding the American units concluded that the American black soldiers at his disposal would make 'excellent attack troops' but worried that in quiet sectors 'the black man, escaping the surveillance of his chiefs, will quickly reassume his habits of laziness and slovenliness which a rapid military instruction has not sufficiently eradicated.' When it came to who should lead these troops into battle, General Mariano Goybet concluded 'the white officer has in him more authority, a greater sense of his responsibilities, and is better suited to command than the black officer.' A month after Goybet came to this independent conclusion, the American Colonel Herschel Tupes asked Goybet to approve his memo asking General John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, to replace the black officers of the 372nd regiment with white officers.⁵² In approving Tupes' request, Goybet turned from drawing on France's experience with its colonial troops to highlighting 'the black question which interests the American people so intensely but which does not concern us.'⁵³ Goybet noted the constant problems caused by the lack of camaraderie between white and black American officers and the blunders French officers made because they could not decipher the complicated racial etiquette demanded by white Americans. When Pershing agreed to stop sending black replacement officers to the regiment, Tupes promptly convened all-white efficiency boards to purge the regiment of its black officers. These boards obligingly judged nearly every black officer called before them as unfit

aux permissions annuelles à accorder aux tirailleurs indigènes, Feb. 26, 1918, 6N97, SHAT. Ministre de la Guerre, analyse: zone de stationnement dans le midi de la France, Oct. 14, 1918, 7N441, SHAT.

⁵² Général Goybet, commandant la 157^e division d'infanterie à M. le Général commandant le 13^e CA, July 18, 1918, 17N76, SHAT. Col. Herschel Tupes, 372nd Infantry to Pershing, Aug. 21, 1918, copy in Du Bois, documents for Wounded World manuscript, chapter 13, box 55, Du Bois Papers, Fisk.

⁵³ Note confidentielle concernant les cadres du 372^e R.I.U.S., Aug. 21, 1918, 17N76, SHAT.

to command combat troops, and recommended transfer to a labor battalion. Morale plummeted in the unit. The rank and file, however, had no knowledge of the secret correspondence circulating within the French Army about their racial ability to lead. Instead, members of this regiment carried home a glowing statement from General Goybet attesting to the 'seven months we have lived as brothers at arms' and the *croix de guerre* awarded by the French government.⁵⁴ The official recognition from the French of their fighting abilities contrasted sharply with memories of Tupes's staged efficiency boards. This episode, therefore, raised no questions for African-Americans soldiers about French color-blindness.

Yet if French racial views and goals sometimes complimented those of the Americans, at other moments they clashed strongly. Unlike in the United States, skin color did not alone determine a man's fate in France. Instead, a black man's nationality also played a role in erecting barriers and opening doors. Welcomed as 'American allies', African-American troops found French soldiers focusing on their embodiment of the very best American characteristics: bravery, discipline, and cordiality.⁵⁵ One French lieutenant felt a sense of relief when his unit received African-American troops. 'At first, getting reinforcements surprised us,' he recalled 'but it made us very happy to think that this was a prelude to the full-scale American effort to help us chase the Germans out of our country.'⁵⁶ Testifying to the acceptance of these men as Americans, many letters written by French troops serving with African-American troops, full of descriptions of their American qualities, did not mention their race at all. This welcome overwhelmed troops who knew how many whites at home doubted their ability to wear an American uniform proudly.

Over the course of the war, however, the majority of French civilians went beyond simply accepting African-American soldiers in their villages in the same manner that they welcomed white Americans.

⁵⁴ General Order, Dec. 15, 1918, General Goybet, 157th French Division, copy in Du Bois, documents for Wounded World manuscript, chapter 13, box 55, Du Bois Papers, Fisk.

⁵⁵ Contrôle postal, 2^eme Armée, Aug. 18, 1918, 16N1397, SHAT.

⁵⁶ Albert Veyrenc, interview in film documentary 'Men of Bronze' (1977) researched, produced and directed by William Miles.

Instead, 'many of the inhabitants of villages in which they [black troops] are stationed declare they like them better than [American] whites', a French military intelligence officer noted with surprise.⁵⁷ Major Adam E. Patterson, who as Judge Advocate of the 92nd Division became the second-highest ranking African-American officer in the AEF, offered an explanation for this partiality. Well-schooled in American racial etiquette, he wrote, African-American troops 'were unobtrusive and always entered the French homes and public places with timidity and never acted or felt at ease until quite sure they were welcome. A French merchant stated to a number of officers in my presence that when a white officer came into his store "he acted like he owned the store and threw the money at him as though he was an object of charity." That the colored soldiers acted like it was a pleasure to trade with him.'⁵⁸

In the spring and summer of 1918, the French mission providing liaison between the two armies received numerous regional reports sharing Patterson's observations of unruly and impolite white American soldiers. French liaison officers, however, also recorded complaints about the comportment of African-American troops. It was natural, the French liaison officer for the 92nd Division wrote, for the population 'to liken these blacks to the soldiers from our African colonies.' But, he complained, the warm welcome given to American black soldiers, 'little used to consideration from whites', led to 'a certain number of incidents: an absolute lack of self-restraint in certain cantonments, coarse propositions to women frequently followed with violence, [and] noisy intrusions at ungodly hours into whore houses'.⁵⁹ The unfolding of relations between American black soldiers and French civilians therefore revealed more than self-discipline on the part of African-American troops. This improving relationship also illustrated the paradoxical results of internal policing within the American Army.

Regardless of the number of complaints lodged concerning the behavior of white troops, French liaison officers noted, 'it seems that the

⁵⁷ Rapport sur les relations entre les militaires américains de la 92^e Division et la population civile française, Aug. 31, 1918, 17N47, SHAT.

⁵⁸ Maj. Adam Paterson quoted in Du Bois, 'The Wounded World', chapter 14, 69, box 57, Du Bois Papers, Fisk.

⁵⁹ Rapport sur les relations entre les militaires américains de la 92^e Division et la population civile française.

officers completely disregard what their men do in the various occupied cantonments.⁶⁰ The contrast with the treatment reserved for black troops was stark. From the *prévôté* of the 92nd Division came the good news that 'thanks to the severity of measures taken by the American commander, the misunderstandings and reported incidents have diminished quite noticeably.'⁶¹ In keeping with their racial stereotypes, American military officials punish infractions committed by black troops severely and at the same time failed to recognize any similarity between the behavior patterns of black and white soldiers. Having warned French inhabitants of the criminal tendencies of the black race, American Army officials smugly concluded that the misbehavior of black troops confirmed the justness of their racial beliefs to the French. 'It is commonly believed among Americans that French people have no objection to Negroes, but this I quickly found was an error', wrote General Robert Lee Bullard, who used the complaints made against the 92nd Division to attack African-American soldiers viciously in his memoirs.⁶² Bullard, and other white observers, however, mistakenly believed that these initial complaints foretold the end of the story.

To those who only saw the behavior of black troops improve as time went by, African-American troops soon appeared as ideal visitors. A steady stream of regulations strictly regulated contact between African-American soldiers and French civilians. African-American soldiers could only visit cafes for limited hours and were forbidden from drinking alcohol, others took a risk if they had a conversation with a white woman or accepted an invitation into a French home.⁶³ Contrary to the impression left by military regulations, however, African-American soldiers and French observers testified that the bond between the two grew strong during the war. 'The shop owners like them better than other troops because they don't experience any problems of payment

⁶⁰ Rapport de la prévôté auprès de la 26^e Division sur les relations entre les soldats américains et la population, Aug. 1, 1918, 17N47, SHAT.

⁶¹ Rapport sur les relations franco-américaines, Mission militaire française près l'armée américaine, prévôté auprès de la 92^e Division, Oct. 1, 1918, 17N47, SHAT.

⁶² Robert Lee Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War* (New York, 1925), 297.

⁶³ Barbeau and Henri, op. cit., 108, 135, 142-143, 167. Chaplain Jos. F. Simpson to Du Bois, June 7, 1919. Louis H. Pomtock to Du Bois, Apr. 26, 1919. Reel 8/43 and 8/927, Du Bois Papers, UM-A.

with them, [while] the bartenders and hotel owners don't endure the same difficulties serving them and kicking them out when closing time arrives,' explained one French investigator.⁶⁴ The enforced discipline of African-American units made them even more appealing to French civilians. The racial warnings of white Americans went unheeded as French civilians finally came into contact with American troops who spent their money freely, respected the French, did not get drunk, and did not damage their property. 'Take back these soldiers and send us some real Americans, black Americans', wrote one village mayor after a group of rowdy white Americans disrupted the town.⁶⁵

Ironically, therefore, the American Army actually helped strengthen the identification of their black soldiers with the American ideal of wealth and vigor by rigorously policing black troops. American Army officials intended to teach the French that black troops had criminal tendencies, but instead they prevented the French from assimilating African-Americans into the prevailing image of the African savage/child or the undisciplined, egotistic, uncouth white American soldier. Along with African-Americans, the French celebrated their ability to withstand pressure from white Americans to cast aside one category of Americans as inherently inferior. One French woman summarized these sentiments nicely in a letter to an African-American officer after the war. 'France feels deeply its debt of gratitude to every American soldier who crossed the sea to aid us in the defense of our homes [...]', Madame Rimlinop wrote to Captain Boutte. 'That there should exist such a widely divergent and so untenable a position as that assumed by some of the Americans of the white race on the question of the equality of their fellow countrymen of darker skin is a painful surprise to every true Frenchman.'⁶⁶

In 1919, Reverend F.J. Grimké welcomed African-American soldiers back to U.S. soil by noting that they had the chance in France to meet 'another than the American type of white man.'⁶⁷ The French, however,

⁶⁴ Rapport sur les relations franco-américaines, Oct. 1, 1918, 17N47, SHAT.

⁶⁵ Quoted in M. Fabre, *La Rive Noire: De Harlem à la Seine* (Paris, 1985), 49.

⁶⁶ Madame Rimlinop to Captain Boutte, June 3, 1919 in Du Bois, *Wounded World* manuscript, chapter 17, 33, box 56, Du Bois Papers, Fisk.

⁶⁷ F.J. Grimké, 'Address of welcome to the men who have returned from the battlefield', reprinted in *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United*

had an analogous wartime experience by coming into contact with 'another type' of black man. This black man was not a colonial subject, but instead represented the power of the United States of America. By the end of the war, African-American soldiers symbolized to the French the best the United States had to offer France in terms of wealth, vigor, and selfless aid, and the best France had to offer the world through its dedication to equality, fraternity and liberty.

States, vol. 3: *From the N.A.A.C.P. to the New Deal*, ed. H. Aptheker (New York, 1990), 242.