



Chapter 7

America Goes to War



In April 1917, after months of debate and disagreement on whether to join the war in Europe, the United States declared war on Germany. Unlike the major European powers embroiled in the conflict since 1914, America's participation in the war was brief—only about a year and a half. Nevertheless, the war exerted a tremendous impact on Americans, soldiers, and civilians alike. For the first time, Americans went off to fight on European soil, and they felt certain that their participation would play a crucial role in defeating the Germans and their allies.

The United States had to mobilize its economy in order to support its allies and build an army to fight in Europe. After some confusion, the nation's industrial and agricultural might was effectively organized and financed. The building of an army also required great effort. The immense problems encountered in creating a fighting force capable of assisting our allies on the battlefields are vividly described in an essay by Meirion and Susie Harries. Based on your reading of this piece, what appear to have been the most difficult challenges facing the civilian and military leaders in their efforts to create this force? How effectively, in your opinion, did they meet the challenges? Finally, what does the essay indicate were the most serious

Part I The Emergence of an Urban, Industrial Society, 1865–1920

obstacles a new recruit had to overcome in making the transition from civilian to military life?

Throughout the war, the federal government used propaganda to convince the public that the cause was noble, a clash between the forces of good and evil. Victory required the absolute loyalty and support of all citizens; any hint of questionable patriotism prompted great concern. For German Americans particularly, the patriotic near-hysteria of these times proved a terrible burden. In restaurants sauerkraut was renamed "liberty cabbage," and hamburger emerged as "liberty steak." Cincinnati's German Street was renamed English Street, and Pittsburgh banned the playing of Ludwig van Beethoven's music. German Americans were harassed and threatened with physical harm if they failed to demonstrate their commitment to the American war effort. The pressure on German Americans to declare their loyalty is vividly reflected in the first document, a statement by a German American distributed by the Committee on Public Information, an agency created by the federal government to generate public support for the war. How did the author's assessment of the war enable him to embrace the American cause without cutting his emotional ties to his native land?

Although a large segment of the population opposed entry into the war right up until 1917, support for the war effort flourished once the United States joined the conflict. Nevertheless, not all Americans supported the war; those who did not and refused to serve in the armed forces on the grounds of religion or conscience suffered condemnation. The second document reveals the experiences and convictions of Mennonites, who, despite their profound religious objections to the war, were drafted into the army. What relationship, if any, can you discern between the patriotic fervor of wartime society and intensified intolerance?

As the essay reveals, conscientious objectors were not the only ones to suffer prejudice during the war. The final document is a directive issued by a French liaison office to French officers at the insistence of the American army. What does it reveal about white America's attitudes toward black troops and African Americans generally?

ESSAY

Building a National Army

Meirion and Susie Harries

In the early fall of 1917, watchers by the rail tracks would have seen a remarkable display of young Americans riding to their appointed camps and cantonments, an unrehearsed pageant of America's ethnic diversity: Chock-

SOURCE: *The Last Days of Innocence: America at War, 1917–1918* by Meirion and Susie Harries. Copyright 1997 by Meirion and Susie Harries, 127–141. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

taws and Cochin Chinese, "Hebrews" (the Army's classification) from everywhere in the Diaspora, Greeks, Italians, English, Irish, Scots, Slavs, Swedes, Germans, Austrians, Albanians, Poles, Armenians, Syrians, Finns, Hispanics, and Japanese. (In Hawaii, the National Guard gained its first Japanese company.) Blacks went on separate trains.

To this army of Babel came men of all shapes and sizes: lanky recruits of Scots blood from the mountains of North Carolina, short and stocky Mediterraneans from the Northeast, where recent immigration had been heaviest. The minimum size was five feet, one inch and 128 pounds; any smaller, and the man would have been unable to carry the regulation army pack (though occasionally lighter men were accepted if they had special skills). The maximum was six feet, six inches; any taller, and the man was likely to have poor circulation. The weight limits were 190 pounds for infantry, engineers, and artillery and 165 pounds for the cavalry.

The average recruit measured five feet, seven and a half inches and weighed 141½ pounds, a meaningless statistic in this miscellany of manhood—except at the unit level, where the average was crucial in determining the sizes of uniforms to be supplied and quantity of rations allocated. Divisions with a high proportion of immigrants from eastern Europe received a smaller average ration and smaller uniforms than midwestern divisions formed of strapping Scandinavians and Germans. Few were racially as mixed as New York's 77th Division, whose theme song ran: "The Jews and the Wops,/The Dutch and the Irish cops,/They're all in the Army now" and which boasted forty-two different languages or dialects spoken in its ranks.

During the war, some 400,000 first-generation immigrants were drafted, including some who were alien enemies and ineligible. This influx was too much for Major General George Bell of the 33rd Division, whose contingent of around 15,000 National Guard volunteers had been fleshed out with conscripts. He complained to the Adjutant General that "the local boards in Illinois had very evidently spared men of the draft age of American birth or stock at the expense of those of foreign birth or patronage."

Many who had known only the ghettos of the East Coast cities could not speak English or understand commands. Bombarded with unintelligible instructions and forced to eat such unfamiliar substances as boiled potatoes and stewed apricots, they created serious morale problems in their units. Recent German or Austrian immigrants had the additional anxiety, so military intelligence reported, of having been warned that "if it were known in their home countries that they were in the American army, their families would be hunted out and killed." This rumor was recognized as one of many deliberate propaganda attempts to disrupt recruitment and ruin morale in the camps. Army authorities believed the Lutheran Church Board to be one of Germany's instruments, noting "its efforts to place its pastors in as many camps, forts and other military establishments as possible."

The plight of these first-generation immigrants was compounded by prejudice. Anti-Semitism inevitably surfaced. One night, six weeks after his induction from the Bronx, Private Otto Gottschalk found himself dragged from his tent, stripped, and thrown into a ditch of black muck. He was forced to drink the filthy water and was then badly beaten.

In the early days of the draft, a high proportion of "unsuitable" immigrants appears to have been sent straight back to the ghetto. Later, attempts were made to fit them for service. Where there were enough of them, immigrants were branded together into "development battalions" under officers of their own. At one point, Camp Gordon, in Georgia, had two Slav companies and two Italian and one Russian-Jewish battalion. They quickly became well disciplined and proficient in drill, and when asked how many of them were ready and willing to go abroad immediately, 92 percent stepped forward.

This jumble of colors, cultures, and languages, European, Asian, and Latin, mercilessly underlined the isolation of the black Americans who formed a large section of the intake—larger, perhaps, than was just. No blacks were appointed to the draft boards, and local boards often used their powers to conscript a far higher proportion of blacks than whites relative to population. In part, this was to compensate for the higher number of whites enlisting voluntarily. (Blacks, after all, had very few units to volunteer for.) But draft boards also had a tendency to use selective service as a means of "cleaning up" the neighborhood. A General Staff report noted, "The physical condition of a large part of the colored draft is very poor. Many must be entirely eliminated and a large proportion of those left are not fit for combat duty. The Surgeon General reports that 50% are infected with venereal disease." There was no organized conspiracy to fill the Army with the poorest and "least socially desirable" blacks, but, judging from the results, that is often what happened.

Whatever damage the draft boards had inflicted by their "selection" techniques the Army compounded by its treatment of its black draftees. Few received more than six weeks' training, and their living conditions were often appalling. In October 1917, black stevedore and labor battalions were formed at Camp Hill, Virginia. Six thousand men arrived at the camp to find "no barracks, no mess halls, no clothing, no sanitary arrangements of any kind." In the coldest winter in Virginia for twenty-five years, those who could find room packed themselves into small, dirty tents pitched on the bare earth, while the less fortunate were obliged to stand in front of fires all night. Those who inevitably fell sick were taken to the crowded large tent that served as a hospital, where they lay on the frozen ground with neither cots nor thick blankets.

Camp Hill was an extreme case, but a War Department inspector criticized the white officers of all these black noncombatant units for their indif-

ference to their men. The NCOs, he continued, had often been promoted to their positions "because of previous knowledge of negroes, usually gotten on plantations, public works, turpentine farms and the like." At Camp Hill, an NCO was often selected from the ranks "because he is a 'husky' and will beat and abuse the men. Two such sergeants are in the guard house now for killing other soldiers under their command." The seeds of hatred, inefficiency, and even mutiny were being sown.

The inevitable consequence was low morale and indifference among black labor units when they got to Europe. "We have experienced considerable difficulty in getting the proper amount of work out of the negro stevedores at the various ports," W. W. Atterbury, Pershing's Director General of Transportation, was later to complain. "Fining them and putting them in the guard-house is very little punishment for them and to be dishonorably discharged and sent home is just what they desire." From Liverpool, one of England's major ports, the commanding officer of a detachment of stevedores reported that police and local citizens had begged for them to be withdrawn. "They are without exception the most worthless aggregation of humanity that was ever collected in one unit."

As for the black combat troops, who had originally been intended to share facilities with white troops, they were eventually consigned to segregated units; worse, they were at no point allowed to assemble and train as complete divisions in the United States. While white divisions could seek to develop esprit and identity from the beginning of their training, the fragmented black divisions barely knew what their senior officers looked like, so infrequently could these officers visit the various units scattered among the cantonments in which the National Army was training.

Arriving at the railheads, the new recruits were marshaled into columns by newly commissioned lieutenants trying to summon up the principles of command. The officers at least had the advantage of being in uniform; the recruits were still in civilian clothes, many wearing their best suits as if they were going to a wedding and clutching a few belongings or the remains of the food they had been given for the journey by the send-off committees in their hometowns.

After a brisk march, they got their first sight of the camp or cantonment that was to be home for months to come: "a far-spreading city of wooden buildings," one remembered, "whose flat roofs extended one after another in exact order like the biscuits in a baker's pan." (He was describing one of the sixteen huddled cantonments built for the National Army; members of the National Guard, who were used to living in tents, were housed in sixteen canvas cities farther south.)

If the recruits still cherished any spark of chivalry or romance about their induction, the medical orderlies waiting inside the gates soon introduced a note of gritty realism. Inspections for vermin and venereal disease

Part I The Emergence of an Urban, Industrial Society, 1865-1920

and a vicious schedule of inoculations against smallpox, typhoid, and other contagious diseases left the new arrivals with barely the strength to crawl to their barracks.

And what they found there was rarely inspiriting. The basic design of the company barracks was sound. Each was to be a two-storied wooden building, the second floor a vast dormitory lined with iron cots, the first floor equipped with kitchen, storerooms, mess hall, and captain's office. Unfortunately, few of the buildings were ready. The delay in deciding on the precise size and structure of the infantry division had entailed constant alterations to the cantonment blueprint. Infirmary buildings, for example, were planned at a time when the Table of Organization prescribed thirty-three men for the medical detachment of an infantry regiment. This number was increased to forty-eight, and the building was too small before it was ever used.

The quality of the work that had been done left much to be desired. Far to the south, near a Houston still in shock after the summer massacre,* the officers and men of the Illinois National Guard—now designated the 33rd Division—found Camp Logan “in a decidedly unfinished state.” The hospital had been built without heating or running water—the construction quartermaster had put in two faucets on his own initiative—and the engineers pronounced the storehouses to be so faulty that it was only a matter of time before they collapsed. At Camp MacArthur, Texas, the builders laid water mains made of wood that had been lying around for months, and when the water was turned on, typhoid ran through the camp.

All these camps were huge, and the numbers rose as the war progressed. Camp Dix, near Trenton, New Jersey, was built for 38,000 men but at one point housed 54,500. The sanitation demands of such concentrations of human life were immense, yet little thought had been given to them. Camp Sherman, Ohio, produced without effort 982,500 pounds of garbage a month and its horses 120 tons of manure a day. The men of Camp Custer, Michigan, filled 1,200 garbage cans a day. None of the camps had waterproof surfaces where the trash cans could be kept, so the earth around the cans became a morass of mashed and rotting waste, magnificent breeding grounds for flies—but nothing compared to the lakes of sewage that loitered in the vicinity of most camps.

At Camp Lee, Virginia, home to the 80th Division, a single creek carried the daily consignment of effluent into a marsh nearby, where it settled. The division's engineers decided to clear the marsh by dredging a channel, but in damming the creek to permit dredging to begin, they created, in the words of a visiting entomologist, a “semi-solid mass of sewage 600 feet long and alive with fly larvae.” The comfort levels of latrines matched their sani-

*Several black soldiers were killed in a race riot in 1917. (Eds.)

Chapter 7 America Goes to War

tary standards; the seats in most had a square hole—an easier shape to cut than an oval.

Among the new arrivals at the camps and cantonments were the conscientious objectors. The Selective Service Act had forced the draft boards to induct them for combatant or noncombatant duty, depending on the nature of their objection, but several months passed before the War Department laid down a policy as to their treatment.

Newton Baker's* intention was that the government's attitude to those who had "personal scruples" about the war should be reasonably liberal, especially in the case of those whose objections were religious: Mennonites (who had come from Russia specifically to avoid war), Quakers, Dukhobors, Seventy-Day Adventists, Plymouth Brethren, Christadelphians, and so on. He specifically ordered that Mennonites and the members of certain other sects should not be compelled to wear uniforms, as their raiment was a tenet of their faith. It was his express wish that conscientious objectors should be segregated from serving soldiers, given noncombatant duty if they had been deemed eligible for it, and treated with "tact and consideration."

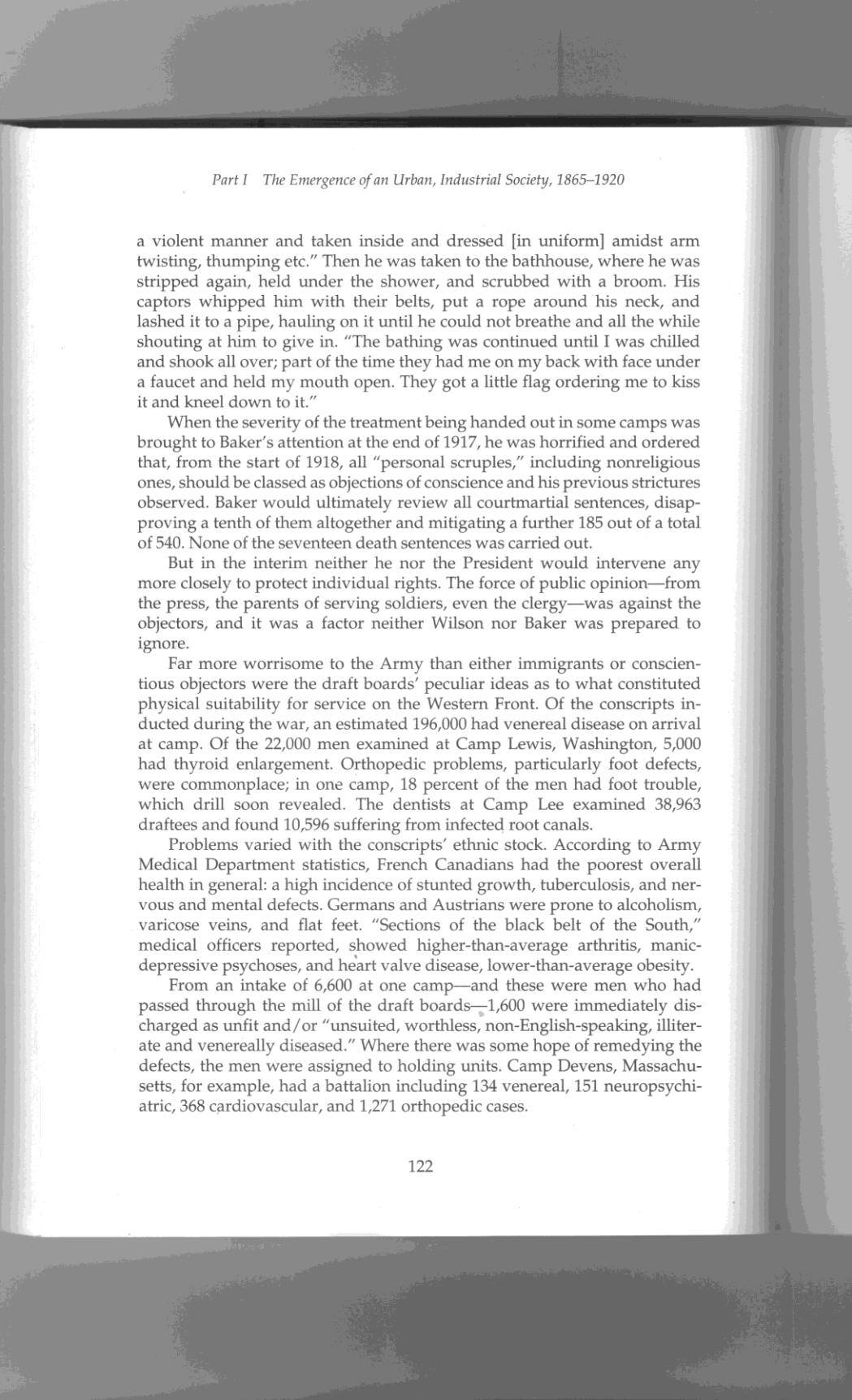
The military authorities had far less sympathy. Going "soft on slackers," they felt, was unfair to ordinary conscripts. Many objectors, now that they had been inducted, flatly refused to perform even noncombatant duties, since these still served the purpose of the war, and declined to obey army discipline, wear uniforms, march, drill, or even, in extreme cases, keep clean. Most of the division commanders, like Leonard Wood at Camp Funston, Kansas, felt it their duty to convert them to the ways of war. The pressure they applied took various forms—verbal abuse, humiliation, courts-martial and exaggerated legal penalties, beating, and, in extreme cases, what amounted to torture.

Hutterites, whose faith forbade them to cut their hair, had their beards shaved off by force. Dukhobors were forced into military dress or tormented if they refused. One who was ducked under a faucet on a freezing day subsequently died of pneumonia; his widow, upon receiving his body for burial, was appalled to find it in full uniform, a desecration of his faith.

The most brutal treatment was generally reserved for those whose scruples were ideological rather than religious—and this included not only socialists and others with political objections to the war but those whose objections were made in the name of humanity rather than that of any recognized creed. A great many were eventually "persuaded" to accept military discipline or noncombatant duties, but almost four thousand held out.

Sheldon W. Smith refused to sign the Army's clothing slip. "They put a pen in my hand and held it there to make a mark. . . . Next I was stripped in

*Newton Baker was Secretary of War from 1916 to 1921. (Eds.)



Part I The Emergence of an Urban, Industrial Society, 1865–1920

a violent manner and taken inside and dressed [in uniform] amidst arm twisting, thumping etc." Then he was taken to the bathhouse, where he was stripped again, held under the shower, and scrubbed with a broom. His captors whipped him with their belts, put a rope around his neck, and lashed it to a pipe, hauling on it until he could not breathe and all the while shouting at him to give in. "The bathing was continued until I was chilled and shook all over; part of the time they had me on my back with face under a faucet and held my mouth open. They got a little flag ordering me to kiss it and kneel down to it."

When the severity of the treatment being handed out in some camps was brought to Baker's attention at the end of 1917, he was horrified and ordered that, from the start of 1918, all "personal scruples," including nonreligious ones, should be classed as objections of conscience and his previous strictures observed. Baker would ultimately review all courtmartial sentences, disapproving a tenth of them altogether and mitigating a further 185 out of a total of 540. None of the seventeen death sentences was carried out.

But in the interim neither he nor the President would intervene any more closely to protect individual rights. The force of public opinion—from the press, the parents of serving soldiers, even the clergy—was against the objectors, and it was a factor neither Wilson nor Baker was prepared to ignore.

Far more worrisome to the Army than either immigrants or conscientious objectors were the draft boards' peculiar ideas as to what constituted physical suitability for service on the Western Front. Of the conscripts inducted during the war, an estimated 196,000 had venereal disease on arrival at camp. Of the 22,000 men examined at Camp Lewis, Washington, 5,000 had thyroid enlargement. Orthopedic problems, particularly foot defects, were commonplace; in one camp, 18 percent of the men had foot trouble, which drill soon revealed. The dentists at Camp Lee examined 38,963 draftees and found 10,596 suffering from infected root canals.

Problems varied with the conscripts' ethnic stock. According to Army Medical Department statistics, French Canadians had the poorest overall health in general: a high incidence of stunted growth, tuberculosis, and nervous and mental defects. Germans and Austrians were prone to alcoholism, varicose veins, and flat feet. "Sections of the black belt of the South," medical officers reported, showed higher-than-average arthritis, manic-depressive psychoses, and heart valve disease, lower-than-average obesity.

From an intake of 6,600 at one camp—and these were men who had passed through the mill of the draft boards—1,600 were immediately discharged as unfit and/or "unsuited, worthless, non-English-speaking, illiterate and venereally diseased." Where there was some hope of remedying the defects, the men were assigned to holding units. Camp Devens, Massachusetts, for example, had a battalion including 134 venereal, 151 neuropsychiatric, 368 cardiovascular, and 1,271 orthopedic cases.

Whatever their vital statistics or their moral standards, the raw levies all had one thing in common; they were in the camps and cantonments to be trained individually in the skills of the soldier and collectively, with their officers, molded into efficient units ready for war. The War Department's strategy had no frills. Besides instructors sent over from Europe by the English and French, they produced company-grade officers—captains and lieutenants—to train the men and then depended on the regular army (and, to a lesser extent, National Guard) officers—majors, colonels, and above—to weld the companies into battalions, regiments, and brigades. The objective was a division that was militarily efficient, a responsive organism of great power.

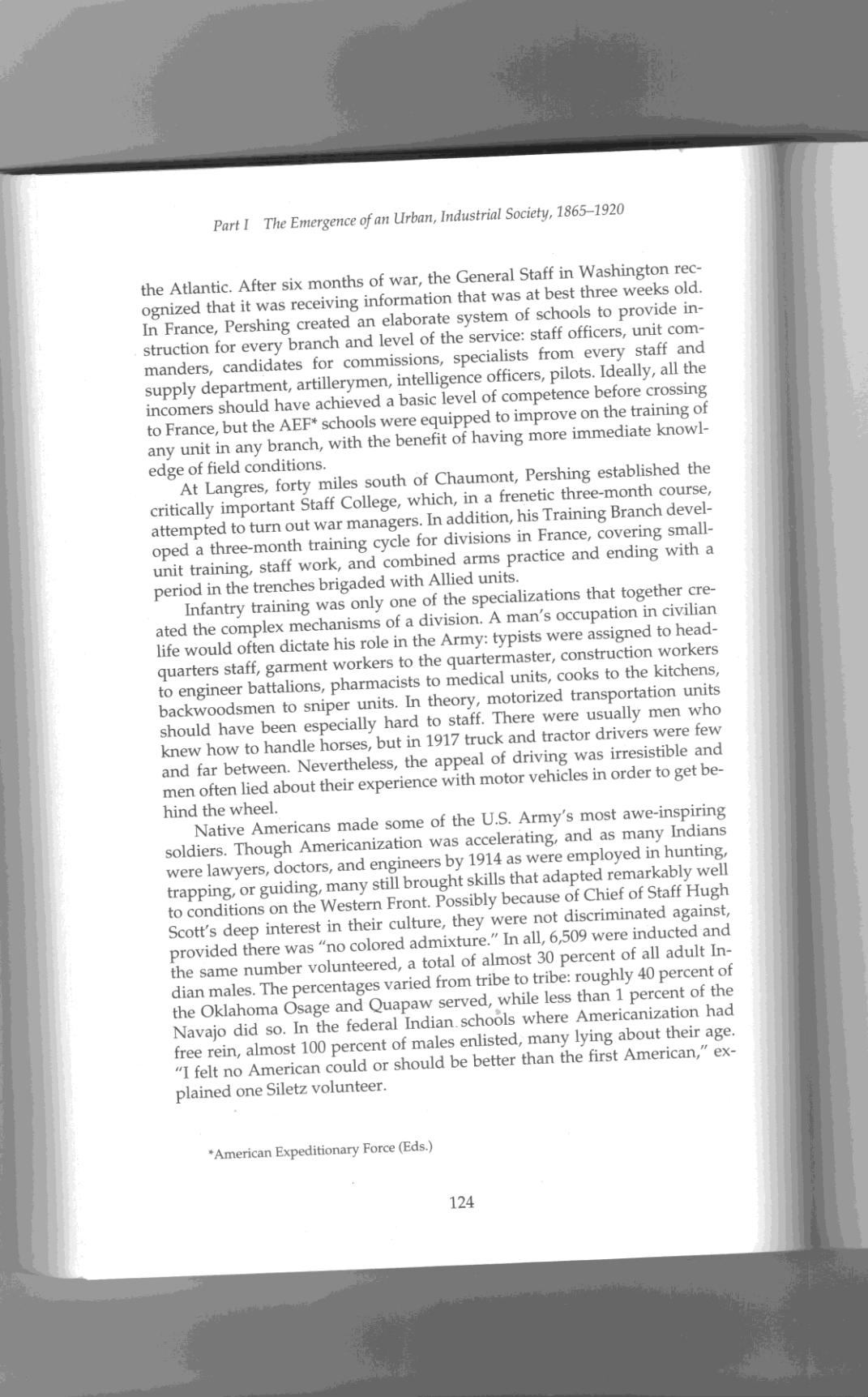
Many of the professional officers had theoretical knowledge of how to handle large units, but none had any practical experience of anything resembling a 28,000-man division; nevertheless, they rose to their task. The newly commissioned company-grade officers, in the Army for less than half a year, were even further at sea, each finding himself suddenly responsible for the welfare, discipline, and instruction of 250 men, with no protective shield of seasoned drill sergeants to cow the insubordinate.

Black company-grade officers of the 92nd Division struggled to create cohesion and maintain morale. Not only was the division never assembled in one place, but hanging over it was General Ballou's warning that "white men made the Division, and they can break it just as easily if it becomes a trouble-maker." The officers hardly advanced their own cause. "The vast majority of colored officers," remembered the regimental surgeon of the 349th Field Artillery, "held themselves distinctly aloof from the colored enlisted men . . . [who] used to nickname their colored officers 'Monkey Chasers.'"

At first, not surprisingly, the key figures in the National Army cantonments were the eight hundred or so British and French instructors. They were all veterans, often with wound stripes on their sleeves, and they brought the callousness of the front with them. "We made an attack one day," one told his pupils.

As our first wave carried the enemy trench, they heard shouts from a dugout: "Kamerad!" The Germans surrendered. The first wave rushed on, leaving it to the second wave to take the prisoners. As soon as the first wave had passed, the Germans emerged from their dugout with a hidden machine gun and broke it out on the backs of the men who had been white enough not to give them the cold steel. So now, men, when we hear "Kamerad" coming from the depths of a dugout in a captured trench we call down: "How many?" If the answer comes back "Six," we decide that one hand grenade ought to be enough to take care of six and toss it in.

It was impossible in these home camps for either men or units to be made fully ready for combat. Communications being what they were, the knowledge and experience accumulating daily in France was simply not crossing



Part I The Emergence of an Urban, Industrial Society, 1865-1920

the Atlantic. After six months of war, the General Staff in Washington recognized that it was receiving information that was at best three weeks old. In France, Pershing created an elaborate system of schools to provide instruction for every branch and level of the service: staff officers, unit commanders, candidates for commissions, specialists from every staff and supply department, artillerymen, intelligence officers, pilots. Ideally, all the incomers should have achieved a basic level of competence before crossing to France, but the AEF* schools were equipped to improve on the training of any unit in any branch, with the benefit of having more immediate knowledge of field conditions.

At Langres, forty miles south of Chaumont, Pershing established the critically important Staff College, which, in a frenetic three-month course, attempted to turn out war managers. In addition, his Training Branch developed a three-month training cycle for divisions in France, covering small-unit training, staff work, and combined arms practice and ending with a period in the trenches brigaded with Allied units.

Infantry training was only one of the specializations that together created the complex mechanisms of a division. A man's occupation in civilian life would often dictate his role in the Army: typists were assigned to headquarters staff, garment workers to the quartermaster, construction workers to engineer battalions, pharmacists to medical units, cooks to the kitchens, backwoodsmen to sniper units. In theory, motorized transportation units should have been especially hard to staff. There were usually men who knew how to handle horses, but in 1917 truck and tractor drivers were few and far between. Nevertheless, the appeal of driving was irresistible and men often lied about their experience with motor vehicles in order to get behind the wheel.

Native Americans made some of the U.S. Army's most awe-inspiring soldiers. Though Americanization was accelerating, and as many Indians were lawyers, doctors, and engineers by 1914 as were employed in hunting, trapping, or guiding, many still brought skills that adapted remarkably well to conditions on the Western Front. Possibly because of Chief of Staff Hugh Scott's deep interest in their culture, they were not discriminated against, provided there was "no colored admixture." In all, 6,509 were inducted and the same number volunteered, a total of almost 30 percent of all adult Indian males. The percentages varied from tribe to tribe: roughly 40 percent of the Oklahoma Osage and Quapaw served, while less than 1 percent of the Navajo did so. In the federal Indian schools where Americanization had free rein, almost 100 percent of males enlisted, many lying about their age. "I felt no American could or should be better than the first American," explained one Siletz volunteer.

*American Expeditionary Force (Eds.)

Chapter 7 America Goes to War

In 1917-1918, young Indian males were still in touch with traditional hunting and fighting skills. In the cantonments, they provided an object lesson to the urban conscripts in techniques of concealment and stealth by slipping across "no-man's-land" to snatch a "German" from the trenches opposite. Their languages were regarded as excellent substitutes for code, though a new vocabulary had to be evolved to deal with the terminology of modern war: machine guns became "little guns shoot fast" and battalions were indicated by "one, two and three grains of corn."

Zane Grey,* touring Wild West shows, and other more authentic by-products of a culture so recently vibrant had all imprinted the Germans with stereotypical images of "Red Indians." They were terrified of the specter of the "red man" and drafted extra snipers into sectors where Indians were spotted, "specially to pick off these dangerous men." Recognizing an opportunity for psychological warfare, the War Department gave serious thought to "attempting a limited number of night raids with men camouflaged as Indians in full regalia."

In the early days of sorting and allocating men, the Army relied a good deal on personal impressions and the direct question "What can you do?" But this was the second decade of the twentieth century, when the psychologist had begun to make an impression, and when Pershing complained that "too many mental incompetents were being shipped abroad," it seemed time to try newer methods. Psychologist Robert M. Yerkes was able to persuade the War Department "to adopt a scientific basis for assessing the quality of the new recruits."

During the war, 3 million soldiers were given intelligence tests—one test for the literate, another for those considered illiterate. (The literacy test itself provided perhaps the biggest shock: throughout the Army, 24.9 percent of men could neither read the paper nor write a letter home—in English, at least—and this was the criterion employed.) Men who were rated "feeble-minded" because they scored so low on the intelligence test were immediately discharged from the Army without review by a disability board—until the authorities realized that many college graduates were using this as an ingenious escape route from the Army.

By today's standards, the tests were obviously flawed, geared remorselessly to the middle-class native English speaker with questions on literature, tennis, and the like. Even so, a grading of "A" to "E" offered a simple, convenient reference tool to personnel officers struggling to allocate thousands of new recruits in a hurry. Once the men with relevant experience had been assigned, each company would receive a mixture of grades. Men who had scored lower than "C" would not be permitted to apply for commissions.

*A well-known author of the American West (Eds.)

Part I The Emergence of an Urban, Industrial Society, 1865-1920

Life in the Army offered the clearest demonstration that the grip of the federal government was closing ever more tightly around the individual. It was a protective as well as coercive clasp. In the late 1890s, William Gibbs McAdoo (then a dealer in railway bonds) had helped the "penniless and starving" wives and families of servicemen in the Spanish-American War. Now, as Secretary of the Treasury, he urged that "the basis of the family's support . . . should be an allotment of a fixed proportion of the soldier's pay." Enlisted married men were obliged to make over half their \$33 monthly pay to their families, which the government then supplemented.

The allotment could not fully compensate for the induction of a husband or son. Draft boards seem to have applied the "genuine dependency" exemption very narrowly, and across the country division headquarters were inundated with applications for the release of enlisted men or for more money in lieu. Desperate letters told of starving children, sick and bedridden relatives. In their bemused incoherence and their combination of greed and optimism with genuine hardship, these were a constant source of amusement to headquarters staff, who circulated a list of the choicest pleas. "My boy has been put in charge of a spittoon. Will I get more money now?" "I didn't know my husband had a middle name, and if he did, I do not think it was 'None.'" "You ask for my allotment number: I have four boys and two girls." "I am writing to ask you why I have not received my elo-ment." "I have not received my husband's pay and will be forced to lead an immortal life." "Please return my marriage certificate. Baby has not eaten in three days."

Material support was only one aspect of the government's paternalism. McAdoo and Cabinet colleagues such as Daniels, Baker, and Wilson made the soldier's moral welfare in camp their concern as well. Baker, a reformer by inclination, remembered the public outrage in 1916 at the plague of brothels spreading along the Mexican border with the soldiers. He knew people were afraid of the effects of these huge new concentrations of troops, and he threw his weight behind a morality campaign; by the end of 1917, some 110 red-light districts near camps had been closed. At the level of private enterprise, the concerned citizens of the National Allied Relief Committee raised funds to bus vulnerable American servicemen through "the London danger zone" and save them "from the distressing and terrible dangers of the streets."

For help in finding something to take the place of the customary army pleasures, Baker turned to a friend, Raymond Fosdick, a thirty-three-year-old moralist and social reformer and the brother of the well-known clergyman Harry Emerson Fosdick. Baker asked him to provide the men with "wholesome recreation and enjoyment." This he was to achieve by coordinating the various voluntary organizations operating in the camps—bodies such as the YMCA, the Jewish Welfare Board, and the Knights of Columbus, up to thirty-six of them in some camps. Under Fosdick's Committee on

Training Camp Activities, the men came to enjoy community songs, Liberty Theaters (occasionally graced by the singing of the President's daughter Margaret), YMCA huts (blacks usually excluded) where they could read magazines and write letters, Hostess Houses (separately provided for blacks) where they could meet female visitors in civilized surroundings, athletics, football and baseball, and educational programs aimed particularly at illiterates and the foreign-born. A small pamphlet published by the YMCA in 1917 offered the man about to go overseas a remarkable selection of handy French expressions: "I should like very much to see the periscope of a submarine"; "I have pawned my watch"; "A piece of shell hit me in the arm"; "Do not stick your head above the trench"; "Here I am, here I stay."

The young American male in those days was deemed by the War Department to be remarkably ignorant about sex; Fosdick's committee set out to put him straight. He was taught the facts of life and the risks of low life. "A German bullet is cleaner than a whore," announced one poster, showing a surprising lack of tact. "You wouldn't use another man's toothbrush. Why use his whore?" The potentially horrific results of normal intercourse seem so to have traumatized the youths of America that some of the young men moved swiftly from a state of ignorance to a widespread preference for alternatives, or so the Paris prostitutes claimed.

The motive of the military authorities for combating vice was military efficiency, not spiritual improvement. Where Fosdick's civilians concentrated on deterrence and moral suasion, the Army blandly provided prophylaxis at any hour of the day and night, somewhat undermining the credibility of the righteous. Contracting a venereal disease was a punishable offense, but this was because it was careless and unnecessary and detracted from the soldier's usefulness, not because it was wicked.

Neither military personnel nor civilians were entirely successful in combating venereal disease. At some camps the scale of the problem verged on the unmanageable. So many conscripts on leave from the camps in Kansas and Missouri headed for the prostitutes on Kansas City's Twelfth Avenue that it had been nicknamed "Woodrow Wilson Avenue—a piece at any price." Local authorities often refused to cooperate in the campaign against the local red-light district, which might be a useful factor of a community's economy. Seattle had to be declared off limits, New Orleans failed to see the point of the campaign, and Galveston, Texas, remained an open city. Where prostitutes were pushed out, they often took up residence in the black districts of town, beyond the reach of the authorities' interest, and into the vacuum stepped the amateurs, hero-worshiping girls, some as young as twelve, who were determined to give themselves to the uniform.

In France, Pershing was very much more draconian, certainly more so than the natives. The French provided licensed brothels for their troops, and in 1918 Premier Georges Clemenceau offered similar services to the AEF. When Baker saw the letter, he exclaimed to Fosdick, "For God's sake,

Part I The Emergence of an Urban, Industrial Society, 1865-1920

Raymond, don't show this to the President or he'll stop the war." Pershing personally inspected the VD returns every day. He declared red-light districts off limits and had them patrolled; MPs were then found to have the highest incidence of VD in the AEF. Men returning to camp drunk were automatically assumed to be infected and were treated, by force if necessary.

The Army also fought a constant, if losing, battle at home against the temptations of alcohol. In the "dry" states, soldiers helped bootleggers make a killing; in "wet" ones, the authorities created "dry" zones around the camps, but the regulations proved nearly impossible to enforce. Men found lemon or ginger "extracts" with a 9 percent alcohol content perfectly satisfactory. The punishment for selling liquor to men in uniform was a year's imprisonment, so the soldiers took off their tunics or paid the proprietor in advance, whereupon the barman "treated" them to drinks.

In Pershing's domain, beyond the reach of the moral crusaders, military efficiency was again the only criterion. Spirits were forbidden, but the men were allowed to buy beer and wine, and "Major Van Rooge" and "Captain Van Blank" became constant companions. Pershing did curb the intake by supporting the move to retain half the pay even of men without dependents. The soldiers' spending power worried him because of the impact it was having on the morale of French and British soldiers, who were paid far less. "\$10 a month," he remarked, "is more spending money than a man in the trenches ought to have."

Drugs, which were widely used in society, duly made their appearance in the Army. Military intelligence gave warning of the sale to troops in southern cantonments of "the Chihuahua or Marihuana weed. This is a plant smoked by Mexicans of the lower classes; its use produces insanity and homicidal mania." The death-dealing weed proved popular, and by the summer of 1918 it had spread as far as Seattle. At Camp Devens, Special Agent Kelleher surprised a narcotics dealer in barracks at six one evening "with a complete outfit of hypodermic syringes, a spoon for heating the concoction, and quite a lot of morphine." Waiting in line were three conscripts with their sleeves rolled up.

DOCUMENTS

German-American Loyalty, 1917

My emotions tell me one thing at this awful time, but my reason tells me another. As a German by birth it is a horrible calamity that I may have to fight Germans. That is natural, is it not? But as an American by preference, I can see no other course open....

For 25 years Germany has shown dislike for the United States—the Samoan affair, the Hongkong contretemps, the Manila Bay incident, the unguarded words of the Kaiser himself, and, lastly, the Haitian controversy in 1914. . . . And it has not been from mere commercial or diplomatic friction. It is because their ideals of government are absolutely opposite. One or the other must go down. It is for us to say now which it shall be.

Because of my birth and feelings beyond my control I have no particular love for the French and less for the British. But by a strange irony of fate I see those nations giving their blood for principles which I hold dear, against the wrong principles of people I individually love. It is a very unhappy paradox, but one I can not escape. I do not want to see the allies triumph over the land of my birth. But I very much want to see the triumph of the ideas they fight for.

It sickens my soul to think of this Nation going forth to help destroy people many of whom are bound to me by ties of blood and friendship. But it must be so. It is like a dreadful surgical operation. The militaristic, undemocratic demon which rules Germany must be cast out. It is for us to do it—now. I have tried to tell myself that it is not our affair, that we should have contented ourselves with measures of defense and armed neutrality. But I know that is not so. The mailed fist has been shaken under our nose before. If Prussianism triumphs in this war the fist will continue to shake. We shall be in real peril, and those ideas for which so much of the world's best blood has been spilled through the centuries will be in danger of extinction. It seems to me common sense that we begin our defense by immediate attack when the demon is occupied and when we can command assistance.

There is much talk of what people like me will do, and fear of the hyphen. No such thing exists. The German-American is as staunch as the American of adoption of any other land and perhaps more so. Let us make war upon Germany, not from revenge, not to uphold hairsplitting quibbles of international law, but let us make war with our whole heart and with all

SOURCE: C. Kotzenabe, "German-American Loyalty," in Committee on Public Information, War Information Series, *American Loyalty* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 5-6.

Part I The Emergence of an Urban, Industrial Society, 1865–1920

our strength, because Germany worships one god and we another and because the lion and the lamb can not lie down together. One or the other must perish.

Let us make war upon the Germany of the Junkerthum,* the Germany of frightfulness, the Germany of arrogance and selfishness, and let us swear not to make peace until the Imperial German Government is the sovereign German people.

Letters from Mennonite Draftees, 1918

DEAR BROTHER——:

I went to Camp Cody, N. Mex., June 25, 1918. At first I drilled without a rifle, but later was asked to take one, explaining that the President's orders concerning the C. O.'s [conscientious objectors] required it, and I would get into noncombatant service in due time. I accepted it, and in two weeks was transferred to the infantry where, of course, I was asked again to take the rifle, and I saw that I had been deceived. I refused and explained why. Several nights after this, while I was in bed, some privates threw water into my bed, put a rope around my neck and jerked me out on the floor.

The next day two sergeants came to my tent and took me out, tied a gun on my shoulder and marched me down the street, one on each side of me, kicking me all the way. I was asked again whether I would take the rifle and drill. I refused and was taken to the bath-house, put under the shower bath where they turned on the water, alternating hot and cold, until I was so numb that I could scarcely rise. Just then one of the higher officers came in and asked what they were about. They explained that they were giving me a bath. The officer told me to dress and go to my tent, that he wanted to interview me himself. He asked if I would take a rifle and drill. I told him that I could not. He ordered my sergeant to put me on company street work until they got my transfer, and in three weeks I was given noncombatant service.

VERY TRULY YOURS,——

DEAR BROTHER:

I came home Wednesday evening, Feb. 5. To get home, receive a hearty welcome and many expressions of joy for the effort made to maintain the faith, was alone worth the hardships which we endured.

SOURCE: J. S. Hartzler, *Mennonites in the World War or Nonresistance Under Test* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1922), 124–127.

**Junkerthum* refers to the Prussian military aristocracy. (Eds.)

Chapter 7 America Goes to War

I had been gone a few days more than ten months, of which I spent twenty-four days in our company, ten days in detention camp, seventy-eight days in the guard-house, one night in the Kansas City Police "lock-up," one hundred ninety-seven days in the disciplinary barracks (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.) and two days on the way home. . . .

I do not approve of such practices as the world was engaged in, and will give them neither moral nor material support though it may mean imprisonment or even death for not doing so. If the army would never kill a man, I can not see how a person could become a part of it, giving moral and material support to its maintenance and still retain a Christian character. The standards it upholds and the injustices it practices are unbelievable to a man who never saw them. . . . The only part that I can have in the army is suffering its punishments. Its purposes and those of Christianity are as different as night and day. The aims of the army are coercion, terrorism, carnal force; the ideals of Christianity are love, meekness, gentleness, obedience to the will of God, etc. When these ideals are maintained to the best of our ability, by God's grace He will provide care and protection in ways not imagined by man.

As to noncombatant service: all branches of service have one purpose; viz., to make the whole system a stronger organization of terrorism, destruction, and death. While I would not have been directly killing any one, I would have been doing a man's part in helping another do the act, and lending encouragement to the same. To support a thing and refuse to do the thing supported is either ignorance or cowardice. To refuse to go to the trenches and still give individual assistance to another doing so, is either an improper knowledge of the issues at stake or downright fear to face the bullets. I have a greater conscientious objection against noncombatant than against combatant service. I feel that the principle is the same, and that both are equally wrong. I would feel guilty toward the other man to accept service where the danger was not so great. . . .

To an observer it may have seemed ridiculous to refuse to even plant flowers at the base hospital. In the first place, that was the duty of the working gang under the quartermaster's department. Technically I would not have been doing military duty for I had not "signed up"; virtually I would have been rendering service because I was at work. . . . The farther one went with the military officers the farther they demanded him to go. I felt that the farther I went the less reason I could give for stopping, so I concluded that the best place to stop was in the beginning. It was on the charge of refusing to plant flowers that I received my court-martial sentence of ten years of hard labor in the disciplinary barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kans.

FRATERNALLY YOURS, —————

Part I The Emergence of an Urban, Industrial Society, 1865-1920

Racism and the Army, 1918

French Military Mission

STATIONED WITH THE AMERICAN ARMY
AUGUST 7, 1918

*Secret Information Concerning Black
American Troops*

1. It is important for French officers who have been called upon to exercise command over black American troops, or to live in close contact with them, to have an exact idea of the position occupied by Negroes in the United States. The information set forth in the following communication ought to be given to these officers and it is to their interest to have these matters known and widely disseminated. It will devolve likewise on the French Military Authorities, through the medium of the Civil Authorities, to give information on this subject to the French population residing in the cantonments occupied by American colored troops.

2. The American attitude upon the Negro question may seem a matter for discussion to many French minds. But we French are not in our province if we undertake to discuss what some call "prejudice." American opinion is unanimous on the "color question" and does not admit of any discussion.

The increasing number of Negroes in the United States (about 15,000,000) would create for the white race in the Republic a menace of degeneracy were it not that an impassable gulf has been made between them.

As this danger does not exist for the French race, the French public has become accustomed to treating the Negro with familiarity and indulgence.

This indulgence and this familiarity are matters of grievous concern to the Americans. They consider them an affront to their national policy. They are afraid that contact with the French will inspire in black Americans aspirations which to them [the whites] appear intolerable. It is of the utmost importance that every effort be made to avoid profoundly estranging American opinion.

Although a citizen of the United States, the black man is regarded by the white American as an inferior being with whom relations of business or service only are possible. The black is constantly being censured for his want of intelligence and discretion, his lack of civic and professional conscience and for his tendency toward undue familiarity.

The vices of the Negro are a constant menace to the American who has to repress them sternly. For instance, the black American troops in France have, by themselves, given rise to as many complaints for attempted rape as

SOURCE: W. E. B. DuBois, ed., "Documents of the War." *The Crisis* 28 (May 1919): 16-18.
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all the rest of the army. And yet the [black American] soldiers sent us have been the choicest with respect to physique and morals, for the number disqualified at the time of mobilization was enormous.

Conclusion

1. We must prevent the rise of any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers. We may be courteous and amiable with these last, but we cannot deal with them on the same plane as with the white American officers without deeply wounding the latter. We must not eat with them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside of the requirements of military service.

2. We must not commend too highly the black American troops, particularly in the presence of [white] Americans. It is all right to recognize their good qualities and their services, but only in moderate terms, strictly in keeping with the truth.

3. Make a point of keeping the native cantonment population from "spoiling" the Negroes. [White] Americans become greatly incensed at any public expression of intimacy between white women with black men. They have recently uttered violent protests against a picture in the "Vie Parisienne" entitled "The Child of the Desert" which shows a [white] woman in a "cabinet particulier" with a Negro. Familiarity on the part of white women with black men is furthermore a source of profound regret to our experienced colonials who see in it an over-weaning menace to the prestige of the white race.

Military authority cannot intervene directly in this question, but it can through the civil authorities exercise some influence on the population.