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## **A Jim Crow Welcome Home: African American World War Veterans In Knoxville, Tennessee**

Kara Elizabeth Kempfski  
kkempfski@utk.edu

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kara Elizabeth Kempfski entitled "A Jim Crow Welcome Home: African American World War Veterans In Knoxville, Tennessee." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Cynthia G. Fleming, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Ernest F. Freeberg, G. Kurt Piehler

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

A Jim Crow Welcome Home:  
African American World War Veterans in Knoxville, Tennessee

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kara Elizabeth Kempfski  
August 2012

This work is dedicated to my wonderful family and friends.  
Thank you for keeping my life so full of love.

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## ABSTRACT

This work examines black veterans who returned to Knoxville, Tennessee after both world wars. Knoxville was a moderately sized Southern town that believed itself to be fairly progressive about racial issues. The life of average Knoxvillians was perennially disrupted in this period by two wars, two returns, and the racial tension that occasionally exploded into violence. This thesis attempts to show that the post-WWII experience of Knoxville's African American veterans was different from what it was after WWI because of the changing sympathies of the federal government, rather than because of changes within the African American community. In many ways, African Americans responded to both world wars with striking similarity: high expectations that the war would bring change, audible complaints at the hypocrisy of discrimination at home while fighting it abroad, and much disappointment in the aftermath. The federal government, however, changed dramatically during the interwar period, both in its treatment of veterans with the GI Bill, and in its treatment of black soldiers with the integration of the military. It was the combination of these two important changes in federal policy that served as an impetus for social change. Knoxville serves as a case study to demonstrate these larger historical trends, and has a unique story of its own as the Marble City weathered this defining period of American history.

Remember My Forgotten Man

Remember my forgotten man,  
You put a rifle in his hand;  
You sent him far away,  
You shouted 'Hip, hooray!'  
But look at him today.

Remember my forgotten man,  
You had him cultivate the land;  
He walked behind the plow,  
The sweat fell from his brow,  
But look at him right now.

And once, he used to love me,  
I was happy then;  
He used to take care of me,  
Won't you bring him back again?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Blondell, *Gold Diggers of 1933*, DVD, directed by Mervyn LeRoy [Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006].

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## CHAPTER 1: THE WORLD WARS IN AMERICAN MEMORY

The image of American soldiers returning from war is stamped on our national memory. As contemporary Americans anxiously await returning veterans, their emotional homecomings recall scenes from past generations of servicemen and their families. After both world wars, Americans of all races excitedly celebrated the triumphant return of those who had made the world safe for democracy, twice. The dreams and expectations of civilians and soldiers, alike predated the end of both wars. Soldiers frequently expressed their impatience to return home in correspondence with loved ones; sentiments that were heartily returned by those waiting in hometowns across the country. This desire also filled soldiers' diaries and the press coverage from the front.<sup>2</sup> These longings were not only articulated in prose, but were captured in other artistic mediums, such as poems and pictures.<sup>3</sup> Advertisers capitalized on these feelings to sell not only war bonds, but various other products, from house wares to toothpaste.<sup>4</sup>

The homecoming fantasy was perhaps best captured in the advertisements created by Community Silver, Oneida Ltd. During World War II. These soft-focus paintings depict beautiful women joyously embracing uniformed men, in ways more wholesome than prurient. Cut from the magazines in which they were originally printed, Oneida advertisements covered the walls of women's dorm rooms and soldiers' barracks, presumably offering the soldiers an additional type of comfort that the more anatomical pin-ups did not.<sup>5</sup> While these advertisements

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<sup>2</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* [1980; repr., Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004], 205.

<sup>3</sup> E.V. Davidson, Scrapbook, Center for the Study of War and Society WWII Collection, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

<sup>4</sup> Colgate, "Move Over, Rover!" advertisement, *Life*, July 1945, 8.

<sup>5</sup> "Speaking of Pictures: Sentimental Advertisements Start a New Kind of Pin-Up Craze," *Life*, May 14, 1945, 13.

are no longer staple features in American collegiate décor, the famous “V-J Day in Times Square” photograph from *Life* magazine continues to adorn the walls of coeds across the country, suggesting that the romanticized version of the servicemen’s return continues to inspire both longing and joy in a new generation.<sup>6</sup>

These artifacts serve as physical record of the intangible hopes of two war-torn generations. While the aspirations were undoubtedly sincere, the expectations of the homecoming period contrasted sharply with the much more difficult reality. Many soldiers found readjustment to civilian life daunting, and lingering mental and physical injuries from the war harder still.<sup>7</sup> Thus these popular remnants from the past tell only a partial story, inadvertently obscuring for later generations the turbulence of the immediate post-war period. Veterans and their families knew these difficulties painfully well, but the truth for these world war generations is frequently misrepresented in the perceptions and assumptions of popular memory.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, these advertisements and photographs ignore the presence of African-Americans and other non-white soldiers in both wars and both returns.<sup>9</sup> But African-Americans were there, in segregated units, returning to the South to segregated cities. These servicemen not only had to deal with the difficult reorientation to civilian life, but they had to do it under the increased strain of segregation and racial violence.

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<sup>6</sup> Alfred Eisenstaedt, “V-J Day in Times Square,” *Life*, August 14, 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Robert F. Jefferson, “‘Enabled Courage’: Race, Disability, and Black World War II Veterans in Postwar America,” *The Historian* 65 [September 2003]: 1103.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Childers, *Soldier from the War Returning: The Greatest Generation’s Troubled Homecoming from World War II* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009], 2.

<sup>9</sup> Unless it was an African-American publication, advertisements featuring American servicemen were always white. This was true of Northern and Southern publications. See for example, the *Knoxville News Sentinel* and the *New York Times*.

Another common misconception is a general underestimation of the impact of WWI on American society. Overshadowed by the devastation felt by Europe and by WWII a generation later, commemorations of American wars tend to short-change the significance of WWI. Too frequently, it is presented as just a short-term commitment or as a precursor to the more crucial WWII. One need look no further than the nation's capital for examples. The monument to WWII far outshines the monument to WWI in size and design. The "Price of Freedom" Exhibit at the National Museum of American History dedicates at least five times as much space to WWII than WWI.<sup>10</sup> The implication is that WWI and its postwar period are less deserving of critical analysis, but this is to miss its distinctive and enduring legacy within the larger American story.

Additionally, popular perceptions diminish the importance of the First World War as part of the quest for racial equality. Studies of the civil rights movement routinely emphasize the importance of African American participation in WWII. Black GIs, it is argued, returned from WWII fundamentally changed by the experience; prouder, more worldly, and unwilling to tolerate the Jim Crow treatment their ancestors had withstood.<sup>11</sup> While this is undoubtedly true for many WWII veterans, it implies that this attitude was unique to them or at least that they were more effective/proactive in fighting inequality than their predecessors had been. Thus this argument seems to slight the experience of previous generations of black veterans, who returned feeling the same indignation. Many of them were also eager to take action against injustice at home with the same fervor that had taken them abroad. As the YMCA Inter-Racial Committee

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<sup>10</sup> In fairness to the public, the slight attention paid to WWI and the Korean War is the primary criticism the museum receives about an otherwise impressive exhibit. National Museum of American History Comment Cards, Price of Freedom Exhibit.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* [Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987], 14-15.

reported in 1919, “The Negro ex-soldier wanted justice and a square deal and became everywhere a spokesmen therefore.”<sup>12</sup> This had been true in every American war since the founding of the country.<sup>13</sup>

What was different, then, about the postwar experience of WWII servicemen compared to the veterans of WWI? To address this question, this essay will examine black veterans who returned to Knoxville, Tennessee after both world wars. Knoxville was a moderately sized Southern town that believed itself to be fairly progressive about racial issues.<sup>14</sup> The life of average Knoxvillians was perennially disrupted in this period by two wars, two returns, and the racial tension that occasionally exploded into violence.<sup>15</sup> This essay will attempt to show that the experience of Knoxville’s African American veterans was different after WWII from what it was in WWI because of the changing sympathies of the federal government, rather than because of changes within the African American community. In many ways, African Americans responded to both world wars with striking similarity: high expectations that the war would bring change, audible complaints at the hypocrisy of discrimination at home while fighting it abroad, and much disappointment in the aftermath.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010], 229.

<sup>13</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. [Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2000], 84, 238, 360, 481; Donald Spivey, *Fire From the Soul: A History of the African American Struggle* [Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press], 223.

<sup>14</sup> W. Bruce Wheeler, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, s.v. “Knoxville Riot of 1919,” <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=753> [accessed July 18, 2011].

<sup>15</sup> “Mayor Deplores Dethroned Law: Seeks Restoration of Order and Quiet,” *Knoxville News Sentinel*, September 1, 1919.

<sup>16</sup> Spivey *Fire From the Soul*, 228.

It is unsatisfying to suggest that the difference between the wars was simply due to the increased number of black veterans after WWII than WWI. Over 367,000 African Americans served in WWI, compared to over 909,000 in WWII.<sup>17</sup> While certainly one difference between the two wars, having a larger concentration of trained, proud black veterans was not automatically cause for increased action for civil rights, since they were also then more of a threat to white supremacists, who repeatedly singled-out black veterans as targets of violence after both wars.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, there was also a much larger concentration of white veterans, who may or may not have been sympathetic to civil rights, competed for jobs and resources upon their return, and could have drowned out the actions of black veterans with a counter-mobilization of their own.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the difference between the homecomings came not from fundamental change in the black experience, but in the veteran experience. The federal government drastically increased the rights and benefits of veterans in the interwar period. Responding to the problems of WWI veterans, who often labeled themselves the “forgotten men” and who protested as a “Bonus Army” in 1933, the federal government was forced to take direct action, which would directly benefit the WWII generation. The federal government also had to take notice of WWII veterans for the sheer size of that demographic. While black and white GIs may or may not have agreed on racial equality or other social issues, they all supported veterans benefits. The 16 million

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<sup>17</sup> Robert J. Norrell, *The House I Live In: Race in the American Century* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005], 78; Glenn A. Knoblock, *African Americans and World War II: Causalities and Decorations in the Navy, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine; A Comprehensive Record* [Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2009], 1.

<sup>18</sup> Norrell, *The House I Live In*, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White* [New York: W.W. Norton, 2005], 113-14.

veteran GIs thus represented a powerful bloc of the constituency of all elected officials.<sup>20</sup> Once the federal government put benefits in writing, black veterans had a legal standing to claim these benefits for themselves. Segregation was still in place and there was rampant corruption that prevented blacks from reaping the full benefits of the veterans programs, but now at least the abuses by veterans bureaus were illegal in black and white.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the NAACP legal victories incrementally tore away at the Jim Crow system and the passivity of the federal government.<sup>22</sup> African Americans could then protest unequal treatment with clear legal support, instead of having to rely on moral appeals to the public, a tactic proven largely ineffective after WWI.

This paper builds on the work of social historians of the GI Bill and other veterans programs, as well as the work of many Civil Rights historians. Notable works which have provided an overview of African-American history and segregation include John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss's *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* and Donald Spivey's *Fire From the Soul: A History of the African-American Struggle*.<sup>23</sup> Both works provide necessary context for this paper, helping to place Knoxville's veterans within the larger historical framework. Robert J. Norrell's *The House I Live In: Race in the American Century* is also a comprehensive study of twentieth century race relations. Norrell's work argues that the Civil Rights movement is best understood as starting in 1938, as opposed to the standard interpretation of 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education* or, even more frequently, 1955 with the Montgomery

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<sup>20</sup> Childers, *Soldier from the War Returning*, 3. More Americans served in WWII than in all the other wars of the twentieth century, combined.

<sup>21</sup> Katznelson, *Affirmative Action*, 136.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* [New York: New Press, 2009], 62.

<sup>23</sup> Spivey, *Fire From the Soul*.

Bus Boycott.<sup>24</sup> This paper does not attempt to provide a new interpretation of the start date of the civil rights movement, but it does look to the protracted struggle for civil rights, which existed before the official movement.

Two seminal works that chronicle and analyze the progression of discrimination in the United States are Leon F. Litwack's *Trouble in Mind* and C. Vann Woodward's, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*.<sup>25</sup> Litwack especially emphasizes the human suffering resultant of the system and evaluates legal means and extralegal terror as systemized mechanisms of social control. Thus the violence and the perpetrators were not aberrations of the society, but worked within the social norms. Woodward focuses primarily on discriminatory legislation and practice. His work is largely top-down, with focus on legislation, the actions of presidential administrations, and the Supreme Court. Even within the movement, Woodward principally focuses on the work of the NAACP and other organized groups. While these efforts are undoubtedly important, the work of civil rights was also done quietly and unofficially, which this work will attempt to acknowledge.

David R. Goldfield argues in *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present*, that “the civil rights movement did not emerge full-blown from World War II, but rather was the culmination of hundreds of local efforts across the South over the previous century.”<sup>26</sup> Goldfield argues that Jim Crow and other methods of discrimination had been challenged since their inception. However, framing the book as he does, he gives scarcely

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<sup>24</sup> Norrell, *The House I Live In*, xvi.

<sup>25</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* [New York: Vintage Books, 1998]; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1975].

<sup>26</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present* [Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990], 11.

any mention to the place of WWI in that process, giving only fleeting mention to the migration of blacks northward and the rhetoric of democracy and equality in the wartime propaganda. He focuses on the influence of WWII and the early movement as the principle agents of change. By contrast, Sean Dennis Cashman in, *African-Americans and the Quest for Civil Rights, 1900-1990*, takes a broader view of the century, which allows him to present both the similarities and the structural difference in the civil rights movement between WWI and WWII, as many more people were involved and in a position to take advantage of the end of the Second World War than had been after WWI.<sup>27</sup> His book attempts to look at the whole South, however, which causes it to lose some detail in the particulars of each region of the South, some of which used far more legal and extralegal means to enforce segregation than did others. For example, housing segregation varied greatly state to state. *Equality and Beyond: Housing Segregation and the Goals of the Great Society*, by George and Eunice Grier gives a brief outline of the legal status of housing segregation before and after both wars.<sup>28</sup>

This paper also calls on the historiography on African-Americans at war. Notable works include *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I*, by Adriane Lentz-Smith and *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* by Chad L. Williams.<sup>29</sup> E. J. Scott's *The American Negro in the World War*, is also consulted in this work,

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<sup>27</sup> Sean Dennis Cashman, *African-Americans and the Quest for Civil Rights, 1900-1990* [New York: New York University Press, 1991], 80.

<sup>28</sup> George Grier and Eunice Grier, *Equality and Beyond: Housing Segregation and the Goals of the Great Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1996], 21-22.

<sup>29</sup> Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009]; Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*.



written by Scott, an African American veteran, not long after the conflict to attest to the meritorious service of African American combatants.<sup>30</sup>

This paper is indebted to the scholarship dedicated to the post-war period, particularly those that stress the place of African Americans inside that period of transition. Notable works on the GI Bill include Edward Humes's *Over Here: How the GI Bill Transformed the American Dream* and Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin's *The GI Bill: The New Deal for Veterans*.<sup>31</sup> Both works evaluate the demand for programs, the promises of the federal government, and the success at reintegrating veterans into society. David M. Kennedy's, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* evaluates American participation in WWI and its impact on American society, providing necessary context for this work.<sup>32</sup> Ira Katznelson added a much-needed analysis of the accessibility of these programs for African American veterans in *When Affirmative Action Was White*. Katznelson found that even though the wording of these programs pledged full equality for all veterans, African Americans were prevented from fully accessing these programs due to structural racism and individual discrimination.<sup>33</sup>

Other historical works focus on the immediate homecoming period in terms of its social upheaval. Thomas Childers's, *Solider From the War Returning* is principally a collection of personal stories from a few families, but its opening analysis adeptly summarizes the difficulty

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<sup>30</sup> Emmett J. Scott, *The American Negro in the World War*, in the BYU Digital Library, <http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/comment/Scott/SCh11.htm> [accessed July 18, 2011].

<sup>31</sup> Edward Humes, *Over Here: How the GI Bill Transformed the American Dream* [Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2006]; Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The GI Bill: The New Deal for Veterans* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009].

<sup>32</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*.

<sup>33</sup> Katznelson, *Affirmative Action*, 135-40.

of transition and the disconnect between popular memory and postwar reality.<sup>34</sup> Michael D. Gambone's *Greatest Generation Comes Home: The Veteran in American Society*, also evaluates the transitional period and spends a chapter on African American veterans' transition.<sup>35</sup> Other social histories that place particular emphasis on black veterans include *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern Political Tradition* by Jennifer E. Brooks and *Fighting for Democracy: Black Veterans and the Struggle Against White Supremacy in the Postwar South*, by Christopher S. Parker.<sup>36</sup> *Stormy Weather: Middle-Class African American Marriages between the Two World Wars*, by Anastasia C. Curwood is an anecdotal collection, including stories from the author's own grandparents, but which also provides some important evidence of national marriage trends in the interwar period. Curwood also argues that marriage, the most intimate of relationships, is not truly private in that it is affected by a complex web of social pressures and aspirations, stemming from race, gender, class, and geographical region.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, this paper also considers the work of critical race theory. Interest conversion, a theory originally put forth by Derrick Bell in the 1980 *Harvard Law Review*, argues that civil rights only gained the support of the federal government when it was in the best interest of the

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<sup>34</sup> Childers, *Soldier from the War Returning*, 2-8.

<sup>35</sup> Michael D. Gambone, *Greatest Generation Comes Home: The Veteran in American Society* [College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2005].

<sup>36</sup> Jennifer E. Brooks, *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern Political Tradition* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004]; Christopher S. Parker, *Fighting for Democracy: Black Veterans and the Struggle Against White Supremacy in the Postwar South* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009].

<sup>37</sup> Anastasia C. Curwood, *Stormy Weather: Middle-Class African American Marriages between the Two World Wars* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010], 3-4.

government to support it, not because of any moral progress.<sup>38</sup> This argument has developed into a school of historical analysis best summarized by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic in *Critical Race Theory*. This paper does not view interest conversion as the ultimate explanation, but it is consulted as one of the causes and as an established framework for understanding that change can come as much from without as from within. This paper also uses the critical race theory of intersectionality, as black veterans dealt with the issues attached to minority status as African-Americans and veterans in ways that were multiplicative, not additive.<sup>39</sup>

As a final prefatory comment, it must be noted that evaluating the difficulties veterans faced is not an accusation of weakness. It is rather a further tribute to their sacrifice, which was not confined to the war years. The hardship American troops have faced while in combat has been well documented, and rightly so, but the struggle of the homecoming has yet to come under full historical scrutiny, and therefore has yet to be fully commemorated. These men, and some women, gave more than just a few years of their lives to the war effort, but dealt with the repercussions of war for the rest of their lives. Those servicemen of color had additional hurdles and setbacks as they navigated the difficult waters of both being black in America and being an American veteran. These struggles do not detract, but add to their heroism, as one need not be invincible to be heroic. It was also a period of adjustment for the families of American servicemen of all races, as they reacquainted themselves to their spouse, brother, child, etc., and came to grips with the fact that the war had changed them, too.<sup>40</sup> The struggles of these

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<sup>38</sup> Derrick A. Bell, Jr., "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma," *Harvard Law Review* 93, no. 3 [Jan., 1980]: 518-533.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* [New York: New York University Press, 2001], 51.

<sup>40</sup> Childers, *Solider From the War Returning*, 4, 6.

Americans should not be remembered as the outliers, but as the norm if we are to attempt to understand American veterans and this period in American history.

The story of black veterans in Knoxville is at its heart an American story. This Southern town and its African American veterans represent a particular story, unique to its time and place, but also subject to larger historical events and reflective of larger trends. Black veterans were a subset of all American veterans, not an independent group with unrecognizable difficulties or concerns. There was as much overlap as nuance between African American veterans and all American veterans, just as there was between veterans and civilians. Each group worked to establish homes, support their families, be part of their communities, and move on past the war that had so disrupted their lives. African American veterans, however, were in the unique position of both defending and demanding the most fundamental American values. Thus their experiences have much to tell us about the American dream in the first half of the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER 2: KNOXVILLE IN THE WAR TO END ALL WARS

“Let not our soldiers and sailors think this country will forget. For over fifty years we have held in reverent memory the men who wore the Blue and the Gray. And now their sons in Khaki will stand beside them always within the Holy Holies in the Nation’s heart.” – *Knox County in the World War*, 1919.<sup>41</sup>

Leading up to WWI, the ethnic tensions dividing American society were deeply felt and often dangerous. German-Americans felt the brunt of wartime propaganda as cities across the country made concentrated efforts to eliminate evidence of German heritage.<sup>42</sup> The bellicose former president, Teddy Roosevelt, articulated the concerns of many nativists when he questioned the loyalty of ethnic whites, particularly Germans, who continued to identify with their country of origin. He declared in 1915, “Those hyphenated Americans who terrorize American politicians by threats of the foreign vote are engaged in treason to the American Republic.”<sup>43</sup> The anti-German hysteria could turn violent, as German-Americans were occasionally harassed and intimidated into proper patriotic feeling. The worst expression of this ethnic violence was perpetrated against Robert Prager, a German-born baker in Collinsville, Illinois, who was first arrested and then lynched for “disloyal utterances” in April, 1918.<sup>44</sup>

In Knoxville, Tennessee, however, the black-white divide continued to be the most importance ethnic/racial distinction. East Tennessee historically had a small German-born

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<sup>41</sup> Roy E. Vale, “Dedication,” in *Knox County in the World War, 1917, 1918, 1919*, ed. Capt. Reese T. Amis [Knoxville, TN: Knoxville Lithographing Co., 1919], 53.

<sup>42</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 67-68. This phenomenon was not restricted to either North or South. Two notable examples: St. Louis, Missouri renamed all German named streets and Cincinnati, Ohio banned pretzels from lunch counters.

<sup>43</sup> “Introduction, Guided Readings: WWI,” *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, [http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module\\_pop\\_intro.php?modules](http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module_pop_intro.php?modules) [accessed July 18, 2011].

<sup>44</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 68.

population, and this did not change when the influx of German immigrants in the mid-to-late nineteenth century affected the demographics of the rest of the country.<sup>45</sup> In Knox County in 1910, only 220 residents were German-born, making them less than 1 percent of the population. This deterred the same level of anti-German hysteria as was present in some American cities before and during the war; the perceived threat of potential traitors and spies was not as strong without large German neighborhoods where the population still spoke German and identified as German. Additionally, there was not the same obvious backlash against German-born Americans in Tennessee because German culture did not define Tennessee cities, and so did not need to be eradicated.<sup>46</sup> African Americans, meanwhile, were a much more visible and formidable threat to white supremacists. 473,088 African Americans lived as permanent Tennessee residents, with 12,709 living in Knox County, making them 13.5 percent of the county's population.<sup>47</sup>

The segregation laws and practices of Knox County reflected these concerns. Interracial schooling at any level was prohibited from 1873 through the first half of the twentieth century. Additionally, Tennessee laws prohibited interracial marriage and segregated transportation on streetcars and railcars. Recreational facilities were not segregated by law, but there were laws prohibiting the government from interfering with the proprietor's decision to segregate their

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<sup>45</sup> John Ballenger Knox, *The People of Tennessee* [Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1949], 9; Thirtieth Census, 1910, Population Schedules, Knox County [Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1916], 602. The National Population Census for 1790 listed only 4.7% German-born Tennessee residents, which is slightly lower than the 5.6% national average. By 1910, the percentage was even lower, with only 3,903 German-born people out of a total state population of 441,045.

<sup>46</sup> Still, it should not be assumed that German-born Tennesseans escaped all discrimination. As such a small minority, they were potentially easier targets, and cultural tolerance may have been lower among non-German Tennesseans with such limited exposure. However, if German-born Tennesseans were harassed, it was not reported in the *Knoxville News Sentinel* or the *Knoxville Journal*.

<sup>47</sup> Thirteenth Census, 1910, Population Schedules, 594, 602.

facilities, if they so wished.<sup>48</sup> There was no housing segregation under the law, but that did not preclude housing segregation in practice. As historian C. Vann Woodward has argued, “The most prevalent and widespread segregation was accomplished without need for legal sanction.”<sup>49</sup> With economic restrictions, social pressure, and violence, black Knoxvilleians were segregated almost exclusively to East Knoxville, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> wards, and Western Heights in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> wards of the city.<sup>50</sup>

Many whites supported the racial caste system, but none more fervently than the Ku Klux Klan. After the release of the blockbuster sensation, *Birth of a Nation*, the KKK was reanimated in 1915 and quickly came to Tennessee. Knoxville’s chapter of the Klan initiated its first members in the spring of 1921 and by the end of the year had over 500 members.<sup>51</sup> The second Klan targeted blacks, Jews, and Catholics with renewed ferocity relying on extralegal terror to enforce their social code.<sup>52</sup> Lynching, defined by the NAACP as the illegal killing of a person by three or more other people, “under the pretext of service to justice or tradition,” was rampant despite Tennessee’s anti-lynching law from 1897. In fact, Tennessee ranked sixth in the nation with the number of lynchings allowed, with a confirmed 214 lynching victims between 1882 and

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<sup>48</sup> Bernard D. Reams, Jr. and Paul E. Wilson, eds., *Segregation and the Fourteenth Amendment in the States: A Survey of State Segregation Laws 1865-1953; Prepared for United States Supreme Court in re: Brown vs. Board of Education in Topeka* [Buffalo, NY: Wm. S. Hein & Co., 1975], 604-606.

<sup>49</sup> Woodward, *Strange Career*, 101.

<sup>50</sup> J. H. Daves, ed., *A Social Study of the Colored Population of Knoxville, Tennessee* [Knoxville, TN: The Free Colored Library, 1926], 1; Grier and Grier, *Equality and Beyond*, 22. The Supreme Court would strike down housing segregation in 1917 when the Kentucky zoning ordinances segregating races was declared unconstitutional in *Buchanan v. Warley*.

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1919* [1967; repr., Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1992], 59.

<sup>52</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994], 78; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 285.

1930. For the many confirmed lynching cases, there were many more unconfirmed, as disappearances were often left uninvestigated and mysterious deaths were frequently dismissed as suicides. When lynching was confirmed, most lynchers went unpunished, despite formal laws, due to sympathetic juries or the refusal of law enforcement to prosecute.<sup>53</sup>

After years of silence on the issue but only a few months after Robert Prager was murdered, President Wilson decried the rampant extralegal justice in a proclamation on July 26, 1918. Capitalizing on wartime rhetoric, Wilson called Americans to consider the message lynching sent to the nation's enemies. He said, "We proudly claim to be the champions of democracy. If we really are, in deed and in truth, let us see to it that we do not discredit our own."<sup>54</sup> No other German-born American was lynched during the war, but African Americans continued to be targeted across the country.<sup>55</sup>

Most wartime rhetoric managed to champion democracy while vilifying Germany, and Knoxville's newspapers were no exception. On October 6, 1918, the *Knoxville Journal* ran a "liberty bond" advertisement entitled, "Heaven or Hell, Freedom or Slavery: Which Do You Choose?" Demonstrating the knack for coupling patriotism with religious dualism, it read: "Liberty bonds stand for freedom and Heaven. Germany stands for slavery and hell. Which will

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<sup>53</sup> Kathy Bennett, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, s.v. "Lynching," <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=816> [accessed July 18, 2011].

<sup>54</sup> President, Proclamation, "July 26, 1918. My fellow countrymen. I take the liberty of addressing you upon a subject which so vitally affects the honor of the nation and the very character and integrity of our institutions...I allude to the mob spirit," Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division [Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1918].

<sup>55</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 87-88. It must be noted, however, that President Wilson refused to make a statement urging Americans to stop harassing German-born Americans in other ways. Wilson continued attacks on foreign-borns even after the Armistice, saying in 1919, "Any man who carries a hyphen about him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic."



you have? Germany is fighting to enslave mankind and make of all the world a hell under German domination. America and our Allies are fighting to save human freedom and make a Heaven on earth. The battle is one; we will have one or the other.”<sup>56</sup> With such an unabashed demonization of Germany, it would be difficult for those 220 German-born Knoxvilleians to navigate an identity as both German and American. Additionally, it is clear that although there was no concerted effort to take German-ness out of Tennessee, there was, as in the rest of the nation, a concerted effort to keep it out. The nationwide propaganda campaign came to the volunteer state as the CPI dispatched “Four-minute men” to drum up support for the war and distrust of the “Huns.”<sup>57</sup> Still, most native-born Americans drew a clear distinction between disloyal German-hyphen-Americans, and patriotic Americans of German-descent. Even the advertisement quoted above did not direct its ire at German-Americans but at Germany, and put equal responsibility on all Americans to support the war effort. Many German-Americans proved their loyalty to the satisfaction of their neighbors and all were welcomed into the American Armed Forces without restriction.<sup>58</sup>

African Americans, on the other hand, continued to be distrusted by the federal government and the majority of white Americans. As Du Bois would famously say, African Americans had a “double-consciousness,” as both black and American, and unlike German-borns, the hyphen did not fade away with successive generations.<sup>59</sup> The pseudo-scientific

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<sup>56</sup> Richard H. Edmonds, “Heaven or Hell, Freedom or Slavery: Which Do You Choose?” *Knoxville Journal, Metro Ed.*, October 6, 1918.

<sup>57</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* [1980; repr., Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004], 41, 61-62.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. In fact, some saw military service as the best way to Americanize foreign-borns.

<sup>59</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, in *Three Negro Classics* [New York: Avon Books, 1965], 215.

eugenics movement had taken firm hold on the minds of many white Americans, even among the intellectual elites, who were sometimes the most vehement adherents to its racial doctrine.<sup>60</sup> Eugenicists sought to classify each racial group based on its inherent abilities and predispositions, and to arrange these groups in a hierarchy relative to each other. They studied phrenology, the size and shape of the cranium of individuals, as well as the perceived “norms” of all races’ behaviors. Eugenicists declared, with all the trappings of scientific objectivity, that African Americans were biologically incapable to equal whites’ morality or intelligence.<sup>61</sup> These findings had major implications for the military service of African Americans, not least for its assessment of moral deficiencies. Whether aware of these studies or not, many white Americans already feared that armed blacks would turn on whites. White audiences in Knoxville and across the county cheered when *Birth of a Nation* showed Klansmen triumphing over abusive, marauding black soldiers.<sup>62</sup> Some suspicious whites petitioned the federal government to prevent African Americans from serving in the military.<sup>63</sup>

The American Armed Forces agreed. Commissioning their own study in 1906, the U.S. Army War College found blacks unsuitable for military service. Flagrantly disregarding the distinguished service of African Americans in previous wars, this study declared that African Americans possessed insufficient intelligence and spatial reasoning to perform the military’s

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<sup>60</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* [New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001], 160-61.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 87, 385.

<sup>62</sup> “Hundreds Brought to Atlanta By ‘Birth of a Nation,’” *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 13, 1915.

<sup>63</sup> Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles*, 36-37.

necessary tasks.<sup>64</sup> The United States military heeded these dismal pronouncements by restricting eligibility for service in the Great War based on race. African Americans were not barred from all service, however, most likely because entering the European conflict presented the US Military with serious logistical problems. In 1917, the United States Army had only 107,641 standing members, thus when President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany, he also soon called for a draft. On May 18, 1917, Congress passed the Selective Service Act, requiring all men between the ages of 21 and 30 to register for the draft.<sup>65</sup> More than 23 million men registered before the war was over, and close to three million draftees would serve.<sup>66</sup>

African Americans responded enthusiastically to the call. They believed, like many other Americans, that they had both the ability and the obligation to “make the world safe for democracy.”<sup>67</sup> This does not mean, however, that blacks were unaware of the hypocrisy of the claim, nor of the failure of whites to recognize black military service in the past. Some black leaders, like A. Philip Randolph, discouraged African-American participation in the war, decrying the democratic propaganda as a farce. The majority of African Americans, however, agreed with Du Bois’s editorial in the *Crisis*. Entitled, “Close Ranks,” it advocated temporarily

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<sup>64</sup> Spivey, *Fire From the Soul*, 223, 225. This same year, a white mob attacked a barracks of black soldiers in Brownsville, Texas, over the alleged rape of a white woman.

<sup>65</sup> Jami Bryan, “Fighting for Respect: African American Soldiers in WWI,” *Military History Online*, <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/wwi/articles/fightingforrespect> [accessed July 20, 2011].

<sup>66</sup> “Over There: American Doughboys Go To War,” *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, [http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module\\_pop\\_intro.php](http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module_pop_intro.php)? [accessed July 17, 2011]

<sup>67</sup> Spivey, *Fire from the Soul*, 227.

setting aside racial interests in favor of national interests and struck a chord with many blacks when it argued that surely, this time, their service in a time of trial would not be forgotten.<sup>68</sup>

More than 2 million African Americans registered, and 367,000 served.<sup>69</sup> Prior to WWI, there were four all-black regiments: the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Within a week of the declaration of war on Germany, the volunteer quotas for all four had been filled. Faced with genuine need and pressure from African Americans, the military added the 92<sup>nd</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup> divisions, all-black infantry regiments, in 1917.<sup>70</sup> Approximately 2,260 African Americans registered in Knoxville.<sup>71</sup>

All of these African American servicemen would serve in segregated units and all would fight in the Army. The Army put the majority of black troops in support staff, but was unique among the branches of the military in that there were all-black fighting troops. The Navy and Coast Guard only allowed blacks to work in menial positions and the Marines did not admit African Americans at all.<sup>72</sup> There were three versions of draft cards used in Knoxville, all of which asked for specification of race and country of origin. One type of draft card, used most frequently, asked the draftee to check the box that applied: White, Colored, Oriental, or Indian. Indian then had two sub categories for citizen or noncitizen. The second most common version instructed draftees to cross out the races that did not apply to them, which were listed as follows:

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<sup>68</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 380. Du Bois also supported military service as another way to distinguish the “Talented Tenth” that could lead racial uplift; Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 181-82.

<sup>69</sup> Norrell, *The House I Live In*, 78.

<sup>70</sup> Bryan, “Fighting for Respect,” <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com>

<sup>71</sup> U.S. Army, World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, under “Knox County, Tennessee,” <http://search.ancestry.com/Browse/view.aspx?dbid=6482&iid=TN-1853026-0857> [accessed January 28, 2012].

<sup>72</sup> Bryan, “Fighting for Respect,” <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com>

White, Negro, Indian, or Oriental. Finally, the third version asked draftees to write in the blank.<sup>73</sup> The answer to this ostensibly simple question would directly affect the draftees' prospects as part of the US Military.

Discrimination did not end with the draft boards, but would remain a part of the black soldier-experience during and after the war. Training camps exposed African American troops to some hostile commanding officers and townspeople near the base.<sup>74</sup> Overseas this did not change, as Allied troops were generally more grateful for the support of African American soldiers than were their fellow doughboys.<sup>75</sup> Living conditions among black troops were far inferior to that of white troops, a disadvantage as hard to ignore as the menial assignments and epithets from fellow soldiers and commanding officers.<sup>76</sup> Blacks back home were aware of the discrimination through letters from soldiers and reports by the black press. Understandably, this had a negative impact on morale, both at home and abroad.<sup>77</sup>

By mid-September, 1918, the German military was also aware of this discrimination and tried to use it to their advantage. In an effort to exploit the racial divide, Germans targeted African Americans in a new propaganda campaign. Canisters blasted across No Man's Land containing, not shells, but English-language pamphlets addressed, "To The Colored Soldiers Of America." One aimed at the 367<sup>th</sup> Infantry argued the following:

What is Democracy? Personal freedom, all citizens enjoying the same rights socially and before the law. Do you enjoy the same rights as the white people do in America, the land of Freedom and Democracy, or are you rather not treated over there as second-class citizens? . . . No satisfaction whatever will you get out

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<sup>73</sup> U.S. Army, World War I Draft Cards, <http://search.ancestry.com>

<sup>74</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 159-60.

<sup>75</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 163.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

of this unjust war. . . . Throw it away and come over into the German lines. You will find friends who will help you along.<sup>78</sup>

The propaganda failed, which many blacks proudly attributed to the depth of patriotic feeling among African American soldiers, especially in light of the truth of the accusations. Some black soldiers also probably assumed that the letter was a trap and did not want to walk into an ambush. Either way, there were no reported cases of African American soldiers defecting to the German side.<sup>79</sup>

Beyond resisting desertion, the commitment of African Americans was proven in battle. Fifty-seven were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, approved by Congress on July 9, 1918.<sup>80</sup> Still, discrimination cut deep. More African-Americans were awarded medals of distinction from Allied armies than from their own. For example, 171 members of the 93<sup>rd</sup> earned the French Legion of Honor.<sup>81</sup> One of these soldiers was a fighter pilot named Eugene Jacques Bullard. The American military would not permit African American pilots, so Bullard trained in France and became a WWI pursuit pilot in the esteemed French LaFayette Flying Corps. Called the “Black Swallow of Death,” he was later awarded several honors by the French government, including the highest French Legion of Honor and Croix de Guerre.<sup>82</sup> His personal motto, “All Blood Runs Red,” was written on the side of his plane and appealed to a common

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<sup>78</sup> Scott, *The American Negro in the World War*. Chapter XI.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> John D. Silvera, *The Negro in World War II: A Record of Achievement* Vol. I [Washington DC: Sentry Publishers, 1944], 39.

<sup>81</sup> “True Sons of Freedom,” African American Odyssey: World War I and Postwar Society (Part I), *Library of Congress Online* <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohhtml/exhibit/aopart7.html> [accessed July 18, 2011].

<sup>82</sup> Lynn M. Homan and Thomas Reilly, *Black Knights, The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen* [Gretna, LA: Pelican, 2001], 12.

humanity above racial distinction.<sup>83</sup> The French military recognized this idea before Bullard's own military did.

Indeed, the American military was cautious about openly commending the service of its black troops. Many white troops openly expressed fears of possible encouragement toward blacks that might increase their likelihood to fraternize with foreign white women or demand equality at home.<sup>84</sup> Various commanding officers echoed this sentiment. Major General Ballou officially commended the troops of the 92<sup>nd</sup> multiple times during the month of November, 1918 and General Pershing praised them in his speech during their official review after the conclusion of the war in January 1919.<sup>85</sup> During the war, however, General Pershing was more wary of commending black troops. In a secret communiqué to French military stationed with the US Army, on August 7, 1918, he instructed, "We must not eat with them, must not shake hands with them, seek to talk to them or to meet with them outside the requirements of military service. We must not commend too highly these troops, especially in front of white Americans."<sup>86</sup> Thus whatever respect black servicemen were due from their superior officers, a potential white audience precluded acknowledgment.

Still, for those who survived the war, white or black, the Armistice meant coming home to a hero's welcome. American veterans were transported home on a combination of carriers, depending on where they were stationed, deloused, and then honorably discharged with fresh

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<sup>83</sup> Lou Potter, William Miles, and Nina Rosenblum, *Liberators: Fighting on Two Fronts in World War II* [New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanoich, 1992], 89.

<sup>84</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 167.

<sup>85</sup> Scott, *American Negro in the World War*, <http://net.lib.byu.edu>

<sup>86</sup> "African-American Soldiers After World War I: Had Race Relations Changed?" *EDSITEment!: The Best of the Humanities on the Web*, <http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-pla/african-american-soldiers-after-ww1>

uniforms and a bonus of \$60.<sup>87</sup> This took place in thirty-three difference demobilization camps around the country.<sup>88</sup> African Americans were often discharged first, due to fears that they would fraternize more with white French women after the Armistice was signed.<sup>89</sup> Given priority to be shipped out, all 200,000 black troops stationed in France were home within the year.<sup>90</sup>

The projected estimate was the daily return of 30,000 troops to American shores.<sup>91</sup> There were parades and celebrations awaiting the arrival of these new veterans in each port city and many in-land cities on the official tour route. Celebrations erupted across the country with news of the armistice, and each new wave of veterans was additional cause for celebration. Residents of New York City sometimes commented that they felt like part of an unceasing parade.<sup>92</sup>

Celebrations in Knoxville predated the arrival of troops. When the Armistice was declared on November 11, Knoxville newspapermen were the first to hear, and on this one occasion, they did not wait for the presses to spread the word. When the news came in at 3 o'clock in the morning, the reporters went into the street, shouting the news and celebrating into the night. Thousands joined by 8 o'clock that morning when the paper was circulated with the news. The front page of the November 12, 1918 *Knoxville Journal, Metro Ed.* Joyfully

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<sup>87</sup> Andrew Johnson, interview by Levi C. Hubert, November 20, 1938, "I Did My Bit for Democracy," *American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-40*, Library of Congress Online, <http://memory.gov/learn/features/timeline/progress/wwone/mybitfordemocracy> [accessed July 1, 2011].

<sup>88</sup> Nancy Gentile Ford, *The Great War and America: Civil-Military Relations during World War I* [Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008], 94.

<sup>89</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 193, 200.

<sup>90</sup> P.L. Pratts, "The Morale of the Negro in the Armed Services on the United States," *The Journal of Negro Education: A Quarterly Review of the Problems Incident to the Education of Negroes* 8, no. 3 [Summer, 1943]: 534.

<sup>91</sup> "Orders to Demobilize Troops Are Issued; Overseas Movement Stops," *Knoxville Journal and Metro Ed.*, November 17, 1918.

<sup>92</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 383.



headlined, “Victorious Peace Brings Joy to Knoxville: Greatest Demonstration Ever Staged in City Comes When News Is Received: Business Cast Aside For Big Celebration.” Indeed Mayor MacMillan suspended business for the day and the celebrations carried on well into the night, clogging Gay Street and other major thoroughfares with throngs of cheering, crying Knoxvilleians who emotionally welcomed the news as a community.<sup>93</sup> The newspaper noted the participation of African Americans in the cheering crowd. A small article on page 12 condensed the participation of African Americans in the community celebration to two sentences: “Knoxville’s negro [sic] population was 100 percent American and patriotic and thousands of negroes appeared on the streets along with the other citizens and visitors Monday. Negroes in all sections of the city decorated their homes with flags and expenditures were made to make the negro section of the parade compare with the best.”<sup>94</sup> All together, Knoxvilleians created an impromptu parade on November 11 that stretched four miles and culminated in an impressively large bon fire later that night.<sup>95</sup>

From that point on, the fantastic expectations of the homecoming could only intensify. Advertisements and political cartoons perhaps best captured the mood of the public. As troops began to trickle back into Knoxville, the local papers were covered in advertisements thanking the troops and wishing them welcome. Some of these advertisements just expressed their

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<sup>93</sup> “Victorious Peace Brings Joy to Knoxville: Greatest Demonstration Ever Staged in City Comes When News Is Received: Business Cast Aside For Big Celebration,” *Knoxville Journal, Metro Ed.* November 12, 1918.

<sup>94</sup> “Thousands of Negroes Join in Celebration,” *Knoxville Journal, Metro Ed.*, November 12, 1918.

<sup>95</sup> Peace Celebration Reaches Climax in lighting of Mammoth Bon Fire on Athletic Field,” *Knoxville Journal, Metro Ed.*, November 12, 1918.

gratitude and signed the name of the company to the sentiment.<sup>96</sup> Others tailored their thanks to their products, like Day Company that promised discounts on new civilian suits.<sup>97</sup> Women's clothing companies also capitalized on the moment, advertizing "joyous" new styles and picturing women embracing servicemen, dressed head to toe in the height of fashion.<sup>98</sup>

Still other advertisements promised a certain state of mind. Stout and McCallie Co. depicted a returned soldier joyfully unpacking his equipment with his beaming son. The tag line read, "as our tribute to your great deeds, we promise a period of re-construction which shall bring things back to their normal wont."<sup>99</sup> King Mantel and Furniture Company also presented their products as the fulfillment of wartime longings. Their advertisement seemed written to soothe veterans into a sale:

After you have settled down to civil life once more; after you have laid away the uniforms and donned your citizen's clothes; your big world task accomplished; there will be other dreams of home, and these dreams to those who strive to win will come true. And when they do come true, won't you please let King Mantel and Furniture Company of Knoxville, in your own dear land of Tennessee, to whatever extent we may serve, help you furnish the home of your dreams?<sup>100</sup>

This putting-the-past-behind-us attitude would, however, be much more difficult in practice.

Some advertisements paid tribute to fallen soldiers and called on Knoxvilleians to remember the sacrifice, not just of years, pain, and distance, but of entire lives. Again, even these

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<sup>96</sup> See for example, Morris Bart, "To Each Returning Hero," and Chapman Drug Co., "Glad You Are Back Home," advertisement, *Knoxville Sunday Journal and Tribune*, March 30, 1919, 9-B.

<sup>97</sup> Day Company, "Knoxville Welcomes You," advertisement, *Knoxville Sunday Journal and Tribune*, March 30, 1919, 10-B.

<sup>98</sup> "Dress Up for the 117<sup>th</sup>'s Home Coming: 1919 Styles Are Joyous!" advertisement, *Knoxville Sunday Journal and Tribune*, March 30, 1919, 12-B.

<sup>99</sup> Stout and McCallie Co. advertisement, *Sunday Journal and Tribune*, March 30, 1919, 4.

<sup>100</sup> King Mantel and Furniture Co. advertisement, *Sunday Journal and Tribune*, March 30, 1919, 5.

tributes could be used to garner sales. Northwestern Life Insurance ran an ad entitled “The Love That Outlasts Life.” Below the title, a friendly life insurance agent delivered a monthly check to a sober-looking woman, clearly a war-widow, and two bouncing children, all three of whom seem to take solace in their monthly safety-net.<sup>101</sup> In all of these advertisements, all of the people were white.

Knoxville hosted three retuning divisions during the week of March 30-April 6, 1919. The city came out in full-force to celebrate the return of so many heroes, some of them Knoxville natives. The 114<sup>th</sup> Artillery marched through on March 30 and 30,000 Knoxvilleians were reportedly in attendance. Confetti, horns, whistles, cowbells, pistol shots, and rattlers “all but drowned out the music of the bands.” Some people from outside the city walked for hours to be part of it, and by three hours before the parade was set to begin, it was already impossible to get anywhere near the front of the crowd lining the street.<sup>102</sup> Two days later, on Friday, April 4, 1919, headlines blared “Welcome Home, Gallant 115<sup>th</sup> Artillery.” There was a parade and reception planned, and though the crowd was smaller due to rain, it was still “large and representative and enthusiastic.”<sup>103</sup>

The main event for the week, however, came the next day with the return of the 117<sup>th</sup>. The other parades were preliminaries for the heroes of the Hindenburg Line. The parade consisted of 2,320 people and the city organized two community dances, one dance on Market Street and one in Cherokee Country Club for officers. Articles on that day predicted, “the

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<sup>101</sup> Northwestern Life Insurance, “The Love That Outlasts Life,” advertisement, *Sunday Journal and Tribune*, March 30, 1919, 20.

<sup>102</sup> “30,000 Knoxvilleians Greet Heroes of 114<sup>th</sup> Artillery. Battery C Turning Into Gay Street For Parade,” *Sunday Journal and Tribune*, March 30, 1919.

<sup>103</sup> “Great Welcome for the 115<sup>th</sup>,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, April 5, 1919.

greatest crowd that ever witnessed a public demonstration in Knoxville” with representatives from “more than 20 neighboring towns” and more from the countryside.<sup>104</sup> The people of Knoxville did not disappoint: some estimated attendance at 75,000 people. Vendors sold flags and souvenirs and city industries shut down the day before so workers could go to the parade.<sup>105</sup> How many African Americans were in the crowd was not specified, but it is reasonable to assume that their absence in the reports was due to bias of the reporters, not absence from the events. For African Americans, the parades were not only cathartic experiences as Americans, but also political demonstrations as black Americans. Historian Chad L. Williams has argued that “The homecoming parades and celebrations, which occurred throughout the country, reflected the collective will of African Americans to demonstrate their civic belonging by organizing and congregating by the thousands around their returning heroes.”<sup>106</sup>

These celebrations could also be very painful experiences, as wounded or disabled veterans found themselves on display and, even worse, 116,516 American soldiers died in the course of the war.<sup>107</sup> For their loved ones, the flag-waving crowds and confetti-filled streets stood in stark contrast to their own private grief. The newspaper editors themselves also drew attention to the fallen, not just in casualty-listings, but also as a common theme in editorials and political cartoons. In a more somber part of the celebration of the 117<sup>th</sup>, wounded troops rode in automobiles and there were commemorations to the 378 men lost from this division. The

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<sup>104</sup> “Welcome Home, Victors of the Hindenburg Line,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, April 5, 1919.

<sup>105</sup> “Knoxville Receives Hindenburg Line Breakers With Unprecedented Acclaim,” *Sunday Journal and Tribune*, April 6, 1919.

<sup>106</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 189.

<sup>107</sup> “Module World War I,” *Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module.php?> [accessed July 18, 2011].

newspaper noted, “There was a pathos in the review of the 117<sup>th</sup> Infantry here Saturday, as well as rejoicing. Some of those who cheered the returning heroes also wept for loved ones who marched away with this regiment and did not come home.”<sup>108</sup> That same week, the *Knoxville Journal and Tribune* included on the front page of the Wednesday paper a cartoon entitled “The Gold Star.” Referencing the common insignia for the loss of a loved one in war, the cartoon depicted a woman, stoop-shouldered, facing away toward a window watching a parade in the distance and holding a paper with the headline “Great Reception Planned for 117<sup>th</sup>.” Above her was a big star with a cross-covered grave in the middle.<sup>109</sup>

The problem of readjustment was equally present, even in moments of tremendous celebration. On the same day the *Knoxville Journal and Tribune* announced the Armistice, the newspaper addressed the issue of reintegrating veterans into society. An article on page 5 announced proposals from Tennessee and South Carolina congressmen to give farmland to every returning soldier.<sup>110</sup> The paper would continue the discussion in the next few days, as some employers promised to return jobs to returning soldiers and encouraged all other employers to do the same. Notably Stephen C. Mason, the president of the National Association of Manufacturers, issued a statement declaring it the obligation of all American manufacturers to allow veterans to step back into their old work, “regardless of how the position may have been filled during his absence in the service of our nation.”<sup>111</sup> This issue was not settled so easily, however, and was on the minds of some troops coming home. Even the 117<sup>th</sup> Infantry, given a welcome beyond that of anyone else, was reportedly worried what their place would be once

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<sup>108</sup> “Hindenburg Line Breakers,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*.

<sup>109</sup> “The Gold Star,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, April 2, 1918.

<sup>110</sup> “Farm Lands for Every Soldier,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, November 12, 1918.

<sup>111</sup> “Old Jobs Awaiting Them,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, November 14, 1918.

they got home. Next to the articles celebrating the 114<sup>th</sup>, the *Knoxville Journal and Tribune* ran an article revealingly entitled: “117<sup>th</sup> Infantry Not Due Here Before Thursday. Men Want to Come at the Earliest Possible Moment, But They Want to Come Full Strength—Are Anxious About Old Jobs.”<sup>112</sup> The decision to include this anxiety on the front page, in striking contrast to parade photographs and celebration itinerary, suggests how prevalent this concern must have been.

Fitting veterans back into the mold of American society would in fact remain a topic of concern for years to come, though no Knoxville knew yet how difficult readjustment would be for the individual and for the community. Even amidst the crowds and reassurances of employment, historians John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr. explained that, “the period of jubilation was short-lived, however, for the business of settling down to postwar living became more urgent with every passing day.”<sup>113</sup> Beyond unemployment and grief for the fallen, there were other problems lurking at the fringes of the newspaper coverage. While the loss of loved ones was an accepted and encouraged form of grief, no other emotional distress was reported, either among the families or the soldiers. An article on April 4, entitled “Knoxville Men A Happy Bunch,” reported that the 114<sup>th</sup> boys, celebrated just a few days before, were already settling back into their homes, overjoyed to be back.<sup>114</sup> This was probably how many of them felt at the time, but the immediate relief would give way to more complex emotions soon after. These feelings would be more difficult to express in public, however, when employers and advertisements repeatedly assured the community that the transition would be immediate and

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<sup>112</sup> *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, March 30, 1919.

<sup>113</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 383.

<sup>114</sup> “Knoxville Men A Happy Bunch,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, April 4, 1919.

smooth. For African Americans, readjustment was especially difficult because they found their society less changed than they had hoped.

## CHAPTER 3: THE REAL RETURN, 1919-1925

“When war’s declared and danger’s nigh  
 ‘God and the soldier’ is the people’s cry,  
 When peace is once more made and all things righted  
 God is forgotten and the soldier slighted.” – 18<sup>th</sup> Century soldier.<sup>115</sup>

The readjustment of American veterans to civilian life would prove difficult in a variety of ways. The \$60 bonus given at demobilization centers was meant to tide veterans over until they secured their old jobs, but the promises of many employers fell flat in the post-war recession.<sup>116</sup> Without the wartime need for materials, the market for manufactured goods constricted, reducing the need for labor. Simultaneously, the surge of newly available workers exacerbated the competition for jobs. Now that the frontier had been officially closed, sending veterans to settle the West was no longer a viable solution, and as such America was like a boiler without a release valve.<sup>117</sup> The War Department foresaw these problems before demobilization had started, but even with foresight developed only a piecemeal plan. Meanwhile Congress, anxious to decrease spending from wartime highs, dramatically cut funding to the US Employment Service in 1919. This reduced the agency’s cost, but also its capacity to help anyone, civilian or serviceman, by 80 percent, just as the labor situation was becoming dire.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Attributed to a soldier in Marlborough’s Army from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish War of Succession, as quoted in *The American Legion Story* by Raymond Moley, Jr. [New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1966], 113.

<sup>116</sup> Rufus E. Clement, “Problems of Demobilization and Rehabilitation of the Negro Soldier After World Wars I and II,” *The Journal of Negro Education: A Quarterly Review of the Problems Incident to the Education of Negroes* 8, no. 3 [Summer, 1943]: 535.

<sup>117</sup> Ford, *Great War*, 93-94.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.



Thus the unemployment fears of the 117<sup>th</sup> proved prescient. The percentage of unemployed veterans rose from 16 percent in February to 33 percent in March.<sup>119</sup> That month, the War Department created the “Emergency Employment Committee for Soldiers, Sailors and Marines of the Council of National Defense” to address the 3 million discharged men who needed help finding work.<sup>120</sup> This committee, later expanded into a Bureau, grew to have 24,000 field representatives throughout the country who were supposed to assist veterans of all races, but the work of the committee was only as impartial as the field representatives, themselves. From their local offices, committee members met with veterans and handed out literature designed to encourage hireable behavior. One pamphlet entitled, “Where Do We Go From Here?” urged soldiers to ignore their instinct to wait for the best career option in favor of the first job available, even while acknowledging that this would be difficult for many of them to accept in light of their wartime sacrifices. This literature also told men to “look like a winner” and “‘go over the top’ as you did in France” for new employers. No doubt this advice was intended inspirationally, but these phrases seem strikingly insensitive to men to who were already the winners of a war and who knew all too well what “going over the top” actually entailed.<sup>121</sup>

To help this committee locate jobs for veterans, the demobilization centers had doughboys fill out cards describing their past work experience.<sup>122</sup> Meanwhile, state and local governments, including the Tennessee legislature, exempted registered veterans from the poll tax in their state for one year, as both tribute and minor financial aid.<sup>123</sup> The War Department also

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 100-101.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>123</sup> County Court Clerk, *Discharge from Service, 1919* Vol. 1-5, Knox County Archives.

reenlisted the support of the CPI to redirect their powers of persuasion from wartime to peacetime needs, using the same tactics to support the hiring of veterans as it had used for making them.<sup>124</sup>

These efforts alone were not enough to fill the need. Not only had veterans given up their jobs, they had also given up years of training that would have enabled them to fill new jobs or be considered for promotions.<sup>125</sup> The federal government attempted vocational training and public works projects, but they were too limited to have real effect. Furthermore, always concerned with funding, the federal government deemed each public works project to have “served its purpose” by August 1919 and abandoned them as a job-creation strategy.<sup>126</sup> Various social groups tried to help veterans where the government failed, but with little success. The Red Cross, YMCA, Salvation Army, Catholic groups, Jewish groups, and the American Legion each made only marginal progress in their employment searches, having to contend with the economy and labor conditions as they existed.<sup>127</sup> These groups also tended to slight African Americans, concerned first with the veterans that identified with their race and religion.

The percentage of veterans out of work rose again in April to 41 percent and the War Department occasionally admitted that the situation for black veterans was even worse.<sup>128</sup> During the war, the federal government had created the US Department of Labor Division of Negro Economics in 1918 to deal with issues arising for blacks in industrial war work.<sup>129</sup> Once the war

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<sup>124</sup> Ford, *Great War*, 104.

<sup>125</sup> Clement, “Problems of Demobilization,” 535.

<sup>126</sup> Ford, *The Great War*, 108-110.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>128</sup> Ford, *Great War*, 95; Robert H. Zieger, *America’s Great War: World War I and the American Experience* [Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000], 133.

<sup>129</sup> Zieger, *America’s Great War*, 132.

was over, African Americans (and women) were often the first fired to create space for the veterans, pitting the two groups against each other in the eyes of many whites. Many black workers resented the implication that they were now the enemy as they had sacrificed for the war effort along with everyone else. What black war workers did not know was that even during the war their contributions had been suspect to the Wilson administration. The CPI director regularly reported that blacks around the country were reaching new levels of unrest, which seems to have suggested to Wilson that black support of the war effort was, at best, opportunistic and, at worst, disingenuous.<sup>130</sup>

In the perspective of many postwar white employers, black veterans posed a particular problem. They were three groups in one: black, veterans, and black veterans, a phenomenon Critical Race theorists would later label intersectionality. Intersectionality is a theory that posits that when an individual is identified with more than one minority group, the stigmas attached to each minority group are not added, but multiplied by each other in the eyes of the majority group. Furthermore, that individual comes to represent not just both groups, but a discrete group of its own, with stigmas all its own.<sup>131</sup> Black veterans conceivably could have been sympathetic figures, but were usually considered more threatening than civilian blacks or white veterans or even those two groups combined.

Thus, Knoxville veterans came home to a more perilous and less receptive welcome than they felt that they had earned, and things were about to get worse, especially for African Americans. Unfortunately, the exact list of African American veterans who returned to Knoxville has been lost. The archival fire at the Military Personnel Archive consumed much of their WWI

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>131</sup> Stefancic and Delgado, *Critical Race Theory*, 52

collection and the city of Knoxville did not preserve this list among its records. Knoxville published a hardbound tribute to white veterans, filled with the early 1919 rhetoric, effusively memorializing their service in battle, but the editors deliberately excluded black soldiers.<sup>132</sup> It is rumored among archivists in Knoxville today that these editors burned the records pertaining to blacks so that no future tribute could be made in their honor. However, through crosschecking the registration cards with the poll tax exemption with the city directory, it is clear that at least fifty-seven African Americans served and returned to Knoxville. Most came home in small numbers each month over the course of 1919, with two periods of greater influx. Fifteen returned between December 1918 and the end of January 1919. Another twenty-five returned between June and August 1919, with nineteen returning in July, the largest number to return in any month by more than twice the next highest monthly return. All together, fifty-five of the fifty-seven African American veterans had returned by the race riot on August 31, almost half of whom had come home within the previous month and a half.<sup>133</sup>

Simmering racial animosity and labor unrest exploded into violence in Knoxville and twenty-five other cities from May to October of 1919, a period which would come to be called the Red Summer. Starting with white veterans leading a mob in Charleston, South Carolina on May 10, mobs sprouted up erratically until the last race riot on October 1, in Elaine, Arkansas.

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<sup>132</sup> Vale, *Knox County*, 51-53. For example, “Honor to who honor is due! For our gallant fighting men we have no words of praise too high. . . . Most sacred of all to us are those who sleep beneath the Flag, having poured out for it their last full measure of devotion.”

<sup>133</sup> County Court Clerk, *Discharge from Service, 1919* Vol. 1-5, Knox County Archives; Wheeler, “Knoxville Riot of 1919,” <http://tennesseencycolpedia.net>. Some historians argue that the riot was not officially a “race riot,” due to the behavior of the white mob while in the jail. However, as the riot soon spread into the black neighborhoods and whites began targeting blacks unconnected to the mob’s original victim, it seems to have enough characteristics of a race riot to be characterized as such.

Hundreds of people were killed in the riots that took place in sixteen different states and the District of Columbia. Tennessee had two race riots that summer; in addition to the Knoxville riot, there was one in Memphis. Race rioting was not contained by the Mason Dixon line: Michigan, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and New York all had at least one race riot that summer. The Western states of Illinois, Arizona, and Nebraska also had riots, with arguably the worst riot of the Red Summer in Chicago, Illinois. The same state willing to lynch a German-American one year earlier drowned a black youth for swimming in waters restricted to whites and refused to prosecute his attackers. Violence there surged for thirteen days, wounding hundreds, killing fifty, and leaving a thousand black families without homes.<sup>134</sup> By the end of October, eighty-nine people had been lynched nationwide in conjunction with the riots, seventy-six of whom were black. At least eleven of the victims were black veterans and many were in uniform.<sup>135</sup>

The trigger of the riot used by white mobs to justify their actions could be different in each case, but it always involved at least one black man, occasionally a veteran, who was perceived as threatening the status quo. The alleged crime was often sexual assault on a white woman, but could also be more visibly connected to economics, such as the attempt of sharecroppers in Elaine to unionize. The white mob, upon hearing of the alleged crime and before waiting for the legal system, would decide to execute the original perpetrator. In this sense, these mobs were no different than any other lynch mobs over the past century. What transformed the events into race riots was that the lynching was not the extent of the violence. First, whites continued to vent their aggression on the rest of the black community, targeting

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<sup>134</sup> Richard Wormser, "Red Summer, 1919," *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*, [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories\\_events\\_red.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_red.html)

<sup>135</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 232.

black neighborhoods and businesses, especially those that were relatively affluent. Second, blacks in these areas decided to fight back.<sup>136</sup>

In Knoxville, the race riot began over the alleged murder of a white woman, Bertie Lyndsey, by a biracial man, Maurice Mayes. Mayes was well known in the city of Knoxville: he occasionally served as deputy sheriff and was rumored to be the illegitimate son of Mayor John E. McMillan.<sup>137</sup> He had also been convicted of shooting and killing John Boyd a few years prior and had received a pardon by Governor Patterson.<sup>138</sup> Mayes was arrested early in the morning on August 30 on charges brought by Lyndsey's cousin, Ora Smyth. Smyth told the paper the following day that she and Lyndsey had been asleep in the same bed when an intruder attacked and murdered Lyndsey. The room was dark except for the flashlight the intruder brought with him, but Smyth insisted she could tell the assailant was an African American by his voice and "because he flashed the light on his hands several times and his face at least once."<sup>139</sup>

The *Sunday Journal and Tribune* presented Smyth as the prototypical virtuous white woman. She was "unusually pretty," and "gave an exhibition of coolness and gameness that could hardly have been excelled." Smyth stressed that if she had moved or screamed for help, the attacker would "have killed me too," an important caveat as her lack of physical resistance might otherwise have called into question not only the veracity of her claims, but her virtue.<sup>140</sup> Good white women resisted the advances and attacks (considered one and the same) of black men to

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<sup>136</sup> Wormser, "Red Summer, 1919," <http://www.pbs.org>

<sup>137</sup> Wheeler, "Knoxville Riot of 1919," <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net>

<sup>138</sup> "Killed in Effort to Escape Negro," *Sunday Journal and Tribune*, August 31, 1919.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

the point of death. Dramatized in *Birth of a Nation* and various other films, this was a foundational Southern value, and as such was essential to her credibility.<sup>141</sup>

From the start, there are elements of the case that cast doubt on the guilt of Mayes. Beyond her confidence that the attacker was black and after a quick glance of him running down the street, Smyth initially did not know who he was. When she gave a description to the police, it was the police who determined that the principle suspect should be Maurice Mayes. Knoxville police had already been watching Mayes, unbeknownst to him, because an unidentified biracial man had been “visiting apartment complexes and causing much trouble” in the area. The newspaper told its readers that “While no clues pointed to Mayes being the guilty negro [in this earlier case], officers at the police station stated Saturday that he has been under surveillance for the past few weeks.”<sup>142</sup> The paper neither condemned this practice as unwarranted infringement on personal rights, nor praised it as compelling foresight on the part of the police, but left that judgment to the reader. Either way, when the police heard of this attack from Smyth, their suspicions led them directly to Mayes. Once they brought Mayes in for questioning, Smyth declared him “the guilty man.”

The police’s account of the other evidence would be flatly contradicted by Mayes’s assertions in the paper. Aware that his words might be changed in publication, Mayes urged that the paper report his version of events faithfully, telling the reporter “I want you to take down what I say just as I say it.” The police found a .38 caliber gun in his dresser; Mayes insisted that the gun had not been fired in years, the police insisted the gun had been fired recently. Mayes

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<sup>141</sup> Michelle Faith Wallace, “The Good Lynching and “The Birth of a Nation”: Discourses and Aesthetics of Jim Crow,” *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 1 [Autumn, 2003]: 88-89.

<sup>142</sup> “Killed in Effort to Escape Negro,” *Sunday Journal and Tribune*.

claimed that he had an alibi with African American friends, the police claimed the footprints outside Lyndsey's house matched the tread on Mayes's shoes. It remains unclear who was telling the truth, but it could not be both. In the last line of the piece, no doubt damning evidence in the eyes of many whites, the police claimed to have found photographs of white women in a trunk in Mayes's house.<sup>143</sup> In white supremacist reasoning, not only did this provide motive for the murder, it provided justification for his lynching.

A white mob formed that night as word of the attack spread. They repeatedly attacked the Knox County jail where Mayes was held until they were able to break in.<sup>144</sup> Once inside, the mob did not attack the other black prisoners, leading some historians to classify this violence as a riot, not a race riot. However, the mob did release the sixteen white prisoners indiscriminately of their misdeeds, some of whom were there on murder charges.<sup>145</sup> As whites were storming the jail, they reportedly heard "that several holdups had been perpetrated by an organized and heavily armed band of negroes near Vine and Central Street."<sup>146</sup> After that, the fighting spread to the black section of town. It is unclear if it was hearsay or fact that African Americans broke into stores at this point in the night, but undoubtedly some were organizing to defend Mayes. It is also undisputed that the white mob did break into various department stores and pawnshops to loot pistols.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> "Machine Guns Used By Soldiers to Quell Mob; Stores Are Looted," *Sunday Journal and Tribune*, August 31, 1919.

<sup>145</sup> "Sixteen Prisoners, Some Held on Murder Charges, Set Free," *Sunday Journal and Tribune*, August 31, 1919.

<sup>146</sup> "Machine Guns in Main Battle of Riot: Principle Fighting Between Races Occurs at Vine and Central," *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, September 1, 1919.



The National Guard was called to restore order, but they banded with the white mob and turned their machine guns on the African American rioters.<sup>147</sup> The riot was chaotic; many members of the white mob were drunk and “several civilians were handling their firearms carelessly and endangering the lives of the soldiers by shooting at every moving object.”<sup>148</sup> One National Guardsman was killed by friendly fire.<sup>149</sup> One African American was also killed, Joe Etter, the owner of a second hand store who was “reputed to be wealthy.”<sup>150</sup> In all the chaos, it is difficult to know for certain if he was targeted for his economic security and independence, or if he was shot at as a black man and based on no other criterion. It is significant, however, that the damage of the riot was almost exclusively confined to black homes and businesses, the two primary sources of black wealth.<sup>151</sup>

Open fire lasted for over an hour and it took the arrival of several hundred additional guardsmen at 3:15 in the morning to quell the riot. These troops remained in the city, occupying the “negro section” with “what amounts practically to martial law,” according to the *Journal and Tribune*.<sup>152</sup> They were joined the next day by additional National Guardsmen, raising the total to 1,100, along with 150 Special Police, and 100 Special Deputies.<sup>153</sup> In addition to the two fatalities, fourteen people were hospitalized.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Wheeler, “Knoxville Riot of 1919,” <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net>

<sup>148</sup> “Machine Guns in Main Battle of Riot,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*.

<sup>149</sup> Wheeler, “Knoxville Riot of 1919,” <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net>

<sup>150</sup> “Civil and Military Guards Patrol City: Believe Riot Situation Is Well In Hand,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, September 1, 1919.

<sup>151</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 385.

<sup>152</sup> “Machine Guns in Main Battle of Riot,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*.

<sup>153</sup> “Civil and Military Guards Patrol City,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*.

<sup>154</sup> “Two Dead, Fourteen In Hospital; Only Minor Disorder Sunday,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, September 1, 1919.

The *Knoxville Journal and Tribune* was unsympathetic to the riot, if not to its provocation, but it did not fault the National Guardsmen for contributing to the hostilities. In an odd commentary of the event, using one eyewitness account, it noted:

The miracle of the whole thing is that more persons were not killed. Officers of the guard however, in a measure account for this. When the soldiers passed off Gay street onto Vine, it is reported that crowds of negroes also advanced toward them from Vine to Central, the first squad of them stopped and set up machine guns. In the meantime, the maddened mob that was trailing the militia began firing in the direction of Vine and Central. This, it is said, frightened the negroes to cover and when the machine guns opened up, only a few remained in the street to catch the fire.<sup>155</sup>

It would seem as though the paper or this eye-witness, drug store manager Dr. Joseph E. Carty, felt that the time it took to set up the machine guns saved the lives of many African Americans, but the language used was unclear enough to be either sardonic or sincere in attributing this mercy to the officers of the guard. Perhaps Carty felt the guardsmen were fulfilling their duty, or perhaps he was unwilling to openly condemn them while they were still stationed in the area to keep the peace. Either way, he was consulted by the paper as a resident expert on African Americans since his drug store, riddled by machine gun fire the night before, was frequented by many in the African American community. African Americans were not interviewed by the white paper to speak for themselves.<sup>156</sup>

While the guardsmen and police patrolled the streets, some civilians beseeched their city to return to the rule of law. The mayor released a proclamation to the city, recognizing the legitimacy of the mob's outrage, but deploring their conduct. He wrote, "A horrible crime upon an innocent woman is well calculated to arouse the primeval passion of men and lead to hasty

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<sup>155</sup> "Eye-Witness Tells Story of Beginning of Race Riots," *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, September 1, 1919.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

action outside the law; but the majesty of law must be sustained and the fair name of Knoxville...must not be allowed to be tarnished.” He continued to urge, “all our people, irrespective of race or color, to let reason and conscience resume their sway.”<sup>157</sup> Additionally, the proprietors of many of the looted stores gave full amnesty to those who would return the stolen goods by Friday. Rationalizing the mob violence, the paper informed all guilty parties, “These firms believe that the excitement of the moment caused many men to commit deeds they would not have been guilty of under any other circumstances. In this belief, the firms are anxious to give all honest men a chance to return their property before they start prosecuting.”<sup>158</sup> The understanding expressed by both the local government and businesses was a clear effort to restore tranquility, but it was also a tacit approval of the premise that when a white woman is attacked, good white men cannot help but respond violently.

Once the riot was investigated, thirty-six whites were arrested and brought up on charges of looting, inciting a riot, and/or endangering the public. All of them were acquitted by an all-white jury. In the meantime Mayes, the professed spark of the riot, still had to come before a jury himself, as the mob was not able to lynch him that night at the jail. He was convicted of murder and sentenced to death, also in front of an all-white jury. His case was appealed up to the Tennessee Supreme Court who ordered a new trial, but the new jury convicted him again in 1920. Mayes was then electrocuted.<sup>159</sup>

Rufus E. Clement, the president of Atlanta University, argued in 1943 in the *Journal of Negro Education* that the riots of the Red Summer were not just about race, but about the

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<sup>157</sup> “Mayor Deplores Dethroned Law,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*.

<sup>158</sup> “Knox Grand Jury Begins Probe Today,” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, September 3, 1919.

<sup>159</sup> Wheeler, “Knoxville Riot of 1919,” <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net>

scarcity of jobs.<sup>160</sup> Undoubtedly white lynching mobs had political and economic motivations for protecting existing social mores, but those social mores were structured in a racial hierarchy, so it would be wrong to misconstrue Dr. Clement's argument to suggest that race was not the primary factor in the violence. Race was the unretractable line that established both sides, predetermining one's loyalty as much as one's appearance. The day after the riot, the majority of Knoxville's employed blacks refused to work as an expression of solidarity and outrage. The food service industry was most affected by this decision, as restaurants all over the city employed predominately black cooks and waiters. During the one-day boycott, many Knoxville restaurants closed, unable to function without their African American staff members.<sup>161</sup>

It is important to give full credence to the effect of the return of black veterans on the cause and continuation of the Red Summer, even when black veterans were not initially attacked, such as in Knoxville. Various historians have rightly noted the targeting of black soldiers and that the return of black veterans affected the decision of black communities around the country to fire back at their white assailants.<sup>162</sup> Additionally, whites in 1919 openly feared black veterans would spark a rebellion.<sup>163</sup> The Tuskegee Institute's president, Robert R. Moton, and director of research, Monroe N. Work, gave speeches immediately following the war promising that black soldiers would not challenge the status quo, arguments that left many whites incredulous and many blacks infuriated.<sup>164</sup> It is therefore evident that in the minds of many white and black

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<sup>160</sup> Clement, "Problems of Demobilization," 535.

<sup>161</sup> "Cooks All Home; Restaurants Close; Hungry Crowds Stung," *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, September 1, 1919.

<sup>162</sup> See for example, Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 385-98; Spivey, *Fire from the Soul*, 228

<sup>163</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 229.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-32.

contemporaries, the main point of contention was the return of black soldiers: what they would do and what they were due. After the Knoxville riot, even Dr. Moton changed his message slightly, still arguing for economic cooperation, but also that blacks now had “more intense feeling towards the white people” than ever before, and that there ought to be positive change.<sup>165</sup> From one perspective, it may seem ironic that whites confirmed their own fears when they attacked black veterans and their communities and found these blacks willing and able to respond in kind. But it ought not be surprising. Resistance to oppression had taken many forms from the beginning of slavery and in a society recently exposed to unprecedented international violence, local violence was not a big leap.

Additionally, blacks were emboldened by the NAACP, which was beginning to rack up victories in the Supreme Court and was already much more powerful than it had been when it was founded a decade earlier. NAACP membership boomed in the interwar period, no doubt in part because many blacks were encouraged to promote racial justice in light of the violence perpetrated against them.<sup>166</sup> This violence was not expressed only in moments of all-out race riots, nor just in the cities where riots erupted. In addition to the lynchings of the Red Summer, there were other acts of vandalism and intimidation all over the country.<sup>167</sup> The NAACP immediately involved itself in prosecuting the Red Summer murders and investigating violence in rural areas, which could be even more deadly and often went unreported in the white press.<sup>168</sup> In the first week of October 1919, alone, “The NAACP reported as many as 250 rural blacks

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<sup>165</sup> “Negro Educator Deplores Riots” *Knoxville Journal and Tribune*, September 4, 1919.

<sup>166</sup> Zieger, *America’s Great War*, 205

<sup>167</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 225.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

may have been killed, some in officially sanctioned mass murders.”<sup>169</sup> Thus, the end of official race rioting was not the end of extensive racial violence, it just shifted to the countryside. Many blacks believed membership in the NAACP could promote racial uplift. The NAACP also made many efforts to keep black veterans in the foreground of the public consciousness and to champion their issues as many members felt the postwar period, despite the violence, still ought to be a new era of “reconstruction.”<sup>170</sup>

White supremacists similarly believed that a racial organization could promote their interests, thus the second Klan membership also increased dramatically in these years. While the NAACP worked within the legal system to fight racial violence and oppression, the Klan worked outside the law, using racial violence to encourage oppression. Knoxville Klan membership peaked in 1923 to include over 2,000 Knoxvillians.<sup>171</sup> Not only did they perpetuate racial terror, with other Tennessee branches of the Klan, they were a formidable enough voting bloc to help elect Governor Austin Peay and Senator Lawrence D. Tyson in 1924.<sup>172</sup> Still, many Klansmen believed themselves to be the besieged party and recognized their tenuous hold on economic security, if the individual member still had any economic security, at all. Historian Nancy MacLean has convincingly shown that the majority of Klansmen came from the middle to lower middle class and, afraid to slide down the socioeconomic ladder, grasped at racial hegemony as a way to limit their decline.<sup>173</sup> Over two-thirds of Knoxville’s Klansmen were laborers or blue-collar workers, the majority of whom were employed by Southern Railway, the Foreign and

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<sup>169</sup> Zieger, *America’s Great War*, 206.

<sup>170</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 211-12.

<sup>171</sup> Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 60.

<sup>172</sup> Mark V. Wetherington, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, s.v. “Ku Klux Klan,” <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=756> [accessed July 18, 2011].

<sup>173</sup> MacLean, *Behind the Mask*, 39, 79.

Domestic Veneer Company, the Appalachian Mills, or the Knoxville Power and Light Company.<sup>174</sup> In the turbulent postwar period, many of them were concerned they would lose either their jobs or regular income when the economy restricted and labor supply boomed. In this regard, Klansmen were not alone as a majority Knoxville's workers felt remarkably insecure in their jobs.

After a relatively calm September in Knoxville, the city was once more the center of a firestorm by mid-October, this time due to labor, instead of race. The Knoxville Railway and Light Company workers went on strike to increase their wages, still at the wartime low that had been justified to them as necessary wartime sacrifices.<sup>175</sup> At midnight on October 17, about 250 employees walked off their jobs, leaving the streetcars nonoperational until October 26. On that day, the KRL began running cars with replacement workers, which unfortunately coincided with a union meeting of 2,500 KRL workers and sympathizers.<sup>176</sup> They attacked the replacements, pulling them from the streetcars and barraging the streetcars with stones and bullets. Once again, the National Guard descended on Knoxville to restore order, undoubtedly conjuring up fresh memories of the force they had been willing to use the last time.<sup>177</sup> Although the National Guardsmen did not turn machine guns on the white strikers, the strike was broken on November 5, without granting any worker demands.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 65.

<sup>175</sup> Clayton David Laurie and Robert Cole, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1877-1945* [Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1997], 273.

<sup>176</sup> Allen R. Coggins, *Tennessee Tragedies: Natural, Technological, and Societal Disasters in the Volunteer State* [Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2012], 201.

<sup>177</sup> "Timeline of Knoxville events, 1910-1919," Staff Reports, *Knoxville News*, [http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2012/feb/26/125\\_timeline/?print=1](http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2012/feb/26/125_timeline/?print=1)

<sup>178</sup> Coggins, *Tennessee Tragedies*, 201.

Wilson responded to the labor strife, but was deliberately silent on the racial violence. The 1919 Red Summer received no response from the Wilson administration. Neither the president nor any member of his cabinet spoke publically about the riots or the lynching and the president would not renew his condemnation of lynching from the year before.<sup>179</sup> Nor would the president offer any condemnation of the Klan, himself a Klan sympathizer who had publically endorsed the film, *Birth of a Nation*, when it was released four years earlier.<sup>180</sup> The governors of each state called for the National Guard to restore order during the riots, but the president took no direct action on his own. In fact, the only government directive related to the riots was to send federal marshals to collude with local whites to sabotage black organizations, claiming that their efforts to affect social change derived from Bolshevik infiltrators.<sup>181</sup> The 3,300 strikes in 1919 however, became a principle domestic concern of the president.<sup>182</sup>

This concern did not translate into concerted economic or labor reform, nor into strategies to assist veterans, ostensibly the most deserving of all the “deserving poor” suffering from high unemployment and low wages. Multiple groups campaigned for veterans’ interests in the 1920s, most notably the American Legion. Created in 1919, the American Legion believed that the government, more than the private sector, had an obligation to provide jobs for its veterans.<sup>183</sup> Its other foundational belief was that that “One Hundred Percent Americanism” needed to be promoted, which was the same rallying cry used against “hyphenated Americanism” for the past

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<sup>179</sup> Zieger, *America’s Great War*, 207.

<sup>180</sup> John Hope Franklin, “‘Birth of a Nation’: Propaganda as History,” *The Massachusetts Review* 20, no. 3 [Autumn, 1979]: 425. The film opens with an endorsement from Wilson and the president had it shown at the White House.

<sup>181</sup> Zieger, *America’s Great War*, 207.

<sup>182</sup> Ford, *Great War*, 98.

<sup>183</sup> Thomas A Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989* [New York: M. Evans and Co., 1990], 120, 90.



few years. At various points, the American Legion convened to determine exactly what that slogan meant and who it included.<sup>184</sup> Generally speaking, it did not include blacks or other minorities, thus while their concerns for veterans was sincere, their conception of veterans was racially restricted.<sup>185</sup>

Still, their lobbying did produce some results black veterans could hope to use to their advantage. Veterans' needs, when split between various government agencies, were not being adequately addressed so, at the lobbying of the American Legion, the War Risk Bureau, Federal Board for Vocational Training, and Public Health Service were consolidated into the Veterans Bureau in 1921.<sup>186</sup> In 1922, the American Legion presented a plan for veterans aid before the House Ways and Means Committee. It was a four-pronged approach that provided the possibility of aid in four different ways: land settlement, home loans, vocational training, and "bonds," which were cash payments.<sup>187</sup> President Harding vetoed it as out of the federal budget. In response, another veterans aid bill passed Congress that same year, eliminating the bonus and land settlement idea and restricting the other available aid. Harding vetoed this version as well, as still too expensive to justify.<sup>188</sup>

The federal government did not turn a blind eye to all veterans' issues. Physically disabled veterans received more support from the federal government than any other veterans, starting even before the Armistice was signed. On June 27, 1918, Congress passed Vocational

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>185</sup> Terry G. Radtke, "Americanism and the Politics of Commitment: The Policies and Ideology of the American Legion in the Interwar Period" [PhD diss., State University of New Jersey, 1993], 489-90.

<sup>186</sup> Rumer, *The American Legion*, 139.

<sup>187</sup> Moley, *American Legion Story*, 113.

<sup>188</sup> Rumer, *The American Legion*, 145.

Rehabilitation Act, appropriating \$2 million for wounded veteran care, which funded the creation of Veterans' Bureau hospitals around the country, including multiple hospitals in the state of Tennessee.<sup>189</sup> Various VB hospitals admitted black patients, however other disability coverage was restricted based on race, if not in the letter in the law, then by the distribution agents.<sup>190</sup> Still, wounded veterans gained more sympathy than most. In 1922, after lobbying by the American Legion, Congress passed and the president approved a bill appropriating \$18.6 million more to hospitals, even as Harding vetoed other veteran aid.<sup>191</sup> This funded the construction of a hospital in Knoxville that specialized in mental cases, an urgent need the federal government was just beginning to address.<sup>192</sup> Indeed it was becoming clear to some government officials that invisible wounds could be as debilitating as physical ailments. The following year in 1923, Congress and the president passed a bill providing an extension of up to three years coverage for neuropsychiatric hospitalization.<sup>193</sup> This was a marked improvement, but still set a time limit on how long veterans had to recover from war-induced mental and emotional instability.

If it took the federal government until 1922-23 to become aware of the invisible toll the war had on returning soldiers, the families of veterans realized it immediately. Post-traumatic stress disorder would not be diagnosed until 1980, but of course that does not mean that it did not previously exist. Many civilians reported that their veteran seemed nervous, moody, anxious, or unsatisfied.<sup>194</sup> "Shell shock" came into common parlance in this period, as many soldiers

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>192</sup> American Medical Association, "New Program for Veteran's Bureau," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 79, no. 17 [October, 1922]: 1440.

<sup>193</sup> Rumer, *The American Legion*, 150.

<sup>194</sup> Childers, *Soldier from the War Returning*, 8.

struggled to come to grips with the terror and helplessness they felt while experiencing the overwhelming and impersonal force of modern warfare.<sup>195</sup> Significantly, the first and most vocal publication addressing the issue was marketed to women: the *Ladies Home Journal*. In the April edition of 1919, the *Ladies' Home Journal* ran an article written by an American war-bride about the difficulties her husband was having readjusting to civilian life and what she considered to be her duty to help him through the transition. The April edition sold over 1,900,000 copies and the orders for tens of thousands more could not be filled. This was sale was “the largest single edition of any American monthly magazine” according to their statement in the *New York Tribune*. The editors apologized for the unfulfilled orders and promised to run the article again in the May edition, which sold over two million more copies.<sup>196</sup> In an advertisement for the article in the *Evening Public Ledger*, the author explained her choice to write the piece: the headline read, “I Tell This Intensely Personal Story Only for One Reason,” the article continues, “Because I may convince some girl or wife that her job is not through when her boy comes home from war, but that it may have just begun.” The columnist for the *Evening Public Ledger* promised that this “is the most thrilling American girl’s story to come out of the war: it will stay with every girl and woman who reads it.” Not only did the writer recall the archetype of the “good woman” when she called women to their duty, the columnist invoked American women’s patriotism, proclaiming that “only an American girl could have stood up under such an experience: only an American girl could tell it as she does. It is, of itself, worth you buying the May *Ladies' Home Journal*.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 211.

<sup>196</sup> “Two Millions,” *New York Tribune*, April 10, 1919, 7.

<sup>197</sup> *Evening Public Ledger*, Night Extra Financial, May 5, 1919.

This emotional distress coupled with the violent racial and labor upheavals put a strain on veterans' family life. It is commonly known that war increases the rate of marriages in a population, but it also increases the rate of divorces and spousal abuse.<sup>198</sup> Of the African American veterans in Knoxville, thirty-five of the fifty-seven men were married. Nine were married before the war, but twenty-seven married after they returned. Some of them may have been too young to consider marriage before the war, but it is significant that nineteen marriages, 54 percent, took place between 1919 and 1925. Five veterans would marry more than once in this same period.<sup>199</sup> Postwar couples, of all races, faced various difficulties readjusting to one another. Additionally, marriage as an institution was beginning to be understood in new ways as American men and women in the 1920s, particularly "New Women," were beginning to expect emotional and sexual fulfillment in marriage to a degree uncommon among earlier generations.<sup>200</sup>

In addition to the New Woman, African American marriages had to respond to the "New Negro." The New Negro movement in the 1920s is best understood in the context of black veterans and the violence of Red Summer, including the labor unrest. The Harlem Renaissance celebrated black cultural contributions at a time when their humanity was routinely questioned or denied, even by their own government. Marcus Garvey and the "Back to Africa" movement fully recognized how pervasive racism was in American society and sought a new society elsewhere. This idea that blacks should leave the United States and form a new society was based on the

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<sup>198</sup> Childers, *Soldier from the War Returning*, 5, 8.

<sup>199</sup> Knoxville Board of Commerce, *1919-1925 City Directory of Knoxville and Suburbs* [Knoxville, TN: City Directory Co. of Knoxville, 1919-1925].

<sup>200</sup> Curwood, *Stormy Weather*, 4.

conviction that a peaceful and equal biracial society was impossible. Based on the violence of the Red Summer, some blacks saw truth in this logic.<sup>201</sup>

The majority of blacks, however, had no intention to leave. Reverend H. F. Butler, an African American civic leader in Philadelphia, spoke for many blacks when he declared at a 1919 rally:

The war is over. We have met the Hun. We have come home, and we have come home to stay. Don't think we are going back to Africa or any other place. This is our land, because we have fought for it, spilled our blood for it and given our lives for it. We have made the world safe for democracy. We have 'cleaned up' over there, and now we are going to clean up at home."<sup>202</sup>

Veterans especially wanted to reassert their place in society and wanted marriages to support that image; particularly blacks with aspirations to be part of the middle class. Historian Anastasia C. Curwood argues that "'Middle Class' in the case of early-twentieth century African-Americans, was a subjective status linked to cultural identity at least as much as it was to objective indicators of economic status."<sup>203</sup> This culture identity extended to gender roles. Women were pressured to return to feminine roles, not only to emotionally support the veterans in their lives, but also to repudiate the workplace. Many people across racial lines disapproved of new roles women were taking on and viewed their expansion into the workplace as an

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<sup>201</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 187, 395. Paradoxically, this notion was as old as the republic itself, as colonization plans were the preferred solution of many noted abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison.

<sup>202</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 211.

<sup>203</sup> Curwood, *Stormy Weather*, 5.

infiltration.<sup>204</sup> Access to the middle-class after WWI seemed to be opening up for people of all races, and veterans especially felt they deserved a piece of that pie.<sup>205</sup>

Without adequate veteran's support, however, the reality was much more constrictive. There was tremendous job insecurity for Knoxville's black veterans from 1919-25. Between 1919 and 1920, twenty-two veterans changed jobs, but that number is somewhat inflated as some were still working for the US military when the data was collected in 1919. But even if that year is excluded, job variation was still very high: an average of thirteen veterans changed jobs each year, nine of whom changed careers along with employers. Some of these changes may have been self-initiated, but the high percentage suggests that other social forces were in play. Besides the US military in 1919, the largest employer of black veterans was Southern Railway. It employed an average of 6.5 black veterans each year. Knoxville Iron Company was the second largest employer, though it averaged only two veterans in any given year.<sup>206</sup>

There was job insecurity even among the skilled trades. 1922 saw a high of nine veterans employed in skilled trades, which fell to a low of five the very next year. Each year, between 1919 and 1925, there was one teacher at the Maynard School, an all black school with all black

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 4, 8-9. One popular movie of the time captured these sentiments. In *Stormy Weather*, a WWI veteran and the sister of a WWI soldier who was killed in action, meet in the postwar period as professional performers. They fall in love, but her desire to keep her career is enough to keep them apart. Years pass but when they meet again, this time during WWII, the revival of the wartime need and their renewed romantic connection convince her to bear his children, the implication being that she will, finally, retire and return to her place in the home. Thus the New Woman of the Roaring Twenties is tamed and the movie is bookended by all characters making the appropriate wartime sacrifices.

<sup>205</sup> George Edmund Haynes, "War Conditions on Negro Labor," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* 8, no. 2 [February, 1919]: 171.

<sup>206</sup> *1919-1925 City Directory of Knoxville and Suburbs*.

teachers,<sup>207</sup> one barber, one butcher, and at least one physician. In 1919, there were three physicians, but by the end of 1925 only one remained in Knoxville. The skilled trades that came and went were carpenter, plumber, tile cutter, plasterer, cook, and grocer. While there were only a handful of black veterans employed in skilled work, they constituted a large percentage of all black skilled work for the city. According to a 1925 social study conducted by the Free Colored Library, only fifteen blacks were employed in skilled work, compared to ninety-six in semi-skilled labor, and 1,253 employed in unskilled positions.<sup>208</sup> This semi-skilled and unskilled work was even more transient. One veteran was consistently employed as a waiter each year, but he worked for three different restaurants. There were between two and four chauffeurs and one to two janitors on average, but different veterans were employed at those jobs at different times. Truck drivers especially represented the flux of the job market: four in 1919, none the next year, and two again in 1925.<sup>209</sup>

With the changes in jobs often came changes in living arrangements. On average, about fourteen veterans changed residences each year, most of them employed in unskilled trades. Unskilled laborers made an average of only \$2.75 a day for 9-12 hours a day and the work was notoriously unsteady, making living expenses difficult to afford.<sup>210</sup> Between 1919 and 1920, fifteen veterans changed homes and the following year, an additional eighteen changed residences. This means an average of 23.5 percent of black veterans and as many as 31.5 percent of black veterans changed homes in any given year in this seven year period. The most common streets where veterans lived were E. Vine, E. Church, S. Central, and College, the same that

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<sup>207</sup> In accordance with the law.

<sup>208</sup> Daves, *Social Study*, 4.

<sup>209</sup> *1919-1925 City Directory of Knoxville and Suburbs*.

<sup>210</sup> Daves, *Social Study*, 4.

would incur the most damage during the Knoxville race riot.<sup>211</sup> It is clear that de facto segregation continued in postwar Knoxville.

Sixty-three percent of all black families in Knoxville did not own their own homes, so they were subject to rent variations as well as unstable pay.<sup>212</sup> Living conditions were varied within the black residential areas, but were on average characterized by a variety of problems. Overcrowding was a serious issue within black neighborhoods, partially the result of many families housing boarders for extra income.<sup>213</sup> An average of three black veterans were boarders themselves to make ends meet in the transition, with a high of five in 1921. Black women were also more likely to work outside the home than white women as another necessary augmentation to the family income. Some were still employed in industrial work in 1925 who had not been pressured to leave these jobs, but the vast majority worked in domestic service in white homes, on average earning \$7-8 per week for twelve hours a day.<sup>214</sup> More affluent black families that could afford to adopt the middle-class model of keeping the wife in the home, actively cultivated an identity apart from lower classes of working class families who could not, a practice with many antecedents which would continue through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>215</sup>

While the riots of 1919 did not encourage a mass exodus from Knoxville, some people did move away in this period, whether to escape the violence or to find employment elsewhere is known only to them. Twenty veterans disappeared from the Knoxville City Directory by 1925. Five appeared Knoxville on the 1930 census, signifying either their return to the area, or

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<sup>211</sup> *1919-1925 City Directory of Knoxville and Suburbs*.

<sup>212</sup> Daves, *Social Study*, 2.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>215</sup> Curwood, *Stormy Weather*, 6.



mistakes in the city directory. However, by 1930, fifteen others had left Knoxville permanently. Eight moved elsewhere in Tennessee, three others moved north, and three more stayed in the South or Midwest.<sup>216</sup> One veteran could not be traced using the national census and military death records.

With all the difficulties veterans had been facing from the economy, labor market, physical injury, emotional distress, and other social changes, many were relieved to hear help was on the way in the form of a veteran's bonus. After much lobbying by the American Legion, various politicians, veterans agencies, and concerned citizens, a bill to increase veterans' benefits finally passed in 1924. Like his predecessor Harding, President Coolidge vetoed the bill as too costly, but this time Congress overrode. Much changed from the original multi-pronged proposal, the bill now consisted of only the cash bonus, itself reduced from its original amount.<sup>217</sup> Still, this was celebrated by many veterans as an improvement on existing benefits, though many quickly lamented the delay before the bonus would be delivered. "Bonus" certificates issued January 1, 1925 could be borrowed against in two years and would be paid in full in twenty years, meaning that veterans could expect a check in 1945 for their service in 1918.<sup>218</sup> How they would pass the meantime was left to each individual.

Then, after all the drama of the previous decade, the Army War College released a new study in 1925, proffering a comprehensive evaluation of the performance of black soldiers in WWI and recommending future military policy. Blatantly disregarding the many awards and

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<sup>216</sup> Fifteen Census, 1930, Population Schedules, transcribed, <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=6224> [accessed April 2, 2012]. One veteran went to each of the following states: New York, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Indiana, and Georgia.

<sup>217</sup> Rumer, *American Legion*, 153.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

citations of merit, it wrote, “All officers, without exception, agree that the Negro lacks initiative, displays little or no leadership, and cannot accept responsibility.” Despite the actions of the Buffalo soldiers in the Argonne forest and many other demonstrations of bravery of individual soldiers and units, the study asserted, “Due to his susceptibility to ‘Crowd Psychology’ a large mass of negroes, e.g. a division, is very subject to panic.” The Army War College used eugenicist data to support their findings, citing, once again, the size and weight of the brain as evidence that “in the process of evolution the American negro has not progressed as far as the other sub-species of the human family.” Segregated troops needed to be controlled by white commanding officers, as the black soldier “has no confidence in his negro leaders, nor will he follow a negro officer into battle.” The study concluded that blacks should continue to serve in strictly segregated units and that these units should be restricted from combat, unless they could prove themselves worthy in future combat training. This could only have been the gravest of insults to black veterans, who had sacrificed so much to prove the opposite. Their government had not only failed to readjust them into civilians, but was now refusing to acknowledge their service as soldiers. The war had brought changes, as promised, but it seemed that all of them were for the worse.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Office of Production Management: Commission on Fair Employment Practice: War Department, 1943, “Memorandum for the Chief of Staff Regarding Employment of Negro Man Power in War, November 10, 1925,” President’s Official Files 4245-G: Archives of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu> [accessed March 15, 2012].

## CHAPTER 4: AND AGAIN: POST-WWII KNOXVILLE AND THE GI BILL

“It sounds pretty foolish to be *against* park benches marked ‘Jude’ in Berlin, but to be *for* park benches marked ‘colored’ in Tallahassee, Florida.” – Roy Wilkins, editor of the *Crisis*, 1941<sup>220</sup>

Fifteen years later, the United States prepared itself for the possibility that a world war ravaging Europe would entangle it for a second time. On September 16, 1940, Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Act, or Conscription Bill, requiring all men between the ages of 21 and 35 to register at local draft boards.<sup>221</sup> This was the first peacetime conscription in the nation’s history.<sup>222</sup> Black leaders called on the president to take the opportunity to integrate the military. Once again, they noted the hypocrisy of fighting for democracy abroad while denying it at home, and this time, democratic principles were not all that was at stake. Nazi Germany’s “final solution” took eugenics to its logical conclusion: arranging racial groups in a hierarchy and eliminating those declared innately “least desirable.” Black leaders resoundingly condemned the proposed practice of fighting this threat to humanity with armed forces divided by a less-extreme manifestation of the same racist ideology.<sup>223</sup> America’s Armed Forces continued to recommend segregation, however, so this policy remained intact. The Conscription Bill urged draft boards not to discriminate in their treatment of draftees, but the new servicemen were once more placed in regiments specific to their race.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Terry H. Anderson, *The Pursuit of Fairness: A History of Affirmative Action* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004], 21.

<sup>221</sup> Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press During WWII* [Cranberry, NJ, Associated University Press: 1975], 143.

<sup>222</sup> Altschuler and Blumin, *GI Bill*, 176. Significantly, the law included provisions for reestablishing veterans into their old jobs at the cessation of hostilities.

<sup>223</sup> Anderson, *Pursuit of Fairness*, 21.

<sup>224</sup> Finkle, *Forum for Protest*, 143

African Americans were outraged and Roosevelt spoke to their concerns. Citing his own “personal observation in the last war,” he praised “how splendidly and valiantly the American Negroes fought for their country.” However, he simultaneously refused and chastised the petitions of pro-integrationists, asserting, “in the present dangerous crisis, Negro Americans, as well as all other Americans, must make sacrifices to meet the emergency and that at this time and this time only, we dare not confuse the issue of prompt preparedness with a new social experiment however important and desirable it may be.”<sup>225</sup> Thus the president equated patriotic duty with acceptance of the racial status quo.

Despite this invocation of wartime rhetoric, black leaders were not convinced that their mission was contrary to American interests, nor that integration should be forestalled in the interest of “preparedness” since the nation was not presently at war. Unimpressed by the calls for enlistment for a second time, A. Philip Randolph advocated a March on Washington in 1941 to protest racial discrimination in the war effort, particularly in defense work. Roosevelt urged him not to organize the march, but preparations went ahead until Executive Order 8802, prohibiting discrimination in war industries.<sup>226</sup> Randolph was not the only critic. An editorial in the *Afro-American* on May 31, 1941 entitled “Should More of Us Be Unwilling to Fight?” detailed the injustices against blacks in the Armed Forces. With appreciable irony, it noted that the only

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<sup>225</sup> President, Statement, 1940, Niles Papers, Civil Rights and Minorities Files, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Desegregation of the Armed Forces Online Research File, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=docs](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=docs) [accessed October, 2011].

<sup>226</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 480.

integrated military camp that was the detainment of conscientious objectors, solemnly concluding, “Moral—More of us should be unwilling to fight. Patriotism doesn’t pay.”<sup>227</sup>

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, patriotism surged among Americans of all races and criticisms of the war effort were quieted. No further protest against the war was put forth by the black press after December 7, 1941. Now that America was directly involved, many Americans were willing to make the necessary sacrifices to avenge and defend their country. From Knox County alone, 24,000 men and women served overseas during the war.<sup>228</sup> Recent legislation has restricted access to veterans’ discharge papers, sealing them for seventy-five years upon the return of the veteran.<sup>229</sup> As such, it is not yet possible to determine how many African American Knoxvilleians served in WWII, but nationwide, almost half a million African Americans served overseas in the course of the war.<sup>230</sup>

Black Americans, once more, recognized the potential for racial uplift. The editor of the *California Eagle* expressed the feelings of many blacks when he editorialized on December 11, 1941, “So long as our service remains complete and unsullied, the cry for ‘total emancipation’ is just inevitable.”<sup>231</sup> Du Bois supported the Second World War as he had the first, this time not just for the benefit of African Americans, but also for the elimination of Adolf Hitler, whom he considered to be a grave threat to the world.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Finkle, *Forum for Protest*, 149.

<sup>228</sup> “Red Cross Aids 15,000 Knox GIs,” *Knoxville Journal*, July 22, 1945.

<sup>229</sup> Tennessee State Legislature, Public Chapter 797, House Bill 2670, Acts to Amend the Tennessee Annotated Code, Relative to Military Discharge Records title 8, ch. 13, sec. 10/7/513 [2010].

<sup>230</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 483

<sup>231</sup> Finkle, *Forum for Protest*, 109.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

As many African Americans registered for military service, many others registered with civil rights organizations. Membership in the NAACP grew dramatically during WWII, from 50,000 to 500,000.<sup>233</sup> National wartime propaganda used “V” as shorthand for victory over the Nazis, Italians, and Japanese. The NAACP expanded on this idea and called for a “double V,” over enemies abroad and racism at home.<sup>234</sup> Additionally, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was established in 1942 as another group committed to African American advancement. Discouraged by the slow pace of NAACP jurisprudence, many CORE supporters advocated a faster, more confrontational approach to civil rights.<sup>235</sup>

The treatment of black servicemen and war workers was a primary concern for these organizations. The exclusion of black soldiers from the Air Force particularly provoked many African Americans, since this new division of the Army was considered by many contemporaries to be the most prestigious part of the military as the newest form of technology and warfare.<sup>236</sup> First lady Eleanor Roosevelt and the president’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services also recommended the admittance of blacks into the Air Force and the president acquiesced.<sup>237</sup> The Tuskegee program was commissioned on January 16,

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<sup>233</sup> “Introduction: Guided Readings; WWII,” *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, [http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module\\_pop\\_intro.php?modules](http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module_pop_intro.php?modules) [accessed July 18, 2011].

<sup>234</sup> Homan and Reilly, *Black Knights*, 17-18.

<sup>235</sup> “Introduction: WWII,” Gilder Lehrman, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org>

<sup>236</sup> Potter, Miles, and Rosenblum, *Liberators*, 89. However, this contention would be hotly refuted by members of the other branches of the military.

<sup>237</sup> President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, “Survey and Recommendations Concerning the Integration of the Negro Soldier into the Army,” Sept. 22, 1941, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Desegregation of the Armed Forces Online Research File, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=docs](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=docs) [accessed October, 2011].

1941. White instructors trained thirty-five black candidates over the course of thirty weeks. The government spent \$1,663,057 to build the Tuskegee airfields attached to the all-black institute rather than allow blacks onto a fully equipped white training site, Maxwell Field, only forty miles away.<sup>238</sup> Tuskegee Airfield was not fully completed when the first cadets got there and the “separate but equal” policy in its construction fell far short of equal in its size and equipment.<sup>239</sup> The Tuskegee pilots distinguished themselves as an elite fighting force, despite unequal training facilities. The standards at Tuskegee were much higher than at other flight colleges: average elimination for white pilots was roughly thirty percent, rates at Tuskegee were almost sixty percent, additionally almost all the African American cadets had college degrees and many had graduate degrees.<sup>240</sup> These pilots were aware of the higher expectations and of their higher performance. As Lt. Roscoe C. Brown put it, “we had to be just as good and probably better than the white guys or they would find some way to wash us out of the program—which gave us a great deal of confidence. Sure, we were colored, but yes, we were qualified. We were Negroes and Americans, too.”<sup>241</sup>

Other elite African American divisions included the 93<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, the Red Ball Express, and the 761<sup>st</sup> Medium Tank Battalions.<sup>242</sup> The 93<sup>rd</sup> distinguished themselves in France in WWI and were this time deployed to the Pacific as the main black combat unit.<sup>243</sup> The Red Ball Express was a predominately African American transportation corps that supplied twenty-

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<sup>238</sup> Homan and Reilly, *Black Knights*, 28, 31; Potter, Miles, and Rosenblum, *Liberators*, 90.

<sup>239</sup> Homan and Reilly, *Black Knights*, 41.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, 55, 58.

<sup>241</sup> Christopher Paul Moore, *Fighting for America: Black Soldiers- The Unsung Heroes of World War II* [New York: Random House, 2005], 135.

<sup>242</sup> Knoblock, *Casualties and Decorations*, 1.

<sup>243</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 486.

eight U.S. divisions across France and Belgium.<sup>244</sup> The 761<sup>st</sup> Medium Tank Battalion fought in the Battle of the Bulge and were engaged in six European countries.<sup>245</sup> Many other African Americans soldiers and sailors served with distinction outside these units, and most black GIs felt a similar pressure to distinguish themselves as representatives of their communities. Dr. E.V. Davidson served in the 370<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Company F and would settle in Knoxville after the war. He recalled in an oral history interview, “I think everybody sort of had their eyes on us. Everybody was kind of watching to see what we were going to do, see whether or not we’re going to be able to stand up under the pressure of combat. And I think that we proved to them that hey, you can do it, we can do it. We could probably do a better job than you’re doing, you know.”<sup>246</sup>

While Davidson and Brown gained the respect of many who saw them in action, there were also many voices of disbelief. As in WWI, many whites petitioned the government to prevent the training, then the deployment, then the use, of black soldiers in combat.<sup>247</sup> Again, white American troops mistreated their black compatriots and objected to interracial fraternization overseas. Multiple fights broke out between black and white GIs, especially concerning black men dancing with white women. These abuses prompted a report from Tuskegee pilot, Captain Benjamin O. Davis, “The actions of some of our white soldiers were causing some of the men to say: ‘Who are we over here to fight, the Germans or our own white

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<sup>244</sup> Jonathon Sutherland, *African Americans at War: An Encyclopedia*, Vol I [Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Inc., 2004], 318.

<sup>245</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 484.

<sup>246</sup> E.V. Davidson, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Jason Bowen, April 4, 2000, transcript, Veteran’s Oral History Project, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Center for the Study of War and Society, 64.

<sup>247</sup> Homan and Reilly, *Black Knights*, 41.



soldiers?’”<sup>248</sup> When American newspapers ran pictures of black GIs dancing with English women, the War Department quickly censored any picture of black soldiers “in poses of intimacy with white women or conveying ‘boyfriend-girlfriend’ implications,” complying with racial mores rather than challenging them.<sup>249</sup>

The War Department was itself a detractor of African American troops. Reports from the office were so critical of the performance of black troops through 1943 that the September issue of *Time* magazine that year reported the Tuskegee experiment a failure.<sup>250</sup> Army classification tests of the same year seemed to lend credence to the department’s criticisms, as low test scores classified 47 percent of black inductees as Grade V and 30 percent in Grade IV. To white supremacist members of the War Department, this was not cause to reevaluate the classification system, but once again proved that black inferiority was endangering the war effort.<sup>251</sup>

African Americans stationed in the Pacific also suffered abuse. The Navy employed about 4,000 blacks by the end of 1941, making them only about 2.3 percent of that branch of the military. Even after Pearl Harbor, that percentage did not increase by much as Navy recruiters much preferred an influx of white cadets over black cadets.<sup>252</sup> Even more than the Army, the Navy relegated blacks to the most demeaning positions and naval bases frequently served rations

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<sup>248</sup> Potter, Miles, and Rosenblum, *Liberators*, 75-76.

<sup>249</sup> Moore, *Fighting for America*, 173.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>251</sup> President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, “I.H.E. to Secretary of War,” February 17, 1942, Record Group 220, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Desegregation of the Armed Forces Online Research File, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=docs](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=docs) [accessed October, 2011].

<sup>252</sup> Knoblock, *Casualties and Decorations*, 5.

to African American sailors after prisoners of war.<sup>253</sup> In a war predicated on racial violence, some black troops remembered the most offensive expressions of intolerance came from fellow sailors. Additionally USO events, ostensibly meant to lift their spirits, were rigidly segregated and as such often did more to damage than to raise black troop morale.<sup>254</sup> A 1942 survey of black soldiers and sailors in the Pacific revealed that a significant portion of them “sympathized with the Japanese struggle to expel white colonialists.”<sup>255</sup> This should not be misunderstood as proof that black sailors, collectively, were less patriotic or committed to their duties as servicemen. It was simply an expression of exasperation of some that partway through a Second World War, blacks were still denied treatment and respect commensurate with their white counterparts.

Once again, the Germany military noticed the American military’s discrimination of its black troops. However, with racial-purity rhetoric as a fundamental pillar of Nazi ideology, the Nazis never attempted to lure blacks to their side. Fascist propaganda, including Mussolini’s in Italy, instead tried to play on racial fears against black American troops. One Italian poster showed a caricatured black man with his arms wrapped around a struggling white woman. The caption, in Italian, read, “Defend her! She could be your mother, your wife, your sister, your daughter.”<sup>256</sup> Still, in spite of themselves, the Axis powers tacitly respected the formidable skill of black GIs. Nazi officials, for example, kept an extensive file on the Tuskegee Red Tails. When Lieutenant Jefferson was shot down and taken as a prisoner of war, he noticed the Nazi officer interrogating him had a large notebook with the cover title, “332<sup>nd</sup> Fighting Group—Negroes—

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>255</sup> Introduction: WWII,” Gilder Lehrman, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org>

<sup>256</sup> “Difendila! Potrebbe essere tua madre, tua moglie, tua sorella, tua figlia.” Davidson Scrapbook.

Red Tails.” It contained information on their training, missions, and each flyer’s personal life. The Nazi was able to tell Jefferson not only about his missions, but his father’s social security number, his sister’s college grades, and the taxes his family had to pay on their home.<sup>257</sup> It is doubtful so much detail would have been in the file of a “racially inferior” group had they not been perceived as a strategic threat to the Nazi military.

The Axis powers were right to take notice because African American troops once again served with distinction. Multiple black divisions and individuals earned commendations for meritorious service from the US and Allied governments, including the French Croix de Guerre and the Yugoslavian Partisan Medal.<sup>258</sup> The Tuskegee Airmen earned almost 900 awards, including, “one Silver Star, one Legion of Merit, ninety-five Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Soldiers Medals, fourteen Bronze Stars, eight Purple Hearts, and seventy-four Air Medals with Oak leaf Clusters.” After more than two hundred missions, they remain the only escort group who never lost an escort to an enemy fighter pilot.<sup>259</sup> The work of black GIs contributed significantly to the Allied victory, which was first achieved in Europe, then in the Pacific.

V-E Day was announced on May 8, 1945 in the *Knoxville Journal*. While many Knoxvilleians took time to celebrate the success in Europe, the news was fairly sober, turning its attention immediately to the Pacific theater. Advertisements did the same; one from White Stores grocery store depicted Uncle Sam shaking hands with three white servicemen: one marine, one soldier, and one sailor. It congratulated them on a job “well done,” but also insisted that

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<sup>257</sup> Alexander Jefferson, Lieut. Col. USAF, Ret. and Lewis H. Carlson, *Red Tail Captured, Red Tail Free: The Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airmen and POW* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2005], 60.

<sup>258</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 491.

<sup>259</sup> Homan and Reilly, *Black Knights*, 234.

everyone remember that there was still more work to do.<sup>260</sup> The Japanese were still unvanquished, depicted in racial caricature as a dark-skinned and buck-toothed, with claw-like hands and slanted eyes.<sup>261</sup> These depictions were intended to dehumanize the enemy, vilifying Japan in the time-tested techniques of wartime propaganda. The caricature of the Japanese was particularly inhuman, however. While German-Americans were forced to recant their ethnic heritage for a second time, only Japanese-Americans were ever interned.<sup>262</sup> It is also significant that these cartoons almost always exaggerated the darkness of Japanese skin-tone, as non-white skin continued to be associated with immorality and animalistic behavior.

V-E day news also announced the point system, the military's plan to determine who could be released from military service now that one war objective had been fulfilled. Points were calculated based on the serviceman's number of children (limited to three), years in the service, years overseas, and combat decorations. Those with eighty-five points were now eligible to return home.<sup>263</sup> General Eisenhower also declared that those who had already served in both Africa and Europe did not need to be shipped to a third foreign continent, and so would be returning to the United States.<sup>264</sup> Most African Americans would not have earned enough points by V-E day to qualify because of their restriction from active duty during the first two years of American involvement in the war, so many, including Dr. E.V. Davidson, were heading to the

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<sup>260</sup> White Stores Grocery, "Well Done Boys!" advertisement, *Knoxville Journal*, May 8, 1945.

<sup>261</sup> PET Pasteurized Milk, advertisement, *Knoxville Journal*, May 8, 1945.

<sup>262</sup> Gambone, *Greatest Generation Comes Home*, 134.

<sup>263</sup> Edward Higgs, "U.S. Sets 'Point' List for GI Releases: Fathers, Veterans of Most Service to Go Home First," *Knoxville Journal*, May 10, 1945.

<sup>264</sup> Austin Bealmear, "Eisenhower Orders African-European Vets Out of Fight" *Knoxville Journal*, May 12, 1945.

Pacific.<sup>265</sup> Some other Knoxvilleans were set to return after V-E day, however, as about 40,000 of the 300,000 Tennesseans serving in WWII were eligible for release based on the point system.<sup>266</sup>

Not long thereafter, Knoxville newspapers began speculating on the readjustment of returning veterans. A May 12 article in the *Knoxville Journal*, calculated that the “veterans of this and other wars may well total 20 million in the postwar period—breadwinners for 1/3 to 1/2 of our total population.” As such a large group, “the nation should make every effort to see that medical care for all veterans is ensured.”<sup>267</sup> Once again, this emphasized the physical rehabilitation of veterans to the exclusion of other forms of rehabilitation, but the future heads of household for one-third to one-half the country would need more multifaceted readjustment. The Office of Education surveyed troops of all races and found that servicemen had high expectations for their return. About two-thirds of white troops and one-half of black troops polled had “definite plans for a postwar career.” These ambitions would not be satisfied by returning to old jobs, as Dr. Ernest Hollins, consulted in conjunction with the polling data, reported that “most veterans will want new or better jobs when they return to the civilian labor force.” These veterans envisioned themselves in a variety of new fields: roughly one million wanted to open their own businesses, 850,000 planned to be farm owner-operators, 750,000 hoped for careers in government, and the rest were divided between professional jobs, the armed services, and private

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<sup>265</sup> Davidson interview, 73.

<sup>266</sup> “40,000 Vets to Return to Vol State,” *Knoxville Journal*, May 12, 1945.

<sup>267</sup> Frank Carey, “War Vet Bread-Winners Will Feed Half of America,” *Knoxville Journal*, May 12, 1945.

businesses.<sup>268</sup> Knoxville held community meetings and training sessions beginning in July to prepare community workers to do their part to reintegrate veterans into postwar Knoxville.<sup>269</sup>

The city of Knoxville, itself, would also need aid readjusting to civilian life. The city had shifted almost entirely to war industry production during the war, as had other industrial Tennessee cities, such as Memphis and Chattanooga.<sup>270</sup> Knoxville had become the headquarters for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which doubled its power generation during the war to meet the needs of the new war industries. Some existing industries boomed during the war years, including Southern Railway and Fulton Sylphon. The war created new industries, as well, such as Rohm and Haas which made Plexiglas, crucial material for the production of airplanes.<sup>271</sup> While integral to the war effort, this left Knoxville susceptible to postwar recession, as war industries were decommissioned once peace was in sight.

After V-E day, the War Manpower Commission made the first of these cutbacks, putting 1 million people out of work, nationwide.<sup>272</sup> Again, cutbacks targeted female and African American war workers first, alienating these groups from the very community that had called them to their duty in the years before. Despite Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practices Mandate, discrimination had persisted in the treatment of African American war workers during the war and was even more evident in the decisions on whose employment to terminate to fill the

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<sup>268</sup> "Million Veterans to Enter Schools After Army Service, Survey Shows," *Knoxville Journal*, May 13, 1945.

<sup>269</sup> "Returning Vets' Rights, Chances to Get Airing," *Knoxville Journal*, July 22, 1945.

<sup>270</sup> Patricia Brake, Tennessee Encyclopedia, s.v. "World War II," <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1536> [accessed April 6, 2012].

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> "Cutbacks Leave Two Million Idle," *Knoxville Journal*, July 22, 1945.

cutbacks.<sup>273</sup> By August, the total unemployed war workers had climbed to 1,400,000 and only 700,000 of these workers were expected to be reabsorbed into the postwar industries.<sup>274</sup>

As labor tensions mounted, reports of the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima reached Knoxville on August 7. Full reports of the effect of the bomb would not become known until the following day, but in the meantime, the use of Oak Ridge, Tennessee's Eastman Kodak plant in the Atomic experiment was announced, to an amazed and "delighted" Knoxville public.<sup>275</sup> Work on the Atomic project transformed that city from small-town farming community to fifth largest city in Tennessee by 1945.<sup>276</sup> The news on August 8 was more somber, reporting the devastation in more measured tones. The following day's headline, "Terror Bomb Hits Nagasaki" leapt from page, as the article informed viewers that "first reports indicated that the attack was as successful as the explosion that devastated Hiroshima," this time, on Japan's eleventh largest city.<sup>277</sup> Still, the newspaper was unequivocally in support of defeating the Japanese, slurred in all articles as "nips" and "japs" in ways that would have done credit to the CPI a generation before.

After a few more days of speculation on peace talks, V-J day was announced on August 14, 1945. The *Knoxville Journal* filled the top quarter of its front page that day with the headline, "PEACE." President Truman declared August 15 and 16 national holidays, relieving all non-critical workers from their duties for two days and requiring employers in critical industries to

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<sup>273</sup> Brake, "World War II," <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/>

<sup>274</sup> "1,400,000 War Workers Jobless" *Knoxville Journal*, August 9, 1945; "Cutbacks Leave Two Million Idle," *Knoxville Journal*, July 22, 1945.

<sup>275</sup> "Secret Delights Knoxville," *Knoxville Journal*, August 7, 1945. Eastman Kodak would take credit for their involvement on August 12 in an advertisement thanking the work of the people of Rochester and at the Oak Ridge branch for making the project a success, "To Kodak People and the Citizens of Rochester" advertisement, *Knoxville Journal*, August 12, 1945.

<sup>276</sup> Brake, "World War II," <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/>

<sup>277</sup> "Terror Bomb Hits Nagasaki," *Knoxville Journal*, August 9, 1945.

pay time and a half for those obligated to stay during this moment of communal grief and celebration. Stores had already closed themselves for celebrations on August 14, as Americans of all races took to the streets and to places of worship. Advertisements for local stores expressed their gratitude while advertisements for victory bonds continued to hammer-home the message that the job was not over; peace had yet to be won.<sup>278</sup>

Indeed in the postwar context, “peace” was not the same as tranquility. The occupation of Japan and Germany would continue to detain servicemen overseas and postwar America was rife with conflicts of its own. Veterans returned to Knoxville in tens and twenties each day over the summer to find, as had their predecessors, that labor was reaching a fever pitch.<sup>279</sup> Additional cuts to war industries after V-J day put 30,000 more people out of work by mid-August.<sup>280</sup> “Reconversion” of industry became the buzzword for the reestablishment of peacetime production and Knoxvilleans hoped for a smooth transition. One article on August 14, in the same paper that announced the end of the war, predicted Knoxville “reconversion” would be completed in three weeks.<sup>281</sup> The reality was much more troubled, as strikes broke out in multiple industries. An August 25 report estimated 48,000 people were out of work due to the

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<sup>278</sup> S.H. George & Sons, “The War is Won” advertisement, *Knoxville Journal*, August 14, 1945; JFG Coffee on behalf of the Treasury Department, “Thank God It’s Over,” advertisement, *Knoxville Journal*, August 15, 1945. The second advertisement urged its readers to buy victory bonds as “your biggest and greatest chance to salute the brave men who fought and won this war for you.”

<sup>279</sup> Knox, E-T, Tri State Vets Due to Return, *Knoxville Journal*, May-December, 1945.

<sup>280</sup> “Return Cuts Strike Idle to 30,000” *Knoxville Journal*, August 12, 1945.

<sup>281</sup> “Knox Reconversion Expected 3 Weeks after V-J” *Knoxville Journal*, August 14, 1945.



strikes and more strikes were soon to follow. In Knoxville, the dairy industry, aluminum industry, and meat packers each went on strike between August and November 1919.<sup>282</sup>

Dairy industry strikers turned violent against one veteran who reportedly told them he had seen enough fighting and now just wanted to work. All of the men involved were white, but neither racial affinity nor common purpose during the war made any difference; the strikers beat the veteran so badly that he had to be hospitalized. The men connected with the veteran's assault were charged with a felony and held on \$1,000 bail.<sup>283</sup> While the nation was outraged at this attack, it was indicative of a larger trend in the postwar period of disassociating with veterans. Many civilians openly speculated that the return of veterans would increase the violence of the society, as after WWI, and sympathy for veterans dissipated quickly once the war was over. As early as 1946, polling data indicated that a majority of civilians "were growing weary of angry veterans and their problems."<sup>284</sup>

For black veterans, this alienation was compounded by the simple, yet critical fact that American racism had not been defeated during the war. Black soldiers were given a Jim Crow welcome as soon as they touched American soil. One Tuskegee Airman recalled a young, white private who had the audacity to command disembarking black veterans, many of whom were his superior officers, war heroes, and POW's, "Whites to the right, niggers to the left." They had not yet crossed the Mason-Dixon line, but were still in New York, the irony of the situation made worse by the visible silhouette of the Statue of Liberty in background.<sup>285</sup> It is often said that

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<sup>282</sup> "7,000 Will Return to Plants As Strike Settlement Reported," *Knoxville Journal*, August 26, 1945; "Strike Vote Bids Follow Truman Talk," *Knoxville Journal* November 1, 1945.

<sup>283</sup> "Vet Beaten in Ten Day Dairy Strike," *Knoxville Journal*, August 21, 1945.

<sup>284</sup> Childers, *Soldier From the War Returning*, 8.

<sup>285</sup> Jefferson and Carlson, *Red Tail Captured*, 107.

WWII taught enduring lessons about the dangers of racism and Americans took heed of these dire warnings.<sup>286</sup> While this was valid for some individuals, when applied to American society as a whole, this is an overstated idea. Historian Patricia Webb has argued that the war and postwar employment statistics pertaining to black workers was strikingly similar to prewar data, indicating that “prevailing negative and paternalistic attitudes toward nonwhites remained virtually unchanged by the war.”<sup>287</sup> Racial violence continued to affect the lives of African Americans all over the country. Klan activity had tapered off in Knoxville by the end of the 1920s, as the Knoxville branch consisted of only 191 members by 1928.<sup>288</sup> Nationally, Klan activity also diminished during this period until the organization officially disbanded in 1944. It would reorganize in 1946, but not to its former strength.<sup>289</sup> However, the combined efforts of various other groups filled the void. In the 1950s, the predominate group was the White Citizens Council, while less clandestine than the Klan, it too was comprised of businessmen and “respectable citizens” who pledged to protect the “Southern way of life.” Additionally, segregationist politicians, like Mississippi Senator Bilbo, “learned the lessons of WWI” and were determined to stop racial equality as a campaign promise.<sup>290</sup>

Racial violence erupted again in Tennessee following the war and included another race riot, this time in Columbia. An African American Navy veteran, James Stephenson, and a white store clerk, also a WWII veteran, got into an altercation on February 25, 1946. The disagreement started over the clerk’s completion of a repair order and turned violent over the reported

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<sup>286</sup> See, for example, Norrell, *House I Live In*, 137.

<sup>287</sup> Brake, “World War II,” <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/>

<sup>288</sup> Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 61.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>290</sup> Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles*, 207.

mistreatment of Stephenson's mother while they were in the shop.<sup>291</sup> Both Stephenson and his mother were arrested for disturbing the peace and fined \$50, but when the police arrested Stephenson later for attempted murder of the clerk during that altercation, the situation escalated out of control. A black business owner was able to post bail for Stephenson, but a white mob, including local police, descended on the African American side of town, looting homes, shooting at random, and arresting over one hundred African Americans. All of them were held without bail after having been searched and arrested without warrants.<sup>292</sup> Additionally, the white mob deliberately destroyed black businesses, including extensive damage to a soda shop and funeral home, both independently operated.<sup>293</sup>

The NAACP immediately became involved, sending Maurice M. Weaver, himself a Navy veteran, to represent Stephenson in the case. He arrived on the same day as the mass arrest, and so was in position to investigate these cases, as well. Whites threatened to lynch Weaver and Z. Alexander Looby, the chief defense council, along with Stephenson.<sup>294</sup> In his experience with the judge, jury, and hostile white public, Weaver did not believe race relations had been changed for average African Americans in any way during the war, calling the situation as "volatile as [it] had been before."<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Maurice M. Weaver, interview by James A. Burran, July 8, 1977, transcript, Center for the Study of War and Society, World War II Collection, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1.

<sup>292</sup> Carroll Van West, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, s.v. "Columba Race Riot, 1946," <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=296> [accessed July 18, 2011].

<sup>293</sup> Weaver interview, 1.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

The situation of Knoxville WWII veterans indeed showed many similarities to the First World War veterans in the immediate homecoming period.<sup>296</sup> An average of fourteen WWII veterans changed jobs each year between 1945 and 1950, slightly increased from the average of twelve from 1919-25, indicating that job insecurity was roughly equivalent to that experienced by WWI veterans. Unsurprisingly, this also corresponded to frequent residential changes, as an average of eleven veterans moved each year in this period. A consistent eight to nine veterans were employed in skilled trades each year, though the trades themselves still varied. Each year, there were two reverends, a barber, a principal, a cook, a doctor, and a life insurance salesman. However, in 1946 there was also an auto repairman and post office carrier, both of whom were no longer employed in these fields by 1949. Instead, there was an additional cook, teacher, and baler. The highest number of black veterans employed in skilled trades in these years was nine, only slightly higher than the peak of eight during the WWI homecoming. Additionally, the average numbers of waiters, truckers, and porters were roughly equivalent at both times, indicating that job opportunities for black veterans had not fundamentally changed.<sup>297</sup> With so many continuities between the postwar periods of both world wars, it begs the question, what had changed?

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<sup>296</sup> Although the discharge papers are still sealed, Knoxvilleans serving overseas had an opportunity to vote in the 1944 election. Of the 1,317 servicemen and women who voted in the presidential election from Knox County that year, sixty-three were African Americans who returned to Knoxville. This was determined by crosschecking these Absentee Ballots with the city directory. Knoxville Board of Commerce, *1945-1948/49 City Directory of Knoxville and Suburbs* [Knoxville, TN: City Directory Co. of Knoxville, 1945-1948/49]; Secretary of State, Division of Elections, Military Absentee Ballots, 1944-1962, Tennessee State Library and Archives, RG: 125, microfilm roll 7, Knox, 51-53, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>297</sup> *1945-1948/49 City Directory of Knoxville and Suburbs*.

In an otherwise similar postwar landscape, the GI Bill was the primary distinction between the readjustment of American veterans after WWII compared to post-WWI. The Selective Service Readjustment Act, more commonly called the GI Bill, was signed into law in 1944 after a protracted struggle. When the Great Depression was at its worst, many WWI veterans could not wait until 1945 for bonus checks from the government. They pressured Congress and President Hoover to accelerate the delivery date, most dramatically by forming a multiracial “Bonus Army” and peacefully marching on Washington to protest in 1932. Hoover ordered the crowds dispersed and MacArthur exceeded his orders by following retreating veterans into the camps they had set up on the National Mall. The forced dispersal turned violent, with federal troops tear-gassing veterans. Roosevelt campaigned on the issue and promised veterans a “New Deal.” After Roosevelt was elected, veterans and the American Legion held him to it, though Roosevelt originally only provided the veterans with jobs in the CCC or money to return to their homes. In 1936, bonus payments for WWI veterans were finally made into law, over a presidential veto like almost all veterans’ legislation in the past.<sup>298</sup> 16 million WWII veterans benefited greatly from this hard work, as historians Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin have argued “the innovations of the interwar period form an immediate and influential background to the proposals that would find their way into the GI Bill of 1944.”<sup>299</sup>

The GI Bill famously provided scholarships for the pursuit of training programs and higher education. The law funded “the customary cost of tuition, and such laboratory, library, infirmary . . . and may pay for books, supplies, equipment, and such other necessary expenses (exclusive of board, lodging, other living expenses and travel) as are required. Such payments

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<sup>298</sup> Altschuler and Blumin, *GI Bill*, 28-29.

<sup>299</sup> Katznelson, *Affirmative Action*, 113; Altschuler and Blumin, *GI Bill*, 32.

shall not exceed \$500 for an ordinary school year.”<sup>300</sup> Veterans could apply for this aid for up to four years of study. Additionally, veteran students were given a living allowance of \$50 a month, if the veteran did not have dependents, \$75 a month if s/he did.<sup>301</sup> This could be used to go to any formalized school: elementary, business, vocational, industrial, teaching schools, normal schools, colleges, or universities.<sup>302</sup>

Veterans could also choose from other aid provided by the law, including unemployment payment for up to 52 weeks and guaranteed loans to start farms, businesses, and buy homes.<sup>303</sup> The VA did not provide the loans, but “the guaranty by the Administrator of Veterans’ Affairs should make such loans more readily available to veterans from individual lenders and lending institutions in the locality where the veteran wishes to buy a home, or a farm, or engage in business.” The VA could guarantee up to 50 percent of the loan “and in certain cases involving second loans, up to 100 percent of the amount thereof, but in no event will the amount guaranteed exceed \$2000.”<sup>304</sup> To access these benefits, veterans, without restriction to race, age, or religion just needed to apply at VA office in their region.<sup>305</sup>

American servicemen of all races were very aware of these programs. The military officially informed them of their rights, both in person and through circulated print material. At the same time civilian newspapers were pressuring Americans to buy victory bonds, the military newspapers kept veterans abreast of the benefits they were due upon their return. Two African

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<sup>300</sup> War Dept. Pamphlet No. 21-24 Explanation of the Provisions of “The G I Bill of Rights” Public Law 346, 78<sup>th</sup> Congress 28 November 1944, 4.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 4.

American military circulations were *The Buffalo* and the *Kobe Globe*. In the closing months of the war, *The Buffalo* advertised courses offered by the US Armed Forces Institute, specifically designed to train GIs to make the transition back into civilian life.<sup>306</sup> The *Kobe Globe* informed servicemen on November 5, 1945 all about the GI Bill; who was eligible, how much they could borrow, what the school benefits were, how they could apply.<sup>307</sup>

White and black veterans participated in GI Bill programs in near equal numbers: 73 percent of white veterans to 75 percent of black veterans.<sup>308</sup> This greatly benefited the veterans and their families. Nationwide, the economic status of African Americans improved more in the 1940s than any time since emancipation.<sup>309</sup> In Knoxville, the most evident difference was the number of black veterans enrolled in school. Enrollment in historically black colleges and universities nationwide grew from 29,000 in 1940 to over 73,000 in 1947.<sup>310</sup> The largest increase of enrollment, 26 percent, took place at black colleges and universities between the Fall of 1946 and 1947.<sup>311</sup> Between 1945 and 1950, eleven of Knoxville's African American veterans enrolled in college or vocational training. None of Knoxville's black veterans went to school between 1919- 1925. There were also more veterans involved in educating younger generations; while there was only one veteran teacher after WWI, there were two teachers and one principal from the veterans of WWII in black Knoxville schools by 1949.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> "Course of Study with USAFI Will Help You After War," *The Buffalo*, date uncertain, Davidson Scrapbook.

<sup>307</sup> "Questions and Answers About Loan Guaranty for Homes, Farms, and Businesses." *Kobe Globe*, November 5, 1945.

<sup>308</sup> Katznelson, *Affirmative Action*, 121.

<sup>309</sup> Norrell, *House I Live In*, 127.

<sup>310</sup> Katznelson, *Affirmative Action*, 120.

<sup>311</sup> Gambone, *Greatest Generation*, 122.

<sup>312</sup> *1945-1948/49 City Directory of Knoxville and Suburbs*.

Despite the substantial benefits and although the GI Bill was ostensibly intended for all veterans, it was not administered equally between whites and blacks. Historian Ira Katznelson had argued that the GI Bill, “written under Southern auspices... was deliberately designed to accommodate Jim Crow. Its administration widened the country’s racial gap.”<sup>313</sup> The law appeared to be straightforward enough in design, openly forbidding discrimination, but the federal government did not respond to most reports of discrimination, which started as early as June, 1945.<sup>314</sup> Katznelson has also argued that the Southern congressmen who helped craft the plan, like chairman Representative John Rankin of Mississippi, knew that the state distribution centers would maintain segregation and unequal treatment. He argues that this is why the GI Bill was deliberately left to local, not federal, authorities.<sup>315</sup>

At the same time, resources in segregated schools were not equal, which amplified the inequity. There were only a few black schools, so not all applicants could be accommodated, even with the scholarships to pay for college. In Tennessee, only eight of the thirty-five institutions of higher learning were open to blacks, keeping in accordance with the segregation ordinances.<sup>316</sup> At the peak of enrollment, 55 percent of black applicants nationwide were rejected due to overcrowding compared to 28 percent of the nation’s white applicants.<sup>317</sup> Additionally, no black colleges or universities at this time had doctoral or engineering programs.<sup>318</sup>

Whites also continued to get preference for jobs: one-third of veterans in the South were black, but blacks got only one-twelfth of job-training opportunities, despite the promised training

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<sup>313</sup> Katznelson, *Affirmative Action*, 114.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.



programs.<sup>319</sup> The majority of blacks were also excluded from Social Security until the 1950s, which promoted the economic security of the white lower and middle class in the meantime, thus furthering the racial economic divide.<sup>320</sup> Furthermore, the disability coverage guaranteed to veterans was also distributed unevenly based on race. The amount of treatment and aid a disabled veteran received was based on his disability classification, which had to be done by a certified doctor. Most of these doctors were white, and some harbored racist assumptions that black veterans were “complaining” or “exaggerating” their symptoms. Thus they tended to issue lower disability ratings, greatly restricting African American veterans from getting the medical care they needed.<sup>321</sup>

Even had the GI Bill been distributed equally, in its ideal form, this legislation was not designed to promote black uplift. The law was meant to help veterans, some of whom happened to be black. It was not about African Americans as a community, nor was it intended to bring the races closer together. Certain African Americans served the nation and were now due certain benefits along with white veterans. But this represented, at best, only a portion of African Americans, and in practice, only a fraction of those veterans. The federal government did transform its understanding of black veterans in this period, but this happened through the executive branch, not the GI Bill. This sea-change was the integration of the military.

Truman issued an executive order on July 26, 1948, integrating the military and establishing a committee to ensure “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the

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<sup>319</sup> Moore, *Fighting for America*, 321.

<sup>320</sup> Katznelson, *Affirmative Action*, 143.

<sup>321</sup> Jefferson “Enabled Courage,” 1104.

armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.”<sup>322</sup> This had tremendous implications for the race, as African Americans were now fully integrated into one aspect of American government and society. But this federal mandate did not grant equality to all African Americans, either. It has been argued that this change was due to pressure on the federal government to present itself well on the world stage during the Cold War.<sup>323</sup> There is much truth in this claim, but as America had been willing to demonstrate its hypocrisy on the world stage during two official conflicts, the coming of the Cold War threat seems to be only a partial explanation for its change of behavior. A more convincing cause was that the government had already obligated itself to the care of its veterans in ways it had never done before, and was beginning to advocate for black veterans as part of that group. In the first two years after WWII, President Truman received reports of violent assaults on black veterans returning to the South. He reportedly exclaimed, “My God! I had no idea it was as terrible as that!” and formed the President’s Committee on Civil Rights to investigate further. Reports from this committee revealed to Truman the extent of the discrimination against African Americans around the country, particularly in the South. One year following the committee’s published report, Truman desegregated the military.<sup>324</sup> Thus advocacy for civil rights began with federal action to protect its veterans. The increased concern for veterans’ rights and no doubt President Truman’s

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<sup>322</sup> Executive Order no. 9981, “Establishing the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services,” Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Desegregation of the Armed Forces Online Research File, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=docs](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/desegregation/large/index.php?action=docs) [accessed October, 2011].)

<sup>323</sup> Bell, Jr., “Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma,” 524.

<sup>324</sup> Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *In the Shadow of Selma: The Continuing Struggle for Civil Rights in the Rural South* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004], 112.

individual respect for the service of African Americans in the war, translated into political action on behalf of that segment of the population.

This theory is also supported by the drastic change in the official federal explanation of lower black socioeconomic levels by the end of the war than it had been using in the decades before. The U.S. Office of Education used Army data to conclude in 1945 that the relative poverty among African American communities, including “poor educational opportunities, low economic status, and high sickness and death rates” were “interdependent and, when combined with certain discrimination, account largely for the social and cultural lag found among Negroes.”<sup>325</sup> This is a significant shift in understanding from a federal government that just twenty years earlier had attributed these problems to brain size and innate incapability. However, the concern of this study still only applied to veterans and war workers, not to all black people or racial uplift, recognizing once, again, only part of the black community.

The changing understanding of federal responsibility toward its veterans extended to their families. GI Bill benefits were not continued if the veteran died, but the federal government did have other programs to help the family.<sup>326</sup> Federal programs nationwide helped place 1,900 Second World War widows and hundreds of First World War widows into federal jobs by mid-November, 1945.<sup>327</sup> It also increased federal dissemination of material to help families help their veteran readjust emotionally. The U.S. Office of Education publication also included

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<sup>325</sup> Ambrose Caliver, *Postwar Education of Negroes: Educational Implications of Army Data and Experience of Negro Veterans and War Workers*, Federal Security Agency, U.S. Office of Education, [Washington D.C., Government Printing Office: 1945], 2.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>327</sup> “1900 War II Widows Get Federal Jobs,” *Knoxville Journal*, November 14, 1945.

recommendations for how black veterans in particular can be aided in readjustment, keeping the socio-economic disadvantages in mind.<sup>328</sup>

After WWII, there was an even bigger marriage boom, and subsequent baby boom, than after WWI. The rates of Knoxville African American marriages reflect the national trend as 45 of the 63 veterans were married by 1949. Twenty-two were married before the war, and twenty-three in the first four years they returned: nine in 1946, nine in 1947, and five between 1948-49.<sup>329</sup> There was also a “divorce boom,” the highest divorce rates in the world at the time and the highest in United States history up to that point.<sup>330</sup> There were three divorces among Knoxville’s black veterans from 1946-49.<sup>331</sup> The government literature warned that, “many of the personality problems of the returning veterans—and of certain war workers, too—will [affect] the reestablishment of wholesome family relation.<sup>332</sup> Once again, there were increased rates of physical and substance abuse among veterans, as well as the difficulties experienced by both the veteran and spouse settling down after years of turmoil. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* was a very popular movie from the time that spoke to the difficulties of falling back into love when both spouses had been changed by their wartime experience. The main female character laments at one point, “It’s as though Tom and I had been married twice, once before the war and once afterward, and what I want is my first marriage back.”<sup>333</sup>

Despite the positive changes for veterans and for black veterans, the post-WWII period was still a very difficult transition. It is easy to misconstrue the success of the GI Bill as evidence

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<sup>328</sup> Caliver, *Postwar Education of Negroes*, 3-7.

<sup>329</sup> *1945-1948/49 City Directory of Knoxville and Suburbs*.

<sup>330</sup> Childers, *Soldier From the War Returning*, 8.

<sup>331</sup> *1945-1948/49 City Directory of Knoxville and Suburbs*.

<sup>332</sup> Caliver, *Postwar Education of Negroes*, 31.

<sup>333</sup> As quoted in Childers, *Soldier from the War Returning*, 160.

that veterans readjusted with relative ease. Many Americans perceive the transition to have been as Tom Brokaw memorialized it in his best-selling book, *The Greatest Generation*: “When the war was over, the men and women who had been involved, in uniform and in civilian capacities, joined in joyous and short-lived celebrations, then immediately began the task of rebuilding their lives and the world they wanted.”<sup>334</sup> This is more comforting than delving into the persistent problems of the day, later hidden from photo albums and pushed to the corners of popular memory. Between 1.5 and 2.5 million veterans needed physical rehabilitation upon their return.<sup>335</sup> Additionally, the federal government and Veterans Administration had learned from WWI that mental/emotional wounds need treatment, a pressing need as 40 percent of the discharges before April 1944 were for “neuropsychiatric reasons.”<sup>336</sup> This same government study concluded, however, that only about one-fourth of the men who need psychiatric care would ask for it themselves, and urged family members to be vigilant and understanding.<sup>337</sup> By 1947, half of the veterans in VA hospitals were there for “invisible wounds.”<sup>338</sup>

Not only could these mental and emotional afflictions cause the veteran to hurt himself or those around him, they also contributed to a widespread general malaise and disappointment. In 1949, an Army survey revealed that 40 percent of all American veterans were disappointed with their homecoming and close to 50 percent thought that military service “had left them worse off than before the war.”<sup>339</sup> Additionally for some veterans, the postwar recession and

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<sup>334</sup> Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* [New York, Delta, 1998], xx.

<sup>335</sup> Caliver, *Postwar Education of Negroes*, 12.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> Childers, *Soldier From the War Returning*, 8.

<sup>339</sup> Samuel Stouffer, *The American Soldier, Combat and its Aftermath 2* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949], 464.

unemployment pinch was just deferred a few years until after college, when they once again had to fill their old jobs, much to their disappointment. Although the public was more aware of veterans' issues, does not mean that increased civilian awareness of veterans' difficulties also increased public support and sympathy during this transition. Veterans felt the sting of civilian complaints that the GI Bill was coddling veterans at the public's expense. This began almost immediately, such as an editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1946, which queried, "Are We Making a Bum Out of GI Joe?"<sup>340</sup>

As historian Thomas Childers argues, these details make the story of the homecoming "darker, more troubled—but also more human. . . . They do not diminish the wartime generation's accomplishments, but they do suggest that the price these men paid was higher, the toll exacted from them and their families greater, and their struggles far more protracted than the glossy tributes to the Greatest Generation would have us believe."<sup>341</sup> Analysis of the homecoming period must be included to the historical study of armed conflict to accurately estimate the true cost of war. If this WWII generation, and their WWI predecessors, were in fact the greatest that American society has ever produced, it is because they survived the many challenges they faced, not because they did not feel them.

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<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>341</sup> Childers, *Soldier From the War Returning*, 13.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

On July 25, 1956, Representative Ed Edmondson of Oklahoma presented a “Tribute to a Great Program” in the House of Representatives the day before the GI Bill officially came to an end for WWII veterans. Widely held as a tremendous success, he reported that the GI Bill trained 7,800,000 veterans over ten years and cost the government \$14.5 billion. It also rehabilitated 610,000 disabled veterans and set up vocational training centers around the country.<sup>342</sup>

Originally, skeptics in politics and higher education scoffed at the ambition of the plan; early government estimates assumed that only about 500,000 veterans would take advantage of the benefits, and many educators openly warned Roosevelt that his 1944 bill would turn institutions of higher learning into “little more than hobo camps.”<sup>343</sup> However, at its peak in 1947, 1,500,000 veterans were enrolled in higher education through the GI program, which is higher than the total college enrollment in 1939-40.<sup>344</sup> All together, the GI Bill was used in some capacity by eight out of ten men born in the 1920s.<sup>345</sup> Not only did this offer individuals a chance at social mobility, it also changed the culture of college campuses and of larger American society.

Educators would later remark that veterans were frequently “more mature, more determined than the average college student,” and in glowing homage to the program, Edmondson argued that after these veterans left college, they radically changed their communities. Through the GI Bill,

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<sup>342</sup> U.S. Congress. House, *Tribute to a Great Program: Extension of Remarks of Hon. Ed Edmondson of Oklahoma in House of Representatives*, 84<sup>th</sup> Cong. 1956, A5808-09.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, A5809.

<sup>345</sup> Katznelson, *Affirmative Action*, 113.

more people were educated than ever before and this education combined with their wartime experience poised veterans to assume leadership positions around the country.<sup>346</sup>

As historian Ira Katznelson has proven, the same level of benefit did not extend across racial lines, and it is impossible to know how profoundly the GI Bill might have closed the racial disparity in wealth had it functioned equally. But some African Americans did benefit from the GI Bill, which in turn benefitted their descendants and their communities. Even more importantly for African Americans as a whole, the GI Bill officially recognized their status as veterans at the same time Truman's executive order recognized their contributions and capacity as soldiers. While it did not happen over night, federal understanding of veterans' legislation changed dramatically in this period, thanks in large part to the GI Bill and the veterans who made it a success. Veterans "benefits" is somewhat of a misnomer now, as the federal government no longer debates them in terms of government generosity, but instead as rightful restitution. Indeed, the popular perception of veterans aid has changed as much as the form: from the "bonus" checks of the 1920s and 1930s to the readjustment programs of the 1940s, from special tribute to just compensation. Veterans' groups have actively cultivated this perception, starting after the First World War period and continuing after the Second. The Commander and Chief of Veterans of Foreign Wars, Frank C. Hilton, frankly distinguished the government's responsibility for its veterans from its civilian citizens in a statement before House of Representatives Committee on Veterans Affairs on February 2, 1952: "The theory that the veteran and the nonveteran should now be treated on an equal basis is utterly absurd for the

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<sup>346</sup> U.S. Congress, House, *Tribute to a Great Program*, A5809.



simple and obvious reason that they were not treated on an equal basis in time of war.”<sup>347</sup> This difference entitled veterans to increased care from the government and country they had served.

Importantly, veterans’ groups soon extended their concerns to civil rights, while remaining a sympathetic group to a majority of whites. The American Veterans Committee, whose slogan read, “To achieve a more Democratic and prosperous America and a more stable world. ‘Citizens first, Veterans second,’” took a firm stand in support of civil rights. On December 1, 1959, they sent a letter to all elected officials with a long and short-form survey asking their opinion on specific matters pertaining to civil rights. Each question warranted a yes or no response about whether the official would support each aspect of the civil rights legislation under review. They gave the politicians two weeks to reply, upon pain of being exposed as uncooperative with the American Veterans Committee and evasive on their positions.<sup>348</sup> African Americans gaining the support of the AVC would not have been possible without the work of African American servicemen in previous wars, and was probably promoted by the experience of integrated troops in the Korean Conflict. Additionally, without the distinguished service of African Americans, it is unlikely Truman would have issued the Executive Order to integrate the military, by which the federal government finally recognized black soldiers and veterans as equal brothers in arms. Inclusion in this demographic only became politically powerful, however, through the precedents set in the interwar period of the federal government deeply obligating itself to veterans’ issues. Without the combination of the GI Bill and the integration of the military, the experience of post-WWII black veterans would likely have been as disappointing as

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<sup>347</sup> House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, “Hearings,” 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1952, 865.

<sup>348</sup> Letter from American Veterans Committee, December 1, 1959, MPA-144, Estes Kefauver Papers, Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy, Knoxville, Tennessee.

it was for WWI veterans. Together, the GI Bill and the integration of the military formed a powerful impetus for social change.

While the federal government continues to fall short of successfully readjusting all its veterans, since the GI Bill, it has at least been forced to treat veterans' needs as a legitimate federal expenditure and social responsibility.<sup>349</sup> As such, the GI Bill was one of the most transformative pieces of legislation of the Twentieth century, not only for expanding access to the middle class to millions more Americans, but for fundamentally altering our understanding of veterans' place in postwar society.<sup>350</sup> Once black veterans were, at least officially, included in that hallowed group, social mobility and social change were possible in ways unlike ever before. Additionally, the integration of the military changed that institution from one that published reports on the innate inferiority of blacks into one that was instructed to recognize African Americans as equal servicemen, and by extension, equal citizens.

This is not to say the Civil Rights Movement was inevitable. The postwar period was stricken with racial animosity and neither the military nor the rest of the federal government accepted these changes without pushback. There was also tremendous discrimination from state and local governments, demonstrated by segregation laws and unequal GI Bill administration, not to mention perennial racial violence among individuals. It took two more decades of bravery, work, and suffering on the part of many African Americans to end segregation and voting discrimination and in many ways, the struggle for racial equality continues today.<sup>351</sup> But it is

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<sup>349</sup> For example, 1 out of 6 homeless people in the United States today is a veteran. "Homeless Veterans: Statistics," American Veterans, Inc., <http://www.veteransinc.org/about-us/statistics/> [accessed April 12, 2012].

<sup>350</sup> Katznelson, *Affirmative Action*, 113.

<sup>351</sup> Brooks, *Defining the Peace*, 15.

also true that men see further when standing on the shoulders of giants. The postwar periods of both world wars were turbulent, often violent, but uniquely transformative in American history. The sacrifices of both world war generations of black Americans laid the groundwork for the racial uplift in the years to come.

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## VITA

Kara E. Kempinski earned a B.A. in History from Gettysburg College, graduating magna cum laude in 2010. She expects to graduate from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville with a Masters in American History in August 2012. During her time in Gettysburg, she studied abroad in Seville, Spain and played four years of varsity softball, earning the NFCA Academic All-American Award in 2010. She has interned for both the National Museum of American History, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, and at the Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, in Cooperstown, New York. She hails from Pittsford, New York.