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Crossing the 'Color Bar'
African American Soldiers in Britain and Australia During the Second World War

A Thesis by
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in War and Society

January 2022

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January 2022

Crossing the 'Color Bar'

African American Soldiers in Britain and Australia During the Second World War

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ABSTRACT

Title: African American Soldiers in Britain and Australia During the Second World War

by Joseph Alexander Dickinson

During the Second World War, African American soldiers were stationed all over the world as part of the American war effort. During these deployments, African Americans encountered a number of white societies, such as those in Britain and Australia, which they generally interacted with cordially. Good relations between African American soldiers and the local white populations angered many white servicemembers, who saw the lack of Jim Crow style segregation as a threat to the racial status quo, and attempted to enforce segregation overseas themselves. These attempts were often resisted fiercely by African American soldiers and the local white populations, both of whom despised such rules being forced upon them. This thesis examines the interactions between American forces and the British and Australian populations during the Second World War through the lens of race. It argues that the deployment of African Americans soldiers overseas left not only an impression on those African Americans who served, but also on Britons and Australians who encountered them. For those African Americans who were deployed in places like Britain and Australia, their experiences with these relatively friendly white societies and the white American soldiers who attempted to enforce segregation outside the United States highlighted the racial inequalities inherent in American society, and strengthened their resolve to fight against inequality. For the Britons and Australians who interacted with African Americans, racial discrimination by white Americans in their own countries lead many to reevaluate their opinions on both racism in the United States and in their own societies. Thus, this thesis expands the boundaries of the wartime struggle for civil rights by bringing the fight for equality into a larger multinational conversation.

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Introduction

From midnight to the early morning hours of June 24th, 1943, a firefight raged through the small British village of Bamber Bridge in Lancashire. As the sun rose that morning, seven men lay injured, and one man, an African American Private named William Crossland, was dead.¹ Despite occurring at the height of the Second World War, the battle was not fought between the Allies and Axis powers, but between American soldiers; specifically, between black and white American soldiers. The engagement was the result of long building racial tensions in Britain during the war, which had existed since the first arrival of American troops in 1942. These tensions existed not only in Britain but in other countries where American troops were deployed, particularly in those where whites made up the majority of the population such as Australia and New Zealand. African American soldiers were at the center of these conflicts, often through no fault of their own. As they navigated new foreign white spaces, they endured the relentless pursuit of Jim Crow, while also fighting a war supposedly in the name of democracy and equality, many must have wondered *what* they were really fighting for, and *who* they were really fighting.

African American soldiers were deployed all over the world during the Second World War as part of the American war effort. While on the surface this may not seem to be much of an occurrence worth discussion, the deployment of African Americans overseas resulted in a number of notable outcomes that deserve analysis. These deployments saw black American soldiers meet and interact with different societies, many of which were unfamiliar with either people of color or American racial norms. The two most prominent locations which saw widespread interactions between African American soldiers and foreign white populations were

¹ Harold Pollins, "The Battle of Bamber Bridge," *WW2 People's War*, BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/85/a3677385.shtml>.

Britain and Australia. Large numbers of African American troops were deployed in Britain and Australia, and the people in both countries interacted extensively with black American soldiers throughout the war. Interactions between African American soldiers and locals were mostly peaceful and friendly. In some cases, black American soldiers found unlikely allies among them in the fight against racial segregation. However this did little to stop attempts by white American soldiers to enforce segregation, and if anything it led to a greater number of incidents of racial violence as African Americans felt emboldened to resist discrimination and fight back against those who wanted to oppress them.

This thesis explores these interactions and conflicts, examining how African American soldiers were received by white populations overseas, what relationships formed between the locals and black troops, and how these foreign societies reacted to the introduction of American racism. Finally, it also investigates the lasting effects of the deployment of African American troops into countries like Britain and Australia. How did their populations' perspectives change through their interactions with African Americans and with white American's attempts to bring Southern Jim Crow beliefs abroad, and how did African Americans interpret their experiences overseas? This thesis argues that the interaction between African American soldiers and the people of Britain and Australia during the Second World War resulted in a transnational exchange of experiences and ideas about the nature of racial discrimination. African American soldiers who were stationed in these countries often wrote home about the good treatment they had received from locals, expressing their surprise at the fact that they felt more welcome among foreigners than they did among many of their own white countrymen, who often went out of their way to try and impose American racial beliefs outside the borders of the United States. As a result, they came home either dejected at the sad reality of their country, or inspired to fight to

change it. On the other hand, Britons and Australians found their racial assumptions challenged through their interactions with African American soldiers, and many saw firsthand the realities of racial discrimination as white Americans attempted to bring Jim Crow to their countries. These new experiences, for people who had rarely seen the realities of racial discrimination up close, led to rising disapproval of racial discrimination, both in the United States and in their own countries. This helped begin a refashioning of understandings of race and race relations in Britain and Australia which would continue into the decades following the war.

To better understand the context of the African American experience during in the Second World War, it is helpful to understand the African American experience of the First World War. African Americans in the U.S. military during the First World War also faced extensive systems of discrimination. As was the case in the Second World War, the vast majority of black soldiers were assigned to labor units. In order to quell backlash about the unfair assignments African Americans were receiving, the Army renamed the units as “Services of Supply” battalions, in order to make them sound more dignified. Nevertheless, out of the approximately 380,000 African American personnel enrolled by the Army, around 338,000 were assigned to non combat service units.² Those black soldiers who were assigned to combat units and sent to France also faced significant adversity. The regiments of the 92nd Division, one of two all black combat divisions, had been forced to train separately in the United States for fears of a racial uprising, and so when they entered combat in September 1918 as part of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, their performance suffered due to a lack of cohesion and the unit received a blemished reputation in the eyes of many military authorities. This reputation was also due to the fact that senior white American officers, including some involved in leading the

² Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1987), 7-8.

division, worked to undermine the reputation of the unit to make the black soldiers appear incompetent.³ The other African American combat division sent to France, the 93rd, saw far more success, however their infantry regiments were dispersed among French units, and equipped with French accoutrements, and even though they saw remarkable success in the field, that success was only really officially recognized by the French.⁴ African American soldiers' encounters with the French populace went remarkably well. Despite extensive efforts by American military officials to enforce segregation in France, generally "the French populace ignored the white American view and afforded the black soldier an equality he had not known before."⁵ W. E. B. DuBois argued in *The Crisis* that through their experiences in Europe, particularly with the French, African American soldiers had developed a new "spirit," one which would lead them to fight for a more equal America. Many white Americans thought the same, although they generally looked upon this development with horror instead of hope. During the First World War, very few African Americans were sent to Britain, due to successful campaigning on the part of the British government and labor unions to keep them out of the country. Those who did land on British shores did not remain for very long, as usually they were quickly shipped off to France.⁶ Upon the black soldiers' return to the United States, racial tensions increased, with "anti-black race riots," occurring in twenty-six cities, and lynchings increasing "from fifty-eight in 1918 to seventy-seven in 1919." Among those lynched were at least ten war veterans.⁷ Service in the war did not lead to any great change in the United States for African Americans, and those African Americans who signed up to fight in 1941 faced many of the same problems their predecessors did in 1917.

³ Jami L. Bryan, "Fighting for Respect: African Americans in World War I," *On Point* 8, no. 4, (Winter 2002-2003), 13.

⁴ Bryan, "Fighting for Respect," 14.

⁵ Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 11.

⁶ Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 16-17.

⁷ Bryan, "Fighting for Respect," 14.

By the Second World War, the influence of Southern Jim Crow had permeated the American armed forces. Southern officers and politicians had worked discriminatory practices and policies into all branches of the military. Racial segregation was enforced both officially and unofficially in almost all aspects of military life at a level similar to that seen in civilian society. African Americans from the North, who faced comparatively less racial discrimination in their daily lives were shocked by levels of discrimination they faced in order to fight for their country. This began with enlistment, where a “separate but equal” policy was implemented.⁸ The decision was made to allow black troops to be recruited to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces; however, they would serve in segregated, all-black units, often under white officers.⁹ Many African Americans were rejected for service due to requirements that specifically targeted their entry such as unfair and discriminatory literacy tests. Others were rejected purely because the headquarters governing their recruiting area secretly enforced rules prohibiting the recruitment of African Americans.¹⁰ Other aspects of life were far from “equal” in the U.S. military for black troops. They often received poor training, with one soldier remarking that “the first two weeks we laid around doing nothing... the third week they started us cleaning the white officers’ rooms, making us they dirty beds and cleaning they latrine,” in Camp Gordon Johnston in Florida.¹¹ Black soldiers also found that many professions in the army were unavailable to them. For example, private Laurence W. Harris who was a tool maker before the war, stated in a letter to *The Pittsburgh Courier*, “I was

⁸ Phillip McGuire, ed., *Taps for A Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), xxi.

⁹ William A. Taylor, *Military Service and American Democracy: From World War II to the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2016), 17.

¹⁰ Phillip McGuire, ed., *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, 2.

¹¹ A Black Soldier to *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 9-27-43, in *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, ed. Phillip McGuire, 19.

in hopes I could become an airplane mechanic, but the field doesn't seem to be open to negro soldiers."¹² Indeed, most African American units were confined to service and labor forces.¹³

Military and civilian services were typically segregated by race in the United States, with black troops discovering that the services supplied to them were often inferior or non-existent. Black troops at Camp Gordon Johnston were denied access to church services at the camp, as well as being turned away from service clubs as they were told, "we don't serve colored."¹⁴ As one soldier described the limited transportation access to recreation areas, "whenever we get a bus they will only take five colored soldiers, and sometimes we have to wait about two or three hours for a bus."¹⁵ One of the ultimate insults for many African American soldiers was seeing German and Italian prisoners of war receiving more privileges than they did.¹⁶

Discrimination, hate speech, and racial violence were common on U.S. army bases in the United States where both black and white servicemen were present. The first major act of racial violence, a lynching, occurred in April 1941 in Fort Benning, Georgia, only shortly after the first African Americans began training.¹⁷ Soon after at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, conflicts arose between black soldiers and the base's military police after "an altercation over the use of a diving platform at the YMCA Lake Area."¹⁸ Another infamous incident occurred in Fayetteville, Georgia, where a number of drunk black soldiers were stopped from boarding a bus by unarmed black military policemen (MPs), whose job it was to keep order on the buses going to and from

¹² Pvt. Laurence W. Harris to *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 11-4-43, in *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, ed. Phillip McGuire, 21.

¹³ Phillip McGuire, ed., *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, 59.

¹⁴ A Black Soldier to *The Baltimore African American*, 9-27-43, in *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, 19.

¹⁵ Pvt. Norman Brittingham to Truman K. Gibson Jr. 7-17-43, in *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, ed. Phillip McGuire, 18.

¹⁶ Linda Hervieux, *Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2019), 102.

¹⁷ Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops: United States Army in World War II* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1963), 349.

¹⁸ Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 349.

Fort Bragg. After the soldiers began threatening the MPs, a detachment of armed white military police arrived and attempted to arrest the chief troublemakers. In doing so, they began to attack some of the black soldiers with their nightsticks. In the confusion, one soldier grabbed a revolver from one of the MPs and fired at him. A number of the MPs responded by firing back. One black soldier and one white military policeman were killed, with two MPs and three other black soldiers wounded as a result of the shooting. In response, many African American soldiers in and around Fort Bragg were rounded up and imprisoned in the fort's stockade, with many soldiers writing home that particularly brutal searches were conducted on them, even though many of them were not involved.¹⁹ Across the United States, more confrontations with white civilian police officers as well as military police resulted in armed conflict, such as in Camp Stewart in Georgia, in which over five thousand shots were fired between black soldiers and white military policemen, or as in Murfreesboro, Tennessee and in Gurdon, Arkansas, where African American troops on training maneuvers "ran into armed resistance from citizens and state police."²⁰ In summary, African Americans serving in the military faced vicious and often violent resistance from their own countrymen in the United States, both from within the military and from the white civilian population. Even while serving their country, they could not escape the oppression of Jim Crow. This made the African American soldier's experience in Britain and Australia all the more unique, when suddenly segregation was no longer the norm. The consequences of such a radical shift would soon become apparent.

The primary method of exploring these experiences will be through newspaper accounts and debates. Newspapers offer scholars the best representation of what was important in the public consciousness at the time of their publishing, and they highlight small local events which

¹⁹ Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 351; Linda Hervieux, *Forgotten*, 108.

²⁰ Linda Hervieux, *Forgotten*, 108.

do not necessarily reach national or global attention but are still relevant to targeted historical analysis. When British and Australian newspapers write about the presence of African American soldiers in their countries, it tells us that they considered their presence worth discussing. Similarly, how these newspapers write about African American soldiers and what information they choose to include and exclude tells us a lot about the way Britons and Australians thought about black soldiers. In African American newspapers, such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Afro-American* we get personal accounts of the war from African American soldiers and African American communities, perspectives which are difficult to come by elsewhere, such as mainstream national newspapers. We also get from these newspapers a period analysis of how these experiences relate to larger ongoing trends at home and abroad. African American newspapers were very concerned with how black soldiers were being treated in the military and how they fared overseas, therefore they would often feature reports from war correspondents about how the troops were doing, as well as letters from the soldiers themselves, alongside their own analysis of the situation. They provide therefore two important sources of information, a direct link to the soldiers overseas, and the perspective of the journalists themselves, who often took a more critical angle to what was happening.

Newspapers do have their drawbacks as sources. The information cited in newspapers cannot always be considered reliable, which means that their value in providing an accurate account of an event is potentially questionable. It is also true that journalists often had biases which affected how they covered certain topics, however in many ways this is also a benefit to using newspapers as these biases themselves are useful in understanding the way people talked and thought. Aside from being a source of raw information, they also capture a sense of the ideological nature of a society or social movement which is difficult to find elsewhere. A number

of other types of sources are also used to aid this thesis, and to help mitigate some of the drawbacks of newspapers as a source. A number of government reports and surveys provide a useful quantitative perspective to supplement the primarily qualitative nature of newspapers, and some letters are used to provide a personal aspect to the subject.

Over the years, a number of historians have written about African American soldiers in the Second World War. The first work concerning this subject was Ulysses Lee's *Employment of Negro Troops: United States Army in World War II*. Published in 1963, Lee's book is considered the definitive work on the subject of African American combat soldiers during the Second World War. While thorough in analyzing the difficulties apparent from the employment of African American combat troops during the Second World War, it has a number of limitations. The book was written as the result of the U.S. War Department's interest in the subject. The War Department perceived African American participation in military service during World War II to be "of national interest as well as of great value for future military planning."²¹ Thus, the book is heavily geared toward analyzing African American service in terms of future practical military application, not through the lens of social history. Secondly, the book focuses solely on black combat troops, not service troops. Seeing as service troops made up the majority of African Americans sent overseas, *Employment of Negro Troops* cannot hope to capture the full scope of the African American experience during the war. Nevertheless, the book provides an extensive base from which many authors have built their own studies on the subject. This thesis in many ways builds on Lee's work. Lee was one of the first writers to analyze the experiences of African American soldiers during the war and also identify the many racial conflicts which arose overseas, attributing the cause of many of them to the actions of white soldiers. This thesis uses much of Lee's research and analysis as the groundwork for exploring how and where those

²¹ Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, ix.

conflicts arose.

In the years following the Second World War, many historians have seen African American service in World War II as a catalyst for the Civil Rights movement. Books like Mary Penick Motley's *The Invisible Soldier: The Experience of the Black Soldier, World War II* and Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck's *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* place African American service and experiences in the war in the context of the fight for domestic civil rights. These books focus far more on the individual experiences of the men and women of color in the war, drawing upon those experiences to examine how the war changed the way they valued their lives. While the events of the civil rights movement during the Second World War are not the central focus of this thesis, they are important to consider when discussing how African Americans interpreted their wartime experiences, and what ideas they may have returned home with concerning the need to fight for civil rights.

Graham Smith's 1987 book, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull* is the most extensive work on African American soldiers in Britain. Smith's book is the only major work which focuses exclusively on the introduction of American systems of discrimination to Britain, analyzing it from a number of diverse perspectives. In doing so, Smith aims to primarily investigate how the British government reacted and adapted to the introduction of American segregation and discrimination to Britain.²² He found that the British Government had a somewhat confused and disorganized reaction to the problem which reflected both the attitudes of the British public and the wishes of many white American soldiers. He points to many instances when the British government was torn between trying to please low-level American military authorities who wished to expand segregation, and the British public who generally opposed any such attempts.

Smith also covers the "attitudes and anxieties" of the British public in a broad manner. In

²² Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 4.

doing so, Smith aimed to paint a picture of British attitudes on race and racism in the 1940's, using the arrival of African Americans in Britain as the defining event. He argues that African Americans "were warmly welcomed in Britain, and the action of the white Americans in furthering a colour bar was roundly condemned."²³ However, he stresses that "important qualifications" must be made about that fact, including that the warmth of the welcome appeared to diminish over time, and that Britons viewed "associations" between black GIs and white British women unfavorably.²⁴ Despite these caveats, Smith supports the idea that Britain, and most significantly the British public, rejected segregation and white American racism, and argues that in many cases the British resisted attempts by white Americans to impose Jim Crow style segregation in British towns and villages.²⁵ This thesis builds on Smith's work, by expanding Smith's interpretation of the effects of the presence of African American soldiers in Britain.

The histories of African Americans in Australia during the war tend to debate the extent to which Australian society was actually receptive to African Americans and the degree to which Australians rejected Jim Crow. Many Australian historians tend to argue that Australia was not receptive to African American soldiers. Historians Kay Saunders and Helen Taylor, in their article "The Reception of Black American Servicemen in Australia During World War II: The Resilience of 'White Australia,' argue that African American soldiers deployed in Australia suffered under "complex, interlinking patterns of segregation" imposed upon them by both Australian and American authorities. Their work, which focused primarily on the actions of the Australian authorities, concludes that African American soldiers were strictly controlled by a strict racial hierarchy while in Australia, and that the war only served to reinforce an already

²³ Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 118.

²⁴ Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 119.

²⁵ See also: Linda Hervieux, *Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes*, (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2016) and Juliet Gardiner, *Overpaid, Oversexed, and Over Here: The American GI in World War II Britain*, (New York: Abbeville Press, Inc, 1992).

strong color line in the country.²⁶

Other historians argue against this line of thinking, usually citing reports from African American soldiers themselves which indicate that they thought that their treatment in Australia was preferable to that in the United States. Historian Chris Dixon examines the presence of African American soldiers in Australia as part of his book *African Americans and the Pacific War 1941-1945*. In the chapter “Nourishing the Tree of Democracy,” Dixon argues that African American soldiers arrived in Australia well aware of the nation’s racially discriminatory immigration policy and the horrific treatment of the Aboriginal population, and that many “believed their wartime mission Down Under entailed remaking, as well as saving Australia,” by cleansing the country of racism.²⁷ Dixon examines the many racial conflicts that occurred in Australia during the war, however he also highlights the fact that many African Americans wrote home praising the surprisingly good treatment that they were receiving from many Australians, noting that some even thought that they were treated better in Australia than anywhere else they had been.²⁸ In regards to the African American experience in Australia during the war, this thesis sides more with Dixon’s interpretation of events. While it may be true that the Australian government and Australians in general were more prejudiced than Britons, the evidence from African American soldiers and the black press, indicates that they still saw the treatment of African Americans in Australia as being preferable to that of many places in the United States.

Another important work to consider when talking about the deployment of African American soldiers abroad during the Second World War is the book *Drawing the Global Colour*

²⁶ Kay Saunders and Helen Taylor, “The Reception of Black American Servicemen in Australia During World War II: The Resilience of “White Australia”,” *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 3 (January 1995), 331-348.

²⁷ Chris Dixon, “Nourishing the Tree of Democracy: Black Americans in White Australia,” in *African Americans and the Pacific War 1941-1945: Race, Nationality, and the Fight for Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 136.

²⁸ Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War*, 157. See also: Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, “Jim Crow Downunder? African American Encounters with White Australia, 1942-1945,” *Pacific Historical Review* 71, no. 4 (November 2002), 607-632.

Line, by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds. Lake and Reynolds argue that a transnational wave of support for white supremacist policies occurred in the early 20th century. This display of support for “whiteness,” was driven, as Lake and Reynolds argue, by a “transnational circulation of emotions and ideas, people and publications, racial knowledge and technologies,” as well as a general “apprehension of imminent loss,” among white communities concerning their loss of global dominance to growing powers in Asia and Africa.²⁹ What Lake and Reynolds do in their book is to analyze what was seen previously as a group of “parallel developments in Australasia, British Columbia and New Zealand, and... the west coast of the United States,” as one “dynamically inter-connected and... mutually formative” development enacted by a larger community, which saw “whiteness” as a concept which crossed national borders.³⁰

In their concluding chapter, Lake and Reynolds discuss the decline of the global color line, identifying the Second World War as the turning of the tide against white supremacy. White imperial power was broken by the Japanese victories in the Pacific in 1941-42, and the image of a supreme and superior white race was shattered. Also, the cause of the war destroyed any ideas of restoring the pre-war status quo, for the Allies had always claimed that the “war in Europe had been fought against Germany and Italy in the name of democracy,” and that, “the war had ‘taken on the character of a crusade for human rights.’”³¹ Lake and Reynolds use the progression of human rights legislation in the fledgling United Nations as proof of the turning tide, as the majority of the nations of the world declared discrimination based on “‘race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,’” in conflict with basic human rights.³²

²⁹ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4, 2.

³⁰ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 5.

³¹ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 339.

³² *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments* vol. 1 (Geneva: United Nations, 1994) 2.

While historians like Smith and Dixon focused on the ways African American soldiers interacted with populations in specific regions, Britain and Australia respectively, this thesis explores the subject in a way more similar to Lake and Reynolds, as a transnational, global event. African American soldiers became acquainted with white populations all over the world, and while the histories and cultures of the people they met were often very different, in the vast majority of cases the reception they received from those populations was very similar. To understand how these interactions took place, Chapter 1 examines the deployment of African American soldiers to Britain, while Chapter 2 explores the deployment of African American soldiers to Australia. These chapters investigate the nature of interactions between African American soldiers and local Britons and Australians, and observe the reactions many white Americans had to the situation overseas, in order to paint a clearer picture of what was really going on between these different groups. These chapters also argue that the presence of African American troops in Britain and Australia, as part of American forces, led to a rise in racial conflicts in both countries (through no fault of the African American soldiers themselves), as well as a rise in local opposition to racial discrimination. Britain and Australia were chosen primarily because they were the two largest, white, English-speaking countries that received large numbers of African American soldiers. They were also chosen because of their significant differences in history, culture, and understanding of race. Britain, while owning a global empire which ruled over millions of people of color, had a population which thought very little about race in their day-to-day lives. Australia on the other hand, was considered at the time, one of the most discriminatory countries on the planet when it came to race, primarily due to their infamous “white Australia” policy. As a result, many would assume that Australians had far more personal beliefs about race and would have some preconceived ideas about the black soldiers who were

arriving to defend their country. Chapter 3 examines the greater global effects of the deployment of African Americans overseas, detailing how it affected the populations they interacted with and how their experience overseas affected African American veterans returning home. This chapter focuses on how the deployment of African American troops overseas changed how those involved thought and talked about race and racial discrimination. Finally, this thesis concludes by looking at the years following the war, determining whether or not shifts in perspective, caused by the interaction between African Americans and overseas white populations, actually resulted in any concrete change.

Chapter 1 - "A World War to Save Civilization"

“What are we fighting for? Were we sent to the ETO [European Theater of Operations] to fight the Nazis - or our white soldiers?” According to Walter White, Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People between 1929 and 1955, this was a common question among many of the African American soldiers he interviewed in Britain in early 1944. He remarked on the situation, “it is tragic that the Civil War should be fought again while we are fighting a World War to save civilization.”³³ Many African Americans serving in the U.S. Armed Forces during the Second World War often saw white Americans as a greater threat to their freedom than the Germans or the Japanese.³⁴ This was exemplified most strikingly during the U.S. Army’s presence in Britain throughout the war. African American soldiers arriving in Britain were surprised to find themselves receiving a very different reception than they expected. These men and women, many of whom had grown up under the shadow of Jim Crow laws in the United States, most likely expected Britain to be much the same. Instead, by and large, they were welcomed warmly by the British people. Despite this, some white American soldiers saw it fit to try to implement the same systems of segregations seen in the United States in Britain. As a result, the island nation quickly became a hotbed of racial tension and was the scene of a number of violent engagements between white and black Americans, the latter of whom were often, to their surprise, aided by British civilians.³⁵

This chapter examines how the British public reacted to the introduction of American racial segregation in Britain. It highlights the problems and consequences which emerged from the unique interaction between the British civilians and the black and white Americans, who

³³ Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO,” February 11, 1944, NARA, RG 107, Box 447.

³⁴ Linda Hervieux, *Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day’s Black Heroes* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2019), 172.

³⁵ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1987), 139.

found themselves in a country, which although not free of racial prejudice, generally rejected the principles of Jim Crow. By examining news articles from the period, as well as the memoirs of soldiers and civilians present in Britain during the war, it is evident that the American armed forces brought American racial conflicts with them to Britain. These conflicts sparked new and unprecedented global attention to racial segregation and discrimination in the United States, and provided a significant piece of evidence for American civil rights activists in the United States to point to when arguing for the desegregation of the U.S. military and the outlawing of segregation nationwide.

In Britain, questions concerning African American soldiers and American segregation and discrimination arrived even before the soldiers themselves. The initial point of concern for the British was the lease of many British naval bases in the Caribbean to the United States as part of the “destroyers-for-bases” agreement of 1940. Many of the islands on which these bases were located had large black populations governed by white colonial administrators and now “black and white Americans, both military and civil personnel, would soon be working in some of the leased territories.”³⁶ Many commentators, particularly those within the Caribbean, expressed concern over the possible arrival of American racial discrimination islands. The *New York Amsterdam News* quoted one Vernon Johnson from British Guyana, who said of the impending American arrival, “the West Indian people will be worse off. American influence, as usual, will bring discrimination and Jim-Crow tactics in the islands.”³⁷ On the other hand, the British government asked the United States not to send African American troops or civilian personnel to the West Indies for fear that the higher standard of living African Americans enjoyed over the

³⁶ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1987), 27.

³⁷ “West Indians Endorse U.S.-British Agreement: Hit Action on Bermuda Deal Say Negro Colonies Were Bartered; Whites Given as Free Gifts,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 14, 1940, 5.

black populations of the Caribbean would incite those populations to revolt against their white colonial administrators. The United States ignored this request, deploying African American soldiers to the area as early as May 1942.³⁸ Clearly race was a prominent subject of concern for everyone involved, as strategic military needs were often checked by concerns about racial discrimination and violence.

There were a number of strong opinions expressed in regards to the deployment of African Americans soldiers to Britain before the soldiers ever set foot in the country. Among the African American press and civil rights activists in the United States, Britain and its empire stood as an example of white racial supremacy and racist imperialist ideology, particularly before the war began. One writer for the *Pittsburgh Courier* bemoaned in 1943, “throughout the length and breadth of the British Empire... there is one standard for whites and another for non-whites. Nowhere in their vast domain are the yellow, brown or black peoples treated as equal. Nowhere has the British Government made a real effort to improve or elevate them.”³⁹ Another commentator, Albert Parker writing for the *Militant* in 1941, compared Britain to Nazi Germany, “while Hitler *preaches and practices* Negro oppression, England *keeps quiet and practices* it... while Hitler *calls* the Negro inferior, England *keeps quiet and treats* him as an inferior.”⁴⁰ While it appears that at least some African Americans had strong opinions on Britain, it is more difficult to ascertain whether or not the British citizens thought much at all about African Americans or racism in America in general prior to 1942. Indeed, historian Graham Smith, writing on British perceptions of American racism, said that “from available evidence it is safe to say that large numbers of British people in January 1942 had no views on, or knowledge of, the

³⁸ Annette Palmer, “The Politics of Race and War: Black American Soldiers in the Caribbean Theater During the Second World War,” *Military Affairs* 47, no. 2 (April 1983), 59.

³⁹ “The British and the Darker Peoples,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 11, 1943, 6.

⁴⁰ Albert Parker, “Randolph’s Apologetics for British Imperialism,” *The Militant*, February 15, 1941, in *Fighting Racism in World War II: A Week by Week Account of the Struggle Against Racism and Discrimination in the United States during 1939-45, from the Pages of the Militant* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1980), 106.

American racial pattern.”⁴¹ While Britain ruled over millions of people of color around the globe, the average Briton lived in a homogeneous white society kept far removed from the rest of the Empire. The result was that your average Briton rarely thought about race or racism, as it had little bearing on their daily lives.

Surprisingly, upon arriving in Britain, African American soldiers received a warmer welcome than expected from the British public.⁴² British civilians often invited black troops into their homes, and many African Americans expressed surprise at the welcoming attitude the British took towards them.⁴³ Walter White reported that many African Americans in Britain told him , “it was their first experience in being treated as normal human beings as friends by white people.”⁴⁴ Many Britons were reportedly impressed by the polite behavior of African American soldiers and often praised their manners. Walter White reported from his tour of the European Theater of Operations that:

An important factor in the keeping down trouble has been the remarkably fine behavior of an overwhelming majority of Negro troops. In virtually every place I visited, and in virtually every conference I have had with British people, ranging from high officials to so-called common people, this has been emphasized. There have been, of course, exceptions. But the majority of Negro troops have won the esteem of the British people not only for themselves but for the United States by their behavior.⁴⁵

The British often noted that they were won over by the politeness and “cheer” of black soldiers, even some Britons who held strong racial prejudices found themselves reevaluating their beliefs. One report from a vicar in Worcester exemplified this in a letter to *The Staid Weekly Spectator* which noted that there was an elderly lady he knew “who was obliged to billet two Yankee

⁴¹ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 35.

⁴² Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 177.

⁴³ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 119.

⁴⁴ Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1945) 21.

⁴⁵ Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

soldiers. To her horror they were Negroes. After a night of fitful sleep she crept nervously downstairs, found all her housework done and the coloured Doughboys waiting to cook her breakfast.”⁴⁶ Another Briton, C. Phillips Cape, wrote, “Here I pay tribute to the excellent behavior of the vast majority of our negro visitors. They are gentle, happy, generous, sober, and well-behaved.” He continues, “A majority are Baptists and Methodists, and their wholesomeness of speech reflects credit upon their homes and teachers.”⁴⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, writing for the *Chicago Defender*, also noted on Britons’ appreciation of black troops “good manners,” albeit perhaps with more insight than many British observers, writing, “the first thing that impressed the English were the manners of the Negroes as contrasted with those of the white Americans. The Negroes were often diffident and apologetic. This was a part of their caste training in the South; and on the other hand, it was the courtesy due to their hosts from strangers in a strange land... they did not, like so many white Americans, order, demand, and swagger.”⁴⁸ The good manners of many African American soldiers, often learned in order to survive in a dangerous and hostile Southern society, struck a chord with many Britons, who in contrast saw many white Americans as being arrogant and rude.

The comparatively similar economic situations of both the average British citizen and African Americans also built common ground. Walter White noted that “the average income of between 60% and 70% of the British people is 13/10 per week, which corresponds to the average wage of many Negroes in the United States. An economic bond of sympathy appears to have been created thereby.” This stands in contrast to many white Americans who generally tended to possess more modern utilities and equipment, meaning that as White saw it, “Negro soldiers

⁴⁶ “Black Soldiers,” *Bellshill Speaker and Mid-Lanarkshire Gazette*, July 21, 1944, 3.

⁴⁷ C. Phillips Cape, “Excellent Behavior of Coloured Men,” *Western Morning News*, June 3, 1944, 5.

⁴⁸ W.E.B. DuBois, “GIs Leave Good Impression on England, DuBois Finds,” *Chicago Defender*, November 24, 1945, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

have been less prone to comment audibly in the presence of British people upon the absence of radios, automobiles, bath tubs and other mechanical devices more common in the United States than among the majority of British people.” Black soldiers made a strong impression on many Britons, and they quickly found that they had a lot of support among the British public. One example was that it was not uncommon to see pubs with signs saying “For British People and Coloured Americans Only.”⁴⁹

Furthermore, throughout Britain’s history, class, not race, had been the defining feature of one’s position in society. While Britain had engaged in the slavery in the past, and at the time of the Second World War, ruled a vast empire in Asia and Africa, the average Briton remained relatively ignorant of any such matters. For many Britons, particularly those living in the multitude of small rural towns and villages in which many African American soldiers were stationed, race played little to no role in their daily lives. To them, the primary way of understanding one’s role in society was the ever complex class system, with one’s wealth or birthright dictating their standing in life. In London or other large, port cities it was different to an extent, there the connection between Britain and its empire was more apparent. However, further inland many remained ignorant of such matters.

Finally, it must be stressed that most Britons saw African American troops as guests in their country, not potential permanent residents. They were allies who were there to help and defend them, and to be discourteous would go against the sensibilities of most Britons. It certainly helped that Black soldiers were seen as polite and regarded as well behaved, however the fact that they were only in Britain temporarily should not be forgotten when assessing the British reaction to their arrival.

⁴⁹ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 118.

Of course, this warm reception did not mean that Britain nor its people were free of racial prejudice. Rather, the opposite was true. British racism definitely existed, albeit expressed differently than in the United States. Strong pre-existing stereotypes, usually forged by depictions in American cinema, often colored the British people's perceptions of African Americans before they had even arrived. The image of the African American as being "unassuming", "kind", and "musical" were all drawn from popular representations in film.⁵⁰ An example of such a stereotype can be seen in a newspaper article from the *Belfast Telegraph*, titled, "Dusky Doughboys In Ulster 'Sho Like It' Here." The article goes on to read, "since the arrival in Northern Ireland of a negro unit of the U.S. Army the dusky Doughboys have been winning all hearts by their cheery ways... They have added a picturesque touch of colour to the Ulster countryside... Fifth-Class Private J.A. Sykes, whom people in the district in which the unit is stationed hail as the U.S. Army's sweetest trumpeter," alluding to a common stereotype which assumed that African Americans were very musical.⁵¹ Other stereotypical depictions of Africans and African Americans were common in Britain as a result of the long history of the British Empire's interactions with non-whites. These stereotypes gave many Britons positive but misled preconceptions about African Americans that led many to be curious about the new "exotic" arrivals on their shores.

Nevertheless, the positive treatment black soldiers received from the British public and their appreciation of that treatment upset many white American soldiers. Some white Americans were more accustomed to the strict segregationist laws of the American South, and many took it upon themselves to try and enforce those laws in Britain. Some officers blackmailed certain establishments such as pubs and clubs. In one case, "the manager of an Aero Club in the Eastern

⁵⁰ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 124.

⁵¹ "Dusky Doughboys In Ulster 'Sho Like It' Here." *Belfast Telegraph*, July 31, 1942, 4.

Base Section and a traveling accountant of the American Red Cross, were driven to a hotel on a cold night through the blackout from the camp at which they were working. Because of the inclement weather they asked that the Negro driver be served a drink. The proprietor declined saying that American officers had ordered him not to serve Negro soldiers on penalty of their boycotting the hotel.”⁵² In another instance, “when the manager of a restaurant was questioned... about refusing service to a Negro soldier, he had a ready answer: ‘White Americans say they will not patronize my place if Negroes were served.’”⁵³ Boycotts by American officers often lead to a significant profit loss for owners, as officers partaking in such actions would generally prevent their enlisted men from attending those establishments as well. Thus, some British stores were coerced into closing their doors to African Americans, although reports of these tactics actually working are rare.

A common method used by some white soldiers to insert Jim Crow segregation in Britain was to spread harmful rumors to try to separate the British public from black soldiers. For many British civilians, especially those who grew up in small isolated villages where many black units were going to be stationed, the arrival of African American soldiers was their first encounter with anyone who was not white. As a result, many believed even the most absurd rumors about the black troops. Walter White reported one instance where white American troops:

Told the British such fanciful stories as that all Negroes have tails, that they are savage, diseased, illiterate and will rape their women... The Lord Mayor of one English town told me that he and all the people were frightened when they heard that Negro troops were to be sent there. For days the British avoided even walking close to Negro soldiers. But one morning the Lord Mayor was greeted with a pleasant “Good morning, Sir” by one of the soldiers. Startled that the soldier could speak English he entered into conversation with him and thus learned of the falsity of the stories

⁵² “Dusky Doughboys In Ulster ‘Sho Like It’ Here.” *Belfast Telegraph*.

⁵³ Roi Ottely, “Dixie Invades Britain,” *Negro Digest*, Vol II, No I, November 1942.

which had been spread in the town by white Army officers and enlisted men. The circulation of such stories and other acts of discrimination have had a most depressing effect upon the morale of Negro soldiers in the ETO.⁵⁴

Other methods were also employed by white Americans to enforce Jim Crow laws in Britain. This included white military police who attempted to segregate towns on their own initiative, despite orders from the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, and the European Theater of Operations (ETO) headquarters attempting to prevent this from happening. As a result, confrontations between black soldiers and white military police were common and often ended violently.⁵⁵

One particularly violent case in the small town of Bamber Bridge in Lancashire presents several incidents which paint a clearer picture of the situation as it stood in many parts of Britain. On June 24th, 1943, two white American military policemen entered the Hob Inn in Bamber Bridge after receiving reports of a commotion inside. There they found several African American soldiers, one who did not have a pass, nor a regulation uniform. Upon attempting to arrest the soldiers, the British civilians in the Hob Inn verbally protested and attempted to protect the soldiers and drive out the MPs. The military policemen left but announced that they were going to return with reinforcements. The black soldiers left the inn heading for their encampment at Adams Hall but encountered the MPs who had gathered some aid. A short but bloody brawl broke out during which one black soldier was shot in the neck.⁵⁶ Both sides dispersed, with the African American soldiers returning to Adams Hall, where rumors spread that the African Americans involved had been shot in the back by the MPs. A crowd quickly formed, and many armed themselves with the intention of fighting the MPs. However, “the situation was calmed by

⁵⁴ Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

⁵⁵ “Court-Martial Told Soldiers Shot Military Police,” *The Washington Post*, October 17, 1943, 4.

⁵⁶ Harold Pollins, “The Battle of Bamber Bridge,” *WW2 People's War*, BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/85/a3677385.shtml>.

the unit's sole black officer, a 2nd Lt., who convinced the men that the (white) senior officers would listen to their grievances."⁵⁷ Unfortunately, at "about midnight about a dozen police arrived in 'a makeshift armoured vehicle', complete with a machine gun," which provoked the black soldiers to once again arm themselves. As the MPs were about to move off, someone fired a shot. The situation quickly escalated into a gunfight, with black soldiers and military police exchanging fire in the streets of Bamber Bridge throughout the night.⁵⁸

The "Battle of Bamber Bridge," as it came to be known, demonstrated both the solidarity that existed between the British people and African Americans, and the underlying racial tensions which the Army had brought from the United States. In this particular case, British civilians leapt to the aid of black troops against the white military police, which was a common occurrence.⁵⁹ Many Britons found white American soldiers disrespectful. As War Correspondent Roi Ottley put it, "They walk the streets and enter restaurants with the feeling, 'We've come to save your country.'... Negro troops are very popular here. I think mainly because they generally have good manners... they do not come here to 'take over'—instead, they adjust themselves to the customs and do well for themselves."⁶⁰ Indeed, the attempts of some white Americans to implement Jim Crow in Britain and impose their views on the British people were met with disgust. They often served only to build greater opposition against segregation among the British population. As one example of this, in what can best be described as a classic piece of British humor, some British pub keepers displayed signs in their windows declaring, "THIS PLACE

⁵⁷ Harold Pollins, "The Battle of Bamber Bridge," *WW2 People's War*.

⁵⁸ One black soldier was killed in the fight, with four others, including one white officer, being wounded. Four of the black soldiers who had participated in the initial brawl were sentenced to three to four years of hard labor; however, upon review, one was acquitted. The second trial saw thirty-five black soldiers, two of whom were among those charged in the first trial, accused of mutiny and rioting. Seven were found not guilty, the rest received sentences of up to fifteen years in prison. However, none of the soldiers served more than thirteen months. Harold Pollins, "The Battle of Bamber Bridge," *WW2 People's War*

⁵⁹ Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 11.

⁶⁰ Mark A. Huddle, ed., *Roi Ottley's World War II: The Lost Diary of an African American Journalist*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 77.

FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF ENGLISHMEN AND AMERICAN NEGRO SOLDIERS.”⁶¹

Britons, thoroughly fed up with the white American soldiers’ attempts to enforce Jim Crow upon them, had been driven instead to support African Americans.

African American commentators and press also picked up on the developing situation in Britain whereby British citizens aligned themselves with African Americans. Whereas before the war African American newspapers had largely been critical of Britain, reports coming back from black soldiers and war correspondents soon changed that. From late 1942 onwards, articles concerning the deployment of African Americans in Britain often emphasized Britons’ opposition to segregation and their resistance to the imposition of Jim Crow laws upon their country. One article from October 1942, discussed attempts by white Americans to segregate pubs in England and relayed, “in a nutshell, the white Southerners were making a nuisance of themselves, just as they do over here. The difference is that in England, the British people are not going to stand for American Southerners telling them how to treat their guests.”⁶² There were even kind words for the British government, the author claiming that “the furor reached the House of Parliament and Prime Minister Churchill was requested to advise President Roosevelt that ‘the color bar is not a custom in England.’”⁶³ Whether or not the claims being made about the extent of British hospitality were entirely truthful was secondary in importance to using examples of that hospitality to level critique at Jim Crow and discrimination at home.

The amount of attention directed towards racial conflicts in Britain quickly became problematic for the U.S. Army. Despite efforts to censor news of racially charged clashes in reports and newspapers, news of fighting quickly spread by word of mouth.⁶⁴ As a result, it

⁶¹ Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 11.

⁶² “Eisenhower to Blame for Race Friction in England,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 24, 1942, 1.

⁶³ “Eisenhower to Blame for Race Friction in England,” 1.

⁶⁴ Pamela E. Walck, “Reporting America’s ‘Colour Problem’: How the U.S. and British Press Reported and Framed Racial Conflicts during World War II,” (PhD diss., Ohio University, 2015), 154, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/docview/1973261495?accountid=10051>.

quickly became evident to U.S. Military and political leaders that action had to be taken to stop the fighting as it jeopardized the war effort and increasingly highlighted the abhorrent nature of Jim Crow, American racial beliefs, and the hypocrisy of the United Nations in the eyes of existing allies.⁶⁵ Observers, both from within the U.S Army and among civilian reporters, noticed that in many cases, it was the sudden exposure to the different status quo in Britain which drove so many white soldiers to be so aggressive, as “most of the racial clashes have been caused... by troops recently arrived in the United Kingdom.”⁶⁶ Therefore, it was decided that efforts should be made to better prepare white GIs for what it was like in Britain.

These efforts were accomplished in a variety of ways. The most quickly implemented measure was a series of “aboard ship lectures... given to soldiers enroute to the ETO [European Theater of Operations] regarding their behaviour in the ETO,” dealing “not only with the different conditions they might find but also the different attitude to race of the British people as contrasted with certain parts of the United States.”⁶⁷ A film was also created to help Americans heading to Britain better adjust to the British way of life. Titled, *A Welcome to Britain*, the film stars American actor-director Burgess Meredith and was directed by Meredith and English director Anthony Asquith. Meredith, who plays the role of the narrator, attempts to explain aspects of British culture which might confuse newly arrived American GIs, with one aspect being the different racial beliefs of the British. The scene concerning this topic opens with an elderly British lady asking an African American soldier over for tea, which Meredith notes as being, “not unusual here. That’s the sort of thing that happens quite a lot.”⁶⁸ He continues by remarking that, “there are colored soldiers as well a white here, and there are less social

⁶⁵ Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

⁶⁶ Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

⁶⁷ Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

⁶⁸ *A Welcome to Britain*, directed by Anthony Asquith and Burgess Meredith, (London: Strand and the Ministry of Information, 1943). <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060022007>.

restrictions in this country. Yes, what you heard was an English woman asking a colored boy to tea. She was polite about it and he was polite about it; now look, that might not happen at home, but the point is, we're not at home, and the point is too, if we bring a lot of prejudices here what are we gonna do about them?"⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that the writers decided to have an older British woman ask the black soldier over for tea as it was judged that to have a younger British woman do so would be too "inappropriate."⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the sentiment that it was the white U.S. soldiers who had to control themselves in Britain is very enlightening with regard to how racial conflicts in Britain were perceived and acted upon by the U.S. Army. The actions of white soldiers were considered the root of the problem by the Army, and films like *A Welcome to Britain* were made to try and discourage them from taking such actions.

This is further demonstrated by a short speech given in the film by General John C. H. Lee, commander of the European Theater of Operations Services of Supply units at the time. Many of the Services of Supply units were African American Units, and General Lee was one of the most vocal supporters of desegregating the Army. In the film, he states, "America has promised the negro real citizenship, and a fair chance to make the best of himself. When the army needs Americans to fight for the country, it takes Negroes along with whites. Everyone is treated the same when it comes to dying, and so the Army wouldn't be true to America if it didn't try to live up to the promises about an equal chance."⁷¹ When asked about whether American soldiers should have to "get over our prejudices," he responds:

You don't get over a prejudice that easily, there's no use pretending that we're different than what we are, but we can try to live up to our American promises. I'd go further and say, we can't do less and still feel ourselves patriots. We have promised to respect each other. All of us.

⁶⁹ *A Welcome to Britain*, dir. by Anthony Asquith and Burgess Meredith.

⁷⁰ Neil A. Wynn, "'Race War': Black American GIs and West Indians in Britain During The Second World War," *Immigrants & Minorities*, 24 (3), May 14th, 2007, 324–346.

⁷¹ *A Welcome to Britain*, dir. by Anthony Asquith and Burgess Meredith.

That's one of the reasons that makes our world worth fighting for. But you're all together in this small country, with the same surroundings, same amount of pay to spend and the same sort of places to spend it. And we're all here as soldiers. Everything we do, we do as American soldiers, not Negroes and white men, rich or poor, as American soldiers. It's not a bad time, is it, to learn to respect each other, both ways.⁷²

The message was quite clear: segregation was not the norm in Britain; therefore, white American troops would have to “learn” to live with African Americans peacefully. Segregation would not be enforced by the command of the ETO in Britain outside of segregated units. In actuality however, segregation was enforced on lower levels in many areas of Britain through a variety of means, but the official stance taken by the U.S. Army, as seen through *A Welcome to Britain*, shows that the American Army as an institution was beginning to understand that segregation was unhealthy and detrimental to their operations. Segregation also reflected poorly on America and Americans as a whole, especially since news of racial violence in Britain was being spread worldwide both through conventional media and Axis propaganda.⁷³ Furthermore, exposure to a society which did not wholly support discrimination and segregation led some Americans who did attempt to enforce segregation in Britain to reevaluate their actions, as they lacked the wide public support which helped perpetuate discriminatory systems back home. Journalist Roi Ottley observed that in England “many of the most rabid anti-Negro American soldiers are now not so sure of their positions. They do not have a wide public support for any show of racial hostility.”⁷⁴ While this change in perspective was not common, the fact it happened at all shows that Britain provided a new environment for Americans to reevaluate their beliefs about each other. However, there was one area of race relations in Britain in which few whites, American or British, were willing to give ground.

⁷² *A Welcome to Britain*, dir. by Anthony Asquith and Burgess Meredith.

⁷³ Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

⁷⁴ Roi Ottley, “Dixie Invades Britain,” *Negro Digest*, Vol II No I (November 1942).

Interracial sexual relationships formed some of the most contentious racial conflicts in Britain during the American Army's stay. The openness of many British women to relationships with black American men caused a great deal of frustration for many white American soldiers, as it touched upon one of the most volatile aspects of Jim Crow racism. In the United States, "much of the violence in and around Southern Military bases was triggered by perceived competition over women."⁷⁵ However, unlike many other aspects of American racial attitudes brought to Britain, the British public often disapproved of racial intermingling between British women and African American men. The participation of British women in these relationships, and the reaction of British civilians, can tell us a lot about the situation regarding race relations in Britain at this time.

To many Americans, relationships between black men and white women was seen as a flagrant breach of social convention. Even to many socially progressive whites, the idea of full racial integration triggered many concerns. In the words of one American lieutenant, "I want my colored friend to vote... I want him to know and enjoy the Four Freedoms. I will work hard to see that he—or his sons—get these things, but I do not want him to live next door to me; I do not want him to dance with my daughter."⁷⁶ It was a topic that remained unthinkable to many white Americans, and one which caused a significant dilemma once in Britain.

In contrast to American proclivities about race and sex, it appeared to many white Americans that many British women held no particular opinions that interactions with black men should be of any concern. Indeed, many African American soldiers found that in Britain, they were, "welcomed by people who noted their courteous demeanor and friendly smiles, not just the

⁷⁵ Jane Dailey, "The Sexual Politics of Race in World War II America," in *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 154.

⁷⁶ Margaret Halsey, *Color-Blind*, (New York, New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1946), 124-125.

color of their skin.”⁷⁷ According to Robin Cruikshank, Chief of the American section of the British Ministry of Information, many British citizens “were deeply impressed with the extreme modesty of behaviour of the Negroes, their softness of voice, their gracefulness of movement and their adaptability to strange custom and surroundings.”⁷⁸ In *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, Graham Smith asserts that “It was obvious that many young girls found the blacks fascinating, appreciating their attentiveness and good manners.”⁷⁹ As a result, with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of black troops into a country which did not perceive the “color bar” to the same degree as the Americans, it was more than likely that interracial sexual relationships would occur.

Evidence of these relationships can be found in a number of places. Some investigations were made after the war to calculate how widespread they were and how many children had been born as a result. One survey conducted by Sylvia McNeill, a Jamaican school teacher working for the League of Coloured Peoples in 1945, found that at least 544 babies had been born to white British mothers and black fathers in Britain.⁸⁰ McNeil claimed that the survey was not representative of the true number, and that there were far more that she had not been able to identify.⁸¹ These relationships, while not necessarily common, certainly existed on a scale of some significance.

One of the most famous examples of opposition to interracial relationships between black men and white women, and pushback against these viewpoints, came from Worle in Somerset. One Mrs. May, the wife of Worle’s vicar, tried to implement a “six-point code” which would dictate the proper way that British women should interact with African American soldiers should

⁷⁷ Jane Dailey, “The Sexual Politics of Race in World War II America,” 157.

⁷⁸ Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 57.

⁷⁹ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 202.

⁸⁰ Sylvia McNeil, *Illegitimate Children Born in Britain of English Mothers and Coloured Americans: Report of a Survey* (London: League of Colored Peoples, 1946), 9.

⁸¹ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 208.

they ever come to the village. Some of the points of this code included rules such as: “If a local woman keeps a shop and a coloured soldier enters, she must serve him, but she must do it as quickly as possible and indicate that she does not desire him to come there again,” “On no account must coloured troops be invited into the homes of white women,” and “White women, of course, must have no social relationship with coloured troops.” Upon hearing the code, many women of the village spoke out, denouncing any ideas of discrimination against African American troops and arguing that “this code amounts to an insult to the troops of our Ally.” One woman, speaking with a writer from the *Sunday Pictorial*, said, “I was disgusted, and so were most of the women there,” and continued that, “any coloured soldier who reads this may rest assured that there is no colour bar in this country and that he is as welcome as any other allied soldier. He will find here that the vast majority of people have nothing but repugnance for the narrow-minded, uninformed prejudices expressed by [Mrs. May]. There is, and will be—no persecution of coloured people in Britain.”⁸² Thus while generally Britons were against Jim Crow, this was not always the case, especially when it came to intimate relations between black soldiers and white British women.

As a matter of fact, many British citizens, generally men, vocally disapproved of such actions. Richard A. Seckerson, writing for the *Clitheroe Advertiser and Times*, stated in a piece rather critical of the situation concerning black soldiers in Britain, “The white American soldiers strongly object to seeing white girls arm-in-arm with coloured men... understand that when Southerners arrive in this country and see negro Americans enjoying liberties which would be almost the subject for a lynching ‘back home,’ well, they get hot under their collars. And what is even worse, these white Americans form the opinion that we have no respect for our

⁸² “Wife Insults Our Allies,” *Sunday Mirror*, September 6, 1942, 3.

womenfolk.”⁸³ Some Britons, such as Seckerson, worried British honor was on the line and that the existence of these relationships threatened to ruin the reputation of British women among the Americans. Many other criticisms of interracial relationships by the British targeted the respectability of the women involved. Maurice Petherick, a conservative member of parliament during the war, wrote in a letter to Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, that the Foreign Secretary should try to prevent the Americans from sending black troops to Britain, suggesting that it would give the Americans “a bad opinion of Englishwomen.”⁸⁴

Some British politicians, especially Conservatives, also argued that because in the United States relationships between black men and white women were prohibited by social norms and law in many places, then they should be considered so in Britain too.⁸⁵ A report from the British War Cabinet in October 1942 noted, “some of the Regional Commissioners have expressed considerable apprehension as to the difficulties likely to be created in their regions by the presence of American coloured troops, and their association with the civil population, and particularly with British women. Some Regional Commissioners have informed me that, in their experience, some British women appear to find a peculiar fascination in associating with men of colour and that this association is resented by American white soldiers and is likely to give rise to difficult social problems in their Regions.”⁸⁶

Thus, the British authorities identified the conflicts that would arise from interracial sexual relationships early on and took a position that such relationships would be “problematic” in terms of relations with white American soldiers. It is important to note that the reason given for these relationships being “problematic” was their connection to social and racial conflicts in

⁸³ Richard A. Seckerson, “Jigs,” *Clitheroe Advertiser and Times*, July 23, 1943, 6.

⁸⁴ “Petherick to Eden,” August 16, 1942, cited in *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 189.

⁸⁵ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 188.

⁸⁶ Memorandum to War Cabinet, 21 September - 26 October 1942, NA, CAB 66/29 Original Reference 421 (42)-470 (42), accessed on September 14, 2019, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-66-29.pdf>.

Britain that resulted from the American presence, not necessarily the existence of the interracial relationships themselves. Yet, the wording of the report implies through the use of the phrase, “a peculiar fascination” that these relationships were still thought of as unusual and improper. This provides useful insight into British racism in the 1940s, and an important point on the American reaction to the social standing as they saw it in Britain. It shows that, while more subdued than in the United States, British racism still existed, especially in regards to interracial sexual relationships. British views on race were not a monolith, and contrary to many modern popular beliefs about Britain’s reception of African American soldiers during the Second World War, there is substantial evidence of resistance to their presence and involvement with white Britons, especially women.

For this reason, some British authorities took action against interracial relationships, in one particular case, two British women in Derby were charged by the police on account of “keeping a disorderly house” due to the fact that black soldiers were often seen entering with the women, essentially accusing them of prostitution. In the women’s defense, a man by the name of Mr. Pinder contended that “that these were the only two coloured soldiers who entered the premises, and added that there was no law in this country to prevent white women from taking negroes to their homes,” adding that, “the police sergeant’s evidence... did not point to the house being a disorderly one.”⁸⁷ This exemplifies a trend of thinking that was common among both white American soldiers and some British citizens: that British women who interacted with African Americans were likely to be prostitutes. However, this was not the case, as shown in the same example, the soldiers were likely in a relationship with the women who lived there. It is possible that this argument was made by British authorities to try and placate American perceptions of, and reactions to, these interactions by painting women who associated with

⁸⁷ “Derby Woman Admits to Having “Negro Friends” at House,” *Derby Daily Telegraph*, April 21, 1943, 4.

African American men as prostitutes. The British government was most concerned about a rise in racial violence due to the presence of both black and white Americans and hoped to dissuade white Americans from seeking retribution by trying to taint the reputation of women known to invite African Americans into their homes. Yet, it is also likely that attempts to stop these relationships were simply driven by racist beliefs among some British authorities.

Nevertheless, the British government generally took little concrete action to prevent interracial relationships from forming, despite some talk among the Bolero Combined Committee, a joint British-American committee dedicated to figuring out the logistics of the deployment of large numbers of Allied troops in Britain during the war, concerning the rumors about black GIs having venereal diseases.⁸⁸ Ultimately, it was decided that no action should be taken on behalf of the British government to enforce any sort of segregation. In a letter sent to the British Chief Constables, the Home Office stated that, “It is not the policy of His Majesty’s government that any discrimination as regards the treatment of coloured troops should be made by the British authorities.”⁸⁹ The British War Department understood that to enforce any sort of segregation in Britain would be difficult. They argued that there was evidence, “both in the public Press and from Members of Parliament that any difference of treatment between white and coloured troops may be regarded as racial discrimination which will give rise to bitter resentment,” among the British populace.⁹⁰ In regards to most aspects of Jim Crow segregation, the British War Cabinet agreed that:

Any lead given to the British people in this country, asking them to adopt the attitude of the American Army towards coloured people, whether American or others, is likely to cause serious resentment among coloured who are British subjects, and also to cause confusion--and even

⁸⁸ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 195.

⁸⁹ Circular Letter from the Secretary of State F. A. Newsam to the Chief Constables, September 4, 1942, NA, CAB 66/29 Original Reference 421 (42)-470 (42).

⁹⁰ Memorandum to War Cabinet, 21 September - 26 October 1942.

protest and resentment--in the minds of the public here who have been asked repeatedly to accept British coloured Colonial persons on equal terms and to extend to them hospitality and friendliness. The British attitude to coloured people is in fact widely different from the American attitude. There are historic and social reasons which may explain this, but the fact is undeniable... We cannot ask people to adopt the American attitude on the colour question without asking them to set aside the British tradition.⁹¹

The British stance on interracial relationships was thus complex and multifaceted, both among the general public and in government, some did not approve of such relationships, yet it is also apparent that many women defied the social convention. Ultimately, the British government did little to influence the conflict either way, as any form of official discrimination was judged to be both hypocritical and unpopular. The government's prior stance on discrimination towards colonial personnel would conflict with any policies targeted towards African Americans, and a general dislike of "the colour bar" among the British populace would have made any attempt to enforce American style segregation in Britain difficult.

As a result, American reactions to the prevalence of interracial sexual relationships in Britain, both official and unofficial, were predictably far more combative. Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, noted in his report that, "if the British people wish to invite American white soldiers into their homes, or to associate exclusively with them, this is obviously their own business. The same principle obtains if they choose to associate with Negro Americans. It is unfortunate that many white Americans believe that such relations are exclusively on a sexual basis with prostitutes." Contrary to this popular belief, White found that there were, "innumerable instances of British citizens wishing to associate and actually associating with Negro Americans on a basis of common interests and tastes." According to White, this assumption, that the majority of British women who associated with African

⁹¹ Memorandum to War Cabinet, 21 September - 26 October 1942.

Americans were prostitutes, angered many Britons, who felt that Americans were attempting to “dictate in the United Kingdom the social relations of the British people.” He considered this a significant problem, for if it was not it would “manifest that much ill feeling will be left against Americans if it is not handled properly.”⁹² Unfortunately, some Americans could not grasp the fact that any white women would willingly associate with black men.

White American fears of improper contact between African Americans and the British often led to an imposition of their way of life upon the British people, which significantly contributed to growing conflict. “American observers who were here in 1942 when the first contingents arrived from America saw amicable and smooth relations develop between the Negro troops and their British hosts... so much so that certain white American soldiers became openly resentful. And they lost no time in attempting to discipline the British people,” reported Roi Ottely in his article, “Dixie Invades Britain.”⁹³ These attempts were often met with backlash from many Britons, “puzzled and antagonized” by attempts to “transplant patterns of racial behavior like that of the most backward states of the South.”⁹⁴ Many white GIs verbally and physically expressed their anger at seeing white women with African American men. In one reported instance, one soldier, after seeing a black soldier walking and holding hands with a British woman, “snatched off his hat and flung it to the ground. He broke into tears and kept repeating over and over, ‘I’m from Georgia and I just can’t take that!’”⁹⁵ Another soldier, in a letter home, expressed anger at seeing black soldiers with French girls, writing, “Incidentally, if there is anything that makes me mad, it is too [sic] see a negro with a couple of attractive French girls around here! My blood just boils and boils! I blame it on the girls too.... surely they must

⁹² Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

⁹³ Roi Ottely, “Dixie Invades Britain.”

⁹⁴ “Army Minority Held Spreading Racial Hatred,” *The Washington Post*, May 1, 1944, 3.

⁹⁵ Roi Ottely, “Dixie Invades Britain.”

know better.”⁹⁶ One particularly telling incident occurred while a band was performing at a dance attended predominantly by American soldiers. Some members of the band were from British West Africa, and at one point during the night, one of the West African performers “took the floor with the wife of one of his colleagues in the band,” who happened to be white. Seeing this, “one of the southern American boys promptly went across the room and struck him.”⁹⁷ Here, not only did a GI attack another man simply for dancing with a white woman, but it was someone completely unfamiliar with American racism. Yet, this particular soldier thought it necessary that he strike the band member, thus enforcing his own racial views on people who were not familiar with nor “beholden” to those views. It was attitudes and actions like these that turned many Britons against the forms of discrimination that Americans brought with them to Britain. Even forms of segregation designed to prevent white women from interacting with black men, which was something many Britons agreed with on principle, were disliked. It also helped spread global awareness of American racism, as the man who had been struck was not an American, nor was he from Britain, but rather a British West African Colony. If Americans essentially saw non-whites around the world as second class citizens, then how could people living in Africa and Asia fully support U.S. participation in the Allied defense, or for that matter, an American-led United Nations after the war?

The growing agitation among white American troops in Britain concerning the treatment of African Americans also became a serious issue for the U.S. Army. They had difficulty handling the growing number of racially charged incidents regarding fights over British women. The issue reached General Eisenhower who wrote in his memoir, *Crusade in Europe*, that, “Prior to my arrival in England censorship had been established by American headquarters on stories

⁹⁶ Howard McCormick to Peggy McCormick, 11 October 1944, Center for American War Letters Archives, Box: WWII 92, Series 1, Folder:1-16.

⁹⁷ “From A London Diary,” *New Statesman and Nation*, September 19, 1942.

involving minor difficulties between Negro troops and other soldiers, or civilians. These incidents frequently involved social contacts between our Negro soldiers and British girls.”⁹⁸ The fact that censorship was used to conceal the existence of the problem showed both the volatility of the issue among white American troops, as well as a focus on interracial sexual relationships being one of the main points of conflict. From Eisenhower’s perspective, “The British population, except in large cities and among wealthy classes, lacks the racial consciousness which is so strong in the United States. The small-town British girl would go to a movie or dance with a Negro quite as readily as she would with anyone else, a practice that our white soldiers could not understand.”⁹⁹ Eisenhower makes a point of mentioning the difference between the people of “large cities” and the rest of the country, hinting at a divide between urban and rural views of race in Britain. Nevertheless, he too found that, despite divided views among Britons on interracial sexual relationships, the British public still often sided with African Americans against white soldiers, noting that, “brawls often resulted and our white soldiers were further bewildered when they found that the British press took a firm stand on the side of the Negro.”¹⁰⁰

Eisenhower’s solution to the issue would be controversial, even at the time. In August 1942, he authorized a plan to send an African American detachment of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) to Britain, “to perform duties such as car driving and secretarial work and also to provide companionship for the thousands of Negro troops,” with the *New York Times* reporting that, “Negroes were performing essential duties. They have, however, been without the companionship of other Negroes.”¹⁰¹ This kind of thinking was common, and some among the U.S. military leadership thought that the best way to stop interracial relationships was to send

⁹⁸ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1948), 58.

⁹⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 59.

¹⁰⁰ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 59.

¹⁰¹ "Duty in England for Negro WAACS" *New York Times*, August 16, 1942, 25.

black female soldiers to Britain to provide “companionship.” This decision was ultimately reversed as it received severe backlash from many groups, especially women and African Americans, who saw it as an insult to the WAACs, who were supposed to be doing legitimate work and not providing “entertainment” to the men.¹⁰²

Beyond this, Eisenhower, and to a further extent the headquarters of the ETO, had minimal involvement with policies attempting to introduce segregation to Britain. In fact, most of Eisenhower’s attempts to prevent racially provoked incidents were aimed towards white Americans. In an order issued in September 1941, General Eisenhower declared that, “The presence of Negro troops in this theater creates a problem of inter-racial relationships much different from that existing in the United States... Undoubtedly a considerable association of colored troops with British white populations, both men and women, will take place on a basis mutually acceptable to the individuals concerned.”¹⁰³ On this, Eisenhower stated that officially, “any attempt to curtail such association by official orders or restrictions is unjustified and must not be attempted... The spreading of derogatory statements concerning the character of any group of United States troops, either white or colored, must be considered as conduct prejudicial to good order... and offenders must be promptly punished.”¹⁰⁴ Evidently, attempts to enforce segregation by white Americans in Britain were causing a headache for senior commanders, who would have preferred to be focusing on winning the war instead of constantly having to deal with outbreaks of racial violence and outrage from British civilians concerning the unjust rules that were being forced upon them.

The deployment of African American soldiers to Britain highlighted many of the worst aspects of American racism, and in many cases brought out some of the deeply ingrained racial

¹⁰² “WAAC’s not Entertainers for Troops,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 5, 1942.

¹⁰³ Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 17-18.

¹⁰⁴ Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 18.

biases of British society. After examining the variety of racially charged conflicts which emerged in Britain over the course of the war, one may come away with the impression that it was a primarily negative and destructive experience for all involved. However, this is not true. While the African American experience in Britain was marred by continuous struggles against the racist ideology which followed them, it was also marked by the positive interactions they had with local Britons and their experiences with a white society which did not inherently demean and discriminate against them, at least not to the extent that American society did. Indeed, many found unlikely allies among the British, and for once the tables were turned against Jim Crow. The British also emerged from their interactions with African Americans with primarily positive impressions, as well as a changed outlook on the world which will be further explored later in this thesis.

Chapter 2 - “White Man’s Country”

In April of 1942, the first African American soldiers to be deployed abroad in the Second World War walked down the gangplank of their ship and onto Australian soil. The outlook of the African American leadership towards the country of Australia prior to the war is well described in an article from the newspaper *Militant* reporting on the landings. “Australia is an all-out Jim Crow country, where Negroes are not permitted to come in time of peace,” wrote the paper before describing a topical cartoon from the *People’s Voice* which depicted “a Negro soldier being greeted by an Australian official standing in front of a sign which reads, ‘Colored persons not allowed in Australia.’” The official in the cartoon said to the soldier, “‘Jolly glad to see you, old boy. Just ignore these bloody signs around here—for the duration.’”¹⁰⁵ Unlike British society, which generally saw class, not race, to be the defining feature of one’s position, Australia had a long history of racial discrimination and enforced strict segregationist policies. In many ways, Australia outwardly appeared to be more similar to the United States in how it approached and understood race. So, the questions at hand are: how did African American soldiers engage with Australian society during their deployment during the Second World War if this was the case and how did the methods of segregation imported by American soldiers play out in Australia?

To understand African American soldiers’ experiences in Australia, we must first explore the history of race in Australia, and the realities of racial policy existing in the country in the 1940s. Unlike Britain, in Australia and the greater Pacific theater there was an incredibly diverse mix of cultures and ethnicities, within which whites were a minority. In spite of this, the Australian government had long had “aspirations to cultivate a homogenous white Australia,”

¹⁰⁵ “First Black Troops in Australia,” *Militant*, April 11, 1942, in *Fighting Racism in World War II: A Week by Week Account of the Struggle Against Racism and Discrimination in the United States During 1939-45, from the Pages of the Militant* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1980), 211.

since white migrants had immigrated there in search of gold in the late 19th century.¹⁰⁶ Until 1901 however, the notion of a “white Australia” existed primarily as an ideology used to encourage the expansion of the frontier and the dispossession of Aboriginal Australians. Colonial officials managing Aboriginal welfare and the settler colonial frontier, many of whom believed in “theories of evolutionary racial science,” used their power to encourage marriage between white and Aboriginal Australians in order to “breed out the colour,” and essentially cleanse Australia of the Aboriginal people and their culture.¹⁰⁷

Following the introduction of the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901, the “white Australia” ideology was established as national policy. Additional laws in the following decades gave the Australian government “the power to deport those of certain ethnicity (*Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901*); to deny naturalization and citizenship rights to others (*Naturalization Act 1903*); and to withhold the vote (*Franchise Act 1902*).”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, “beginning with the *Invalid and Old Age Pensions Act* and *Maternity Allowance Act*, both of 1912, health and welfare rights were also systematically denied to any ‘Aboriginal native of Asia, Africa or the Pacific, excepting New Zealand.’”¹⁰⁹ These laws were drawn up as Australia began to assert itself as a sovereign entity, during their transition from colony to dominion, and in those early years “Australia resolved... ‘to make a legislative declaration’ of its ‘racial identity.’”¹¹⁰ According to scholars Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, “at the beginning of the twentieth century, Australians drew a colour line around their continent and declared whiteness to be at the very

¹⁰⁶ Gregory D. Smithers, “The Evolution of White Australia, 1860–1890,” in *Science, Sexuality, and Race in the United States and Australia, 1780–1940* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 245.

¹⁰⁷ Smithers, “The Evolution of White Australia,” 246-247.

¹⁰⁸ Raymond Evans, “Pigmentia”: Racial Fears and White Australia,” in *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, ed. Dirk Moses (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 105.

¹⁰⁹ Evans, “Pigmentia,” 105.

¹¹⁰ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 138.

heart of their national identity.”¹¹¹ Thus it is evident through a brief examination of Australia’s early 19th century legislation regarding non-whites, that leading up to World War II Australians had far more exposure to race as an element of society than Britons. If the nature of Australia’s racial policy is to be any indicator, Australians were more closely aligned in their racial beliefs to southern white Americans than to most Britons.

The “white Australia” policy was on the minds of many African Americans when African American troops were deployed to Australia in January 1942.¹¹² This was especially true after the Australian War Cabinet announced that it was opposed to African Americans soldiers being sent to Australia. The United States government briefly considered only sending white troops to respect Australia’s wishes, however they ultimately ignored the request and began sending African Americans soldiers to Australia, citing the fact that military necessity in the post-Pearl Harbor crisis overruled Australia’s preference for white soldiers.¹¹³ In all, approximately 100,000 African American soldiers were deployed to Australia over the course of the war.¹¹⁴

The Australian request for only white troops to be deployed to their country drew a lot of attention from the African American soldiers, as well as the black press.¹¹⁵ Why should African Americans fight and die to protect a world order which so blatantly oppressed them? Many of the newspaper commentators also made connections between Australia’s racial policies and those of the United States, revealing how many African Americans felt conflicted about fighting to defend Australia. One writer for the *New York Amsterdam Star-News* commented that “the arrival of colored (U.S.) soldiers in Australia to fight at the side of white American and “pure

¹¹¹ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 138.

¹¹² Kay Saunders and Helen Taylor, “The Reception of Black American Servicemen in Australia During World War II: The Resilience of “White Australia,” *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 3 (January 1995): 332.

¹¹³ Christ Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War 1941-1945: Race, Nationality, and the Fight for Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 140.

¹¹⁴ Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War, 1941-1945*, 136.

¹¹⁵ Saunders and Taylor, “The Reception of Black American Servicemen in Australia,” 322.

white” Australians in an effort to stem the rising tides of invasions of that great island-continent by the yellow hordes from Japan has stirred unusual resentment among colored people in this country.”¹¹⁶ Speaking on African American sentiment towards Australia, “to them Australia with its ‘white’ policy had long been a symbol of the most brutal prejudices and vicious types of discrimination generally practiced in the United States and the Union of South Africa... Her ‘white’ policy and her treatment of the African and Asiatic races, based on that policy, have made her an outcast among the decent nations of the earth.”¹¹⁷ The irony of black soldiers being sent to defend a country which would not allow them to live there was blatantly obvious to many observers, and was a particular favorite sticking point for the press. The deployment of black troops to defend a country which practiced such racist policies discouraged many African American journalists and activists from supporting the war. Others saw it differently. That same *New York Amsterdam Star-News* article concluded that “it is Australia, the ‘white man’s’ country, that American Negroes, Indians, Burmese and Chinese must defend, either directly or indirectly. Truly, it has been said in the Holy Scripture: ‘And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner. ‘This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.’”¹¹⁸ While defending “white Australia” was seen as counterproductive by many African Americans, some saw the war as an opportunity to help break down such racial barriers. In another article, the author writes “that the black man should be sent to the defense of Australia, where, with his white fellow-Americans, many of them will be killed, mutilated and wounded, is one of the most bitter experiences that any race may be called upon to face.”¹¹⁹

Elaborating on why this was the case, he explained:

¹¹⁶ “Australia: ‘White Man’s Country,’ Black Troops on Lines to Check Japs,” *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, March 28, 1942, 7.

¹¹⁷ “Australia: ‘White Man’s Country,’” 7.

¹¹⁸ “Australia: ‘White Man’s Country,’” 7.

¹¹⁹ “U.S. Colored Troops in Australia: Staff Sergeant Cables Dad from ‘Down Under’,” *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, March 21, 1942, 1.

To defend the United States, all Americans, regardless of race, color or creed, defend their country; to defend Great Britain, there is an excuse that after all Britain has stood for some of the decent things of life. But in the case of Australia, there is no difference between sending a black man to fight on the side of Adolf Hitler to uphold his hellish racial and social theories and sending him to fight for the defense of Australia, which boasts that it is ‘a white man’s country.’¹²⁰

The author draws valid questions concerning the deployment of black troops to defend Australia. Australia was as a nation which fully embraced white supremacy, and now that nation was scrambling, “with their backs against the wall, rushing wildly and madly all possible means to save their skins from the savage and almost irresistible attacks of the Japanese hordes,” must ask African Americans to, “gladly face the fury of Japanese guns and bombs in the defense of a people whose racial policy is not one whit [sic] less vicious and brutal than that of Hitler.”¹²¹ Australia’s racial policies were all too familiar with the African American press, and they did not hesitate to highlight the irony of black soldiers going to fight and die for a country who discriminated so intensely against them.

In a similar vein, many scholars highlight and debate the degree to which race was seen by African Americans as a part of the war, particularly in the Pacific. In *War Without Mercy*, historian John Dower argues that the Second World War was a race war:

The blatant racism of the Nazis had a twofold impact in the anti-Axis camp. On the one hand, it provoked a sustained critique of ‘master-race’ arguments in general... at the same time, this critique of Nazi racism had a double edge, for it exposed the hypocrisy of the Western Allies... Even while denouncing Nazi theories of ‘Aryan’ supremacy, the U.S. government presided over a society where blacks were subjected to demeaning Jim Crow laws, segregation was imposed even

¹²⁰ “U.S. Colored Troops in Australia,” 1.

¹²¹ “U.S. Colored Troops in Australia,” 1.

in the military establishment, racial discrimination extended to the defense industries, and immigration policy was severely biased against all nonwhites.¹²²

It is easy to see the parallels between Dower's description of American racism and that of Australia as described by the writers of *The New York Amsterdam Star-News*. Those journalists found an avenue through criticism of Australia to criticise American discrimination at a time when direct criticism of the American government would have seemed treacherous or un-patriotic. Indeed, certain newspapers were investigated for sedition by the Justice Department during the war, and many were forced to curtail their criticism of the government.¹²³ Regardless of who the criticism was directed to, journalists, and by extension, their audiences, nevertheless highlighted the racial dimensions of the war which made a full commitment to the Allied cause difficult for African Americans.

Other journalists during World War II tackled the question of the role of people of color in the war more directly, with one commenting on a poem titled "The Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels," written by an Australian soldier about South Pacific Islanders who helped the Australian Army as stretcher bearers and guides. Commenting on the poem's popularity in Australia and the United States, he writes, "the wide publicity given to this poem serves to re-emphasize the Darker Races' status in the Anglo-Saxon world. The English and American whites are ever ready to praise the brown, yellow or black peoples who administer to them as servants or lackies, or aid them in times of great danger; but stubbornly refuse to accord to their benefactors a fair chance to elevate themselves or to grant them equality."¹²⁴ Essentially, the poem tried to reinforce a social hierarchy where people of color had a specific place and role to fill, praising those who

¹²² John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 4-5.

¹²³ Jervis Anderson, "The Crackdown That Never Was: A Question of Sedition," *New York Times*, August 17, 1986, 9.

¹²⁴ "The British and The Darker Peoples," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 11, 1943, 6.

stayed in their lane in a deceptive attempt to win the support of black and pacific islander communities in the war effort. As a result, the poem represented the sort of white supremacist thinking that many African Americans detested, the idea that people of color were best kept in a subservient position fulfilling only certain roles in society. Furthermore, it was “the intelligent, aggressive, ambitious and manful Negroes who are the problem.”¹²⁵ By straying from their prescribed social strata, it was “Negroes who want jim-crowism and segregation abolished; Negroes who want every right, privilege and opportunity accorded to other citizens... who are considered problematic and are dangerous because they will not willingly accept the status which the American and Anglo-Saxon has assigned them.”¹²⁶ The author concluded by drawing attention to the ways African Americans were being treated by the military, bemoaning the fact that “even in our Army every effort is made to adhere to the peacetime pattern by assigning few Negroes to combat duty. The vast majority must be laborers with deceptive titles.”¹²⁷ For many African Americans, being able to serve in combat units was important because it gave them the opportunity to disprove popular stereotypes about their inability to perform well in combat. These stereotypes continued to exist despite numerous examples to the contrary because they proved useful for keeping African Americans in a subservient position.

In a letter to the editor in *The Chicago Defender*, another writer focuses on yet another conversation regarding the war within the African American community. This was the opinion that for some black Americans, the war was not only an event exemplifying the discrimination people of color faced in the United States and the British Empire, but also as an “imperialistic war” fought between “competing economic organizations called ‘governments,’ to determine

¹²⁵ “The British and The Darker Peoples,” 6.

¹²⁶ “The British and The Darker Peoples,” 6.

¹²⁷ “The British and The Darker Peoples,” 6.

who will exploit and bleed colonial lands and the people thereof.”¹²⁸ The letter-writer argued that “[The war] is not being fought to free the unfree, unless of course they be the recently subjugated people of Europe. Black Africa and brown and yellow Asia, not Europe, constitute the victor’s spoils. It is therefore significant that the only free and equal peoples in the British commonwealth are the Europeans who inhabit South Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There is not even a suggestion of freedom for the others.”¹²⁹ Raising even more questions as to which side is in the right, the author notes that “the brown skin natives of French Indo-China were not permitted to enter a French port until the Japanese invaded seized them and invited the Annamite natives to visit and inspect these hitherto forbidden ‘bastions of defense.’”¹³⁰ Stories like this led many African Americans to wonder whether fighting for the United States in the Pacific was in their best interest.

The question as to whether African Americans should fight to protect and expand American power in the Pacific was not a new one. The 1898 Spanish-American War and the 1899-1902 Philippine-American War both saw African American troops deployed overseas in support of the U.S. war effort. In both cases, these soldiers were directly supporting U.S. imperialism and expanding the reach of a country which intensely discriminated against people of color over large populations in the Pacific and Caribbean. In the Philippines, African-American soldiers were “foot soldiers for a racist ideology in which white Americans characterized Filipinos as they did African-Americans: as inferior, inept, and even subhuman.”¹³¹ This is not to say that these soldiers necessarily understood or agreed with their participation in the furthering of such an ideology. In fact, many African American soldiers sympathized with the

¹²⁸ C.C. Harding, “The Negro and the War,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*, January 11, 1941, 14.

¹²⁹ Harding, “The Negro and the War,” 14.

¹³⁰ Harding, “The Negro and the War,” 14.

¹³¹ Scott Ngozi-Brown, “African-American Soldiers and Filipinos: Racial Imperialism, Jim Crow, and Social Relations,” *The Journal of Negro History* 82, no. 1 (Winter, 1997), 42.

Filipinos in their struggle, and some believed that it was the horrific treatment that African Americans endured in the United States which encouraged Filipinos to fight for their independence.¹³² In fact, Filipino nationalist propaganda often played on African American fears of supporting white supremacy in the Philippines, pointing out that “blacks are ‘being lynched by the same people who are trying to compel us [Filipinos] to believe that their government will deal justly and fairly with us.’”¹³³ African Americans went through similar experiences during the First World War. Many black Americans had enlisted to fight for the United States, and yet they were discriminated against and, in the words of W.E.B. DuBois, “‘Jim Crowed’ at every corner.”¹³⁴ Not only that, but the peace which followed the war, in the eyes of African American observers, only served to reinforce the white supremacist world order.¹³⁵ With this precedent, what good could come from another American victory? Four decades later, black soldiers faced a very similar question, do they fight to protect nations which discriminate against them?

Journalists also sought to highlight the hypocrisy of the U.S. war effort by addressing the ways American racism mirrored “Axis race policy.” A. M. Wendell Malliett, writing for *The New York Amsterdam Star-News* compiled a list of reasons why racism was imperiling the war effort, some points of which included:

1. We, like them, believe in the superiority and supremacy of the white, Aryan race, which, although fighting with its back to the wall, has carried segregation of the United States soldiers even to England.

¹³² Paul A. Kramer, “Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire: The Philippine-American War as Race War,” *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 2 (April 2006), 180.

¹³³ Ngozi-Brown, “African-American Soldiers and Filipinos,” 46.

¹³⁴ Shane A. Smith, “‘The Crisis’ in the Great War: W.E.B. DuBois and His Perception of African-American Participation in World War I,” *The Historian* 70, no. 2 (Summer 2008), 258.

¹³⁵ Smith, “‘The Crisis’ in the Great War,” 257.

2. In the greatest battle for human rights and liberties in the world's history, we, Americans, insist on dividing the people on the basis of color and maintaining our age old system of segregation of white and black folk.
3. While there is a reasonable clamor for a second front in Europe, presenting a golden opportunity to smash the Axis, in which all races, creeds and colors beg to do their share, strong elements in our nation, men and women in high places, are devoting their efforts to keep the black race in chains.¹³⁶

For many African Americans who experienced racism in their daily lives from their fellow countrymen, the idea that the war was to be fought in the name of freedom must have been questionable. Why should people of color around the world, many living in regions dominated by white nations which denied them equal rights and treatment, fight to protect one discriminatory world order over another? As one writer put it in the context of black troops arriving in Australia, "with 'democratic' slogans as battle cries shouted from the camps of the United Nations, the future racial policy of Australia will become one of the major problems and questions of the war."¹³⁷ Surely the ironies inherent in fighting Japan in the defense of the United States and Australia remained in the minds of many African American soldiers as they departed American shores for deployment in the Pacific, and many of those bound for service in Australia surely expected to encounter the same prejudice there as they did in the United States, however the reality which awaited them was far more complex than they ever could have imagined.

Compared to the people of Great Britain, who had very little experience with people of color prior to the war, Australians had far more experience with non-whites among them. Whereas race played little part in British society, particularly in the small villages where many African American soldiers were stationed, race had been a fundamental aspect of Australian

¹³⁶ A.M. Wendell Malliett, "Look Here America: Hitler's Laughing at Us: Axis Race Policy Aped in America," *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, October 17, 1942, 13.

¹³⁷ "U.S. Colored Troops In Australia," 1.

society essentially since its creation. Indeed, Australian racial policy was undoubtedly discriminatory in nature, as indicated by a series of national policies addressing race and ethnic minorities passed since the turn of the 19th century. As a result, many black soldiers feared that Australians would treat them much like they were treated in the Jim Crow South, if not worse. White officers leading many of the first black units to land in Australia were reportedly “apprehensive concerning the reaction of Australians to this challenge of their white doctrine,” and “feared that a least unpleasantness would result.”¹³⁸ Yet most of these fears were at least quashed temporarily after landing in the country, and the first African Americans arriving in Australia received much the same welcome as their comrades who landed in Britain.

From the beginning, African Americans arriving in Australia sent positive reports of their experiences to the homefront, and the black press jumped on the opportunity to publicize good relations between black troops and the Australians as a sign of breaking “the color bar.” “Australia, long known as a ‘white man’s country,’ cheered and applauded as a troopship of specialized Negro soldiers, disembarked there,” wrote *The Pittsburgh Courier*.¹³⁹ Many of the soldiers felt that “the ship’s arrival would result in some unpleasantness,” however, “their worries were uncalled for,” as their arrival was met primarily with celebration.¹⁴⁰ *The Atlanta Daily World* reported that the African American soldiers who first disembarked in Australia found that “they actually ran into less prejudice than they ordinarily experienced in their home areas of Chicago and Detroit.”¹⁴¹ African American newspapers on the whole recorded a largely positive response from the Australian population concerning the arrival of African American soldiers in Australia. Indeed, the only trouble *The Pittsburgh Courier* reported was caused by the smuggling

¹³⁸ “Negro Troops find ‘White Law’ Exists in Australia,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 1, 1942, 1.

¹³⁹ “Race Troops Cheered as they Land in Australia: Official Extends Welcome,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 4, 1942, 1.

¹⁴⁰ “Race Troops Cheered as they Land in Australia,” 1.

¹⁴¹ “Negro Troops find ‘White Law’ Exists in Australia,” 1.

of “a mongrel dog named ‘Dopey’” into Australia aboard one of the troopships.¹⁴² Due to Australia’s strict rules concerning the importation of animals, the dog sadly had to be sent back to America.

Of course one could argue that black newspapers sought to portray African American experiences of Australia in the best possible light in order to either put pressure on the U.S. government to sort out racial discrimination at home or to paint a positive picture of the war effort for the paper’s readers, however newspaper articles from Australia corroborate the reports of a generally positive reception. The Australian newspaper *Tribune* based in Sydney, published a short article at the time the first black soldiers arrived in April of 1942 titled “Negro Soldiers Welcome.”¹⁴³ The article announced that “a number of U.S. Negro fighting men are to be noticed in the streets of Sydney and other cities,” and stressed that “they have come to fight in our defence. We must make them doubly welcome.”¹⁴⁴ This was accompanied by a plea, that “readers of the ‘Tribune’ must do everything to combat colour prejudices,” and an emboldened warning, that “any member using the word ‘nigger’ is subject to expulsion in the U.S. Communist Party.”¹⁴⁵ Evidently, at least some Australians tried to make an effort to accommodate African American soldiers in their country.

Australians succeeded in making a positive impression on Vincent Tubbs, an African American war correspondent writing from Australia in 1943. In an article titled “Race Mixing in Australia Goes on; No Friction” published in the *Afro-American*, Tubbs sought to quell fears that black soldiers were being sent to “a backward country.”¹⁴⁶ Tubbs’s interpretation of race in Australia led him to report that “on the race issue, the country has (in some ways) been almost

¹⁴² “Race Troops Cheered as they Land in Australia.”

¹⁴³ “Negro Soldiers Welcome,” *Tribune*, April 15, 1942, 4.

¹⁴⁴ “Negro Soldiers Welcome,” 4.

¹⁴⁵ “Negro Soldiers Welcome,” 4.

¹⁴⁶ Vincent Tubbs, “Race Mixing in Australia Goes on; No Friction,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 13, 1943, 7.

democratic. Persons of color are extremely few and are usually of the genus we would call half-caste.”¹⁴⁷ He continues by highlighting the fact that many Australian women who outwardly appear to be white actually identify as “colored,” citing a common occurrence in conversations between African American men and Australian women, where “a girls whose complexion is as white as the driven snows will speak up, without provocation and say, “I’m colored y’know.”¹⁴⁸ Efforts put into investigating these claims often revealed that, according to Tubbs, “true to prediction—either the mother or the father is of dark skin.”¹⁴⁹ According to Tubbs, these women, who were the children of interracial marriages were accepted, even encouraged in Australia, and were “readily accepted in all circles.”¹⁵⁰ In the United States, particularly in the South, at the same time, interracial marriages were particularly taboo, and so to make such a point of reporting that these marriages were normal in Australia showed that Tubbs believed that while Australian society was not free of racism, it was better in that regard than much of the United States. However, these interracial marriages were still part of the “white Australia” policy, as they were seen as a method to eventually breed color out of society. Of course, the nature of wartime necessity means that it is possible Tubbs wrote this article to primarily quell discontent among African Americans about having to fight to defend “white” Australia, however it nonetheless provides an important and unique African American perspective on race and racism in Australia.

While Tubbs’s perspective on the welcome African American soldiers received in Australia depicts a generally benevolent and positive reception, historians debate how accurate such reporting actually was. Australian historians in particular, such as Kay Saunders and Helen Taylor, argue that “having been forced to accept the presence of Black GIs, both the

¹⁴⁷ Tubbs, “Race Mixing in Australia Goes on,” 7.

¹⁴⁸ Tubbs, “Race Mixing in Australia Goes on,” 7.

¹⁴⁹ Tubbs, “Race Mixing in Australia Goes on,” 7.

¹⁵⁰ Tubbs, “Race Mixing in Australia Goes on,” 7.

Commonwealth and Queensland governments negotiated and established complex, interlinking patterns of segregation to contain this unwanted inclusion in the Allied forces.”¹⁵¹ They alleged that many Australians, men in particular, participated in enforcing segregation in conjunction with efforts by white American troops and officers. The truth is likely that African Americans saw a wide variety of responses from individual Australians to their presence. The generally positive reports suggest however that many black soldiers saw Australia as at least better than the United States in terms of treatment.

What the Second World War black press and modern historians generally agree on is that white Americans played a significant role in stirring racial conflict in Australia. Much like in Britain, it was widely reported that white American soldiers, particularly officers, spread rumors and falsehoods in order to try and turn the Australian public against the African Americans. Furthermore, white American officers used their authority to try and impose Jim Crow style segregation in Australian towns and cities.¹⁵² “The boys ‘Down Under’ want the people back home to know that white servicemen are creating disunity among Negroes and Australians by fostering segregation and discrimination” one article in the *Cleveland Call and Post*, quoted African American soldier James Robinson.¹⁵³ Robinson claimed that “on two occasions a race riot was narrowly averted in Australia because Negro servicemen objected to white soldiers encouraging Australians to discriminate against colored, and that several Negro servicemen are serving time because they rebelled against segregation which whites insisted upon.”¹⁵⁴ Another article quoted Frederick Clark and Momolu Sandemannie, two African American merchant seamen, who said, “‘Australian citizens are the finest in the English-speaking world, but white

¹⁵¹ Kay Saunders and Helen Taylor, “The Reception of Black American Servicemen in Australia during World War II: The Resilience of White Australia,” *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 3, (January 1995), 331.

¹⁵² Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, “Jim Crow Downunder? African American Encounters with White Australia, 1942-1945,” *Pacific Historical Review* 71, no. 4, (November 2002) 608.

¹⁵³ “Fighting Americans Object to Spread of Segregation Abroad,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, January 13, 1945, 11B.

¹⁵⁴ “Fighting Americans Object to Spread of Segregation Abroad,” 11B.

American Army officers are working overtime to poison them against colored people.”¹⁵⁵ They continued, “I was surprised,” Mr. Sandemann said, “for years I had heard about Australia, but those people are the finest I have ever met in any English-speaking country, and the only obstacle thrown in the way of the colored soldiers was by white U.S. Army officers who are working overtime trying to poison the minds of the Australians.”¹⁵⁶ If these accounts are to be believed, then the developing situation in Australia closely mirrored that in Britain, that white Americans were the primary source of racial hostility towards African Americans overseas. That hostility led them to attempt to enforce racial discrimination through influencing local populations and turning them against the African American soldiers, in an effort to try and win support for the implementation of strict segregation between the local white communities and the black soldiers.

However, much like in Britain, these attempts were met with significant anger from locals. In one example, a trade union in Sydney published a statement which expressed the following frustrations with the American presence in the country:

1. Dixie white soldiers have begun fights in Australian cities to drive colored troops off the streets and out of public places;
2. American army officers have visited schools and lectured to children not to associate with colored troops;
3. American army officials have conducted a deliberate campaign to prevent Australian soldiers and organizations from associating with or welcoming colored troops;
4. Colored soldiers are barred from attending the troops center in Sydney established by the American community for American troops.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Davis Lee, “Whites Take Prejudice to Australians,” *Afro-American*, April 25, 1942, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Lee, “Whites Take Prejudice to Australians,” 8.

¹⁵⁷ “Australia Reports Riots: Labor Surprised at Color Prejudice Among U.S. Troops,” *Afro-American*, November 28, 1942, 1.

Further statements from the union indicated that they were concerned that “the people of Australia have become aware of a situation which never before has been brought home to them with so much force,” that “due to the presence and influence of the many Southern Americans who are here, there has been a marked trend towards ‘jim-crowism’—and all that it entails.”¹⁵⁸ The union claimed that prior to the arrival of the Americans, the Australian people were “comparatively free from racial prejudices and problems,” and that “when colored troops first landed in Australia, they were given rousing and often tumultuous welcomes by Australian citizens... He was treated as an equal; he walked about our streets as freely as our own soldiers; people spoke to him and did all those little things for him which help make ‘strangers in a strange land’ feel a little less homesick.”¹⁵⁹ Of course, Australia’s policies towards their own Aboriginal population was very different, and they certainly did not feel like they were being treated equally in any sense, this benevolent attitude was seemingly reserved for African Americans. This general period of good feelings and friendship was put to an end when “there started the most cold-blooded, inhumanly calculated campaign that any of us have ever witnessed.”¹⁶⁰ Much like they had done in Britain, white American soldiers began to try and work Jim Crow into Australian society in an attempt to see African American soldiers separated from the Australians.

Despite the union’s misguided notions concerning the lack of racial prejudice among the Australian population, their statement proves valuable in providing an Australian perspective on American attempts to spread segregation abroad. “Various ways and means were employed,” they wrote, “most of them extremely effective. It was rumored that the American colored man was a low-cunning, perverted fiend, who should be kicked out of all decent human society,

¹⁵⁸ “Australia Reports Riots,” 1.

¹⁵⁹ “Australia Reports Riots,” 2.

¹⁶⁰ “Australia Reports Riots,” 2.

trampled underfoot — and kept there.”¹⁶¹ White American officers were once again identified as some of the foremost agents of Jim Crow, with the union reporting that “American army officers have visited schools, delivered lectures to children, and instructed them not to go near the black men. Australian soldiers have been told not to have anything to do with the ‘n—s.’”¹⁶² Officers also reportedly used their influence over their men to enforce segregation over local businesses by telling them not to visit establishments which catered to African Americans.¹⁶³ In another case, white American officers withheld the pay of black seamen prior to their arrival in Australia “in order to keep the colored engineers from enjoying the Australian hospitality upon arrival.”¹⁶⁴ These tactics were markedly similar to those used by white soldiers and officers in Britain, and, according to *The Pittsburgh Courier*, wherever else black troops were deployed by the U.S. military. “There are... stories from South Sea Islands where our boys are stationed detailing the extreme lengths to which officers in the Army are going to establish a difference between white soldiers and black soldiers and between black soldiers and natives. In Australia, in India, in East Africa, in North Africa, in Central Africa, the germ is planted,” wrote P.L. Prattis for the *Courier*.¹⁶⁵ Evidently, much like in Britain, the root cause for a lot of the harassment and discrimination directed towards African American soldiers were the actions of their fellow white Americans.

Many of these white Americans saw the liberties African Americans enjoyed in Australia and realized that they received better treatment there than in the United States. For those most invested in maintaining the racial hierarchy in the United States after the war, “it was the

¹⁶¹ “Australia Reports Riots,” 2.

¹⁶² “Australia Reports Riots,” 2.

¹⁶³ “Australia Reports Riots,” 2.

¹⁶⁴ Lee, “Whites Take Prejudice to Australians,” 8.

¹⁶⁵ P.L. Prattis, “The Horizon: Slander of American Negro by White Soldiers and Sailors Weakens Our Cause.” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 8, 1943, 13.

realization of that fact that most troubled white Americans.”¹⁶⁶ This drove many of them to take up the mantle of enforcing segregation themselves, through any means necessary, irrespective of their host country’s laws and customs. The destruction of this “threat” to white supremacy was so important to these individuals, that any “successful challenge to American racism and segregation was presumably inconceivable.”¹⁶⁷ Sensing that an outbreak of violence was likely, and also possibly due to their own racially biased concerns about the presence of African American soldiers in Australian urban centers, American military leadership in the Pacific thought it best to keep black troops away from the more populated areas of Australia.¹⁶⁸

Once again, like in Britain, African American interactions with white women became the focal point of a lot of the racial tension and violence in Australia. In much of the world at the time, and particularly the United States, interracial relationships were taboo, especially those between a black man and a white woman. Many white American soldiers and Australians, as well as the U.S. military leadership, “assumed that black servicemen would be incapable of controlling their physical urges,” and as a result, their presence in Australia would result in “imperiling the moral and physical welfare of white women.”¹⁶⁹ Commentators at the time seem to have identified the commonality of this myth, with one newspaper mentioning that “the American white male has long accepted with ready gullibility the myth of the sexual virility of the Negro male.”¹⁷⁰ African Americans’ success with white women was seen as a humiliation for white men, and a “threat to white masculine hegemony.”¹⁷¹ These fears ultimately contributed greatly to attempts to segregate African Americans from the white population of Australia, and

¹⁶⁶ Brawley and Dixon, “Jim Crow Downunder?” 617.

¹⁶⁷ Brawley and Dixon, “Jim Crow Downunder?” 617.

¹⁶⁸ Kay Saunders, “Conflict Over the Introduction of Black American Servicemen into Australia in 1942,” *Negro History Bulletin* 48, no. 3 (July, August, September 1985), 36.

¹⁶⁹ Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War, 1941-1945*, 95.

¹⁷⁰ “Sex, Race, and War,” *Michigan Chronicle*, November 3, 1945, 7.

¹⁷¹ Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War, 1941-1945*, 95.

also constituted the greatest concern among Australians about the presence of black soldiers in their towns and cities.

Apprehensions about interactions between black soldiers and white women appeared early, even among the African American press, who likely saw these meetings as a catalyst for the escalation of racial violence overseas and the establishment of Jim Crow-like laws in Australia. “Since there are no colored people living in Australia—other than Aborigines on reservations in northern and central Australia or on the islands surrounding the continent—the problem of recreation for Negro soldiers is expected to prove troublesome,” wrote the *Atlanta Daily World*, “occasionally a colored soldier is seen on the street chatting with an Australian girl, but thus far no trouble has been reported.”¹⁷² Other black newspapers spoke of these relationships more as evidence of successful “race mixing,” as put by the *Afro-American*, and hoped that they would pave the way for interracial relationships to become more accepted in the United States. Vincent Tubbs, once again reporting from Australia for the *Afro-American*, believed that some African American soldiers were “planning to do a bit toward depopulating the country by bringing back to America their Australian brides,” and that “more than a hundred Australian brides of United States servicemen have already gone to America since last December.”¹⁷³ The *Afro-American* reported on a dance held in Sydney, where “some of the colored soldiers visited one of the dance halls and were shown a nice time by the Australian girls.” Unfortunately, “the next night when the colored boys went back the M.P.’s told them that they had orders not to let them in.” As it turned out, “the Australian soldiers resented this and broke up the dance... they forced all of the girls to leave the hall.”¹⁷⁴ The Australian soldiers saw this action by the

¹⁷² “Negro Troops find ‘White Law’ Exists in Australia,” 1.

¹⁷³ “Race Mixing in Australia Goes on,” 7.

¹⁷⁴ Lee, “Whites Take Prejudice to Australians,” 8.

American Military Police as offensive, and broke up the dance in support of the African American soldiers who had been prevented from entering.

This reported display of positivity by the Australians towards interaction between the African American soldiers and white Australian women was not the norm. Most Australian commentators from the time disapproved of such relationships. However, unlike white Americans, who often targeted their fury towards the black men involved (and still reserved some choice words for them), Australians laid most of the judgement upon the woman. Women who associated with black soldiers were often depicted as having moral failings, or portrayed to be prostitutes. One Brisbane newspaper called the *Truth*, published an article titled “Girl and Negro,” which detailed an affair between an Australian woman and an African American soldier, and revealed some important insights into the way some Australians viewed African Americans. “Since the arrival in Australia of colored men in unusual numbers, Brisbane has heard some unusual stories of the behavior of certain Australian girls,” said the *Truth*, “typical example was provided by the appearance in Brisbane police court last week of an attractive young, well built peaches-and-cream brunette... branded by police with the stigma, though married to another man, of being the consort of a black “notorious character.”¹⁷⁵ The *Truth* covered another similar story of an Australian woman who had “fallen victim to the peculiar charms of an ebony soldier of Uncle Sam,” beginning the article with the exclamation “White woman, black man!”¹⁷⁶ A third article, posted in the Australian newspaper the *Mirror*, details a divorce between a man named William Edward George Ryan and his wife Hazel Elizabeth, who he accused of having an affair with an African American soldier. The article quotes a conversation between Hazel’s lawyer and the judge. Hazel’s lawyer, one Stan Tippet, remarked that at one point “women fell

¹⁷⁵ “Girl and Negro,” *Truth*, January 28, 1945, 19.

¹⁷⁶ “Preferred A Negro To Husband,” *Truth*, December 2, 1945, 35.

over themselves to entertain colored seamen when they appeared in the city.” The judge replied, “no doubt we will all learn better in time.”¹⁷⁷ The *Mirror* later wrote another article about relationships between white women and black men, however this second article was far more opinionated on the subject. Titled “Black Velvet and White Satin,” the article comments on the broader topic of relationships between white women and black men. “Yes: it has come to that,” the article says, “war has tumbled down those hoardings on which were blazoned the ‘White Australia’ policy.... Women who had known black men only through the pages of geographic magazines now know them in the flesh—and, tragically, like them.”¹⁷⁸ The article then warns of dangerous breaches of social convention, for there were “black cheeks pressed against the cheeks of white women! Black arms encircling white women’s waists... white women’s lips surrendering to the touch of a negro’s; to the passion that pulses through a black man’s veins.” The article continued, “they may seem to you things that... Kipling denied could ever happen... ‘East is east and west is west. ‘And never the twain shall meet,’ he wrote. But he didn’t live in Perth in the year 1945 AD. For here, while men are away fighting for their ideals and their country, east is meeting west.”¹⁷⁹ These articles show both the “stigma” attached to women who associated with African Americans, but also the way Australians thought about and talked about African Americans themselves. The women were either portrayed as prostitutes and vagrants, or as misguided and victims of dangerous black sexuality.

Take for example one article in the *Mudgee Guardian and North-Western Representative*, titled “Bathed With Negroes: Shameless Woman,” or another from *The Sun*, titled “Slept Near Negroes: Woman Gaoled.”¹⁸⁰ Simply being near black soldiers was enough to put in question a

¹⁷⁷ “Wife Tells of Her Wine, Cards, Kisses with Yank Negro Sailors,” *Mirror*, June 24, 1944, 5.

¹⁷⁸ “Black Velvet and White Satin: Sordid Story of Negro and a Digger’s Wife,” *Mirror*, April 7, 1945, 11.

¹⁷⁹ “Black Velvet and White Satin,” 11.

¹⁸⁰ “Bathed With Negroes: Shameless Woman,” *Mudgee Guardian and North-Western Representative*, January 13, 1944, 3; “Slept Near Negroes, Woman Gaoled,” *The Sun*, February 5, 1944, 3.

woman's character. As for how African Americans were treated, black sexuality had always been seen as a threat by white societies, both in the United States and Australia, who saw and treated black sexuality as "inherently deviant," and it was the desire to control black sexuality which resulted in some of the more violent outbursts between white and black Americans in Australia.¹⁸¹ Its "threatening" qualities can be seen in most of the described articles, which bemoan the fact that white women are *choosing* African Americans over white men. Some Australian papers fueled the moral panic surrounding black sexuality by widely publicizing unproven accusations, as well as by warning their readers to be wary of African American soldiers. Fletcher Martin, NNPA Pacific Correspondent writing for the *Chicago Defender* identified the *Truth* as one of the leading offenders, decrying the Australian paper's tendency to insist that "it is unsafe for our women to walk the streets alone."¹⁸² Obviously there was still strong opposition in Australia to relationships, or even associations, between black men and white Australian women.

Interactions between African American men and white women in Australia were dangerous for both parties. As we have seen, women stood to be stigmatized or even arrested on charges of vagrancy or "keeping a disorderly house", for as many at the time understood it, only "certain types" of women would have associations with black men.¹⁸³ Australian women who went out with African Americans were also often humiliated by white Americans, who "subjected them to such humiliation and embarrassment... that they dare not be seen with them again."¹⁸⁴ Relationships with white women were particularly dangerous for black men however, especially those of a romantic or sexual nature. African Americans always had to fear retaliation

¹⁸¹ Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War*, 95.

¹⁸² Fletcher P. Martin, "Few Australia Papers Show Bias On Race News," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*, July 29, 1944, 3.

¹⁸³ "Wife Tells of Her Wine, Cards, Kisses with Yank Negro Sailors," 5.

¹⁸⁴ "Australia Reports Riots," 2.

from white Americans if knowledge of any interracial relationships were made public, and “any accusation of rape from a white woman could lead quickly to suspicion falling on all African American men in a particular area.”¹⁸⁵ Assumptions about the nature of black sexuality often meant that black men were more likely to be accused and convicted of any sort of sexual assault, with convictions often being made with insubstantial evidence.¹⁸⁶ In March 1944, six African American soldiers were accused of assaulting two U.S. Army nurses in Australian New Guinea. Despite questionable evidence, such as the two women initially being unable to identify their attackers, as well as “significant flaws in both the investigation of the alleged crimes and the quality of the defense counsel provided”, the six men were hanged.¹⁸⁷ The entire event was suppressed by the Army so as to not incite further racial violence. One did not even have to be convicted to be in mortal danger. On December 14, 1943, the body of an African American soldier was found 12 miles from the city of Darra, shot through the chest with a service rifle. A woman from that city identified the body as belonging to a man who raped her in her home four days earlier.¹⁸⁸ Whether or not she was correct is unknown, however what is certain is that someone decided to take justice into their own hands.

Australia proved a far more complex environment to navigate for African American soldiers. Many arrived in the country expecting the worst as the Australian racial policy established prior to the Second World War did not give many black GIs much hope of finding an egalitarian society in Australia. In many cases they were right in their belief. A number of Australian newspapers, most notably the *Truth*, maintained a strong negative slant on any article which discussed the presence of African American soldiers in Australia, and Australian civilians

¹⁸⁵ Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War*, 118.

¹⁸⁶ Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War*, 118.

¹⁸⁷ Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War*, 126.

¹⁸⁸ “Negro’s Body Found,” *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, December 15, 1943, 1.

generally opposed romantic relationships between African American men and white Australian women.¹⁸⁹ The Australian government also maintained its “white Australia” policy after the war, even denying immigration rights to black American veterans who had married Australians and had served in defense of the country.¹⁹⁰ On the other hand, many African Americans were surprised by the welcome they received from many of the locals in Australia, many of whom came out in support of them in opposition to the white Americans and Australians who sought to discriminate against them. The African American press, who championed civil rights throughout the war, and were often critical of Australia’s racial policies before the war, generally spoke well of the Australian people, limiting their criticism to the white soldiers who sought to implement Jim Crow in Australia, the Australian newspapers which showed racial prejudice, and the Australian government which maintained its “white Australia” policy.

¹⁸⁹ Brawley and Dixon, “Jim Crow Downunder?” 621.

¹⁹⁰ “Aussie’s Policy Bars GI’s Who Fought for It,” *Afro-American*, October 6, 1945 16.

Chapter 3 - A Global Conversation

In February 1945, the British newspaper the *Sunday Dispatch* carried an article titled “America’s Greatest Problem.” Written by the paper’s New York correspondent Don Iddon, the article sought to connect Briton’s experiences with African American soldiers to the realities those soldiers faced once they returned home. “The trickle of American coloured soldiers back to the United States has begun,” Iddon wrote, “there are the wounded, the honourably discharged, and a tiny group on leave. These men have returned in an entirely different frame of mind and with a totally different outlook than when they sailed to Britain in 1942 and 1943.”¹⁹¹ This new frame of mind, Iddon claimed, was due to the fact that “in England, among the ordinary citizens, they found there was no colour bar, no special discrimination... for the most part they were treated with the same respect and had much the same privileges as the American soldiers whose skins happened to be white. They were, and are, deeply appreciative of this.”¹⁹² Despite Iddon being a white British man presuming to understand how African Americans interpreted their experiences in Britain, it is hard not to believe that he was right. The stories returning with African American soldiers deployed in the country speak to or highlight the British rejection of the “color bar,” thus these experiences must have left some impact on those African Americans who had grown up in the Jim Crow south and only knew the law of white supremacy. To be treated essentially as an equal by white people, possibly for the first time in their lives, must have been striking for some African Americans, and have also generated many conversations about the return to the pre-war status-quo which awaited them once they returned home. On this, Iddon comments, “now that the first few Negro soldiers are back they are startled and hurt to find that the war, which has avowed objectives of freedom and democracy, has not changed in any

¹⁹¹ Don Iddon, “America’s Greatest Problem,” *Sunday Dispatch*, February 18, 1945, 6.

¹⁹² Iddon, “America’s Greatest Problem,” 6.

appreciable degree the American attitude to what is known in America as ‘The Colour Question.’”¹⁹³ For Iddon, the fact that black war veterans were to return to a country which continued to discriminate so intensely against them was shocking, and he believed that change was bound to come. He decried the fact that “down south, in many States, the Negroes status is that of less than human, and in some States a poll tax prevents them from exercising the primary privilege of citizenship—that of voting.”¹⁹⁴ Iddon thought that such injustices were bound to be rectified, for “this extraordinary inequality has obvious elements of dynamite, and tucked away in the back of most American minds is an uneasy realization that sooner or later the problem will have to be faced and grappled. Because all fair-minded Americans know that there is no reasonable basis for discrimination.”¹⁹⁵ Iddon believed that change would come. But what Iddon may have missed is that change had already happened, maybe not in U.S. national policy, but in a global mentality regarding race relations.

Historians have identified the rapid string of Japanese victories in the Pacific as the turning of the tide against the existence of a white supremacist world order. While only temporary, the blow to European and American control in Asia severely damaged their ability to reestablish that control after the war. Perhaps more importantly, however, the Japanese victories of 1941-42 shattered the image of the white race as supreme and superior. Historians Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds identify it as such, claiming that “the ‘charisma’ on which British rule rested in Asia had been destroyed for ever... the position of the white man in Asia - American as well as European - ‘could never be the same again.’”¹⁹⁶ The Japanese showed people all over the

¹⁹³ Iddon, “America’s Greatest Problem,” 6.

¹⁹⁴ Iddon, “America’s Greatest Problem,” 6.

¹⁹⁵ Iddon, “America’s Greatest Problem,” 6.

¹⁹⁶ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 341.

globe that the white empires were not invincible, and that in fact their power to hold on to their colonies was actually rather limited.

But there were more aspects to the global turn against the “color line” during the Second World War than just the Japanese victories of 1941-42 and the stated Allied war goals in contrast to those of the Axis. The Second World War was, unsurprisingly, a global war, and saw a massive contribution to the war effort from all corners of the world as well as the relocation of millions of people, either as soldiers deployed overseas or as refugees of the war. African Americans were deployed around the world as part of the United States’ war effort, and as we have seen, the discrimination they endured in the United States followed them wherever they went, much to their dismay, and the frustration of the populations they were stationed among. The arrival of American segregation to the shores of Britain and Australia (as well as many other countries) introduced the populations of those countries to a side of white supremacy which they had never really seen before. Sure, each population had its own “racial consciousness” and held their own unique prejudices, particularly Australia and South Africa (the latter of which is somewhat of a special case in the history of racial discrimination) but few among the populations of these predominantly white countries had experienced the realities of enforcing the “color bar” in the way that it was often practiced in the United States. For many, not only was the treatment of African American soldiers abhorrent, but few could understand how soldiers fighting in defense of the United States could receive such harassment from their fellow countrymen. And as we have seen from Iddon’s article about returning black servicemen, many African American soldiers found the contrast between their treatment overseas and their treatment at home as a grave injustice. Had they not fought a war in the name of human rights and democracy? How could they accept the fact that the treatment they received from white men and women overseas

was better than that they received from the white men and women from the nation they fought to defend? If the rise and fall of the global color line was due to a series of transnational processes, then would the deployment of African Americans overseas not be one of those processes, a process which facilitated the exchange of ideas and experiences which assisted in the ultimate destruction of the global color line?

Local populations that interacted with American forces and African American troops during World War II learned much about the nature of Jim Crow and American racial thinking. The British population emerged significantly changed from their experiences during the war, owing to the fact that very large numbers of American troops were stationed in the country, including over 130,000 African American soldiers.¹⁹⁷ Walter White, then chairman of the NAACP asserted as much when he claimed that “British public opinion has not been untouched... On numerous occasions mistreatment of American Negro soldiers and the introduction of racial discrimination in pubs, hotels, and other places of public accommodation have been discussed in Parliament.”¹⁹⁸ Many incidents in Britain had seen British civilians coming out in support of African American soldiers, with what White called “widespread indignation,” having been caused “by courts-martial of Negro soldiers which the British believed had been unjust or unduly harsh against Negro defendants.”¹⁹⁹ This claim most likely referred to the court-martial of Leroy Henry, who was accused of raping a British woman in the suburb of Combe Down near Bath on the 5th of May, 1944. Irregularities with the woman’s story as well as the belief that Henry’s confession made to the military police had been “extracted from him under duress,” led many Britons to believe he was innocent, and that his trial had been a “gross

¹⁹⁷ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1987), 4.

¹⁹⁸ Walter White, *A Rising Wind* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1945), 147-148.

¹⁹⁹ White, *A Rising Wind*, 148.

miscarriage of justice.”²⁰⁰ The case was discussed in the House of Commons, and a petition was, according to DuBois, signed by over 80,000 British citizens and submitted to General Eisenhower asking for Henry’s acquittal, which was granted by General Eisenhower on the 17th of June, 1944.²⁰¹ Incidents like this led to what Walter White called, “a marked increase in skepticism... among British people regarding the official government attitude on race questions,” for as anger grew among Britons towards the color line as drawn by the Americans in Britain, so too did anger towards the British Empire itself, and the discrimination which was employed by Britain against people of color around the world.

The latter part of the Second World War saw a marked increase in British newspapers of articles which indicated some widespread criticism of “the color bar” as detailed in several British newspapers. One article, published in the *Rochdale Observer* in Manchester, England, in March 1945, discussed a lecture given by a woman named G. R. Punchard at their local Art Gallery. Punchard asserted that “the world is one to-day as it has never been before, but inter-racial understanding is one of the most important factors in the peace to come. There is no logical reason for believing that the coloured man is inferior to the white man... in the coming peace we must strive for the harmony of the races, and not make the same mistake this time as we did the last.”²⁰² Another article in the *Bradford Observer* detailed a demonstration against racial discrimination in the British Commonwealth, with one speaker at the demonstration making “a strong plea for a better deal after the war for the coloured peoples, who had proven their loyalty to the British Commonwealth.”²⁰³ The last years of the war saw a large swell of support for such ideas among the British population, driven by the desire to see Allied war goals

²⁰⁰ Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 2-3.

²⁰¹ Mary Louise Roberts, “The Leroy Henry Case: Sexual Violence and Allied Relations in Great Britain, 1944,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 3 (September 2017), 402, W.E.B. DuBois, “GIs Leave Good Impression On England, DuBois Finds,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*, November 24, 1945, 1.

²⁰² G. R. Punchard, “The Colour Bar: Miss G. R. Punchard’s Lecture,” *Rochdale Observer*, March 21, 1945, 3.

²⁰³ “Colour Bar Demonstration in Bradford,” *Bradford Observer*, December 13, 1943, 3.

of a free world brought to fruition, and the more direct experience with the realities of racial discrimination in the world facilitated by the war effort.

Opposition to racial discrimination in the Empire was especially strong among Britain's religious leaders. Reverend William Gilmour Hopeman made an address to the Northern Baptist Association in Aberdeen in which he argued that "the so-called colour bar... was a very grim and serious issue in South Africa and the U.S.A.," which "came into view in our own homeland from time to time." Hopeman insisted that "the political and economic discrimination brought to bear against the coloured man constituted a practical denial of the Divine concern for all the sons of men."²⁰⁴ The war had brought the realities of racism to Britain, and Reverend Hopeman asserted that such were intolerable in the eyes of god. Britain was still very religious at the time, and as such, religious men held some sway over the average Briton. Another Reverend, M. A. Faulds of Edinburgh, declared in a speech to the members of the Berwick Rotary club that "it had taken six years to eradicate the claim of the white race to dominate and rule the world," and "our reputation for sincerity and honesty of purpose would depend very largely upon how freely we showed ourselves to be in the post-war years in this racial superiority."²⁰⁵ Faulds concluded his address by stressing the fact that "the colour bar was a problem which confronted the world to-day," and that it "would not be settled until we and others followed the old wisdom of 'doing unto others as we would they do unto us.'"²⁰⁶ Perhaps the most publicized condemnation of racial discrimination came from the Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland. The conference issued a joint statement in 1945, the first time that all the missionary societies combined to make a statement.²⁰⁷ The statement included a "strong condemnation of the

²⁰⁴ "No Colour Bar in Bible," *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, November 30, 1944, 4.

²⁰⁵ "Minister on Colour Bar: Address to Berwick Rotarians," *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, November 20, 1945, 4.

²⁰⁶ "Minister on Colour Bar," 4.

²⁰⁷ "The Colour Bar Must Go," *Bradford Observer*, March 19, 1945, 2.

colour bar and racial discrimination,” as it existed in the British Colonies, as well as a “plea for Government efforts to remove them.” The Conference declared the “elimination of the colour bar,” as “an obligation not only of common justice, but also of the Christian faith.”²⁰⁸ Members of the Conference pledged that “attempts to stir up public opinion of this subject would be made at forthcoming meetings all over the country,” and public opinion certainly began to change.²⁰⁹ The pledge of the societies to fight against racial discrimination throughout the empire is representative of a growing commitment among the British public to do the same. The church still held sway over much of the population, and so the commitment of the church to fight racism was either founded in the opinions of churchgoers or influential to those who would listen.

The British Anthropologist Eric John Dingwall wrote in his 1946 book *Racial Pride and Prejudice*: “there is little doubt that many people in Great Britain, especially those who came into close contact with Negro troops, were awakened to a wider appreciation of a problem which up to that time few of them had ever considered seriously.”²¹⁰ As W.E.B. DuBoise described it, “Englishmen came to know Negroes as friends. Negroes visited in their homes and talked to them... They told their stories of oppression and difficulty and they gained sympathy and understanding.”²¹¹ Many Britons were awoken to the realities of racial discrimination through their interactions with African American soldiers, and through their experiences with white American attempts at enforcing segregation in Britain. The British government even conducted a survey called the Panel Directive in June 1943, in which they asked questions about Briton’s beliefs concerning race. Although the survey was not specifically about America and was more directed towards Africa and India, “interest in black GIs was indicated by the fact that 1 person

²⁰⁸ “Colour Bar,” *The Scotsman*, March 19, 1945, 4.

²⁰⁹ “The Colour Bar Must Go,” 2.

²¹⁰ Eric John Dingwall, *Racial Pride and Prejudice* (London: Watts & Co., 1946), 3-4, cited in *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 227.

²¹¹ DuBois, “GIs Leave Good Impression On England, DuBois Finds,” 1.

in 15 spontaneously mentioned them.”²¹² Perhaps the most intriguing finding of the survey was that while before the war very few Britons expressed any interest or opinions about race or racism, by the time the survey was conducted in 1943 “nearly a quarter of the observers had now changed their attitude and had become ‘more friendly and more pro-colour.’”²¹³ African Americans, and the war in general, were awakening Britons to the existence of a global color line and strengthening the opinion against it.

Naturally for many of those Britons who became enlightened to the global realities of racial discrimination, questions began to arise about racial discrimination in the British colonies where millions of people suffered under similar systems of oppression. “Some realized that Britain’s Empire contained many more black people than had ever been in the country during the war,” wrote Graham Smith, “and reactions to these GIs might have some significance for the country’s imperial future.”²¹⁴ Many of these Britons, who over the course of the war became abhorred by the introduction of Jim Crow in Britain by American forces, now realized that the “colour bar” also existed in Britain, just not within sight.

These ideas certainly made their way into the minds of some members of the British government. One member of parliament, Captain L.B. Gammans, announced that there ““must be no colour bar”” after the war in an address to the Royal Empire Society. ““We have got to make the Empire peoples realise that Empire and British citizenship must mean more than in the past,” he asserted, ““there must be no colour bars, either at home or abroad... Kipling and all he represented are dead. Our task is to find a successor.””²¹⁵ Tom Driberg, another member of parliament, asked Prime Minister Winston Churchill in a meeting of the House of Commons to

²¹² Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull*, 122.

²¹³ Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull*, 123.

²¹⁴ Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 227.

²¹⁵ ““Must Be No Colour Bar After War,”” *Northern Star*, June 10, 1942, 5.

ask the American military authorities “to instruct the men that the colour bar was not the custom in Britain and its non-observance by British troops and civilians should be regarded with equanimity.”²¹⁶ However, perhaps the most damning condemnation of racial discrimination from the British government came from the British Labour Party, which issued a proclamation in 1942 which made known their intent to see “the laws and administrative practices upon which the ‘color bar’ rests... abolished,” in the British colonies, and “that every kind of legal or administrative discrimination on the ground of race, color or religion should cease.” The party even cited the African American movement to end discrimination in their goals, stating that their proclamation was “the first definite indication of the enormous stake which the colored peoples of the world have in victory for the United Nations... It is finally the essence and exemplification of The Pittsburgh Courier’s slogan—Double Victory—At Home and Abroad.”²¹⁷ Considering that the Labour Party won the 1945 general election with an unprecedented landslide victory, it is undeniable that most Britons found such a stance agreeable.

Other countries within the British Commonwealth also saw changing attitudes towards race during the war, or at least shifting ideas of how the global color line would be drawn after the war. Australia, which harbored some of the most well-known discriminatory immigration laws in the world by the Second World War as part of the “White Australia” policy, was the target of immense criticism. In the closing years of the war, the Australian government sought to reaffirm this policy. For example, at a meeting of a number of national representatives in 1944, the Australian spokesperson said, “We intend to keep Australia a white man’s country. We exclude all Asiatics and colored peoples.”²¹⁸ However, the reality was that many Australians,

²¹⁶ “Britain Wants No Colour Bar,” *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, October 1, 1942, 3.

²¹⁷ James E. Boyak, “Ask Emancipation of Colored Races in British Empire,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 7, 1942, 1.

²¹⁸ John Simmons, “Australia for White Men Only, Spokesman Says,” *Afro-American*, December 16, 1944, 5.

through their interactions with African American soldiers, had reevaluated their “assumptions upon which White Australia was predicated.”²¹⁹

A particularly telling letter, written by W. E. Andrews of New South Wales to the parents of an African American Officer, Captain J. T. Brown shows the impact the presence of African American soldiers in Australia had on Australians. Andrews, through his experiences interacting with a number of black soldiers, believed that “we now understand that all men are equal,” and that initially, “when we saw how well they conducted themselves and were educated... we were very surprised. But ever so pleased.”²²⁰ He goes on to explain his surprise, writing:

You will perhaps understand why, what I mean when I tell you that our colored people are kept down and have little or no opportunity in their lives. We see very little of them because they are restricted in every way. Our government has promised for many, many years to uplift and do something for them. But it's a pitiful story. We cannot understand your people having high school and university education and being so modern and up-to-date. It is indeed very wonderful. But then again, America is ever so much in front of us in practically everything. We have everything we want here but the development is so slow and we are so far behind your country. Can you imagine our surprise when we got to know that your sons had the positions and ranks of officers in the American Army. It is wonderful.²²¹

This letter shows the effect African American soldiers had on many Australians. Although it may surprise them to know it with all of the difficulties they faced, African Americans represented a success in the eyes of Australians, especially when compared to the Australian government’s treatment of Australia’s Aboriginal population. This letter also shows a desire for change. In the eyes of Australians like Andrews, if African Americans could achieve university educations and

²¹⁹ Chris Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War 1941-1945: Race, Nationality, and the Fight for Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 173.

²²⁰ W. E. Andrews, “‘All Men Are Equal,’ Writes a Citizen of Australia about Negro Soldiers,” *Atlanta Daily World*, May 18, 1945, 2.

²²¹ Andrews, “‘All Men Are Equal,’” 2.

become officers in the United States' military, why could Australia's Aboriginal population not do the same in Australia?

In a manner similar to Britain, the presence of African American soldiers in Australia had caused many Australians to reconsider their racial assumptions, and left a noticeable change in white Australians' racial consciousnesses.²²² As a result, in the years following the war, a growing number of Australians joined with international critics of the white Australia policy, as they "came to regard both the White Australia Policy and the lack of civil rights for indigenous Australians as unacceptable."²²³ Of course, change was not instantaneous. It took a little over two decades for the white Australia policy to be fully dismantled. However, that change began with the Second World War, which precipitated a global shift away from white supremacy.

Among the other nations caught up in this global exchange, New Zealand serves as another example of the effect the overseas deployment of African American troops had on white populations. New Zealand was, in many ways, situationally similar to Australia, however unlike Australia, which had adopted strict segregatory controls on their Aboriginal populations and confined them to reservations, New Zealand had taken steps to integrate the Maori population with their white population. While it was by no means an egalitarian utopia, many African Americans seemed to look upon New Zealand as a model of progress, especially when compared to the Jim Crow South. One article in the *Afro-American* declared that "New Zealanders practice, as well as fight for, democracy." The article quoted Walter Nash, the New Zealand Minister to the United States, who said in a statement to the newspaper that "there are no inherently superior peoples in the world. Give them all the same food, environment and opportunities, and they will all be the same." The minister went on to discuss the relatively integrated nature of

²²² Dixon, *African Americans and the Pacific War 1941-1945*, 173-4

²²³ Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, "Jim Crow Downunder? African American Encounters with White Australia, 1942-1945," *Pacific Historical Review* 71, no. 4 (November 2002), 630.

New Zealand's armed forces: “The native soldiers serve in every branch of the armed forces... In New Zealand we realize that it takes all the keys on a piano, both black and white, to make a perfect tune, therefore we use them all because our dominion is made up of every nationality of the South Sea section.”²²⁴ The Maori population of New Zealand also had significant representation in the nation’s parliament, and a number of Maori had held high level positions in New Zealand’s government.

Many white New Zealanders were proud of their nation’s advances in racial equality, and as a result, the arrival of American forces to the island brought quite a shock. “Officers and men of the U.S. Army have horrified inhabitants of this locality by a display of color prejudice,” wrote the *New Journal and Guide*, an African American newspaper, on the actions of white American soldiers in New Zealand. The newspaper remarked that “there is absolutely no display of race prejudice among inhabitants to colored Americans... The equal treatment they accord to the aborigines confirm their principles of fair play and honest dealing with members of the darker races.”²²⁵ Perhaps the most famous incident of this nature was the Battle of Manners Street in 1943. There, a large fight between New Zealanders and white American soldiers, reportedly ignited by attempts by the Americans to bar Maori soldiers from using an Allied soldier’s club, something which many Maori and white New Zealand soldiers objected to. According to some sources, over 500 soldiers on both sides engaged in a two hour long brawl which may have left two Americans dead. However, the sources on the event are few, as wartime censorship saw the event covered up to prevent further violence, and more recent research has found that the commonly accepted version of the story likely did not happen, at least not for any racially motivated reasons. Another fight, occurring on Cuba Street in Wellington in 1945, was

²²⁴ Mable Alston, “New Zealand Both Practices and Fights for the Democratic Way of Life: New Zealanders Practice, as Well as Fight for, Democracy,” *Afro-American*, February 13, 1943, 3.

²²⁵ “New Zealanders Alarmed By U.S. Color Prejudice,” *New Journal and Guide*, December 18, 1943, A19.

found to have been caused by racial tension between white Americans and local Maori, and it appears that in popular memory of the war the two events were merged.²²⁶ Nevertheless, the event showed that New Zealanders took a similar stance towards white American's attempts to enforce racial discrimination as Britons and Australians, and that those sort of actions would not be tolerated, especially towards New Zealand's own Maori population.

While it is true that New Zealand was far more progressive in its approach to racial equality compared to the United States or Australia, the Maori population still found in their wartime experience evidence that conditions could be improved further. One Maori officer, Major Harawira, observed in October of 1944 that "in his civilian capacity as a vocational guidance officer in the Dominion, he had observed more alarming signs of the colour bar in New Zealand to-day than after the last war." In comparison, he found that "in England there was a total absence of that sort of thing," specifically mentioning the "hospitable treatment the men of the Maori battalion received from the English upper classes."²²⁷ Evidently African Americans were not the only people of color to come home from the war with a new perspective on the world and on their place in society.

Indeed, much of the world was exposed to the horrors of American racism during the Second World War, if not directly through the deployment of American forces, then through news media. Walter White reported that "London correspondents of Indian, South African, West Indian, and other newspapers... have manifested a very considerable interest in the handling of the new racial problems created in England by Americans."²²⁸ With the United States emerging as the predominant world power towards the end of the Second World War, people all over the

²²⁶ "Wellington's notorious WWII 'Battle of Manners St' riddled with myths and inaccuracies - historian," Stuff, accessed October 30, 2021, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/pou-tiaki/124430177/wellingtons-notorious-wwii-battle-of-manners-st-riddled-with-myths-and-inaccuracies--historian>.

²²⁷ "Maori Major Complains of Colour Bar," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 19, 1944, 6.

²²⁸ White, *A Rising Wind*, 145.

world looked to see what American supremacy might mean for them. People of color all over the globe, through news media, however, bore witness to the injustices African Americans faced from their own countrymen in Britain, Australia, etc. Many must have wondered, if that was how the Americans treated their own black citizens, then what did that mean for them?

African Americans soldiers had a lot to think about concerning their wartime experiences. Many had suffered through continuous discrimination throughout the war at the hands of white soldiers, both at home and abroad. The lengths to which some white soldiers went to ensure their subservience and segregation from white society overseas cast real doubts in the minds of many soldiers as to what they were fighting for, and who they were really fighting. Walter White, discussing an interaction he had with one black soldier in Britain, remarked “I was puzzled at the frequency, despondency, and bitterness of the use of the phrase ‘the enemy.’ I soon learned that Negro soldiers referred not to the Nazis across the Channel but to their white fellow Americans.”²²⁹ From White’s perspective, the war had brought forth an urge to fight for equality among black soldiers. Constantly reminded of the injustices of Jim Crow through the actions of their countrymen, White felt that “World War II has immeasurably magnified the Negro’s awareness of the disparity between the American profession and practice of democracy.”²³⁰ African American soldiers’ experiences overseas in countries like Britain and Australia aided in the raising of this awareness. While racial discrimination was to be expected in the American South, the methods white soldiers employed to try and enforce similar rules overseas highlighted the lengths to which white Americans would go to ensure the maintenance of the strict racial hierarchy, as well as the need African Americans had for that hierarchy to be destroyed.

²²⁹ White, *A Rising Wind*, 18.

²³⁰ White, *A Rising Wind*, 142,

The tendency of foreign white populations to treat African Americans warmly exacerbated the issue on both sides. Some white Americans saw how African Americans were being treated and worried that black soldiers would return home and try to retain the liberties they enjoyed overseas.²³¹ On the other hand, black soldiers worried about how white Americans would treat them once they returned home, with one article in the *New York Amsterdam Star-News* reporting that “Negro occupation troops in Italy are reported to dread returning to the United States after their service abroad comes to an end. Negro soldiers in Japan, Germany, and other areas have expressed fear of racial conflict when they return home.”²³² Many African Americans saw in their interactions with foreign white populations freedoms they had not enjoyed before, as well as a potential model for an integrated society comparatively free of racial discrimination. Some saw their overseas deployments as a sanctuary from the racism they faced at home, thinking that “the farther away we are from the racism, jim crow, discrimination, and segregation of our own country, the better off we really are.”²³³ For many black soldiers who before the war only knew the law of Jim Crow, experiences with white societies which did not openly discriminate against them, at least not to the same degree as in the United States, provided an attractive alternative to the situation they faced at home. The attempts of white Americans to bring segregation to these societies only served to remind many black soldiers of what they faced when they returned home.

These experiences ultimately contributed to a resolve among many black veterans to carry on the struggle against white oppression at home. Scholar Christine Knauer asserts that “at the end of the war, a growing number of African Americans, especially black soldiers, were eager to make their protest and demands for equal rights heard,” and it is easy to understand

²³¹ Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 224.

²³² “The Negro GI’s Best Bet,” *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, July 26, 1947, 8.

²³³ “The Negro GI’s Best Bet,” 8.

why.²³⁴ Black soldiers, who had been fighting for their country and allegedly in the name of freedom and equality were subjected to constant reminders throughout the war that those rights were not accorded to them by their countrymen. Knauer points out that “the mistreatment of blacks in the military proved a powerful rallying point among African Americans.”²³⁵ For many black veterans, the juxtaposition of the cause for which they fought and the reality of their situation made achieving progress at home all the more important. Through their experiences overseas, many had seen firsthand that the ultimate goal of equality was possible. If African Americans could receive better treatment in Australia of all places then surely it was possible in the United States, they just had to make that change possible.

One prominent example of an African American whose experiences in the military drove him to fight harder for change is Grant Reynolds. Reynolds was a Chaplain in the U.S. Army, and believed he could use his post to help black soldiers deal with the humiliation and discrimination they faced in their daily lives from white soldiers.²³⁶ However, during his time in the army he faced more discriminatory acts than even he expected, and due to his outspoken nature he was forced to accept an honorable discharge due to a questionable psychiatric evaluation.²³⁷ He stated in a letter to Walter White that he was “completely fed up with the unforgivable treatment accorded to Negro soldiers under the Roosevelt Administration,” and that he was “opposed to the perpetuation in office of a government which continually indicates its unwillingness to protect Negro soldiers against humiliation, abuse, and outright mob

²³⁴ Christine Knauer, *Let Us Fight as Free Men: Black Soldiers and Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 32.

²³⁵ Knauer, *Let Us Fight as Free Men*, 3.

²³⁶ Knauer, *Let Us Fight as Free Men*, 1.

²³⁷ Knauer, *Let Us Fight as Free Men*, 1.

violence.”²³⁸ Reynolds reaffirmed to White his, “deep sense of moral obligation to the hundreds of thousands of my Negro comrades still under arms.”²³⁹

Many histories of the Cold War civil rights movement identify African American veterans as some of the most driven activists for civil rights. Historian Thomas Borstelmann found that black soldiers’ “experiences fighting abroad for democracy, rendered black soldiers less willing to return home and quietly accept their prewar status as second-class citizens.” Borstelmann even identifies African Americans’ experiences with foreign white populations as part of this new drive for change, as “experiences of better treatment by whites abroad altered their expectations when they returned.”²⁴⁰ Scholar Mary Dudziak describes black soldiers as having forged a “commitment to democracy... sealed in blood.”²⁴¹ The African American press certainly seemed to encourage this mindset among black veterans. One article in *The Chicago Defender* argued that “Negro soldiers and civilians earnestly believe that they will never again submit to injustice as before, and even the gentlest and the mildest among them are beginning to believe that the time has come to fight.” The importance of veterans in this fight was essential, “there will be fierce and terrible men among the Negroes who come back from the war,” the article claimed, “veterans make good revolutionaries... the Negro, sent to fight for democracy, is now deterred to enjoy some of it.”²⁴² Black soldiers' experiences of the war ensured that when they returned home they were ready to fight another war, not against Germany or Japan, but against Jim Crow and the enforces of American racism.

²³⁸ Grant Reynolds to NAACP, September 28, 1944, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

²³⁹ Grant Reynolds to NAACP, September 28, 1944.

²⁴⁰ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 43.

²⁴¹ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 10.

²⁴² Lucius C. Harper, “Dustin’ off the News: What We Will Face When the Veteran Returns,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*, September 2, 1944, 1.

Service overseas played a part in this, interactions with white populations around the world more often than not reinforced the idea that achieving equality was possible and that many white people even supported them in their struggle. Their service also reminded them of the determination of the enemy they faced, and the lengths they were willing to go to keep African Americans under their control. The deployment of African American troops overseas also had a significant effect on the white populations they encountered. People in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand experienced American racism firsthand and were left outraged. Many of these people came to know African American soldiers quite well, and through interactions with them they began to reevaluate the racial assumptions through which many of them understood the world. This great global exchange of ideas was greatly facilitated by the war, and left both sides with significantly changed perspectives.

Conclusion

On the 26th of July, 1948, President Truman issued Executive Order 9981, effectively beginning the desegregation of the U.S. military. He did so under pressure from both civil rights activists, who argued that segregation was inherently discriminatory and that the continued existence of a segregated military would lead to organized resistance from black youths subjected to the draft, and from ordinary citizens who saw a segregated military as a bad look for American democracy abroad, and as a perfect target for communist propaganda.²⁴³ American troops deployed abroad during World War II had highlighted the latter of these problems, as astonished observers around the world watched how many white American soldiers took it upon themselves to ensure that African Americans were denied equal treatment and respect. Truman may also have come to understand that the precedent set by military segregation (the segregation of black and white Americans into different units) encouraged those who sought to expand and enforce segregation to pursue their goals with the belief that the U.S. military was on their side. While law only really enforced segregated units and some other technicalities, the precedent that segregating units set in the military meant that stopping any other forms of segregation was difficult. White soldiers saw segregation as being fully endorsed by the military, despite only segregated units being official military policy. This became evident as American troops deployed around the world attempted to force their racial beliefs on those white populations they came in contact with, who were often less willing to comply with forms of segregation than civilians back in the United States. Whatever the reasons, the desegregation of the U.S. military marked a major milestone in the long battle for civil rights in the United States, and stood as a symbol of the changing global perspectives on race in the years following the Second World War.

²⁴³ William A. Taylor, *Military Service and American Democracy: From World War II to the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2016), 62.

Britain also struggled with its own racial conflicts following the war. From the early 1950s until the Commonwealth Immigration Act took effect in 1962, hundreds of thousands of people from the West Indies and South Asia migrated to the United Kingdom. Many had either served in the British military during the war and had been stationed in Britain, or had been imported during the war to work in British war factories. The soldiers and workers had been sent home after the war, yet many of those who had been stationed in Britain saw there the opportunity for employment and a higher standard of living, and so in the post war years they immigrated back to Britain.²⁴⁴

This sudden mass migration of people of color to Britain also saw the rise of many “anxieties” among the white population.²⁴⁵ Once again, concerns over interracial sex came to the forefront, much as they had during the war, however this time those concerns were amplified by the fact that the West Indians were not temporary arrivals. Baffling negative stereotypes emerged regarding West Indians in particular; that they were lazy and unmasculine, while also being aggressive and promiscuous. Many of these stereotypes were based on the same long-held racial assumptions about black people which Britons had held during the war, the same assumptions with which they had perceived African Americans during the war. In the post-war period there was a decidedly negative turn to the interpretation of these assumptions which likely stemmed from many Briton’s anger that West Indians had seemingly taken *their* jobs and were apparently messing with their cultural norms. Historian Marcus Collins argues that West Indians faced an impossible situation in Britain, as paradoxically the “underlying prevailing white attitudes to West Indian men was that they were characterized as essentially unassimilable deviants while at

²⁴⁴ H. Ter Heide, “West Indian Migration to Great Britain,” *Neiuwe West-Indische Gids/New West Indian Guide* (1963-1964), 76.

²⁴⁵ Chris Waters, “‘Dark Strangers’ in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963,” *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 2 (April 1997), 209.

the same time being expected to assimilate to white gender norms.” They were to either embrace Britishness or “be considered... antagonistic to all it stood for.”²⁴⁶ This is all to say that there were significant racial conflicts which engulfed Britain after the war, and Britain was most certainly not free of racial prejudice. Unfortunately, Britain’s pride in being a country free of the “color bar” was not representative of the nation’s ability to actually accept non-white immigrants, and although conditions certainly improved in the decades following the 1950s, racism and xenophobia still remained significant problems among the British population.

Compared to Britain, Australia’s post-war history regarding racism is surprisingly progressive, lending credence to the effect the war had on the nation's racial consciousness. In the immediate postwar period the Australian government returned to enforcing hard-line “white Australia” policies, going so far as to prohibit the entry of Asian women who had married Australian soldiers and African American men who had married Australian women while stationed in the country during the war.²⁴⁷ Following the election of a Liberal government in 1949 however, restrictions gradually relaxed. Alongside Australian experiences with African Americans during the war, a number of factors contributed to the growth of opposition to “white Australia.” The policies had little support from the Australian public and were becoming increasingly unfashionable in the global community. The emergence of strong independent Asian states in the 1950s and 60s which firmly objected to “white Australia” finally led the Australian government to officially begin to dismantle the policy in 1966. The last of the policies which constituted “white Australia” were struck down in 1973.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Marcus Collins, “Pride and Prejudice: West Indian Men in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain,” *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 3 (July 2001), 412.

²⁴⁷ James Jupp, “From ‘White Australia’ to ‘Part of Asia’: Recent Shifts in Australian Immigration Policy towards the Region,” *The International Migration Review* 29, no. 1, 209, “Aussies’ Policy Bars GI’s Who Fought for It,” *Afro-American*, October 6, 1945, 16.

²⁴⁸ Jupp, “From ‘White Australia’ to ‘Part of Asia,’” 210.

The history of African Americans during the Second World War is undoubtedly part of a greater global history. While African Americans struggled for civil rights at home, their experiences abroad brought their fight into a greater global context, one which not only exposed them to somewhat more tolerant white societies beyond the borders of the United States, but also exposed those white societies to the realities of racial discrimination and violence up close. Not only did African American soldiers return from their wartime service with new perspectives on what an (almost) integrated society could be like and what still needed to be done in the United States, but white civilians, such as those in Britain and Australia, became more aware of the global color line, not only in the United States, but within their own countries as well. These changes were not the end, but the beginning of a long process of changing views on race and race relations in Britain and Australia, one which would continue to evolve for decades to come.. This great change was made possible by the mass movements of people during the war, as well as the growing global influence of the United States which saw American troops deployed in a diverse set of communities around the world.

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