Opinions and activities of the black community during World War II as seen in the black press and related sources

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OPINIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY
DURING WORLD WAR II AS SEEN IN THE BLACK
PRESS AND RELATED SOURCES

A THESIS

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BY
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The first World War provided the tide of protest upon which the Black Press rose in importance and in militancy. It was largely the Black press that made Blacks fully conscious of the inconsistency between America's war aims to "make the world safe for "democracy" and her treatment of this minority at home. The Second World War again increased unrest, suspicion, and dissatisfaction among Blacks.\(^1\) It stimulated great interest of the Black man in his press and the fact that the depression was just about over made it possible for him to translate this interest into financial support.\(^2\)

By the outbreak of the war many Black newspapers had become economically able to send their own correspondents overseas. In addition, the Chicago Defender; the Baltimore Afro-American and the Norfolk Journal and Guide had special correspondents who traveled from camp

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to camp and reported on conditions in this country while men were undergoing preparation for overseas operations. 3

Unlike the editors of World War I who devoted most of their editorials to encouraging Blacks to migrate from the South to the North, the interest of World War II editors was in achieving a double victory for Blacks both in the military and on the home front. 4 This revolved around securing a fair distribution of federal funds for the training of defense workers; opening of war jobs to Blacks; obtaining adequate housing for Blacks in defense areas; abolition of Jim Crow laws and discrimination at home; and complete integration of Blacks into the armed forces. 5

Fulfilling the Blacks' desire to read more about Black achievements in all facets of American life was also the concern of World War II editors. Blacks wanted to read about what happened to the four hundred thousand drafted Black men and two hundred thousand Black soldiers in France. 6 Expressive in the Pittsburgh Courier which


6 Myrdal, An American Dilemma, p. 914.
stated that Black Americans were anxious to know why there was so much secrecy in the whereabouts of Black troops when so much newspaper space was given to the experiences of "white boys." "Is this another form of discrimination or is it more indifference and shortsightedness?," the editor asked. In either case, the editor felt that there was no justification for it and urged Judge William Hastie, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, to call the attention of the Army to "this stupid negligence."7

As riots increased in number and bloodiness, Blacks wanted to read about them.8 Claude A. Barnett, Director of the Associated Negro Press, commented in the Norfolk Journal and Guide that as a rule, white daily papers carried little or no information about the activities of Blacks other than that which was comical or criminal. Barnett continued that events which presented Blacks in a creditable manner were usually only carried in Black newspapers. Therefore, if Blacks wanted to read about their accomplishments, they had to turn to the Black press.9

7"Where Are Our Soldiers?" Pittsburgh Courier, 7 March 1942, p. 2.
8Myrdal, An American Dilemma, p. 914.
The Pittsburgh Courier and the Norfolk Journal and Guide in the period from December 6, 1941 to November 7, 1942 devoted 55.3 per cent and 51.3 per cent respectively of their editorials to comments on the overall relationships of Blacks to World War II. 10

The purpose of this study will be to present through the eyes of four selected Black newspapers, and related sources, the activities of Black people during World War II. The papers used for the study are: The Pittsburgh Courier; the Norfolk Journal and Guide; the Atlanta Daily World; and the Baltimore Afro-American.

The Afro-American centered in Baltimore has four editions in addition to its home one. It is one of the oldest and most powerful Black journalistic institutions in the United States. Its origin lies in religious circles. In 1907 the Afro was merged with the Ledger and it was called the Afro-American Ledger. John H. Murphy was the publisher and George F. Bragg wrote the editorials. During its history, this paper followed a policy of moderation in direct editorial opinions and an emphasis on news coverage as a tool with which to inform and mold public opinion.11


The Norfolk Journal and Guide began as the fraternal organ of the Knights of Gideon. During its early years it was known as the Lodge Journal and Guide. The paper was purchased by P. Bernard Young in 1910 and converted into a general Black newspaper. This weekly, although until recent years somewhat more conservative in its policies than other national papers, was never silent about the Black citizens' role in wartime, but still supported the war without pretending that Blacks were faring better at home. The Journal and Guide also had the reputation of avoiding ultra sensationalism more than most medium-sized or large Black papers.  

The Pittsburgh Courier is one of the oldest Black newspapers. Founded in 1910, it once had the largest circulation of any Black paper in the country--close to three hundred thousand. Credited with developing the paper was Robert L. Vann. His formula was to launch numerous crusades in behalf of the Black community and Black citizens generally. These campaigns were against Jim-Crowism and discrimination in all facets of American life. Vann even saw to it that the Courier was taken into the South where, in some localities, Black citizens were prohibited from reading Black publications. The Courier succeeded in attracting to its staff some of the major Black

journalists of the first half of this century—men such as George S. Schuyler, P. L. Prattis, William G. Nunn, and many good young writers who later became important on other papers.13

The most important Black newspaper founded between the two World Wars was the Atlanta *World*, established in 1928 as a weekly. Within two years it became a semi-weekly, and by another year a tri-weekly, and finally a daily in 1932. The paper was founded by William Alexander Scott, who did not remain with it long because he was assassinated in 1934. Cornelius A. Scott, a younger brother of William Scott and former student at Morehouse College, became the next owner of the paper. Under his leadership, The *World* was consistently conservative on political issues. The paper maintained a fixed circulation of about thirty thousand daily for a number of years.14

The four Black newspapers selected for this study were very active in reporting incidents of maltreatment of Blacks in both the military and on the home front, sometimes to the point where their loyalty was questioned. Pressure was brought upon the White House and the Justice Department from several Southern congressmen and some newspapermen to indict some Black editors for sedition and interference with the war effort.15


14 *Ok*, *The Negro Newspaper*, pp. 126-128.

Typical of the criticism from white newspapermen was that of Westbrook Pegler, columnist for "Scripps Howard Paper," and Virginius Dabney of the Richmond Times Dispatch. Both men, in separate articles, accused the Black press of using the war situation to incite riots and engage in other subversive activities.

The Crisis, in an editorial, reported the criticisms and comments of Dabney:

Race riots are occurring in various cities, mostly Southern, in the vicinity of any camps, almost always between Black soldiers and white policemen. The prevailing assumption is that these bloody encounters are due primarily to the campaign being carried on by such publications as the Crisis and such agencies as the NAACP.16

In Answer, the editorial denied that either Black newspapers or the NAACP was responsible for riots. It contended that Dabney was well aware of the factors which accounted for interracial strife in the military: (1) The treatment of Black soldiers at Fort Bragg by white Southern Military Police; (2) the shooting of twelve Black soldiers on January 1940 in Alexandria, Louisiana by white city and state policemen; and (3) the fact that at some camps, like Camp Lee, Virginia, Black soldiers were not allowed to walk down certain streets or be seen in certain neighborhoods. The Crisis stressed that "these

16"We Are Accused of Inciting to Riot and Being Traitors," Crisis 49 (June 1942), p. 183.
were the conditions which incite riots, cause bloodshed and create continuing interracial tension." 17

Pegler's accusation was challenged by the NAACP in a statement released by the Courier in May, 1942. The NAACP maintained that the Black Press had never been against the war effort, but only against the way in which Black American citizens had been treated.

The Black Press resented the beating and shooting of Black soldiers in uniform; it protested against the restricted quota of Black flying cadets for the army at a time when the army was seeking 2,000,000 men in the air forces; it resented a lynching on a Sunday morning four days after Pearl Harbor as being inconsistent with the army's war aims. It also resented segregation which was responsible for the mistreatments Blacks suffered. 18

Some of the other papers also responded to the charges of the Southerners. The Norfolk Journal and Guide claimed that the criticism expressed in the Black Press was created by the "nothing at all" attitude of whites. 19

In an editorial on April 25, 1942, the Journal and Guide maintained that what concerned and worried critics of the Black Press most was that it had repeatedly specified by irrefutable facts and figures the

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
special discrimination reserved for Blacks which this
democracy refused to modify as it faced total war."

This paper continued:

The Black Press is essentially a public ser-
vant with definite responsibilities. When
we fail to enlighten, instruct, and inspire
the people we serve in their uphill struggle
to obtain justice in democratic practices,
we earn only their contempt and disrespect
and finally end up in total loss of useful-
ness.20

Most Blacks agreed fully with the opinion held by the

Journal and Guide concerning the role of the Black press.

Occasionally, however, a lone dissent was heard. Such a
dissent was that of Dr. Warren H. Brown, a Black who
served as Director of Negro Relations for an organization
named the Council for Democracy. Dr. Brown's views were
expressed in an article published in The Saturday Review
of Literature in December 1942. He contended that:

... the kind of justice for which the Negro
strives is undoubtedly delayed by the Negro
Press. Its inflammatory attempts to indi-
cate that the Negro never gets fair treatment,
and its efforts—whether the Negro is right
or wrong—to use his misfortunes, not to get
justice but to arouse more violent racism,
make the going more difficult for that great
majority of white and black who are working
for a more even-handed treatment of the
Negro--not as a Negro, but as an American?21

20"Service or Betrayal?" Norfolk Journal and Guide,
25 April 1942, p. 8. This role of the Black press of
rendering service to struggling minority has been an
historical one. See Martin E. Dann, The Black Press,

Saturday Review of Literature 25 (December 19, 1942): 5-6.
Louis E. Martin, Vice President of Negro Newspaper Publisher's Association, answered Brown in an open letter printed two weeks later in the Baltimore Afro-American. Martin contended that Brown's statement revealed both his ignorance and his lack of originality. Martin insisted that almost every concession obtained by Black Americans in government, industry, and labor in the last few years was due to the tremendous pressure of newspapers, working hand in hand with legitimate and responsible leaders of the masses. In addition, the abolition of segregated army officers' training schools and the equalization of teachers' salaries in the Southland, increased representation in government, and all other practical and progressive steps toward full citizenship were due to pressure from the press and leaders whom Dr. Brown labeled "sensation-mongers."

Martin concluded that:

The Colored Press like the labor press and the press of other minority groups, was born out of inequities in our society. The time may come when its function is fulfilled, then it will cease to exist. Until then, those who believe that we can achieve in America the kind of democracy for which we are waging this global war would do well to let the minority presses roar.22

The NAACP and the Urban League also responded to the charges against the Black Press. They claimed that it was patriotic for Blacks to protest against undemocratic practices, and those who sought to stifle this protest were the unpatriotic ones.²³

In the following chapters analyses will be made of this role of Black newspapers as critics, challengers and guardians of the rights of the Black community during World War II.

CHAPTER II

BLACKS ON THE HOME FRONT
BLACK SUPPORT OF THE
WAR EFFORTS

Blacks generally supported the war effort, but they were urged by both their Black leaders and newspapers to remember and to continue their fight against injustices at home. Black leaders pledged their all-out support of the war effort by voicing their sentiments in a survey compiled by the Associated Negro Press. The results of this survey was reported in the leading Black newspapers. The Atlanta *Daily World* quoted several of the outstanding leaders.¹ Among them was Dr. Fred D. Patterson, President of Tuskegee Institute, who declared that Blacks shared with the rest of the American people the conviction that Japan's action "must be met with a complete all-out war effort." The *World* also reported the opinion of Lester B. Granger, Executive Secretary of the National Urban League:

America's war with Japan is the war of every Negro regardless of dissatisfaction with

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existing conditions or that part previously accorded Negroes in the National defense program.

Dr. Emmett J. Scott of the "Republican publicity department" and Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP were also included in the World's report.

"The basic feeling of every Negro in the country," said Scott, "is one of complete loyalty to our country. There is and can be no questions of the full support of our nation in this hour of tragic emergency by the thirteen million Negroes of the United States."

Walter White was in substantial agreement with Scott:

Though thirteen million Negro Americans have more than not been denied democracy, they are American citizens and will as in every war give unqualified support to the protection of their country. At the same time we will not abate one iota our struggle for full citizenships rights here in the United States. We will fight but we will demand the right to fight as equals in every branch of the Military naval and aviation services.²

In the Norfolk Journal and Guide, Mary McLeod Bethune, President of the National Council of Negro Women, stressed the fact that Negro women dedicated themselves unreservedly to the service of America in defending its freedom and integrity.³

Black newspapers, like the public leaders, supported the war while strongly advocating equal treatment for

²Ibid.

Blacks. Mental reservations associated with all-out support of American's war effort were evident in the editorial opinion of many Black newspapers.

The editors of the Pittsburgh Courier developed its war slogan—a double "V" for a double victory for Black America. It maintained that Black Americans were determined to "protect our country, our form of government, and the freedom we cherish for ourselves and the rest of the world." Thus in their fight for freedom, the Courier continued, Black Americans should wage a two-pronged attack against their enslavers at home and against those abroad who would attempt to enslave them.

The Baltimore Afro-American expressed similar sentiments in one of its early issues:

Now with the enemy at our door, we say again to our fellow Americans ... We cannot defend America with a dust brush, a mop and a white apron. We cannot march against enemy planes and tanks and challenge warships armed only with a whiskbroom and a wide grin.

The Norfolk Journal and Guide was the only paper to pledge all and ask nothing in return.

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It's comment was as follows:

Always in every crisis through which the nation has passed, our people have contributed their lives and their labor without stint or limit. We crave the opportunity to serve ... wherever we are called upon to go.6

That Blacks agreed with and supported the sentiment of the leaders and the newspapers is evidence both by their enlistment in the Armed Forces (See Chapter III) and their support of the bond effort.

Blacks purchased bonds enthusiastically, and many corporations reported that Black employees signed up for payroll savings plans whereby regular amounts were deducted from wages for the purpose of buying bonds.7

The World reported on the financial support of the war effort by Black business. Of fifty Black Insurance Companies of various types in the United States, more than twenty-five purchased Defense Bonds amounting to a total of $469,074. Six of the companies bought $50,000 worth of series F and G, the maximum amount any corporation was permitted to buy in one year. They were Mammoth Life and Accident, Louisville, Kentucky; Supreme Camp of American Woodmen, Denver, Colorado; Atlanta Life, Atlanta, Georgia;


Southern Aid Society of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia; North Carolina Mutual, Durham, North Carolina; and Universal Life, Memphis, Tennessee.  

Further attempts to aid the war efforts were carried out by establishing savings committees which sponsored drives to help raise money for the government. They laid out a five point program: (1) canvass all Black business houses to explain the allotment plan; (2) Buy-a-Bond Sunday; (3) Speakers bureau to serve clubs and lodge meetings; (4) school parades; (5) Distribution of posters and placards by Black Boy Scouts.  

Blacks gave economic support to the war by participating in programs to conserve foods and other commodities and to control prices. The Pittsburgh Courier praised small Black farmers who aided the war effort. Thousands of them purchased their farm equipment co-operatively and, according to the Department of Agriculture, this equipment which was shared by the co-op groups helped to make up for the shortage in manpower, and at the same time it helped to conserve the supply of vital materials needed for guns, planes and tanks.  

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
War Industries and Jobs

As industrial plans began to convert for the purpose of producing weapons of war, Blacks found great difficulty in securing employment. Approximately five million whites were still unemployed and employers were generally inclined to absorb them first. Since the vast majority of Blacks were unskilled, the explanation for failure to employ them was usually that skilled workers were needed. The first benefits which Blacks derived from the boom in defense industries were in securing jobs that had been deserted by whites who were attracted by higher wages to plants making weapons of war.

The federal government made several gestures to discourage discrimination. The United States Office of Education declared that in the expenditure of funds in the defense training program there should be no discrimination on account of race, creed or color.\footnote{Herbert Garfinkel, \textit{When Negroes March} (New York: Atheneum, 1969), pp. 25-26.}

In August, 1940, the National Defense Advisory Committee issued a statement against the refusal to hire Blacks in defense plants. The Office of production Management established a Black Employment and Training Branch in its Labor Division in the effort to facilitate the hiring of Blacks in defense industry. None of these actions brought satisfying results, and Blacks made it
clear that they wished more than gestures from their government.  

Because some editors of Black newspapers felt that Blacks were being treated unfairly in employment, they seized upon each incident of Jim Crowism in industrial hiring practices and gave it the same publicity that white papers gave to rape or murder cases in which Blacks were involved. For example, The Pittsburgh Courier became incensed over the Navy's policy requiring Black yard workers to wear "N" on badges to denote their race. This paper devoted several article to the incident, reporting in detail the account of the NAACP protest led by Theodore Spaulding, President of the Philadelphia branch. The Navy, in responding to the accusation of race-labeling, replied simply that it would make appropriate inquiry. The NAACP compared these identification badges to the labels used by the Nazis to single out Jews in Germany.  

A weeks later the Courier printed the contents of a letter from Ralph A. Bard, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, to the NAACP in which he said that the letters "W" for White and "N" for Negroes were inconspicuous and could not be construed to be discriminatory. In the same article, The NAACP's reply was printed verbatim:

\[\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{13}}\text{"Says Order to Use "W" for Whites and "N" for Negroes Came from Washington Following NAACP Protest," Pittsburgh Courier, 1 November 1941, p. 2.}\]
The question is not whether or not the designation is discriminatory. It is humiliating, insulting and unnecessary. It offers gratuitous affront to Negro citizens by labeling them (as though a man with a colored skin needed to be labeled) in much the same manner as the labels used by the Nazis.14

The Norfolk Journal and Guide complained that few Blacks in Baltimore had been absorbed by the war industries in skilled or semi-skilled occupations. It cited the fact that failure to employ Blacks was due to the conviction of many employers that Black and white mechanics could not work together. No matter what his personal feelings were, an employer was not inclined to hire Black labor if he felt it would cause a lowering of morale in his plant.15

Many companies had policies not to hire Blacks. An example was reported in the Atlanta Daily World, December, 1941. The article described how the Boeing Aircraft Company, Seattle, Washington, holder of the extensive contracts to manufacture aircraft for the army and navy refused to hire Blacks. A Boeing representative who was sent to Chicago to interview workers because of a scarcity of available labor in the northwest flatly refused the appli-


cation of Robert Weaver, a qualified engineering draftsman, because of his color.16

For decades, tension between Black and White workers had been cultivated by the policies of employers and labor unions alike. Employers generally refused to hire Blacks for any but the most menial work except as strike breakers. The labor unions traditionally excluded Black workers and even exerted pressure to have Blacks fired from jobs.17 The attitude of the American Federation of Labor officials toward Blacks is exemplified in the remarks made by Harry O'Reilly, regional director of the A.F.L. in Chicago when he said:

I consider the Negro worker an evil rather than an asset to organized labor. I don't believe all of this discrimination exists against Negroes, if it does, it is their own fault and also their fight.18

The NAACP also charged O'Reilly with using profanity freely to its committee, which contained women, and to have used the word "nigger" during his discourse. It also labeled O'Reilly's remarks as insulting to Black people and a menace to the unity of pro-labor forces. The organization requested that President William Green of the A.F.L.


18 "AFL Leader Calls Negro 'Evil In Labor Movement'," Pittsburgh Courier, 1 January 1944, p. 1.
officially and publicly rebuke O'Reilly. Moreover, the NAACP referred to O'Reilly as "ignorant as well as insulting," and declared that discrimination by the A. F. of L. unions was well-known throughout the labor movement and had been discussed at numerous A. F. of L. Conventions. The NAACP reminded Green of powerful anti-labor forces at work in the country, of the anti-labor legislation pending in Congress and of the appeal which had been made to Black Americans to help defeat the legislation.¹⁹

Prior to World War II some efforts had been made to organize independent Black labor unions but they were largely unsuccessful because of the marginal nature of the Black worker. One notable exception was the Black labor union led by A. Philip Randolph. Organized in 1925, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters finally won a charter from the American Federation of Labor in 1936. Randolph was a major figure in the labor movement. In 1941, when Black workers were being discriminated against in defense industries, Randolph organized what was planned to be the first civil rights protest march on Washington.²⁰ The plan of the march was to have Blacks from all over the country march in protest to Washington, thus dramatizing

¹⁹Ibid.

the need and desire for "jobs and equal participation in national defense." The administration ignored the talk of a march. No one really expected Black people to be able to do it.21

Writing for the Baltimore Afro-American, Randolph stated that Black Americans had a stake in national defense and that the stake involved jobs, equal employment opportunities and equal opportunity for integration in the armed forces of the nation. Randolph stressed the belief that discrimination could not be stopped in national defense with conferences of leaders and intelligensia alone. Moreover, he asked Blacks to not be afraid because they were simply fighting for their constitutional rights as American citizens.22

In an article written for the Pittsburgh Courier, Randolph harshly criticized the national defense set up contending that it reeked and smelled of race prejudice, hatred and discrimination. He maintained that the army, navy and air corps were dominated and virtually controlled by Southerners; but insisted that Southerners were not alone responsible for the fact that Blacks were being brutally pushed around. The North, East and West


were also to blame because they connived and acquiesced in the practice of discriminating against Blacks.²³

Randolph urged Blacks to support and strengthen the hands of Black Americans like Dr. Channing H. Tobias on the Draf Board, Judge William H. Hastie in the War Department, Dr. Robert Weaver in the National Defense Commission and Frances Williams in the Consumer's section and a few others. Hence, he asked that 10,000 Blacks march on Washington, D. C. with the slogan "We loyal Black American Citizens Demand the Right to Work and Fight for Our Country."²⁴

The Baltimore Afro-American reported that some high persons in national affairs appealed to Randolph to halt the scheduled march. Among these persons were Secretary of Navy Frank Knox and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt told Randolph that she feared the march would set back the progress being made in the Army toward better opportunities and less segregation. Despite the advice, Randolph refused to call off the march.²⁵

Finally, after much negotiation between officials in Washington and Randolph, President Roosevelt persuaded leaders to cancel the march by issuing his famous Executive

²⁴Ibid.
Order 8802. This presidential decree banned racial discrimination in defense industries and government offices and created the FEPC.26

Following the issuance of the Executive Order, newspapers indicated an upsurge in the hiring and promotion of Blacks. The Atlanta Daily World, for example, gave detailed coverage to several companies which attempted to comply. It began with a general discussion of compliance practices in an article dated October 20, 1942. Although the Committee on Fair Employment had no power to institute punishment, employers and trade unions did not enjoy appearing at hearings as defendants; some were even willing to change their policies to avoid being called up. The Office of Production Management submitted a report to the newly formed FEPC that listed several organizations who had hired Blacks without pressure from the FEPC.27

Another example of company compliance was the Curtiss Wright Company at Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. According to the World, this company employed Blacks in all capacities. The same company at Columbus, had 120 Blacks as machine tool operators, fabricators, sheet metal workers and others trained to go into the factory immediately upon


completion of their course. In connection with the training program the local Urban League maintained a revolving fund which allowed each trainee to borrow ten dollars and purchase tools. This was returned to the League when the trainee started work.

The Union Switch and Signal Company of Pittsburgh had 90 Blacks employed as moulders, helpers, assistants, firemen and truckers. According to the *World*, the company's plans were to "up grade" these men and hire additional Blacks. In addition, the Seneca Ammunition Depot, New York, had 250 Blacks or about 20 per cent of the whole staff engaged in construction work and many more were to be hired upon completion of the plant.\textsuperscript{28}

Not only did the newspapers report instances of increased hiring of Blacks but also those in which Blacks were promoted or upgraded as a result of the executive order. For example, the Pittsburgh *Courier* played up the fact that a Black man J. W. Pate, was appointed Supervisor of Service at a $36,000,000 government munition plant in Minnesota. Pate had previously been one of five Blacks employed as plant guards. His position was that of being in charge of 200 white and Black workers. It was believed that the position was the highest ever given a Black person at any defense plant during that time.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid.
In spite of the instances of Black employment and upgrading mentioned above, the results of the Executive Order fell far short of expectation. Blacks originally thought of the Order as the most significant document affecting them since the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation." They were disappointed when wide-spread discrimination continued in defiance of the order. 

29 "Munition Plant Head Names Negro Supervisor," Pittsburgh Courier, 1 November 1941, p. 5.

CHAPTER III

TREATMENT OF BLACKS IN THE ARMED FORCES

Shortly after the close of World War II, Dr. L. D. Reddick, an authority on the subject wrote that there were "certain considerations that seemed to characterize the so-called 'Negro policy' of the United States Army from the time of the American Revolution all the way down through World War II." These considerations were:

(1) that Blacks be used only when and where they are required by manpower shortages and by public pressures;
(2) that no Blacks be in a position of authority, but if they must be, they would be limited and would be over Black personnel only; (3) that Black soldiers be segregated not only from their non-Black fellow soldiers but also from non-Black civilians—especially women—at home and abroad; (4) that there be no Black heroes but if there must be awards granted to Black soldiers for extraordinary endeavor, these should be for preserving supplies and other military properties, for saving the lives of army personnel, especially of white officers—rather than for heroic performance, under fire, against the enemy.¹

With these considerations in mind, this chapter will concern itself with details and examples which will support Dr. Reddick's contention. In addition, news articles will be included to show the attitude Black newspapers took concerning the U. S. military policy toward Blacks.

**Enlistment and Training**

As the United States began to prepare itself for war, Blacks raised the question as to what considerations would be given them, both in the building up of a large fighting force and in the manufacture of the materials of modern warfare. When the Selective Service Act was passed in 1940, it was amended by a clause forbidding discrimination in the drafting and training of men. For a period of time, however, some draft boards rejected Blacks on the grounds that there was a lack of housing facilities for them in the camps. At the first signs of discrimination Blacks began to protest loudly.² In September, 1940 a group of outstanding Black leaders, including A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Walter White of the NAACP and T. Arnold Hill of the Urban League, submitted a seven-point program to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. They urged that all available reserve officers be used to train re-

cruits; that Black recruits be given the same training as whites; that existing units in the army accept officers and men on the basis of ability and not race; that specialized personnel, such as physicians, dentists, and nurses be integrated; that responsible Blacks be appointed to draft boards; that discrimination be abolished in the Navy and Air Forces; and, that competent Blacks be appointed as civilian assistants to the Secretaries of War and Navy.³

In October, 1940, President Roosevelt announced that Black military strength would be in proportion to the Black percentage of the total population; that Black groups would be organized in every branch of the service, combatant as well as noncombatant, that Blacks would have the opportunity to become officers and attend Officers Training Schools; and that Blacks would be trained as pilots, mechanics, and technical aviation specialists. However, Blacks and Whites would not be mingled in the same regiments because that would produce situations destructive to morale and detrimental to the preparation for national defense.⁴

The text of this policy was written in letter form and sent to all branches of the NAACP. White daily newspapers of October 9 and 10 carried a statement from the

³Ibid.
⁴Ibid.
White House saying that President Roosevelt had approved the policy of complete segregation in the army after conferring with Walter White, T. Arnold Hill, A. Philip Randolph, Secretary of the Navy Knox and assistant Secretary of War Patterson. These news stories gave clear implication that the three Black leaders approved the policy of segregating Blacks in the Army. As soon as the story appeared, the leaders sent a joint telegram of protest and repudiation to Roosevelt. The telegram expressed shock "that a President of the United States at a time of national peril should surrender so completely to enemies of democracy who would destroy national unity by advocating segregation."\(^5\)

In another article appearing in this same issue, the *Crisis* related the text of the policy and labeled it a "Jim Crow Plan."\(^6\) The policy narrowed down to: (1) no Blacks sent to West Point; (2) no Blacks accepted in the Citizens Military Training Camp; (3) very little, if any training for Black reserve officers; (4) restricted training for Blacks in the ROTC. The Crisis appealed to the public to write the President opposing segregation in the Army. Moreover, it asked the public to protest


vigorously against the misrepresentation of the leaders and the NAACP in the press story released by the White House October 9, 1940.\(^7\)

In order to quiet the furor raised by the Black press and the NAACP, some appointments and promotions of Blacks were instituted. Colonel Benjamin O. Davis was appointed the first Black Brigadier General in the country’s history, William H. Hastie was appointed the Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, and Colonel Campbell Johnson became an Executive Assistant to the Director of Selective Service. In addition, Senior R.O.T.C. units were added at many Black colleges.

However, these attempts at appeasement did not convince Blacks that the administration had made a significant change of policy with regard to them. Therefore, the Crisis, the NAACP and most of the Black press, while praising the signs of change within the Army which meant greater opportunities for Blacks, continued to attach the Army's segregation policy.\(^8\) For example, in 1942 the Norfolk Journal and Guide included information which revealed that Walter White of the NAACP, had appealed to the War Department to organize a volunteer division of the United States Army opened to men

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of any race, creed, color, or national origin. He felt that this division would serve as a tremendous lift to the morale of Blacks and have a tremendous psychological effect upon White Americans. A similar suggestion had been made by Claude A. Barnett, director of the Associated Negro Press, on December 8, 1941. The government, however, failed to act on either of the suggestions.9

Although the government retained its segregated pattern, it made changes in its draft procedures and officer procurement policies. Blacks were put on draft boards in more than a thousand towns and cities.10 As a result of Blacks sitting on draft boards, enlistees met far less discrimination than they had in World War I. However, discrimination and segregation in training facilities and opportunities for Blacks were still very much in evidence. An editorial in the Crisis protested that:

The United States Army's policy of segregation is weakening the fighting phases within and without the Army. Army officials would do well to, at the end of the first year of training and in the second month of war activity, consider from the viewpoint of the Negro citizen, this policy of segregation.11


The first implication of segregation is inferiority. The *Crisis* continued that this inescapable feeling of inferiority, and the shame and resentment of Black soldiers and civilians at the enforcement of this national policy upon them during a war against racial bigotry and barbarity were the underlying causes of all the headaches the war department had over Black soldiers during training in 1941. When Blacks reported to training camps they often found isolated stations, far from other soldiers; separate buses "for colored," separate candy and cigarette counters; separate theaters and Jim Crow "roosts" for them in regular theaters. They found that their behavior off post was supervised by white military police. Worst of all, Black troops found that the United States Army had meekly surrendered control over its Black troops to any white constable, sheriff, or mayor in Dixie who wanted to take over. In its conclusion, The *Crisis* stated that, "The 1942 Black resented and rebelled against 1842 regulations. These must be rooted out of the United States Army."\(^{12}\)

A tour of army camps made by P. L. Prattis, editor of the Pittsburgh Courier, corroborated much of the *Crisis*’s revelations about discrimination in army camps. Prattis reported that, at Camp Lee, Virginia, Black soldiers told

\(^{12}\text{Ibid.}\)
him that they had started at the center of the camp and had successively cleared up areas which were turned over to white troops while the Blacks were always kept in the woods. Prattis continued that these type conditions unquestionably lowered the Black soldiers' morale and effectiveness.13

Interesting confirmation of discrimination in various ways during the training period came from four World War II veterans interviewed by the writer. The first veteran, Mr. Leroy Jones, who was stationed at Camp Lee in 1942, concurred with Prattis' findings.14

Mr. Gerald Lee, World War II veteran, stated that officials at Camp Crowder, Missouri, placed Black personnel in one section of the camp and white in the other. They had never housed Black soldiers before and when he and other members of his company arrived, they used the same facilities as the whites—the Guest House, PX, and the service clubs; but after a period of time, army personnel set up a special barracks for Blacks and made the PX and other social facilities off limits to them.15


14Interview with Mr. Leroy Jones, veteran of World War II, Atlanta, Georgia, 25 November 1974.

15Interview with Mr. Gerald Lee, veteran of World War II, Atlanta, Georgia 8 July 1974.
Mr. William Phillip Shepard, Sr., a World War II veteran, also attested to the findings of newsman Prattis concerning the inferior facilities for Blacks at Camp Lee, Virginia. Mr. Shepard also contended that the Army provided segregated NCO clubs for Black soldiers, but at Camp Moultrie, Georgia, Blacks used the white "Rec" for dances and other social activities.16

Unlike the enlisted men, Black officers were trained in integrated camps where they ate, slept and were quartered with their white counterparts. Mixed reactions to this kind of integration was voiced. Many whites who were opposed attempted to play up any incident which suggested that many Blacks were also opposed to the integrated officer training camps. For example, the Pittsburgh Courier investigated a statement made over the Mutual Broadcasting System by newscaster Fulton Lewis, Jr., on October 20, 1941. According to the Courier, Lewis announced that:

A large group of the most responsible Black leaders in the country has appealed to President Roosevelt in a formal official letter opposing the present policy of the Army whereby Black officers are being trained in the same schools as white officers.17

16Interview with Mr. William Phillip Shepard, Sr., veteran of World War II, Mobile, Alabama, 3 June 1974.

17"Leaders Fight Separate Training for Officers," Pittsburgh Courier, 1 November 1941, p. 1.
The reaction of Blacks was immediate. On November 1, 1941 the Courier reported that 41 distinguished clergymen, editors, lawyers, business and professional men repudiated this appeal made to the President expressing opposition to integrated training for Black officers. 18

The NAACP called upon the White House and the War Department to reveal who the "so called responsible leaders" were. In answer to many inquiries on the possibility that the mixed officers training camps would be discontinued, the War Department declared that separate schools would be uneconomical and inefficient.

Our objective is based primarily on the fact that the Negro officer candidates are eligible from every branch of the Army and it would be decidedly uneconomical to attempt to gather in one school the material and instructor personnel necessary to give training in all these branches. 19

This policy of considering economics was not followed by the War Department's policy in establishing training for air cadets. The flying school for Blacks at Tuskegee was set up on July 19, 1941. The Pittsburgh Courier contended that the Tuskegee Air Base was established originally to give Blacks only token representation in the air corps. Since five hundred Blacks had already finished

18 Ibid.

the Civilian Pilot Training program and wanted to enlist into the Air Corps. Some had even been drafted into the Army while awaiting the call for air training. The Courier felt that this was demoralizing to young Blacks who wanted to serve. The most deplorable angle was the waste of public money involved at Tuskegee where only a small fraction of the facilities were being used. The waste was a by product of the War Department's policy of segregation.\textsuperscript{20}

On March 1, 1941, The Baltimore Afro-American included an article which reported that Earl Dickerson, a Chicago alderman, suggested to the Committee on Participation of Negroes in National Defense that Black Flying cadets should receive their elementary training at the same civilian schools in which whites received theirs. Mr. Dickerson criticized the fixing of quotas of Black men to be selected and trained under the Selective Service Act and the limitation of Black youths to one squadron in the Army Air Corps.\textsuperscript{21}

In a later article, August, 1942, The Baltimore Afro-American asked that the quota system and the segregated base at Tuskegee be abolished, and that Blacks be

\textsuperscript{20}"Claim Air Corps Bias Depriving United States of Airmen," Pittsburgh Courier, February 1942, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{21}"Chicago Alderman not Opposed to Base at Tuskegee, but Urges Equality in North for Cadets," Baltimore Afro-American, 1 March 1941, p. 3.
trained at all bases. The Afro-American also stated that according to the NAACP white applicants for air cadet training were kept waiting a maximum of ninety days. However, many Black applicants who had passed all tests for the Air Corps were so far down the list that they were inducted in the draft and forced to serve in other branches. It protested that, "at the Tuskegee segregated air base, men are trained only as ground crewmen and fighter pilots."^{22}

In an interview, July 4, 1974, Mr. Marion John Shepard, Sr., a veteran of the Tuskegee Training Program, contended that white air cadets were given elementary flying instructions in segregated schools in the United States and that in Mobile, Alabama, his home town, the school was formerly all white Murphy High School. Yet Blacks had to go to the segregated base at Tuskegee. However, Mr. Shepard added, "The training I received at Tuskegee was of the highest caliber." Asked if the government made any special promises to recruits about special military positions after training, Mr. Shepard said that as far as he could remember, it did not.^{23}


^{23}Interview with Mr. Marion John Shepard, Sr., Mobile, Alabama, 4 July 1974.
The establishment of the segregated Air Base at Tuskegee against the advice of William H. Hastie, Black Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, was responsible for his resignation from the post. The Baltimore *Afro-American* in a eye-catching headline and first page story related that "Discrimination in the Air Forces Caused Dr. Hastie to Resign from the War Department." It reported that Dr. Hastie resigned because of reactionary policies and discriminatory practices affecting Black servicemen in the Air Corps. The paper also stated that Hastie said that the Army Air Force was reluctant to accept Black men and that the Jim Crow flying field at Tuskegee was set up over his objections, and the segregated officer candidate school at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, without his knowledge. Before stepping down, Hastie counselled Black soldiers to "square their shoulders and do their best--confident that millions of Americans will never cease fighting to remove every racial barrier and humiliating practices now confronting them."24

The segregational policies of the Navy was another bone of contention continuously picked at by Black leaders and the Black press. The Navy proposed a plan by which Black women were to be admitted and trained on a segregated basis. Protest from Blacks was loud and urgent. The

Atlanta Daily World reported that Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority's non-Partisan Council on Black Affairs launched a campaign in 1943 to head off the Navy's plan. The protests were lodged with President Roosevelt and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox by the Council of Public Affairs of the Sorority. Two days later, the World reported Walter White's protest against the Navy's plan. White telegraphed Knox asking that "any plan which provided for separate training for Black auxiliaries be disapproved." White's statement came after a group of Black women, A.K.A.'s had quietly conferred with Commander Mildred McAfee of the WAVES on the subject of permitting Black women to enter the Navy auxiliary and on which occasion they were reported to have shown unanimous agreement that a segregated basis would be undesirable.

Incidents of Prejudices in the Armed Forces

Black soldiers met with prejudices and discrimination in many aspects of their Army life—in training as well as in assignment to combat duty. During World War II Blacks were largely concentrated in the South for training. While these camps were not totally Black, the attitudes


of the communities were usually hostile. Several unpleasant incidents occurred, particularly in or around these camps. However, Blacks expected this treatment in the South where they had traditionally been the targets of discrimination. Some Blacks were trained in the West and North and could not understand their treatment in these communities near the camps. For example, The Crisis commented on this treatment of Black soldiers pointing out that prejudice was so rampant in the service that it infiltrated into western camps and towns. Jim Crow signs were seen in Portland, Oregon; Denver, Colorado; and Ogden, Utah. On post there were complaints about Black soldiers being forced into galleries or the back rows of theaters. Another complaint was against some of the Southern white officers who brought their small town Dixie oppression into the Army.

The Baltimore Afro-American recounts charges made by the NAACP in August, 1942, that some USO workers discriminated against Black soldiers aboard troop trains. Investigation showed that women canteen workers ignored a train load of Black soldiers until the intervention of a Troy, New York, AME Zion Church, whereupon one basket of food and smokes were made available to the soldiers.

27 Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, p. 419.
29 "Discrimination Charged to Troy, New York; USO Workers," Baltimore Afro American, 29 August 1942, p. 11.
There were also cases of discrimination against Blacks in some countries abroad, often instigated by United States Army Policies. In September, 1942, the Baltimore Afro-American reported that American Military Chiefs who feared trouble in London had requested British officials to bar Black troops from saloons, bars and certain dance halls. Although the officials agreed to carry out the request, they refused to order police to enforce the ban. One storekeeper said:

Black men are in England to fight for freedom, their own as well as the freedom of mankind. To erect bars against them savous of what Hitler is doing.\(^{30}\)

The Afro-American reported that on August 18, 1945, a group of white soldiers attached several Black soldiers near Piccadilly Circus, London, England. Although the reason for the outbreak was not made known, one report was that the whites were enraged by the sight of two Black soldiers with two white girls. During the street fighting several Black GI's who had taken refuge in a service club reportedly were dragged out and beaten. One was nearly "lynched" as the attackers beat him about the head. According to the Afro-American, Londoners expressed shock upon learning that the white soldiers who helped defeat Hitler, expressing opposition to his

theories and practices were using the same techniques against the Black men who fought with them. 31

Articles in Black newspapers and magazines bore witness to the fact that Black soldiers who fought for four freedoms abroad did not enjoy them on the home-front or in the service. Segregated and discriminated in training, organized into segregated units, encountering racial prejudice abroad, the Black soldier indeed had a right to question the policy of the United States Army.

CONCLUSION

The initial treatment of Blacks in World War II was very similar to that of World War I. However, Blacks had a stronger voice of protest in World War II and succeeded in exerting more pressure for changes. The Black press, Black leaders and the various Black national organizations joined in the effort to force larger employment and better treatment of Blacks. Two of the most determined and sustained fights waged by the Black press during World War II were against discrimination and segregation of Blacks in employment and in the military services of the United States. Because Black newspapers continually headlined stories of racial injustices in the armed forces, some white southern newspapermen and congressmen appealed to President Roosevelt to either censor them or to bring charges of sedition against them. They also proposed that the government should make it difficult for militant Black newspapers to buy newsprint and paper. They charged the Black press with being against the war effort. However, the Black press pointed out to these critics that Black newspapers were one hundred per cent behind the war, but that they were still concerned with the discriminatory practices
sanctioned by the American government against Blacks. Moreover, the Black papers showed their patriotism by including articles like the Pittsburgh Courier's Double "V" for Victory both on the home front and abroad. Another act of patriotism was the "Buy-a-Bond" campaigns waged by most of the Black publications to aid the war effort.

Through pressure exerted by Black organizations, and the press, Blacks received more advantages in war services than they had enjoyed during World War I. Black officers were trained together with white men. Blacks served in the navy; there were 28 Black naval officers. Black women were admitted to the navy and into the Woman's Army Corps. However, despite all these changes, World War II caused no fundamental alterations in the inherited patterns of Southern life. Southerners resisted with violence, or threats of violence, any interference with their customary racial standards. They opposed successfully all attempts of Blacks to assume political power and prevented the destruction of race distinctions both in the armed forces and war industries. The contacts of war did not stifle sectional prejudices.

Thus, Black life during World War II was fraught with the same racial tensions as were found in World War I. Institutionalized patterns of segregation and discrimination were still the basic racial policy of the United States Army, Navy, Marine and Air Corps.
More study needs to be undertaken concerning many factors of Black participation in World War II as seen through the eyes of the Black press and related sources. Further examination of other Black papers like the Chicago Defender, the Amsterdam News and the California Eagle and of periodicals such as Opportunity, the official publication of the Urban League would round-out this study. An exploration of the public or private papers of some of the Black leaders during this period and of the files of organizations and agencies like the NAACP and the Urban League would add another dimension to the research.
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