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The Death Knell for Jim Crow: How African-American Soldiers’ Experiences Abroad Impacted the Modern Civil Rights Movement

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Introduction
In an enlisted officers’ club in Ashberg, Bavaria, African-American GIs were dancing the night away with lovely white European women. While the African-American officers twirled their girls around the dance floor as Jazz music played, five white officers stood in a corner fuming. The white officers’ frustration was a result of African Americans stepping out of their place and having the audacity to dance with white women, for where most of the men came from, the Southern United States, such a thing was against societal custom, and in many places the law. One of these white officers was so infuriated he heaved his beer bottle into the crowd of dancing interracial couples as he and his buddies left. The bottle shattered and disrupted the couples’ dancing. Outraged at the disrespectful and brazen act by the white officer, several African-American soldiers decided something must be done. The African-American soldiers quickly armed themselves with their .30 caliber carbines and hunted down the group of white officers. They quickly found the white officers and an altercation ensued leaving Floyd D. Hudson, the officer who threw the bottle into the crowd, fatally shot and his four companions wounded. The African-American soldiers responsible for carrying out the vindictive attack were court martialed and sentenced to death.¹

Though a radical incident, this altercation between African-American and white soldiers in Bavaria demonstrates many of the trends that occurred during and after the war in Europe, and their effect on African Americans. In Europe African-American soldiers were provided new outlets for freedom, which they did not possess within the United States, such as dancing with white women. These new freedoms angered and frustrated whites in the military, particularly those who were from the South, as their ideological worldview was being challenged and deconstructed before their eyes. Since no codified legal systems, such as Jim Crow, existed in

¹ “Friendships with Frauliens Result in Racial Tensions,” Ebony, October 1946, 7.
Europe, white Americans would have to transport the patterns of Jim Crow into European society by various ways, including throwing beer bottles at African-Americans dancing with white women. These new freedoms experienced by African Americans created a new consciousness, giving them the belief that they could stand up and confront the whites who attempted to restrain their newly found freedoms. The use of force by the African-American soldiers demonstrates the new found understanding of autonomy and freedom, and the shift in mentality for African Americans that they will fight, whether in true physical altercations or in other ways, to avoid being oppressed again. Moreover, African-American soldiers’ experiences of new freedoms and opportunities overseas during the Second World War and the occupation of Europe created a new consciousness for African-American soldiers to fight for equal rights on their return home to the United States.

African-American Soldiers and the Second World War

With America’s entrance into the Second World War in 1941 following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, African Americans were faced with a dilemma: to fight or not to fight. The violence and discrimination in the United States directed towards African Americans following their return from fighting in the First World War, made many African Americans hesitant to want to join the American war effort. According to President Roosevelt and wartime propaganda American involvement in the war was to fight for freedom and Democracy. To many African Americans this idea of fighting seemed antithetical, as the United

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States itself did not fulfill the ideas of freedom and democracy to all of its citizens. Many African Americans seemed to wonder “what [are] we fighting for?” as they were recruited and drafted to join the American military. Others like African-American journalist J. Saunders Redding argued that the war was once again an opportunity to fight in the internal war he saw in America between African Americans and the racial structure of white supremacy. The war against the Axis powers, in Redding’s eyes, was the only way to achieve the freedoms that African Americans had been longing for. This idea was more broadly discussed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), in their Double V campaign, which called for victory abroad and victory at home.

The idea of African Americans using their war experience and service to their nation to gain rights pushed by the Double V campaign was more of a domestic movement and one of African-American leadership, than international movement taken on by African-American soldiers. While African-American leaders and intellectuals, such as W.E.B. DuBois, argued for a dual campaign for democracy in African-American newspapers, such as the *Pittsburg Courier*, the soldiers did not have the same goal when departing for war service. The focus of many of these troops was just to stay alive and make it back home to the United States following the war. Spencer Moore, an African-American soldier from New Jersey, declared that he was just “into having a good time” and wanted “to keep from getting killed.” There were many African-

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4 Walter Patrice Interview, German Historical Institute, The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany, 2010.
8 Spencer Moore Interview, “No Time for Civil Rights,” German Historical Institute, The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany, 1998, 3.
American soldiers, such as Moore, who did not intend on fighting a battle for freedoms they were denied in the United States when they entered the military. Instead, entering the segregated United States military was not an issue many African-American enlistees wrestled with, as they did not even envision a situation that was different.  

9 African-Americans also did not see a purpose or way to challenge the racial standards of the United States, as “some things you accepted [as] fact, because [that was] the way it's always been.”  

10 However, the sentiment that the war would not change anything and that African Americans did not have the power to alter their situation in America would change as the African-American soldiers experienced the liberation they would find in European society.

The Second World War not only brought African-American soldiers into a fight for freedom and democracy, but it also brought African Americans from across the United States together to experience Southern racism and segregation together. As the Second World War started and African-American men volunteered and were drafted into the armed forces, they entered into segregated units similarly to the Great War, even though President Roosevelt had desegregated the American defense industry in 1941.  

11 The segregated units were largely led by white commanding officers, and were usually designed to relegate African-American soldiers to manual labor. The segregated units that African Americans served in, such as the 92nd Infantry unit, were comprised of men from both the North and South. These regionally integrated units acted as educational factors and unifiers for the African-American soldiers as men from the North were exposed to the rampant racism in the South for the first time in many of their lives.


Many of the military bases training soldiers before they left to head overseas were in the Jim Crow South; this forced African-American soldiers from the North to begin to confront segregation on their journey to the military base. A major form of transportation for soldiers was by way of train, and African Americans, once they reached segregated areas, were forced into the “Jim Crow car” which sat behind the train’s engine. The Jim Crow car’s location caused the temperature in the car to be very warm as they were right behind the coal-burning firebox and the car was not equipped with air-conditioning. In addition African-American soldiers had to deal with the smell and soot produced from the burning coal of the engine room, creating many unpleasant journeys.\(^{13}\) African-American soldiers also faced the issue of being under control of white officers, most of whom were from the South. These officers often treated African-American soldiers “like [they] were dogs,” using derogatory language, continually enforcing ideas of segregation, and inflicting severe punishment on troops for minor infractions.\(^{14}\) These common experiences of racism would create a shared experience of discrimination among African-American soldiers.

In preparation for invasion of mainland Europe, American troops were amassed in England, allowing African-American soldiers to experience months of society free from legal segregation. With the entrance of the United States into the Second World War, President Roosevelt decided to send American troops to be stationed in Europe in early 1942 as part of Operation Bolero. Roosevelt, however, did not send African-American soldier to Britain until June of 1942 due to uncertainties about how troops of both races would interact in a society

\(^{13}\) Patrice Interview, 2010.; Moore, “No Time for Civil Rights,” 2.
\(^{14}\) Reuben Horner Interview, “Fighting against my White Superior,” German Historical Institute, The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany, 1998, 3.
without racial strictures. With pressure from Josef Stalin to open a Western front in France by the British and American forces, the United States began to amass an even greater number of American troops in England to stage a potential invasion of Europe. As Americans arrived in Europe, to the great excitement of African-American soldiers and the dismay of white soldiers, they realized of the absence of a codified legal system akin to Jim Crow to curtail African-American soldiers in England. This realization was harrowing to white soldiers from the South, as their traditional social order would be challenged by African-American soldiers, who were able to step out of their set societal place. African-Americans saw this as an opportunity to live for a little while without the strictures of race placed on them within the United States. White American soldiers from the South, though, attempted to impose their racial beliefs on the British.

White Americans stationed in England attempted to enforce ideas of Jim Crow on the English population, in order to restrict the freedoms African Americans were allowed. When arriving in England the fear of African-American soldiers being able to live freely and interact equally with whites, especially white women, horrified Southern soldiers. In attempts to prevent African Americans from enjoying these freedoms white soldiers created the African-American camps on the outskirts of town in run down areas. In addition to relegating African Americans to camps located away from the cities large population centers, white officers also established curfews for African-American soldiers, limiting the amount of freedom they had. Along with formal actions to enforce Jim Crow white American soldiers also used informal ways

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16 Smith, *Jim Crow and John Bull*, 43.
such as telling stories to the English that African Americans had tails. The intent was to dehumanize the African-American soldiers in hopes that the British would refuse to associate with them. The failure of these attempts to enforce Jim Crow in England led white American soldiers to act more brazenly, by using force to try and curtail African Americans freedoms. While out in pubs and other public establishments, white American soldiers would physically assault African Americans who were stepping out of their place by interacting with white women. Often this took the form of white soldiers bashing a beer bottle on top of the head of an African American creating small scuffles; these violent attempts to enforce Jim Crow also found little success. Ultimately, the attempts by white American soldiers to enforce Jim Crow in England failed, and in many ways these attempts allowed for greater freedoms for African Americans as the British resented white Americans attempts to instill the racial policies of Jim Crow.

The British population largely supported African-American soldiers and their new freedoms, despite their frustration with American troops in general. The massive buildup of troops in Britain by the United States led to tensions between British citizen and white American soldiers. The British population believed that white American GIs were “oversexed, over paid, and over here,” and were not happy with their presence in England. Though the British despised the white American troops for being loud and obnoxious, they despised white Americans even more due to them bringing the ideas of Jim Crow with them to Britain. To many British they could not understand how a country espousing freedom and democracy, could discriminate against and oppress a group of its own citizens. The British on the arrival of

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20 Patrice Interview, 2010.
African-American troops to England welcomed them warmly and treated them with respect and dignity.\textsuperscript{22} Many African-Americans developed strong relations with the British population, and even with British soldiers. In the pubs of Britain, English bartenders would often save the best whiskey for African-American soldiers, denying it to their white counterparts.\textsuperscript{23} The British even created certain pubs for “British civilians and U.S.A. Negro forces only,” and affectionately referred to African-American soldiers as “Black Yanks.”\textsuperscript{24} In the city of Manchester, British citizens were extremely friendly to African-Americans and actively resisted white American officers’ attempts to establish patterns of Jim Crow within the city, to the extent that several citizens, including a woman, were attacked by mobs of white Southern officers.\textsuperscript{25} The British also openly resisted the derogatory language used towards African-American soldiers by white Americans, confronting whites who verbally assaulted African Americans.\textsuperscript{26} These actions by the British in actively defending African-American soldiers and resisting the patterns of racism pushed by white Americans had a strong effect on the African Americans stationed there. The friendliness and willingness of the English to advocate for the African-American troops gave African Americans hope, as well as a burning desire to have the same treatment in the United States.

In addition to the friendly treatment by the British in response to the white American push for segregation, African Americans stationed in England during the war had expanded social freedoms. In the Southern United States African-American men were not allowed to

\textsuperscript{22} Ottley, “August 14, 1944,” 77; Lea M. Crawley Interview, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archive of World War II, November 3, 1994, 26.
\textsuperscript{23} Ottley, “August 31, 1944,” 97.
\textsuperscript{26} Moore, “No Time to Think About Civil Rights,” 8.
interact with white women; if one did he faced the potential for a violent response by whites. While stationed in the South prior to going overseas African-American soldiers witnessed several instances where African-American men were violently attacked by white soldiers, and in some cases killed for just saying hi to white women. In England, however, African-American men were able to enter into a new social order, one in which they could not only have an interaction with a white woman, but could also enter into a sexual relationship with her In England, American troops went to pubs where they would meet many young British women, who were looking for companionship. African-American men were especially looked on favorably by English women, as they were seen as more fun, humble, and better lovers. African-American men stationed in England were able to interact and dance with the white women in the pubs largely free from scorn, something that had been impossible to do in the United States. These soldiers also frequently developed strong emotional and sexual relationships with the white women of England. These new sexual relationships were an even greater freedom to African-Americans as in the South interracial relationships, especially sexual relationships, were illegal. Many of these African American-British women relationship resulted in pregnancies, leading to a large population boom of “brown babies” during the war years.

In addition to the social-sexual freedom found in England with relationships with white women, African-Americans also experienced developing relationships with the white communities they lived within. Lawrence Johnson, an African-American soldier stationed in South Molten, England, experienced the development of an “easy and friendly” relationship

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between the British and African-American soldiers.\(^{31}\) In South Molten the community and soldiers created a Christmas party to celebrate the holidays together and enjoy each other’s company; from this event Johnson formed many good friendships. In addition to the community Christmas party Johnson also was invited by a British family to their home on New Years to meet their daughter. Johnson enjoyed his time with the family and developed a strong relationship with them.\(^{32}\) In much the same situation soldiers in Manchester wanted to return the hospitality given to them by the warm welcoming they received and therefore, organized a Christmas party for the children of the town. The soldiers provided gifts for the children consisting of chocolate and gum, as well as played music and taught the children and town people how to dance.\(^{33}\) For many this social interaction was new and greatly cherished, as they were seen as equal human beings deserving respect and kindness.

As American troops began their invasion of Europe and began to liberate European citizens, African Americans were once again presented with various experiences of new freedoms devoid of the prejudices that dominated American society. The movement into Europe of American forces was met with stiff and hard fought resistance by German troops starting in the Italian campaign and continuing all the way till the fall of Berlin. The increased intensity of fighting Europe led to a breakdown in the Jim Crow system that the army had tried to maintain while in England. The chaos and brutality of war led to African-American soldiers fighting and dying next to white soldiers as they slowly and methodically pushed the Axis forces back towards Berlin.\(^{34}\) In these scenarios of integrated fighting prejudices seemed to melt away and

\(^{31}\) Lawrence Johnson Interview, “A Lot of Pleasure in Berlin,” German Historical Institute, The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany, 1998, 3.


\(^{33}\) Ottley, “September 2, 1944,” 105.

whites began to see their African-American counterparts as humans and in many ways equals. The walls of segregation continued to fall as whites and African Americans were forced to sleep side by side throughout the campaigns due to Jim Crow inability to operate in the field, bringing the men closer together and forcing whites to confront the humanity of the African Americans that slept and fought next to them.\textsuperscript{35} As African Americans, along with their white counterparts, moved further into Europe liberating Europeans, they were met with joy and warm embraces. In France African-American soldiers settled into life and began to develop relationships with the locals, especially the French women.\textsuperscript{36} One African-American soldier who did so was Medgar Evers. Evers, while stationed in Paris, began a romantic relationship with a local girl and developed a close relationship with her family.\textsuperscript{37} African Americans, like Evers, enjoyed the even greater freedoms they had in France than in England as Jim Crow did not transfer there allowing them total freedom from racial discrimination. African-American soldiers in other European countries also experienced the new freedom of interacting socially with white women. Fred Hurns, a medic in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Army Division, while stationed in Liege, Belgium attended a dance at a Red Cross Club established for the soldiers to enjoy the company of women on their time off. Fred and his friends danced with local white ladies, but were scorned by white officers for stepping out of their place. Not wanting to cause an incident the men reluctantly stopped dancing and left. A few nights later they attended a different establishment and once again began to dance with white women, but this time no one interfered.\textsuperscript{38} These experiences of freedom and new opportunities free from racial discrimination that soldiers had during the Second World War


\textsuperscript{36} Ottley, “July 25, 1944,” 57.


\textsuperscript{38} Hurns, “Young Ladies, Coffee and Donuts,” 6.
in England and other countries would have a profound impact on them once they returned to the United States.

As the European Theater in the Second World War came to a close, American troops flooded into Germany; with this African Americans were prepared to encounter what was to be the most racist society in the world.\(^\text{39}\) What African-American soldiers encountered when they entered Germany, however, was quite different. On the arrival of African-American troops into Germany, Germans cheerfully welcomed these soldiers into their town and communities.\(^\text{40}\) African American troops were treated as heroes who deserved the utmost respect. Much like in England, African-American soldiers were more welcomed by German citizens than white American soldiers.\(^\text{41}\) This was a great shock to the African-American men, who had prepared to face the venomous racism said to be practiced by Germans, and were instead warmly greeted. The immediate acceptance of the African-American soldiers created a dissonance in the soldiers’ mind as they were being treated better by the so called most racist people on earth who were undemocratic and evil, than they were by white Americans abroad and at home where freedom and democracy were supposed to be so highly valued. The warm welcoming of African-American soldiers in Germany, could have been the Germans acting timid since they were a conquered people, but more likely, because of the long enduring trend of African-American soldiers and white German relationships, it was that the German people truly accepted the African-American soldiers as equals.


\(^{41}\) “Germany Meets the Negro Soldier,” 5.
African Americans and the Occupation

With the end of the Second World War the United States and other Allied nations created four spheres of occupation in Germany and in the city of Berlin to facilitate the restructuring of German society in the postwar years. In each sphere, the occupying power developed its own individual policies governing the area it controlled. To enforce the policies created in a respective zone the occupying countries stationed military forces to ensure stability and compliance. In the American zone the focus of the occupation was on four key components: demilitarization, deindustrialization, denazification, and democratization. These four components of occupation were to ensure Germany never started a third World War. At the beginning of the occupation of Germany the American military was still a segregated entity and consisted of 350,000 soldiers, of which 25,000 were African American. Within the occupied zones these 25,000 African-American soldiers along with others that would be sent to Germany throughout the occupation once again were provided with many new opportunities and freedoms, much like they had possessed in the Second World War.

African-American soldiers stationed in Germany during the occupation experienced treatment as equal humans by German citizens which created a desire to be seen as equals by all. African Americans stationed in Germany quickly realized the German people were not as they described during the war; instead, the people of Germany were largely very kind and welcoming. Many of the African Americans stationed in Germany quickly realized that they were “finding more friendship, more respect, and more equality than they would back home—either in Dixie or

43 Höhn and Klimke, A Breath of Freedom, 40; Fehrenbach, Race After Hitler, 9.
on Broadway."45 African Americans were able to freely engage in discussion with both male and female German citizens in public, as well as in private. In Mariendorf, Germany Lawrence Johnson encountered a white woman struggling with her groceries and asked if she needed help carrying them; she gladly accepted his assistance and the two walked and conversed on the way to her apartment. Once they arrived at her apartment he was invited in to meet her mother and have dinner; Johnson ended up staying with the two for several hours discussing their life stories. When he went to leave it was so dark he had to stop a pair of German men and ask for directions back to his base; the men kindly gave him directions and wished him a goodnight.46 The chance for Johnson to have these opportunities to accompany a white woman, and then be invited to dinner with her family, as well as approach two white men without fear or apprehension signifies the dramatic differences between the sets of equality in Germany and the United States. In the German capital of Berlin African-American GIs believed that they were experiencing truer democracy than they had in the United States’ South.47 Part of this democracy experienced by African Americans was the respect given to them by Germans to allow them to more freely and not be termed with derogatory language, such as being called “niggers”; instead African Americans were seen as “like-able, good natured, and humble.”48 These expressions of kindness and feelings of being treated better by in Germany would have a powerful impact on African Americans.

In addition to the experiences of being treated with respect and feeling of greater liberty in Germany, African-American soldiers, like their comrades during the war, possessed a social

45 “Germany Meets the Negro Soldier,” 5.
48 Milton and Charlotte Johnson Interview, German Historical Institute, The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany, 2010; “Germany Meets the Negro Soldier,” 5.
and sexual freedom due to the ability to associate with white women. African-American soldiers in Germany frequently accompanied white “frauleins” to dance clubs and bars, in which they socialized together as friends, as well as relational companions.⁴⁹ In Germany bars were created by German businessmen that facilitated this interaction allowing only African-American service officers and white German women to enter the establishment.⁵⁰ In addition African-American soldiers and their frauliens would often go around Germany and spend their time off duty relaxing and going to places such as the beach. African Americans were often serenaded by their fraulien gals with a popular German song titled “Little Girl, If You Love a Black American,” in which the women are told to love and kiss their black American forever.⁵¹ The development of these interracial relationships at first were built on the self-interests of the German women, but largely often became strong romantic relationships.⁵² The development of such relationships led to a many “brown babies” being born in Germany during the years of the American occupation. In addition to having a large number of interracial children being born, there were some African-American soldiers, such as Milton Johnson, who ended up marrying white German women. Johnson met and fell in love with his wife Charlotte while stationed in Europe, and they decided they wanted to be married. The process was a long arduous one due to race laws in America, but the two after four separate ceremonies were able to be married.⁵³ Instances similar Johnson’s were unheard of in the Southern United States and the ability to not only have a romantic and


⁵⁰ “Germany Meets the New Negro,” 5.

⁵¹ “Song of Girls and GIs, 11.


⁵³ Johnson, 2010.
sexual relationship with white women, but a marriage with one was monumental for African-American soldiers.54 The black press reporting on these experiences by African Americans abroad in Germany led to a large number of African Americans volunteering and requesting to be sent to Germany. This rise in applications led to African-American soldiers constituting sixteen percent of American forces stationed abroad.55 The large influx in African Americans desiring to go and being stationed in Germany demonstrates the transformative experiences that Germany offered African-American soldiers.

The freedoms found by African Americans in Germany were highly criticized by white American soldiers, especially those from the South, much like in England; therefore they attempted to transport Jim Crow to German society. White American soldiers entering occupied Germany were very frustrated at the freedoms their African-American counterparts held, and wanted to try and curb the freedoms provided to African Americans, as African Americans had “become men and would no longer be treated as boys.”56 In order to prevent the development of relations between white Germans and African Americans, the white soldiers who were part of the democratization efforts in Germany attempted to implement ideas of African-American racial inferiority through “anti-Negro propaganda,” that were similar to those espoused by Hitler, in the minds of German citizens.57 These attempts to racialize the German population and build on ideas of white supremacy established by Hitler, were largely rejected by many Germans.58 There were some Germans though, who did begin to accept this racial doctrine and began to create all-white establishments, barring African-American soldiers from entering their establishments.59

54 Schroer, Recasting Race, 133.
56 Höhn and Klimke, A Breath of Freedom, 32.
59 Höhn and Klimke, A Breath of Freedom, 58.
White American soldiers not only used propaganda to restrain African Americans, but also violence. Occurrences such as the incident in Bavaria, with white soldiers heaving beer bottles at African-American soldiers dancing with white women were strategies used by many white officers.\(^{60}\)

In addition to attempting to instill a culture of Jim Crow in Germany society, despite Harry Truman’s Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, which desegregated the United States military, the American military continued policies of segregation in Germany until 1952.\(^ {61}\) The refusal of the top military brass military in Germany was largely due to the desire to restrict the potential freedoms held by African Americans, and keep the racial status of African-American soldiers unequal to avoid issues when they returned home to the United States. The ultimate integration of troops in Germany did not occur until April of 1952 under direct order from President Harry Truman.\(^ {62}\) The integration occurred rapidly once the final direct order reached the troops, but the desire to keep American troops in Germany segregated almost until the end of the American occupation displays the attempts of the white American soldiers to limit the freedoms of African-American soldiers.\(^ {63}\) These attempts however, to prevent African-Americans from having an expanse in freedoms largely failed and African-American soldiers were able to form a new identity and consciousness.

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\(^{60}\) “Friendships with Frauliens Result in Racial Tensions,” 9.


The Development of a New Consciousness and the Return Home

The new freedoms experienced by African-American soldiers in both the Second World War and the Occupation led to a development of a new identity and consciousness for African-American soldiers. African Americans serving abroad were met with equality and freedom for the first time in many of their lives, and this equality and freedom provided African Americans with a tangible feeling that they desired to have all the time.64 African Americans discovered “in Europe the racial bigotry [was] not as great as it [was] in the United States,” demonstrating the extent of American discrimination and oppression.65 In addition to recognizing the large gap in equality and freedoms between the United States and Europe based on racist ideas, the African-American soldiers, also developed an understanding that their economic status could be improved as African-American soldiers abroad were paid tremendously better than any other job they could achieve at home in the United States.66 African Americans realized that it was “much easier to function in Europe than at home,” as they could move freely and begin relationships with people regardless of their race.67 African-Americans also saw the importance of being able to possess and carry weapons, as it made them feel like equals and that segregation would soon fall.68 One African-American soldier stationed abroad in a letter to the NAACP described his development of consciousness saying he was “taught to kill, to suffer, to die for something he believes in, and he will live by these rules to gain his personal rights” on return to the United States.69 The experiences abroad for African-American soldiers fueled the development of an

autonomous identity that was able to advocate for oneself and insist upon equality within the United States.

This realization that the United States fell so far short of what it preached was an education for many of these African-American soldiers in what was true freedom and equality felt and looked like. The United States government conducted an investigation on the effects of African-American involvement in the war effort in 1946. The report issued after the study stated that it was important to recognize the effects of “the collateral education gained by every Negro man and woman during the war years.”

Citing that “the imprints of travel of bettered living and health conditions, plus the increased financial resources, have left a mental stamp which will persist and continue to become more articulate.” The acknowledgement of the development of the education received by African Americans abroad was not only recognized by the American government, but also African Americans in the United States. *Ebony Magazine* in 1947,

described African-American veterans as earning and education and being hungry for knowledge and were looking to take advantage of every opportunity provided to them. The recognition of the education received and new consciousness developed by African-American soldiers abroad affirms these notions and helps explain the tensions on the African Americans’ return to the United States.

When African-American soldiers returned home with this newly developed consciousness and identity that demanded equality and freedom, they were severely disappointed by the tightening of racial constraints and defense of Jim Crow in the South. The American

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71 President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, “Circular NO. 24,” 4.

South as American soldiers came home from service remained a segregated society and lashed out, similarly to the soldiers return after the Great War, with violence and a determination to keep African Americans in their “place.”  

African-American veterans faced vehement racism as they returned home as they were forced once again to use separate facilities than whites and were treated poorly. Following the return of soldiers there was an increase in violence against “uppity” African Americans who wore their military uniforms in public or rejected white authority. African-American soldiers once again had to fear the threat of being lynched by white mobs, if they were not cautious in the South. The string of violence against African-American servicemen was also displayed in the white mob attack of Isaac Woodard after he was pulled off of a Greyhound bus in Aiken, South Carolina, by local police officers after refusing to be treated as a man, resulting in him being blinded. The police and citizens in Aiken responsible for attacking Woodard were found not guilty of any crime, as Woodard’s actions were put on trial. The brutality of the attack on Woodard was also displayed in several other cases of African Americans being attacked by white mobs. With newly developed consciousness and beliefs in their own advocacy African-American soldiers “were disgusted at what they saw” and some decided to stay in Europe or leave the United States for Europe where equality already existed, while others took it upon themselves to resist the racial ideas of white Americans being put on them again.

77 “Heroes find Peacetime Battle Rougher than War,” Ebony, January 1, 1947, 10.
The freedoms and equality found in Europe were greatly cherished by African Americans, and many did not want to return to the old way of life in the United States. Some African-American soldiers believed that they could never achieve the same type of equality they possessed in Europe in the United States and so they decided that once their time of service was up to remain in Germany. The men that decided to stay not only enjoyed the freedom of not being under the boot of Jim Crow, but also being able to sustain their relationship with their German lovers and create stable families.  

There were other African-American soldiers who did return briefly to the United States, but after seeing the lack of changes in American society decided to return to Europe. Milton Johnson, along with his German wife Charlotte, was one of these soldiers as he requested redeployment to Europe as he believed he would never be treated equally while living in the United States. Similarly, Hugh Marius and Ave DeKnight, friends who served together in World War II, decided to return to Paris, France a city which “they helped free to find equality and freedom they could not win at home.” These soldiers return to Europe was influenced by their desire to have freedom and equality, along with their strong belief that it could not be obtained at home in the United States.

The new consciousness of African-American soldiers and a refusal to be put back in the racial caste system of America led individuals to resist segregation on a personal and united level. The new consciousness developed by African Americans gave them the personal conviction to stand up to white authority that attempted to restrain their newly found freedoms. African-American veterans who had fought the Axis powers and had helped to democratize a nation believed that the new enemies they had a duty to fight were “bigotry, unemployment, and

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African Americans believed that “the battle [would] be over only when the world [was] free of hate and war, when black men in America [could] raise their heads proudly and truly say, ‘I am an American’.”

This belief was emulated as African-American soldiers stood up to white authority figures to make them recognize the equality between the two races. Spencer Moore on return home to the United States was awarded two medals of Honor, but when he returned to the South he was pushed to return to his place of second class citizenry. Moore one day in McClean, Alabama, was asked to move to the back of the bus, but instead of complying Moore responded, “I don't have to get in the back for nobody.”

In a similar situation, Felix Goodwin, an officer of a black battalion in Germany during the occupation, was arriving into his new base in Louisiana and wanted to visit the NCO club. Upon arrival to the club he was told he had to attend the “colored NCO club.” Goodwin with his newly found consciousness declared, “I’m an officer and I will not go to any back rooms. I expect to be served.” While African-American soldiers like Moore and Goodwin refused to be treated differently and demanded freedom, others such as Harold Montgomery used the threat of violence to make their claim for rights. On a military base in the South, Montgomery was confronted by a commander requesting for the soldiers to be seated by race. Angered that his equality was trying to be usurped Montgomery told the captain that if he made the wrong decision and enforced segregated seating, Montgomery would “fight [him] with the same determination [he] fought the enemy on the field of combat.”

Montgomery’s mentality was one echoed by many soldiers, like the ones in Bavaria, who after experiencing equality abroad found it necessary to physically fight “bitterly

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81 “Heroes find Peacetime Battle Rougher than War,” 1947.
82 “The Negro Veteran Tests America,” 40.
84 Felix Goodwin Interview, “I Didn't Care Whether Their Daddy was the Head of the Ku Klux Klan,” German Historical Institute, The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany, 1998, 7.
85 Montgomery, “Integration by Five O’clock,” 5.
against the attempts to put [them] back “in their place.” These acts by individuals to claim the
rights and freedoms that they felt they deserved came directly from the awakening of their
consciousness by their experiences abroad.

In addition to African-American soldiers acting on individual levels to secure the
freedoms they desired, African Americans joined together to attain these rights. On return to the
United States some African-American soldiers organized the United Negro and Allied Veterans
Association (UNV) to “beat back the tide of reaction in Dixie” and “stay in their place, which
[was] as full-fledged, first-class American citizens.” The members of the UNV saw themselves
as a united front battling against “American fascism” and desiring to obtain permanent status as
equals within the entire United States. This unification of African-American veterans was
forged in the segregated units they served within during the war, in which they held the shared
experiences of discrimination. The UNV, also looked to capitalize on progressive white veterans
who had served alongside African Americans overseas and had gained a perspective of equality
between the races. In addition service abroad made it even clearer to members of the UNV that
African Americans did not possess full freedom as they should. In addition to the UNV, many
African-American soldiers joined the NAACP on their return home seeing the lack of progress
made and worked to fight for rights through legislation. One of the most notable of these
African-American soldiers was Medgar Evers who had enjoyed the freedoms found in France,
but was limited in his experiences back home in Mississippi. Evers after facing the
discrimination in Mississippi joined the local NAACP and worked to give African Americans,

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February 21, 1947, W.E.B. DuBois Papers, University of Massachusetts Library. Accessed online:
http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b116-i014.
especially veterans the right to vote.\textsuperscript{90} Eventually Evers became the leader of its Mississippi branch and would become a strong leader in the Civil Rights Movement until his assassination in 1963. The unification of African-American veterans in organizations like the UNV and the NAACP would be first steps in building momentum for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Conclusion

African-American veterans from the Second World War and the occupation in Europe were exposed to new freedoms and opportunities the created a new consciousness and identity as a people. The new consciousness created was one that understood what actual equality was and fully recognized the hypocritical nature of the United States, which claimed to be the bastion of freedom and equality. The new consciousness galvanized African-American soldiers to call for equality in the United States, and challenge the racial caste system of white supremacy as individuals, but also as united groups. This fight for rights by African-American soldiers would act not only as a defense of their own rights, but as the beginning of the much larger Civil Rights Movement, even before the iconic 1954 Supreme Court Case \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}. The activism and defiance asserted by these soldiers would continue on into the 1950s and 1960s as they worked to end legal segregation and again be able to experiences the freedoms and equality that they had for a short time while in Europe.

\textsuperscript{90} Evers-Williams, \textit{The Autobiography of Medgar Evers}, 10.