

Stand Up For Your Rights

UNIT 11

1900-1958

Unit Summary—In 1917, America once again found itself involved in war. As was the case in the Spanish American War, many African Americans volunteered to fight abroad for democracy, hoping for an end to racism and discrimination at home. However, these brave soldiers found that racism and discrimination followed them into the military. (Chapter 35)

At the same time, a belief was sweeping the globe that people of African descent should unite for the purposes of social, political, and economic empowerment. This belief, known as Pan-Africanism, was fueled by a series of conferences that convened throughout the 20th century. (Chapter 36)

In the 1920s, African Americans banded together in the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Led by Marcus Garvey, the organization sought to foster self-determination and collective economics among its members. (Chapter 37)

A celebration of “all things African” flourished in Harlem, New York. During this Renaissance, African American artists and intellectuals revived, defined, and uplifted the best of African American traditions. (Chapter 38)

As culture was flourishing in Harlem, political ideologies were developing in various parts of the world. Some African Americans embraced communism; others turned to socialism. All African Americans continued to seek refuge from the social injustices they faced daily. (Chapter 39)

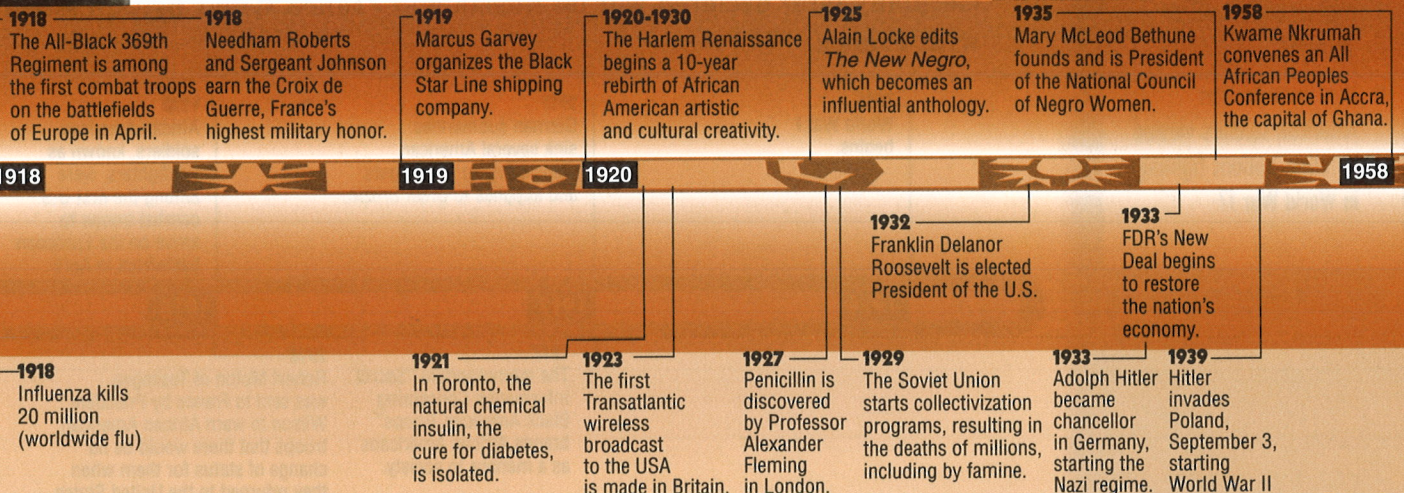
The Great Depression brought about a new wave of hardship to African Americans. With the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, however, they finally found a friend in the White House who took actions to ensure equality for all. (Chapter 40)

BEFORE YOU READ

As social creatures, all humans have a need to belong to a community. The community provides more than social interaction to its members. It also provides protection and support.

In this unit, you will discover how the African American community took actions to protect and support its members. You will recognize that while its leaders often differed in their views of how the community should proceed, they always worked diligently in pursuit of equality for all.

Think about the communities you belong to. How have these communities provided you with opportunities for socializing? How have these communities offered you support and protection?



**AS YOU READ**

- What events led to the outbreak of World War I?
- How were African American soldiers discriminated against?
- Why did the African American community believe that whites respected the German enemies more than the African American soldiers fighting for America?
- How did African American soldiers obtain officer training?
- How were African American soldiers viewed by other nations fighting in World War I?

Chapter Outline

- War Breaks Out
- African Americans in the World War
- Racism: The Enemy Within
- Campaign for African American Officers
- Recognition Abroad

Vocabulary

- democracy • Hellfighters • Croix de Guerre • labor battalions • propaganda

War Breaks Out

Modern warfare can easily become a global conflict because so many countries have a common interest in trade, politics, and the security of their nations. We are all a part of the same earth and the same markets and trade system. The first global war began in 1914.

On a Sunday, June 28, 1914, the Archduke of Austria, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, the Duchess Sophia, were on a state visit to Sarajevo, the capital of Serbia (Sarajevo is now in Bosnia). As they drove through the streets, a Serbian man named Gavrilo Princip shot and killed them both. A month later, Austria declared war on Serbia. The war started because Serbia would not agree to all of Austria's demands to try the accused and eliminate anti-Austrian groups. Soon Germany declared on the side of Austria and Russia declared against Austria and on the side of Serbia. Germany later declared war on Russia and France. Great Britain allied with France.

1914
World War I begins.

1917
German submarines sink several American ships carrying passengers and supplies to Great Britain.

1918
African American soldiers, known as Hellfighters, were among the first U.S. combat troops to arrive on the European battlefield in April.

1914**1917****1918**

1917
The memorandum "Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops" brands African Americans as a menace to society.

1918
Robert Moton of Tuskegee was sent to France by President Wilson to warn African American troops that there would be no change of status for them when they returned to the United States.

The war among the Europeans escalated. German submarines sank several American ships carrying passengers and supplies to Great Britain. On April 1, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson declared that:

“The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.”

and asked Congress to declare war. The United States formally entered the war on April 6, 1917, when Congress declared war on Germany. About a year and a half after the U.S. entered the war, a cease-fire was declared in most of the war areas. By November 11, 1918, the war now known as World War I was over. World War I was a conflict among the nations of Europe. The U.S. entered the war to protect its economic interests. African Americans again volunteered to fight abroad for **democracy**, hoping for an end to racism and discrimination at home, but Jim Crow would torment them even in the armed services.

African Americans in the World War

President Wilson believed in the segregation of the races. He did not believe that African Americans should have the same rights as whites. Wilson said that the U.S. should be involved in fighting the Germans “to make the world safe for democracy,” although he did not believe in democracy for African Americans. Nevertheless, more than 370,000 African Americans joined the war effort (see *New Horizons*, p C3). There is no way to determine how many of these volunteers were influenced by W. E. B. Du Bois’s editorial in *The Crisis* magazine. He exclaimed:

“Let us while the war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens and

the allied nations that are fighting for democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly with our eyes lifted to the hills.”

He hoped that by supporting the war, African Americans would win respect at home.

African Americans who joined the armed forces found themselves as discriminated against in the military as they had been in civilian life. Many of the basic training camps were located in the South, the most prejudiced part of the country. There were numerous fights with local whites.

One racist encounter between African American trainees and white residents occurred in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Noble Sissle, who would later gain fame as a bandleader and songwriter, entered a hotel to purchase a newspaper. The store owner demanded that



African American soldiers who fought in World War I return home, wearing the Croix de Guerre of France.

Sissle remove his cap. He refused and a fight started. Sissle was kicked out of the hotel. Enraged, he hurried back to the barracks and told the others what had happened. The armed soldiers were on their way to shoot up the town when army band director, James Reese Europe, stopped them. Later they had to be convinced again by the white commanding officer, William Hayward, not to go to town seeking revenge.

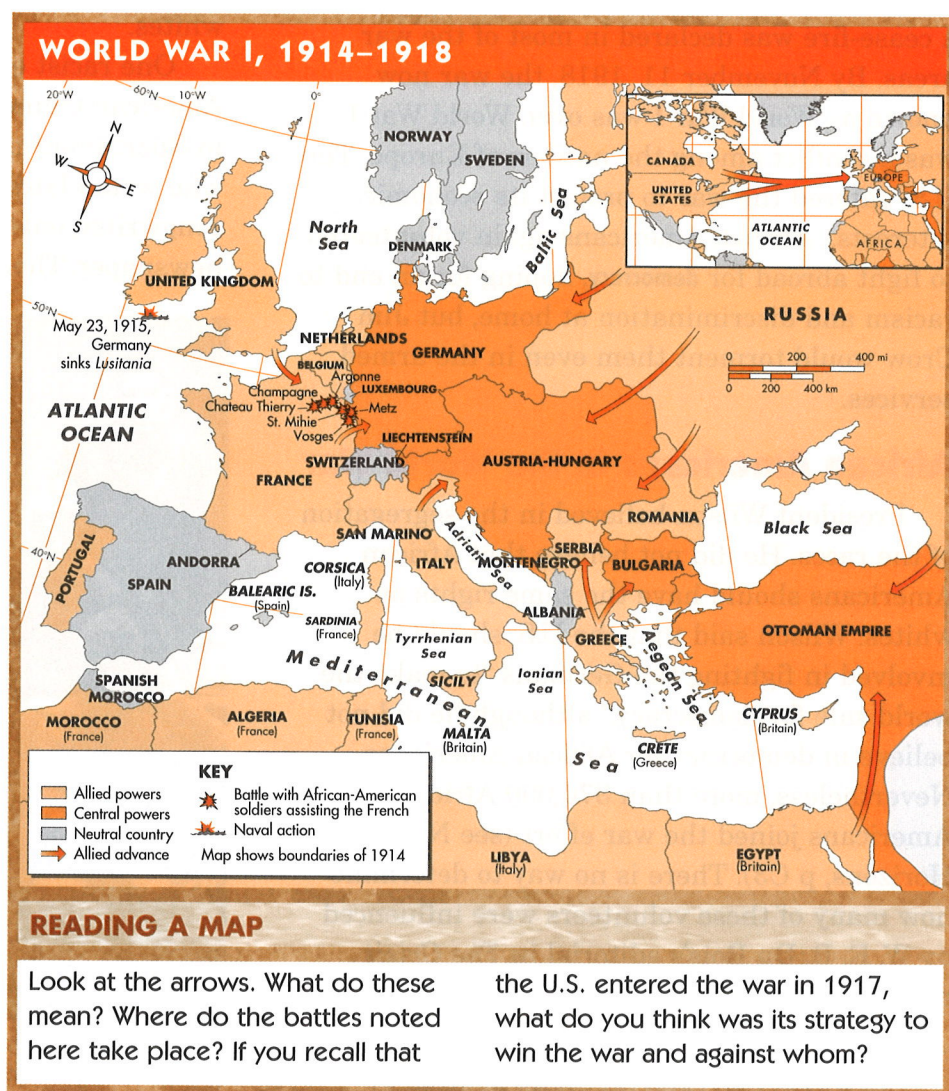
Emmett Scott, an aide to Booker T.

Washington, was dispatched by the secretary of war to investigate the incident. In order to avoid further trouble, the entire African American 15th Regiment was sent to France immediately. It was renamed the 369th Regiment, but the soldiers became known as the **Hellfighters** because of their fierce and courageous fighting. These African American men were among the first U.S. combat troops to arrive on the European battlefront in April 1918. Their assignment was to hold a 4.5-kilometer (2.79 mile) stretch of land. It represented 20 percent of the territory under U.S. control. Within weeks, the 369th was caught in one of the war's most memorable battles. For 191 days the regiment was under fire from the Germans and never lost an inch of ground. In 1918, two soldiers, Needham Roberts and Sergeant Johnson, received the **Croix de Guerre**, France's highest military honor.

The battle experience of the 369th was unusual, since few other African American units saw combat. During the brief war, most African Americans in the navy and army were given jobs that included work as kitchen

helpers, truck drivers, road builders, boiler-room assistants, and cooks. The Marine Corps barred African Americans from service altogether. It was the most racist of all branches of the military at the time. The army reluctantly employed African Americans as infantry.

Back home, African American leaders angrily charged the government with using African Americans solely for their labor. The secretary of war assured the African American community that this was not the case, although three-fourths of the African Americans sent to France were used solely as laborers. African American soldiers had to labor for whites who were often reactionaries and racists. They were subject to abusive language, kicks, cuffs, and harmful blows. Yet African American soldiers stuck it out.



According to one source:

"They unloaded the transports, prepared the vehicles to convey the supplies to the interior, and built depots for storing them. When the way to the expeditionary force lay through woods and over hills, the **labor battalions** built roads from the port of entry to the front. Moreover, they buried the dead, salvaged war material, and detonated explosives scattered over France by the enemy."

African American women also served in France, preparing food, nursing wounds, and bolstering spirits. Addie Hunton was among the volunteers at the battlefronts of Romange and Belleau Woods. She recalled how she and other African American women provided tender loving care for the beleaguered troops.

"Always, whether in the little corner set aside in the Y barracks as our reception room, or among the books they liked so well to read, whether by the side of the piano or over the canteen, we were trying to love them as a mother or a dear one would into a fuller knowledge and appreciation of themselves."

This boosting of morale was particularly needed after intense battles and racist treatment from white officers.

Racism: The Enemy Within

There was a clear sign in August 1917 that white Americans would not accept African Americans as equals despite the fact that they were soldiers. In Houston, Texas, African American troops in training boarded a streetcar

to go into town. A dispute broke out between the troops and local whites as to whether the troops could ride the streetcar, since segregation of the races was the law in Texas. The African Americans defied the whites. Since they were men in uniform ready to defend their country, they refused to be segregated. A mob of whites gathered, pulled the soldiers off the streetcar, and hurled abusive words at them. When this news reached the military barracks, a group of African American soldiers grabbed their guns and ammunition and rushed to the defense of the others. A vicious street fight broke out and 12 whites were left dead.

A trial was held and the whites who controlled the legal system brought back a judgment that the whites were innocent of all charges. Thirteen African Americans



AFRICAN AMERICAN TROOPS REMAIN LOYAL

Despite rampant racism and discrimination, African American troops never violated their oath to the U.S. and were not swayed by German **propaganda**, the attempt to influence them to turn against America. According to Charles Wesley and Carter G. Woodson, German agents approached African Americans suggesting that they might want “to make America safe for democracy” before going to Europe to try to make the world safe for democracy. History records no instance in which African

Americans betrayed the United States for Germany during this period. Much like the 280,000 Senegalese troops from Africa who had helped the French repel the Germans on the Oureq and the Marne rivers, the 30,000 Congolese and 20,000 West Indians who had come to the rescue of France, and the numerous other soldiers of African descent, African Americans expressed their willingness to fight for democracy. More than 370,000 served during the war, and of these troops 1,353 were officers.

were hanged, and 14 were imprisoned for life. There was immediate protest across the nation when this news was published. The African American community believed that the whites respected the German enemies more than they did their own African American fighting men.

Those who returned from the war in Europe often found that their sacrifice and service meant little among the racists. In 1918, Robert Moton, president of Tuskegee University, was sent to France by President Wilson to warn African American troops that there would be no change of status for them when they returned to the United States. He did not want the returning troops to expect a change in treatment from the American society. What they had done in Europe to make the world safe for others, they could not do for themselves in the United States.



Robert Moton, president of Tuskegee University, sent by President Woodrow Wilson to France to warn fellow African Americans that their civil status wouldn't change when they returned to the United States.

Campaign for African American Officers

Mass meetings of African Americans revealed deep-seated discontent with racist practices. Again it would take a protest to move the nation toward a more open and equal society. Students and faculty at Howard University began a nationwide campaign for training camps where recruits who had an adequate educational background could be trained as officers. Many educated African Americans served in units where their white leaders were uneducated or illiterate. Finally, a camp was established in Des Moines, Iowa, to train African American officers. Six hundred and seventy-five of the 1,200 men accepted for officers training at the camp were commissioned in October 1917. This was the largest number of African Americans ever to wear the bars of a commissioned officer.

In the 92nd Division where most served, African American officers suffered unbearably under the command of an incompetent white officer, General Charles Ballou. He shaped racist policies by harshly criticizing these officers in front of their subordinates. Other white officers who wanted to eliminate the competition from African American officers also followed this pattern.

Recognition Abroad

The French military, on the other hand, greatly admired and appreciated African American soldiers. General Goybet observed that

the African American officer served under a severe racist doctrine based merely on color. He stepped in to save many African American officers from humiliation and dishonorable discharge from the army. Indeed, the 370th and the 8th Illinois, led by African American officers, received more citations for their gallantry, including the Croix de Guerre, than any other American regiment in France.

Despite their valor and bravery, African American soldiers were resented by their white compatriots. On one occasion when a group of soldiers was ordered to sail on the battleship USS *Virginia*, the officer in charge had them removed on the grounds that no African Americans had ever traveled on board a U.S. battleship. In France, American whites tried to separate African American troops from the French people. General Ervin wrote a secret memorandum, Order Number 40. It was a proclamation that African Americans should not associate with French women. On August 7, 1917, another memorandum on race, Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops, was issued through the French mission from the headquarters of General John "Black Jack" Pershing. This memorandum branded African Americans as a menace to society and said that there was an "impassable gulf between the two races." The French were cautioned not to treat African Americans with familiarity and friendliness. They were told that to do so would be an affront to the U.S. policy of separation of the races. The memorandum explained that

although the African American man is a citizen of the United States,

"he is regarded by the whites as an inferior with whom relations of business and service only are possible; and the black person is noted for his lack of intelligence, lack of discretion, and lack of civil and professional conscience."

The "secret" memorandum told the French that they should not shake hands, seek to talk with, or meet with, or eat with African Americans.

The French people were especially pleased with the conduct of the African American soldiers and welcomed them in to their homes, nightclubs, cafes, restaurants, and hotels. After all, the African Americans, many under French command, had fought bravely to save the French nation.

Decorated or not, African American soldiers returning from the war were greatly influenced by their interaction with Africans from the Caribbean and Africa. They had also seen whites who respected them for their abilities and talents. The war had given them a new outlook on life. These returning soldiers would make good troops for the self-determination and self-help programs of the noted African-centered activist Marcus Garvey. They were disciplined and sophisticated, with fresh ideas, new opinions, and a sense of worldliness that was exciting and dazzling.

MARKS OF VALOR

The French honored a number of African Americans and their battalions for their bravery and courage. They included: Sergeant Matthew Jenkins, who received the Distinguished Service Cross and the Croix de Guerre for holding a position against the Germans by himself for 36 hours; and Corporal Isaac Valley, who received the Distinguished Service Cross for stepping on a grenade to protect his fellow soldiers. The entire First Battalion of the

367th Infantry Regiment of the 92nd Division was awarded the Croix de Guerre for bravery. The 369th Infantry Regiment of the 93rd Division was cited 11 times for bravery and awarded the Croix de Guerre. It was given the honor of leading the Allied Forces to the Rhine a week after the truce was signed. They had earned the glory. Members of the 370th Infantry won the Distinguished Service Cross 21 times and the French Croix de Guerre 68 times.



Chapter 35 After You Read

Read each section carefully, then write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Comprehension Review

1. What event caused the United States to enter World War I?
2. In what capacity did the U.S. military use African American soldiers?
3. What was the purpose of W. E. B. Du Bois's editorial in *The Crisis* magazine?
4. What was unusual about the battle experience of the 369th Regiment?
5. How did African American women aid in the war effort?
6. What message did Robert Moton bring to African American troops in France?
7. What caused a dispute between African American soldiers and whites in Houston, Texas, in 1917?
8. How did the military of other countries view the African American soldiers?
9. What message was communicated by the memorandum titled Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops?

Center Your Thinking

10. African American soldiers felt that they were treated better by whites abroad than by white Americans. When many returned to the United States after the war, they did not get recognition for their services. Create a story about an imaginary African American soldier and write a newspaper article about his or her heroic deeds. Be sure to include a headline.

Vocabulary and Concept Development

1. What was ironic regarding President Wilson's views on U.S. participation in World War I and his belief in segregation of the races?
2. Why were soldiers in the 369th Regiment known as **Hellfighters**? What type of connotation does this name send?
3. What was France's **Croix de Guerre**? What are some American equivalents?
4. The prefix *com-* means "with." What is a compatriot? Would you classify black and white soldiers as compatriots? Explain why.

Reading a Timeline

Use Unit 11 and Chapter 35 timelines to complete the following:

1. Look at the unit timeline. How much time elapses between the beginning of the African American events listed and the end? Is there a steady progress in the achievements and other events listed? How would you characterize the progress? As a lack of it, or a mix?
2. Look at the chapter timeline. What changes in attitudes toward the loyalty of African Americans in regard to the war do you see? Why do you think these varying viewpoints were held? Was the variety of viewpoints reasonable?
3. Compare the early part of the unit timeline with the chapter timeline. Given the events in the African American history you see to 1916, might whites have taken a different, more consistent approach to African Americans during World War I than they did?