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## A War to Save Civilization: African American Soldiers in Britain during the Second World War

### Cover Page Footnote

I would first and foremost like to thank my parents for all their love and support throughout the years, they have been a huge help and I cannot thank them enough. I would also like to thank Dr. David Fauser, Dr. William Cumiford, Dr. Charissa Threat, Dr. Shira Klein, Dr. Alexander Bay, Dr. Gregory Daddis, and Dr. Jennifer Keene for all their help and support through my years at Chapman, and for helping me develop the skills I needed to take on this project. Finally, I would like to thank all my friends and classmates from Chapman, especially Michael MacInnes and Bo Kent, for their friendship and excellent advice.

A War to Save Civilization  
African American Soldiers in Britain during the Second World War

Joseph Dickinson

May 19, 2020

## **Introduction**

“‘What are we fighting for? Were we sent to the ETO [European Theater of Operations] to fight the Nazis - or our white soldiers?’” According to Walter White, Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People between 1929 and 1955, this was a common question among many of the African American soldiers he interviewed in Britain in early 1944. He remarked on the situation, “it is tragic that the Civil War should be fought again while we are fighting a World War to save civilization.”<sup>1</sup> Many African Americans serving in the U.S. Armed Forces during the Second World War often saw white Americans as a greater threat to their freedom than the Germans or the Japanese.<sup>2</sup> This was exemplified most strikingly during the U.S. Army’s presence in Britain throughout the war. African American soldiers arriving in Britain were surprised to find themselves receiving a very different reception than they expected. These men and women, many of whom had grown up under the shadow of Jim Crow laws in the United States, most likely expected Britain to be much the same. Instead, by and large, they were welcomed warmly by the British people. Despite this, some white American soldiers saw it fit to try to implement the same systems of segregations seen in the United States in Britain. As a result, the island nation quickly became a hotbed of racial tension and was the scene of a number of violent engagements between white and black Americans, the latter of whom were often, to their surprise, aided by British civilians.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I wish to look at how the British public reacted to the introduction of American racial segregation in Britain. In the context of a world war, I also wish to observe the

<sup>1</sup> Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO,” February 11, 1944, NARA, RG 107, Box 447.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Hervieux, *Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day’s Black Heroes* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2019), 172.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1987), 139.

problems which resulted from the conflict between these two very different social and cultural establishments. I want to explore the consequences of this unique interaction for the British civilians involved and the black and white Americans who found themselves in a country which, although not free of racial prejudice, generally rejected the principles of Jim Crow. I will argue that because African American soldiers arriving in Britain faced less racism and discrimination from Britons than they were used to in the United States, many white Americans, especially those from the American south, became resentful of the new status quo. The fear of what this new status quo might result in after the war led to a rise in racially charged conflicts in Britain. These conflicts sparked new and unprecedented global attention to racial segregation and discrimination in the United States, and helped lead to the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces. I will analyze this situation by looking first at arguments and conflicts over discriminatory segregation in Britain in a general sense, and then at the more specific point of conflict in interracial sexual relationships between British women and African American men. Segregation in everyday life and interracial relationships in particular represented the greatest point of contention for many white Americans regarding the ways that African American soldiers interacted with British society, and here one finds the most evidence of conflict.

In doing this, I will be using a variety of primary sources, including British and American newspaper articles, to analyze popular opinion and civilian interpretation of these events. I will also use a number of British War cabinet reports to gauge the British government's stance on the developing situation. Finally, I will heavily rely on Walter White's reports and memoirs from his time investigating racial discrimination in the U.S. Army in Britain. White's insight and opinions help reveal the general trends which defined the experience of African American servicemen in Britain during the Second World War.

### ***Historiography***

Furthermore, to contextualize the place of this paper in the broader field of existing literature on the subject of African Americans in the U.S. Army, we must first establish that the existing literature on the subject of African Americans during World War II began with Ulysses Lee's *Employment of Negro Troops: United States Army in World War II*. Published in 1963, Lee's book is the definitive work on the subject of African American combat soldiers during the Second World War. While thorough in analyzing the difficulties apparent from the employment of African American combat troops during the Second World War, it poses a number of limitations. Firstly, the book was written as the result of the U.S. War Department's interest in the subject. The War Department perceived African American participation in military service during World War II to be "of national interest as well as of great value for future military planning."<sup>4</sup> Thus, the book is heavily geared toward analyzing African American service in terms of future practical military application, not through the lens of social history. Secondly, the book solely focuses on black combat troops, not service troops. Seeing as service troops made up the majority of African Americans sent overseas, *Employment of Negro Troops* cannot hope to capture the full scope of the African American experience during the war. Furthermore, the book is a product of its time, and while it attempts to objectively analyze its subject matter, from a modern point of view, it can be problematic due to its outdated language and statistically driven analysis of the effectiveness of soldiers. Nevertheless, the book provides an extensive base from which many authors have built their own studies on the subject.

In years following the Second World War, many historians have seen African American service in World War II as a catalyst for the Civil Rights movement. Books like Neil A. Wynn's

<sup>4</sup> Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops: United States Army in World War II*, (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1963) ix.

*The Afro-American and the Second World War*, Mary Penick Motley's *The Invisible Soldier: The Experience of the Black Soldier, World War II*, and Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck's *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* place African American service and experiences in the war in the context of the fight for domestic civil rights. These books focus far more on the individual experiences of the men and women of color in the war, drawing upon them to examine how the war changed the way they valued their lives. However, these books do not use the situation in Britain as a particular case-study.

Graham Smith's 1987 book, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, is the most extensive work on African American soldiers in Britain. Smith's book is the only major source which focuses directly on the introduction of American systems of discrimination to Britain, analyzing it from a number of diverse perspectives. Alongside the stories from African American soldiers and observers of the war, much of *this book* focuses on the British government's reaction to the arrival of the Americans and the Jim Crow racism that followed, but it also covers the "attitudes and anxieties" of the British public in a broad manner. In doing so, Smith aims to paint a picture of British attitudes on race and racism in the 1940's, depicting the arrival of African Americans in Britain as the defining event. In this thesis, I will build upon Smith's established work on the subject with new sources, taking a fresh look at how British society received Jim Crow, and the way this reception affected both American and British beliefs on race and racism.

## **Segregation**

The issue of racial segregation and how it was to be enforced by the U.S. Army in Britain during the Second World War was a topic of great debate among both British and American leadership. It was also the source of widespread confrontation between white American soldiers and African American soldiers, the latter often finding themselves supported by British civilians.

By the Second World War, the influence of Jim Crow had permeated the American armed forces. Racial segregation was enforced both officially and unofficially in almost all aspects of military life at a level similar to that seen in civilian society . This began with enlistment, where a “separate but equal” policy was implemented.<sup>5</sup> The decision was made to allow black troops to be recruited to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces; however, they would serve in segregated, all-black units, often under white officers.<sup>6</sup> Many African Americans were rejected for service due to requirements that specifically targeted their entry such as unfair and discriminatory literacy tests. Others were rejected purely because the headquarters governing their recruiting area secretly enforced rules prohibiting the recruitment of African Americans.<sup>7</sup> Other aspects of life were far from “equal” in the U.S. military for black troops. They often received poor training, with one soldier remarking that “the first two weeks we laid around doing nothing... the third week they started us cleaning the white officers rooms, making us they dirty beds and cleaning they latrine,” in Camp Gordon Johnston in Florida.<sup>8</sup> Black soldiers also found that many professions in the army were unavailable to them. For example, private Laurence W. Harris was a tool maker before the war stated in a letter to *The Pittsburgh Courier*, “I was in hopes I could become an

<sup>5</sup> *Taps for A Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II*, ed. Phillip McGuire, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), xxi.

<sup>6</sup> William A. Taylor, *Military Service and American Democracy: From World War II to the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2016), 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, ed. Phillip McGuire, 2.

<sup>8</sup> A Black Soldier to *The Baltimore African American*, 9-27-43, in *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, ed. Phillip McGuire, 19.

airplane mechanic, but the field doesn't seem to be open to negro soldiers."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, most African American units were confined to service and labor forces.<sup>10</sup>

Military and civilian services were typically segregated by race in the United States, with black troops discovering that the services supplied to them were often inferior or non-existent. Black troops at Camp Gordon Johnston were denied access to church services at the camp, as well as being turned away from service clubs as they were told, "we don't serve colored."<sup>11</sup> As one soldier described the limited transportation access to recreation areas, "whenever we get a bus they will only take five colored soldiers, and sometimes we have to wait about two or three hours for a bus."<sup>12</sup> One of the ultimate insults for many African American soldiers was seeing German and Italian prisoners of war receiving more privileges than they did.<sup>13</sup>

Discrimination, hate speech, and racial violence were common on U.S. army bases in the United States where both black and white servicemen were present. The first major act of racial violence, a lynching, occurred in April 1941 in Fort Benning, Georgia, only shortly after the first African Americans began training.<sup>14</sup> Soon after at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, conflicts arose between black soldiers and the base's military police after "an altercation over the use of a diving platform at the YMCA Lake Area."<sup>15</sup> Another infamous incident occurred in Fayetteville, Georgia, where a number of drunk black soldiers were stopped from boarding a bus by unarmed black military policemen (MPs), whose job it was to keep order on the buses going to and from Fort Bragg. After the soldiers began threatening the MPs, a detachment of armed white military

<sup>9</sup> Pvt. Laurence W. Harris to *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 11-4-43, in *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, ed. Phillip McGuire, 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, ed. Phillip McGuire, 59.

<sup>11</sup> A Black Soldier to *The Baltimore African American*, 9-27-43, in *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Pvt. Norman Brittingham to Truman K. Gibson Jr. 7-17-43, in *Taps for A Jim Crow Army*, ed. Phillip McGuire, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Linda Hervieux, *Forgotten*, 102.

<sup>14</sup> Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 349.

<sup>15</sup> Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 349.

police arrived and attempted to arrest the chief troublemakers. In doing so, they began to attack some of the black soldiers with their nightsticks. In the confusion, one soldier grabbed a revolver from one of the MPs and fired at him. A number of the MPs responded by firing back. One black soldier and one white military policeman were killed, with two MPs and three other black soldiers wounded as a result of the shooting. In response, many African American soldiers in and around Fort Bragg were rounded up and imprisoned in the fort's stockade, with many soldiers writing home that particularly brutal searches were conducted on them, even though many of them were not involved.<sup>16</sup> Across the United States, more confrontations with white civilian police officers as well as military police resulted in armed conflict, such as in Camp Stewart in George, in which over five thousand shots were fired between black soldiers and white military policemen, or as in Murfreesboro, Tennessee and in Gurdon, Arkansas, where African American troops on training maneuvers "ran into armed resistance from citizens and state police."<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> In summary, African Americans serving in the military faced vicious and often violent resistance from their own countrymen in the United States, both from within the military and from the white civilian population. Even while serving their country, they could not escape the oppression of Jim Crow. However, this makes the African American soldier's experience in Britain all the more unique, when suddenly segregation was no longer the norm. The consequences of such a radical shift would soon become apparent.

Upon arrival in Britain, African American soldiers received a warmer welcome than expected from the British public.<sup>19</sup> British civilians often invited black troops into their homes, and many African Americans expressed surprise at the welcoming attitude the British took

<sup>16</sup> Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 351.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Hervieux, *Forgotten*, 108.

<sup>18</sup> Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 352.

<sup>19</sup> Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 177.

towards them.<sup>20</sup> Walter White reported that many African Americans in Britain told him , “it was their first experience in being treated as normal human beings as friends by white people.”<sup>21</sup>

Many Britons were reportedly impressed by the polite behavior of African American soldiers and often praised their manners. Walter White reported from his tour of the European Theater of Operations that:

An important factor in the keeping down trouble has been the remarkably fine behavior of an overwhelming majority of Negro troops. In virtually every place I visited, and in virtually every conference I have had with British people, ranging from high officials to so-called common people, this has been emphasized. There have been, of course, exceptions. But the majority of Negro troops have won the esteem of the British people not only for themselves but for the United States by their behavior.<sup>22</sup>

The British often noted that they were won over by the politeness and “cheer” of black soldiers, even some Britons who held strong racial prejudices found themselves reevaluating their beliefs. One report from a vicar in Worcester exemplified this in a letter to *The Staid Weekly Spectator* which noted that there was an elderly lady he knew “who was obliged to billet two Yankee soldiers. To her horror they were Negroes. After a night of fitful sleep she crept nervously downstairs, found all her housework done and the coloured Doughboys waiting to cook her breakfast.”<sup>23</sup> Another Briton, C. Phillips Cape, wrote, “Here I pay tribute to the excellent behavior of the vast majority of our negro visitors. They are gentle, happy, generous, sober, and well-behaved.” He continues, “A majority are Baptists and Methodists, and their wholesomeness of speech reflects credit upon their homes and teachers.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 119.

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

<sup>22</sup> Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

<sup>23</sup> “Black Soldiers,” *Bellshill Speaker and Mid-Lanarkshire Gazette*, July 21, 1944, The British Newspaper Archive, accessed on October 22, 2019, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001526/19440721/052/0003>.

<sup>24</sup> C. Phillips Cape, “Excellent Behavior of Coloured Men,” *Western Morning News*, June 3, 1944, The British Newspaper Archive, accessed on November 18, 2019,

The comparatively similar economic situations of both the average British citizen and African Americans also built common ground. Walter White noted that “the average income of between 60% and 70% of the British people is 13/10 per week, which corresponds to the average wage of many Negroes in the United States. An economic bond of sympathy appears to have been created thereby.” This stands in contrast to many white Americans who generally tended to possess more modern utilities and equipment, meaning that as White saw it, “Negro soldiers have been less prone to comment audibly in the presence of British people upon the absence of radios, automobiles, bath tubs and other mechanical devices more common in the United States than among the majority of British people.” Black soldiers made a strong impression on many Britons, and they quickly found that they had a lot of support among the British public. One common example was that it was not uncommon to see pubs with signs saying “For British People and Coloured Americans Only.”<sup>25</sup>

Of course, this warm reception did not mean that Britain nor its people were free of racial prejudice. Rather, they were far from it. British racism definitely existed, albeit expressed differently than in the United States. Strong pre-existing stereotypes, usually forged by depictions in American cinema, often colored the British people’s perceptions of African Americans before they had even arrived. The image of the African American as being “unassuming”, “kind”, and “musical” were all drawn from popular representations in film.<sup>26</sup> Other stereotypical depictions of Africans and African Americans were common in Britain as a result of the Empire. An example of such a stereotype can be seen in a newspaper article from the *Belfast Telegraph*, titled, “Dusky Doughboys In Ulster ‘Sho Like It’ Here.” The article goes on to read, “since the arrival in Northern Ireland of a negro unit of the U.S. Army the dusky

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000329/19440603/032/0005>.

<sup>25</sup> Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 118.

<sup>26</sup> Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 124.

Doughboys have been winning all hearts by their cheery ways... They have added a picturesque touch of colour to the Ulster countryside... Fifth-Class Private J.A. Sykes, whom people in the district in which the unit is stationed hail as the U.S. Army's sweetest trumpeter," alluding to a common stereotype which assumed that African Americans were very musical.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the positive treatment black soldiers received from the British public and their appreciation of that treatment upset many white Americans. Some white Americans were more accustomed to the strict segregationist laws of the American South, and many took it upon themselves to try and enforce those laws in Britain. Some officers blackmailed certain establishments such as pubs and clubs. In one case, "the manager of an Aero Club in the Eastern Base Section and a traveling accountant of the American Red Cross were driven to a hotel on a cold night through the blackout from the camp at which they were working. Because of the inclemency of the weather they asked that the Negro driver be served a drink. The proprietor declined saying that American officers had ordered him not to serve Negro soldiers on penalty of their boycotting the hotel."<sup>28</sup> In another instance, "when the manager of a restaurant was questioned... about refusing service to a Negro soldier, he had a ready answer: 'White Americans say they will not patronize my place if Negroes were served.'"<sup>29</sup> Boycotts by American officers often lead to a significant profit loss for owners, as officers partaking in such actions would generally prevent their enlisted men from attending those establishments as well.

A common method used by some white soldiers was to spread harmful rumors to try to separate the British public from black soldiers. For many British civilians, especially those who grew up in small isolated villages where many black units were going to be stationed, the arrival

<sup>27</sup> "Dusky Doughboys In Ulster 'Sho Like It' Here." *Belfast Telegraph*, July 31, 1942, The British Newspaper Archive, accessed on November 20, 2019,

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0002318/19420731/110/0004>.

<sup>28</sup> "Dusky Doughboys In Ulster 'Sho Like It' Here." *Belfast Telegraph*.

<sup>29</sup> Roi Ottely, "Dixie Invades Britain," *Negro Digest*, Vol II, No I, November 1942.

of African American soldiers was their first encounter with anyone who was not white. As a result, many believed even the most absurd rumors about the black troops. Walter White reported one instance where white American troops:

Told the British such fanciful stories as that all Negroes have tails, that they are savage, diseased, illiterate and will rape their women... The Lord Mayor of one English town told me that he and all the people were frightened when they heard that Negro troops were to be sent there. For days the British avoided even walking close to Negro soldiers. But one morning the Lord Mayor was greeted with a pleasant "Good morning, Sir" by one of the soldiers. Startled that the soldier could speak English he entered into conversation with him and thus learned of the falsity of the stories which had been spread in the town by white Army officers and enlisted men. The circulation of such stories and other acts of discrimination have had a most depressing effect upon the morale of Negro soldiers in the ETO.<sup>30</sup>

Many other methods were also employed by white Americans to enforce Jim Crow laws in Britain. Often, white military police would attempt to segregate towns on their own initiative, despite orders from Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force General Dwight D. Eisenhower and the European Theater of Operations headquarters attempting to prevent this from happening. As a result, confrontations between black soldiers and white military police were common and often ended violently.<sup>31</sup>

One particularly violent case in the small town of Bamber Bridge in Lancashire presents several incidents which paint a clearer picture of the situation as it stood in many parts of Britain. On June 24th, 1943, two white American military policemen entered the Hob Inn in Bamber Bridge after receiving reports of a commotion inside. There they found several African American soldiers, one who did not have a pass, nor a regulation uniform. Upon attempting to

<sup>30</sup> Walter White, "Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO."

<sup>31</sup> "Court-Martial Told Soldiers Shot Military Police," *The Washington Post*, October 17, 1943, ProQuest Digital Archives, accessed on October 22, 2019, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/docview/151651547?accountid=10051>.

arrest the soldiers, the British civilians in the Hob Inn verbally protested, attempting to protect the soldiers and drive out the MPs. The military policemen left but announced that they were going to return with reinforcements. The black soldiers left the inn heading for their encampment at Adams Hall but encountered the MPs who had gathered some aid. A short but bloody brawl broke out, during which one black soldier was shot in the neck.<sup>32</sup> Both sides dispersed, with the African American soldiers returning to Adams Hall, where rumors spread that the African Americans involved had been shot in the back by the MPs. A crowd quickly formed, and many armed themselves with the intention of fighting the MPs. However, “the situation was calmed by the unit’s sole black officer, a 2nd Lt., who convinced the men that the (white) senior officers would listen to their grievances.”<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, at “about midnight about a dozen police arrived in ‘a makeshift armoured vehicle’, complete with a machine gun,” which provoked the black soldiers who once again armed themselves. As the MPs were about to move off, someone fired a shot. The situation quickly escalated into a gunfight, with black soldiers and military police exchanging fire in the streets of Bamber Bridge throughout the night.

One black soldier was killed in the fight, with four others, including one white officer, wounded. Two Court Martials were carried out in response to the incident, with all of the blame falling upon the African American troops. In the first trial, four of the black soldiers who had participated in the initial brawl were sentenced to three to four years of hard labor; however, upon review, one was acquitted. The second trial saw thirty-five black soldiers, two of whom were among those charged in the first trial, accused of mutiny and rioting. Of these, seven were

<sup>32</sup> Harold Pollins, “The Battle of Bamber Bridge,” *WW2 People's War*, BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/85/a3677385.shtml>.

<sup>33</sup> Harold Pollins, “The Battle of Bamber Bridge,” *WW2 People's War*.

found not guilty, the rest received sentences of up to fifteen years in prison. However, none of the soldiers served more than thirteen months.<sup>34</sup>

The “Battle of Bamber Bridge,” as it came to be known, demonstrated both the solidarity that existed between the British people and African Americans, as well as the underlying racial tensions which the Army had brought from the United States. In this particular case, British civilians leapt to the aid of black troops against the white military police, which was a common occurrence.<sup>35</sup> Many Britons found white American soldiers disrespectful. As War Correspondent Roi Ottley put it, “They walk the streets and enter restaurants with the feeling, ‘We’ve come to save your country.’... Negro troops are very popular here. I think mainly because they generally have good manners... they do not come here to ‘take over’—instead, they adjust themselves to the customs and do well for themselves.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the attempts of some white Americans to implement Jim Crow in Britain and impose their views on the British people were met with disgust. They often served only to build greater opposition against segregation among the British population. In one example of this, in what can only be described as a classic piece of British humor, some British pub keepers displayed signs in their windows declaring, “THIS PLACE FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF ENGLISHMEN AND AMERICAN NEGRO SOLDIERS.”<sup>37</sup>

Incidents like “The Battle of Bamber Bridge” quickly became problematic for the U.S. Army. Despite efforts to censor news of racially charged clashes in reports and newspapers, news of fighting quickly spread by word of mouth.<sup>38</sup> As a result, it quickly became evident to U.S.

<sup>34</sup> Harold Pollins, “The Battle of Bamber Bridge,” *WW2 People's War*

<sup>35</sup> Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 11.

<sup>36</sup> Roi Ottley, *Roi Ottley's World War II: The Lost Diary of an African American Journalist*, ed. Mark A. Huddle (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 77.

<sup>37</sup> Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Pamela E. Walck, “Reporting America’s ‘Colour Problem’ How the U.S. and British Press Reported and Framed Racial Conflicts during World War II,” (PhD diss., Ohio University, 2015), 154, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/docview/1973261495?accountid=10051>.

Military and political leaders that action had to be taken to stop the fighting, as it jeopardized the war effort and increasingly highlighted the abhorrent nature of Jim Crow, American racial beliefs, and the hypocrisy of the United Nations in the eyes of existing allies.<sup>39</sup> Observers, both from within the Army and among civilian reporters, noticed that in many cases, it was the sudden exposure to the different status quo in Britain which drove so many white soldiers to be so aggressive, as “most of the racial clashes have been caused... by troops recently arrived in the United Kingdom.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it was decided that efforts should be made to better prepare white GIs for what it was like in Britain.

These efforts were accomplished in a variety of ways. The most quickly implemented measure was a series of “aboard ship lectures... given to soldiers enroute to the ETO regarding their behaviour in the ETO,” dealing “not only with the different conditions they will find but also the different attitude on race of the British people as contrasted with certain parts of the United States.”<sup>41</sup> A film was also created to help Americans heading to Britain better adjust to the British way of life. Titled, *A Welcome to Britain*, the film stars American actor-director Burgess Meredith and was directed by Meredith and English director Anthony Asquith. Meredith, who plays the role of the narrator, attempts to explain aspects of British culture which might confuse newly arrived American GIs, with one aspect being the different racial beliefs of the British. The scene concerning this topic opens with an elderly British lady asking an African American soldier over for tea, which Meredith notes as being, “not unusual here. That’s the sort of thing that happens quite a lot.”<sup>42</sup> He continues by remarking that, “there are colored soldiers as well a white here, and there are less social restrictions in this country. Yes, what you heard was an

<sup>39</sup> Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

<sup>40</sup> Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

<sup>41</sup> Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

<sup>42</sup> *A Welcome to Britain*, dir. by Anthony Asquith and Burgess Meredith, London: Strand and the Ministry of Information, 1943. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060022007>.

English woman asking a colored boy to tea. She was polite about it and he was polite about it; now look that might not happen at home, but the point is we're not at home, and the point is too if we bring a lot of prejudices here what are we gonna do about them?"<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to note that the writers decided to have an older British woman ask the black soldier over for tea as it was judged that to have a younger British woman do so would be too "inappropriate."<sup>44</sup> However, the sentiment that it was the white U.S. soldiers who had to control themselves in Britain is very illuminating to how racial conflicts in Britain were perceived and acted upon by the U.S. Army.

This is further demonstrated by a short speech given in the film by General John C. H. Lee, commander of the European Theater of Operations Services of Supply units at the time. Many of the Services of Supply units were African American Units, and General Lee was one of the most vocal supporters of desegregating the Army. In the film, he says, "America has promised the negro real citizenship, and a fair chance to make the best of himself. When the army needs Americans to fight for the country, it takes Negroes along with whites. Everyone is treated the same when it comes to dying, and so the Army wouldn't be true to America if it didn't try to live up to the promises about an equal chance."<sup>45</sup> When asked about whether American soldiers should have to "get over our prejudices," he responds:

You don't get over a prejudice that easily, there's no use pretending that we're different than what we are, but we can try to live up to our American promises. I'd go further and say, we can't do less and still feel ourselves patriots. We have promised to respect each other. All of us. That's one of the reasons that makes our world worth fighting for. But you're all together in this small country, with the same surroundings, same amount of pay to spend and the same sort of

<sup>43</sup> *A Welcome to Britain*, dir. by Anthony Asquith and Burgess Meredith.

<sup>44</sup> Neil A. Wynn, "Race War": Black American GIs and West Indians in Britain During The Second World War," *Immigrants & Minorities*, 24 (3), May 14th, 2007, 324–46.

<sup>45</sup> *A Welcome to Britain*, dir. by Anthony Asquith and Burgess Meredith.

places to spend it. And we're all here as soldiers. Everything we do, we do as American soldiers, not Negroes and white men, rich or poor, as American soldiers. It's not a bad time, is it, to learn to respect each other, both ways.<sup>46</sup>

The message was quite clear: segregation was not the norm in Britain; therefore, white American troops would have to “learn” to live with African Americans peacefully. Segregation would not be enforced by the command of the ETO in Britain outside of segregated units. Now, in actuality, segregation was enforced on lower levels in many areas of Britain through a variety of means, but the official stance taken by the U.S. Army, as seen through *A Welcome to Britain*, shows that the American Army as an institution was beginning to understand that segregation was unhealthy and detrimental to their operations. Segregation also reflected poorly on America and Americans as a whole, especially since news of racial violence in Britain was being spread worldwide both through conventional media and Axis propaganda.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, exposure to a society which did not wholly support discrimination and segregation led many Americans who did attempt to enforce segregation in Britain to reevaluate their actions, as they lacked the wide public support which helped perpetuate discriminatory systems back home.<sup>48</sup>

## **Interracial Sexual Relationships**

<sup>46</sup> *A Welcome to Britain*, dir. by Anthony Asquith and Burgess Meredith.

<sup>47</sup> Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

<sup>48</sup> Roi Ottely, “Dixie Invades Britain,” *Negro Digest*, Vol II No I (November 1942).

Interracial sexual relationships formed some of the most contentious racial conflicts in Britain during the American Army's stay. The openness of many British women to relationships with black American men caused a great deal of frustration for many white American soldiers, as it touched upon one of the most volatile aspects of Jim Crow racism. In the United States, "much of the violence in and around Southern Military bases was triggered by perceived competition over women."<sup>49</sup> However, unlike many other aspects of American racial attitudes brought to Britain, the British public often disapproved of racial intermingling between British women and African American men. The participation of British women in these relationships, as well as the reaction of British civilians, can tell us a lot about the situation in Britain at this time.

To many Americans, relationships between black men and white women were seen as a flagrant breach of social convention. Even to many socially progressive whites, the idea of full racial integration triggered many concerns. In the words of one American lieutenant, "I want my colored friend to vote... I want him to know and enjoy the Four Freedoms. I will work hard to see that he—or his sons—get these things, but I do not want him to live next door to me; I do not want him to dance with my daughter."<sup>50</sup> It was a topic that remained unthinkable to many white Americans, and one which caused a significant dilemma once in Britain.

In contrast to American proclivities about race and sex, it appeared to many white Americans that many British women held no particular opinions that interactions with black men should be of any concern. Indeed, many African American soldiers found that in Britain, they were, "welcomed by people who noted their courteous demeanor and friendly smiles, not just the color of their skin."<sup>51</sup> According to Robin Cruikshank, Chief of the American section of the

<sup>49</sup> Jane Dailey, "The Sexual Politics of Race in World War II America," in *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 154.

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Halsey, *Color-Blind*, (New York, New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1946), 124-125.

<sup>51</sup> Jane Dailey, "The Sexual Politics of Race in World War II America," 157.

British Ministry of Information, many British citizens “were deeply impressed with the extreme modesty of behaviour of the Negroes, their softness of voice, their gracefulness of movement and their adaptability to strange custom and surroundings.”<sup>52</sup> In *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, Graham Smith asserts that “It was obvious that many young girls found the blacks fascinating, appreciating their attentiveness and good manners.”<sup>53</sup> As a result, with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of black troops into a country which didn’t perceive the “color bar” to the same degree as the Americans, it was more than likely that interracial sexual relationships would occur.

Evidence of these relationships can be found in a number of places. Some investigations were made after the war to calculate how widespread they were as well as how many children had been born as a result. One survey conducted by Sylvia McNeill, a Jamaican school teacher working for the League of Coloured Peoples in 1945, found that at least 553 babies had been born to white British mothers and black fathers in Britain.<sup>54</sup> McNeil claimed that the survey was not representative of the true number, and that there were far more that she had not been able to identify.<sup>55</sup>

One of the most famous examples of this opposition to discriminatory policies and actions came from Worle in Somerset. One Mrs. May, the wife of Worle’s vicar, tried to implement a “six-point code” which would dictate the proper way that British women should interact with African American soldiers should they ever come to the village. Some of the points of this code included rules such as: “If a local woman keeps a shop and a coloured soldier enters,

<sup>52</sup> Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 57.

<sup>53</sup> Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 202.

<sup>54</sup> Sylvia McNeill, *Memo from S. McNeill to Executive Committee of League of Coloured Peoples Re: Illegitimate Children Born to English Mothers and Fathers of Various Coloured American Service-Men*, N.d. MH - Records Created or Inherited by the Ministry of Health and Successors, Local Government Boards and Related Bodies, Records of the Health Divisions. MH 55 - Ministry of Health: Health Divisions: Public Health Services, Registered Files (93,000 Series) and Other Records. Subseries within MH 55 - Children, United Kingdom. National Archives at Kew, 1948.

<sup>55</sup> Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 208.

she must serve him, but she must do it as quickly as possible and indicate that she does not desire him to come there again,” “On no account must coloured troops be invited into the homes of white women,” and “White women, of course, must have no social relationship with coloured troops.” Upon hearing the code, many women of the village spoke out, denouncing any ideas of discrimination against African American troops and arguing that “this code amounts to an insult to the troops of our Ally.” One woman, speaking with a writer from the *Sunday Pictorial*, said, “I was disgusted, and so were most of the women there,” and continued that, “any coloured soldier who reads this may rest assured that there is no colour bar in this country and that he is as welcome as any other allied soldier. He will find here that the vast majority of people have nothing but repugnance for the narrow-minded, uninformed prejudices expressed by [Mrs. May]. There is, and will be—no persecution of coloured people in Britain.”<sup>56</sup>

However, that is not to say that the British public fully approved of such relationships taking place. Many British citizens, generally men, vocally disapproved of such actions. Richard A. Seckerson, writing for the *Clitheroe Advertiser and Times*, stated in a piece rather critical of the situation concerning black soldiers in Britain, “The white American soldiers strongly object to seeing white girls arm-in-arm with coloured men... understand that when Southerners arrive in this country and see negro Americans enjoying liberties which would be almost the subject for a lynching ‘back home,’ well, they get hot under their collars. And what is even worse, these white Americans form the opinion that we have no respect for our womenfolk.”<sup>57</sup>

Many other criticisms of interracial relationships by the British targeted the respectability of the women involved. Maurice Petherick, a conservative member of parliament during the war,

<sup>56</sup> “Wife Insults Our Allies,” *Sunday Mirror*, September 6, 1942, The British Newspaper Archive, accessed on December 6, 2019, [britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000844/19420906/019/0003](https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000844/19420906/019/0003).

<sup>57</sup> Richard A. Seckerson, “Jigs,” *Clitheroe Advertiser and Times*, July 23, 1943, The British Newspaper Archive, accessed on October 10, 2019, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0002041/19430723/061/0005>.

wrote in a letter to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that the Foreign Secretary should try to prevent the Americans from sending black troops to Britain, suggesting that it would give the Americans “a bad opinion of Englishwomen.”<sup>58</sup>

Some British politicians, especially Conservatives, also argued that because in the United States relationships between black men and white women were prohibited by social norms, then they should be considered so in Britain, too.<sup>59</sup> A report from the British War Cabinet noted, “some of the Regional Commissioners have expressed considerable apprehension as to the difficulties likely to be created in their regions by the presence of American coloured troops, and their association with the civil population, and particularly with British women. Some Regional Commissioners have informed me that, in their experience, some British women appear to find a peculiar fascination in associating with men of colour and that this association is resented by American white soldiers and is likely to give rise to difficult social problems in their Regions.”<sup>60</sup>

Thus, the British authorities identified the conflicts that would arise from interracial sexual relationships early on and took a position that such relationships would be “problematic” in terms of relations with white American soldiers. It is important to note that the reason given for these relationships being “problematic” was their connection to social and racial conflicts in Britain that resulted from the American presence, not necessarily the existence of the interracial relationships themselves. Yet, the wording of the report implies through the use of the phrase, “a peculiar fascination” that these relationships were still thought of as unusual and improper. This provides useful insight into British racism in the 1940s, as well as an important point on the American reaction to the social standing as they saw it in Britain. It shows that, while more

<sup>58</sup> “Petherick to Eden,” August 16, 1942, cited in *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 189.

<sup>59</sup> Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 188.

<sup>60</sup> Memorandum to War Cabinet, 21 September - 26 October 1942, NA, CAB 66/29 Original Reference 421 (42)-470 (42), accessed on September 14, 2019, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-66-29.pdf>.

subdued than in the United States, British racism still existed, especially in regards to interracial sexual relationships. British views on race were not a monolith, and contrary to many modern popular beliefs about Britain's reception of African American soldiers during the Second World War, there is substantial evidence of resistance to their presence and involvement with white Britons, especially women.

Because of this, some British authorities took action against interracial relationships, in one particular case, two British women in Derby were charged by the police on account of "keeping a disorderly house" due to the fact that black soldiers were often seen entering with the women, essentially accusing them of prostitution. In the women's defense, a man by the name of Mr. Pinder contended that "that these were the only two coloured soldiers who entered the premises, and added that there was no law in this country to prevent white women from taking negroes to their homes," adding that, "the police sergeant's evidence... did not point to the house being a disorderly one."<sup>61</sup> This exemplifies a trend of thinking that was common among both white American soldiers and some British citizens: that British women who interacted with African Americans were likely to be prostitutes. However, this was not the case, as shown in the same example. It is possible that this argument was made by British authorities to try and placate American perceptions of and reactions to these interactions by painting women who associated with African American men as prostitutes. The British government was most concerned about a rise in racial violence due to the presence of both black and white Americans and hoped to dissuade white Americans from seeking retribution by trying to taint the reputation of women known to invite African Americans into their homes. Yet, it is also likely that attempts to stop these relationships were simply driven by racist beliefs among some British authorities.

<sup>61</sup> "Derby Woman Admits to Having "Negro Friends" at House," *Derby Daily Telegraph*, April 21, 1943, The British Newspaper Archive, accessed on October 2, 2019, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000521/19430421/033/0004>.

However, the British government took little concrete action to prevent interracial relationships from forming, despite some talk among the Bolero Combined Committee concerning spreading rumors about black GIs having venereal diseases.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, it was decided that no action should be taken on behalf of the British government to enforce any sort of segregation. In a letter sent to the British Chief Constables, the Home Office stated that, “It is not the policy of His Majesty’s government that any discrimination as regards the treatment of coloured troops should be made by the British authorities.”<sup>63</sup> The British War Department understood that to enforce any sort of segregation in Britain would be difficult. They argued that there was evidence, “both in the public Press and from Members of Parliament that any difference of treatment between white and coloured troops may be regarded as racial discrimination which will give rise to bitter resentment,” among the British populace.<sup>64</sup> In regards to most aspects of Jim Crow segregation, the British War Cabinet agreed that:

Any lead given to the British people in this country, asking them to adopt the attitude of the American Army towards coloured people, whether American or others, is likely to cause serious resentment among coloured who are British subjects, and also to cause confusion--and even protest and resentment--in the minds of the public here who have been asked repeatedly to accept British coloured Colonial persons on equal terms and to extend to them hospitality and friendliness. The British attitude to coloured people is in fact widely different from the American attitude. There are historic and social reasons which may explain this, but the fact is undeniable... We cannot ask people to adopt the American attitude on the colour question without asking them to set aside the British tradition.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, 195.

<sup>63</sup> Circular Letter from the Secretary of State F. A. Newsam to the Chief Constables, September 4, 1942, NA, CAB 66/29 Original Reference 421 (42)-470 (42).

<sup>64</sup> Memorandum to War Cabinet, 21 September - 26 October 1942.

<sup>65</sup> Memorandum to War Cabinet, 21 September - 26 October 1942.

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

As a result, American reactions to the prevalence of interracial sexual relationships in Britain, both official and unofficial, were predictably far more combative. Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, noted in his report that:

If the British people wish to invite American white soldiers into their homes or to associate exclusively with them this is obviously their own business. The same principle obtains if they choose to associate with Negro Americans. It is unfortunate that many white Americans believe that such relations are exclusively on a sexual basis with prostitutes. I have found innumerable instances of British citizens wishing to associate and actually associating with Negro Americans on a basis of common interests and tastes. There is considerable ill feeling against the United States because of some Americans attempting to dictate in the United Kingdom the social relations of the British people. It is manifest that much ill feeling will be left against Americans if it is not handled properly.<sup>66</sup>

White American fears of improper contact between African Americans and the British often led to an imposition of their way of life upon the British people, which significantly contributed to growing conflict. "American observers who were here in 1942 when the first contingents arrived from America saw amicable and smooth relations develop between the Negro

<sup>66</sup> Walter White, "Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO."

troops and their British hosts... so much so that certain white American soldiers became openly resentful. And they lost no time in attempting to discipline the British people,” reported Roi Ottely in his article, “Dixie Invades Britain.”<sup>67</sup> These attempts were often met with backlash, with many Britons, “puzzled and antagonized” by attempts to “transplant patterns of racial behavior like that of the most backward states of the South.”<sup>68</sup> Many white GIs verbally and physically expressed their anger at seeing white women with African American men. In one reported instance, one soldier, after seeing a black soldier walking and holding hands with a British woman, “snatched off his hat and flung it to the ground. He broke into tears and kept repeating over and over, ‘I’m from Georgia and I just can’t take that!’”<sup>69</sup> Another soldier, in a letter home, expressed anger at seeing black soldiers with French girls, writing, “Incidentally, if there is anything that makes me mad, it is too [sic] see a negro with a couple of attractive French girls around here! My blood just boils and boils! I blame it on the girls too.... surely they must know better.”<sup>70</sup> One particularly telling incident occurred while a band was performing at a dance attended predominantly by American soldiers. Some members of the band were from British West Africa, and at one point during the night, one of the West African performers “took the floor with the wife of one of his colleagues in the band,” who happened to be white. Seeing this, “one of the southern American boys promptly went across the room and struck him.”<sup>71</sup> Here, not only did a GI attack another man simply for dancing with a white woman, but it was someone completely unfamiliar with American racism. Yet, this particular soldier thought it necessary that

<sup>67</sup> Roi Ottely, “Dixie Invades Britain.”

<sup>68</sup> “Army Minority Held Spreading Racial Hatred,” *The Washington Post*, May 1, 1944, ProQuest Digital Archives, accessed on October 23, 2019, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/docview/151682497?accountid=10051>.

<sup>69</sup> Roi Ottely, “Dixie Invades Britain.”

<sup>70</sup> Howard McCormick to Peggy McCormick, 11 October 1944, Center for American War Letters Archives, Box: WWII 92, Series 1, Folder:1-16.

<sup>71</sup> “From A London Diary,” *New Statesman and Nation*, September 19, 1942.

he strike the band member, thus enforcing his own racial views on people who were not familiar with nor “beholden” to those views. It was attitudes and actions like these that turned many Britons against the forms of discrimination that Americans brought with them to Britain. Even forms of segregation designed to prevent white women from interacting with black men, which was something many Britons agreed with on principle, were disliked. It also helped spread global awareness of American racism, as the man who had been struck was not an American. If Americans essentially saw non-whites around the world as second class citizens, then how could people living in Africa and Asia fully support an American-led United Nations after the war?

The growing agitation among white American troops in Britain concerning the treatment of African Americans also became a serious issue for the U.S. Army. They had difficulty handling the growing number of racially charged incidents regarding fights over British women. The issue reached General Eisenhower who wrote in his memoir, *Crusade in Europe*, that, “Prior to my arrival in England censorship had been established by American headquarters on stories involving minor difficulties between Negro troops and other soldiers, or civilians. These incidents frequently involved social contacts between our Negro soldiers and British girls.”<sup>72</sup> The fact that censorship was used to conceal the existence of the problem showed both the volatility of the issue among white American troops, as well as a focus on interracial sexual relationships being one of the main points of conflict. From Eisenhower’s perspective, “The British population, except in large cities and among wealthy classes, lacks the racial consciousness which is so strong in the United States. The small-town British girl would go to a movie or dance with a Negro quite as readily as she would with anyone else, a practice that our white soldiers could not understand.”<sup>73</sup> Eisenhower makes a point of mentioning the difference between the

<sup>72</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1948), 58.

<sup>73</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 59.

people of “large cities” and the rest of the country, hinting at a divide between urban and rural views of race in Britain. Nevertheless, he too found that, despite divided views among Britons on interracial sexual relationships, the British public still often sided with African Americans against white soldiers, noting that, “brawls often resulted and our white soldiers were further bewildered when they found that the British press took a firm stand on the side of the Negro.”<sup>74</sup>

Eisenhower’s solution to the issue would be controversial, even at the time. In August 1942, he authorized a plan to send an African American detachment of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) to Britain, “to perform duties such as car driving and secretarial work and also to provide companionship for the thousands of Negro troops,” with the *New York Times* reporting that, “Negroes were performing essential duties. They have, however, been without the companionship of other Negroes.”<sup>75</sup> This decision was ultimately reversed as it received severe backlash from many groups, especially African Americans, who saw it as an insult to the WAACs.<sup>76</sup>

Beyond this, Eisenhower, and to a further extent the headquarters of the ETO, had minimal involvement with policies attempting to introduce segregation to Britain. In fact, most of Eisenhower’s attempts to prevent racially provoked incidents were aimed towards white Americans. In an order issued in September 1941, General Eisenhower states that, “The presence of Negro troops in this theater creates a problem of inter-racial relationships much different from that existing in the United States... Undoubtedly a considerable association of colored troops with British white population, both men and women, will take place on a basis mutually

<sup>74</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 59.

<sup>75</sup> “DUTY IN ENGLAND FOR NEGRO WAACS” *New York Times*, August 16, 1942, Proquest Digital Archives, accessed on October 5, 2019, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/docview/106369643?accountid=10051>.

<sup>76</sup> “WAAC’s not Entertainers for Troops,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 5, 1942.

acceptable to the individuals concerned.”<sup>77</sup> On this, Eisenhower states that officially, “any attempt to curtail such association by official orders or restrictions is unjustified and must not be attempted... The spreading of derogatory statements concerning the character of any group of United States troops, either white or colored, must be considered as conduct prejudicial to good order... and offenders must be promptly punished.”<sup>78</sup>

It was sentiment like this that showed the beginnings of a re-evaluation of segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces. While officially segregation was limited on a unit by unit basis, the existence and acceptance of any form of unit segregation encouraged many white soldiers to think that other forms of racial segregation and discrimination were acceptable. Additionally, as outlined above, the idea of “separate but equal” espoused by the U.S. military was obviously not practiced, which further encouraged a culture of discrimination against black soldiers. This was not helped by the fact that the majority of African American units, at least earlier in the war, were non-combat labor units, and therefore also considered by many white soldiers to be inferior and proved the point that black troops were not reliable enough to fight.<sup>79</sup> Thus, when both black and white American GIs began arriving in Britain, this “culture of discrimination” which was so ingrained in the military by this point was brought with them. This almost immediately caused problems due to a radically different local culture, with the interaction between African American men and white British women being the greatest point of contention. Many white troops, especially those from the American South, saw fit to impose those laws in Britain not only on black troops, but on the British population as well. This was exceptionally detrimental to African American morale, as well as exceedingly unpopular among the British people, to the point to which the Army had to relent and try to unindoctrinate white troops heading overseas. It

<sup>77</sup> Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 17-18.

<sup>78</sup> Walter White, *A Rising Wind*, 18.

<sup>79</sup> Walter White, “Observations and Recommendations of Walter White on Racial Relations in the ETO.”

must have seemed to American military commanders then, that segregating the Armed Forces provided little benefit to conducting military operations.<sup>80</sup> It ruined morale among both black and white troops, who were constantly fighting. It also soured relations with local populations who had to deal with the fallout of this fighting, as well as trying to adjust themselves to American ways of life, some aspects of which they deeply disliked. Something had to change, and soon they did.

## **Conclusion**

On the 26th of July, 1948, President Truman began the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces.<sup>81</sup> Some small scale integration of African Americans into white units had already occurred in Belgium and Germany in late 1944 and 1945, and had proven successful,<sup>82</sup> however Executive Order 9981 officially abolished all forms of discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin in the U.S. Armed Forces.<sup>83</sup> Civil rights activists in the United States played a major role in bringing this policy to life; however, the conditions which allowed for this change to occur were set during the American experience in the Second World War, especially in places like Britain. The conflict caused by the rapid collision of social norms in Britain resulted in significant difficulties for both the U.S. Army as well as the civilian population. So much so that American military authorities deemed it necessary to train white GIs through films, lectures, and orders that discrimination and segregation were a detriment to the war effort and should not be enforced or practiced in the European Theater of Operations. Desegregation soon followed, and

<sup>80</sup> President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, *Freedom to Serve: Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, A Report by the President's Committee*, cited in *Military Service and American Democracy* by William A. Taylor.

<sup>81</sup> William A. Taylor, *Military Service and American Democracy*, 59.

<sup>82</sup> Ulysses Lee, "Chapter XXII: Volunteer Infantry Replacements," *The Employment of Negro Troops*.

<sup>83</sup> William A. Taylor, *Military Service and American Democracy*, 63.

although discrimination and racism in the U.S. Armed Forces was not eliminated, the lessons learned in Britain helped bring an end to the institution of segregation in the military which allowed these problems to persist and grow.

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