



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Pamphlet: A Negro Looks at War

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000,000) would create for the white race in the Republic a menace of degeneracy were it not that an impassable gulf has been made between them. . . .

"Although a citizen of the U.S., the black man is regarded by the white American as an inferior being with whom relations of business or service only are possible. The black is constantly being censured for his want of intelligence and discretion, his lack of civic and professional conscience, and for his tendency toward undue familiarity.

"The vices of the Negro are a constant menace to the American who has to repress them sternly. For instance, the black American troops in France have, by themselves, given rise to as many complaints for attempted rape as the rest of the army. . . .

"Conclusion: 1. We must prevent the rise of any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers. We may be courteous and amiable with these last, but we cannot deal with them on the same plane as with the white American officers without deeply wounding the latter. We must not eat with them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside the requirements of military service.

"2. We must not commend too highly the black American troops, particularly in the presence of [white] Americans. . . .

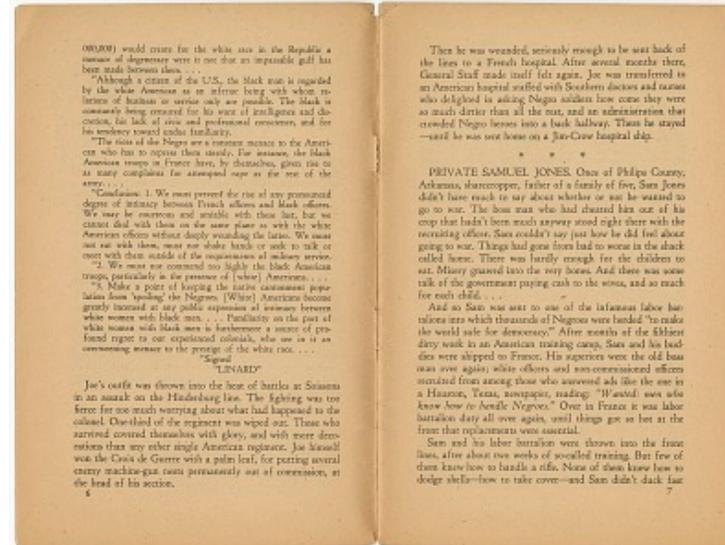
"3. Make a point of keeping the native cantonment population from 'spoiling' the Negroes. [White] Americans become greatly incensed at any public expression of intimacy between white women with black men.... Familiarity on the part of white women with black men is furthermore a source of profound regret to our experienced colonials, who see in it an overweening menace to the prestige of the white race....

"Signed
"LINARD"

Joe's outfit was thrown into the heat of battles at Soissons in an assault on the Hindenburg line. The fighting was too fierce for too much worrying about what had happened to the colonel. One-third of the regiment was wiped out. Those who survived covered themselves with glory, and with more decorations than any other single American regiment. Joe himself won the Croix de Guerre with a palm leaf, for putting several enemy machine-gun nests permanently out of commission, at the head of this section.

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Then he was wounded, seriously enough to be sent back of the lines to a French hospital. After several months there, General Staff made itself felt again. Joe was transferred to an American hospital staffed with Southern doctors and nurses who delighted in asking Negro soldiers how come they were so much dirtier than all the rest, and an administration that crowded Negro heroes into a back hallway. There he stayed - until he was sent home on a Jim - Crow hospital ship.



* * *

PRIVATE SAMUEL JONES. Once of Philips County, Arkansas, sharecropper, father of a family of five, Sam Jones didn't have much to say about whether or not he wanted to go to war. The boss man who had cheated him out of his crop that hadn't been much anyway stood right there with the recruiting officer. Sam couldn't say just how he did feel about going to war. Things had gone from bad to worse in the shack called home. There was hardly enough for the children to eat. Misery gnawed into the very bones. And there was some talk of the government paying cash to the wives, and so much for each child....

And so Sam was sent to one of the infamous labor battalions into which thousands of Negroes were herded "to make the world safe for democracy." After months of the filthiest dirty work in an American training camp, Sam and his buddies were shipped to France. His superiors were the old boss man over again; white officers and non-commissioned officers recruited from among those who answered ads like the one in a Houston, Texas, newspaper, reading: "Wanted: men who know how to handle Negroes." Over in France it was labor battalion duty all over again, until things got so hot at the front that replacements were essential.

Sam and his labor battalion were thrown into the front lines, after about two weeks of so-called training. But few of them knew how to handle a rifle. None of them knew how to dodge shells-how to take cover-and Sam didn't duck fast

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