

Volume III, Chapter 1

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# War on Two Fronts

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The Experiences of African American Soldiers  
During World War I

Jamie L. Lathan, Ph.D.



FREDDIE STOWERS  
CORPL. 371 INF. 93 DIV.  
SOUTH CAROLINA SEPT. 28, 1918

M.H. U.S.A.

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# Introduction

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. **Who are some of the African American soldiers who fought in World War I?**
2. **What actions, personalities, or forces led to the racial integration of the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery?**
3. **What are some of the major military battles of the Meuse-Argonne campaign that involved African American soldiers?**

African American doughboys are forgotten individuals in a forgotten war. Despite the racism and discrimination they faced at the hands of U. S. society and their White colleagues in the military, these men persisted in their fight against the dual enemies of the Central powers and the racist attitudes and actions back home. From the streets of New York, Chicago, and Washington, D. C. to the countryside of the Carolinas and the Deep South, these men went to the trenches of France united in their fight for first-class American citizenship. Simultaneously symbols of patriotism and militancy, these soldiers evoked feelings of heroism and courage from the African American community and feelings of fear from some White Americans. An estimated 500 African American soldiers are buried in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery. Giving the ultimate sacrifice of their lives, the African American men interred in the Meuse Argonne cemetery not only represented infantry regiments, but also stevedore regiments, engineer service battalions, labor battalions, butchery companies, and pioneer infantry regiments. To shed light on some of those African American soldiers and on the military and post-military accomplishments of other African American soldiers, this chapter provides summaries of key individual men, analyses of important primary and secondary sources, interactive learning activities, and reflective journals of the author's trip to the battlefields and the American Battle Monuments Commission's (ABMC) cemetery of the Meuse-Argonne campaign of 1918.

## My Journey

13 July 2014 - Journal Entry

As I arrive in Belgium and prepare for the journey to France, I am acutely aware of the color of my skin. Yes, I am the only African American taking this journey with eleven other amazing teachers from North Carolina and Virginia and an equally amazing supporting cast of college professors and graduate students. But, that is not uncomfortable - these folks are my professional colleagues and are quickly becoming good friends. What is a bit discomfoting is the relatively few people of color that I see in the Belgium airport, and even more discomfoting is my knowledge of Belgium's past imperialistic and brutal colonial relationship with the Congolese in Africa.

All of my discomfort pales in comparison to the experiences of the African American soldiers in France during World War I. These men faced racism, discrimination, hate, lynching, and second-class citizenship treatment in France - not at the hands of the French civilians or soldiers, but at the hands of their fellow White Americans. The French soldiers did not always treat African American soldiers with respect and dignity, but, compared to the White Doughboys from the U. S., they were not as racist and discriminatory.

Reading more about the military feats of the all African-American (except for high-ranking officers) 92nd and 93rd Divisions gives me a sense of amazement and pride. Despite the Jim Crow racism and segregation that they faced at home and the exported Jim Crow attitudes of their fellow White American soldiers in

France, these men fought bravely, and many sacrificed their lives, for their country.

I am reminded of the African American soldiers that fought in the previous wars for the United States. "The Colored Soldiers" a poem written by Paul Lawrence Dunbar in 1894, captures the power and strength of African American soldiers. Although this poem is explicitly an ode to the black soldiers that fought in the U. S. Civil War, the words transcend time and place, and are equally relevant to the blacks soldiers fighting in World War I.

Different war, same conflict, courage, conviction, crisis, and ultimately compromise. Whether fighting in the U. S. Civil War or World War I (in fact, the U. S. has never fought a war without African American participation), the African American soldiers participated in a conflict against the predominant beliefs about their inferiority. They also displayed courage to fight the enemies of the nation and the enemies of racial equality. Additionally, their conviction to prove themselves worthy of first-class American citizenship remained high in both wars. As a result of their successful military service, the United States faced an identity crisis about whether to include African Americans as equal citizens. Ultimately, in both wars, the United States chose to compromise, offering few concessions to African Americans, and remaining a segregated and racist nation. Not until the 1948 integration of the military and the civil rights legislation of the 1950s and 60s did a positive change for racial equality for African Americans begin.

The Colored Soldiers by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1894)



*In this video, I recite "The Colored Soldiers" while standing behind the graves of sixty-one of the African American soldiers from North Carolina and South Carolina who are buried in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery. This is my small way of honoring these men and their sacrifice. Please note that I begin and end the poem standing behind the gravestone for Corporal Freddie Stowers, the only African American U. S. Congressional Medal of Honor recipient from World War I. He was born in my home state of South Carolina.*

If the muse were mine to tempt it  
And my feeble voice were strong,  
If my tongue were trained to measures,  
I would sing a stirring song.

I would sing a song heroic  
Of those noble sons of Ham,  
Of the gallant colored soldiers  
Who fought for Uncle Sam!

In the early days you scorned them,  
And with many a flip and flout  
Said "These battles are the white  
man's,  
And the whites will fight them out."  
Up the hills you fought and faltered,  
In the vales you strove and bled,  
While your ears still heard the thunder  
Of the foes' advancing tread.

Then distress fell on the nation,  
And the flag was drooping low;  
Should the dust pollute your banner?  
No! the nation shouted, No!  
So when War, in savage triumph,  
Spread abroad his funeral pall—  
Then you called the colored soldiers,  
And they answered to your call.

And like hounds unleashed and eager  
For the life blood of the prey,  
Sprung they forth and bore them  
bravely

In the thickest of the fray.  
And where'er the fight was hottest,  
Where the bullets fastest fell,  
There they pressed unblanched and

fearless  
At the very mouth of hell.

Ah, they rallied to the standard  
To uphold it by their might;  
None were stronger in the labors,  
None were braver in the fight.  
From the blazing breach of Wagner  
To the plains of Olustee,  
They were foremost in the fight  
Of the battles of the free.

And at Pillow! God have mercy  
On the deeds committed there,  
And the souls of those poor victims  
Sent to Thee without a prayer.  
Let the fulness of Thy pity  
O'er the hot wrought spirits sway  
Of the gallant colored soldiers  
Who fell fighting on that day!

Yes, the Blacks enjoy their freedom,  
And they won it dearly, too;  
For the life blood of their thousands  
Did the southern fields bedew.  
In the darkness of their bondage,  
In the depths of slavery's night,

Their muskets flashed the dawning,  
And they fought their way to light.

They were comrades then and brothers,  
Are they more or less to-day?  
They were good to stop a bullet  
And to front the fearful fray.  
They were citizens and soldiers,  
When rebellion raised its head;  
And the traits that made them worthy,—  
Ah! those virtues are not dead.

They have shared your nightly vigils,  
They have shared your daily toil;  
And their blood with yours commingling  
Has enriched the Southern soil.

They have slept and marched and  
suffered  
'Neath the same dark skies as you,  
They have met as fierce a foeman,  
And have been as brave and true.

And their deeds shall find a record  
In the registry of Fame;  
For their blood has cleansed completely  
Every blot of Slavery's shame.

So all honor and all glory  
To those noble sons of Ham—  
The gallant colored soldiers  
Who fought for Uncle Sam!

## **Introduction**

General Count Alfred von Schlieffen of Germany knew the difficulty of fighting a two-front war. His plan for German victory and dominance in Europe depended on the slow mobilization of Russian forces on the eastern front and the concentration of military might on the western front against France. After defeating the French in six weeks, the Germans would then attack and defeat Russia. Fighting on two fronts had to be avoided. It was not. The plan failed. Germany lost the war.

African American soldiers during World War I knowingly faced similar odds in their two-front war against the Germans and the racist Americans. In their plan, which resembled the ideas of black soldiers in previous wars in United States history and foreshadowed the Double-V campaign of World War II, African American soldiers would fight for their country, defeat the Germans, and simultaneously defeat the enemy of racism and discrimination by proving themselves worthy of first-class citizenship rights. Though African American soldiers lost many battles along the racial frontlines due to the persistence of racial inequality and violence in the immediate aftermath of World War I, their sacrifice, courage, and military accomplishments laid the foundation for a more racially-just society for all Americans.

## **Background**

During the academic school year of 2013-2014, I began my personal and professional journey of discovery of African American contributions to the Great War. Having taught Advanced Placement United States History for more than ten years and Honors African American Studies for more than five years, I was familiar with the Great Migration of African Americans on the homefront, the Harlem Renaissance, and the New Negro movement of the 1920s. I knew very little about the military and combat experience of African American soldiers in World War I. I knew that the men were in segregated units and I vaguely knew about the positive French treatment of African American soldiers. There was so much that I had to learn.

Over the next eight to ten months, I learned about the military exploits of the 92nd and 93rd Division of African American soldiers, the heroics of Freddie Stowers, Henry Johnson, and countless others, the introduction of jazz to France, and many other lessons, events, and ideas that I attempt to capture in the pages that follow.

# Memorializing African American Soldiers: Cemeteries

## *My Journey*

15 July 2014 – Journal Entry

I was immediately overtaken by the massive size of the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery. I knew that the loss of life in that particular campaign in the war was tremendous, but seeing the over 14,000 grave-stones really made it “real.” The white crosses, the “Star of David” gravestones, and the inscriptions on the gravestones of the “Unknown” soldiers led me to thoughts of faith and religion.

The grounds of the cemetery are immaculate. There doesn't seem to be a blade of grass out of place. The grave stones look as clean as the day when they were first carved and engraved. I look forward to participating in the washing of the stones in a couple of mornings. Mr. Dave Bedford, the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery superintendent, and his staff, take special care to clean all the headstones weekly. I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this activity to honor the fallen soldiers.

*Solemnity, peace, tranquility . . . all feelings that engulfed me as I walked around the 130-acre site.*

*What is more amazing is the democratization of the cemetery. Men who were not social equals in life were put on equal standing in death. Privates were buried beside captains, lieutenants were buried beside buglers, and, most surprisingly, Whites were buried beside Blacks. Especially shocking since cemeteries were segregated in the United States. Even Arlington National Cemetery remained segregated until 1948 when President Harry S. Truman integrated the military.*

*Who was responsible for the integration of the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery? Was it Pershing? Was it a French general?*

*The integration of the cemetery was a bold decision in a U. S. society marked by racial segregation and discrimination. Was the decision less bold because it took place in France?*

I have never really thought much about cemeteries. What can a “resting” place for the dead teach about the attitudes and practices of the living? Quite a bit, as it turns out.

The way that graves are arranged, the shape of the gravestones, the symbols on the gravestones, the landscape around the gravesite, the general maintenance of the gravesite, and many other factors provide insight into the priorities and beliefs of the living.

There are several potential explanations for the integration of the cemetery. Perhaps the African American doughboys’ valiant and courageous service and sacrifice in the war led to the decision. Or, maybe the American desire to segregate the cemetery was trumped by the French desire to honor the African American soldiers. The French, though far from racial egalitarians, appreciated the fighting of the African American soldiers. Lastly, and maybe more farfetched, a high official in the U. S. military could have recommended the integration of the cemetery due to the bravery exhibited Black soldiers. Though this mystery has not been solved, it is clear that the integration of the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery created a crack in the seemingly impenetrable armor of racism and discrimination against African Americans.



## Lesson Plan: Segregated in Life, Integrated in Death

In this activity, students will examine the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery in light of a few other cemeteries created around the same time in the United States and France. Students should pay particular attention to whether people of different races are buried adjacent to one another.

### Guiding Questions

1. Why are the burial arrangements of the Meuse-Argonne cemetery different from other cemeteries created around the same time?

### Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to:

1. Interpret and analyze images of cemeteries.
2. Photograph cemeteries in their home communities.
3. Create a PowerPoint about the Meuse-Argonne and other cemeteries.

### Teacher Planning

#### Time Required

60 minutes

#### Background Information

Arlington National Cemetery was established in 1864. At that time, African American soldiers were buried in a separate section from white soldiers. About 1500 United States Colored Troops,

the first black combat soldiers of the Civil War, are interred in section 27. Another 4000 African American citizens – former residents of Freedman’s Village (a “model” community of emancipated slaves, runaway, and free blacks) -- are buried in this section. Four Medal of Honor recipients are interred in section 27:

- Landsman William H. Brown, U. S. Navy (Civil War)
- Sgt. James H. Harris, 38th U. S. Colored Troops, U. S. Army (Civil War)
- Pvt. James Richmond, 8th Ohio Infantry, U. S. Army (Civil War)
- Sgt. Thomas Shaw, 9th U. S. Cavalry, U. S. Army (Indian Campaigns – 1881)

Segregation by race and rank continued in the cemetery for 82 years.

With the Executive Order 9981, President Harry S. Truman integrated the military. While the process was gradual on the battlefield, it was immediate in the cemeteries. The policy of segregation of military cemeteries was finally abandoned.

Several African American soldiers from World War I are now buried in Arlington National cemetery in an integrated manner. Spotswood Poles, a combat veteran with five battle stars and the Purple Heart, is buried in section 42, site 2324. Henry Johnson, the first American soldier to earn France’s highest military honor (the Croix de Guerre) is buried in section 25, site 64.

## Materials Needed

### Primary Source Photographs



*A French World War I cemetery in Verdun, France.*

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### Pre-activities

For homework, assign the students to take a picture of the oldest cemetery in their hometown. The students should then bring their photos/images to class and share them. During observations of the photographs of the cemeteries, the students should answer the following questions:

1. Do any patterns stand out to you?
2. Are there any grave-stones that are different from the others?
3. Are there any indicators as to the race or ethnicity of any of the individuals buried in the cemetery?
4. Is the cemetery well-kept? Is the grass cut, bushes trimmed, etc.?
5. Are there any religious symbols present? If so, describe them.

### Activities

1. Assign the students to share their answers to the “Pre-activities” questions with the class.
2. Assign the students to view the photographs of the cemeteries in France.
3. The students should then answer the following questions:  
**What do the cemeteries have in common? How are the cemeteries different?**
4. Assign the students to create a PowerPoint presentation about the Meuse-Argonne cemetery as it compares to the Arlington National cemetery before 1948 and other cemeteries in France in the early 20th century.

### Assessment

Students will create a PowerPoint presentation about the differences between the Meuse Argonne cemetery and other cemeteries created around the same time in their communities. Students will also include their hypothesis about why the Meuse-Argonne cemetery is different.

Checklist for the PowerPoint presentation:

- PowerPoint includes images of the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery and the Arlington National cemetery.
- PowerPoint includes images of at least two other cemeteries in the United States.
- PowerPoint includes an analysis of the cemetery design and practices of integration or segregation.
- PowerPoint includes a hypothesis about the reasons for the integration of the Meuse-Argonne cemetery.

# Memorializing African American Soldiers: Monuments

Like the integration of the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery, the monuments to African American soldiers in France give these men more in death than anything they ever experienced in life – dignity, respect, equality, and appreciation. I had the privilege and honor to visit four monuments: the monument to the 371st Infantry at Ardeuil-Montfauxelles, the monument to the 371st Infantry at Bussy Farm, the monument to the 369th Infantry at Sechault, and the monument to 372nd Infantry at Monthois.

Monuments to soldiers provide a lot of information about the values deemed important by those who create and design them. Growing up in the American South, I have seen many monuments to the Confederate soldiers of the Civil War. Whether to promulgate the “Lost Cause” narrative or to celebrate a White southern heritage, those monuments mean a lot to their creators. What did the monuments to the African American soldiers of World War I mean to their creators?

After an up-close, “front-row” view of the monuments, I was struck by their simplicity and beauty. All of the monuments were in the shape of an obelisk and all, except for the monument at Ardeuil-Montfauxelles, had inscriptions written in English. Though subtle,

the English inscriptions on the monuments are a great way to honor the English-speaking African American soldiers of World War I. In terms of cleanliness, the monument at Sechault was, by far, the best well-kept. Interestingly, it was also the only monument that made any mention of the race of the soldiers. The inscription on the monument reads, “369th Infantry (15th Reg-NYG) (Colored)”. If I did not know that the 371st and 370th were African American units, I potentially would have ignored the monuments at Ardeuil-Montfauxelles, Bussy Farm, and Monthois. Why did the creators of the monuments choose to avoid mentioning race? I have a few hypotheses:

1. These men gave their lives to liberate the French towns. Their race is a minor detail that does not matter. They are heroes and should be recognized as such, regardless of their race;
2. The creators of the monument wanted the viewers to do research and be surprised by the fact that the men honored were African Americans;

3. The creators built the monument for an audience who were familiar with World War I and U. S. regiments that took part in it;
4. A focus on the race of the men could take attention away from the focus of the sacrifice that the men made; and
5. The creators of the monument were sensitive to the racial climate in the United States at the time.

While these reasons are all valid and plausible, I think that acknowledging the race of the men could allow for better understandings of the sacrifices that the men made for a home country that hated them.

Another observation from my travels to the monuments was the awe and disappointment of the monument at Bussy farm. If the Sechault monument was in the best condition, the Bussy farm monument was the most worn-down and ignored. Our quest to find that monument is a story on its own.

## **Lesson Plan: Commemorating African American Soldiers in France**

There are several monuments in France commemorating the military actions of African American soldiers during World War I. In this activity, students will view photographs of the monuments and compare and contrast the monuments.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. How are World War I African American soldiers remembered in France?
2. What are key characteristics of memorials/monuments to the African American soldiers?
3. What are key differences between the monuments to African American soldiers?

### **Learning Outcomes**

The student will be able to:

1. Identify the main reasons for the existence and location of each monument.
2. Compare and contrast each monument.
3. Perform an oral presentation on the importance of the monument.

## My Journey

16 July 2014 - Journal Entry

I am grateful for Lynn, Todd, and Nicole for sharing this amazing journey with me. This was quite a day - a broken down car, a trip to a mechanic, and a search for Hill 188! Along with all of that we found four monuments to the black soldiers who fought in the battles of World War I! All of the monuments were relatively close to each other - probably a 15-mile radius existed between the towns where the monuments were erected. It seems clear that the African American troops were all stationed close to each other and that some regiments liberated multiple towns along the western front. My thoughts were confirmed by the maps located in the Blue Book (American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: A History, Guide, and Reference Book) - we were traveling paths that African American troops helped to liberate nearly 100 years ago!

The monument at Montfauvelles was the first one we located. We drove through the small town and stopped in front of the monument. Initially, I thought that the monument was dedicated to the men from the town of Montfauvelles who had died fighting in World War I. We had already seen a lot of those monuments and this one looked no different. It was only after taking a close look at the inscription that I noticed that the monument was dedicated to the 371st Infantry! Apparently, the African American soldiers of the 371st liberated this town between September 28 and October 1, 1918. Awesome! It was interesting that there was no mention of the race of the soldiers.

While I took pictures of the monument at Montfauvelles, my colleague, Nicole, initiated a conversation with a Frenchman who

lived just a few steps away from the monument. The Frenchman had been looking at us suspiciously as we stopped our car and starting taking photos. After the conversation with Nicole, he became our greatest asset in our quest to find the Bussy Farm monument.

Parson, the Frenchman, kindly and graciously agreed to drive us to the monument at Bussy Farm. We literally drove through a wheat field to get to the monument. Thank you Lynn for your great driving!

. . . What an amazing find! There is no way that we would have ever happened upon this monument had it not been for Parson's kindness to us, Nicole's French language fluency, and Lynn's masterful driving!

. . . My excitement for the moment waned a bit when I noticed the worn-down condition of the monument. My wish-list . . . that the town would take better care of this monument and make it more accessible to the public.

During the ten minutes or so that we spent in front of the monument, Nicole continued to talk with Parson. We found out that the town had a celebration centered around the monument about 20 years ago. Parson also mentioned that several Americans attended the ceremony, but he could not remember whether any African Americans attended. He also said that, since then, the mayor of the town has paid little attention to the monument.

I hope that changes . . .

## Teacher Planning

### Time Required

90 minutes

### Materials Needed

Photographs



Monument to 371st Infantry at Ardeuil-Montfauxelles. Tap or click for fullscreen.

1 of 18

Presentation with images



Tap or click for fullscreen.

### Websites

- [371st Infantry Regiment 93rd Division \(Colored\)](#) includes great information on the 371st regiment and the Bussy Farm monument.
- [Doughboy Center](#) includes the military actions of the African American regiments during World War I.

## Pre-Activities

1. Assign the students to view the presentation.
2. As they view the photographs of the monuments, ask them to take notes on the following:
  - a. The shape of the monument
  - b. Whether there are any religious symbols
  - c. Their general impressions of the monument
  - d. The geographic features that surround the site
  - e. Whether the sites are well-maintained
  - f. Whether the monument mentions the race of the soldiers
3. After taking notes, the students will pair with another student and share their insights.

## Activities

1. Assign the students to read background information (see links in left column) about the monuments and the battles.
2. Assign the students to create a chart that lists the features of each of the monuments.
3. Ask the students to list two similarities between the monuments and two differences between the monuments.
4. Ask the students to hypothesize why some monuments mention the race of the soldiers and other monuments do not. Does race matter?

## Assessment

1. Divide the students into groups and assign each group one of the monuments.
2. Assign the group to create a brochure for their assigned monument.

### Checklist for Monument Brochure:

- ★ Contains a photograph of the monument.
- ★ Contains a brief history of the monument.
- ★ Contains a brief history of the group of soldier that the monument honors.
- ★ Contains at least two reasons why people should visit the monument.
- ★ Contains at least two reasons why the monument should be protected and maintained.

## John “Black Jack” Pershing

General John “Black Jack” Pershing is one of the most recognized figures and personalities of the First World War. Born in Missouri in 1860, Pershing grew up working on his family’s farm. As a teenager, he taught children at local country schools – one of the schools being for African American children (Lengel 2008). In the former slave state of Missouri in the 1870s, teaching African American children was a very radical move for young Pershing. Did this action reveal Pershing’s more humanitarian and egalitarian views towards African Americans? I’m not sure.

After graduating from the U. S. Military Academy at West Point in 1886, Pershing participated in some of the Indian Wars in the American West and then, in 1895, became an officer with the 10th Cavalry African American “Buffalo Soldiers” stationed in Montana (*ibid*). In 1898, he served as the captain of the 10th Cavalry as they led the charge in the battle at San Juan Hill in Cuba. His service with these African American soldiers led to the “Black Jack” nickname – a derogatory name given to him by students at West Point.

It is difficult to pigeon-hole Pershing as either a racist or an egalitarian. He is a complicated individual and it is apparent that his ideas on race changed at different times. For example, during a review of the 92nd Division immediately following the war, Pershing stated:

*the 92nd Division stands second to none in the record you have made since your arrival in France. I am proud of the part you have played in the great conflict . . . yet you have only done what the American people expected you to do and you have measured up to every expectation of the Commander-in-Chief . . . I commend the 92nd Division for its achievements not only in the field, but on the record its men have made in their individual conduct. The American public has every reason to be proud of the record made by the 92nd Division (Scott 1919, 167).*

Then in 1931 in his book about the war, Pershing had this to say about the African American soldiers of the 92nd Division:

*It is well known that the time and attention that must be devoted to training colored troops in order to raise their level of efficiency to the average were considerably greater than the white regiments. More responsibility rested upon officers of colored regiments owing to the lower capacity and lack of education of the personnel . . . It would have been much wiser to have followed the long experience of our Regular Army and provided these colored units with selected white officers” (Pershing 1931, v.2, 228-229).*

It is important to note that the Black soldiers were courageous and valiant despite the ambiguity at best, and hostility at worst, from the U. S. military leadership of Pershing.

## **Pershing’s Role in the Integration of the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery**

And, finally, what about the role that Pershing may have played in the integration of the Meuse-Argonne cemetery? The racially progressive Pershing - who taught African American children as a teenager - would support the integration. On the other hand, the segregationist and racist Pershing would never support integrating the cemetery.

In the *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: A History, Guide, and Reference Book*, Pershing is presented as a man who appreciates all soldiers, regardless of the color of their skin. For example, in the written tour of the Meuse-Argonne American Memorial at Montfaucon, the author includes a photograph of Pershing’s tribute to the officers and men that served there:

*Physically strong, virile, and aggressive, the morale of the American soldier during this most trying period was superb. In their devotion, their valor, and in their loyal fulfillment of their obligations, the officers and men of the American Expeditionary Forces have left a heritage of which those who follow may ever be proud (American Battle Monuments Commission 1938, 204).*

Perhaps another way that Pershing decided to honor all American soldiers was to integrate the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery.

My hope is that one day historical records will be uncovered that identify the person(s) responsible for integrating the cemetery.

## Lesson Plan: General John Pershing – Racial Egalitarian or Racial Bigot?

General John “Blackjack” Pershing has a complex history when it comes to his racial ideas about African Americans. This activity will allow students to explore his race ideas through his words and the words of others. Was General Pershing a man of his times or a man ahead of his times concerning race and racial justice?

### Guiding Questions

1. Was General Pershing a racial egalitarian or a racial bigot?

### Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to:

1. Interpret and analyze quotes by, and about, General Pershing.
2. Synthesize quotes into 140-character tweets.
3. Support an argument for or against Pershing as a racial egalitarian.

## Teacher Preparation

### Time Required

90 Minutes

### Materials Needed

Quotes by, or about,  
General John Pershing



Tap or click the preview image to view the document.

### Pre-activities

Students will read an account of how General John “BlackJack” Pershing got his nickname.

### Activities

1. Assign students to read the quotes by, and about, General John Pershing.
2. Pair students off into groups of two or three and have each group create a tweet (140-word sentence) for each quote.

3. Assign each group to then write three additional tweets that summarize their feelings about whether General Pershing is a racial egalitarian or a racial bigot.

### **Assessment**

Students will transform each quote by, or about, Pershing into a tweet. Then, students will compose another three tweets arguing that Pershing was either a racial egalitarian or a racial bigot.

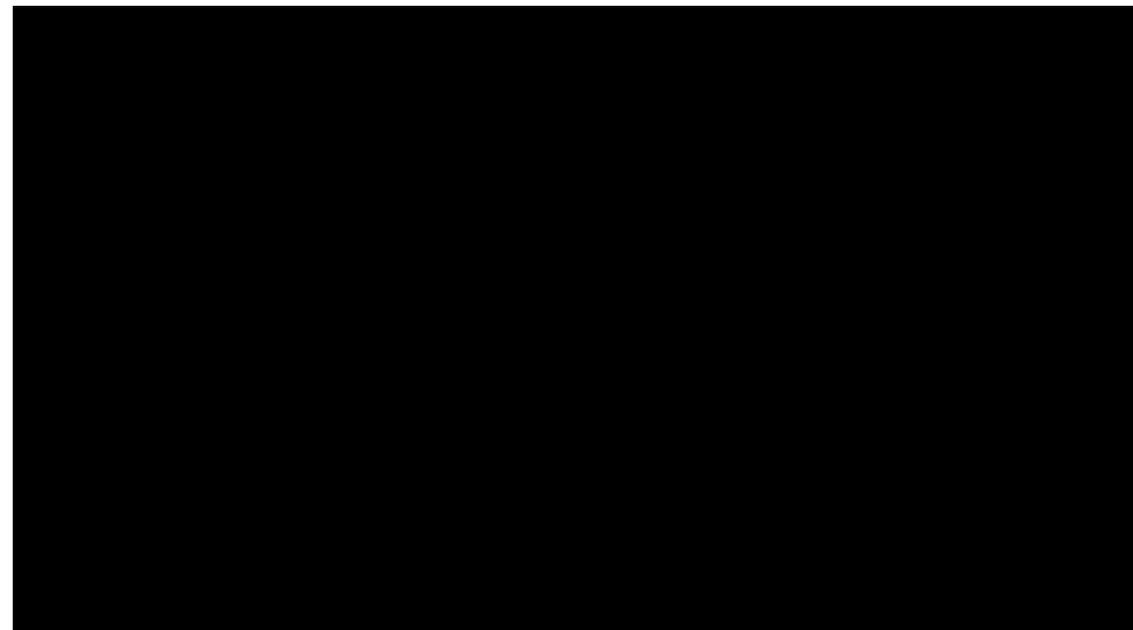
### **Extensions**

1. Students can sign up for Twitter and follow a World War I historian.
2. Students can post their tweets about General John Pershing.

# Corporal Freddie Stowers

Corporal Freddie Stowers was a man of humble origins who gave his life for the cause of freedom and democracy in World War I. He also was the only African American recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor from World War I.

As a South Carolina native, I am proud to have discovered another hero from the great Palmetto state.



*Dave Bedford, the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery superintendent, explains the significance of Corporal Freddie Stowers's headstone.*



## SC House Bill 5393



*Tap or click the preview image to view the document.*

Stowers's courage, leadership, and selflessness make him a great role model for all Americans, White and Black.

**This interactive e-book details the life and death of Corporal Freddie Stowers.**

Corporal Stowers and the C Company of the 371st Infantry regiment began the attack of Hill 188 by cutting through two heavy layers of barbed wire. The men did this in the face of heavy enemy fire (Heywood 1931). A few minutes after the C Company cut through the wire and began firing, the Germans pulled a “Kamerad” trick of war in which they ceased to fire, held up their hands, and climbed out of their trenches to surrender to the Americans. When the men of C Company were within one hundred yards of the Germans, a German blew a whistle, the “surrendering” Germans jumped back into their trenches and began to fire at the Americans (*ibid*). When this happened, “the French machine gunners withdrew and left for parts unknown,

thus exposing [the] left flank and the Germans immediately took full advantage of the abandoned position and occupied it themselves” (*ibid* 167). The entire C Company was nearly annihilated.

Corporal Stowers took command of the men after his superiors in rank were either badly wounded or dead. Despite being terribly wounded, he courageously led the remaining men forward to take out a German machine gun nest (*ibid*). When the men reached the first trench line, they noticed a second trench line with Germans firing at them. Stowers continued to lead the men on to the second trench when he was mortally shot and killed.

D Company and B Company of the 371st joined the fight later that day around 11:30am (*ibid*). At 2:00 p.m., Hill 188 was captured by the 371st Infantry. Major Pate of D Company wrote, “We are now in possession of Hill 188; the famous Hindenburg Line had been broken and the enemy had withdrawn to the Sechault-Ardeuil line, about 2 kilometers to the north of us” (*ibid* 169-170). It is clear that Hill 188 was a strategic capture that led to the end of German dominance on the western front. It is also clear that without the bravery of Corporal Stowers, the Hill may have remained German territory.

## **Lesson Plan: Freddie Stowers - American Hero**

Corporal Freddie Stowers is the only African American soldier to be awarded the U. S. Congressional Medal of Honor for his service and sacrifice in World War I. This lesson will allow students to identify key characteristics of the life and war experiences of Stowers.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. Why was Corporal Stowers worthy of the U. S. Congressional Medal of Honor?
2. Why was Corporal Stowers awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor over 70 years after his heroic actions?

### **Learning Outcomes**

Student will be able to:

1. Identify the key characteristics of the life and experiences of Corporal Freddie Stowers.
2. Write a persuasive essay about Corporal Stowers.

### **Teacher Planning**

#### **Time Required**

90 minutes

## Materials Needed

Black History Month: Freddie Stowers

Primary Source Document: Citation for the Medal of Honor for Corporal Freddie Stowers

Interactive E-book about Corporal Stowers

## Pre-activities

1. Assign the students to read **Black History Month: Freddie Stowers**.
2. Assign the students to read the **Citation for the Medal of Honor for Corporal Freddie Stowers**.
3. Ask the student to compare the first account to the citation for the Medal of Honor:
  - a. Are the accounts similar or different? What accounts for the similarities or differences?

## Activities

1. Assign the students to read the **Interactive E-book about Corporal Stowers**.
2. As the students read, they should take notes on the actions that led to Corporal Stowers receiving the Medal of Honor.

## Assessment

Assign the students to write a 1-2 page argumentative essay detailing the reasons why Corporal Stowers did not receive the Medal of Honor in 1918 and why he should have.

### Rubric for Essay:

- A** – Student includes a thesis statement and at least three pieces of evidence to support claims about Corporal Stowers.
- B** – Student includes a thesis statement and less than three pieces of evidence to support claims about Corporal Stowers.
- C** – Student does not include a thesis statement or any evidence.

# Hill 188



FREDDIE STOWERS  
CORPL. 371 INF. 93 DIV.  
SOUTH CAROLINA SEPT. 28, 1918

## *My Journey*

16 July 2014 – Journal Entry

Hill 188 . . . the hill that claimed the lives of many men of the 371st Infantry regiment; the hill where Freddie Stowers displayed tremendous courage, leadership, and selflessness. I really wanted to find this site so that I could thank Stowers and the other men for giving their life for our country. I know that it sounds weird, but being in the place where the men died allowed me to connect with them in deeply emotional and spiritual ways. But, more on that later . . .

Before Lynn, Nicole, and I set off on our journey to find Hill 188, I talked with Dave Bedford to map out exactly where it was located. Admittedly, I am terrible with maps and directions, so I was grateful for Dave's help. After getting a general sense of the location of the hill, I went to resident-GPS expert, Chris, to map the coordinates. At this point, I felt confident about our quest.

A broken-down car and two detours later, Todd joined our caravan as we searched for the famous hill. I'm so glad that Todd joined us. He had been digitizing World War I maps and hoped to locate Hill 188 also. We gave him the perfect opportunity.

After we arrived at the Bussy Farm area, we drove around several hills covered in grain. We ended up locating two places that could have been Hill 188. Both places were full of trees and shrubbery. Because I knew that there were still some undetonated artillery shells in those areas, I very cautiously preceded forward into the heavily forested areas. In fact, in the first place that we suspected was Hill 188, I was content viewing the area from the car – I did not need to venture into the “wild” to find evidence of trenches, bunkers, or any other World War I relics. My hesitancy drew a few laughs from my companions . . . I laughed at myself as well.

As we walked around the area of Bussy Farm, I remained silent. Truthfully, I am naturally pretty quiet in groups; but, this time my silence was due to a deep reflection on the significance of the moment. As an African American male whose father and grandfather served in the United States military, I was now standing on the ground where other African American men gave their lives for the U. S. military. Those men of the 371st Infantry regiment did not live to see their children or grandchildren grow up. Those men of the 371st were predominantly from rural South Carolina. My great grandfather could have been one of those men.

I am forever grateful. Men of the 371st, you will not be forgotten.



Possible sites of Hill 188. Tap or click for fullscreen.



## Lesson Plan: Hill 188

Hill 188 (Cote 188) was the site of an intense battle for African American soldiers against the Germans during World War I. In this lesson, students will read two accounts of the taking of Hill 188 and retrace the actions of the battle.

### Guiding Questions

1. What role did African American soldiers play in the capture of Hill 188?

2. What role did the capture of Hill 188 play in the eventual German surrender during World War I?

### Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to:

1. Comprehend, interpret, and analyze secondary sources about the battle for Hill 188.
2. Identify key players in the taking of Hill 188.
3. Create a presentation that details the events of the battle for Hill 188.

### Teacher Planning

#### Time Required

60 Minutes

#### Materials Needed

Secondary Sources:

Heywood, C. (1931). *Negro Combat Troops in the World War: The Story of the 371st Infantry*. Worcester, MA: Commonwealth Press. (p. 164-179)

Williams, C. (2010). *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press. (p. 136-138)

Lengel, E. (2008). *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918. The Epic Battle That Ended the First World War*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. (p. 194-195)

### Pre-activities

1. Assign the students a series of events that took place during the battle for Hill 188.
2. Ask the students to put those events in chronological order.
3. The events to include are:
  - “Kamerad trap”
  - Crawling along the telephone trench
  - Withdrawal of French machine gunners
  - D Company attack
  - Gap between the 2nd Moroccan Division and the 161st Division

### Activities

1. Assign the students to read the excerpts from the secondary sources listed.
2. Assign the students to groups of three or four.
3. As a group, assign the students to create a timeline of the events that led to the taking of Hill 188.

4. Assign the students to create the timeline as a Prezi presentation.

### Assessment

1. Assign the students to create a Prezi account at [prezi.com](http://prezi.com).
2. For each event in the timeline, the students should include a one-paragraph narration and explanation.

### Checklist for Timeline

- ★ Include at least 7 events that led up to, or happened, during the taking of Hill 188.
- ★ Include a one paragraph narration and explanation for each event.

## Other African American Soldiers Buried at the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery

Other than Corporal Freddie Stowers, there are at least 500 African American soldiers buried at the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery. Due to insufficient records, it is difficult to determine the race of all of the individuals buried there. For example, there are white officers of the segregated 369th, 370th, 371st, and 372nd infantry regiments buried in the cemetery. Additionally, there were all-African American labor battalions that served and died in the Meuse-Argonne campaign and are buried in the cemetery. With more time, a devoted researcher should be able to determine the race of all of the men buried . . . I wish I had that time.

To narrow my focus, I paid attention to the African American soldiers from North Carolina and South Carolina. There were two soldiers, in particular, that piqued my interest – Boaz Alston and Dee Weaver. Private Boaz Alston of the 371st Infantry lived in my hometown of Winnsboro, South Carolina. Private Dee Weaver of the 369th Infantry lived in my current city of residence, Durham, North Carolina. I am excited to learn about my hometown men and make a contribution to local African American history.

As of August 2014, I know that the mothers of both of the men were invited to participate in the Gold Star Mothers pilgrimages. I also know that Private Alston died in the campaign to capture Hill 188 at Bussy Farm. In terms of his hometown life, I may have access to the great-grand-nephew of Private Alston. I look forward to setting up an interview with him. Private Dee Weaver's name is listed on a World War I memorial monument in Durham, North Carolina. I will do further research into his life in Durham before the war.

### **Lesson Plan: Who Is Benjamin Bowie?**

The job of the historian is to take pieces of available evidence and knit them together into a narrative. With pieces of evidence from the life of Benjamin Bowie, students will craft a narrative of his life and death.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. Who is Benjamin Bowie and how does his experience align with the experiences of African American soldiers during World War I?

## Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to:

1. identify and list a series of questions to be answered about Benjamin Bowie.
2. analyze photographs, newspaper clippings, and registration records for Benjamin Bowie.
3. use their historical imagination to write a narrative of Benjamin Bowie's military life.

## Teacher Preparation

### Time Required

90 Minutes

### Materials Needed

#### Images



*Document A - Photograph of Bowie. Tap or click for fullscreen.*



## Pre-activities

Assign the students to write down at least 10 questions that they would like to ask a veteran of World War I.

## Activities

1. Assign students to view the images associated with Benjamin Bowie.
2. Ask the students to try to find the answers for Benjamin Bowie for the 10 questions that they previously generated.
3. Assign the students to do further research on Benjamin Bowie, the World War I battle in which he fought and died, and the Gold Star mothers pilgrimage in which his mother may have participated.

## Assessment

Assign the students to write a one-page history fiction narrative on the life of Benjamin Bowie.

## My Findings about Private Benjamin Bowie

First of all, from Private Bowie's gravestone, I know that he was a private in the 365 Infantry regiment of the 92nd Division. I also know that he lived in California at the time that he was drafted. Because he was a member of the 92nd Division, I also know that he was African American. It is very likely that his parents migrated to California from the American South in the post-bellum period or around the turn of the century. Given that the population trend

## Rubric for Essay/Narrative

Content Components of Essay	Points
Inclusion of correct place of birth and well-researched information about the life of African Americans in the place and time of Bowie's birth	20
Inclusion of correct military rank and role. Also, include well-researched information about the experiences of African American soldiers in World War I	30
Inclusion of observations and inferences drawn from photographs and newspaper articles	20
Inclusion of correct date of death. Also, include well-researched information about the battle in which he lost his life	15
Inclusion of inferences about Bowie's childhood and adolescence based on the time and place in which he grew up	15

known as the "Great Migration" of African Americans has its origins during and after World War I, it is interesting to find an African American living in California in the early 20th century. Perhaps his ancestors were "Exodusters" who left the South immediately after the Civil War and settled in the West.

In addition to the gravestone, I have a draft card, a photograph, and two newspaper articles. After examining the draft card, I now know that he was born on December 8, 1887 in Monticello, Florida. I also now have further proof that he is African American. In terms of his family's move to California, I know that the move took place in 1910. Lastly, I know that his mother's name is Mrs. Annie Bowie and, at the time of the draft, she still lived in Tampa, Florida. Interestingly, Bowie's draft card lists him as a Corporal rather than a Private. I do not know what accounts for this discrepancy.

The photograph of Bowie reveals several interesting details as well. While I do not know when this photograph was taken, he seems to be in his military uniform and there are no identifying patches for the rank of Corporal. So, perhaps he was a Private. His stance in the photograph is very confident – this could reveal the attitudes of the more assertive "New Negro" of the 20th century or it could just be normal posture for photographs during this historical period.

The newspaper articles about Bowie reveal more information about his life. However, there are more discrepancies. While the

gravestone at the Meuse-Argonne cemetery lists Bowie's date of death as September 10, 1918, both newspaper articles wrote that Bowie died on September 11, 1918. Perhaps the newspaper writers can be given a little allowance for error since they are not historians. Another discrepancy is the rank of Bowie. Like the draft card, the newspaper articles listed Bowie as a Corporal, however, the grave stone lists Bowie as a Private. I will trust the U. S. military's cemetery over the writings of a journalist.

Other than the discrepancies, I learned that in October 1918, Bowie's mother was no longer in Tampa, Florida, but was now in Los Angeles, California at 651 Ceres Avenue. I also got a glimpse of the courage of Bowie from a letter that he sent to his mother just before his death. One of the newspaper articles included the letter, in which Bowie stated, "I am now going into the front line trenches, mother. If you do not hear from me again, don't worry." What a powerful note!

Along with the newspaper articles, draft card, and photographs, I found that there is an American Legion post in Los Angeles named after Benjamin Bowie. I did a simple Google search and the Benjamin Bowie American Legion Post #228 was one of the search results. I attempted to call the post, which is still active today, but I never received a call back. After following other leads in my search to find out about the American Legion Post, I learned that Norman O. Houston, an African American World War I veteran, established the post for blacks only and "named it in

memory of a black Angeleno who gave his life on the battlefield in France" (Flamming 2005, 412).

# Gold Star Mothers

During the 1930s, the United States government sponsored trips to Europe for mothers that lost their sons and widows that lost their husbands on the battlefields in World War I. This all-expense paid trip to Europe was a gesture of gratitude by the government to honor the men that made the ultimate sacrifice and to give their mothers and wives a sense of closure and pride. It is clear from the document above that Mrs. Annie Bowie had a desire to go on the trip, but I do not have further documentation proving that she actually went.

Mrs. Annie Bowie, along with the other African American mothers eligible for the trip, had concerns other than the expected excitement and fear of traveling abroad for the first time in their lives. These women were asked to travel to Europe under segregated conditions – receiving inferior transportation and lodging than the white women. Though segregation was common in the Jim Crow America of the 1930s, this action was a “slap in the face” given the sacrifices of the African American soldier. Two-hundred and nineteen mothers begrudgingly accepted invitations by May of 1930 and another group of them expressed interest in going in a later year (Graham 2005, 117). A few black

women protested – in fact, twenty-three of them, “17 mothers and six widows, most of whom rarely traveled far from their hometowns, passed up a trip of a lifetime” (Seranno 2002). Initially, there were fifty-five African American Gold Star mothers (from 21 different states) who planned not to go on the European pilgrimage. Those fifty-five women signed a petition of protest written by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The second paragraph of the petition read:

*When the call to arms came from our government in 1917, mothers, sisters, and wives, regardless of race, color, or creed, were asked to give their loved ones to the end that the world might be saved for democracy. This call we answered freely and willingly. In the years which have passed since death took our loved ones, our anguish and sorrow have been assuaged by the realization that our loved ones who rest in the soil of France gave their lives to the end the*

*world might be a better place in which to live for all men, of all races and all colors (Graham 2005, 117-118).*

This act of protest, while not a sit-in, race riot, or non-violent march, was still a powerful statement for civil rights and equality. Most of these women were “giving up the only chance they would likely have in their lifetimes to visit their sons’ graves . . . [and, thus] paid a heavy price to retain their honor and self-respect” (Keene 2008, 67).

For the black women that made the voyage to see their sons’ or husbands’ burial place, the voyage to France was segregated and somewhat degrading, but the time and experiences in France were fun and encouraging. John W. Graham in his book, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s: Overseas Grave Visitations by Mothers and Widows of fallen U. S. World War I soldiers*, sheds more light on their experiences:

*If black pilgrims faced segregation in the United States, an ironic thing happened once they reached Europe. In one notable area, black pilgrim parties fared much better than white. The world of white expatriate Paris, those American artists and bohemians who had left the United*

*States, by and large ignored the Pilgrims completely. Perhaps the pilgrims reminded the assorted poets, writers, and artists too much of their own mothers back home. The black community of Paris, by contrast, welcomed the black travelers with open arms. Entertainers, athletes, churchmen, and others greeted, entertained, and feted the black mothers during their trips, as Noble Sissle had done for Party L. Several hundred black living in Paris turned out to welcome the pilgrims, not just in 1930 but in later years as well. While America continued to practice segregation and intolerance in 1930, the black pilgrims found themselves moving in what was the most accepting, tolerant, and free society they had ever known (Graham 2005, 127).*

## Lesson Plan: African American Gold Star Mothers

The mothers and widows of soldiers killed in action during World War I were invited by the U. S. government to take a pilgrimage to view the burial places of their sons and husbands in Europe. Of the 17, 389 women eligible for the pilgrimage, 624 were African American (Keene, 2008, p. 77). Even though the sacrifices of their sons and husbands were equal, the travel accommodations for the mothers were not. The African American mothers had to travel on segregated ships to go see their sons. In this lesson, students will explore the African American Gold Star mothers' response to the segregated travel arrangements by the U. S. government.

### Guiding Questions

1. How did African American Gold Star mothers respond to the U.S. government-sponsored segregated pilgrimages to Europe?

### Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to:

1. Interpret and analyze a primary source document.
2. Write historical fiction based on the Gold Star mother pilgrimages.

### Teacher Preparation

#### Time Required

90 minutes

#### Materials Needed

Primary Source Document: NAACP Petition

There were initially 55 eligible black women (from 21 different states) who planned not to go on the European pilgrimage. The NAACP sent the petition signed by those 55 women. The petition was sent to President Hoover in May 1930. The petition is on **pages 117 and 118** of the following book:

Graham. J. (2005). *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s: Overseas Grave Visitations by Mothers and Widows of fallen U. S. World War I soldiers*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company.

**Poignant Protest** is an *LA Times* article by Richard A. Serrano about the African American Gold Star Mothers.

### Pre-activities

1. Assign the students to take on the role of a mother that just found out from the U. S. government that her son had been killed in action in France during World War I.
2. Assign the students to write down a list of emotions that she may experience.

## Activities

1. Assign the students to read the primary source document (Gold Star mothers petition the president to end the segregation of the pilgrimages).
2. As the students read the document, ask them to write down three main reasons that the mothers cite for eliminating segregation in pilgrimages.
3. Ask the students to then take their exercise from the opening activity and then imagine that they were African American and were told that they could visit their sons' burial place on segregated ships.

## Assessment

Assign the students to write a fictional diary entry from an African American Gold Star mother that took the voyage.

### Requirements of the Diary Entry:

- One-page
- Include a description of the voyage.
- Include at least two events that happened or places she may have seen while in France visiting the burial site of her son.
- Include a description of how she may have related with the French and how they French may have related with her.

# Famous African American World War I Soldiers

As mentioned in the quote above, Noble Sissle, a famous black music composer, played jazz in France for Gold Star mothers. He is one of many African American veterans of World War I that came to more prominence and fame after the war. In some ways, the war was a breeding ground for black leadership in the arts, politics, and education. Out of the crucible of the racism, death, and horror of the Great War, African American soldiers courageously imagined and created a world that valued and made room for their individuality and talents. Simultaneously, these men, by learning how to fight for something bigger than themselves in war, continued to fight for the betterment of the African American and the human race.

Noble Sissle and James Europe led the 369th U. S. Infantry “Hell Fighters” band and, on a micro-level, transformed some of the listening preferences of the French nation. On a macro-level, the presence of African American men as intelligent and creative composers of jazz music made a large impact on the positive views about African Americans. Jazz music, and black culture, in general, became conduits through which African Americans gained respect, value, and rights in a society dominated by White

Americans. Chad Williams, in *Torchbearers for Democracy*, states:

*Black culture has historically functioned as a crucial resource for African Americans to simultaneously challenge white supremacist constructions of history and engage in an imaginative process of reinterpreting and re-creating history from the experiential perspectives of black people themselves (Williams 2010, 324).*

Jazz musicians, like Sissle and Europe, used the improvisation and grittiness of the music to capture the realities of war. These men also created and played jazz music to uplift the spirits of the French and American soldiers. Because the music also reflected the African American experience, these World War I jazz musicians were international emissaries of black culture. Consequently, the global perception of the intellect, sophistication, and culture of the African American could slowly

become more positive and affirming. Perhaps black culture, as expressed through jazz music, became the World War I United States export with the most lasting and powerful legacy.

## Lesson Plan: How Jazz Arrived in Europe

Jazz, a uniquely American genre, began in the United States, but came to prominence in Europe through the African American soldiers' regimental bands during World War I. In this lesson, students will explore the role that jazz played in Europe during and after the war.

### Guiding Questions

1. Given the devastation and the tremendous loss of life in World War I Europe, was it inappropriate for jazz music to be played and listened to during and following the war?
2. What role did jazz music play for Europeans and African Americans during the war?

### Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to:

1. identify the characteristics of jazz music.
2. debate whether jazz was appropriate for post-war Europe.

## Teacher Preparation

### Time Required

90 Minutes

### Materials Needed

Noble Sissle - Harlem Hellfighters band – “On Patrol in No Man's Land” recording



*Tap or click to load.*

Noble Sissle - Harlem Hellfighters band – “How Ya Gonna Keep 'em Down on the Farm” recording



*Tap or click to load.*

“On Patrol in No Man’s Land” lyrics

“How Ya Gonna Keep Em Down on the Farm (After They’ve Seen Patee)” Lyrics

## Informational Video:

### James Reese Europe and the Harlem Hellfighters



Tap or click to load.

## Debate Procedures Handout



Tap or click to view the document.

d. How is “How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm” especially relevant for African Americans soldiers returning to the United States after World War I?

3. Assign students to watch the informational video on James Reese Europe and the Harlem Hellfighters.

## Activities

1. Assign the students to debate the following issue: **Jazz music was great for the healing of Europe after World War I.**
2. Divide the class into two groups of students and have one group argue for the statement and have the other group argue against the statement.
3. Moderate the debate by following debate procedures listed on the debate procedures handout.

## Pre-activities

1. Assign the students to listen to the audio clips of “On Patrol in No Man’s Land” and “How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm”.
2. Assign the students to answer the following questions related to those songs. You may also want to provide the students with the lyrics.
  - a. In “On Patrol in No Man’s Land,” how does the author describe the war experience?
  - b. Does “On Patrol in No Man’s Land” address race or racism? Why or why not?
  - c. In “How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm”, describe the post-war conditions that are mentioned.

## Assessment

Assess the students on the quality and content of the debate.

## Horace Phippen

Just as the jazz music of Noble Sissle and James Europe emerged from the trenches, so too did the art of Horace Phippen. In the Sechault campaign of September 26, 1918, Phippen was shot in the right shoulder and arm in No Man’s Land and left for dead. He was immobilized, hungry, and thirsty for an entire night before being rescued. Once he returned home from the war, he no longer had use of his right arm due to his injury. Despite the

physical disability, Pippen began painting by holding the brush stationary with his right hand and using his functional left arm to move the canvas around (“Pippen’s Story”). He was the first African American artist to address social justice and political issues in his paintings. For Pippen, painting was a form of emotional and psychological healing from the scars of the war (*ibid.*).

## **Lesson Plan: The Artist of No Man’s Land**

This 90-minute activity will allow students to discover more about the war experiences of Horace Pippin. Through his diary and artwork, students will analyze the experience of trench warfare according to Pippin.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. How were the realities of trench warfare reflected in the diary and the painting of Horace Pippin?

### **Learning Outcomes**

The student will be able to:

1. Analyze a painting.
2. Interpret and analyze a diary entry.
3. Write an argumentative essay about the painting and diary entry.
4. Write their own journal entry.

## **Teacher Preparation**

### **Time Required**

90 Minutes

### **Materials Needed**

**Document A: The End of the War: Starting Home** Pippen completed this painting nearly 15 years after the war. Painting became a part of the healing process for Pippen. This painting is housed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

**Document B: Diary Entry** The excerpt from the diary is pages 54-55 of a 62-page diary, image 30 in this collection. Just before this particular entry in the diary, Pippen was involved in a military offensive campaign on September 26, 1918. In the campaign, Pippen was shot in right shoulder and arm. Pippen was immobilized, hungry, and thirsty lying in or near No Man’s Land. The diary picks up where a French soldier comes to assist him.

**Document C: Photographs from *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: A History, Guide, and Reference Work*.**

These photographs taken from an ABMC book provide the students with real images of what Pippen saw when he fought in France.

Photographs from *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*



*No Man's Land South of Malancourt - p. 193*



**Pre-activities**

Display the painting, *The End of the War: Starting Home* (1930-1933). Ask the students to look at the painting and answer the following questions:

1. What is going on in the painting? What makes you think that?
2. What objects seem to be revered in the painting? What makes you think that? Why might the artist have included them?

3. How does this painting reflect what you already know about World War I?
4. How does the painting reflect the African American experience in World War I?

**Activities**

1. Assign students to share their answers to the pre-activities with at least two other students in the class.
2. Assign students to read an excerpt from Pippen's diary.
3. After they read the diary entry, assign the students to outline the events that took place in the diary entry.
4. Also, as they read the diary entry have each student write down the personal details that Pippen included.
5. Next, have the students discuss the following questions:
  - a. Why are Pippen's details important?
  - b. How do they help the reader?
  - c. What do they tell us about Pippen?
  - d. What questions do you have about the writer?
6. Assign the students to view and analyze the photographs from *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: A History, Guide, and Reference Work*.

7. Next, ask the students to discuss what those photographs reveal about the setting in which Pippen fought.
8. Ask the students to compare the photographs to the Pippen painting.
9. Assign the students to write their own journal entry about an important event in their lives.
10. In a class discussion, assign students to compare and contrast the diary entry and the painting.

### Assessment

Essay: Construct a 1-2 page paper answering the following question:

**How is the African American experience in World War I reflected in the artwork and diary entry of Horace Pippen?**

### Rubric for Essay

- A** – student uses at least three pieces of evidence from the artwork and the diary to argue that the African American experience is or is not reflected.
- B** – student uses between one and three pieces of evidence from the artwork and the diary to argue that the African American experience is or is not reflected.
- C** – student uses no pieces of evidence from the artwork or the diary.

### Alternative Assessment

Assign the students to use their own journal entry of the important event in their lives and create a work of art that represents that event. The students must include an accompanying caption to the art that explains how it represents the event.

### Rubric for Art

- A** – student creates a work of art and explains how it represents the event discussed in their personal journal.
- C** – student creates a work of art, but does not explain how it represents the event discussed in their personal journal.
- D** – student does not create a work of art.

## More Famous African American World War I Soldiers

In addition to musical and visual artistry, there were African American soldiers in World War I with athletic skills and prowess. Spottswood Poles is one such individual. Known as the “Black Ty Cobb,” Spottswood Poles had an outstanding baseball career in the Negro Leagues from 1906 to 1923 (Revel and Munoz 2013). His quickness and speed, hitting, excellent fielding in baseball very likely contributed to his success in the Chateau-Thierry, Belleau Woods, Champagne-Marne, and Meuse-Argonne campaigns as a member of the 369th Infantry regiment (*ibid*). Poles also received a Purple Heart for his service in Europe. When Poles died in 1962, he was buried with full military honors in

Arlington National Cemetery. Spottswood Poles was more than an all-time great baseball player; he was a patriot and national hero. Learn more about Spottswood Poles in the PDF ebook, *Forgotten Heroes: Spottswood Poles*.

In politics and education, African American soldiers of the Great War distinguished themselves quite well. Charles Hamilton Houston endured racism in the U. S. army during the war, and went on to fight racism legally as the Litigation Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. There is, perhaps, no single lawyer in American history who had a more prominent role in dismantling Jim Crow segregation. Charles Spurgeon Johnson, a non-commissioned officer in France during World War I, transitioned from the wartime horrors of the trenches to the halls of academia. A renowned sociologist, Johnson became the first African American president of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Along with the “famous” soldiers, there were approximately 367,000 African Americans that served the United States in World War I (Franklin & Moss 2005). Robert Dalessandro, the Chairman of the United States World War One Centennial Commission and the Deputy Secretary for Headquarters Operations at ABMC, provides extensive research and photographs of African American soldiers in World War I in his book *Willing Patriots: Men of Color in the First World War*, which he co-wrote with Gerald Torrence (Dalessandro & Torrence 2009).

## **Lesson Plan: Who am I? - African American Soldiers of World War I**

There were many notable African American men that served as soldiers during World War I. Some of the men had illustrious careers before the war; others came to prominence after the war.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. Who were some of the famous African American soldiers that participated in World War I?

### **Learning Outcomes**

The student will be able to:

1. identify notable African American men who served in World War I.
2. identify the accomplishments of the notable African American soldiers of World War I.

### **Teacher Preparation**

#### **Time Required**

30 minutes



# “The Other Fellow’s Burden”

In 1919, W. Allison Sweeney (1851-1921), a writer and editor of a black newspaper (*Chicago Conservator*) wrote *History of the American Negro in the Great World War; his splendid record in the battle zones of Europe, including a resume of his past services to his country in the wars of the revolution, of 1812, the war of the rebellion, the Indian wars on the frontier, the Spanish-American war, and the late imbroglio with Mexico*. The book is now available for free use and distribution online through the Project Gutenberg Ebook collection.

Along with documenting the history of African American participation in the nation’s wars, Sweeney included rare photographs, letters, and other military history documentation in the book.

His poem “The Other Fellow’s Burden” is Chapter 31 of the book. Written in the style of Rudyard Kipling’s poem, “The White Man’s Burden,” Sweeney’s poem speaks to the African American participation in the nation’s wars to prove themselves worthy of equality, fairness, and citizenship rights.

## Lesson Plan: The Other Fellow’s Burden

The poem entitled, “The Other Fellow’s Burden,” was written by W. Allison Sweeney and included in his book, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War* (1919). Students read and analyze this poem in light of the historical context of African American soldiers fighting in World War I.

### Guiding Questions

1. How does the poem “The Other Fellow’s Burden” reflect the experience of African American soldiers during World War I?

### Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to:

1. read and interpret the poem “The Other Fellow’s Burden” by W. Allison Sweeney.
2. identify and define specific words within the poem.
3. paraphrase the first stanza of the poem.
4. answer analytical questions about the poem.

## Teacher Preparation

### Time Required

60 minutes

### Materials Needed

Handout including brief biography of W. Allison Sweeney, text of “The Other Fellow’s Burden” poem, glossary of terms, and questions about the poem.

## Other Fellow’s Burden Handout



*Tap or click the preview image to view the document.*

## Pre-activities

Assign the students to read the poem “The Other Fellow’s Burden.”

## Activities

1. Assign the students to paraphrase the first stanza of the poem.
2. Assign the students to answer the questions related to the poem.

## Assessment

Assess students’ answers to the questions related to the poem. Each answer should be in the form of a paragraph.

# World War I and the Civil Rights Movement

For African American soldiers, the burden of proving themselves worthy of first-class citizenship rights extended beyond the World War I battlefields. The blatant racism of the U. S. military during the war fueled their fire for equality and racial justice. The discrimination and racial violence of the postwar, “democratic” United States pushed some African American veterans to lifelong civil rights activism.

After surviving “No Man’s Land” and the deadly trench warfare of World War I, some African American veterans did not survive the racial hatred and violence in the United States.

*On August 3, [1919] Charles Kelley, who had been recently discharged from Camp Gordon, was killed in the small town of Woolsey, Georgia. While driving his father to church, Kelley did not turn his car out of the road quick enough to suit a white boy also driving on the street. The boy informed his father, who confronted Kelley.*

*Kelley tried to run, but was shot in the back” (Williams 2010, 233).*

In 1919, the year of the armistice, seventy-six black people were lynched – the highest total since 1908 (*ibid*). According to historian Chad Williams in *Torchbearers of Democracy*, “[l]ynching functioned as both a fierce corrective and a warning for black people to remember their place” (Williams 2010, 232).

Some African American veterans formed the League for Democracy (LFD), a civil rights organization devoted to fighting against racism and racial violence and fighting for the equality of black people in the U. S. In its introductory promotional brochure, the LFD stated:

*Lest we forget that the Democracy for which our men fought and died to have conferred upon Serbian, Belgian, Armenian and Slav is denied us in our own Republic; . . . lest we forget our irrecompensatable debt and sacred obligations to*

*our dead upon the battlefields of France, that their supreme sacrifices will not be nullified by our forgetfulness . . . (Williams 2010, 273).*

The seeds of the Civil Rights movement were planted or were already germinating during the Great War.

## **Lesson Plan: World War I - Beginning of the Civil Rights Movement?**

Is it possible to trace the origins of the 20th century Civil Rights Movement to World War I? In this lesson, students will explore the civil rights activism emerging during and immediately following the Great War.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. In what ways was World War I the beginning of the Civil Rights movement?

### **Learning Outcomes**

The student will be able to:

1. identify key events of African American participation in World War I.
2. determine the significance of events based on the progression to the modern Civil Rights movement.

### **Teacher Preparation**

#### **Time Required**

90 minutes

#### **Materials Needed**

“Birth Certificate to the Civil Rights Movement” handout



*Tap or click the preview image to view the document.*

### **Pre-activities**

1. Assign the students to brainstorm ideas for the birthplace and birthdate of the Civil Rights Movement.
2. After students share their thoughts, ask them whether World War I could be considered a birthdate to the modern Civil Rights movement.

### **Activities**

1. Assign the students to give three reasons why World War I could be viewed as the beginning of the modern African American Civil Rights movement.

2. Assign the students to share their three reasons with another student.
3. Assign the students to groups of two and ask them to complete a “birth certificate” for the Civil Rights movement.

### Assessment

1. Assign the students to complete a “Birth Certificate” for the Civil Rights Movement that has a birth date during or immediately following World War I.
2. Based on their knowledge of the events, ideas, organizations, and personalities that defined African American participation in World War I, the students must decide when (during or immediately following World War I) the Civil Rights movement actually was born and the events, ideas, organizations, and personalities that should be considered the “parents” of the movement. The students should also decide the birth date (can be a year or a specific date) and explain why they selected it, and who/what gave birth to the movement and why they give them credit. For the “weight” category, the students should choose an event or idea that has significance during World War I and the Civil Rights movement. For the “height” category, the students should choose an event or idea that spans a length of time during World War I and the Civil Rights movement.

### Examples of “birth dates,” “parents,” “height,” and “weight” for the birth certificate:

Great Migration	Justice
Jazz	Bigotry
Harlem Renaissance	Capt. Chester Haywood
Henry Johnson	Col. Louis Linard
Freddie Stowers	Paris
Racism	Fear
Segregation	Meuse-Argonne campaign
Osceola McKaine	Chicago <i>Defender</i>
Noble Sissle	Tulsa Race riot
Lynching	Intolerance
Harlem Hellfighters	New Negro movement
Croix de Guerre	James Europe
Equality	Eugene Bullard
Democracy	Crisis
League for Democracy	Pan Africanism
Ida B. Wells-Barnett	College education
Gold Star mothers	Communism
NAACP	93rd Division
Marcus Garvey	Talented Tenth
W. E. B. DuBois	Black “ex-patriots”

## Document-Based Question

In this Document-Based Question essay about World War I, the students are asked to construct an academic paper using nine primary source documents to answer the following question:

*To what degree did African Americans achieve military success fighting for the United States and social success fighting against United States racism during World War I?*

This [Voicethread presentation](#) includes my “think aloud” commentary on all nine of the documents.

## World War I Document-Based Question



Tap or click the preview image to view the document.

# Conclusion

African American soldiers during World War I made an implicit bargain with the United States government and society (Williams, 2010). The soldiers would prove their loyalty and patriotism by defending the nation against her enemies. In return, the soldiers expected first-class citizenship rights and equal treatment.

The U. S. government and society never fulfilled its part of the bargain.

From the onset of the draft to the racist practices at the training camps, the odds were certainly stacked against the black soldiers ever having a fair and equal shot to prove themselves as worthy soldiers and citizens. Relegated to menial jobs as laborers and stevedores, many of these soldiers were indeed important to the war effort in France. However, it was racial discrimination that led to their assignment of “grunt” work rather than combat duty on the front lines. Upon their arrival in France in 1917, these African American soldiers “were classified as stevedore regiments, engineer service battalions, labor battalions, butchery companies, and pioneer infantry regiments” (Franklin and Moss 2005, 366).

When black soldiers were organized into combat units and sent to France, the U. S. military continued to treat them as inferior, second-class citizens. General Pershing, although staunchly in favor of an independent American army, relinquished control of the African American units and assigned them to the French.

According to historian Chad Williams:

*Assigning the division to the French army allowed Pershing simultaneously to fulfill his pledge to provide France with American combat regiments when the United States entered the war and to free himself from the dilemma of how to use the African American fighting regiments of the provisional Ninety-third. They now became France’s problem, an act that cast African American troops as outside the U. S. Army, and, in a symbolic sense, outside of the nation itself (Williams 2010, 120).*

That Pershing did not know how to “use” the African American fighting regiments is surprising given that he commanded African American troops in Cuba during the Spanish American War less than twenty years prior to World War I. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine soldiers amputated from their own army. In fact, throughout the war the black soldiers were “in, but not of the U. S. army” (*ibid*, 121).

Despite the blatant racism of the U. S. military, the African American soldiers still upheld their part of the implicit “bargain” and fought courageously for the nation. By early 1918, the 369th United States Infantry arrived in France and, by April 1918, they moved to the fighting front. Historian Robert Edgerton provides a good commentary and summary of the accomplishments of the 369th:

*In April 1918, the 369th represented only 1 percent of American troops in France, but they held 20 percent of the front lines occupied by U. S. soldiers. Known to the Germans as ‘hell-fighters,’ and to the French as ‘men of bronze,’ officers and men of this regiment received 550 decorations by the French and Americans, including 180 awards of the Croix de Guerre. They occupied front-lines trenches for 191 days*

*without yielding a foot of ground or having a single soldier taken prisoner” (Edgerton, 2002, 85).*

It is also important to note that the 369th “saw the first and longest service of any American regiment as part of a foreign army” (Franklin and Moss 2005, 367).

The 368th Infantry regiment of the 92nd Division, created in October 1917 under the command of Brigadier General Charles Ballou, received many honors for their military service. This is especially noteworthy since most of the officers in the 368th were African American, although none of those officers ever commanded a white officer (Bryan 2003). Unfortunately, the 368th is more known for its “failure” than its successes in battle. During the beginning of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the 368th was ordered to fill a gap between the American 77th Division and the French 37th Division. They did not accomplish this mission due to several factors: 1) personal animosity between two white officers associated with the troops; this led to the sabotage of the reputation of the 92nd Division; 2) the lack of training with the French; 3) shortages of equipment; and 4) unfamiliarity with the terrain (*ibid*). For nearly thirty years, the “failure” of the 368th was used as evidence to prove that African Americans did not make good combat soldiers. Historian Robert Edgerton provides more evidence about the 368th’s “failure”:

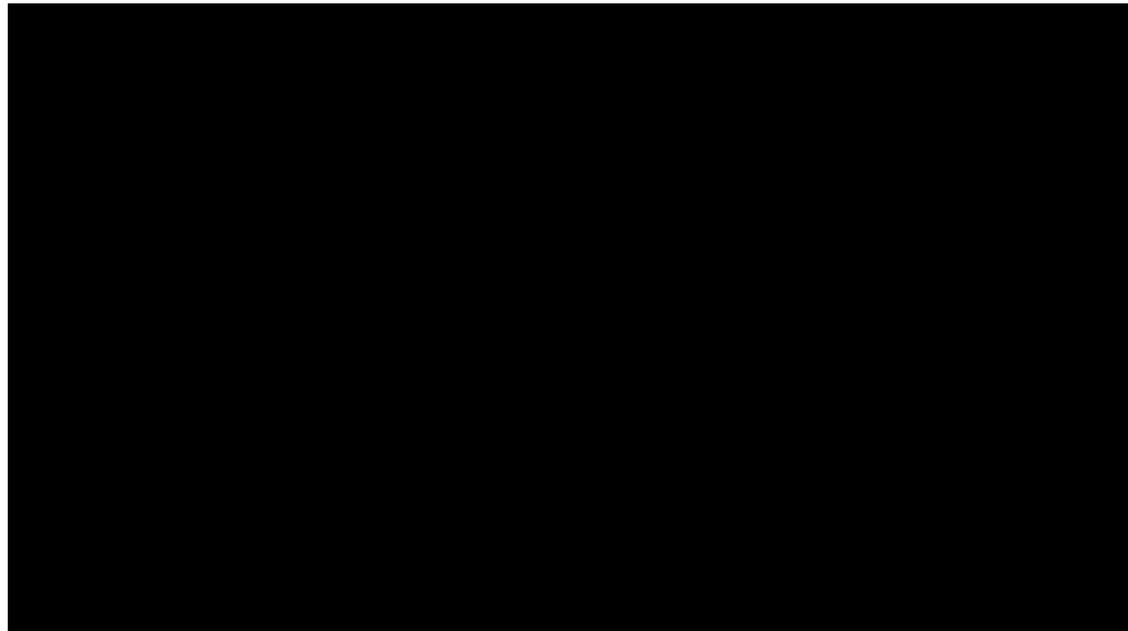
*In this same battle [at the beginning of the Meuse-Argonne offensive], elements of the all-white 35th Division broke under fire at least as badly as the 2nd Battalion of the 368th Regiment. But the retreat of these white troops was officially and unofficially attributed to command failures, never to the inherent cowardice of the men. The accusations of cowardice by the black soldiers sometimes proved embarrassing to the officer who made them. One white officer of the 92d who described his African American troops as cowards was later shown to have hidden in a ditch during the night of the battle. Max Elsner, the white major who initially reported that his black troops had fled in panic, later admitted that he had ordered their withdrawal before he became so hysterical he ‘placed his hands to his face and cried out to his personal runners to take him out of there, that he could not stand it.’ He abandoned his command post and subsequently had to be hospitalized. More than one historian*

*has concluded that the army made black officers and men into scapegoats to protect the reputations of white officers like these. Neither of these white officers was punished – Elsner not only was not court-martialed but was later promoted – but thirty black officers were relieved of duty and five were convicted by courts-martial, with four sentenced to death and one to life imprisonment at hard labor. All five were later freed (Edgerton, 2002, 94).*

I want to reclaim the reputation of the 368th. Here is my small way of honoring them.



*Our hotel in France was located where the 368th fought during World War I.*



*Dave Bedford, the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery superintendent, discusses the prejudice African American soldiers faced in World War I.*

While I want to offer historic justice to the black soldiers of the 368th, I also want to offer my personal thanks to the black soldiers of the 371st. As an African American male from South Carolina, I feel a special connection to the men of the 371st who were also from the Palmetto State. These men trained at Camp Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina (about 30 miles from my hometown), and arrived on the Western front in April of 1918. They participated courageously in the Meuse-Argonne campaign and suffered heavy casualties. However, as a result of their fighting, the 371st liberated Hill 188, Bussy Farm, Ardeuil, Montfauxelles, and Trieres Farm near Monthois. These soldiers definitely upheld their part of the implicit “bargain” with the United States. In fact, Corporal Freddie Stowers’ actions, alone, would have been more than sufficient.

## *My Journey*

*2 September 2014 – Journal Entry*

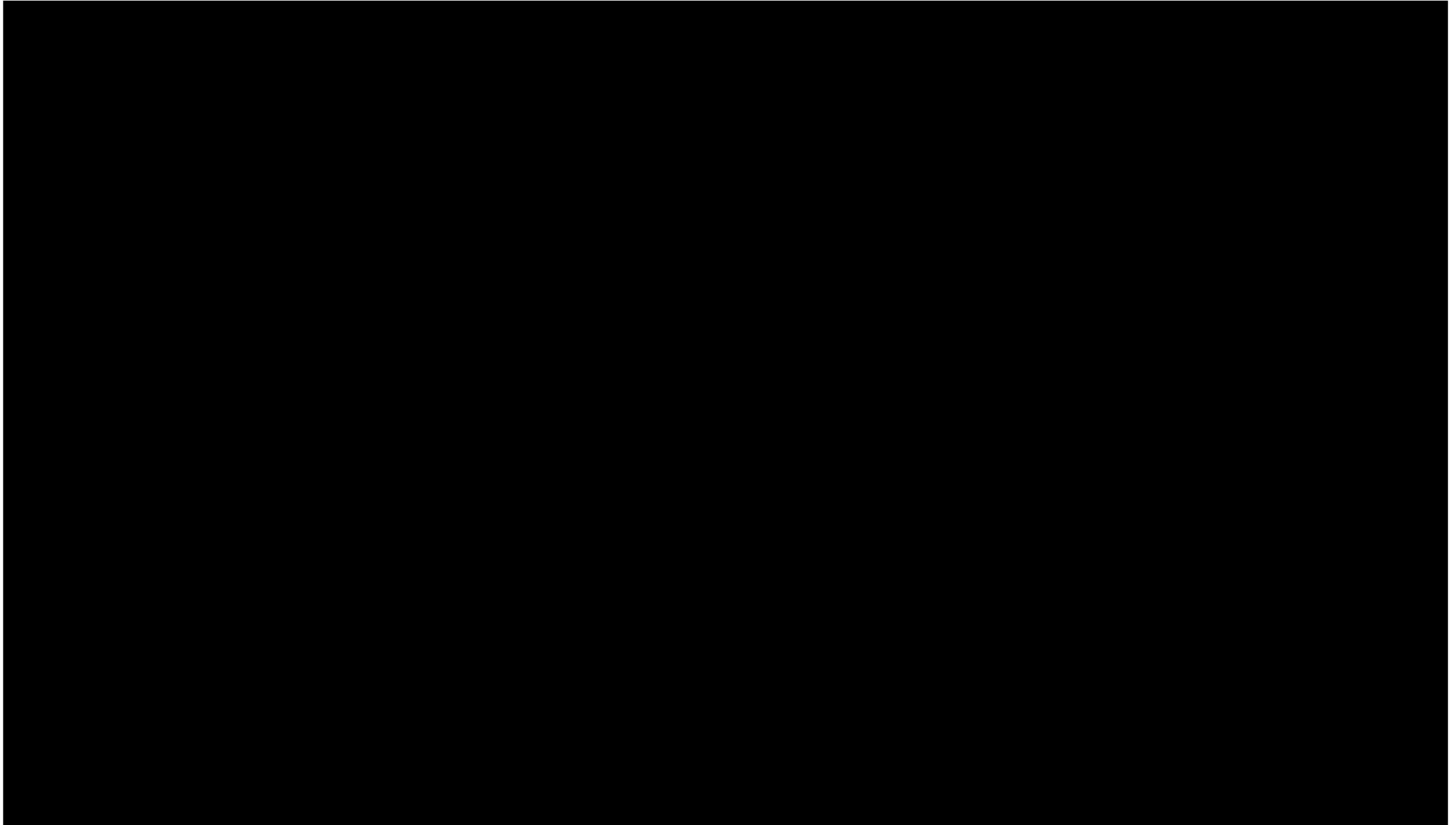
*I'm excited to continue to uncover the stories of the African American soldiers buried at the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery. Dave Bedford is passionate about giving these men their rightful “historic” place at the cemetery. Ms. Stephanie Huijnen, a French-native, graduate student, and ABMC summer intern at the cemetery, is equally passionate and plans to write her Master's thesis on African American soldiers in World War I. I'm looking forward to future collaborations!*

*To the African American soldiers of World War I, I am forever grateful for your courage and sacrifice.*

*To the African American soldiers buried at the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery, thank you. Remembering your death for this country has given me a renewed sense of life, civic duty, and responsibility as an African American man.*

*You will not be forgotten.*

*Humbly,  
Jamie L. Lathan*



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# Video Transcriptions

## ***The Colored Soldiers*, by Paul Laurence Dunbar**

If the muse were mine to tempt it  
And my feeble voice were strong,  
If my tongue were trained to measures,  
I would sing a stirring song.  
I would sing a song heroic  
Of those noble sons of Ham,  
Of the gallant colored soldiers  
Who fought for Uncle Sam!  
In the early days you scorned them,  
And with many a flip and flout  
Said "These battles are the white man's,  
And the whites will fight them out."  
Up the hills you fought and faltered,  
In the vales you strove and bled,  
While your ears still heard the thunder  
Of the foes' advancing tread.  
Then distress fell on the nation,  
And the flag was drooping low;  
Should the dust pollute your banner?  
No! the nation shouted, No!

So when War, in savage triumph,  
Spread abroad his funeral pall—  
Then you called the colored soldiers,  
And they answered to your call.  
And like hounds unleashed and eager  
For the life blood of the prey,  
Sprung they forth and bore them bravely  
In the thickest of the fray.  
And where'er the fight was hottest,  
Where the bullets fastest fell,  
There they pressed unblanched and fearless  
At the very mouth of hell.  
Ah, they rallied to the standard  
To uphold it by their might;  
None were stronger in the labors,  
None were braver in the fight.  
From the blazing breach of Wagner  
To the plains of Olustee,  
They were foremost in the fight  
Of the battles of the free.  
And at Pillow! God have mercy

On the deeds committed there,  
And the souls of those poor victims  
Sent to Thee without a prayer.  
Let the fulness of Thy pity  
O'er the hot wrought spirits sway  
Of the gallant colored soldiers  
Who fell fighting on that day!  
Yes, the Blacks enjoy their freedom,  
And they won it dearly, too;  
For the life blood of their thousands  
Did the southern fields bedew.  
In the darkness of their bondage,  
In the depths of slavery's night,  
Their muskets flashed the dawning,  
And they fought their way to light.  
They were comrades then and brothers,  
Are they more or less to-day?  
They were good to stop a bullet  
And to front the fearful fray.  
They were citizens and soldiers,  
When rebellion raised its head;  
And the traits that made them worthy,—  
Ah! those virtues are not dead.  
They have shared your nightly vigils,  
They have shared your daily toil;  
And their blood with yours commingling  
Has enriched the Southern soil.

They have slept and marched and suffered  
'Neath the same dark skies as you,  
They have met as fierce a foeman,  
And have been as brave and true.  
And their deeds shall find a record  
In the registry of Fame;  
For their blood has cleansed completely  
Every blot of Slavery's shame.  
So all honor and all glory  
To those noble sons of Ham—  
The gallant colored soldiers  
Who fought for Uncle Sam!

**Dave Bedford, the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery superintendent, explains the significance of Corporal Freddie Stowers's headstone.**

Each one of these headstones is a, is a, is the history of this individual in part and then you have to dig a little bit deeper. All the headstones will have the name of the individual, in this case we're looking at Freddy Stowers. His grade, or rank- Corporal- the unit that he served with- 371st infantry regiment- in the 93rd division. And there's a story in each one of those, and let's go on down and I'll talk a little bit about that. South Carolina, where he went into the military from. So he could have been from North Carolina and gone to South Carolina. Where he entered the military from is

what would be on this headstone. And then his date of death. If he has, had any medals, as Freddy Stowers does, the Medal of Honor, U.S.A, the Medal of Honor. And in this case all our medals of honor, the 9 here as well as all of those in World War 1 and World War II cemeteries, they will always be in 23 and three-quarter carat gold leaf. So just about pure gold leaf. To understand these, is to understand- to look at these and to do a little bit of research, you know that the 93rd division and the 371st, they kind of have a significance once you start doing the research. The 371st infantry regiment has a specific connotation, or denotation, because that means that these guys were all draftees, or a majority were draftees, out of the state of South Carolina. And in this case, they're in the 93rd division, which meant that without knowing it, we could put those pieces together and say that more than likely, Freddy Stowers is an African American. And in this case we actually do know that Freddy Stowers is an African American. So as you go to the headstones, you can look, we're not looking particularly at race, but each headstone tells a story whether it's Louis Baker back here, from the 80th division I automatically think that he was from Pennsylvania and actually indeed is. By knowing the histories of the battles, we know approximately where these young men died, where they sacrificed their life, and that significance is brought together in the fact that they're going to be more who might have died on the 28th of September of their unit and you can find that they're interspersed throughout the cemetery. The cemetery, we have no order except for brothers. We have five sets of brothers buried side by side and

one set of friends we know of. Otherwise, they're all treated equal in death. This is potentially the first time the United States ever desegregated. Because Freddy Stowers, along with at least the other 500 African Americans are spread throughout the cemetery at random. Somewhat interesting in our culture.

### **Dave Bedford, the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery superintendent, discusses the prejudice African American soldiers faced in World War I.**

Lathan: As you know I've become really fascinated with African-American soldiers who served here, fought here, and died here. And I know, and I've learned, that these soldiers had to fight really two battles. One battle was against the enemy, and the other battle was really against the racism and discrimination that they faced. I wonder if you could talk to us a little bit about the battle against the enemy. And how people like Freddy Stowers or some other members of the 92nd or 93rd, and what they did and what they accomplished.

Bedford: Yeah. Freddy Stowers is probably the pinnacle event for me, because we have so many to research I've not been able to do the research, that's why we've given you all those names and said go for it and find out who's who.

Lathan: Right, right.

Bedford: And that's what I hope your students learn, hey we can do research on these guys and bring them back to life. But for the

92nd and 93rd it's like night and day. Because the 92nd and 93rd, I don't know if you've read in the histories, but men, African Americans were sent over here very quickly after the formation of their units.

Lathan: Right.

Bedford: Because African Americans then had guns. And the United States was afraid of this situation, although not announcing it officially. Quickly they got over here. So the 93rd got over here, in their separate regiments, because they would not be, it was a provisional division, it was not- which meant it did not have all the elements to become a division of 28,000 but it did have their 4,000 men regiments. So they came over here and they would start training with the French, Pershing basically wrote him off. He said, 'the French understand how to work with them, with colonials.' I have to scratch my head at that, because colonials are not African Americans, and African Americans are not colonials.

Lathan: Right

Bedford: It's a whole different mentality. Yet, you see the prejudice that we have and the preconceived notions that we have at that time towards African-Americans in general. And that's interesting from Pershing's perspective because he was known as Black Jack Pershing. But, probably bowing to the politicians of the United States he did that and it was actually the 93rd's benefit, where they were actually, correctly, and superbly trained. The prejudice in

them though, as I pointed out yesterday, you take the 77th division, their history. Or let's say the 42nd's. And then you take the 93rd, and they're literally half. They saw as much battle time. The 93rd had as much days in battle as anyone else. [whispers] They don't want to talk about thought, because they're black.

Lathan: Right

Bedford: And also, another thing that intrigues me is the 42nd is, has like 5 or 6, 7 pages in the official history about their initial contact in the Marne and just probably about 10 kilometers to their east is the 93rd division. There's a paragraph on the same defense and they call it a retreat, and I'm going 'oh!' This is so intriguing in the fact that, when you read these histories, you read it and say 'Well they retreated! They're failures! They're not worthy!' But yet, we know that they had to perform the same exact actions as the 42nd who were lauded for those actions, and they were demeaned for the same thing.

Lathan: Wow

Bedford: So that prejudice you see in the history. 92nd division came over here as a full division, but they weren't allowed to train together. They were used as labor battalions. And stevedore battalions. And placed like that. And eventually they would be trained, but there was a big problem. One of the problems was that junior white officers refused to salute senior African-American officers. The breakdown of discipline is already there. Of course,

everything, every job that they could take they were. The racists were taking their jabs at the 92nd. They were easy to take a jab at. So, they really, you guys, your hotel is down there near Vienne-le-Chateau is where they took their first stance in an offensive, and they weren't even given wire cutters to go cross the wire. Everybody else was trained to go across the wire, the proper procedures. And I'm sure they would've figured it out, had they had wire cutters they would have used the damn things. But yet, we didn't supply them correctly, and we expected them to go in and in my opinion, they held, they did more. Probably through courage and intestinal fortitude that any other unit up there on that line that day, because they didn't have the training and they weren't given the equipment, the basic equipment, to succeed. Yet they would get all up close to Benerville. The criticisms of the lost battalion and 92nd in my opinion are totally invalid and you go on the ground you see why. It's just, for me it's intriguing. The African-American experience here. We had 550 we thought right around there, probably more actually African Americans buried here from labor battalions also, incredible to think you could just put a guy in a labor battalion. IT seems sometimes we actually don't have anybody in here, but they were traditionally African American also. So, and then pioneer infantry, some of those guys, in other words the guys- engineers that would be right on that front line, bearing the arms, we had a number of those that are buried here. So I charge you to find out their personal stories, so we can tell their personal stories. Cause that is an intriguing part of us, us Americans.

Lathan: Absolutely. So tell us a little bit more about Corporal Freddy Stowers. He is, he's the only African-American soldier to be awarded the Medal of honor from World War I, he is from my home state of South Carolina, I'm very proud of this man. Tell us how he won that award, and, the courage that he showed winning that award.

Bedford: Freddy Stowers, he's amazing because he's buried out there, right next to the alley, and I know that he was waiting so many years for that Medal of Honor to be bestowed upon him. But Freddy Stowers was a sharecropper's son. I don't know if he was drafted- you guys need to find that out. Because of course drafting in the Southern states, the white land owners did not want the draft for the African Americans. So he might have had to fight to be drafted, he might have been a volunteer. But he was a sharecropper's son, we know that. He would come here, and apparently he gained the rank of Corporal, he must be of good standing, had leadership qualities, which would merit him being awarded the Medal of Honor. But he was in the, on a hillside in the Champagne region, and his unit had a little bit of experience of combat so they weren't total rookies, but they fell into a trap. They were at the bottom of a hill, somewhat of what we have here in the cemetery, and the Germans jumped up out of the trench, and they waved the white flag. With that white flag, the battalion commander- that was not Freddy Stowers, I forget the battalion commander- everybody up, let's go move forward into this field. And of course as soon as you got that battalion, it would probably

be 800 or 900, up to 1000, into that field, you jump down into the trenches-

Lathan: The Germans are there

Bedford: The Germans would pull up the machine guns and just mow them down. They lost over half their men. Half the men in Freddy Stower's company were killed. Freddy had a choice. Move forward, or die in the field with the rest. Of course he chose to move forward, and being a Corporal you'd kind of expect that from him. But he would take his company forward. Being wounded in the taking of the first trench, and realizing that there was a second trench that had to be taken out, he would move towards that second trench and be wounded fatally during that time period. But he pulled his men, through leadership, pulling forward ahead of him into safety. And that's why his deeds merited the Medal of Honor. That was of course not realized during that time, overlooked, downplayed, he's an African American we don't need to give him a medal of honor. And we review medal of honor cases, extraordinary cases such as his, frequently in the United States government, and of course George Bush would award him the medal of honor. And I think Freddy Stowers there, he was waiting there in that spot because he's the closest Medal of Honor recipient to that alley. It's intriguing for me, that faith that he's right there.

Lathan: So he's someone that many people see now, because he's there.

Bedford: Absolutely. And they understand a little bit more about the African American story because they say 'who is that individual? Now I need to go look for his story.' But let's think about that, Freddy Stowers is a young African American who comes over here and the first time he can go into a cafe through the front door, without worry, feeling as though he's a human being, without any fear is here in France. To speak to a white woman, there was no fear in that either. And to think about that, this is not his home country, and yet he would experience the full, the fullness of being a man here in France, but not in his home in the United States of American is kind of- it's shameful! At the end of it all it's shameful. And hopefully from his time to now we've gotten better. We're not perfect but we're hopefully getting better.

## **Closing Video**

Lathan: My name is Jamie Lathan, and I'm a history instructor at the North Carolina School for Science and Math in Durham, North Carolina. In thinking about this project, I guess the thing that hooked me was WWI. It's a war that I think is often forgotten, and it's, I love the 1920s and U.S. History and this war kind of leads into the 1920s. Anytime you talk about a war, you're talking about human beings whose lives are being sacrificed. And human beings on the home front whose lives have been, are being changed forever. So, knowing that I would have the opportunity to come here and really honor these 14,000 or so Americans who willingly gave their lives for us was a no brainer. I was ready to come and excited to come, and really excited to bring this- bring

these men, bring their stories to life, and make it accessible to my students.

Mike Bamford, videographer: So let's talk about your expectations before the trip, I think that's a good way to frame this question. You had a lot of research to do, you had a game plan, I know you did. Tell us about that, tell us about that mindset.

Lathan: Well initially when I thought about doing research in preparation for the trip, I kind of had a broad, broad idea of wanting to learn about the African-American experience in France, the African-American experience in Europe, during this war. For many African Americans this was their first time leaving the United States. And so that was way too broad. And so throughout the course of the year, I had to narrow my focus a little bit. So what about the African-American experience did I want to concentrate on? And I think naturally being that we're coming to the cemetery, I wanted to focus on these men. And to narrow it even further, the men from the state of North Carolina and the state of South Carolina, my home state. So, figuring out who these men were, who their families are, heroes. Many of the, probably most prominent heroes of WWI in terms of African-Americans are from South Carolina, which is our medal of honor winner Freddy Stowers. And then, Henry Johnson, who's another hero of WWI. He's from, he was born in Winston-Salem North Carolina. So these men, again their stories really aren't in the history textbooks. So I kind of wanted to- being able to learn more about

them, and focus in on them really helped me a lot in this project, and helped me connect with these men.

Mike: So let's talk about that connection. You and I spent a good afternoon walking through all 8 of these plots, except for plot B I guess, finding 60 individuals. Tell me about that connection, that personal connection. How that changed you and affected you, and what that means when you bring it back home.

Lathan: So, man. The connection is pretty powerful for me. Think about in the Christian bible there's a verse that really came to mind doing this work this week. And the verse is from first Corinthians 4:15, and it talks about even though you have 10,000s, or tens of thousands of guardians, you do not have many fathers. Now I'm blessed with a wonderful biological father, have 13 uncles, and I have many other men around me in my life. Men who've given me encouragement, men helping me guiding me. Being a role model for me. Walking around here, going on adventures like finding the hill, hill 188 where Freddy Stowers gave his life. Walking around and touching the grave stones of the 60 plus men from North Carolina and South Carolina, African-American men, really felt a sense of like, these men are my fathers. A lot of these men were young, probably unmarried, never had any children of their own. Walking through here I really felt like they were fathering me. They were encouraging me. They were saying 'hey, we gave our lives! The least you can do is tell our stories.' So, that, that personal connection is real. As a new father

myself, with my four-month old son, I look forward to going back home and the lessons that I've learned here of courage, sacrifice, selflessness, character, leadership. The lessons that all of these men have taught me. Not just the 500 African-American men, but all these men have taught me. And I look forward to going home and really spending the rest of my life sharing those lessons with my son. So it's really deep for me. And thinking about, again, the battles that they fought wasn't just the battle against the Germans, you know. They did all of this, this fighting, facing racism and discrimination too. So man, I mean, the least I can do is say thank you. That's the least I can do, so thank you. Thank you men for your sacrifice. You will never be forgotten.

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