

AN EXCEPTIONAL ENDEAVOR: THE UNITED STATES
ARMY'S INDUSTRIALIZATION OF SEX WORK
IN LIBERIA DURING WORLD WAR II

by

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DEDICATION

For George “Doc” Abraham, the United States Task Force #5889, the Liberian women during World War II, and to the memory of Dr. James H. Pohl a devoted teacher, mentor, and historian.

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ABSTRACT

After the United States entered World War II, one of the first troops sent overseas, Troop #5889, arrived in Liberia in June 1942. It was primarily tasked with guarding the Firestone Rubber plantation, one of the Allies only sources of rubber, and managing Roberts Field, a major aviation hub for lend-lease operations into Africa and the Middle East. The task force consisted of a predominately African American infantry, less than one hundred European American officers, and a few African American medical officers, including the first group of African American nurses sent overseas during WWII. Within a couple of months, the venereal disease rate of the soldiers skyrocketed to one of the highest in the army. In order to combat venereal infections, the army rationalized the industrialization of Liberian sex work based on exported ideologies about race, ethnicity, class, and gender fostered in the United States under the intersectional forces of colonialism, eugenics, and militarization.

This thesis is an intersectional study of the forces that permitted the army to industrialize a segregated system of sex work unparalleled in United States history. It explains eugenics and militarization in the United States as a means to reduce venereal disease among troops, and how social hygienists influenced the army's ideologies regarding race, ethnicity, class, and gender. It analyzes Liberia as a de facto colony of the United States which justified the army's colonization and militarization of Liberian women. It contends that industrialized sex work did not necessarily victimize the women, but instead provided them with economic opportunities unavailable prior to the troop's

arrival. It examines how colonization intersected with militarization and eugenics to allow the African American nurses to overlook or accept the appropriation of Liberian women's sexual labor to appease United States soldiers. Lastly, it explores the ramifications of the army's industrialization of segregated sex work that disrupted the social hierarchy by privileging African American soldiers sexual access and denying European American officers access to sexual services to which they felt entitled.

I. INTRODUCTION: AT THE INTERSECTION OF EUGENICS, COLONIALISM, AND MILITARIZATION



Figure 1: United States Army Forces in the Middle East, jurisdictional map, 1944. Shows African command bases during World War II including the US Army Forces in Liberia (USAFIL) on the west coast of Africa. *Communicable Diseases: Malaria*. Vol VI of *Preventive Medicine in World War II Series*. Edited by Hoff, Ebbe Curtis. In *Medical Department of the United States Army in World War II Series*. Edited by Coates, John Boyd, Col. (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1963), 307. Used under Fair Use.

Upon arrival of these troops, in a land of cheap “jig-jig” (promiscuous intercourses), the men found the quickest way to forget about their homesickness was to make frequent trips into the fog-bound jungles...

Wearing nothing but the least, all types of women came flocking in from the interior—from young girls to G-stringed ladies on the dropping side of fifty-nine—and almost all of them were teeming with organisms causing chancroid, syphilis or gonorrhea... These natives beckoned from every bush and some were bold enough to awaken sleeping soldiers and tell them what they came for. Foot-worn trails connected the camp with palm-roofed villages... The upshot: seven of every ten soldiers were infected with one form of sexually transmitted disease or another...

Two areas near the Army reservation were selected and cleared. Bamboo sticks were twisted together and used to form thatched, one-room huts. Each palm-roofed dwelling was to be operated by an Army-inspected native prostitute who was prevented from catering to native males or white soldiers. One such village, “Shangri-La,” housed around 300 “comforting” girls who were known as “The Belles of Shangri-La.” The other village, “Paradise,” contained a similar number of local maidens. The little bamboo dwellings, row on row, took the place of cheap road houses, honky tonks, and dine-and-dance tents, such as those that mushroomed around the Army camps in the states – only on a larger scale. Such a system was not in accordance with Army practices; in fact, opposition to prostitution had long been the formal policy of the U.S. Army and Navy.

~ George “Doc” Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La and Other Stories of Sex, Snakes, and Survival from World War II* (2000)¹

¹ George “Doc” Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La and Other Stories of Sex, Snakes, and Survival from WWII* (New York: Vantage Press, 2000), 80-81 and 87-88.



Illustration 1: George “Doc” Abraham while stationed in Liberia, circa 1942-1943. Abraham’s narrative documents a largely unacknowledged system of industrialized sex work created by the United States army in World War II Liberia. *George and Katy Abraham Papers*, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Used under Fair Use.

George “Doc” Abraham’s memoir of his service in Liberia during World War II encapsulates the situation the United States army faced when it sent Troop #5889 to Liberia to guard the Firestone Rubber plantation, assist Roberts Field with lend-lease campaigns, and to build an infrastructure for the tiny nation in exchange for allowing the US to operate from Liberia. The troop arrived in three waves between mid-1942 and early 1943. It initially consisted of a little over two thousand African American infantry soldiers, roughly a hundred European American officers, and about fifty African American medical officers, which included thirty African American nurses sent in the

last wave. To stymie boredom soldiers sought out Liberian women for commercial sex and soon the troop's rate of venereal disease infection rose to one of the highest in the entire army. To decrease the incidence of venereal disease the army constructed brothel-type camps, called *tolerated villages*, in which they contained Liberian sex workers who routinely underwent gynecological exams in order to stay in the villages.² Abraham was a non-commissioned officer of Lebanese descent, classified as "white" by the US army, who assisted medical physicians as they inspected the women.

While the army's use of women as sex workers for soldiers has a long history, particularly as a means of controlling venereal disease, the social conditions in Liberia differed from those usually encountered when examining army sex work during World War II (and earlier wars) in three ways. First, the army did not adopt or modify an existing brothel system, but instead created and industrialized a system based on their own ideas of acceptable behavior. Second, African American infantry represented a minority in theaters around the world, but in Africa the European American officers constituted the minority. Third, the army built the camps expressly for African Americans and officially barred European Americans from using these services. The European Americans' minority status, along with denial of access to sexual services to which they felt entitled, placed a strain upon the army's established social hierarchy as both men and women resisted the controls placed on their sexuality. The intersectional forces of militarization, eugenics, and colonialism underscored how the US army constructed

² Interview with Major Herbert L. Traenkle M.C., Venereal Disease Control Officer, December 23, 1943 [Traenkle interview]; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #1 to #50; Box 219; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; Records of the Surgeon General (RG 112); National Archives Building, College Park, MD (NACP).

ethnic, race, gender, and class ideologies in Liberia, and that allowed the army to justify industrializing segregated sex work under the heading of social hygiene.

Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935 and for the most part the world accepted it without opposition. In April 1938 both Britain and France recognized Italy's rule over Ethiopia. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia marks the beginning of World War II for Africa, almost four years before Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939. A majority of the research on Africa and the war centers on the combat zones of North Africa and the Mediterranean; however, much of the continent was pulled into the global conflict. Liberia serves as a prime example of an African nation whose participation historians often overlooked despite its importance to the war effort. While logistical support for an army receives less attention than harrowing tales of combat, it is no less important. Without support in the form of transportation, supplies, medical care, engineers and the like, soldiers on the front lines pay with their lives. The lend-lease deals into which the US entered during the war emphasize the importance of these services.

With Germany's control of the Atlantic at the beginning of the war Liberia's role as a base of US operations became crucial. Not only did Liberia supply much-needed rubber for the Allies, Liberia served as an aviation hub for missions across Africa and into Asia.³ What little research that exists concerning Liberia's role in World War II primarily deals with the diplomatic and economic ties between Liberia and the US which prompted the US to send troops to the nation and cement Liberia's de facto colonial

³ Judith A. Byfield, "Beyond Impact: Toward a New Historiography of Africa and World War II," in *A Companion to World War II Vol I*, edited by Thomas W. Zeiler and Daniel M. DuBois, 652-665 (Sommerset, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 654-655; and Tom Culbert and Andy Dawson, *Pan Africa: Across the Sahara in 1941 with Pan Am* (McLean, VA: Paladwr Press, 1998), 37-47.

status for the duration of the war.⁴ What brought Troop #5889 to Liberia is certainly important, but the nation's role in the war and interaction with the US did not stop with the arrival of American troops in Liberia.

Liberia in World War II presents a richly diverse and unique environment from which to undertake an intersectional study of militarization, colonialism, and race, ethnicity, class, and gender under the overarching umbrella of eugenics. Many reduce intersectionality to a simplistic notion of diversity, but intersectionality is much more complicated. Some confuse intersectionality with what feminist Fran Beal called the "double jeopardy" in which oppression is multiplied by the number of oppressive factors such as African American women experiencing twice the oppression of European American women due to their race while African American lesbians experienced even greater oppression compared with heterosexual African American women due to their sexual expression.⁵ Legal and race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw developed the concept of intersectionality as a way to explain how different forms of domination and power combine to create *new* power structures. In her examination of legal cases she found African American women had no voice of their own due to intersectionality. She claimed courts concluded that European Americans represented African American women regarding gendered experiences and African American men represented them concerning racial issues; yet at the same time courts did not consider African American women as representative of either European American women or African American

⁴ Harrison Akingbade, "U.S. Liberian Relations during World War II," *Phylon* (1960-) 46, no. 1 (First Quarter, 1985): 25-36 and Emily S. Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate: The United States, Liberia, and the Evolution of Neocolonialism, 1909-40," *Diplomatic History* 9, no. 3 (1985): 191-214.

⁵ Linda Gordon, "'Intersectionality', Socialist Feminism and Contemporary Activism: Musings by a Second-Wave Socialist Feminist," *Gender & History* 28, no. 2 (August 2016): 343; and refuting a comparison of "double jeopardy" to "intersectionality" is Devon W. Carbado, "Colorblind Intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (2013), 813.

men.⁶ In World War II Liberia, the women who worked in the tolerated villages experienced the intertwining and dominating forces of colonialism, eugenics, and militarism, which created a new form of domination that the army used to rationalize the appropriation of their labor for industrialized sex work that did not necessarily victimize the women.

On the eve of World War II both Liberia and the US had well-established social hierarchies based on conceptions of civilization and ethnicity. Liberia possessed its own social hierarchy with Americo-Liberians, descendants of the founding freed slaves from the US, occupying most of the positions of power despite the majority of its people belonging to various ethnic groups who never left Africa. Liberia has a unique history as being the only African nation to escape European colonialism, but it unofficially held a de facto status as an American colony. Its government and customs were based upon American ideologies concerning government, industry, and culture, and when in need Liberia turned to the US due to its long and intertwined history. These various different social structures collided when the US sent troops consisting of fewer than one hundred European American officers and two thousand African American infantry soldiers to Liberia in 1942.

Racial and ethnic tensions among the soldiers and between Americans and Liberians were compounded by class when one uses disease as a marker of social class and civility. During the early twentieth century, Europe and the US constructed their own

⁶ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-167; and Sumi Chow, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (2013), 790-791.

social hierarchies with ‘white’ nations at the apex based upon the pseudo-science of eugenics, explained in detail in the next section of this chapter, which posited European nations and nations founded by Europeans such as Australia, Canada, and the US as more ‘civilized’ because they used modern medicine to wipe out diseases that caused humans as a species to degenerate. Disease not only signaled degeneracy within a race, but it also lowered one’s social status particularly in colonial projects.⁷ Due to a number of factors, venereal disease among African Americans in the US was high and this high level of disease too served as a justification to see them as inferior to European Americans.⁸

Social hierarchy also defined army life. Within the army, rank divides soldiers into a class structure allowing those with higher rank to dictate the actions of those with lower rank. Higher social standing carried greater responsibility as officers were held accountable for the conduct of their troops while also serving as role models for those under their command. Scientific racism justified placing African Americans within a lower class in American society which also relegated them to lower rank. The army rejected many African Americans as officers during the First World War stating they were “Unqualified by reason of qualities inherent in the Negro race...rendering them unfit for officers and leaders of men.”⁹ As the world plunged into the second war, fewer than ten African American officers from the first war were still qualified and in the Active Reserve, while the army only allowed four regiments to use African Americans as

⁷ For more information about linking disease with degeneracy and degraded status please see Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

⁸ James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. New and Expanded Edition* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: The Free Press, 1993), 21 and 23; and John Parascandola, *Sex, Sin, and Science: A History of Syphilis in America*, Healing Society: Disease, Medicine, and History Series (Westport CT and London: Praeger, 2008), 38-39.

⁹ Quote in William H. Hastie, “Negro Officers in Two World Wars,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 12, no. 3 *The American Negro in World War I and World War II* (Summer, 1943), 318.

officers. Although the War Department established an integrated officer training program, fewer than thirty African American candidates were accepted between July 1, 1940 and January 31, 1941 due to the failure of field commanders to recommend African American soldiers. Once the War Department started requiring commanders to justify their reasons for not making recommendations or providing soldiers with information about officer training the number of African American officer candidates increased. By 1942, roughly two hundred African American officers graduated per month, but they still faced considerable challenges moving up in rank in the segregated armed services, as explained in chapter three.¹⁰

In addition to the reinforcement of racialized ideologies and segregation within the ranks, the US army also espoused a conservative gender ideology that was inflected with racialized notions of sexuality. The army held men, and a few women, to different standards of behavior under notions of masculinity and femininity left over from Victorian days and the concept of separate spheres. Men were thought to be virile and proved their masculinity by venturing out into the world. They left the safety of their home to work and provide for their families and when necessary left their home country to protect their families from threatening forces. Women, in contrast, were thought to be docile and proved their femininity by taking care of the home and family. They provided a place for men to rest their weary bones after a hard day's work and insulated them from the pressures of the outside world. The fact that she worked all day in the home and may want to rest her weary bones went unnoticed, but if her husband proved his masculinity and adequately provided for her with servants then her labor decreased or disappeared

¹⁰ Hastie, "Negro Officers in Two World Wars," 318-320.

and she evidenced her femininity through conspicuous consumption. The wife's duty also included granting her husband sexual access to her body anytime he chose. Though the sex-gender system of the US had undergone significant challenges and transformations since the nineteenth century, the economic devastation of the 1930s witnessed a retreat into a conservative gender ideology characterized by the male breadwinner and the female dependent.¹¹ This gender ideology was also racialized, since few African American women could afford the privilege of withdrawing from the wage labor market.

A useful method to analyze social constructions like race, class, and gender as a basis for establishing a social hierarchy is by examining the discourse surrounding these measures. Three areas in which discourse produced complicated relationships of power are colonialism, eugenics, and militarization. Colonialism has a longer history than eugenics, but both were practiced during the nineteenth century on a global scale and into the twentieth century in the years leading up to the Second World War (and some argue both are still in use today). Militarization has occurred since armies existed, but it is only in recent years that a specific theory has been developed as it applies to women. However, before examining how these theories worked together during World War II to negatively affect Africans and African Americans it is best to define exactly what is meant by colonialism, eugenics, and militarization, and how they applied to the body.

For the purposes of this analysis I draw from Catherine Hall who defines colonialism as “the creation of colonies and their exploitation in systematized ways...[and]... dominance over geographically separate ‘others’, which resulted in the

¹¹ For more information about gendered spheres of influence please see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994); and Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

uneven development of forms of capitalism across the world and the destruction and/or transformation of other forms of social organization and life.”¹² Scholars rarely include Liberia as a colony of the US since the US government did not exert direct sovereignty over it; however, as chapter four examines in detail, Liberia was colonized by Americans. In 1819, Congress provided funding for free people of African descent from the US, or African Americans, to settle on the west coast of Africa to establish an independent nation.¹³ In the coming years the African Americans, who became known as Americo-Liberians, colonized and exploited the African people who already lived on the land. The US government also aided the Americo-Liberians in gaining control over these rural Liberians by providing resources to suppress a series of riots that broke out in the 1910s and 1920s, for example.¹⁴ The US protected Liberia when Britain threatened its sovereignty in 1907.¹⁵ In 1912, the US sent its army to help train the Liberian Frontier Force and started indirectly and directly controlling Liberia’s finances.¹⁶ When the League of Nations threatened Liberia’s sovereignty in 1930 over forced labor conditions, the US again stepped in to defend it.¹⁷ While it is true the US government never held sovereignty over Liberia, it cannot easily be said Liberia is not a colony of the US. Thusly, examining the US as a colonizing force in Liberia and over the Liberian people is justified.

¹² Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire, A Reader: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5.

¹³ J.H. Mower, "The Republic of Liberia." *Journal of Negro History* 32, no. 3 (Summer, 1947): 266.

¹⁴ Monday B. Akpan, "Black imperialism: Americo-Liberian rule over the African peoples of Liberia, 1841-1964." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1973), 233.

¹⁵ Harrison Akingbade, "Afro-American Officers and the Reorganization of the Liberian Frontier Force." *Negro History Bulletin* 42, no. 3 (July 1, 1979), 74.

¹⁶ Akingbade, "Afro-American Officers," 74; and Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 195 and 205.

¹⁷ Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 207.

Although not the first to posit improving humanity through controlling reproduction, Francis Galton is often credited with pulling the pieces together in the late nineteenth century with eugenics. For Galton eugenics was “the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally.”¹⁸ In 1908 he proclaimed the goals of eugenics as:

Its first object is to check the birth-rate of the Unfit, instead of allowing them to come to being...The second object is the improvement of the race by furthering the productivity of the Fit by early marriages and healthful rearing of their children. Natural selection rests upon excessive production and wholesale destruction; Eugenics on bringing no more individuals into the world than can be properly cared for, and those only of the best stock.¹⁹

This statement expressed the two-pronged approach employed in an attempt to improve the human race. First, negative eugenics sought to decrease the reproduction of those considered ‘unfit.’ Second, positive eugenics encouraged those considered ‘fit’ to increase their reproduction. Exactly who was and was not considered fit, and therefore allowed to reproduce, was largely a reflection of the fears of the person or group of people who determined fitness.

Cynthia Enloe, noted feminist scholar of international relations, developed the theory of militarized women in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, *Does Khaki Become You?* and *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives*. Enloe defines militarization as “a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or

¹⁸ Galton quoted in Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

¹⁹ Galton quoted in Bashford and Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 5.

comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas.”²⁰ The army relies upon an idea of femininity in which women take care of the home and the family while governments try “to harness women’s labor and women’s self-worth to the military’s wagon...[and] make women’s sense of duty, vulnerability, security, or pride enhance the military’s influence.”²¹ Enloe asserts that the military uses women “to solve their nagging problems of “manpower” availability, quality, health, morale, and readiness...by focusing on those women most subject to military exploitation: military prostitutes, military wives, military nurses, women soldiers, women defense industry workers, and “civilianized” defense workers...women who straddle military and civilian positions, we can learn how and at what price women become militarized.”²²

These systems combined to make colonizing, commoditizing, and militarizing Liberian women’s bodies not only easy, but pragmatic for the US army. As a colonial power with a long history of eugenics and the militarization of women, the army was no stranger to using sex workers to solve soldiers’ unrest and as a salve for soldiers’ morale. While the army knew regulated commercial sex was not possible on the home front under the watchful eyes of the American public it was quick to regulate sex work during World War II away from the continental US where the army’s unconventional endeavor escaped public scrutiny. Since the US army viewed ‘black’ people as hypersexual and unable to control themselves, in Liberia the army was able to justify the use of African women to sexually pacify African American men.²³ The army was also able to justify denying

²⁰ Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2000) 3.

²¹ Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women’s Lives* (London: Pandora Press, 1988) xv.

²² Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 44.

²³ Major Herbert L Traenkle, Middle East Venereal Disease Control Officer, to Chief Surgeon, USAFIME, Dec 4, 1943 [Traenkle report]; 726.1 Venereal Diseases and Reports, USAFIL, 1943-1945;

European American officers sexual access through a discourse of superior civility and fitness. The army used these overlapping discourses to maintain a social hierarchy, yet this discourse destabilized the very hierarchy it created once the US appropriated Liberian women's sexual labor.

CIVILITY, FITNESS, AND MILITARIZED WOMEN: LITERATURE REVIEW

The road to recognizing the discourse surrounding the colonized body was paved by many noteworthy scholars. Literary scholar Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* brought attention to the role of imaginaries in colonial encounters. One learns far more about the Occident and what the Occident consider civilized behavior when examining the Occident's discourse surrounding the Orient than one learns about the actual Orient. The Occident projected its own social constructions onto the Orient and deemed those activities which did not conform to the Occident's notion of proper activities as uncivilized or backwards. Or, the Occident projected its own ideas onto the Orient in order to excuse their own behavior such as claiming colonized women "express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing."²⁴ This scenario played itself out in Liberia many times. Anthropologist Ann Stoler takes her analysis of colonialism a step further by applying a Foucauldian approach in her examination of intimate relationships within Dutch colonialism. She identified the disadvantage of

USAFIL VD – USAFIME; Box 779; Decimal File 1941-1946, 721.5-728; Records of the Africa-Middle East Theater of Operations (World War II Army), Records Group 497 (RG 497); National Archives Building, College Park, MD (NACP); Report of Investigation of Venereal Diseases among United States Army Forces in Central Africa, the Middle East, and India, Major William A. Brumfield to Assistant Chief of Staff, March 1943 [Brumfield report]; Box 438; Decimal File 1942-June 1946, 710 – 726.1; G-1 (Personnel); Records of the War Department, General Staff, Records Group 165 (RG 165); NACP; and Jones, *Bad Blood*, 21 and 23.

²⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: 25th Anniversary Edition with a New Preface by the Author* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 206-207.

viewing colonialism as “Clear demarcated territorial borders and sharp distinctions between colonizer and colonized.”²⁵ This view discounts those situations where imperialism is felt, but not explicitly stated. Colonialism is not only about who has access to the state or who is counted as citizen, but who has power, and as such is applicable to intimate matters which Stoler defines as “privileged sites for the implementation of colonizing techniques of surveillance and control.”²⁶

Historians Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton provide a basic framework from which to think about the colonized body in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*. They posit that an empire is the “webs of trade, knowledge, migration, army power, and political intervention that allowed certain communities to assert their influence and sovereignty over other groups.” These webs “function as systems of exchange, mobility, appropriation, and extraction, fashioned to enable the empire-building power to exploit the natural resources, manufactured goods, or valued skills of the subordinated group.”²⁷ When two entities come together they create contact zones which are essentially marketplaces of “both real and imagined spaces in which cultures and their agents come together in circumstances of asymmetrical power.”²⁸

Historians of US imperialism and prostitution in Puerto Rico offer the type of body-as-contact-zone analysis advocated by Ballantyne and Burton. Historian Eileen J. Suárez

²⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), xix. For more information about Stoler, colonialism, and intimate matters please see Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995) and Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (Dec 2001): 829-865.

²⁶ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, xx-xxi, and xxiii.

²⁷ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

²⁸ Ballantyne and Burton, *Bodies in Contact*, 406-407.

Findlay undertook such an intersectional analysis of race, class, and sexuality in the US territory of Puerto Rico in *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*.²⁹ She reveals how key sexuality was to Puerto Rican women's "construct[ion of] their gender, race, and class identities" as well as their recognition of the link between sexuality and power.³⁰ Using a bottom-up approach, she shows how plebeians affected change in society through their own actions and "shaped the ideas and strategies of more powerful groups in the process" and how various political groups created their own identities through the discourse they themselves created.³¹ In analyzing the discourse surrounding sexual norms and practices she found "the other" emerged as signified by race with a preference for "lighter" instead of "darker" without society ever addressing or identifying race specifically. She departs from scholars who claim discourses over sexuality and women metaphorically stood for most anything from nation building to colonialism to class struggle. Although women's bodies and sexuality were politically important symbolically, she shows how discourses about women and sex often times were actually about women and sex or "marriage, consensual union, prostitution, and male infidelity."³² She further contends that political activists routinely emphasized racial differences or commonalities dependent upon their needs.

In *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and United States Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, Laura Briggs, who specializes in women, gender, and sexuality, builds upon Findlay's work regarding the US exportation of racial and gendered ideologies as civilizing

²⁹ Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 6.

³⁰ Findlay, *Imposing Decency*, 2.

³¹ Findlay, *Imposing Decency*, 5.

³² Findlay, *Imposing Decency*, 8.

forces from the 1920s to the 1970s and challenges the benevolent image of modern medicine. She argues that globalization is another form of colonization and to understand this dynamic one needs look at the continuities between colonialism and globalizing development policy, particularly the perceived goodness it brings to the family, women, and medicine.³³ This link between colonialism, eugenics, and globalization is made more apparent by examining world fairs at the turn of the century.

Eugenics gained momentum through the anthropological studies associated with world fairs, which pitted the colonizer against the colonized to determine the more advanced civilization, based upon the colonizer's idea of civility. The link between these three ideas is made clear in Philippa Levine's chapter "Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics" in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. With colonialism came the theory of the dying race in which the indigenous peoples of British settler colonies in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US were displaced and dying out as a result of the more technological advanced settlers. Charles Darwin commented in the *Descent of Man* that "civilized nations everywhere are supplanting barbarous nations," and the inherent racism in some observations is apparent as with a New Zealand settlers' comment, "the black savage shall disappear before the white settler."³⁴

Anthropologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries studied the dying races for posterity and to determine a people's degree of civility and modernity and established the basic foundations of scientific racism. Scientists determined race based on physiological features like hair color and texture, head shape and facial features, and skin

³³Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and United States Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, Berkeley: University of California, 2002, 1, 3, 14-15, 80-81.

³⁴ Darwin and settler quotes both in Bashford and Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 48-49.

color. Physical differences coupled with extreme differences in religion, clothing, and governance identified the “savage.” Using physiology and socially constructed norms concerning clothing, behavior, and expression as markers of civility. Europeans with fair skin placed themselves and their descendants at the top of the racial hierarchy.

“Civilized” races claimed more “primitive” races’ poorly developed brains made them feeble and in some cases unable to adapt to modern changes. They saw others as too “savage” and aggressively violent which led them to kill each other off. Whether “primitive” or “savage,” scientists perceived both unfit.³⁵ As Levine states, “Their biologization, achieved through making progress a factor of heredity, sealed for the Victorians the fate of modern primitives, doomed to die out as progress – the cornerstone of the eugenic ideal – continued on its steady march.”³⁶ As those who considered themselves the more civilized races contemplated the dying races it prompted them to think about degeneracy and decadence within their own races.

Fears that those perceived as inferior and unfit displayed greater fecundity brought new restrictions on their mobility and reproduction. The “white settler colonies” Levine identified enacted severe immigration policies in New Zealand (1899 and 1908), Australia (1901), Canada (1910), and the US (1924). Many nations also passed anti-miscegenation laws under the belief that offspring inherited the more inferior qualities of their parents; effectively ensuring the ultimate demise of the ‘superior’ stock.³⁷ These

³⁵ Philippa Levine, “Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 44-50.

³⁶ Levine, “Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics,” 50.

³⁷ Levine, “Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics,” 51-53. Many states within the U.S passed anti-miscegenation laws until the Supreme Court’s *Loving v. Virginia* ruling in 1967 which declared such laws unconstitutional.

same nations sought to control venereal disease under the same rationale.³⁸ It is also important to note that actors employed different terms and overall discourse for eugenics dependent upon their agendas. Social hygiene was most often used by those concerned with morality and who wanted to eradicate sex work and disease.

Cynthia Enloe established the feminist critique of the US militaristic, imperial foreign policy and practice. She joined a set of post-colonial scholars inspired by both Edward Said and Michel Foucault to posit that the body, and bodily practices should be an area of inquiry. Since the late 1990s, historians have taken up these questions, exploring the ways that colonial projects are projects about the governance of the body on both a figurative and literal level. Enloe focuses on the army to uncover the ways that the US policed the bodies of women to uphold social and global hierarchies.

When the US draws attention for its many army bases on foreign soil, discussions revolve around national sovereignty, while the sexual politics surrounding gendered relationships, viewed as a feminine issue, are omitted from the discussion.³⁹ A soldier's promiscuity is accepted for the most part as natural. In the army's drive to assert its 'masculinity' it casts women as sexual playthings. When the US and Britain established segregated brothels in WWII North Africa under the heading of soldier's health they participated in the trends Enloe identifies. By regulating prostitution under the guise of protecting soldier's health the army escaped public scrutiny while also controlling

³⁸ Alexandra Minna Stern, "Gender and Sexuality: A Global Tour and Compass," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 176; and Susanne Klausen and Alison Bashford, "Fertility Control: Eugenics, Neo-Malthusianism, and Feminism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 100. Although the Comstock Law effectively made birth control illegal, the more affluent classes which were also considered the more fit classes had access to birth control. Classes considered less fit did not have access to reliable birth control which contributed to their greater fertility.

³⁹ Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You*, 66-71.

women's sexuality and recruiting them to service men's sexual needs.⁴⁰ While the army colonizes and appropriates women's bodies and their labor for its own agenda, so too do nationalist forces colonize women's bodies.

Enloe, following Said, also finds that local women in colonies are marketed as erotic and sexually available and that distinctions between which women and men are and are not colonized stems from ideas of civility. 'Civilized' women spoke English, wore Western clothing, and were sanitary, chaste, and Christian. Civilized men showed reverence to these women. Those women that did not conform to this notion of civility and those men that did not treat women with reverence were deemed 'uncivilized' and therefore worthy candidates for colonization. However, this reverence for women did not extend from the colonizing male to the colonized female as colonizers possess a long history of making colonized women sexually available for men.⁴¹

Historians of women interested in the intersection of the military, gender, and prostitution have turned their attention to the ways that the US state regulated sexuality during World War II. One of the first to address the issue of the US army and sex work during this period was Beth Bailey's and David Farber's *The First Strange Place: Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii*. They adopt an intersectional approach to examine the social and cultural history that emerged during the war years and how exposing multiple races and ethnicities to each other helped redefine what it meant to be an American. Prior to the war, Hawaii possessed a diverse ethnic population consisting of Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, and the *haole* or descendants of mostly

⁴⁰ Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You*, 19-20, 27-29, and 76-80. For more information about the militarization of women, see Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*.

⁴¹ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* Revised Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 42-48, and 81-84.

Americans who arrived on the island in the early nineteenth century. In preparation for war, many servicemen from the mainland arrived and brought with them their own ideas about race and gender based upon the region in which they grew up. The army maintained segregated units and in Hawaii proud African Americans from Harlem and white supremacist European Americans from the South clashed as each attempted to assert themselves in an unknown and uncertain racial world. 'Black' men found themselves objectified by locals based upon rumors spread by southern 'whites.' Outside of accusations that they descended from monkeys and possessed tails, local women also thought of African Americans as hypersexual brutes and most rape accusations occurred against African Americans.⁴²

Historian Mary Louise Roberts examines how struggles for power and national sovereignty were reflected in efforts to control sexual relations in her book *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France*. American soldiers thought of stories their fathers told them about the First World War of promiscuous, experienced French women they met, while the army presented a romanticized tale of liberated and grateful women. Soldiers took these tales of promiscuous women as a license to act without sexual restraint in occupied France. Many engaged in sexual relations in public in full view of others, including children. In response to these conditions, French authorities wanted to regulate sex work in order to remove it from public view and to help control venereal disease. The US army unofficially facilitated sex work, but refused to allow regulation over fears that journalists would spread the news of such immorality in the American press. Venereal disease rapidly spread and French women took the blame.

⁴² Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 21-26, 150-153, and 162-163.

Many in the US army then equated the French authorities' lack of control over the women with their lack of control in their own country and saw the women's sexual submission as the submission of the nation of France.⁴³ Roberts also found that during the US liberation of France and the sexual liberties taken by the army, a disproportionate number of African Americans were tried and executed for rape partly over French fears of race mingling.⁴⁴

In *Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan*, Sarah Kovner analyzes how Allied servicemen interacted with sex workers in occupied Japan and illuminates the political and gendered collusion necessary in order for the implementation of policies. Prior to the war, poor Japanese women engaged in regulated and licensed sex work without much moral or social condemnation. Fearing Allied servicemen might indiscriminately rape Japanese women, directly after the war the Japanese government set up Recreational Amusement Associations (RAA) where Allied servicemen legally paid for sex. Officials attempted to inspect and treat sex workers whom they classified as "reservoir[s] of venereal disease,"⁴⁵ but few medical supplies remained in war-torn, occupied Japan and their efforts failed. When the venereal rate increased among the servicemen officials outlawed sex work and placed the RAA off limits in January 1946. Closing the RAA drove many more sex workers into the streets where their visible presence came to represent the occupation of the nation. In the eyes of the Japanese, *panpan* girls adopted Western fashions and mannerism and catered to

⁴³ Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1-5, and 8-9

⁴⁴ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 195-196 and 200-201.

⁴⁵ Sarah Kovner, *Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 47.

Allied servicemen not to survive, but to make a profit. Sex work for personal profit strayed from the narrative of the woman sacrificing for her family's sake and thusly dishonored all Japanese women. For Japanese men, the loss of control over sex workers and their diminished access to them symbolized the loss of control over their nation and their access to her resources.⁴⁶

Transactional sex has a long and nuanced history in Africa that scholars have only begun to unravel. Different types of transactional sex occurred in different culturally sanctioned (and unsanctioned) spaces and could be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the specific time, place and cultural values at play. Women repeatedly engaged in sex work to better their economic situation. Women unable to support themselves within their own villages migrated to locations where single men worked in order to provide sex and in some cases other domestic services for a fee. Some women used the money to help their families or in the case of public women in Gold Coast the money they generated ideally went to the community. A large number of women also entered into sex work to escape an abusive, polygynous, or forced marriage in which they were treated as property and a source of income or free labor. Once sex workers started to attain independence and property men retaliated by forcing them into marriage in order to maintain their control over women and their status within society.

Luise White examined sex workers' activities and contributions in Nairobi. As an acceptable form of labor, sex work afforded women the opportunity to acquire property and help their families. She identified three forms of sex work based upon a workers' access to housing. Homeless *watembezi* workers walked the streets and solicited men.

⁴⁶ Kovner, *Occupying Power*, 3-10, 24-25, 30, 78-81.

Even after they acquired housing they continued to proposition men on the street because they believed it kept the location of their homes secret and provided a sense of safety. They developed networks in which they shared rooms and bailed each other out of jail. They rarely accumulated wealth as they used their money to support their children and husbands. *Malaya* workers stayed home and accepted any man that walked through their door. While they also provided sexual services, they stressed their domestic skills such as cooking, providing a bath and bed, cleaning laundry, and even singing. They usually waited until the end of a visit to discuss price so they could charge for all of the services and resources they provided. They remained secretive to evade police and social reformers. If a man refused to pay or beat them they remained silent so as not to disturb their neighbors or landlords and risk losing their housing. Without families to support they acquired property and wealth over time. Many established themselves as landlords and rented to tenants before and after retiring from the sex industry. *Wazi-wazi* workers sat outside their homes or apartments and solicited from their doorsteps. They usually only provided sexual services, but occasionally cooked for regular clients that brought food with them. They set regular prices for their services and usually lived within close proximity of each other so they could come to each other's aid if needed. Most *wazi-wazi* women engaged in sex work temporarily and sent money back to their families in remote villages. After helping their family, they returned to their villages and provided non-sexual labor.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 12-21; also read Luise White, "Prostitution, Identity, and Class Consciousness in Nairobi during World War II," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11, no. 21 (1986), 255-273.

Moving closer to Liberia, Benedict B. B. Naanen analyzed sex work in the Cross River Basin, a rural area of Nigeria, and claims that while extramarital sex existed prior to colonialism, sex as a form of labor developed due to colonialism. Colonialism brought migration and forced labor to the region and as men moved around women had to find work. Men dominated the yam market and palm production which left few options open to women and due to inheritance laws, widows received none of their husband's possessions, but were required to pay for half the funeral expenses. Sex work required little capital other than a seemingly healthy body and sex workers exerted less energy than agriculture workers while earning more money; the majority of the money they sent home. The migrating women no longer fell under their clan's rules and posed a problem to patriarchy. According to Naanen, records suggest that women in clans that excluded a bride-price in marriage arrangements were more prone to engage in sex work or take on lovers than women in clans that required grooms to pay the bride's family. Social convention perceived of the first group of women as free while the second group was not considered free because many clans used child brides and bride-price as a disguise for slavery. Clans punished women that left their husbands because they feared sexually liberated and independent women, but also when women left their husbands the woman's family had to pay back the bride-price and their husbands paid others for domestic help. As more clans passed laws restricting women's behavior more women turned to sex work and left their village. Since women did not pay taxes many local authorities started fining sex workers before they allowed them back into the villages.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Benedict B. B. Naanen, "'Itinerant Gold Mines': Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930-1950," *African Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (September 1991), 58-59, 62-64, 67-69, and 71.

Historian Emmanuel Akyeampong studied how sex work changed along the Gold Coast from 1650 to 1950 and found two forms of sexual labor; public women and “prostitutes,” or independent sex workers. He wrote, “Public women were disempowered by being deprived of their sexual autonomy; prostitutes empowered themselves by asserting their control over their sexuality.”⁴⁹ A comparison of the two forms allows for an examination of changing gender roles. Public women served an institutional role within Akan society. Elder men feared younger men might steal their wives so they provided public women to maintain generational authority within a polygynous society that viewed women as a sign of wealth and status. Elite members of society, including men, women, chiefs, and colonial governors, purchased women to provide sex for bachelors and fined married men who visited public women. Their “masters” collected revenue which was expected to flow back into the community. They lived in a separate part of the village, received no choice in occupation, no right to refuse sex, and no pay; however, they were allowed to take food from anywhere without retaliation and received a pension of sorts upon retirement. Men saw women “as a form of wealth, and their sexuality and economic potential were subordinate to men.”⁵⁰ Women who asserted themselves or remained unmarried threatened the social order and turned to sex work in order to survive. During colonialism men flocked to towns for work and women followed including a large number of the Kru people from Liberia who migrated to the Gold Coast during the 1930s and the 1940s. Independent sex work upset the gender roles as women with little capital soon acquired property (including sewing machines which became a

⁴⁹ Emmanuel Akyeampong, “Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan of the Gold Coast c. 1650-1950.” *Past & Present*, no. 156 (August 1997), 173.

⁵⁰ Akyeampong, “Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan,” 156.

sign of wealth among women), achieved autonomy, and even enjoyed some measure of glamour. Reliant upon women's labor, in the 1930s men rounded up many of the independent sex workers and forced them into marriage. At the same time, anti-witchcraft cults rose up who lumped together all successful, autonomous women as witches to persecute.⁵¹ In Liberia, as with other African nations, men depended upon women's labor as domestic help or as an unpaid agricultural work force. It is not hard to image that if the Kru migrated and engaged in sex work along the Gold Coast that other rural Liberian women might also enter into sex work.

Saheed Aderinto's *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958* is the most recent scholarship on African sexuality and provides valuable insights into sexual commerce's integral place in Lagos society as a whole during British colonization. Aderinto's analysis of British efforts to control venereal disease among Nigerian troops is most germane to this examination of US efforts to do the same with African American troops, and many parallels exist regarding race, gender, and class, though each country attacked the problem differently. British colonialism justified its existence by claiming to bring "civilization" to "primitive" people. In Nigeria, Britain created the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) to assist in its civilizing mission with British officers in charge of the rank-and-file, made up of Nigerians. Venereal disease was rampant among the soldiers, and the British created a discourse of otherness around African sexuality to frame venereal disease as a

⁵¹ Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan," 146, 148-149, 151-152, 155-160, 162, 166, and 168-170.

“black problem.”⁵² As occurred in the US with regards to African American soldiers, Aderinto claimed “African soldier’s sexuality was judged by the color of their skin, not by the prevailing military culture that openly and tacitly promoted sexual impropriety.”⁵³ While eugenics does not figure into Aderinto’s analysis, the hallmarks of scientific racism and sexism are easily recognizable in the following assertion:

For the imperialists, VD [venereal disease] was the visible manifestation of pathological and physiological differences between the “superior” (white) and “inferior” (black) races because, unlike most other ailments, it was associated with immorality, sin, and sexual laxity. Stereotypes of sexual recklessness on the part of women who sold sex and men who paid for it were directly linked to savagery, physiological mutation, and the inability of Africans to develop into sophisticated humans.⁵⁴

However, the British distinguished between Nigerian soldiers and Nigerian civilians, and addressed venereal disease among the soldiers because they protected the empire.

Aderinto further explained the difference between African soldiers and civilians:

All Nigerians were racially backward, in the colonists’ view; however, the rank-and file military, by virtue of their training and apprenticeship under white officers, were considered to be advancing more rapidly on the ladder of civilization than the teeming population of natives who still clung to their ancient “barbaric” ways.⁵⁵

This attitude does not mean the mean the British placed any confidence in the Nigerian soldiers’ abilities as the British viewed the African men as “stubborn, undisciplined, and sexually unrestrained.”⁵⁶ And, while the British saw African men and women as equally

⁵² Saheed Aderinto, *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 92, and 101.

⁵³ Aderinto, *When Sex Threatened the State*, 94-95.

⁵⁴ Aderinto, *When Sex Threatened the State*, 94.

⁵⁵ Aderinto, *When Sex Threatened the State*, 95.

⁵⁶ Aderinto, *When Sex Threatened the State*, 96.

lascivious, Aderinto argued that “women were viewed as more sexually dangerous than men because of the reinforcing stereotypes of being “female” and being ‘black.’”⁵⁷

Several of the same assumptions about race, gender, and class found in Aderinto’s study existed in Liberia, but because the US army was comprised of African Americans with the same skin color as Liberians, colonialism and militarization played out differently in Liberia. Just as the British mistakenly viewed all “black” people as diseased and promiscuous, so too did the US, as the next chapter explains, but the US military viewed African Americans as more “civilized” than Liberians because they were not colonized. As chapter three explains, elite African Americans adopted the behavior of upper- and middle-class European Americans, and in Liberia African Americans considered themselves more “civilized” than Liberians as well. These factors resulted in a different outcome when both nations searched for a solution to the growing epidemic of venereal disease among soldiers during WWII. In Nigeria, a British proposal to establish “controlled” brothels in order for soldiers to legally purchase sex from medically inspected women was dismissed by Attorney General G.L. Howl. Howl believed that “controlled” brothels were counter to Britain’s mission to bring “civility” to Africa, and that “it would implicate administrators as proponents of immorality” according to Aderinto.⁵⁸ Although Washington DC briefly bristled at the notion of industrialized sex work under the army’s management, as chapter five explains, the US did establish tolerated villages housing medically inspected Liberian sex workers for African American troops to visit in order to lower the number of soldiers infected.

⁵⁷ Aderinto, *When Sex Threatened the State*, 102.

⁵⁸ Aderinto, *When Sex Threatened the State*, 101.

Different types of working environments in Liberia brought about different forms of regulation concerning sex work. Prior to the US army's arrival brothels existed in the capital of Monrovia. Neither army records nor narratives from officers stationed in Liberia indicate the US army ever attempted to control these brothels. While some of the narratives provide glimpses of what occurred inside them, it is difficult to speculate about the working conditions of these spaces. Around the army base near Roberts Field existed several off-limit villages the soldiers were barred from visiting, but from which sex workers snuck onto base for freelance commercial exchanges. Outside of freelance workers, soldiers often visited women in the off-limit villages to negotiate their own terms in sometimes coercive relationships. Due to the army's inability to control sex in the brothels and in off-limit villages, in the fall of 1942 the army set up the tolerated villages next to the army base in which they regulated who could participate and under what conditions sex occurred. Within the tolerated villages, the army set up the isolation camps in which they confined venereally-infected sex workers. While the workers could leave the tolerated villages and the isolation camps within, they had to adhere to army regulations while living in the tolerated villages.

LANGUAGE IS NOT BLACK AND WHITE: USAGE

As the above scholarship shows, words and how people use them matter. While race and racism are present in this analysis the issues at play are not easily relegated to 'black' and 'white' categories. Many different ethnicities are found in Liberia during WWII and while it seems easy to classify all people of European descent as 'white' and all people of African descent as 'black' to do so grossly overlooks the differences among

the people within these two limited classifications. In many ways, the Americans, regardless of race, shared more similar beliefs with one another than they did with Liberians or Europeans. Thusly, the black/white dichotomous view is too restrictive to capture the nuanced differences with regards to the diverse groups of people in Liberia during World War II. In order to account for these differences, I do not describe people as *black* or *white* unless I am directly quoting another person. However, as perceptions of race are part of this intersectional study and racism itself rears its ugly head in a number of ways, when bigotry or discrimination occur strictly as a result of one's perceived race based upon skin color I do use *black* and *white* to acknowledge the inherent racism of a situation or statement.

As a descriptor, *western* denotes a way of living and performance associated with countries that attempted to colonize Africa, including Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. In Liberia, *western* also includes the US. Although the US never officially claimed Liberia as a colony, chapter four shows that it is the US which the Americo-Liberians used as a basis for their laws, social customs, and their concept of *kwi*, or civilized, hence the inclusion of the US as a western colonizing force in Liberia. While the Americas include Canada, Mexico, and the countries in Central and South America, here *American* refers to citizens of the United States of America. During World War II when nations referred to people with a shared nationality they labeled them based upon their country of origin. When they referred to people from Canada they called them Canadian, Mexicans were from Mexico, and names for the people in the rest of the Americas likewise derived from their country of origin, hence American refers to people from the United States of America. Further breaking down Americans, this inquiry

departs from assumptions that those of European descent are the norm when picturing an American while all other Americans are described in hyphenated terms which perpetuates notions they are not ‘full-blooded’ Americans. Thusly, the terms *European American* and *African American* are used unless referring to Americans as a collective.

While this analysis concentrates on African Americans due to their participation in Liberia, it is also important to point out that while Americans are made up of multiple races from around the globe during World War II the army treated and classified African Americans differently than other minorities. By the end of 1945 the army had inducted a total of eight million two hundred and twenty-two thousand three hundred and fifty-three soldiers. They separated these inductees into five main racial categories: white, African American, Puerto Rican, Japanese, and other; however, it was only African Americans the army segregated into separate units with different facilities.⁵⁹ When referring to soldiers during the war the army often omits race except for references to ‘whites’ or ‘blacks’ with other minorities subsumed under both classifications depended upon the larger makeup of the unit.⁶⁰ An example of whitewashing minorities except for African Americans is also found with George Abraham, the author of a personal narrative with a firsthand observation of Liberian prostitution during the war. He was Lebanese, but was classified as ‘white,’ and while he did not experience any discrimination based on his race, he witnessed discrimination against African Americans and Africans.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *Selective Service and Victory: The 4th Report of the Director of Selective Service* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948), 189.

⁶⁰ Outside of African Americans two other races were not classified as “white;” Navajo Code Talkers due to their importance in covert communications and Japanese Americans due to their ethnic heritage with an enemy of the US. For more information about either please see Sally McClain, *Navajo Weapon: The Navajo Code Talkers* (Boulder, CO: Books Beyond Borders, 1994); and Masayo Umezawa Duus, *Unlikely Liberators: The Men of the 100th and 442nd*, translator Peter Duus (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

⁶¹ Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La*, 74 and 76.

Table 1: Number of United States soldiers as classified by army based upon racial categories the army tracked. *Selective Service and Victory: The 4th Report of the Director of Selective Service* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948), 189.

| | Number of Army inductees as of December 31, 1945 | Racial makeup of Army as of December 31, 1945 |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| All inductees | 8,225,353 | 100% |
| White | 7,181,784 | 87.3% |
| African American | 901,896 | 11% |
| Puerto Rican | 51,438 | 0.6% |
| Japanese | 20,080 | 0.1% |
| Others (include): | 70,155 (total) | 0.9% |
| Native American | 19,567 | |
| Chinese | 13,311 | |
| Filipinos | 11,506 | |
| Hawaiians | 1,320 | |
| Unidentified | 24,451 | |

A discussion of language for identifying different ethnicities is also necessary in the continent of Africa. Since this research centers on Liberia, *African* refers to a person born in Africa, most likely West Africa regardless of their nationality or ethnicity. While it is very probable Africans from neighboring countries migrated to Liberia and worked for the US during the war, here a Liberian is someone assumed to be born in the country. Liberia is made up of roughly sixteen groups with a shared identity that differs from the other groups. Some of the most notable groups include the Bassa, Gio, Gola, Grebo, Kpelle, Kru, Loma, Mandingo, Mano, and Vai. Although many labels are used to describe these groups such as natives, indigenous, tribal, and so forth most of these terms carry a history of derision. For these reasons, the term *rural Liberian* is used to emphasize their ties to a traditional way of life passed down through their groups. These groups do not act in unison and some share an acrimonious history; therefore, when

necessary each groups' individual name is used. However, since this examination looks at the two-class system initiated by the Americo-Liberians who placed themselves in authority, these groups are most frequently referred to by the collective rural Liberians due to their shared history apart from the Americo-Liberians.

Today scholars use *repatriated Liberians* to denote descendants from the enslaved people of the US that colonized the country. Here the contemporary term *Americo-Liberian* is used for several reasons. During the war, barriers existed which prevented rural Liberians from participating in government and this policy created a society with two different classes of people. This difference was so profound that in 1944 when William V.S. Tubman replaced Edwin Barclay as president, Tubman implemented the Unification Policy to incorporate rural Liberians into government.⁶² Second, *Americo-Liberian* provides a reminder of the ties those in authority had with the US and it reinforces the US influence on those in authority. This association is explored in more detail in chapter four, but it is good to remember those in charge were called *Americo-Liberians* and not *Euro-Liberians* for a reason. Third, using the terms *Americo-Liberian* and *rural Liberian* more accurately denotes a social binary very similar to the 'black' and 'white' binary of the US and the 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' binary of colonialism. Lastly, the term repatriate means for a person to return to their own country, but the African Americans that settled in and colonized Liberia were not returning to their own country. They were colonizers born in a foreign land who imposed foreign ideologies and a foreign system of governance on the people that already lived on the land they settled.

⁶² T.D. Roberts, Irving Kaplan, Barbara Lent, Dennis H. Morrissey, Charles Townsend, and Neda Franges Walpole, *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Liberia* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1964), 22.

Another area where language is critical in setting the tone of inquiry is the term *sex work*. Regardless of how acceptable societies in different countries and eras perceive prostitution, it is work, and the women who participate in this form of labor deserve the respect that comes with acknowledging their contributions as work. While both sex work and prostitution are referred to in this study the word prostitute is omitted unless quoted by contemporary actors. During WWII in the US, popular culture, social hygienist, and the army frequently interchanged words like *prostitute*, *slut*, and *whore* to shame and express their contempt for sexual choices women made that ran counter to perceived notions of middle-and upper-class behavior, but in Liberian society contempt was not directed at women who exchanged sex for goods and money. Sex work allowed women to provide for their households and in some cases, acquire their own wealth and land unattached to the fortunes of a man. Liberian sex workers did not face shame for how they chose to earn a living and therefore this research rejects the use of the term prostitute to describe women who undertook sex work. Although some scholars tend to group World War II sex work under one umbrella such as equating comfort women in Japan with sex workers in Liberia,⁶³ it is important to understand that how one country implemented or regulated prostitution is not how other countries handled commercial sex. In addition, not all women who engaged in sex work were forced to do so. Many women chose to earn a living selling their companionship as is discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

⁶³ Byfield, "Beyond Impact," 659.

TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES: SOURCES

This research began with Abraham's interview in the documentary *Sex during Wartime: History under the Covers* which led to his autobiography, *The Bells of Shangri-La and Other Stories of Sex, Snakes, and Survival from WWII*, about his time stationed in Liberia during World War II. He assisted the physicians with their examinations of the sex workers and visited off-limit villages to conduct physical exams and collect blood samples, among other duties. In addition to Abraham, a number of soldiers served in Liberia, and left a record of their service. Additional information about Task Force or Troop #5889, the designation for the US troops in Liberia, and their training stateside is found in two autobiographies by Lieutenant General and former ambassador Edward L. Rowny and within army records in multiple repositories in the US and Britain. The records from the army's Surgeon General provided invaluable information about efforts to control venereal disease, including the tolerated villages. The Surgeon General's records also held several interviews conducted with medical personnel stationed in Liberia, which address a myriad of topics including sex work, venereal disease, and daily activities. Correspondence and army records from William H. Hastie, civilian aid to the Secretary of War, also provide information about efforts to control venereal disease among African Americans. Periodicals from the US and Liberia as well as additional sources help provide supplementary information.⁶⁴ As this research centers on the factors which more easily allowed for the institutional commercialization of sex by the army,

⁶⁴ Edward L. Rowny, Lt. Gen., *Engineer Memoirs: Lieutenant General Edward L. Rowny, Former Ambassador* (Alexandria, VA: Office of History, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1995); Edward L. Rowny, Lt. Gen., *Smokey Joe and the General: The Tale of Gen. John E. Wood and His Protégé Lt. Ed Rowny*, Anne Kazel-Wilcox ed. (Washington DC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013); *Sex during Wartime: History under the Covers*, produced by Nancy Dubuc and Charlie Maday (A&E Television Networks, 2009); and Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La*.

homosexual relationships are omitted from this evaluation.⁶⁵ Outside of venereal disease, another factor which assisted the army in their decision to set up the tolerated villages was high rates of malaria since soldiers often contracted it while visiting off-limit villages. Malaria is excluded from this research because the army records do not associate the establishment of the tolerated villages with any reduction in malaria.

As occurs with many studies about power, the voices of the subaltern are sadly missing. As noted, most of the primary sources for this analysis come predominately from the US army or former American soldiers which means the information is inherently biased to one degree or another. European American male officers produced the majority of the records with a few records produced by African American officers. As a result, what the African American infantry thought of their time in Liberia can only be surmised through the voice of others. Missing along with the African American infantry's voice is the average Liberian's voice. The few Liberian records that exists are from the Americo-Liberians by way of newspapers, government records, and personal accounts. Incidentally, the most detailed explanation of what the rural Liberians thought of the American army comes from George Abraham, a non-commissioned European American officer.

This analysis is topically arranged which provides for a discussion of colonialism, eugenics, and the militarization of women within multiple contexts to explain how industrialized sex work disrupted social relations along gendered, class, ethnic, and racial lines. The next chapter summarizes how eugenics allowed society to establish a social structure and influenced society's and the army's response to venereal disease which

⁶⁵ Abraham briefly wrote about a lieutenant sent back to states as "sick" for repeated homosexual activity, Abraham, *Bells of Shangri-La*, 135-136.

negatively impacted women and African Americans. The first part shows how knowledge of venereal disease developed prior to WWII, attempts to impose European American middle-class values on the working classes, and the effects of this imposition on African Americans and women. Next, it analyzes changes to the army's approach to venereal disease in the Second World War and the subsequent effects of these changes. The third chapter focuses on the social hierarchy within the African American community and racial uplift as a means of agency to promote and oppose various aspects of eugenics as well as to address the high incidence of venereal disease among African American soldiers. It discusses a conference attended by prominent African American and European American army and civilian aides to formulate a venereal disease plan aimed directly at African Americans and analyzes the role of thirty African American nurses briefly stationed in Liberia to use as a point of comparison to fully illustrate how intersectionality affected Liberian women, and to examine the nurses' role as transnational agents of racial uplift. Although the African American nurses experienced the forces of eugenics and militarization, it was the added force of colonialization which allowed the army and African American officers to justify the treatment of Liberian women as sex objects to pacify men.

The narrative then primarily moves across the Atlantic to Liberia. The fourth chapter provides a brief history of the relationship between the US and Liberia to establish that Liberia was a de facto colony of the US and that the Americo-Liberians used the US as a model for civilized behavior. It is divided into three parts which cover the colonization of Liberia by freed slaves from the US and the social structure they created, colonization of the hinterland, and lastly Liberia's changing relationship with the

US in the twentieth century. The culmination of this intersectional study is the fifth chapter covering sex work in Liberia. It shows how the army justified the creation of the tolerated villages, the army's management of the villages, and resistance to the army's control of sexual behavior. Ultimately, the US employed eugenics, colonialism, and militarization to justify its exportation of negative social assumptions about race, class, and gender to Liberia that the army used to industrialize sex work, and led to increased racial tensions as well as increased Liberian women's value as both as a sex object and as a companion.

II. EUGENICS, VENEREAL DISEASE, AND THE ARMY

I propose to show in this book that a man's natural abilities are derived by inheritance...Consequently, as it is easy...to obtain by careful selection a permanent breed of dogs or horses, gifted with the peculiar powers of running, or of doing anything else, so it would be quite practicable to produce a highly gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations.

~ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (1869)⁶⁶

The Columbian Exposition of 1893, held in Chicago, celebrated the “progress of civilization in the New World” according to Congress.⁶⁷ One of the exhibit's name, the White City, captured the essence of the exposition and how the upper- and middle-class European Americans viewed civilization's advancements as exclusively ‘white.’ However, at the turn of the century in the United States the upper and middle classes worried they fought a losing battle as their fertility declined while that of ‘inferior’ people increased. As a result, their Victorian ideals of “civilized morality,” as Freud labeled them, waned as the social makeup in the US changed.⁶⁸ The ‘New Woman’ entered the workforce, a wave of immigrants arrived, and the efforts of African Americans, recently granted citizenship, to move up the social ladder after the Civil War lingered in ‘white’ America's mind.⁶⁹ The upper and middle classes feared their decreasing power over the masses and needed a new means of controlling them while securing their own place near the top of the hierarchy. Eugenics, which revolved around a person's ‘fitness,’ provided a scientific way to ensure the upper and middle classes stayed on top without appearing to be motivated by racism, sexism, or classism. Those who feared losing their social status

⁶⁶ Galton quoted in Nancy Stephan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 23.

⁶⁷ Congressional quote in Wendy Kline, *Building A Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), 8.

⁶⁸ Kline, *Building A Better Race*, 46.

⁶⁹ Kline, *Building A Better Race*, 2, 9, and 11.

cast the diseased body as unfit thusly allowing them to control the sexuality of those they considered unfit, generally African Americans and sexually active women. The principle of the diseased body guided the army's policy toward venereal disease control during both world wars, but as sexual attitudes changed so too did the army's approach to venereal disease.

Eugenics, or population control and the idea of controlling society through reproduction, has long roots associated with campaigns to identify the source of poverty. Although not the first to address the problem of overpopulation and poverty, Thomas Malthus's book *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, published in 1798, sparked new interest and debate upon the subject by positing overpopulation in economic terms and proposed reducing poverty by means of fertility control through abstinence and delayed marriage.⁷⁰ Inspired by the discovery of evolution and inheritance a little over seventy years later, Francis Galton published *Hereditary Genius* in 1869, in which he proposed breeding humans as one breeds livestock. He coined the term eugenics, loosely derived from Greek for 'well-born,' and the phrase 'nature versus nurture' in which he placed heredity above education in producing 'fit' humans. Whereas Malthus favored negative eugenics, or reducing the population of the 'unfit,' Galton saw it as the duty of the 'fit' to reproduce for the good of the species; he endorsed positive eugenics.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the ideas of breeding a better human and fertility control took the world by storm. These ideas often operated under the guise of social hygiene, racial hygiene, race betterment, and population control, but the foundation for this discourse, regardless of its name, was eugenics. Simplified, social and racial

⁷⁰ Klausen and Bradford, "Fertility Control," 99.

hygienists concentrated on increasing reproduction of those considered ‘fit’ while restricting the reproduction of those considered ‘unfit,’ which brought more scrutiny upon women, the poor, the sick, and minorities in the US. Although eugenics circulated around the US in the late nineteenth century, it received its formal unveiling at the 1915 San Francisco Panama Pacific Exposition which hosted the National Conference on Race Betterment and declared one week as “Race Betterment Week.”⁷¹

The exposition and conference emphasized the betterment of the ‘white’ race, yet race betterment was not restricted to European Americans; it included controlling venereal disease among all races, particularly African Americans. Social and economic obstacles caused high incidences of venereal disease among African Americans. While the same obstacles accounted for venereal disease among working class and poor European Americans, scientific racism instead attributed the high rates within the African American community to a mistaken belief in biological differences between races. Not only did these supposed biological differences make African Americans more susceptible, but it also meant venereal disease affected African Americans differently than European Americans. The unethical Tuskegee Experiments which studied the effects of untreated syphilis on African American men is one well-known example of this belief in which physicians attempted to determine exactly what biological differences existed between ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’ regarding venereal disease.⁷² As this research shows, the ‘black’ diseased body, whether African American or African, was a central part of

⁷¹ Kline, *Building A Better Race*, 14-15.

⁷² For more information about the Tuskegee Experiments please read James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. New and Expanded Edition* (New York: The Free Press, 1993); Susan M. Reverby, *Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Susan M. Reverby, ed., *Tuskegee's Truths; Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

scientific racism and the prevalence of the mistaken belief in the ‘black’ diseased body within society justified the army’s use of ‘black’ women to satiate ‘black’ men’s sexual desires while denying ‘white’ men’s access.

Much of the discourse about African Americans throughout US history positioned them below European Americans in the social hierarchy and as an ‘unfit’ race. While this social hierarchy existed across the US, after Reconstruction the Southern states enacted black codes, or Jim Crow laws, which solidified the unequal power structure through disenfranchisement, and the Supreme Court’s 1896 decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* that made segregation legal, the social hierarchy was again rigorously policed along racial lines. Along with the Jim Crow laws came harmful stereotypes that depicted African Americans as lazy, alcoholic, criminals who pursued sexual vice and gave no care for personal hygiene, nutrition, or health. The most dangerous stereotype about African American men was that they longed to rape European American women. The myth of the black male rapist led to a horrific number of lynchings as reported by Ida B. Wells in *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* published in 1892 and *The Red Record* published in 1895. Many of the same accusations about a lack of ‘fitness’ were also made against the poor of all races and ethnicities, but as a whole European Americans perceived African Americans as diseased, debauched, and less evolved.

Scientific racism held that African Americans physically developed faster and were more akin to some sort of bestial ancestors than European Americans. According to the prevailing racialized science of the nineteenth century, their smaller brains accounted for their lack of self-restraint and an appetite for sexual indulgence. European American doctors believed African American’s hypersexuality along with their supposedly large

genitalia and vigorous sexual action caused genital abrasions and made them more susceptible to venereal disease.⁷³ As Dr. James McIntosh wrote in 1891, “with the utter lack of virtue and chastity so markedly characteristic of the race, there was nothing to prevent its [syphilis] indiscriminate spread.”⁷⁴ Class differences within the African American community led to statements like the following one that was featured in a 1915 article: “negro physicians...admit that virginity is rare among the poorer members of the race.”⁷⁵ In this statement the top tier of the African American community, physicians, condemned poor African Americans as promiscuous.⁷⁶

Many of the European American scientific and medical authorities felt African Americans were beyond help. A survey of unwed African American mothers conducted in 1945 linked their high promiscuity to a lack of sex education, but many European Americans considered education useless as African Americans were thought to care little for their health or their community and let disease spread indiscriminately from one to another without concern. European American physicians considered treating African Americans ineffective because once their symptoms subsided they were thought to stop treatment, and many European American experts accepted that eventually all African Americans caught syphilis and were affected differently by it than European Americans because, according to this line of reasoning, African Americans were biologically

⁷³ Jones, *Bad Blood*, 21 and 23; and John Parascandola, *Sex, Sin, and Science: A History of Syphilis in America. Healing Society: Disease, Medicine, and History Series* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 38-39.

⁷⁴ McIntosh quoted in Jones, *Bad Blood*, 25.

⁷⁵ Article quoted in Parascandola, *Sex, Sin, and Science*, 39 and 162n70.

⁷⁶ For more information about southern racism and black codes please see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); and Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

inferior.⁷⁷ Publications classified African Americans as a “syphilis soaked race” and those with venereal diseases as “the ignorant, the careless, the criminal and the social outcast.”⁷⁸

Outside of race, ethnicity, and class, eugenicists also used biology to establish a gender hierarchy with men considered more evolved than women. Eugenicists favored sexual inequality as a means to prevent the feminization of men and the masculinization of women. They believed women’s reproductive capabilities stunted their development, particularly their intellectual capacity. As with ‘primitive’ people’s bodies, they used women’s bodies to claim them as less evolved as evidenced by their menstruation and smaller skulls.⁷⁹ They infantilized women due to their smaller skulls as reflected in Thomas Huxley’s claim that women “will stop in the doll stage of evolution to be...the drag on the civilization.”⁸⁰ Their childlike nature meant they possessed little appreciation for progress or civilization which also reflected attitudes toward ‘less evolved’ races. According to historian Nancy Leys Stephan, “Lower races represented the ‘female’ type of the human species, and females the ‘lower races’ of gender.”⁸¹ Under a rubric of African Americans as less evolved than European Americans and women as less evolved than men, African American women emerge as the least evolved with the basest sexuality; a perfect target for social and racial hygienists.

⁷⁷ Dollie Walker, “The Need for Sex Education in Negro Schools,” *Journal of Negro Education* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1945). 174; Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 80; and Jones, *Bad Blood*, 25-27. It should be noted that many European Americans also stopped treatment once symptoms disappeared, but few physicians considered treating them ineffective.

⁷⁸ “Draft Aids Syphilis Study,” *The Science News-Letter* 43, no. 26 (June 26, 1943). 409; and Col. W. Lee Hart, “Social Hygiene in War and Peace,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 29, no. 4 (April 1943). 220.

⁷⁹ Philippa Levine, “Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics,” 54-55.

⁸⁰ Huxley quoted in Levine, “Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics,” 54.

⁸¹ Stephen quoted in Levine, “Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics,” 55.

Social hygienists paid particular attention to women's reproductive behavior. As more working class young women found employment in factories rather than as household servants, the middle class lost the ability to directly control sexual activity among the working class at the turn of the twentieth century. Since working class women gave their earnings to their parents they lacked the resources to enjoy their new-found freedom. The social practice of treating emerged to fill this need in which men treated or paid for women's admission to amusements and entertainment. Some women used the opportunity away from supervision to experiment with sexuality.⁸² The experimentation mixed with treating seemed very much like prostitution to social hygienists intent upon clearing the street of vice. At the same time, 'New Women' emerged from the upper and middle classes who tested gender roles and sought fulfillment in the public sphere. New Women differed from previous generations of women with greater access to higher levels of education, escape from parental control by living outside the family home, working or participating in social endeavors; some delayed marriage and procreation, some choose never to marry or bear children, and still others engaged in sexual experimentation. According to historian Peter Filene new women were "the enemy of marriage, the home, and therefore civilization."⁸³

Social hygienists believed promiscuous women were mentally defective, which gave the state the right to control their actions and working with local law enforcement they institutionalized many women on mere suspicion. These were not "Mothers of

⁸² For more information about working class women and treating please see Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States, 20th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986) and Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁸³ Filene quoted in Kline, *Building A Better Race*, 11.

Tomorrow” preparing to enrich their race.⁸⁴ They labeled sexually promiscuous women as ‘feeble-minded’ and ‘morons’ and therefore ‘unfit’ to reproduce.⁸⁵ Upper- and middle-class female social hygienists silenced and disenfranchised working class and poor women as another way to control their reproduction. In doing so they asserted their own political power while denying working class and poor women power which also helped to distinguish between the ‘fit’ and the ‘unfit.’⁸⁶ The army also maintained conflicting opinions when it came to women’s sexuality and bodies compared to men.

Eugenics garnered the most political and governmental support during the 1910s and 1920s. However, nations worldwide openly practiced and endorsed eugenics until the discovery of what many globally condemn as the *savage* and *barbaric* treatment the Nazis inflicted on a wide range of people in the name of eugenics.⁸⁷ Although social hygienists fought the diseased body in both the Great War and the Second World War, they employed two entirely different techniques in each war based upon changes in social

⁸⁴ Term in Kline, *Building A Better Race*, 16.

⁸⁵ Kline, *Building A Better Race*, 10, and 16; and Alexandra M. Lord, *Condom Nation: The U.S. Government’s Sex Education Campaign from World War I to the Internet* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 14.

⁸⁶ Alexandra Minerva Stern, “Gender and Sexuality,” 176-178.

⁸⁷ This, however, did not stop the practice of eugenics, only the name. Positive eugenics inspired the idea for sperm banks in the 1970s and in 1980 Robert Graham founded the Repository for Germinal Choice in California. Not long after sperm banks emerged in countries across the globe. Today in 2016 as the Zika virus spreads across the western hemisphere fears of microcephaly and other developmental problems prompt society to reconsider their restrictions on access to abortion, or negative eugenics. Levine, “Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics,” 43; Alexandra Minerva Stern, “Gender and Sexuality,” 180; Daylanne English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 33; and for more information about eugenics see A. Dirk Moses and Danstone, “Eugenics and Genocide,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 192-209 (see chap. 1, n.18); Paul Weindling, “German Eugenics and the Wider World: Beyond the Racial State,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 315-331 (see chap. 1, n.18); Brent McDonald, “Brazil’s Abortion Restrictions Compound Challenge of Zika Virus,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2016 http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/19/world/americas/zika-virus-abortion-brazil.html?_r=0 (accessed September 12, 2016); “Q&A: Abortion rules in Zika-affected countries,” *BBC News*, April 14, 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35438404> (accessed September 12, 2016); Arian Campo-Flores and Dan Frosch, “Zika Virus Spread Renews Focus on Abortion Debate,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 21, 2016 <http://www.wsj.com/articles/zika-virus-spread-renews-focus-on-abortion-debate-1471821486> (accessed September 12, 2016).

attitudes toward the diseased. This change in methods evolved from seeing venereal disease as a moral dilemma to a health crisis.

VENEREAL DISEASE AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In 1495, a new disease appeared in France among the military unlike any previously experienced in Europe. Known as the “French disease,” or the pox, today we know it as syphilis.⁸⁸ Modern society is plagued by a variety of sexually transmitted infections, but in the early days of gonorrhea and syphilis physicians believed both ailments were variations of the same disease. Not until 1837 did Phillipe Ricord prove each disease emanated from separate sources. Outside of genital lesions, syphilis caused congenital defects, cardiovascular problems, the inability to coordinate muscles, paralysis, insanity, and death. It proved extremely dangerous for reproduction causing birth defects, retardation, blindness, and transmission from mother to child.⁸⁹ This last discovery greatly alarmed racial hygienists as it provided concrete proof that “venereal peril is an actual cause of the degeneration of the race,” according to physician Prince Morrow.⁹⁰ Gonorrhea caused genital discharge, arthritis, meningitis, and damaged internal organs. Since women showed none of the associated symptoms, physicians believed all women played host to gonorrhea and infected men without damage to their own bodies. Physicians considered syphilis more dangerous than gonorrhea, but in the 1870s Albert Neisser identified the microorganism responsible for gonorrhea and studies showed that not only did gonorrhea cause blindness in utero, but contrary to earlier

⁸⁸ Parascandola, *Sex, Sin, and Science*, 2.

⁸⁹ Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880, with a New Chapter on AIDS* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 9-10 and 15.

⁹⁰ Morrow quoted in Kline, *Building A Better Race*, 45.

beliefs, asymptomatic husbands infected their wives which caused sterility, miscarriages, or the need for a hysterectomy from damaged reproductive organs. Physicians now recognized the seriousness of both diseases and the need to treat those infected.⁹¹

The turn of the twentieth century brought great strides in our understanding of venereal disease. In 1905 Fritz Schaudinn and Eric Hoffman identified the microorganism responsible for syphilis, followed the next year by August Wasserman's development of a test to detect syphilis in those infected (previously physicians diagnosed syphilis based upon visible genital lesions). In 1909, Paul Ehrlich created one of the first effective treatments for syphilis, an arsenic compound named Salvarsan. Due to the high number of deaths associated with the compound, he created a less toxic, but a slightly less effective lower dose of the compound called Neosalvarsan. It required intravenous injections at a time when many physicians lacked the necessary training and skill to locate veins so less educated physicians continued to administer mercury treatments. In 1912 scientists developed a test specifically to identify gonorrhea, but few facilities existed capable for conducting the difficult and technical test.⁹² Despite these advances, venereal disease remained a problem as the world headed toward war.

During the Great War, the army had to address the issue of venereal disease. When civilian officials noted the high incidence of venereal disease amongst troops, the army defended itself citing the high number of infection rates among the civilian population. Prior to the war the army rejected infected recruits, but necessity dictated lowering

⁹¹ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 11, 14, and 129; and Jones, *Bad Blood*, 2-3, and 7 explains the three stages of syphilis as a chancre appearing on the genitals in the primary stage within ten to sixty days of contact, the secondary stage as a rash similar to measles or chicken pox appearing in six weeks to six months, and the final stage, or tertiary stage occurs after a period of dormancy which usually last two to three years, but possibly up to thirty years, after which tumors, cardiovascular, and neurological problems arise.

⁹² Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 40-41; and Jones, *Bad Blood*, 7.

standards to accept previously rejected recruits, and the acceptance of all infected African Americans for service under the belief that almost all African Americans were infected. Army physicians also disclosed that five out of six infected soldiers contracted their disease prior to army service. The high incidence of venereal disease among inductees cleared the way for programs designed to eliminate venereal disease from both the civilian and army populations.⁹³

As protectors, soldiers felt entitled to companionship and objectified women, using them for recreational purposes. Promiscuity led to venereal disease. The army borrowed from efforts to control venereal disease along Texas border towns while in pursuit of Pancho Villa by suppressing vice and replacing it with wholesome activities. Believing prostitutes were responsible for the spread of disease, two weeks before the US entered World War I the General Medical Board of the Council of National Defense prohibited alcohol and prostitution near camps and promoted sexual abstinence. They threatened to relocate bases, and the revenue they brought, in cities which refused to comply, despite the objections of some towns. The sex trade changed locations and went underground. Unable to control prostitution, authorities imprisoned sex workers and promiscuous women. Those women who defied gender norms were stripped of their rights and labeled feeble-minded.⁹⁴ State governments launched compulsory examination programs for civilian “persons reasonably suspected of having syphilis, gonorrhea, or chancroid”⁹⁵ that disproportionately fell upon poor and working-class women. States further demanded involuntary quarantine and treatment for those found infected while

⁹³ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 77 and 116.

⁹⁴ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 53-56; and Nancy Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 96-103, 109-112 and 123.

⁹⁵ Virginia State Board of Health quoted in Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 85.

barring lawyers from securing their release. One hundred and ten vice districts vanished over the course of the war.⁹⁶

The army also created the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) that developed recreational, educational, and entertaining programs to assist with morale and health. Army camps resembled small cities with libraries, theaters, clubs, and sports. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Knights of Columbus, and the Jewish Welfare Board sponsored religious services and entertainment with athletics consisting of boxing, football, basketball, baseball, and volleyball. Although created with the express purpose of combatting venereal disease, the CTCA viewed their work in army training camps as the first step in redefining the national culture. Through a program of education, recreation, and repression they would alter the social order and redefine manhood and womanhood based upon their own ideals of gender, race, and class without regard for cultural ideals already in existence among various communities. While the CTCA sought to implement sexual equality with one standard of purity for both men and women, they actually reinforced a sexual double standard favorable to men. They associated men and masculinity with self-control and virility. Men were righteous crusaders that protected women and children. Women exhibited piety and submissiveness while maintaining their domestic qualities in public. Seen as the morally superior gender, women fulfilled the role of caring nurturers. Their gendered ideals reflected middle and upper-class values not always accepted by the populace.⁹⁷

Contrary to World War II propaganda, that associated sex with virility and masculinity, the army's preventative educational program during the First World War

⁹⁶ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 63, 70-77, and 90-91.

⁹⁷ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 60; and Bristow, *Making Men Moral*, xvii-xviii, 19-21, 45-49, and 56.

employed a moralistic tone to highlight the health benefits to the soldier and their future families which stemmed from social and racial hygienists' goal of increasing the reproduction of those considered 'fit.' The army reprimanded officers who promoted the notion that men needed sex, and if necessary replaced uncompliant officers.⁹⁸ The *Fit to Fight*, later changed to *Fit to Win*, slogan graced numerous posters and pamphlets utilized to spread the army's message that "clean living" led to "virility."

While the CTCA initially used positive persuasion to alter European American cultural attitudes, they relied upon segregation, repression, and control for African Americans from the beginning. Segregation led to fewer prophylaxis facilities for African Americans. Soldiers left camp and encountered racism and led to violent confrontations between African American soldiers and European American city dwellers. Due in part to race riots, African Americans were spread throughout camps across the nation leaving fewer numbers in each camp. Their widespread distribution further reduced the availability of programs for them and the army told African Americans to accept inequality in the interest of nationalism.⁹⁹ With fifty-eight percent of all enlisted African Americans diagnosed as infected, compared to ten percent of all European American soldiers, many divisions enacted special orders directed at African American troops including mandatory administration of chemical prophylaxis regardless of whether or not they engaged in sex.¹⁰⁰ One base even built "a wire stockade" around the camp and only allowed four-hour passes for African Americans under condition they undergo chemical

⁹⁸ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 62-63 and 68.

⁹⁹ Bristow, *Making Men Moral*, 137-141, 146-147, 151, and 167-168.

¹⁰⁰ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 116. Brandt noted physicians' racial prejudice may account for the high rate of venereal disease diagnoses among African Americans as well as social conditions in which most had never seen a physician prior to recruitment.

prophylaxis before reentry into the camp. In addition to segregation, African American soldiers received little venereal disease education because European Americans believed they lacked the necessary intelligence to learn.¹⁰¹

The army found moderate success with their combination of programs, but after the war discussion of venereal disease faded. At the beginning of the war, reports claimed twenty-five percent of men were infected; however, by 1918 only thirteen percent returned to the states with venereal disease. After the war, middle-class society viewed venereal disease education as obscene for discussing prophylactics, which they felt promoted promiscuity.¹⁰² In 1927, Surgeon General H.S. Cumming wrote, “It must be borne in mind that persons most in need of protection are usually the more irresponsible groups in a community and under the circumstances often would not have sufficient foresight to provide [condoms].”¹⁰³ This statement painted those who engage in sexual activity outside of marriage as irresponsible on several levels. First, the fact that a couple needed a condom means the sexual activity they engage in was immoral and probably not within the bounds of matrimony because it did not lead to procreation and thusly was rendered irresponsible sex. Second, their irresponsible character shown since they did not plan ahead by carrying a condom. Last, the fact that a couple engaged in sex outside marriage meant they lacked will power and valued sexual gratification above all else, which also cast them as irresponsible. Those considered too irresponsible were not worth saving, nor could they be saved, so why try. In 1920, the government provided four

¹⁰¹ Parascandola, *Sex, Sin, and Science*, 65-67; and 67-68 notes a lack of African American medical personnel which caused African American soldiers to avoid treatment.

¹⁰² Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 77.

¹⁰³ Cumming quoted in Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 125.

million dollars to controlling venereal disease, but by 1926 this number dropped to sixty thousand dollars.¹⁰⁴

The backlash against venereal disease protection might also be interpreted as a reaction to what historian George Chauncey identified as the “heterosexual counterrevolution.”¹⁰⁵ The heterosexual counterrevolution aimed to distinguish a new generation of men and women from previous generations that adhered to the notion of separate spheres, gender segregation, and homosocial activities. As new and working-class women increasingly ventured into the public sphere they intermingled with men and both genders started rejecting the constraints placed upon them through gender segregation. New and working-class women now openly socialized with men in speakeasies and night clubs while defying prohibition and sexual restrictions, with many taking pleasure in sexual encounters.¹⁰⁶ Older generations might associate support for venereal disease control as support for the heterosexual counterrevolution and the risk associated with women and men socializing together much as conservatives today fear that comprehensive sex education encourages sexual activity.

FIGHTING VENEREAL DISEASE IN WORLD WAR II

During the 1930s, society ostracized the infected as well as those who worked with them. By the early 1930s one in ten people had contracted syphilis and five hundred thousand new infections occurred each year while seven hundred thousand new gonorrhea infections occurred annually. Rather than blame the increase in venereal

¹⁰⁴ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 125.

¹⁰⁵ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994); 118.

¹⁰⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 117-118.

disease on cuts in funding, social hygienists blamed loose morals acquired during the 1920s. Those most often infected were African Americans, the poor, and the young. Treatment consisted of alternating weekly injections of an arsenic compound one week followed by an injection of bismuth the next week to counteract the toxic effects of the arsenic. Treatments lasted for a year and usually cost from three hundred to one thousand dollars for a private physician and eighty dollars at a public clinic, all during the Depression. Life insurance companies refused to cover those infected while some hospitals refused to admit patients with venereal infections. Employee benefits excluded venereal diseases and companies fired employees found to be infected.¹⁰⁷ Dr. N.A. Nelson's testimony in 1938 before congress in a hearing on venereal disease control summed up the overall sentiment, "Physicians and lay people alike think venereal diseases...are disgraceful diseases; and that the average practitioner who would stoop to treat those diseases was to be classified as a dishonorable doctor and a disgrace to the community, which has led to the neglect of teaching those subjects to students in the medical schools."¹⁰⁸ He went on to say that as long as venereal diseases were associated with morality and sexual misbehavior, the country would not develop an "intelligent" plan to fight venereal diseases. An intelligent plan was on the horizon once Thomas Parran sounded the alarm.

¹⁰⁷ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 82, 126, 129, 131, and 135.

¹⁰⁸ Nelson quoted in Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 135 and 245n30.

Table 2: Illustrates the rise in venereal disease in the United States while Denmark and Sweden infection rates decreased. Thomas Parran, *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1937), 298.

| | | |
|---------------|-------|-------|
| | 1927 | 1936 |
| United States | 79.6% | 84.1% |

| | | |
|---------|-------|------|
| | 1919 | 1935 |
| Denmark | 11.9% | 2% |
| Sweden | 9.7% | .07% |

During the 1930s no one more openly criticized the country's attitude toward venereal disease than Dr. Thomas Parran. He graduated from Georgetown University's medical school in 1915 and worked in Public Health Service as an assistant surgeon when World War I began where he quickly rose to head of the venereal disease control division. In 1930, Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him the state health commissioner of New York and in 1936 President Roosevelt appointed him Surgeon General of the United States. Parran's first call-to-arms came in 1937 when he published *Shadow on the Land* recounting the abysmal efforts of the US to address venereal disease in comparison to Europe. While the US infection rate slightly rose from 79.6 percent in 1927 to 84.1 percent in 1936, Denmark dropped from 11.9 percent in 1919 to two percent in 1935 and Sweden dropped from 9.7 percent in 1919 to .07 percent in 1935. He later published *Plain Words about Venereal Disease* in 1941 criticizing the army's efforts to control venereal disease among the troops. In this book he singled out the army's refusal to enforce the May Act, passed that same year, which made prostitution near army bases a federal offense.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Parran, *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1937), 298; and Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 125, 144, and 162. For more about European efforts to control venereal disease read Parran chapters five and six.

Parran's approach departed from previous efforts. He proposed treating venereal disease as any other medical disease, deemphasized morality and judgement, and urged for the state to take responsibility for treatments. He called for reducing the stigma associated with venereal disease and for medical professionals to address it with medical intervention instead of clergy attacking it as a personal failure. His proposal included free and confidential diagnosis in order to find and immediately treat those infected, taking a sexual history to contact previous partners known as *contact tracing*, mandatory testing before marriage and for pregnant women, and widespread public education about venereal disease. Due in large part to his efforts, in 1938 FDR signed the National Venereal Disease Control Act which allotted federal funds to states in order to control, provide treatment for, and prevent the spread of venereal disease as well as funding for research to fight the disease.¹¹⁰

As the world plunged into war again, the US once again faced the problem of venereal disease among the troops. In 1940, of the fifteen million selective service registrants approximately five percent were infected with venereal disease while two percent of European American soldiers and twenty-two percent of African Americans soldiers were diseased. Due to the burden treatment placed on medical services, when the war began the army refused to admit infected soldiers except in rare cases. The army started admitting infected soldiers in 1942 once manpower shortages reached critical conditions. Of the first two million soldiers drafted for World War II, 4.8 percent were infected with syphilis and among all new recruits 30.1 percent had gonorrhea. Although the army frequently rejected African Americans due to infection, among the first two

¹¹⁰ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 137, 139-140, 144, and 154.

million draftees 27.2 percent of the African Americans had syphilis. Due to preventative efforts undertaken during the war by 1943 the overall infection rate dropped to 2.5 percent and by 1945 the army had treated two hundred thousand draftees for venereal diseases.¹¹¹

Table 3: Venereal disease rates among United States draftees with racial breakdown showing an increase once the army started accepting infected inductees. Thomas Parran, *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1937), 206-210.

| | 1940 | 1942 |
|---|------|--|
| All draftees with venereal disease | 5% | 4.8% with syphilis 30.1% with gonorrhea |
| European American with venereal disease | 2% | N/A |
| African Americans with venereal disease | 22% | 27.2% with syphilis |

Although the medical community discovered penicillin's effectiveness against venereal disease in 1943, the army postponed widespread usage until 1944. During the war they relied upon sulfa drugs to treat gonorrhea and continued using an arsenic compound to treat syphilis. After experimenting with dosages and switching to an intravenous drip they cut treatment time to ten days of hospitalization. This development significantly cut down on lost man hours, from 1,278 lost days in 1940 to only 368 in 1943.¹¹² However, rather than treat soldiers once infected, the army aimed to prevent

¹¹¹ Parran, *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis*, 206-210; Clifford H. Greve, "Venereal Diseases Found in Selective Service Registrants," *American Journal of Public Health* 36, no. 7 (July 1946): 751; and Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 78-80, 128, and 169-170.

¹¹² Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 161, and 169-170.

infection altogether and thusly avoid lost man hours due to hospitalization that was otherwise avoidable.

Within the continental US, the federal government regulated sexuality by criminalizing sex work and classified sex workers as “cesspools of infection” in “a slimy social swamp.”¹¹³ In 1940, Major General Charles R. Reynolds feared women’s mobility and their access to cars which allowed them to follow troops for what he deemed immoral purposes.¹¹⁴ Others claimed women “took advantage” of naïve “boys from tranquil villages” and society’s duty was to “protect the boys.”¹¹⁵ As occurred during WWI, officials demanded the mandatory arrest, segregation, and treatment of infected sex workers and promiscuous women in an attempt to lower the number of infected soldiers. Congress granted their wish with the Eight-Point Agreement of 1940 and the May Act of 1941 which made prostitution near army bases illegal in the US.¹¹⁶ Law enforcement started rounding up women on flimsy suspicions of prostitution. According to federal reformatory warden Helen Hironimus the women arrested ranged from “flashily dressed, gay, reckless young women... [to the] homesick, bewildered young girl...expecting to marry her soldier sweetheart,” but failed to find him and ran out of

¹¹³ Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 62, 65 and 195n17.

¹¹⁴ Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 49-50.

¹¹⁵ Paul M. Kinsie, “The Prostitution Racket Today: Summary Report of Field Studies of Prostitution Conditions in 176 Communities since the Declaration of the Limited Emergency,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 27, no. 7 (October 1941). 327-328.

¹¹⁶ Charles R. Reynolds, “Prostitution as a Source of Infection with the Venereal Diseases in the Armed Forces.” *American Journal of Public Health and the Nations Health* 30, no. 11 (November 1940). 1281; U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Military Affairs. *Making Permanent the Provisions of the Act of July 11, 1941, Prohibiting Prostitution Near Defense Centers*. 79th Cong., 2nd sess., May 10, 1946. Report No. 2004; U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Military Affairs. *Prohibiting Prostitution Near Defense Centers*. 77th Cong., 1st sess., April 18, 1941. Report No. 399; U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Military Affairs. *Prostitution Near Military and Naval Establishments*. 77th Cong., 1st sess., May 16, 1941. Report No. 327; and Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 13 and 165-166. Some opponents of these laws feared that denying soldiers, whom they believed needed sex, access to sex workers the soldiers would seduce or rape women or turn to homosexuality, Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 166-167.

money while others arrived from poor, depressed areas in search of better chances of survival.¹¹⁷ In one crackdown near Camp Forrest in West Virginia, of the one hundred women arrested only four carried venereal infections.¹¹⁸ A few admitted to exchanging sex for money and one seemed “bewildered at finding herself...confined for doing something she considered her own personal affair.”¹¹⁹ Across the country, law enforcement arrested women and subjected them to invasive medical exams on nothing more than a suspicion, and most of those arrested were not infected sex workers.¹²⁰ From 1940 to 1944, the number of women charged by the Federal Bureau of Investigations with moral violations rose 95 percent.¹²¹ During the WWII years, irregular, non-conjugal sex was closely policed by local law enforcement and military police; however, while overseas and away from social scrutiny the army adopted a very different policy concerning prostitution.

In an attempt to control venereal disease, the army strove for continence, but placed little faith in soldiers’ ability to abstain. Many in the army believed men were entitled to sex as evidenced through General George Patton’s words “if they don’t fuck, they don’t fight.”¹²² In 1926 Congress passed a law “for the forfeiture of pay... [for those] who are absent from duty on account of...venereal disease.”¹²³ A number of men chose not to report their venereal status and in 1939 the policy was modified to include court martial for those who concealed their status. By World War II many felt the law

¹¹⁷ Hironimus quoted in Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 37.

¹¹⁸ Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 38.

¹¹⁹ Hironimus quoted in Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 167-168.

¹²⁰ Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 8, 49, 57, and 71.

¹²¹ Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 65.

¹²² Patton quoted in Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 160.

¹²³ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 168-169.

condemned men for doing what was in their nature as physician and Captain Joel T.

Boone expressed when he wrote:

I do not think this practice should be continued. I hope a further interpretation and understanding of man's frailty will modify these regulations. I am one of those who believe that the unfortunate individual who illicitly exposes himself and who contracts disease should not be permanently stigmatized. He should be pitied.¹²⁴

He vaguely condoned rape when he further commented:

They cannot, they must not, be mollicoddled, and this very education [army training] befits nature, induces sexual aggression, and makes them the stern, dynamic type we associate with men of the armed force. This sexual aggression cannot be stifled...If we bear in mind that our armed forces are sexually aggressive, that they must be if they are going to be good soldiers and sailors, an important part of our problem is solved. We cannot legislate morals, and the passing of absurd laws will not bury instincts upon which the very fabric of our race is spun.¹²⁵

Congress agreed with Boone and in 1944 they repealed the law and wrote in a protection of "secrecy of records of venereal disease" and forbade any sanctions or denial of benefits for army personnel that contracted a venereal infection.¹²⁶ The government and army exalted men's sexual behavior while condemning women's sexuality.

Secondary to abstinence was prevention of disease if exposed. The army's perceptions of male sexual behavior resulted in an expectation that fifteen percent of the soldiers would abstain from sex of their own accord and fifteen percent would engage in sex regardless of the dangers which left seventy percent open to army warnings about

¹²⁴ Joel T. Boone, Capt.. "The Sexual Aspects of Military Personnel," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 27, no. 3 (March 1941), 116-117.

¹²⁵ Boone, "The Sexual Aspects of Military Personnel," 116-117.

¹²⁶ U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Military Affairs. *Providing for Repeal of Provisions of Act May 17, 1926, Concerning Forfeiture of Pay of Persons Absent from Military Duty Due to Contraction of Venereal Disease*. 78th Cong., 2d sess., March 16, 1944. Report No. 1263; and U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Military Affairs. *Repealing Law Providing for the Forfeiture of Pay Because of Venereal Disease*. 78th Cong., 1st sess., July 1, 1943. Report No. 380.

venereal disease.¹²⁷ Of that seventy percent between 53 to 68 percent actually engaged in sex, and that among African Americans sexual activity was ten percent higher than among European Americans.¹²⁸ The *Basic Field Manual*, issued to all soldiers, contained practical advice about venereal disease while inserted pamphlets informed soldiers of the importance of remaining disease free and warned of promiscuous women who infected men.¹²⁹

The gendered nature of these instructions institutionalized the sexual double standard found throughout the army. It created the Women's Army Auxiliary Corp (WAAC) in 1942, and in 1943 the army granted the Women's Army Corp (WAC) full status. Oveta Culp Hobby served as director and the army put the first female Medical Corps officer, Major Margaret D. Craighill, in charge of managing health care for WACs and nurses. At first the army performed the same physical on woman as men. Craighill pointed out this oversight as women with "gynecologic defects" were mistakenly inducted.¹³⁰ From that point on women received pelvic exams and provided their menstrual history before induction. Each month soldiers underwent a physical inspection, but venereal disease is difficult to visually detect in women. Since no set policy existed regarding pelvic exams some army surgeons mandated monthly pelvic exams. Women objected to the painful monthly exams and the lack of uniform procedures. Craighill assisted in establishing standards for pelvic exams including providing women with

¹²⁷ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 165.

¹²⁸ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 165.

¹²⁹ U.S. Department of War, *Basic Field Manual: Soldier's Handbook* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, July 23, 1941), 204-205; U.S. Department of War, *Off to a good start*, Pamphlet (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, c.1940-1945); and War Department, *Sex Hygiene and Venereal Disease*, Pamphlet (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, September 30, 1942).

¹³⁰ No explanation was provided for "gynecologic defects" and therefore it is difficult to determine what ailments this references; Mattie E. Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps, Special Studies, United States Army in World War II* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1991), 603.

covering, not requiring nudity, the presence of another woman, and only detailed pelvic exams if other symptoms were present. Once the army discovered a pregnant soldier they dismissed her, and while the army inducted venereally infected men they rejected infected women. Scholars note that male soldiers received six condoms a month, but omitted providing women with prophylactics or training in its use. However, the decision not to supply women with condoms was not the army's decision; that came from the women themselves.¹³¹

As the army developed a venereal disease policy for male soldiers, it also developed a program for women similar to men, even suggesting distributing prophylactics in women's bathrooms from devices comparable to slot machines. Director Hobby quickly put a stop to such ideas, and for good reason it seems. Recruitment for the WAAC dropped significantly after national columnist John O'Donnell erroneously reported the army distributed prophylactics to female soldiers in order to keep male soldiers' morale up. Soon after this smear on WAAC the army subsumed it, dropped its auxiliary status, and renamed it WAC.¹³² Eventually the army distributed a pamphlet, after Hobby rewrote it with moral intent imbuing it with a righteous and conservative moralistic tone that labeled venereal disease "a national menace" and illegitimacy "a personal tragedy as well as a loss in woman power." But the pamphlet provided no instructions on how to avoid either fates other than abstinence.¹³³ In 1944, Hobby also distributed a pamphlet that expressly stated the army did not provide instructions about or

¹³¹ Parascandola, *Sex, Sin, and Science*, 101-102, and 105-106; Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 166, and 168; and Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 29, 603-604, 608-609, 615, and 620-621. Company commanders pushed to have menopausal women dismissed because their "constant complaints and chronic depression" affected the company's morale, 614-615.

¹³² Christopher Paul Moore, *Fighting for America: Black Soldiers – The Unsung Heroes of World War II* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), 113.

¹³³ Hobby's pamphlet quoted in Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 617.

issue prophylactics to women. The army did establish a venereal disease liaison in May 1943, but dissolved the position in July as venereal disease among women never posed a problem.

During World War II two types of prophylactics existed, mechanical and chemical. Mechanical prophylactics are condoms, but not the pre-rolled, lubricated rubbers of today. Although soldiers received condoms, most used them to “cover...their rifle butts...to keep mud out” instead of sexual activity.¹³⁴ They complained they were “too small,” “half of them bust,” they “came off during relation,” or were “so damn thick you can’t enjoy yourself.”¹³⁵ Condoms only offered protection against gonorrhea which enters through the urethra, but they offered little protection against syphilis so after using the condom the army advised soldiers to take a chemical prophylactic.¹³⁶

Soldiers visited prophylactic stations, or *pro* stations, to receive chemical prophylactics or purchased individual pro kits which the army later distributed free. The army installed pro stations on bases and near locations soldiers frequented such as brothels and Red Cross clubs and adopted the phrase “soap, silver, and mercury” to encourage their use.¹³⁷ The soap allowed soldiers to clean themselves, silver picrate to help prevent gonorrhea and mercury in the form of calomel ointment for syphilis. Treatments were so

¹³⁴ Anonymous quote in Leonard D. Heaton, *Communicable Diseases Transmitted through Contact or by Unknown Means*, vol. 5 of *Preventative Medicine in World War II*, 9 vols. (Washington, DC: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1960), 243.

¹³⁵ Soldiers quotes in Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 168.

¹³⁶ Thomas H Sternberg, Ernest B. Howard, Leonard A. Dewey, and Paul Padget. “Venereal Diseases” in *Communicable Diseases: Transmitted Through Contact or By Unknown Means*. Vol V of *Preventive Medicine in World War II Series*. Edited by Hoff, Ebbe Curtis. In *Medical Department of the United States Army in World War II Series*. Edited by Coates, John Boyd, Col. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1963, 197.

¹³⁷ Quote in Boone “The Sexual Aspects of Military Personnel,” 118; additional information in Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 168; and Sternberg, “Venereal Diseases,” 202. Sternberg provided no date as to when the military started distributing chemical prophylactics free to soldiers.

agonizing one soldier “wound up almost fainting on the floor” and chose to “forego” sex rather than endure the pain again.¹³⁸ The army made plans to start using a one-ointment treatment to combat both syphilis and gonorrhea developed by Captain Thomas G. Faison in Liberia. It was reportedly “simple to use – caused no burning or pain,” but penicillin made it unnecessary.¹³⁹ Regardless of what soldiers thought of condoms and pro stations, overseas supply deliveries failed to keep up with the fast-moving army.¹⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

Under the names of social and racial hygiene the army’s venereal disease control policy was determined by eugenics. As scientists unraveled the mysteries of venereal disease hygienists incorporated the new information in a way that reinforced their preconceived notions of ‘fitness,’ ‘civility,’ or ‘modernity.’ Social and racial hygienists cast both African Americans and sexual females as diseased and in need of segregation from the rest of society. European Americans constructed a social hierarchy with European American men first, European American women second, men of non-European and non-African ethnicities third, women of non-European and non-African ethnicities fourth, and at the bottom were African American men and women in that order. On top of this racial and gendered rubric lay a class element with the wealthy at the top, then the middle-class followed by the working class, and the poor occupied the bottom class. Rank also

¹³⁸ Soldier quoted in Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 168.

¹³⁹ Venereal Disease Activities, Report ending March 26, 1943, Faison to the Commanding General, USAFIL, April 4, 1943; Box 449; Geographic Series 1943-1944, Africa: Eritrea (F) to Africa: North Africa-369 (F); Records of the Surgeon General (RG 112); National Archives Building, College Park, MD (NACP); and Sternberg, “Venereal Diseases,” 200-202.

¹⁴⁰ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 168.

determined class within the army, but unlike in civilian society one attained higher rank, or class, through merit in the army much more easily.

During the First War the army addressed venereal disease through a program dominated by abstinence in order to produce healthier families for tomorrow. Social hygienists equated celibacy with strength and supplied athletics and entertainment to encourage soldiers to abstain. Society and the army, as a reflection of society, constructed a gendered binary with men out in the world as protectors and women at home as nurturers. This binary reflected upper- and middle-class values, which did not necessarily apply to the working class or the poor. European Americans cast most African Americans as lustful and incapable of self-control. The North incorporated informal methods of segregation while the South relied upon legal segregation and disenfranchisement to protect the 'fit' European Americans from the 'unfit' African Americans.

As the world failed to put one war behind it and headed into a second war, the army continued to rely upon eugenics to inform its venereal disease program, but it abandoned its morally driven message for a pragmatic approach grounded in medicine. Although it preferred abstinence as it had during the first war, the army now offered practical advice concerning venereal disease. In an effort to increase the army's strength by decreasing the amount of manpower lost to disease, the army developed a comprehensive prevention program coupled with athletics and entertainment, and near the end of the war eliminated all sanctions for contracting a venereal infection. It loosened its gendered binary with an increased number of women serving in WAC and as officers in the capacity of nurses, a nurturing career by its very nature. While it now acknowledged and in some cases celebrated men's sexual prowess, it continued to condemn women's sexual expression as

evidenced by its gendered venereal disease program. As the army continued to segregate what it considered promiscuous women so too did it segregate African Americans based on erroneous notions of the diseased body. In order to counter claims of hypersexuality and the diseased body African Americans adopted racial uplift and the politics of respectability, explored in the next chapter.

III. RACIAL UPLIFT AND THE POLITICS OF RESPECTABILITY

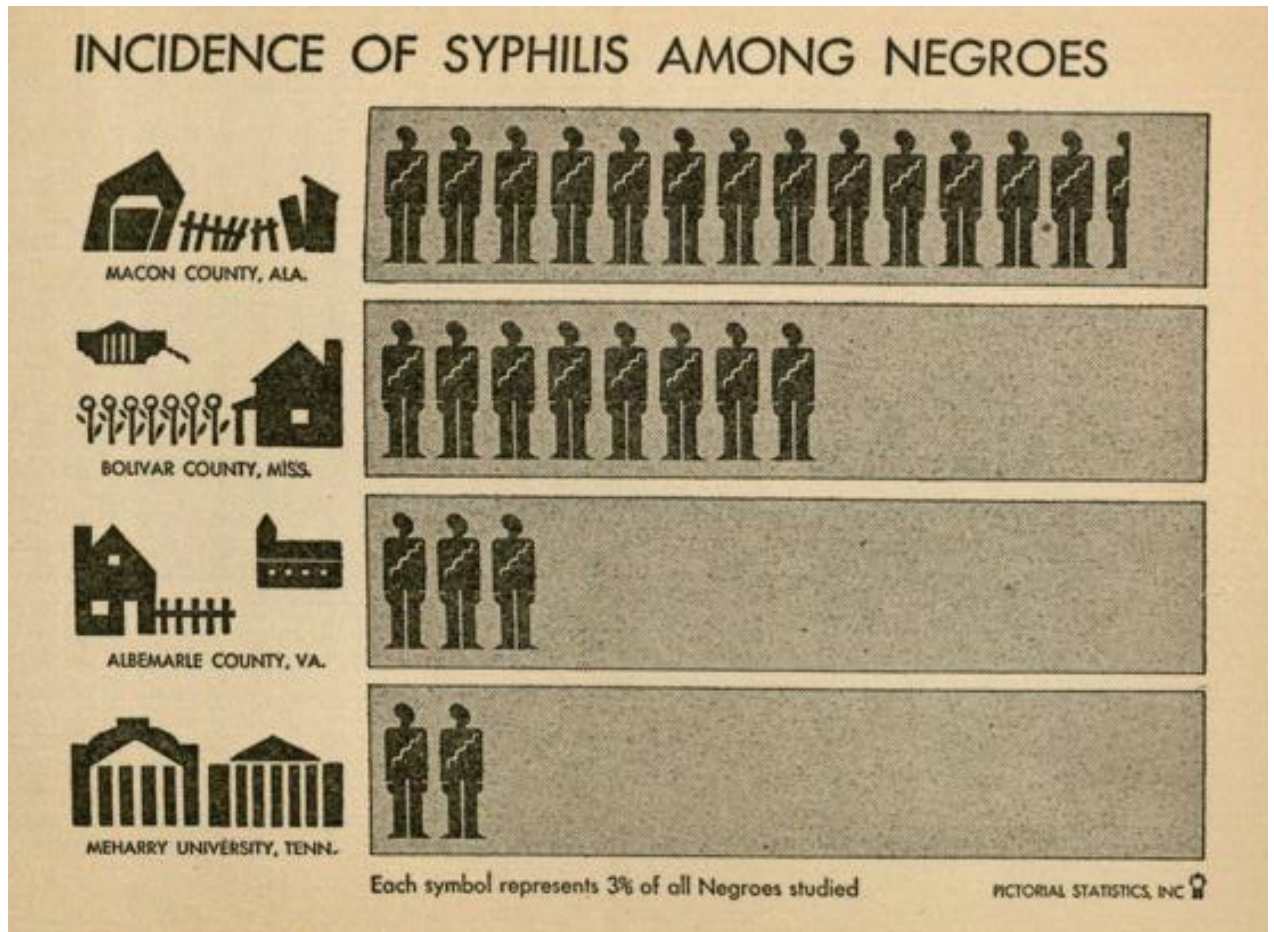


Figure 2: Graphic illustrating that African Americans' class, economics, and environment greatly influenced venereal disease rates. Thomas Parran, *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1937), 179. Used under Fair Use

The Negro is not to blame because his syphilis rate is six times that of the white. He was free of it when our ancestors brought him from Africa. It is not his fault that the disease is biologically different in him than in the white; that his blood vessels are particularly susceptible so that late syphilis brings with it crippling circulatory diseases, cuts his working usefulness in half, and makes him an unemployable burden upon the community in the last years of his shortened life. It is through no fault of hers that the colored woman remains infectious two and one-half times as long as the white woman.

~ Thomas Parran, *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis* (1937), 175.

While eugenicists believed that the races were biologically different, not everyone blamed biology for the high incidence of venereal disease among African Americans. The physicians that participated in the forty-year Tuskegee Experiments started in 1932 were racial progressives sincerely interested in lowering syphilis rates within the African American community. Prior to the experiments, in 1929 many worked with the Rosenwald Fund to survey the prevalence of syphilis within several southern African American communities and ways to effectively administer treatments. Thomas Parran discussed some of their findings in 1937's *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis*. While he endorsed the belief that biological differences existed, he primarily wrote about the environmental factors that led to differences in venereal rates between races.¹⁴¹

While overall the survey found 20.5 percent of those tested were infected with syphilis, four distinct African American communities with very different rates of syphilis emerged. Macon County, Alabama, had the highest collective rate for women and men at 39.8 percent. Parran described these conditions as “primitive.” Sharecroppers lived in “tumble-down shacks” with no floors, furniture, bedding, or outhouse nearby.¹⁴² They often moved around looking for better labor terms and housing. They ate no green vegetables, fruit, milk, or red meat. Only students at the Tuskegee Institute and patients at the Veterans Hospital received nutritious meals. The second highest rate was located in Bolivar County, Mississippi, with twenty-four percent collectively. All of these sharecroppers worked for one plantation. Since they were viewed similarly to livestock, the plantation provided food, housing, and a resident doctor. As one manager explained, “This is a matter of dollars and cents for our company. We have found that it doesn’t pay

¹⁴¹ Parran, *Shadow on the Land*, 161; and Jones, *Bad Blood*, 4 and 171-172.

¹⁴² Parran, *Shadow on the Land*, 170.

to keep sick livestock. But the sickly nigger is another problem...I called the croppers together and told 'em I had the healthiest mules...I said, You ought to want to be as good as a mule."¹⁴³ Albemarle County in Virginia had a rate of 8.9 percent, which was less than many European American communities. The African Americans in Charlottesville usually worked as domestic servants or provided other services for European Americans. They received medical care from the University of Virginia Hospital and an above average education.¹⁴⁴ Finding the lowest rate, 5.9 percent overall and less than two percent among the women, in Tennessee at Meharry Medical College prompted Parran to write, "Wherever the education and living conditions among the negro race approximate that of the white, the syphilis rate approximates that of the white."¹⁴⁵ Parran not only dispelled notions that African Americans were responsible for the spread of syphilis, but in explaining the reasons for different venereal rates he also clearly describes four distinct social classes among the African Americans with the professional students at the medical school considered the elite.

The graphic accompanying Parran's analysis nicely fits the venereal disease narrative, an important component when literacy is not widespread. The figures representing infected individuals are men since they do not wear skirts. The male figures are used for one of two reasons. Society is male centric and men created the image and conducted the study therefore they unconsciously used men in the image. A second interpretation is they specifically represent African American men who were viewed as a bigger threat to the European American population than African American women.

¹⁴³ Manager quotes in Parran, *Shadow on the Land*, 173.

¹⁴⁴ Parran, *Shadow on the Land*, 169-170, 172, 177, 179.

¹⁴⁵ Parran, *Shadow on the Land*, 177

Analysis of the pictorial representation of the four counties reflects the social classes found within the African American community along with the varying levels of infection. The most infectious were poor and rural people of the lowest social class as evidenced by their dilapidated home, fence and outhouse. Higher on the social ladder, and with a lower infection rate, were rural African American farmers based on the plants, grain machine, and well-maintained home. The second lowest infection rates were found among the second highest social class, which included city dwellers based on the well-maintained home and fence with an institutional building nearby. The elite among the African Americans were educated, economically well off, and possessed the lowest venereal infection rates.

Although European Americans generally viewed African Americans all the same, African Americans used values, behavior, and deportment to distinguish between classes with the “better class of Negroes” displaying piety, hard work, cleanliness, and sexual virtue.¹⁴⁶ In 1899, W.E.B. DuBois described four “grades” of African American in his sociological study *The Philadelphia Negro*, in which he wrote about the negative effects of the Great Migration or as DuBois wrote, “untrained and poorly educated countrymen, rushing from the hovels of the country...into the strange life of a great city.”¹⁴⁷ Most are familiar with DuBois’ “talented tenth” or lawyers, doctors, teachers, preachers, and successful entrepreneurs who represented “the realized ideal of the group” and by whom all other African Americans might be “understood and finally judged,” but he also wrote

¹⁴⁶ Anonymous quote in Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 205.

¹⁴⁷ DuBois quoted in English, *Unnatural Selections*, 45.

about three other grades.¹⁴⁸ Hardworking laborers made up the two middle grades with the higher of the two grades able to provide for themselves and the working poor within the lower grade.¹⁴⁹ The fourth grade DuBois named the “submerged tenth” and was comprised of the “lowest class of criminals, prostitutes and loafers.”¹⁵⁰

The African American community fought claims they were somehow inferior to European Americans through racial uplift and the “politics of respectability.” Historian Kevin K. Gaines explained the changing definition of racial uplift. For slaves uplift meant “a personal or collective spiritual – and potentially social – transcendence of worldly oppression and misery.”¹⁵¹ After Reconstruction African American elites saw uplift as “an emphasis on self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth.”¹⁵² Essentially racial uplift is “a form of cultural politics, in the hope that unsympathetic whites would relent and recognize the humanity of middle-class African Americans, and their potential for...citizenship rights.”¹⁵³ The cultural politics Gaines referred to is what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has called the “politics of respectability.”¹⁵⁴

Within African American women lay the intersecting powers of race and gender. While European American women experienced oppression associated with their status as women, and African American men due to their race, within African American women

¹⁴⁸ DuBois quoted in English, *Unnatural Selections*, 45.

¹⁴⁹ English, *Unnatural Selections*, 45; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 205; and Michael B. Katz and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds. *W.E.B. DuBois, Race, and the City: “The Philadelphia Negro” and its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 259.

¹⁵⁰ DuBois quoted in English, *Unnatural Selections*, 45.

¹⁵¹ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1.

¹⁵² Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 2.

¹⁵³ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 3.

¹⁵⁴ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 14

these two forces combined to create a different and more powerful type of oppression for African American women, particularly in the Jim Crow South. European Americans viewed African American women as the complete opposite of European American women, and while African American men were seen as hypersexual, according to a European American writer in a 1904 newspaper “Negro women evidence more nearly the popular idea of total depravity than the men do...When a man’s mother, wife and daughters are all immoral women, there is no room in his fallen nature for the aspirations of honor or virtue...I cannot imagine such a creation as a virtuous black woman.”¹⁵⁵ According to social hygienists, “unclean” African American women failed in every respect and were primarily responsible for the failings within the African American community as a whole. As teachers, the moral education African American children received was subpar, as immoral mothers they created degeneracy within the family, and as unfaithful wives they emasculated men. Due to their perceived innate immoral and promiscuous nature, the Jim Crow South refused to convict European American men of raping African American women once they reached puberty.¹⁵⁶

To counter these claims Baptist and African American clubwomen practiced respectability politics and expected all other African Americans to as well. According to Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham “black Baptist women waged war against gum chewing, loud talking, gaudy colors, the nickelodeon, jazz, littered yards, and a host of other perceived improprieties.”¹⁵⁷ Further expanding upon the vice of jazz one Baptist leader wrote in 1912 that “the poison generated by jazz music and improper dancing will

¹⁵⁵ Writer quoted in Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 190.

¹⁵⁶ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 190.

¹⁵⁷ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 193.

completely demoralize the womanhood of today. The sure way to ruin is by way of the public dance hall” that is a place of “unbridled animality” where African Americans made “a voluntary return to the jungle.”¹⁵⁸ To distinguish themselves in the eyes of European Americans, African American clubwomen also juxtaposed their prim behavior against poor African American women assumed to be promiscuous.¹⁵⁹ Since post-reconstruction days, both racial uplift and respectability politics provided tools for middle-class African Americans to wage war against scientific racism, and they continued to rely upon the politics of respectability and racial uplift during World War II as African American leaders worked with the army to tackle the ever-growing problem of venereal disease among African American soldiers.

Due to the large contingency of African American infantry assigned to Task Force #5889 the army allowed African American physicians and nurses to serve as army officers at the 25th Station Hospital in Liberia. Both female and male African American officers faced racial discrimination in the army and adopted respectability politics as a way to move up in rank. As medical professionals, they epitomized DuBois’ “talented tenth” and those assigned to the troop expected to use their skills to not only aid the wounded, but to also set an example for the African American infantry and for the Liberians. A few of those stationed in Liberia during the war returned afterward as part of a United States health mission to help rid the country of malaria and venereal disease, the same diseases the officers of the 25th Station Hospital fought among the soldiers.¹⁶⁰ On

¹⁵⁸ Baptist leader quoted in Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 199.

¹⁵⁹ Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013), 105.

¹⁶⁰ John B. West, “United States Health Missions in Liberia.” *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* 63, no. 12 (October 15, 1948), 1354 and 1358.

the surface, the African American officers appear to participate in transnational racial uplift in Liberia as part of the task force. Outside of guarding the rubber and airfield, they brought ‘civilization’ by building roads, providing health care, and participated in a goodwill mission to make friends with local Liberians. Although African American officers looked upon Liberians with benevolence, they none-the-less viewed themselves as a step above as evidenced through an analysis of thirty African American nurses stationed in Liberia; however, before analyzing the nurses in association with the Liberian sex workers it is best to understand the nurses’ place within the army and within the African American community.

RACIAL UPLIFT IN THE ARMY

Today many ascribe the prejudices of the 1940s for the higher rates of venereal disease reported among African American soldiers. Some note biased European American officers attributed higher rates within individual units on African Americans, thusly skewing overall numbers. Many scholars hold segregation practices responsible for the high venereal rates. Segregation restricted the number of recreational activities available for African Americans to participate in and as a result they frequented more bawdy establishments that welcomed their patronage. Additionally, prophylactic stations were segregated and the army failed to provide enough for African Americans, which also contributed to the high rates of infection. When examining the only sex education film made specifically for African American soldiers some criticize its racist undertones.¹⁶¹ Racism abounded during the war; as a result, few analyze the army’s

¹⁶¹ Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 35 and 104; Parascandola, *Sex, Sin, and Science*, 107; Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 165; and Alankaar Sharma, “Diseased Race, Racialized Disease: The Story of the Negro

reasoning behind its venereal policy precisely because racism within the army is a given for the time period, but the fact remained that venereal disease still disproportionately affected African Americans soldiers. The army could not ignore the problem and attempted to reduce rates using the best available medical knowledge.

To address the vexing problem of high venereal disease among African American soldiers the army held a conference October 5-7, 1943. The acting Surgeon General, Brigadier General A.W. Kenner, and the acting Director of the Preventative Medicine Division, Colonel S. Bayne-Jones, opened the conference held at the surgeon general's office in Washington, DC. In attendance were African American and European American representatives from several army and civilian agencies. The goal of the conference was to determine how large of a problem existed, the factors involved in its creation, methods to fight it, and specific recommendations to address the problem.¹⁶²

The pervasiveness of a preventable disease among African American soldiers placed a financial burden on the army and diverted resources. African American infection rates were six to ten times greater than European American soldiers, with syphilis infecting African American soldiers fifteen times more than European American soldiers. Despite the army's best efforts, African American infection rates continued to rise and

Project of American Social Hygiene Association Against the Backdrop of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment," *Journal of African American Studies* 14 (2010), 249.

¹⁶² In November 22-23, 1943, the American Social Hygiene Association hosted the "Conference with Negro Leaders on Wartime Problems in Venereal Disease Control" in New York City between several African American and European American civilian organizations in order to discuss venereal disease control within the African American community. It essentially echoed many of the military's recommendations for education as well as training and employing African Americans to treat and educate their fellow community members. "Report of Conference on Venereal Disease Control Problems among Colored Troops," to the Surgeon General of the Army, October 13, 1943 [hereafter referred to as "ASHA Conference Report, Oct. 13, 1943"]; File Venereal Disease Control among Colored Troops; Box 254; Subject File 1940-47 Urban League Conference to Violence against Negro Military Personnel; Office, Asst. Secretary of War, Civil Aide to the Secretary, Records of the Secretary of War (RG 107); National Archives Building, College Park, MD (NACP); and "Conference with Negro Leaders on Wartime Problems in Venereal Disease Control." *Journal of Social Hygiene* 30 no. 2 (Feb 1944), 76-83.

stood at 15.2 percent in August 1943. Approximately sixty thousand new infections occurred in 1943, and venereal disease accounted for seven hundred and fifty thousand hospital beds occupied by infected African American soldiers.¹⁶³ These figures omit cases acquired prior to induction and therefore reflect the army's inability to prevent venereal disease once a soldier joined. Since the army provided preventative services and training to both European American and African American soldiers then both groups should have similar rates of infection. Unfortunately, African Americans had a much higher rate, which necessitated a change of tactics.

Both civilian and army life contributed to the high venereal rates of African American soldiers. Within the civilian population, poverty, low education and literacy, and a lack of knowledge about health matters coupled with inadequate law enforcement exacerbated the problem. The army blamed African American community leaders for not taking the matter seriously and for not cooperating to help control the spread of the disease. The army admitted they contributed to the problem by not providing adequate recreational facilities or an education program that met the needs of African American soldiers. The Secretary of War also criticized commanding officers' "defeatist attitude," which led to a lack of cooperation.¹⁶⁴ The use of the word "defeatist" to describe officers is more of an indictment of the African American community than European American officers. Although the army held officers responsible for the infection rate of their troops, in this case the army did not associate the officers' attitude to a failure of leadership.¹⁶⁵ Instead, using the word "defeatist" shows they saw it as an insurmountable problem

¹⁶³ This data only covered the continental US, ASHA Conference Report, Oct. 13, 1943.

¹⁶⁴ ASHA Conference Report, Oct. 13, 1943.

¹⁶⁵ Gaylord W. Anderson, Lt. Col., "Venereal Disease Education in the Army," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 30, no. 1 (January 1944), 20-28.

within the African American community that led to European American officers feeling defeated. How could officers control venereal disease among their troops when African American community leaders remained apathetic and let it run amok in the communities that African American soldiers visited?

Even Louie Lautier, an African American representing the Civilian Aide on Negro Affairs to the Secretary of War, reprimanded the African American community during his opening remarks at the conference, and he exhibited the classism of the politics of respectability. He said the Office of the Civilian Aide held illiteracy and venereal disease as high priorities and both were related: “The states from which the majority of Negroes with the lower intelligence classes in the army come, have the greatest prevalence of venereal disease. It is significant that these states are characterized by a low economic status in a large portion of the population.”¹⁶⁶ For Lautier, within the African American community, poverty equaled lower intelligence, which meant higher venereal rates because poor people lacked control and concern. He attributed this perceived lack of concern within the African American community to its leaders when he said, “Too many of us are sitting too complacently in our communities doing nothing about the problem, even though these rates are being flaunted in our faces continuously.”¹⁶⁷

The 1943 conference prompted the army to revise its approach to preventing venereal disease in African American soldiers and distributed the revisions the next year

¹⁶⁶ Lautier, Louis R., “Opening Remarks, Second Day of Conference on Venereal Disease Control among African American Personnel,” speech, October 6, 1943 [hereafter “Lautier Speech, Oct. 6, 1943”]; File Venereal Disease Control among Colored Troops; Box 254; Subject File 1940-47 Urban League Conference to Violence against Negro Military Personnel; Office, Asst. Secretary of War, Civil Aide to the Secretary; RG 107; NACP.

¹⁶⁷ Lautier Speech, Oct. 6, 1943.

in “Circular No. 88: Venereal Disease Control among Negro Troops.” Founded on the results of a program at the Tuskegee Army Air Field and a presentation by Captain Marcellus H. Goff, the African American Venereal Disease Control Officer (VDCO) for the 366th Infantry at Fort Devan, MA, the Secretary of War called for African American medical officers “with the proper qualifications” to act as the VDCOs for African American troops on permanent or temporary duty.¹⁶⁸ The army coordinated recreational programs with Special Services so as not to schedule activities during training or assignments. Physicians needed to intensify efforts to develop a one-tube method of prophylactics effective against both gonorrhea and syphilis because the established two-tube system seemed overly complicated. The circular advised that VDCOs avoid constructing pro stations near police stations since African American soldiers avoided all police. The conference attendees also suggested changing the appearance of African American pro stations to make them more inviting inside and outside, and replacing European American soldiers who administered treatment within segregated pro stations with African American soldiers (See Illustrations 2 & 3).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Nothing explained what “proper qualifications” the army sought and until recently Circular 88 was considered restricted, Lautier Speech, Oct. 6, 1943; Marcellus H. Goff, speech, untitled and undated [Goff Speech], attached to “Venereal Disease among Colored Troops,” memo to commanding officers, post, camps, and stations, First Service Command from Major Glen W. McDonald by order of General Miles, August 20, 1943; File Venereal Disease Control among Colored Troops; Box 254; Subject File 1940-47 Urban League Conference to Violence against Negro Military Personnel; Office, Asst. Secretary of War, Civil Aide to the Secretary; RG 107; NACP; and “Circular No. 88, Venereal Disease Control Among Negro Troops,” signed by G.C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, February 28, 1944 [Circular No. 88]; File HD: 300 (Miscellaneous Papers) Persian Gulf Command, Compiled by Stanley L. Harrison; Box 2; WWII Administrative Records, Middle East 040-330; RG 112; NARA.

¹⁶⁹ Circular No. 88; and ASHA Conference Report, Oct. 13, 1943

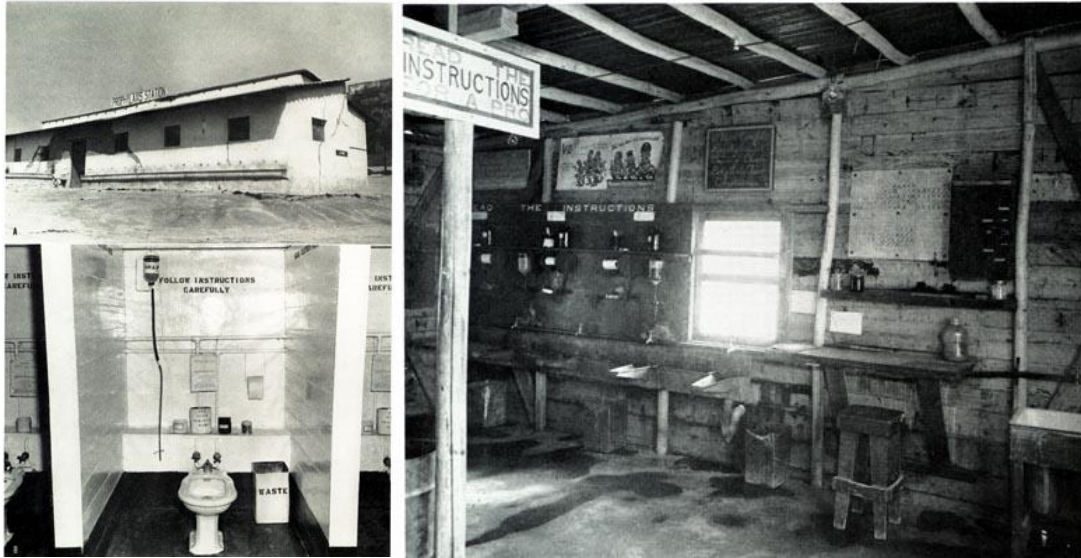


Illustration 2 (on left): Naples prophylactic station.

Illustration 3 (on right): Prophylactic station in Iran.

Prophylactic, or *pro* stations, varied in quality dependent upon location and the race of soldiers expected to visit as seen in these two pictures. The well-kept *pro* station on the left was in Naples while the *pro* station in Iran, on the right, was less inviting. Thomas H., Sternberg, Ernest B. Howard, Leonard A. Dewey, and Paul Padget, “Venereal Diseases” in *Communicable Diseases: Transmitted Through Contact or By Unknown Means Vol V of Preventive Medicine in World War II Series*, edited by Hoff, Ebbe Curtis in *Medical Department of the United States Army in World War II Series*, edited by Coates, John Boyd, Col. (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1963), 222 and 280.

The biggest change in the army’s response came with its education program. First, Captain Goff suggested increasing the frequency of lectures because posters and written instructions provided little help to an illiterate soldier. He stated that African Americans clung to their “superstitions and folklore.”¹⁷⁰ The only effective way to dispel the erroneous assumptions were through the council of other African Americans. Goff also noted that individual soldiers cared little for their own health, but they cared a great deal about their families, friends, and communities. He recommended appealing to an African American’s sense of “racial betterment” for improved compliance from soldiers.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Goff Speech.

¹⁷¹ Goff Speech.

The new education plan called for African American medical officers to train African American non-commissioned officers who in turn trained small groups of three to six soldiers and answered their questions both during lectures and as they came up in daily life. The army reasoned that African Americans “can better understand the mores, folkways, and race psychology of the Negro soldier than similar white personnel, and can thus be used more advantageously.”¹⁷² The conference and Circular 88 also advocated adapting educational procedures to “fit the needs of colored troops. Full use should be made of psychological appeals...such as pride, both individual and racial, competitive spirit, and patriotism.”¹⁷³ However, not all bases implemented these procedures. According to a 1944 memo sent to the new Civilian Aide, Truman Gibson, bases failed to implement the procedures because of a lack of qualified African American medical officers, a lack of support from commanding officers, and the wide geographic distribution of African American troops. Although African Americans only made up ten percent of the army, they accounted for forty-five percent of all reported venereal disease cases in 1944. Despite the army’s efforts, “venereal diseases [still] represent the most serious health problem of the Negro race, both in civilian life and in the Army.”¹⁷⁴

TROOP #5889: THE LIBERIAN TASK FORCE

Long before Pearl Harbor many anticipated the US entry into World War II and made preparations. In August 1940, the army organized the 41st Engineer Combat

¹⁷² ASHA Conference Report, Oct. 13, 1943.

¹⁷³ Circular 88

¹⁷⁴ Office of the Surgeon General to Gibson, “Venereal Disease Control in Negro Troops,” memo, September 29, 1944; File Venereal Disease Control among Colored Troops; Box 254; Subject File 1940-47 Urban League Conference to Violence against Negro Military Personnel; Office, Asst. Secretary of War, Civil Aide to the Secretary; RG 107; NACP.

Regiment (ECR) under the command of Colonel “Smokey Joe” Wood. Its origins dated back to the late nineteenth century and westward expansion with the 9th and 10th Cavalry, which were composed of African American soldiers and European American officers. Among other duties, they protected settlers in wagon trains as they moved out west. During modern warfare, however, the ECR provided engineer support for infantry on the front lines by sewing and clearing minefields and building barbed-wire defenses. While some things changed from their days out west as Buffalo soldiers, others like segregation did not. The army resisted integration until President Truman issued Executive Order 9981 in July 1948.¹⁷⁵

Edward L. Rowny served as an officer in the 41st ECR under Colonel Wood before both became generals. Rowny, a graduate from West Point of Polish descent, wrote *Smokey Joe and the General: The Tale of Gen. John E. Wood and His Protégé Lt. Ed Rowny* (2013) as a tribute to his mentor and *Engineer Memoirs: Lieutenant General Edward L. Rowny, Former Ambassador* (1995) at the request of the Army Corps of Engineers. Both books recount his long illustrious army career including his time training the 41st ECR in Fort Bragg and the early months setting up the base in Liberia. According to Rowny, many joked that the “C” in ECR stood for “colored,” but Colonel Wood took his job seriously, including combat training.¹⁷⁶ In keeping with the army’s policy of putting southern European American officers in charge of African American troops under the misguided notion they understood African Americans better than northern officers,

¹⁷⁵ Edward L. Rowny, Lt. Gen., *Smokey Joe and the General: The Tale of Gen. John E. Wood and His Protégé Lt. Ed Rowny*, Anne Kazel-Wilcox, ed. (Washington DC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013), 31; and Edward L. Rowny, *Engineer Memoirs: Lieutenant General Edward L. Rowny, Former Ambassador* (Alexandria, VA: Office of History, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1995), 7.

¹⁷⁶ Rowny, *Engineer Memoirs*, 5-7, and Rowny, *Smokey Joe and the General*, 31. Rowny also served as a US ambassador during President Ronald Reagan’s term of office.

Wood was a southern man born in North Carolina. He graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1911 before enrolling in and graduating from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.¹⁷⁷

The inherent racism that prevailed in the army at this time exposed itself in officers' attitudes toward African Americans soldiers' abilities. In anticipation of war, every month those units with a year or more of experience forfeited ten percent of their force to create new units with seasoned soldiers to teach the less-experienced new recruits, and Wood selected the best men to forfeit. Company commanders complained that they spent ninety percent of their time training and disciplining their worst ten percent of soldiers. To prove to the officers that they lacked the ability to lead, rather than the men lacking an ability to learn, he formed J Company and put Rowny in charge of their training.¹⁷⁸

Each company sent their ten worst soldiers for duty in J Company, and in exchange for getting rid of their ten worst problem soldiers, Wood selected what he considered the company's best soldier and assigned him to J Company.¹⁷⁹ Despite the less-than-stellar reports about their abilities, he praised them and congratulated them for being selected for J Company, an elite unit. For this special unit, he provided them with the best officers at his disposal as well as the best cook in the regiment. Their daily training routine consisted of four hours of close-order drills, two hours of physical training, and four hours of various subjects such as personal hygiene. Soon

¹⁷⁷ Rowny, *Smokey Joe and the General*, 43.

¹⁷⁸ Rowny, *Smokey Joe and the General*, 53-54.

¹⁷⁹ Rowny, *Smokey Joe and the General*, 41 and 54-56.

J Company started winning awards and outshining the other companies.¹⁸⁰ Wood proved the motto he lived by, “There are no good units or poor units, only good or poor commanders.”¹⁸¹

If soldiers were not training they cleaned rifles or played sports, as Wood believe idle time led to disciplinary problems, so soldiers under his command always did something. His policy worked, as few disciplinary problems arose.¹⁸² However, the soldiers’ lack of downtime also reveals that Wood lacked faith in his troops to manage their own time without getting into trouble. In the days leading up to World War II tensions between African American soldiers stationed in southern states grew and Fort Bragg was no different. Around midnight August 4-5, 1941, a riot broke out on a Fayetteville bus that left an African American soldier and a European American military police officer dead and three African American soldiers and two European American military police officers wounded. Angered over the death of military police officers, back at Fort Bragg the provost marshal ordered all African Americans not already in the stockade rounded up and brought to the stockade where they remained until the next morning. For the remainder of the night, all African American soldiers arriving from city buses were searched and threatened by military police without explanation.¹⁸³

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 Wood sent a telegram to the War Department declaring the 41st ECR ready for combat. On December

¹⁸⁰ Rowny, *Smokey Joe and the General*, 55, 57-59, and 62.

¹⁸¹ Motto quoted in Rowny, *Smokey Joe and the General*, 8.

¹⁸² Rowny, *Smokey Joe and the General*, 32, 42, 77, 79, and 83; and Roy Parker Jr., “41st set example for all engineers” *The Fayetteville Observer*, date unknown, http://www.fayobserver.com/military/article_f1b76015-7f80-5866-9432-0b7fd4aa682e.html?mode=jqm (accessed June 2013).

¹⁸³ Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, United States Army in World War II (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 2000), 351.

18, 1941, the 41st Engineers received orders to prepare to deploy, but instead of entering a combat zone as they trained for, the army sent them as a General Engineer Service Regiment to Liberia. In January, they learned of their mission to finish construction of Roberts Field and to guard the Firestone Rubber Plantation. They arrived in Charleston in March and disembarked in June for a ten-day journey to Liberia.¹⁸⁴ The Liberian Task Force, or Troop #5889, was under the command of Brigadier General Percy L. Sadler and consisting of the 41st ECR, now known as the Engineer General Service Regiment, minus the 2nd battalion, Company A, the 802nd Coastal Artillery Battery, and an advance unit of the 25th Station Hospital arrived in June 1942. Upon arrival, a cadre of African American non-commissioned officers left for the capital of Monrovia to train the Liberian Frontier Force. The 41st Engineers stayed in Liberia until March 1943 when they left for North Africa. At the same time, the 367th Infantry Battalion and the remaining attachment of the 25th Station Hospital with thirty African American nurses arrived. In November, the nurses returned to the states and in January 1944 the 367th Infantry deployed to Oran. The 802nd Coastal Artillery disbanded in Liberia, while the African Americans training the Liberian Frontier Force, air servicemen at Roberts Field, and the dwindling forces of the 25th Station Hospital remained in Liberia until the end of the war.¹⁸⁵

Although African American officers with the 25th Station Hospital arrived between June 1942 and March 1943, before the conference about African American soldiers' venereal disease, they are an example of conference recommendations to

¹⁸⁴ Parker, "41st set example for all engineers;" and Rowny, *Smokey Joe and the General*, 73, 89-93, and 96.

¹⁸⁵ History of the 25th Station Hospital, 1942 [25th station history, 1942]; 25th Station; Box 105; WWII Administrative Records, 1940-1949; RG 112; NACP; and Bryan D. Booker, *African Americans in the United States Army in World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2008), 75-76.

employ racial uplift to better African American lives. As officers in the army they stood as a model for African American infantry to follow, but according to one European American officer the African American officers did not always treat those under their command well, and African American enlisted men did not like working with African American officers. Captain John M. Garrett, the malaria control officer with the Sanitary Corps stationed at Roberts Field, claimed, “A colored officer has no respect for a colored enlisted man. They ask him to do things a white officer would never think of asking him. It is a matter of showing authority...It’s the attitude that well, we are college men, and we are the hoipolloi of the colored race.”¹⁸⁶ The African American officers also saw it as an opportunity for race betterment by bringing the advances of civilization such as modern medicine to the Liberian people; yet as the African American officers saw themselves above the African American infantry, in this respect they too considered themselves above the Liberians as explained later when analyzing African American nurses’ roles. The harshness with which African American officers treated those they considered ‘less civilized’ may partly be due to the officers and nurses need to constantly prove their worthiness as officers while facing discrimination on a day-to-day basis.

According to an article written by William H. Hastie, the army long held African Americans as “Unqualified by reason of qualities inherent in the Negro race...rendering them unfit for officers and leaders of men,” but in the Second World War they integrated officer training school in July 1941.¹⁸⁷ The army hoped training African Americans

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Captain John M. Garrett, Malaria Control Officer, Sanitary Corps, Roberts Field, Engineers, March 10, 1944 [Garrett interview]; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #51 to #90; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; RG 112; NACP.

¹⁸⁷ Anonymous quote in William H. Hastie, “Negro Officers in Two World Wars,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 12, no. 3 The American Negro in World War I and World War II (Summer, 1943), 318.

alongside European Americans would produce equally successful officers. After overcoming European American officers' doubts about the army's seriousness to train African Americans as officers the schools started graduating almost two hundred officers each month. These graduating officers still found restrictions placed on their service. Combat units always included European American officers, very few African Americans worked in administrative positions, and the army loathed to assign African American officers in positions of authority over European American officers. According to Hastie, the army only promoted European Americans unless the War Department specifically requested an African American fill the position.¹⁸⁸ Hastie further illuminated the difficulties African Americans faced with promotions when he wrote:

Early in 1943, the War Department announced that a white officer candidate school graduate had already risen to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, several had become Majors and hundreds had been promoted to Captaincies since the inauguration of the officer candidate program. But not a single Negro officer candidate school graduate had been promoted beyond the grade of First Lieutenant.¹⁸⁹

Regardless of how valuable African American officers' skills were to the army, they still faced barriers to advancement within the army as the medical officers in the 25th Station Hospital found out.

During the mobilization phase in 1940, the army allowed forty-two doctors, six dentists, and fifty-six nurses to enlist and serve in segregated units at Fort Devens, MA, Fort Bragg, NC, and Camp Livingston, LA. In 1941, the army raised the number of African American physicians recruited to between two and three hundred and the number of dentists to between fifty or sixty, but the army did not raise the quota for nurses at that

¹⁸⁸ Hastie, "Negro Officers in Two World Wars," 319-320, and 322.

¹⁸⁹ Hastie, "Negro Officers in Two World Wars," 323.

time.¹⁹⁰ By the end of 1942, more than two hundred African American men served as physicians, fifty as dentists, and a handful were veterinaries; all as commissioned officers.¹⁹¹ Unfortunately, the army only assigned them to “Fort Huachuca, Fort Bragg, Camp Livingston, Tuskegee Air Base, and one overseas station [with] Negro officers as members of the hospital staffs.”¹⁹² Considering Hastie published this comment in the summer of 1943 the overseas officers he referred to must be those with the 25th Station Hospital in Liberia.

The 25th Station Hospital employed between twenty and twenty-two physicians and thirty nurses as officers, all of which were African Americans except the Commanding Officer, Chief of Surgery, Executive Officer, and the Supply Officers. Among the African American officers were Major John B. West, post malariologists for Roberts Field and previous chief of medical service for the 25th Station Hospital, First Lieutenant Susan Freeman, chief nurse of the 25th Station Hospital, and Second Lieutenant Gertrude M. Ivory.¹⁹³ Freeman and Ivory, along with Second Lieutenant Chrystalee M. Maxwell and Second Lieutenant Sammie M. Rice who also served in

¹⁹⁰ Darlene Clark Hine, “Black Professionals and Race Consciousness: Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 1890-1950,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 4 (March 2003), 1284-1285.

¹⁹¹ Hastie, “Negro Officers in Two World Wars,” 321.

¹⁹² Hastie, “Negro Officers in Two World Wars,” 322.

¹⁹³ West and Freeman both provided interviews with the Office of the Surgeon General, and Ivory provided an interview with a researcher and wrote a memoir of her service. Interview with Major John H. West, Post Malariologist, Roberts Field, January 17, 1944 [West interview]; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #1 to #50; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; RG 112; NACP; Interview with First Lieutenant Susan Freeman, Chief Nurse of 25th Station Hospital, Roberts Field, December 24, 1943 [Freeman interview]; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #1 to #50; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; RG 112; NACP; Gertrude Margarette Ivory-Bertram, interview by Joan Denman, October 10, 2007, transcript [Ivory interview], The Margarette Ivory-Bertram Collection, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL; and Margaritte Ivory-Bertram, *Nurse: The Story of One Woman's Effort to Succeed* (Dayton OH: Landfall Press, 1991).

Liberia, were among the first fifty-six African American nurses admitted to the army Nurse Corp. Freeman's service in Liberia made her the first African American woman to command an overseas unit. In addition to the officers, between 150 to 180 enlisted men worked with the 25th Station Hospital.¹⁹⁴

The army activated the 25th Station Hospital at Fort Bragg, NC with General Order #5 on March 24, 1942 as a two hundred and fifty bed hospital, and on April 2nd Lieutenant Colonel Stephen D. Berardinelli assumed command. While at Fort Bragg officers and enlisted soldiers received medical training, and went on marches and overnight hikes. Technicians trained in several departments including dental, x-ray, surgery, and laboratory. Four officers took a two-month course on tropical medicine while another officer took a one-month course in radiology. As the army deployed Task Force #5889 in three echelons so too was the 25th Station Hospital deployed. Berardinelli, twelve officers, and sixty-five enlisted soldiers arrived off the coast of Marshall, Liberia on June 16, 1942. The new permanent hospital compound in Liberia was opened and operational by September 23, 1942.¹⁹⁵

When the hospital first opened it only used a few of the wards and established one for surgery, one for venereal disease, one for other medical concerns, one for both officers and "white personnel," and one contained "two wire cages for mental patients."¹⁹⁶ The housing of "white personnel" with officers provide an excellent example

¹⁹⁴ 25th station history, 1942; West interview; Freeman interview; Ivory interview; and Lt. Col Carolyn M Feller and Maj. Debora R. Cox, *Highlights in the History of the Army Nurse Corps* (Washington DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2001), 12.

¹⁹⁵ 25th station history, 1942; and "Army Medical Services in Africa and the Middle East," in *The Medical Department: Medical Service in the Mediterranean and Minor Theaters*, ed. Charles M. Wiltse, in *United States Army in World War II*, ed. Stetson Conn (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1965), 67.

¹⁹⁶ 25th station history, 1942.

of respectability politics at work as the African American officers were accepted among European Americans due to their rank, but the enlisted African Americans were kept separate. Unfortunately, the hospital soon burst beyond capacity to roughly three hundred patients and hospital personnel “cut” to make room for everyone, although what it means to “cut” is not made clear.¹⁹⁷ The 25th Station Hospital treated soldiers within the task force, members of the British Royal Air Force, Liberians who worked for the army, and on occasion civilians. Personnel also made trips to local villages to conduct physicals on those interested in joining the army and to test for diseases.¹⁹⁸

Although African American physicians held elite positions within the African American community, medical personnel faced challenges to inclusion. Physicians often worked in segregated hospitals in society and during the Great War. As the US began mobilizing for the Second World War, the National Medical Association (NMA), an organization for African American physicians excluded from the American Medical Association, and the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) challenged the army’s segregation policy. Despite their efforts, the army only allowed African American medical personnel to care for African American soldiers, and later care for German prisoners. The reason for the segregation policy was clearly grounded in racism as officers claimed that based on army intelligent test African Americans were less intelligent than European Americans and unsuited for technical fields like medicine, while the Surgeon General of the United States Army, James C. Magee, maintained European American patients were offended if African Americans treated them.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ West interview.

¹⁹⁸ 25th station history, 1942 and 1944; and Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 15

¹⁹⁹ Hastie, “Negro Officers in Two World Wars,” 322; and Hine, “Black Professionals and Race Consciousness,” 1280, 1282-1286.

The segregation policy negatively affected African American physicians with the 25th Station Hospital according to West, who pointed to Captain Manly's experiences, the African American ward surgeon, as an example. The army assigned two surgeons to the unit, but the hospital did not perform many surgeries. Since Chief of Surgery Major John Wigel, a European American, performed the bulk of the surgeries, Manly operating only about three times per year. By not performing surgery he lost opportunities to prove his value and earn promotions. Due to segregated medical services, he also lost any chance to transfer to a unit that performed more surgeries. West summarized by saying "Wigel is in a job where he can get a chance to get a promotion or be moved to another theater or gets a chance to actually do some surgery. Captain Manly is...doing the same work he was doing the year he graduated medicine."²⁰⁰ He further elaborated on the disadvantages African American medical officers faced. European Americans filled all administrative posts except his previous post as Chief of the Medical Service so African Americans could not advance in their own unit, nor transfer to a unit where advancement was possible. Additionally, African American medical officers overseas were assigned the duties of those with higher ranks for over two years, but never received the corresponding promotion which came with the increase in duties. West faulted the theater commander for not promoting African American men and characterized Berardinelli and Wigel both as "fair and square."²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ West interview.

²⁰¹ West interview.

AFRICAN AMERICAN NURSES IN LIBERIA

While African American physicians faced segregation once admitted to the army, African American nurses faced barriers just to practice medicine. The movement to create African American hospitals and nurse training schools started in the 1890s and peaked in the 1920s. European American philanthropic foundations' desire to assist with African American healthcare stemmed from fears of diseases crossing the color line to infect European Americans. European Americans offered nurse training for African American women to provide them with work and their community with health care. African American men educated nurses for community needs, but additionally they believed the field trained women to be better wives and mothers. Schools constantly questioned the students' morality and subjected them to compulsory pelvic exams with any sign of illness as the school assumed illness was due to morning sickness. Those few municipalities providing instruction for African American nurses usually only occurred after complaints from local African American leaders or pressure from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).²⁰²

European Americans' identification of African American women with domestic service created additional barriers as the nursing field moved to professionalize and disassociate itself from domestic service. Northern schools started using quotas, with some only admitting one African American a year and none of the southern schools accepting African Americans. The creation of state licensing and examination marked African American nurses as inferior because many southern states did not license them or the states administered different exams based on race. They received less pay than their

²⁰² Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890–1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 3, 5-6, 10, 12, 15, 17, 21, and 44.

European American counterparts and were only allowed to care for African American patients. Racism kept them out of the Great War as the Red Cross and the Armed Forces Nurse Corp continually denied their requests to volunteer. At the end of the World War I, only about thirty African American nurses served compared to approximately thirty-three thousand European American nurses.²⁰³



Illustration 4: African American nurses stationed in Liberia. This picture is often incorrectly identified as a W.A.A.C. unit, as the National Archives caption reads “A company of Negro WAACs was reviewed by the Hon. Lester A. Walton, U.S. Minister to Liberia, recently on a visit to an American camp near Monrovia [Liberia]. The WAACs are shown as they lined up for review.” However, the only American women to serve in Liberia during WWII were thirty African American nurses assigned to the 25th Station Hospital. “Pictures of African American During World War II.” Select Audio Visual Records. [Online version, <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures/images/african-americans-wwii-153.jpg>, National Archives and Records Administration, February 21, 2017]. Used under Fair Use.

²⁰³ Hine, *Black Women in White*..., xix, 90-93, 99-103, and 106.

Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 8802 in 1941 granting full participation in defense programs regardless of race, and passage of the Bolton Bill in 1943 established the United States Cadet Nurse Corp. As European American nurses joined the war effort, African American nurses found employment in hospitals and public institutions that previously excluded them. After NACGN Executive Secretary Mabel Staupers lobbied, the army inducted the first African American nurses into the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) in 1941. The army set quotas on the number inducted based on the number of African American soldiers enlisted. In 1943, the army raised the quota to one hundred and sixty and assigned thirty African American nurses to foreign duty, most likely the unit sent to Liberia. In 1945, Roosevelt announced an intended draft for nurses because of a shortage. The public cried foul over the prospects of drafting European American nurses when Stauper let the press know several African American nurses wanted to volunteer, but were denied the opportunity due to the quotas. Within days the army abolished quotas and roughly two thousand more African American nurses joined. The ANC required membership in the American Red Cross and proof as a registered nurse to receive an officer's commission.²⁰⁴

The army assembled the thirty nurses sent to Liberia predominately from Fort Huachuca and Fort Bragg. Originally from Stratford, Connecticut, prior to joining the ANC Susan Freeman worked in Washington, DC as the head nurse at Freedman's Hospital. She was first assigned to Camp Livingston and in 1942 transferred to Fort Huachuca as director of the nursing staff. Unfortunately, the nurses at Fort Huachuca were not accorded the privileges of their rank. The European American women and the

²⁰⁴ Hine, *Black Women in White*, 151, 163-168, 171-176, and 179-180.

African American men did not recognize their status as officers, did not invite them to officer functions, and excluded them from officer meetings. In 1943, Freeman became the chief nurse of the 25th Station Hospital as it readied to ship out for Liberia. Before the war ended, she attained the rank of captain.²⁰⁵

Gertrude M. Ivory was a recent graduate of the nursing program at Brewster Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida, and signed up after Stauper spoke there.²⁰⁶ The ANC offered her the choice between Fort Bragg and Camp Livingston. Many people advised her to go to Fort Bragg because “race relations” were better in North Carolina than in Louisiana.²⁰⁷ She arrived on May 1, 1941 and soon met Maxwell and Rice. The fort offered a number of diversions to keep troops entertained, and in the fall, they built a club expressly for African American officers. The only negative thing from Ivory’s perspective was that the army did not allow the nurses to fraternize with the enlisted men. On February 8, 1943, she and twelve nurses traveled to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, where they met Freeman and the rest of the nurses added to the 25th Station Hospital. From there they all traveled to Staten Island and then on to Africa with arrival in March 1943 as the majority of the task force left for North Africa.²⁰⁸

Unfortunately, the nurses experienced difficulties once in Liberia. They endured menstrual problems due to taking Atabrine and quinine for malaria prevention. Eighty

²⁰⁵ *Huachuca’s Heroes: Army Nurses at Huachuca*. A Guide to Studying History at Fort Huachuca. Fort Huachuca AZ: U.S. Army Intelligence Center and Fort Huachuca, http://huachuca-www.army.mil/files/History_ArmyNurseCorps.pdf (accessed February 24, 2017); and Hine, *Black Women in White*, 176.

²⁰⁶ Ivory-Bertram, *Nurse*, 45, 69, and 85.

²⁰⁷ Ivory-Bertram, *Nurse*, 78.

²⁰⁸ Sammie M. Rice to Estelle Rice, letter, September 2, 1942, Sammie M. Rice Papers, Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA; 25th station history, 1942; and Ivory-Bertram, *Nurse*, 79, 82-85, and 87.

percent experienced some type of change with their menstrual cycle and seventy-five percent became dysmenorrhea each month. Some nurses stopped taking malaria prophylactics about seven to ten days prior to their menstrual cycle starting while others stopped taking it all together. Although they contracted malaria, they eventually got over it and considered dealing with it better than the menstrual problems associated with the prophylactics.²⁰⁹

The nurses ran into more problems than malaria, but exactly what those problems were is difficult to ascertain. Berardinelli said they were sent back to the states after ten months of service because the unit “didn’t have enough work.”²¹⁰ Approximately 150 enlisted men worked in the hospital, but it only averaged 125 patients when the nurses arrived in 1943. He felt their skills were better used back in the states. When specifically asked if a problem existed with the nurses he confirmed “they were a problem. I don’t know if the problem was any greater than if you had had white nurses there.”²¹¹ He did not elaborate.

Garrett, the Roberts Field malaria control officer, said the nurses “felt they had been unfairly treated because they weren’t given a chance to show what they could do. They showed what they could do, alright. That’s the whole trouble. We tried to work them to death.”²¹² He claimed Wood worked all African Americans “from sun-up to

²⁰⁹ West interview; and 25th station history, 1943.

²¹⁰ Interview with Lieutenant Colonel F.C. Bernardinelli M.C., Commanding Officer of the 25th Station Hospital, March 25, 1944 {F.C. Bernardinelli is on the cover page of the interview written by a transcriber who did not interview the officer; however, on the History of the 25th Station Hospital, 1942 prepared and signed by him he signed his name as S.D. Berardinelli and *The Medical Department: Medical Service in the Mediterranean and Minor Theaters* list his name as Stephen D. Berardinelli, [Berardinelli interview]}; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #51 to #90; Box 219; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; RG 112; NACP.

²¹¹ Berardinelli interview.

²¹² Garrett interview.

sunset;” however, Wood returned to the states in September 1942 and the nurses did not arrive until the next year, and Wood commanded the 41st Engineers, not the 25th Station Hospital. Berardinelli also stated there was not enough work for the nurses; therefore, Garrett’s statement “We tried to work them to death” makes no sense, and does not explain the previous statement “They showed what they could do, alright. That’s the whole trouble.”²¹³ Unfortunately, examining interviews with West, Freeman, and Ivory does not clear up the confusion.

According to West, the nurses were not well suited for an inactive theater, and they came from different camps in the states which caused problems. The first time they met each other was when they left for Liberia, which meant Freeman did not get “a chance to study the psychological factors of the girls with whom she is to supervise or see how they will work together. It became very bad.”²¹⁴ In Liberia they cared for few patients, felt unneeded, and lacked an outlet. While nurses in active theaters made friends with each other and disliked transferring out of a unit, not so in Liberia. He claimed “in a theater of inactivity 30 women living together and having nothing to do but talk about each other [would] be glad to get rid of each other.”²¹⁵ West called some nurses “psychopathic,” not suited for a tropical climate, and better off where they could go to a show, restaurant, see friends, or visit another town. Just not in Liberia. He thought that in picking nurses for overseas duty mental and emotional stability were the most important factors. Those in Liberia volunteered and no one checked their background before accepting them to make certain “they qualify from a standpoint of experience, training

²¹³ Garrett interview.

²¹⁴ West interview.

²¹⁵ West interview.

and emotional stability.”²¹⁶ He claimed to suggest sending the nurses back to the states because they wasted their time and talent in Liberia.²¹⁷ While West’s comments sound sexist, his observations about the nurses’ “psychological factors” were reinforced by Freeman’s interview.

Freeman agreed with West’s assessment and said “The girls for that type of work should have been selected...in the tropics you must have good, strong, mental girls who don’t go to pieces when things go wrong because it is hot and everyone is irritable.”²¹⁸ She faulted the nurses’ constitution and insubordination regarding their own health, “they must be physically fit, and I mean one that isn’t sick too many times and one that will adhere to all the rules and regulations to keep well. Apparently, the athletic type is the best.”²¹⁹ She also said she “ran into moral problems.”²²⁰ She did not expand on this claim except to say they “were solved by bringing all the girls back to the states with me.”²²¹ She claimed their mission in Liberia differed from the rest of the tropics in that they were on a goodwill mission and were expected to make friends. She said “those going should have been people who knew how to make friends. We were told by General Sadler that we were to make friends with the Liberians.”²²² She considered their mission a failure because they did not select people who wanted to forge transnational friendships.²²³

Ivory discounted any negative discourse surrounding the nurses, and claimed they returned to the US due to malaria. She praised Freeman’s leadership and added “I was

²¹⁶ West interview.

²¹⁷ West interview.

²¹⁸ Freeman interview.

²¹⁹ Freeman interview.

²²⁰ Freeman interview.

²²¹ Freeman interview.

²²² Freeman interview.

²²³ Freeman interview.

amazed that you could control some of the women;” however, rumors of the problems with the nurses were overstated, “They lied about that. That’s exactly what they told us would happen...There was no morale—there was no unusual behavior.”²²⁴ According to her, while at Fort Bragg she was asked to interview nurses to go to Liberia and the army only accepted volunteers. She said they received a lot of criticism and “they didn’t want the nurses somehow to be too dominant to serve.”²²⁵ She did not explain what “too dominant to serve” meant, but she clearly referred to the politics of respectability when she stated, “We had always been told by our parents of a certain class, that your behavior should always be acceptable to the society. Because you represent everyone else from your race.”²²⁶ She went on to say “the nurses...were told to be ladies at all times. No discussing politics or religion with strange people in the villages...to mind our manners... to always dress properly. When we were out, we ate properly. No heavy drinking. No profanity. No selecting the wrong people...it made us conservative.”²²⁷

Part of the problem in interpreting the nurses’ situation stems from the fact that ‘moral’ and ‘morale’ are spelled so similarly, which causes considerable confusion over whether the problem the nurses encountered was due to morals or morale (see Illustration 5). Plus, two versions of the army’s interview transcripts for the West and Freeman interviews exist. One might consider what I deem the unofficial transcript as a rough draft edited for clarity. What I consider the official transcript is for the most part a fair record of the unofficial transcript, though its content has been rearranged by subject matter and in some cases the editor purposefully omitted comments from the official

²²⁴ Ivory interview.

²²⁵ Ivory interview.

²²⁶ Ivory interview.

²²⁷ Ivory interview.

version. Judging from the context of Freeman's unofficial interview she did use the word 'moral', not 'morale.' Both Ivory and West used the word 'morale' in their interviews, but West used it to refer to medical officers and barriers to advancement.²²⁸

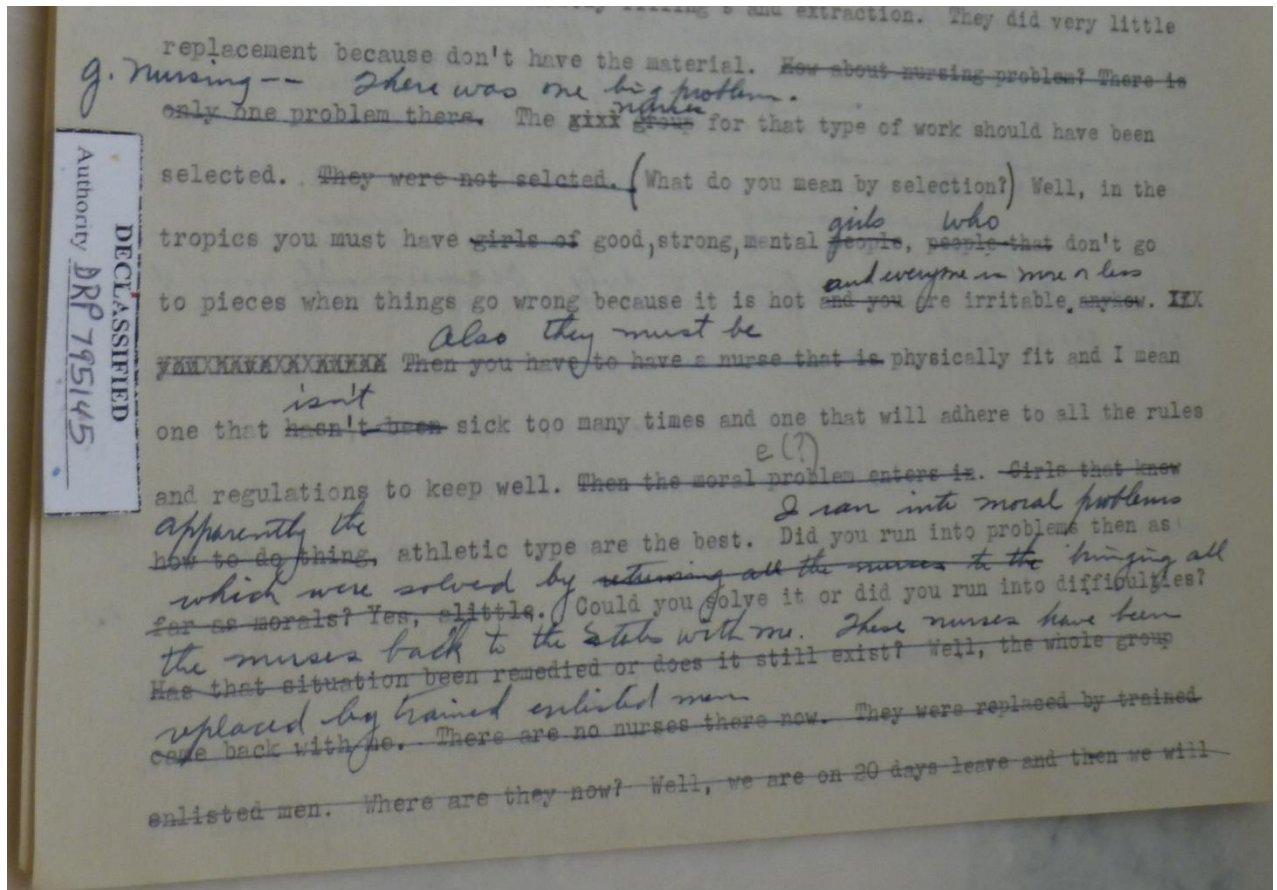


Illustration 5: Unofficial transcript of Chief Nurse, Lieutenant Susan Freeman's interview. Notice the "e(?)" above the word moral in roughly the center of the image. Interview with First Lieutenant Susan E. Freeman, Chief Nurse of 25th Station Hospital, December 24, 1943; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #1 to #50; Box 219; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; Records of the Surgeon General; National Archives Building, College Park, MD.

²²⁸ Freeman interview; Ivory interview; and West interview.

Evaluating the problem with the nurses within the context of all of the interviews, a fair assessment is that both morals and morale explained the nurses' situation. Other than Garrett, who erroneously claimed the nurses were overworked, all of the interviews spoke of a lack of patients after the bulk of Troop #5889 left Liberia. When the nurses arrived, the 25th Station Hospital averaged 125 patients with 150 enlisted men trained as orderlies and 20 physicians to care for them; numerically speaking the nurses were not necessary. However, Berardinelli also mentioned a problem with the nurses beyond a lack of patients, and Freeman does refer to morals, not morale. Outside of complaining about army regulations against fraternizing with enlisted men, Ivory admitted to sneaking around base to meet her future husband.²²⁹

West's comments in the unofficial transcript, omitted from the official transcript, likely reflect a more accurate representation. He agreed with Ivory that discrimination against African American nurses caused the rumors about the nurses' immoral behavior, and that "It was certainly a slap in the face." However, he elaborated by saying "Now whether they deserve the slap in the face or not is something for the WD to decide. But there were girls among that crew of nurses who were fine nurses, who gave us not a moment's trouble the whole time they were over there. And for the innocent to suffer with the guilty, I think is unfortunate to say the least."²³⁰ While the politics of respectability affected some of the nurses' behavior, it did not dictate their behavior in absolutes. Just as men and women of all races and time are not immune to the heady freedom that comes with being young and away from the watchful gaze of one's elders,

²²⁹ Berardinelli interview; Ivory interview; and Ivory, *Nurse*, 90-91.

²³⁰ West interview.

so to were the nurses affected by the freedom. Ivory specifically mentioned how respectability politics affected her behavior, yet she still met her beau in secret.²³¹

Ivory made no reference to any goodwill mission. In fact, she claimed the army did not want the nurses to interact with Liberians, at least not rural Liberians. According to her, the army told them not to drink the water or eat anything unless it was prepared by Americo-Liberians; “Unless they were civilized and practiced sanitation.”²³² She socialized with one couple that consisted of an Americo-Liberian woman who met her African American husband when the woman studied at the Tuskegee Institute. Ivory visited them “because she knew what the sanitation and climate of the United States had for their personnel. Like water and food, and all.”²³³ When asked about the rural Liberians she said the women liked them and wanted the nurses to return after the war to “teach them how to live better lives and educate them,” and Freeman gave her permission while in Liberia to teach them “home nursing, home care.”²³⁴

However, not everything was as congenial as Ivory perceived as she also stated the women were “very aggressive. And you know the one thing they would tell us? We were not allowed to discuss politics and slavery with them. They told us that we’d been slaves so we were second-class citizens.”²³⁵ It seems that based upon Ivory’s own words of referring to rural Liberians as uncivilized, unsanitary, and uneducated, and her desire to teach them home nursing and care she saw herself as above the rural Liberians in an

²³¹ West interview; and Ivory, *Nurse*, 90-91.

²³² Ivory interview.

²³³ Ivory interview.

²³⁴ Ivory interview.

²³⁵ Ivory interview.

echo of the politics of respectability. Yet, the objects of her reform, the rural Liberians, perceived themselves as superior to African Americans who descended from slaves.

Although Freeman felt the nurses failed in their mission, not all saw their mission as a failure. When the hospital dropped again to a seventy-five-bed hospital after most of the remaining Task Force #5889 moved on to North Africa the army sent the nurses back to the states on November 10, 1943.²³⁶ They served in Liberia for nine months and after their service nine received letters of commendation: First Lieutenants Susan E. Freeman and Susan F. Harris, and Second Lieutenants Phloy G. Frierson, Norma L. Greene, Gertrude M. Ivory, Louise M. Jacobs, Chrystalee M. Maxwell, Sammie M. Rice, and Rosemary Vinson. While some remained in the states, others went on to serve with the 383rd and the 335th Station Hospitals in Burma and the all-African American 268th Station Hospital in the southwest of the Pacific.²³⁷

African American nurses overcame much to gain acceptance within the army and experienced greater difficulties than did European American women or African American men due to intersectionality. As Historian Darlene Clark Hine writes about African American nurses during World War II:

[B]lack nurses bore a heavier burden of oppression than those who suffered only sexism or only racism. They endured both forms of oppression simultaneously. Their gender and race combined to reinforce the wall of segregation and discrimination that locked them into subordinate positions within nursing and in the military. They negotiated minefields of power within the gendered and racial politics of military medicine. At hospitals ostensibly controlled by black men, black women complained of not receiving the promotions and ranks they deserved or desired.²³⁸

²³⁶ 25th station history, 1943.

²³⁷ Feller and Cox, *Highlights in the History of the Army Nurse Corps*, 9.

²³⁸ Hine, "Black Professionals and Race Consciousness," 1293.

The lack of respect accorded African American nurses is made more evident when one considered that the US and Britain tried to use them as diversions for African American men in England. Fearing the high rates at which ‘white’ English women found companionship with African American soldiers, the US and Britain wanted the NAACP to cooperate in their efforts to send an African American WAC troop to England. Rightfully, the NAACP rejected the offer.²³⁹ While the NAACP did not know about the tolerated villages, the African American officers stationed in Liberia most certainly knew about the Liberian women employed by the army as sex workers; however, they did not care if the army used them as sex objects. Ivory befriended the Americo-Liberian couple that she considered civilized and reached out to rural Liberian women seeking to learn civilized ways, but Ivory did not reach out to the sex workers. In fact, she does not even acknowledge their existence in her memoir or her interview. Based on Freeman’s claim that the nurses were unfriendly it is fair to assume they too did not object to using Liberian women as sexual rewards for soldiers.

While both the African American women and the Liberian women’s labor had been militarized, the African American nurses did not experience the added oppression of colonialism. Outside of militarization, Liberian sex workers also felt the burden of eugenics, which influenced the army’s perception of their gender and race, but colonialism allowed their bodies to be commodified while the African American nurses refused to let their bodies be sold or used to pacify soldiers’ sexual needs. Racial uplift and respectability politics kept them protected while they overlooked what happened to the Liberian women. Ivory does not mention prostitution of any kind in her interview or

²³⁹ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, 68-69.

the memoir she later published. Of Ivory's time stationed in Liberia, the only thing she wrote about in her memoir was that she met her husband, Staff Sergeant Robert Bruce Bertram, a non-commissioned officer on the clerical staff of the 25th Station Hospital, while ill with malaria and that after her hospital discharge they met in secret. Her entire entry describing her time in Liberia is less than one page, and she never writes about the tolerated villages or anything else other than meeting her husband. Since her memoir was published in 1991, long after the war, she either found the tolerated villages acceptable or of no concern to her.²⁴⁰

Freeman fully acknowledged the tolerated villages, but offers no commentary on how the women were treated or whether or not she approved of the army's use of them as sex workers. She appears to take a pragmatic approach when she credited the villages for the lower venereal rates, and praised the VDCO who had "quite a difficult task because he had to examine the women."²⁴¹ She said too many opportunities existed for soldiers to engage in sex and "it was difficult to place them off limits. So, they thought it would be better to have a place nearby where the women would be willing to come and be examined...one had no control over civilian population and if the women go with soldiers, they might also go with native men and if these men were infected, it came back to the soldier. Consequently, by examining the women...the disease was kept down."²⁴² Ivory's silence might be due to dissemblance or as Freeman seems to indicate she placed the soldier's health above the women's commodification.

²⁴⁰ Ivory, *Nurse*, 90-91.

²⁴¹ Freeman interview.

²⁴² Freeman interview.

CONCLUSIONS



Illustration 6: “Americans Inspecting Prostitutes.” Abraham supplied the above description along with “U.S. Army doctors and nurses inspect native prostitutes each Sunday Morning. Girls are placed on table and legs put in stirrups.” *George and Katy Abraham Papers*, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Used under Fair Use.

The photographic evidence presented above shows a gendered and classed structure among the African Americans and the Liberians as the army perceived it (Illustration 6). Considering respectability politics, African Americans likely agreed with the army’s perception of the social hierarchy: based on ideologies carried from the US, the army placed African American male officers above both African American and Liberian women. The photo reflects this as an African American male physician literally stands at the top, right overlooking all of the women. Next were the African American nurses who managed the Liberian women. The nurses wear a darker uniform and stand

behind the Liberian women watching over them. The Liberian women in white appear to be aides, but their exact title is unknown. The aides represent the “civilized” Liberian women capable of adopting the politics of respectability. They were the type of women Ivory wanted to teach “home nursing, home care.”²⁴³ At the bottom of the social hierarchy were Liberian sex workers, seen in the photograph literally on their backs with their bodies on display to scrutinize, but their faces hidden. Considering Americans stigmatized prostitution while Africans viewed it as labor, it is most probable the army covered the sex workers’ faces rather than the women requesting to have their faces covered. A surface interpretation of the army covering the women’s faces amounts to protecting the women against an internalized stigma against commercial sex within the army, but deeper analysis reveals it as both a literal and symbolic act that objectifies and hides the women. By covering the women’s faces the army attempted to erase their humanity and position them as a militarized object in keeping with Cynthia Enloe’s theories discussed in the introduction.

The army also wanted to hide the tolerated villages from the rest of the world. At first the US kept the task force’s mission secret to maintain a strategic advantage over the Axis, but the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) let the information slip and the army allowed the US press access to the African American troops for publicity.²⁴⁴ Both *Life* magazine and the *New York Times* celebrated the Liberian Task Force, but soon after creating the tolerated villages the army started censoring information from Liberia.²⁴⁵ As

²⁴³ Ivory interview.

²⁴⁴ “U-boats Strike at Allied Ships off Africa,” October 11, 1942, *Dallas-Morning News*; “U.S. Troops Reported in Liberia,” October 18, 1942, *Dallas-Morning News*; “Nazi Craft Apparently Carrying Out Plans Made Years in Advance of War,” October 11, 1942, *New York Times*; “U.S. Army Force Based in Liberia: R.A.F. Station There to Fight,” October 18, 1942, *New York Times*.

²⁴⁵ Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (Washington, D.C); “First Soldiers Ashore Recites on Freedom: Pvt. Napoleon Speaks His...,”

the fifth chapter about the tolerated villages points out, the army feared the Axis might use the villages as negative propaganda.²⁴⁶ The army did not want American society knowing soldiers engaged in commercial sex away from home. Abraham wrote about army censorship; however, since he also served as a field correspondent for *Yank* magazine the commanding officer allowed him to keep his camera, but “the general” censored his photos.²⁴⁷ The army’s desire to hide its facilitation of industrialized sex work is reflected by the army literally hiding the sex workers.

While African Americans viewed themselves as above Liberians, this perception of the social hierarchy was not shared by the Liberian women. Liberians’ disagreement with this assessment of the social hierarchy is quite clearly illustrated when Ivory recounted that Liberian women refused to discuss politics with the African Americans because the Liberians viewed the African Americans as “slaves” and “second-class citizens.”²⁴⁸ The Liberian women allowed the African Americans to manage their labor because, like the African Americans, the Liberians were also militarized employees. The Liberian women were employed by the army and as any employee is required to follow the rules and management hierarchy of their employer, so too did the Liberian workers follow the rules set by the army. They chose to work for the US army and submitted to medical oversight by African American doctors and nurses simply because it

New York Times, December 4, 1942; and “US Negro Troops are based in Liberia,” *Life*, December 21, 1942, 36-37.

²⁴⁶ Truman E. Gibson, Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, to Charles Poletti, memo, March 16, 1943 [Gibson memo]; File 2912; Box 447; Secretary of War December Files 1943-45; Decimal File Mar 1943-Nov 7, 1945, 253.13 to 300.4; Administrative Office, Under Secretary of War; Records of the Secretary of War, Records Group 107 (RG107); NACP.

²⁴⁷ Abraham managed to smuggle photos out of Liberia with the postal clerk’s help. The clerk gave the sealed and approved envelopes back to Abraham who steamed opened the envelopes and replaced the approved photos with uncensored photos, and the postal clerk told Abraham that the general sent the censored pictures to his own wife, Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 73-74.

²⁴⁸ Ivory interview.

economically benefited them, but unlike the African American medical corps, when they disagreed with their employer they quit, as chapter five about the tolerated villages show.

While stationed in Liberia, African American nurses were *the* primary health care providers and venereal disease inspectors of the Liberian women whose bodies were commodified. They knew what purpose the women served and rather than object to their treatment the nurses participated in the institutionalization of commercial sex. The Liberian women clearly experienced an added layer of oppression that justified their sexual commodification while sparing African American women the same fate. Although touted as science, the conclusions within eugenics were actually based upon preconceived notions of ‘fit’ and ‘unfit’ that already existed globally and are analogous to notions of ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ within colonial societies. Both established somewhat static and binding group identities based upon arbitrary measures. When infection rates in Liberia starting rising drastically in a short period of time the commanding officers based their decision to set up the tolerated villages on a racist understanding of African American sexuality and what worked elsewhere within the army. While African American officers refused to cast their members of their own community as sex objects, they had no problem casting the Liberian women as such due to colonization. In fact, African Americans had long viewed Liberia through colonial eyes and this perception dates back to when African Americans colonized the country as explained in the next chapter.

IV. UNITED STATES COLONIALISM IN LIBERIA

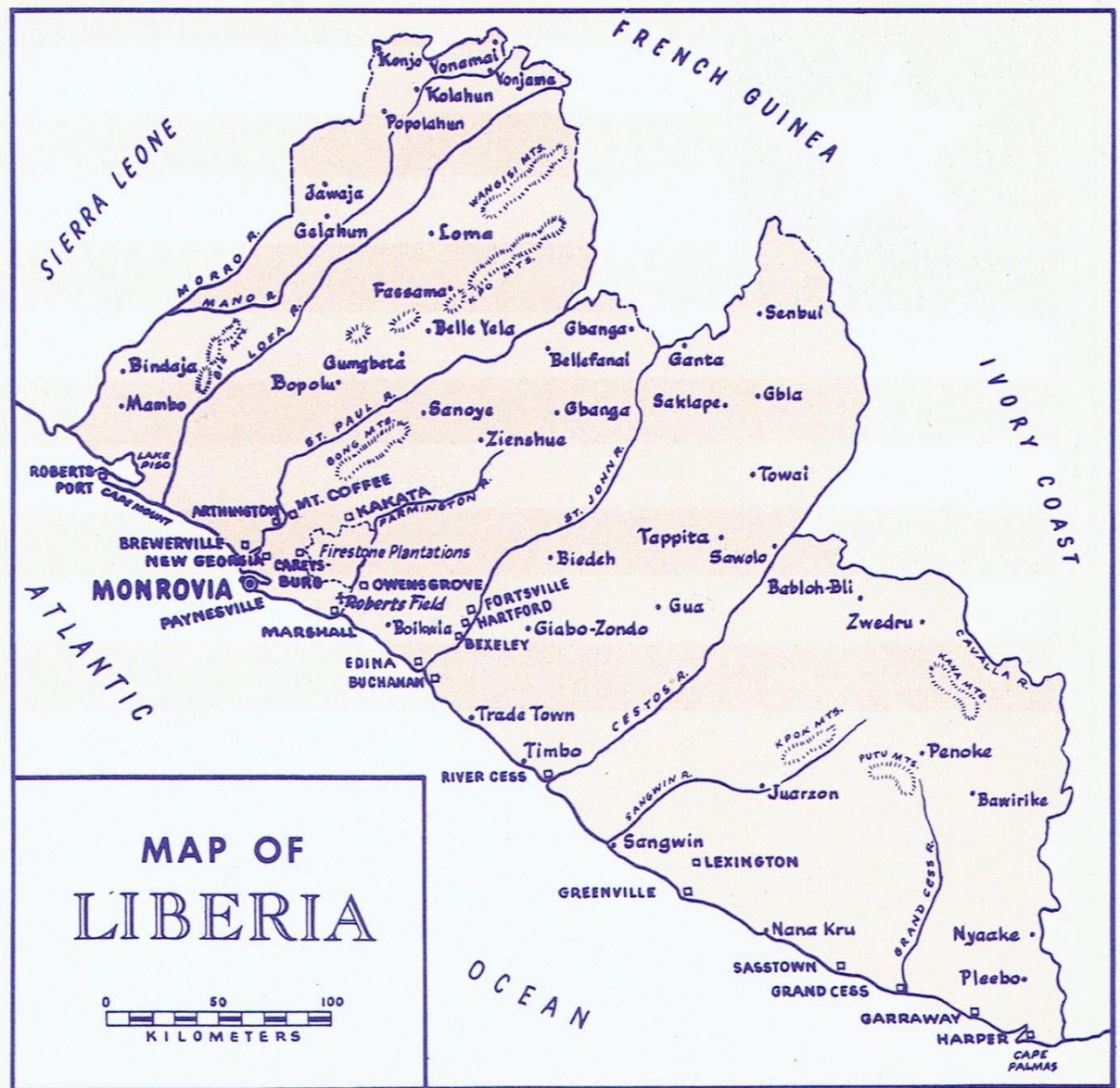


Figure 3: Map of Liberia. The caption provided by the source, "Liberia, with its long coast line, is divided into three provinces. This map is adopted from the original by Arthur Sherman prepared in 1947 from surveys." Taken from Price, F.A., *The Liberian Odyssey, "By Hammock and Surfboat": The Autobiography of F.A. Price* (New York: Pageant Press, 1954), xviii. Used Under Fair Use.

Multiple layers of colonization existed in the west African nation of Liberia leading up to World War II. Although the United States never claimed sovereign authority over Liberia, it was founded by free people of color and former slaves from the US, or African American colonists, with the US government's financial and army support. After becoming an independent nation, Liberia's sovereignty was often threatened by European countries and it relied upon US protection politically, financially, and militarily in order to technically remain independent, but in reality, it was a de facto colony of the US. The African Americans colonized the coast and established a social hierarchy based on a complicated understanding of civilization, or *kwi*, that placed them in elite positions without referring to skin color since the people they colonized had similarly colored skin. Although their use of civility to set themselves apart without referencing race was comparable to the discourse of other colonizers, the African Americans, or Americo-Liberians as they called themselves, expanded the meaning of *kwi* to refer to one's social class. The Americo-Liberians considered the coastal people as a middle class and relegated the people of the hinterland as the lowest class in their social hierarchy. This social structure allowed the Americo-Liberians to oppress and disenfranchise rural Liberians in a manner very similar to the ways in which European Americans once oppressed and disenfranchised them and it loosely reflects Liberia's place as an oppressed and colonized nation in the social hierarchy of international politics.

It is easy to assume that Americo-Liberians adopted European ideologies in constructing their society since Europeans colonized most of Africa, but they did not. Scholars continually assert that Americo-Liberians adopted the very southern antebellum

practices that oppressed them in their endeavor to colonize Liberia. In 1941, economist George W. Brown wrote *The Economic History of Liberia* in which he compared Americo-Liberians' belief system to the antebellum south in the US, "as the psychology of many of the settlers closely resembled that of their former Virginia and cotton belt masters, the Africans were regarded as a peon class. Such settlers immediately planned to dominate Africans as the white planters in America had dominated them...Having come to Africa to escape the strictures of slavery, many of the colonists did not want to engage in the manual labor with which they had been so closely associated."²⁴⁹ Political scientist and African scholar J. Gus Liebenow reiterated the association between Americo-Liberians and the antebellum south in 1969 with *The Evolution of Privilege* when he wrote "their [the Americo-Liberians] standards were those of the ante-bellum American south. Far from rejecting the institutions, values, dress, and speech of a society that had rejected them, the free persons of color painstakingly attempted to reproduce that culture...It was not then (nor is it today) unusual to hear tribal people refer to the Americo-Liberians as 'white people.'"²⁵⁰ In 2003, the *Smithsonian Magazine* published an article in which it referred to Liberia as "Little America" and claimed the Americo-Liberians "assumed some of the ways of Southern plantation owners and slaveholders. Americo women are pictured wearing hoop skirts while the men sport long tailed coats and top hats. Like Southern gentry, they set up plantations, joined the Masons and planted collard greens and okra." The magazine further commented that their houses

²⁴⁹ Brown quoted in Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, "African/Caribbean Linkages: Krio, Americo-Liberian and Haitian Elites in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 101-102.

²⁵⁰ Liebenow quoted in Bellegarde-Smith, "African/Caribbean Linkages," 102.

“resemble antebellum plantation manor houses, down to their tall-columned entryways.”²⁵¹

During the nineteenth century missionaries were a vital element to the colonization of Liberia as they helped ‘civilize’ the Liberians and enticed colonists to emigrate. Protestant missionaries successfully converted Liberians to Christianity and to duplicating the missionaries’ idea of civilized behavior. Upper-class and wealthy Americans provided support to very educated missionaries who freely interacted with Liberians. The missionaries learned the languages of those they converted and developed a written alphabet to record some of the languages. They encouraged Liberians to adopt monogamy and opened segregated schools that provided a conventional American education and taught gender roles consistent with the idea of separate spheres with girls learning American ways of cooking, making dresses, and keeping a home.²⁵² Missionaries were so important to the colonization of Liberia that when the Maryland colony in southern Liberia faced difficulty supplying enough schools and teachers for the colonists and the Grebo community, the Grebo granted land to the missionaries to establish more schools.²⁵³ The African American Methodist minister William H. Heard wrote *The Brighter Side of African Life Illustrated* in 1898 to encourage African Americans to emigrate and proclaimed that Liberian “opportunities are unparalleled in any country in the civilized world, especially for the Negro.”²⁵⁴ Two of the most

²⁵¹ Alan Huffman, “Tumult and Transition in ‘Little America.’” *Smithsonian Magazine* (November 2003) <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/tumult-and-transition-in-little-america-92437262/> (accessed March 15, 2017).

²⁵² Mary H. Moran, *Civilized Women: Gender and Prestige in Southeastern Liberia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 51-52.

²⁵³ Moran, *Civilized Women*, 46.

²⁵⁴ Heard quoted in David McBride, *Missions for Science: U.S. Technology and Medicine in America’s African World* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 107.

successful missionaries in Liberia were Dr. Clinton Boone and his wife Rachel. The African American Baptist Church's Lott Carey Mission Society funded their efforts from 1906 to the 1920s while Boone provided medical care and Rachel ran a school in Monrovia.²⁵⁵ Dr. Boone recounted the colonization of Liberia and his time there in *Liberia as I Know It* published in 1926. He wrote that missionaries not only wanted to convert and educate, but believed their presence would bring an end to slavery.²⁵⁶ According to Boone, "Domestic slavery in Africa among the Africans themselves is far worse and inhuman than ever it was in the United States."²⁵⁷

As missionaries helped spread civilized behavior, so too did they help establish the social structure of *kwi*. In Liberia, the Kru people's word *kwi* is translated to English as civilized, but civilized does not carry the same meaning as it does in other English-speaking nations.²⁵⁸ Scholar Christopher Clapham claims that "To be *kwi* is above all to be educated, and to move in the world of western tastes, motor travel and the English language which distinguishes the *kwi* from the 'country people', and qualifies them for salaried employment. Being *kwi*, rather than being ethnically Americo-Liberian, is the essential condition for participation in the political system."²⁵⁹ Scholar Merran Fraenkel further clarifies what it means to be *kwi* versus educated:

‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ or ‘tribal’ as the terms are used in Liberia, are not distinct and mutually exclusive statuses, but two ends of a continuum which...is really an embryonic social class structure. The most important

²⁵⁵ McBride, *Missions for Science*, 107.

²⁵⁶ Clinton C. Boone, *Liberia as I know It* (Richmond, VA: 1929; Westport, CT: Negro University Press, 1970), 4, Digital Public Library of America & Hathi Trust Digital Library. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b2838186;view=1up;seq=7> (accessed March 3, 2017).

²⁵⁷ Boone, *Liberia as I know It*, 35.

²⁵⁸ Moran, *Civilized Women*, 2.

²⁵⁹ There are many uses for the attributes civilized and *kwi* in Liberian society, but for simplicity and space this paper only deals with *kwi* as it applies to behavior and social structure. Clapham quoted in David Brown, "On the Category 'Civilised' in Liberia and Elsewhere," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 20, no. 2 (January 1982), 290.

component of ‘civilization’ is education, but while to the outsider the question immediately arises of how much education a man needs in order to be regarded as civilized, to the Monrovia it does not occur in quite these terms, since ‘civilized’ has a much wider connotation than ‘educated.’ More generally, ‘civilized’ status involves adoption of the outward signs of civilized life – Western dress (more especially by women), house type and furniture.²⁶⁰

A Liberian elementary principle in 1975-1976 explained “If you don’t know how to have a better table here, a good chair there, if every place on your premises is dirty, it means you’re educated but you’re not civilized... You can be an educated man, but then if you don’t know what to do – you act like a worse illiterate man.”²⁶¹ Fraenkel explains that kwi stratifies society “on the basis of social and economic status and position in the power structure.”²⁶² The concept of kwi functions as both an adjective to describe behavior and as a noun to denote social status.

As US plantation owners used land to establish their place at the top of the social hierarchy, so too did land owners in Liberia. Land ownership barred rural Liberians from rising within the social hierarchy as the colonists deeded out land once farmed by rural Liberians to themselves. Each colonist received a few acres of land and within fifty years land ownership was concentrated within a few families. Land owners formed plantations resembling those in the US and some constructed buildings and storefronts they rented out or used themselves. As they accumulated more wealth, or with the wealth they brought from the US, a few also purchased schooners for commercial trading. The Americo-Liberians constructed a social hierarchy that placed large land owners and merchants at the top and in control of politics and culture. President Joseph Jenkins

²⁶⁰ Fraenkel quoted in Brown, “On the Category ‘Civilised’ in Liberia and Elsewhere,” 288.

²⁶¹ Liberian principle quoted in Brown, “On the Category ‘Civilised’ in Liberia and Elsewhere,” 295.

²⁶² Fraenkel quoted in Brown, “On the Category ‘Civilised’ in Liberia and Elsewhere,” 289.

Roberts, the first president of Liberia, was an example of the people who occupied the top tier.²⁶³

Below Roberts and his peers were the small land owners and artisans who also made up the largest class. The artisans usually owned no more than a small plot of land in the city on which they lived and worked. This class consisted of blacksmiths, bakers, carpenters, cooks, mechanics, seamstresses, and soap makers. They grew their own food and sold the surplus on the market. They made up the bulk of the church and militia members, and the men voted. Roughly twenty percent of these two classes were considered “educated,” “literate,” or “semiliterate,” and the men outnumbered women two to one.²⁶⁴ Coastal Liberians befriended the early colonists and voluntarily abandoned the slave trade or sought the colonists’ protection from slave traders. They became wage earners who worked in the farms, stores, and warehouses or as domestic servants. They attended church, enrolled in school, learned English, and adopted English names.²⁶⁵ They merged with the artisan class, and as they assimilated they were allowed to vote and work as civil servants, and a few attained high positions of power.²⁶⁶

The elite and the emerging middle class rejected African culture in favor of retaining American culture, and even in 1876 made references to the US as their “native land.”²⁶⁷ Men wore silk hats and long coats while women wore silk gowns even though both were impractical in Liberia’s tropical climate. They built one- and two-story portico houses made from wood, stone or brick popular on southern US plantations. Although

²⁶³ Herbert Brewer, “The Antinomies of Black Identity Formation in West Africa, 1820-1848,” *African Historical Review* 43, no. 1 (2011), 19-20.

²⁶⁴ Brewer, “The Antinomies of Black Identity Formation in West Africa,” 21.

²⁶⁵ Brewer, “The Antinomies of Black Identity Formation in West Africa, 1820-1848,” 16-17.

²⁶⁶ Monday B. Akpan, “Black imperialism: Americo-Liberian rule over the African peoples of Liberia, 1841-1964,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1973),” 227-228.

²⁶⁷ For example, see *The African Repository* quote in Akpan, “Black Imperialism,” 219.

Liberia provided a bounty of cassava, palm-oil, plantains, sweet potatoes, yams, and “country” rice, the Americo-Liberians imported American bacon, butter, cornmeal, flour, lard, pickled beef, and rice. They continued to speak English, and advocated against polygamy and marriage with rural Liberians, but not in practice.²⁶⁸ Although this hierarchy was established by the late nineteenth century, it does not mean it was fixed or stagnant. Social mobility was possible through intermarriage with an Americo-Liberian, by joining the Liberian Frontier Force, or through education and behavior.

Americo-Liberians officially detested marriages and sex between themselves and rural Liberians, but unofficially used sex to exert and display power. In a missionary’s memoirs published in 1868, the author quoted a Bishop Payne as saying “The natives were wild as the beasts...The institution of marriage can hardly be said to have existed, for both polygamy and the grossest immorality prevailed.”²⁶⁹ Colonists feared intimate relations with “heathen” rural Liberians would cause them to “relapse to barbarism.”²⁷⁰ In 1879, the Liberian vice-president tried to encourage intermarriage to assist with assimilation, but acknowledged “it would require on the part of the man of the least culture, strong moral courage to break through the strong prejudice against intermarriage of the colonists and natives which prevails here among the Americo-Liberians.”²⁷¹

This abhorrence for intimate relations with rural Liberians was mostly talk, however, as many sexually abused girls apprenticed in Americo-Liberian shops and homes while others entered into unofficial polygamous marriages up to the 1980 coup

²⁶⁸ Akpan, “Black Imperialism,” 219 and 225.

²⁶⁹ Payne quoted in Moran, *Civilized Women*, 52.

²⁷⁰ William E. Allen, “Making History in the Bedroom: Americo-Liberians and Indigenous Liberians Sexual Unions, 1880s- c. 1950s,” *Liberian Studies Journal* 34, no. 2 (2009), 20.

²⁷¹ Quote in Akpan, “Black Imperialism,” 225.

d'état.²⁷² The 1950s, the Liberian ambassador to the US claimed that in the 1940s, "Customs in Liberia at the time were that farmers married an educated lady mainly to maintain his prestige with the civilized community. He could likewise have as many native or farm wives as he might find financially possible...Some farmers had two or three such wives who never mingle with his city home or family."²⁷³ An Americo-Liberian known as "Father Tolbert" was a wealthy farmer, Baptist deacon, a member of the House of Representatives, and the father of the future President William Tolbert.²⁷⁴ When asked why he married so many women "Father Tolbert" replied, "true, I have a lot of women around me, but I have to...I'm a big farmer. The women do lots of special work."²⁷⁵ Due to the frequency with which these arrangements occurred the women and children from these unions were known as "outside" wives and children, and many Americo-Liberian men fathered both legitimate children with their legal wives and as many "outside" families as they desired.²⁷⁶ Some of the "outside" children were accepted into the Americo-Liberian elite, as occurred with Edwin Barclay, the president of Liberia during World War II, that US President Franklin D. Roosevelt negotiated with in order to station troops in Liberia during the war.²⁷⁷

²⁷² This domestic relationship is often referred to as concubinage in other societies, but in Liberia they were referred to as unofficial marriages and the women were called "outside wives," not concubines. Allen, "Making History in the Bedroom," 21; and Akpan, "Black Imperialism," 226 notes the abuse of apprenticed girls.

²⁷³ Padmore quoted in Allen, "Making History in the Bedroom," 26.

²⁷⁴ Allen, "Making History in the Bedroom," 21, and 29-30.

²⁷⁵ Tolbert quoted in Allen, "Making History in the Bedroom," 29.

²⁷⁶ Allen, "Making History in the Bedroom," 25; and Elizabeth Tonkin, "Settlers and their Elites in Kenya and Liberia," in *Elite Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Chris Shore and Stephen Nugent, 129-144 (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2002), 139.

²⁷⁷ Allen, "Making History in the Bedroom," 25-26.

COLONIZING THE COAST

Prior to American colonization of Liberia, the region was home to a diverse set of ethnic groups, including the Bassa, Belleh, Dei, Gbandi, Gio, Golah, Grebo, Kissi, Krahn, Kru, Kpelle, Loma, Mandingo, Mano, Mende, and Vai.²⁷⁸ The groups were different with their own languages, customs, and governance. Some shared friendly relationships with each other and the early colonists while others were acrimonious. In general, as early American colonists recorded, the indigenous population wore little clothing, practiced polygamy, owned land communally, and held spiritual beliefs unfamiliar to Christians.²⁷⁹ The region was also one of many along the western coast of Africa that economically benefitted from the international slave trade and the domestic slave trade as many Africans sold approximately one hundred and eighty thousand other Africans from the Windward coast on the international slave market from 1600 to 1820.²⁸⁰ Exporting slaves was a central part of their economy and when agents of the American Colonization Society (ACS) arrived in the early nineteenth century from the US hoping to purchase land and obtain treaties the negotiations broke down because chiefs among the Bassa, Dei, and Vai rejected clauses that interfered with their ability to sell slaves.²⁸¹

The ACS was formed in 1816 to establish an independent nation in Africa for African Americans (and later those in the West Indies).²⁸² Although the US abolished the

²⁷⁸ Akpan, "Black Imperialism," 221-222; and Allen, "Making History in the Bedroom," 17.

²⁷⁹ Akpan, "Black Imperialism," 224-225; and Allen, "Making History in the Bedroom," 16, and 19-20.

²⁸⁰ Brewer, "The Antinomies of Black Identity Formation in West Africa, 1820-1848," 5.

²⁸¹ Harrison Akingbade, "The Role of the Military in the History of Liberia," Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 1977, 40.

²⁸² The British colony for former slaves established in 1787 at Sierra Leone, north of Liberia, inspired U.S. colonization societies. Boone, *Liberia as I know It*, 4-6; Moran, *Civilized Women*, 44; and Catherine Grace Jones, "The American Colonization Society," *Cobblestone* 17, no. 6 (September 1996), 26.

importation of slaves in 1808, pirates continued to smuggle enslaved people across the Atlantic Ocean. In an effort to enforce the law, Congress passed the Anti-Slave Trade Act of 1819 and granted ACS supporter and US President James Monroe \$100,000 to return Africans seized aboard slave ships.²⁸³ The ACS earmarked the funds to purchase territory in West Africa and a ship, the *Elizabeth*, to transport eighty-six African Americans from the US to Africa. The US government sent the warship *Cyane* to accompany the colonists and ensure their safe passage.²⁸⁴ By the 1860s, approximately twenty-thousand colonists from the US settled on the Windward coast of Africa, but only about five thousand were actually seized from slave ships. The majority were African American former slaves from the US who became known as Americo-Liberians.²⁸⁵

When the first ACS colonists arrived, they failed to secure land, and eventually the U.S government resorted to coercion to acquire it. Unable to purchase land and stricken with malaria the first American colonists fled to the British colony of Sierra Leone to the north. In December 1821, a US naval captain accompanied representatives from the ACS and the US government to Cape Mesurado to acquire land for the colonists. After a number of Bassa chiefs reneged on their initial deal, the captain obtained a treaty for a strip of land one hundred and thirty miles long and forty miles wide after putting a gun to a Bassa chief's head.²⁸⁶ Further tensions occurred between the

²⁸³ Liberian Borders: Background and Present Status, R&A No. 3019, June 6, 1945; Strategic Survey of Liberia, British Empire Section and African Section, R&A No. 762, July 10, 1942, Vol 6: Liberia, Box 51C, William J. Donovan Papers, United States Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle PA; and J. H. Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," *Journal of Negro History* 32, no. 3 (Summer, 1947), 266.

²⁸⁴ Boone, *Liberia as I know It*, 7; Akingbade, "The Role of the Military," 17; and Jones, "The American Colonization Society," 26.

²⁸⁵ Jones, "The American Colonization Society," 26.

²⁸⁶ It should be noted the captain also signed the treaty as a representative of the U.S. government which further evidences Liberia as a colony of the US. Boone, *Liberia as I know It*, 12-13; and Akingbade, "The Role of the Military," 17-19.

African American colonists and the Africans when a British ship wrecked and the colonists joined the British in defending the ship from Africans trying to plunder it. The Kru people were furious that black people sided with white people against them and started acting against the colonists. Fortunately, the influential Chief Boatswain of the Dei and Bassa backed up the Americans and on April 25, 1822 the American colonists planted an American flag on what eventually became the Liberian capital of Monrovia.²⁸⁷

The ACS was not the only US organization that faced difficulties colonizing Liberia. A settlement established by Quakers at Bassa Cove, later renamed Buchanan, by the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania and the New York City Colonization Society was attacked on June 10, 1834 by Bassa Chief Joe Harris. With the help of other American colonists, the settlers regained their land and forced the chief to sign a treaty which relinquished his land south of Benson's River, submitted his people to colonial rule, and ended their sale of slaves.²⁸⁸ In 1831, a Maryland bill granted twenty thousand dollars to the ACS to relocate African Americans, and stipulated that any slaves freed after its passage must immigrate to Africa or leave the state. The ACS moved too slowly and a year later the state reallocated the funds to the Maryland State Colonization Society (MSCS). The MSCS settled in the middle of an established Grebo community of fifteen hundred and two thousand at Camp Palmas two hundred and fifty miles south of Monrovia. They signed treaties to buy twenty square miles of land for one thousand dollars. In 1854, the colony became an independent state and in 1857 tried to forcibly remove Nyomowe Grebo, but the Nyomowe cut the colonists off from their farms and food supply. The colonists enlisted the aid of the ACS and the US Navy which brought

²⁸⁷ Boone, *Liberia as I know It*, 15; and Akingbade, "The Role of the Military," 21-22.

²⁸⁸ Akingbade, "The Role of the Military," 50-52.

supplies and turned the navy's guns on the Nyomowe. In 1857, Liberia annexed the republic of Maryland.²⁸⁹

During many of the aforementioned years, Liberia held an ambiguous status in international politics. Although it operated under an 1825 constitution that granted governing powers to the ACS, it was neither a formal colony of the US nor an independent nation. One scholar likened it to a chartered company colony.²⁹⁰ Britain made several inquiries to clarify Liberia's status with the US to determine the validity of the colonists' attempts to control trade and levy taxes. The US Secretary of State Daniel Webster did not clear up Liberia's status in 1843 when he wrote, "Without having passed any laws for their regulation, the American government takes a deep interest in the welfare of the people of Liberia, and is disposed to extend to them a just degree of countenance and protection."²⁹¹ Due to continued questions about Liberia's international status, in 1846 the ACS relinquished control and 1847 proved to be the nation's defining year. That year the colonists declared independence, wrote a constitution, and established executive, legislative, and judiciary branches of government. They named the nation Liberia which derives from the Latin word for freedom, *libertas*. They renamed Cape Mesurado to Monrovia in honor of US President James Monroe and proclaimed it the capital. They chose Joseph Jenkins Roberts as the first president who later earned the

²⁸⁹ Moran, *Civilized Women*, 45-47; for more about the protracted battles in southern Liberia please read Harrison Akingbade, "The Settler-African Conflicts: The Case of Maryland Colonists and the Grebo 1846-1980," *Journal of Negro History* 66, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 93-109; Outside of the ACS at Cape Mesurado, the Pennsylvania and New York societies at Bassa Cove, and the MSCS at Cape Palmas, a Mississippi society also established a colony at Greeneville. All of the colonies, except MSCS, were united under the ACS in 1837. *Liberian Borders: Background and Present Status*.

²⁹⁰ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 267.

²⁹¹ Webster quoted in *Liberian Borders: Background and Present Status*.

moniker “Father of Liberia.”²⁹² The airport the US troops guarded during WWII, Roberts Field, was named after him. Their flag looked like the US flag with red and white stripes and a field of blue, but instead of many stars representing many states, the Liberian flag contains one star. The Americo-Liberians also adopted a national motto, “The love of liberty brought us here,” that ignored the fact that many free people lived there prior to the colonists’ arrival, and that it was in fact the Americo-Liberians that took liberties away from the rural Liberians.²⁹³

Although many European countries recognized Liberia’s independence, the US did not recognize the nation until 1862.²⁹⁴ Southern slaveholding states opposed recognition of Liberia’s independence as it challenged their rationale for keeping African Americans enslaved due to the incorrect assumption that black people lacked the ability to govern themselves.²⁹⁵ Some Northerners viewed an independent nation governed by Africans as justification for increased discrimination against African Americans. This fear was exemplified during debates over the newly ratified 1851 Indiana constitution which barred “negroes” and “mulattoes” from moving to the state. Instead of allowing African Americans admittance to the state the legislature encouraged African Americans to immigrate to Liberia because, as reported by the *Daily Courier* newspaper, “the

²⁹² Liberian Borders: Background and Present Status; Douglas R. Egerton, “Averting a Crisis: The Proslavery Critique of the American Colonization Society,” *Civil War History* XLIII, no. 2 (1997), 151-156; Jones, “The American Colonization Society,” 26; Mower, “The Republic of Liberia,” 268-269; Brandon Mills, “‘The United States of Africa’: Liberian Independence and the Contested Meaning of a Black Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 34 (Spring 2014), 89-90.

²⁹³ Huffman, “Tumult and Transition in ‘Little America.’”

²⁹⁴ Liberian Borders: Background and Present Status; Jones, “The American Colonization Society,” 26; and Mower, “The Republic of Liberia,” 269.

²⁹⁵ Mills, “The United States of Africa,” 106.

colored man enjoys all the rights and privileges which the whites enjoy in this country.”²⁹⁶

A close reading of the Liberian *Declaration of Independence* and the Constitution of 1847 reveals an inherent paradox with the nation’s creation. Even as colonists attempted to set themselves apart from the US, they recreated the same types of inequality that existed in the US which eventually led to international accusation of slavery and threatened their sovereignty, as is explained later. In their declaration, the Americo-Liberians, as the African American colonists now called themselves, listed their grievances with the treatment they received while in the US. These same grievances persisted for African Americans well into World War II, and they also existed for rural Liberians with regards to the treatment they received from Americo-Liberians. The declaration states:

We...were originally inhabitants of the United States...we were debarred by law from all rights and privileges of man...public sentiment, more powerful than law, frowned us down...excluded from all participation in the government...taxed without our consent...compelled to contribute to the resources of a country which gave us no protection...made a separate and distinct class, and against us every avenue of improvement was effectively closed.²⁹⁷

In the declaration, Americo-Liberians denounced their legal and nonlegal exclusion from US government and society. They contributed to the US through their labor, resources, and taxes, yet received no voice in the laws they abided by and no protection either. From the start, the Americo-Liberians restricted rural Liberians’ ability to own land and thusly participate in government or improve

²⁹⁶ *Daily Courier* quoted in Brandon Mills, “The United States of Africa,” 96-97.

²⁹⁷ Liberian Collections Project. “Declaration of Independence.” Indiana University Digital Library Program. http://www.onliberia.org/con_declaration.htm (accessed May 10, 2015).

themselves, and soon they would exploit the rural Liberians' labor, resources, and taxes while offering no benefits.

In the Constitution of 1847 they explained their intentions for the nation of Liberia as “a home for the dispersed and oppressed children of Africa, and to regenerate and enlighten this benighted continent, none but Negroes or persons of Negro descent shall be eligible to citizenship in this Republic.”²⁹⁸ It restricted voting to citizens twenty-one and older that owned real estate or a hut for those in the hinterland provinces.²⁹⁹ It allowed “citizens” and “benevolent institutions” to own land, but it defined which citizens were allowed to own land and it excluded “citizens from the aborigines of this country.”³⁰⁰ Just as the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the US Constitution granted citizenship and voting rights to free people and those of color, the Liberian constitution appears to include all people of African descent regardless of where they were born; however, as occurred in the US, in practice the ideal of equal rights did not materialize. As southern states in the US set limits on African Americans' rights and privileges based on land ownership and notions of civility, the Americo-Liberians set limits on rural Liberians and reproduced a similar type of social hierarchy as existed in the US.

Despite a constitutional right to vote for those with land or a hut, rural Liberians had no direct representation in government. Starting in the 1870s “delegates,” one or two chiefs from each group of Kru, Bassa, Vai, etc. appointed by Americo-Liberians, represented their interests. The “delegates” attended legislative sessions. Most were

²⁹⁸ Liberian Collections Project. “Liberian Constitution of 1847” Article V, Section 13. Indiana University Digital Library Program. http://www.onliberia.org/con_1847.htm (accessed May 10, 2015).

²⁹⁹ “Liberian Constitution of 1847” Article I, Section 11.

³⁰⁰ “Liberian Constitution of 1847” Article V, Section 12-14.

illiterate and paid a one-hundred-dollar fee to speak on behalf of their people through an interpreter as most did not speak English. Since they did not vote, their requests were often denied.³⁰¹ Things only worsened for rural Liberians when the Americo-Liberians colonized the hinterland during the “Scramble for Africa.”

COLONIZING THE HINTERLAND

Prior to the scramble at the turn of the twentieth century, Liberia claimed six hundred miles of the western coast of Africa between the Sherbro and San Pedro Rivers, and roughly one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles inland to the River Niger. Despite their claims to the land, the Liberian government had no control over the rural Liberians that lived in the hinterland. The rural Liberians conducted business as usual, oblivious that others laid claims of authority over them. The Berlin Conference in 1884 used the term “effective occupation” as a blueprint by which European nations laid claim to African lands.³⁰² The Brussels Act of 1890 further stipulated under what conditions a nation may lay claim to land with provisions for “effective occupation” to include infrastructure projects like building hospitals, schools, roads, and railways. It required the “progressive organization of the administrative, judicial, religious, and military services in African territories, placed under the sovereignty or protectorate of civilized nations” under a belief it might end the hinterland slave trade according to Liberian scholar Harrison Akingbade.³⁰³ Although rural Liberians in the hinterland signed treaties with Americo-Liberians, they continued to control the hinterland trade with the Mandingo

³⁰¹ Akpan, “Black Imperialism,” 228.

³⁰² Akpan, “Black Imperialism,” 223.

³⁰³ Akingbade, “The Pacification of the Liberian Hinterland,” 278.

doggedly guarding its near monopoly over trade with the British and the French, while the Kru, Dei, and Gola robbed travelers and traders regardless of their nationality.³⁰⁴

Unable to demonstrate “effective occupation,” Liberia lost much of the land it claimed during the scramble. The British annexed the Gallinas district in 1882, and in 1885, they annexed sixty miles of the Liberian coast near the Mano River to Sierra Leone. In 1889, France wanted to claim itself protectorate of Liberia in order to control the smuggling along its border, but the US stepped in and instead negotiated a treaty which gave a significant portion of Liberian land to the French. In 1892, the French coerced Liberia to cede a large strip of land between the Cavalla and San Pedro Rivers in Maryland County to the Ivory Coast, as well as vast amounts of land in the hinterland near the River Niger to Guinea.³⁰⁵ In 1907, France annexed two thousand square miles near the Makona River, and in 1911, the British annexed the Kanre-Lahun district to Sierra Leone, and the French forced Liberia to accept new unfavorable boundaries.³⁰⁶ In the end, Liberia lost between forty-five and fifty percent of the land it originally claimed to the British and French.³⁰⁷

The Liberian government’s inability to occupy the hinterland and stop rural Liberians from pillaging and infighting was tied to the nation’s economic instability and an untrained militia. Although Liberia collected taxes on imports and exports from their coastal ports, most of the country’s resources were traded in the hinterland where the

³⁰⁴ Akingbade, “The Pacification of the Liberian Hinterland,” 278-279.

³⁰⁵ Akpan, “Black Imperialism,” 224; Akingbade, “The Settler-African Conflicts,” 103; and Claude A. Clegg, “A Splendid Type of Colored American”: Charles Young and the Reorganization of the Liberian Frontier Force.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29, no. 1 (February 1996): 47-70.

<http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hus&AN=509577202&site=eds-live&scope=site> (accessed February 19, 2017).

³⁰⁶ Clegg, “A Splendid Type of Colored American,” (accessed February 19, 2017).

³⁰⁷ Clegg, “A Splendid Type of Colored American,” (accessed February 19, 2017).

government lacked the ability to enforce its laws. The government still utilized an unpaid militia from its colonial days to enforce its rule, which proved problematic. The militia officers were Americo-Liberian elite while poor Americo-Liberians and *kwi* served as militiamen. The officers exerted little control over those under their command and the militia frequently abused its authority by assaulting rural Liberians and stealing communal cattle and other resources.³⁰⁸ During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Liberia relied on British financial assistance much more than it relied on American financial assistance. The US was preoccupied with its own internal struggles with Reconstruction and a mass influx of immigrants, and in 1871 and again in 1906, the British loaned a half a million dollars each time to the Liberian government for infrastructural improvements. In accordance with terms of the loans, two British financial advisors took control of the Liberian customs revenue and the bulk of one loan went to the Liberian Development Company, a British company run by Sir Harry Johnson. The company squandered the funds, refused to turn over their records, and filed for bankruptcy without making any improvements while leaving Liberia responsible for the debt.³⁰⁹

In 1907, the British Foreign Office delivered an ultimatum to the Liberian government: institute the necessary changes outlined by the British within six months or forfeit its sovereignty to Britain. The British demanded the appointment of three more British financial advisors to the customs administration, reforms within the treasury and judiciary, and the establishment of a Frontier Force under the control of European

³⁰⁸ Akingbade, "The Role of the Military," 134-136.

³⁰⁹ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 272-273; and Emily S. Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate: The United States, Liberia, and the Evolution of Neocolonialism, 1909-40," *Diplomatic History* 9, no. 3 (1985): 192.

officers.³¹⁰ The French agreed with British demands for a Frontier Force and threatened Liberia's sovereignty as well due to Liberia's inability to protect trade and travelers in the hinterland.³¹¹ To comply, Liberia passed a law on February 6, 1908 which allotted sixty thousand dollars annually for the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF). The act required "foreign officers to organize and command the same" with no more than seven foreign officers at one time.³¹² The British recommended and the Liberians appointed two British captains, and Major R. MacKay Cadell, previously a captain stationed in South Africa, to recruit for, organize, and outfit the LFF.³¹³

Liberia reorganized the LFF with Americo-Liberians as officers and rural Liberians making up the rank and file.³¹⁴ Americo-Liberians viewed rural Liberians from the coast as "unwarlike" due to their exposure to civilizing forces and designated them as laborers or carriers. They heavily recruited "warlike" rural Liberians from the hinterland as fighters within the LFF. As colonizers elsewhere equated the uncivilized with barbarism, so too did the Americo-Liberians as they recruited the "warlike" in keeping with this ideology, but perceived savagery was not the only reason for organizing the LFF in this manner. The hinterland Liberians fought amongst themselves and some joined under the notion they might eradicate their enemies. Thusly, the rank and file were ethnically mixed and unable to unite against the Americo-Liberian officers. Additionally,

³¹⁰ Harrison Akingbade, "Afro-American Officers and the Reorganization of the Liberian Frontier Force," *Negro History Bulletin* 42, no. 3 (July 1, 1979), 74; Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 273; and Akingbade, "The Role of the Military," 137.

³¹¹ Akingbade, "Afro-American Officers," 74.

³¹² Akingbade, "The Role of the Military," 137; and Akingbade, "The Pacification of the Liberian Hinterland," 281.

³¹³ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 273; Akingbade, "Afro-American Officers," 74; Akingbade, "The Pacification of the Liberian Hinterland," 282; Akingbade, "The Role of the Military," 139.

³¹⁴ Akingbade, "The Pacification of the Liberian Hinterland," 282.

rural Liberians rarely questioned orders because they feared forced labor or losing their privileges.³¹⁵ They often went without pay or discipline. The officers also served as district commissioners and used the LFF as their own private armies. As such the LFF pillaged, raped, assaulted, and kidnapped fellow Liberians with impunity.³¹⁶

The LFF collected hut taxes from rural Liberian populations that amounted to one hundred and seventy-eight thousand, five hundred and forty dollars in 1925; a considerable jump over hut taxes of ten thousand dollars in 1911.³¹⁷ The Americo-Liberians annually taxed rural Liberian huts, and in 1916 they levied a one-dollar tax on each hut payable by the village chief. Commissioners charged the chiefs more than the law allowed or collected more than once per year, and they used the LFF as their collection agents which acted more like mob enforcers than defenders of the people. Many parents pawned their children in order to pay the taxes rather than face the LFF's brutality. In return the Americo-Liberian run government provided no benefits such as roads, schools, or hospitals to the rural Liberians on the coast or the hinterland. Most government officials lined their own pockets, and as Americo-Liberians they rarely paid taxes. The few that paid taxes abused loop holes which allowed them to avoid paying up to seventy-five percent of their taxes.³¹⁸

As agents of the government, the LFF enjoyed a great deal of authority over the rural Liberians. The LFF extracted "taxes" from chiefs and coerced them into providing food, housing, and anything else they wanted including women, and due to a lack of roads, rural Liberians carried the LFF in hammocks. Wherever the LFF set up military

³¹⁵ Akingbade, "The Pacification of the Liberian Hinterland," 282-284.

³¹⁶ Akpan, "Black Imperialism," 230.

³¹⁷ Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 203.

³¹⁸ Akpan, "Black Imperialism," 230.

post, the surrounding villages moved as did those villages near areas traversed by the LFF. The LFF took or killed villagers' cattle and chickens so frequently the rural Liberians stopped raising them. If villagers retaliated or defended themselves, the LFF killed them, including the chiefs, and rarely faced repercussions for their actions. In January 1912, in a trial that lasted one day, two LFF officers, Majors T.C. Lomax and James W. Cooper, were acquitted of hanging eight chiefs, and Lomax was appointed "Native Expert" by the Liberian government two years later.³¹⁹

Although the early settlers opposed slavery, they did not oppose the free work chiefs enticed from villagers for the community's benefit, and the Americo-Liberians exploited and institutionalized this practice. Every rural Liberian was required to work a set number of months, some as many as nine months, every year on either public projects or on private plantations owned by Americo-Liberians without pay, food, or housing provided. The LFF was exempt from forced labor and its members were responsible for rounding up rural Liberians to work against their will. Many joined the LFF in order to do the rounding up instead of be rounded up, while many others fled the country. The LFF forced rural Liberians to build their barracks, commissioner's houses, or work on plantations to provide food for the LFF and the commissioners. Outside of the power granted to members of the LFF over rural Liberians, members also received uniforms, learned a trade, and how to speak, read, and write in English. Joining the LFF allowed men to migrate to the more prestigious *kwi* class.³²⁰

³¹⁹ Akpan, "Black Imperialism," 230.

³²⁰ Akingbade, "The Pacification of the Liberian Hinterland," 285 and 290-291; and Akpan, "Black Imperialism," 231.

Due to the threats posed to Liberian independence, in 1908 the nation sent a commission to the US to enlist help with Europe. In 1909, the US sent a commission to investigate Liberia's situation which claimed the US as the only reasonable country able to provide aid since European countries desired Liberian territory and resources.³²¹ In 1910, the Secretary of State, Philander C. Knox, argued in favor of assistance and establishing a customs receivership under the US claiming, "Liberia is an American colony."³²² In 1912, an international loan, largely underwritten by the US, was provided to Liberia with provisions. In return for paying off Liberia's bad debt, the US appointed an American financial advisor to assume charge of customs receivership. Concerned with Europe's interest in Liberian territory, the loan also required that the LFF be reorganized under the command of American officers.³²³

DE FACTO COLONIZATION

The Liberians requested the US send commissioned African American officers to put in charge of the LFF. The US claimed only one African American qualified, Charles Young, the third African American to graduate from West Point. If Liberia wanted commissioned officers, they had to use European Americans. The Liberian government instead chose the less expensive Young, and four former African American non-commissioned officers.³²⁴ Young was born in 1864 to former slaves in Kentucky, and he believed in respectability politics. Like many African American intellectuals of his day

³²¹ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 274.

³²² Knox quoted in Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 275.

³²³ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 275; Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 195; Akingbade, "Afro-American Officers," 74; and Clegg, "A Splendid Type of Colored American," (accessed February 19, 2017).

³²⁴ Akingbade, "Afro-American Officers," 76.

he subscribed to W.E.B. DuBois elitist idea of the “talented tenth.” Young wanted European Americans to distinguish “between the educated, well-dressed, well-behaved, self-respecting, property-owning, cultured, moral Negro man and woman” from “the ignorant, dirty, noisy, vicious class of the race.”³²⁵ While he sympathized with the rural Liberians he still used a colonizer’s language when he called them “savage peoples” and “rude and backwards peoples” that would perish if they did not accept civilization “from the outside.” Young’s elitism crossed over into scientific racism. He believed African Americans lacked initiative, courage, and stamina compared to European Americans, and were “by nature more dependent,” “predisposed” to taking orders, fought well if “properly lead,” and capable of leading minorities, but not European Americans. In tropical climates, he claimed, “mulattoes...are best fitted for this work, combining, as they do, the intelligence and ‘push’ of one race with the physical adaptability for living in hot zones of the other.”³²⁶ This statement shows his belief that European Americans were more intelligent than African Americans.

From 1912 to early 1922, former African American officers led the LFF as agents of the Americo-Liberians and showed little remorse for the rural Liberians while also offending Americo-Liberian officers. The first to accompany Young in 1912 were the well-educated Major Willard Ballard and Captains Arthur Brown and Richard Newton. The Americo-Liberian officers immediately disliked the African American officers. They viewed them as intruders, did not like taking orders from them, and were particularly

³²⁵ Clegg, “A Splendid Type of Colored American,” (accessed February 19, 2017).

³²⁶ All quotes from Clegg, “A Splendid Type of Colored American,” (accessed February 19, 2017); Clegg claims many African Americans of his time viewed Young as a “race traitor” and quotes one serviceman that said Young went to “pains to gratify the curiosity of white people to the neglect of our race.”

incensed over the African American's high pay because the LFF were rarely paid or provided with resources.³²⁷ Young also dismantled the practice of officers serving as commissioners, and while this lessened their official authority, it did not stop them or the LFF from engaging in their previous terroristic tactics.³²⁸ In fact, under the African Americans some might say they increased their brutality. In 1913, Ballard led the LFF in a massacre of the Kru at Rock Cess so vicious the *New York Times* commented on the "heavy slaughter."³²⁹ Ballard's actions instilled a fear of African Americans in the rural Liberians, and this fear only deepened when Captain Brown beheaded rural Liberians.³³⁰ By 1915, the first officers completed their contracts and were replaced by new African American officers, but nothing changed as they too acted on behalf of the Americo-Liberians to the detriment of the rural Liberians.

From the 1910s to the 1920s rebellion among the rural Liberians intensified. Although Grebo and Kru groups long engaged in noteworthy and sporadic rebellions, very destructive and bloody revolts occurred with the Grebo (1910), Kru (1915), Golah (1918), and the Kpelle (1920). The US often supplied Liberia with the arms and resources to squash the uprisings.³³¹ Ultimately, the Americans were unable to effect lasting change within the LFF, the Liberian government, or regarding corruption among Liberian

³²⁷ Young set up a contemporary payment system for the LFF among other eventual reforms, but due to corruption the LFF continued to experience fluctuations in financial support, Akingbade, "Afro-American Officers," 75; and Clegg, "A Splendid Type of Colored American," (accessed February 19, 2017).

³²⁸ A fourth unnamed African American officer was also among the first five African American officers in Liberia, Clegg, "A Splendid Type of Colored American," (accessed February 19, 2017).

³²⁹ "Liberian Troops' Victory," *The New York Times*, February 6, 1913; and Clegg, "A Splendid Type of Colored American," (accessed February 19, 2017).

³³⁰ Clegg, "A Splendid Type of Colored American...," (accessed February 19, 2017).

³³¹ Akpan, "Black Imperialism...," 233; for a detailed account of several rural Liberian revolts and the African American led expeditions to quell them please see chapter four, "The Military Occupation and Administration of the Hinterland" in Akingbade's dissertation "The Role of the Military."

officials, and by 1921 all African Americans had submitted their resignations.³³²

Although the African American officers departed in 1922, except for short periods of time the US continued to maintain a group of army advisors in Liberia to oversee training and maintenance of the LFF as part of numerous financial deals.³³³

The 1912 receivership that put the US in charge of the LFF never worked. Once the Great War started, it cut off Liberia's customs by fifty percent and in 1915 the nation fell behind on its payments and the Kru rebelled again. The British sent a warship to Liberia to offer its "assistance," but the US arrived and told the British to leave while providing Liberia with the arms to put down the Kru uprising.³³⁴ A 1917 plan called for sanctions against the LFF, downsizing government by merging departments under fewer employees, and giving more power to the general receiver and financial advisor. Under the new plan the general receiver took control of all public finances, tax collections, LFF expenses, and the supervision of all government bureaus.³³⁵

The state department championed the loan for several reasons. It provided the US with an African base of operations and a strategic link in the US wireless network. It would also help quell race riots in the US by again using threats that African Americans could leave the US if they disliked their treatment. In 1919, the State Department wrote:

From the point of view of unrest among the negroes in the United States, it seems of the utmost importance to maintain undiminished our prestige in and control over the affairs of Liberia. The fact that these agitators can be confronted with the statement that if they are not satisfied with conditions in the United States, they can resort to a black man's land in Africa under republican form of government, will make in a large measure for tranquility among the negroes of this country. It would, however, be very dangerous for the country were Liberia to be in any degree under the

³³² Akpan, "Black Imperialism," 233.

³³³ Akingbade, "The Role of the Military," 176.

³³⁴ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 276.

³³⁵ Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 196-197.

domination or control of a foreign power, as it could easily become a hot bed of intrigues against the United States at a time when radical unrest is rife in this country.³³⁶

In the 1920s, the US turned to Harvey Firestone to secure a private loan for Liberia in order to bypass legislature.³³⁷ Firestone's presence in Liberia ended up saving the Allies during WWII when Japan took control of Britain's rubber supply, leaving Liberia as the only significant source of rubber available to the Allies.

In order to pay off its war debt, in 1922, Britain adopted the Stevenson Plan, which restricted the quota of rubber exports by seventy percent.³³⁸ This raised the international price of rubber since the British produced eighty percent of the world's supply. The US consumed seventy percent of all rubber produced and needed an alternative source.³³⁹ Urged on by the US government, with provisions, Firestone extended a five-million-dollar loan to Liberia in return for a ninety-nine-year lease for one million acres of land.³⁴⁰ Firestone offered a forty-year five-million-dollar loan at five percent interest, later refinanced at seven percent interest, to pay off the 1912 loan and infrastructure improvements.³⁴¹ Firestone also included guarantee terms that Liberia disliked for placing too much control in US hands, but the state department threatened to withhold aid. In 1926, Liberia agreed to the terms and gave control of its finances to a

³³⁶ Quote in Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 198.

³³⁷ Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 201-202.

³³⁸ The Stevenson Plan was also called the Stevenson Restriction Scheme in RJ Harrison Church, "The Firestone Rubber Plantations in Liberia," *Geography* 54 no. 4 (November 1969), 43; quota reduction of seventy percent noted by Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 283; the plan also noted in Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 202; and Frank Chalk, "The Anatomy of an Investment: Firestone's 1927 Loan to Liberia," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 1, no. 1 (1967), 15.

³³⁹ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 283.

³⁴⁰ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 284; and Church, "The Firestone Rubber Plantations in Liberia," 432.

³⁴¹ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 287; and Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 203.

US-appointed advisor and eight US-recommended officials to assist him appointed by Liberia, and it put two US army officers in charge of the LFF.³⁴² The Americo-Liberians did not like the European American financial advisors. The salaries for the advisors totaled two hundred and twenty thousand dollars which constituted twenty percent of Liberia's revenue in 1928, and fifty percent in 1931 with the onset of a global depression.³⁴³ Outside of salaries well above anything offered in Liberia, the Americans also lived in the best houses in a town short on quality homes.³⁴⁴

Americo-Liberian animosity toward African Americans permeated their deal with Firestone. During negotiations with Firestone the US replaced its consul in Liberia, an African American named Solomon Porter Hood. Officially Porter returned due to illness, but unofficially the state department replaced him because he failed to close the Firestone deal. According to De la Rue, Americo-Liberians lacked respect for African Americans and claimed they brought "destructive criticism with them and nothing more."³⁴⁵ The accuracy of De la Rue's observation is questionable considering he was a racist who disliked Hood. He claimed, "You never really know where you are with a negro,,and Hood could have gotten filled with race hatred...It took him nearly a year to forget he was Black the time he first came out."³⁴⁶ However, his comment about Americo-Liberians lack of respect for African Americans is in line with previous observations and lay at the heart of Liberia's decision to accept the Firestone agreement instead of an African American offer. When Liberian President Charles King visited the US seeking a

³⁴² Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 286-287; and Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 202 claims only eight total financial representatives from the U.S were sent to Liberia in addition to the military advisors.

³⁴³ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 288.

³⁴⁴ Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate," 204.

³⁴⁵ De la Rue quoted in Chalk, "The Anatomy of an Investment," 20.

³⁴⁶ De la Rue quoted in Chalk, "The Anatomy of an Investment," 24.

loan, an African American life insurance company from Durham North Carolina offered the president five million dollars which he turned down in favor of Firestone's offer.

Another telling sign is that once Firestone opened its rubber plantations in Liberia it only sent European Americans to work as managers. According to Harvey Firestone, "King and [future president] Barclay desired no colored American workers."³⁴⁷

"An army travels on rubber," and the Allies were no different.³⁴⁸ The *New York Times* reported the US with "an annual deficit of some 600,000 tons."³⁴⁹ In 1941, the empire imported "97 per cent of our rubber...from the Far Eastern regions now aflame with war, British Malaya, where a scorched-earth policy is already destroying thousands of acres of orchard-like rubber plantations, ...the threatened Netherlands Indies; [and] ... French Indo-China, already overrun by Japan."³⁵⁰ By 1942, Japan controlled 90% of the world's natural rubber supply. As the Allies scrambled to fulfill their demands, the US assumed responsibility for rubber plantations in the Western Hemisphere and in Liberia where the Firestone Company had an established plantation.³⁵¹

In 1939, under President Edwin Barclay, Liberia declared its neutrality in the escalating conflict sweeping the world, but this neutrality was tenuous at best. The British controlled Sierra Leone on Liberia's northern border and the Vichy French controlled the

³⁴⁷ Firestone quote from Baltimore *Afro-American*, September 21, 1929 in Baiyina W. Muhammad, "'Slavery in Liberia': The Afro-American Newspaper's Investigation of the Liberian Labor Scandal, 1926-1936," *Liberian Studies Journal* 35, no. 2 (2010): 126 with additional information from Muhammad, 123, and 126.

³⁴⁸ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 7.

³⁴⁹ "Three-quarters of a ton of rubber goes into one twenty-eight-ton tank. It takes the rubber of 13,000 passenger tires to equip a battleship, of 100 tires to line a bullet-sealing gas tank for a bomber" and "one 37mm AA-Carriage requires 190 lbs. [of rubber], one scout car requires 340 lbs., one flying fortress requires 1,450 lbs., one 10 ton pontoon bridge requires 3,200 lbs." William Hayes, "Needed: 600,000 Tons of Rubber," July 26, 1942, *New York Times*.

³⁵⁰ Frank S. Adams, "Rubber," January 11, 1942, *New York Times*.

³⁵¹ Paul Wendt, "The Control of Rubber in World War II," *Southern Economic Journal* (1947). 203-204.

Ivory Coast on the east and Guinea on the northeast.³⁵² In 1941 Germans still lived in and traded with Liberia, but 1942 the *Dallas Morning News* and *New York Times* reported U-boats off the southern tip of Liberia at Cape Palmas in Harper wreaking havoc by torpedoing Allied ships. This prompted the British to threaten to blockade Liberia's port if it continued to work with the Germans.³⁵³

With the Axis occupying most of North Africa and German submarines in control of the north Atlantic, air travel across Europe and North Africa was dangerous. The US also feared a possible Axis invasion of South America. The US soon put their efforts toward securing an airfield in Liberia. Since the US had not officially entered the war, Pan-American Airways obtained permission to operate their planes in Liberian airspace and Firestone acquired permission to build an airfield on its Harbel plantation near the Farmington River. In March 1942, the US attained permission from the Liberian government "to construct, control, operate, and defend the airport" after signing the "Defense Areas Agreement" in Monrovia. Soon Pan-Am pilots used Roberts Field as a major aviation hub to refuel before traveling on to ports across the Middle East and Asia as part of US lend-lease agreements. After delivering their supplies, the pilots returned to Roberts Field to pick up latex and transport it back to the US for the production of rubber goods.³⁵⁴

³⁵² Akingbade Harrison, "United States Liberian Relations during World War II," *Phylon* (1960-) 46, no. 1 (1st Quarter, 1985). 26.

³⁵³ "U-boats Strike at Allied Ships off Africa." October 11, 1942, *Dallas-Morning News*; "U.S. Troops Reported in Liberia," October 18, 1942, *Dallas-Morning News*; "Nazi Craft Apparently Carrying Out Plans Made Years in Advance of War" October 11, 1942, *New York Times*; "U.S. Army Force Based in Liberia: R.A.F. Station There to Fight" October 18, 1942, *New York Times*.

³⁵⁴ Akingbade, "United States Liberian Relations during World War II," 26-28; Rowny, *Smokey Joe and the General*, 96. For a more complete discussion of Pan-America's role in Africa during WWII see Deborah W. Ray, "Pan American Airways and the Trans-African Air Base Program of World War II," (PhD diss., New York University, 1973); William R. Stanley, "Trans-South Atlantic Air Link in World War II," *GeoJournal* 33, no. 4 (August 1994): 459-463; and Andrew Dawson's personal account as a pilot

When Troop #5889 first left for Liberia in the spring of 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt denied their existence; however, the Axis started reporting US troop movement in October 1942. Without declaring war, Liberia sent a formal request for assistance from the US in December. This began another chapter in the long history of US and Liberian relations. Without ever formally declaring itself a protectorate over Liberia the US nonetheless stepped in during times of need. In October 1942, when England threatened to bomb the Liberian port after Germans sunk one of their ships, Liberia had little choice really in agreeing to let the US use its natural resources for the war efforts.³⁵⁵ Liberian President Barclay remembered an old African proverb about the grass dying when elephants fight. Knowing Liberia played the role of the grass in the global conflict, Barclay agreed to Roosevelt's request to send troops to Liberia. By the end of 1942 the US had sent five thousand troops. In return the US agreed to once again reorganize and train the Liberian Frontier Force, help build a Liberia infrastructure with roads and electricity, and build a harbor whose ownership reverted to Liberia once the army recouped the expense of building it. Liberia did not officially declare war on the Axis until January 1944 and in April of 1944 the United Nations made Liberia the thirty-fifth nation accepted into the organization.³⁵⁶

for Pan-Am in Tom Culbert and Andy Dawson, *PanAfrica: Across the Sahara in 1941 with Pan Am* (McLean VA: Paladwr Press, 1998).

³⁵⁵ "U-boats Strike at Allied Ships off Africa," October 11, 1942, *Dallas-Morning News*; "U.S. Troops Reported in Liberia," October 18, 1942, *Dallas-Morning News*; "Nazi Craft Apparently Carrying Out Plans Made Yeats in Advance of War," October 11, 1942, *New York Times*; "U.S. Army Force Based in Liberia: R.A.F. Station There to Fight," October 18, 1942, *New York Times*.

CONCLUSIONS

In 1947, scholar J.H. Mower convincingly argued that Liberia's ambiguous relationship with the US not only impaired the nation's ability to advance technologically, but it also facilitated Americo-Liberians' abuse of rural Liberians. Mower wrote:

This "halfway house" policy has resulted in the United States backing a completely corrupt oligarchy. Had the United States pulled out entirely, the country probably would have been absorbed by either France or Britain. The natives, in contra-distinction to the Americo-Liberians, would certainly have been better off than they are now. One the other hand, if the United States was determined to stay in Africa, then she should have accepted the responsibilities that are concomitant with this position. A relatively small program of agricultural and medical aid would work wonders in the country. The United States has not been willing to do this.³⁵⁷

Considering rural Liberians repeatedly sought British and French help, even asking for annexation, due to the abuse they endured under a US supported Americo-Liberian government Mower's assessment was fairly accurate.

The relationship between the Americo-Liberians and the rural Liberians was as strained as race relations in the US and eventually led to the 1980s coup to overthrow the Americo-Liberians. In February 1942, Ralph Bunche, an African American in charge of the African section of the Office of Strategic Services, advised Roosevelt, "The elite African especially is even more sensitive on racial matters than is the American Negro."³⁵⁸ The Americo-Liberians colonized the Windward coast partly under the pretense of abolishing slavery and creating a civilized nation for Africans. The Windward

³⁵⁷ Mower, "The Republic of Liberia," 304-305.

³⁵⁸ Bunche quoted in Christopher Paul Moore, *Fighting for America: Black Soldiers – The Unsung Heroes of World War II* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), 124.

coast already belonged to Africans before the African Americans colonized it. In Liberia, the Americo-Liberians adopted the manners and behaviors of the southern gentry and incorporated aspects of colonialism with a uniquely developed concept of civility or *kwi* to oppress others as they were once oppressed. Although Americo-Liberians and rural Liberians shared a similar phenotype, the Americo-Liberians viewed themselves as equally different from the rural Liberians as the European Americans viewed themselves as being different from African Americans. This assumed difference was a point of contention for the Americo-Liberians.

A report submitted prior to the US sending troops to Liberia commented on the fragile relationship Americo-Liberians experienced with Americans due to perceptions that Americans viewed Americo-Liberians similarly to rural Liberians. It stated “Liberians are proud...and far more...racially sensitive than Americans Negroes...and are bitterly resentful of any intimation of their inferiority.”³⁵⁹ It warned against equating the Americo-Liberians with the rural Liberians and against European Americans treating Americo-Liberians as they treated African Americans. The report also commented upon rural Liberians’ attitude toward Americo-Liberians and claimed they “harbor many grievances against the Negro rulers of the country, and who only have a very limited participation in the government.”³⁶⁰ Rural Liberians also held no goodwill toward African Americans due to fresh wounds from African Americans officers in command of the LFF during the 1930s who razed their villages at the behest of Americo-Liberians.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ The Liberian Airport, R&A no. 19, November 24, 1941, Strategic Survey of Liberia, British Empire Section and African Section, R&A No. 762, July 10, 1942, Vol 6: Liberia, Box 51C, William J. Donovan Papers, United States Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle PA.

³⁶⁰ The Liberian Airport, R&A no. 19.

³⁶¹ Akingbade, “The Liberian Problem of Forced Labor 1926-1940,” 272.

Personal relationships between Americo-Liberians and Americans were further injured by Liberia's dependence upon the US. Economically and politically Liberia looked to the US when threatened by a European nation. While harmful to Liberia, this arrangement benefited the US by granting favorable terms to US businesses like Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. In 1942, Germany sunk a British ship in the harbor of Cape Palmas and Liberia's sovereignty was again threatened by Britain.³⁶² With the world once again at war, personal relationships between Liberians and Americans were again tested, but on a larger scale than previously occurred. This interaction between the two nation's people only increased tensions as each nation's preconceived notions about race, ethnicity, gender, and class was disrupted when two competing social hierarchies clashed as countries fought for their place in the international social order.

³⁶² "U-boats Strike at Allied Ships off Africa." October 11, 1942, *Dallas-Morning News*; and "Nazi Craft Apparently Carrying Out Plans Made Yeats in Advance of War" October 11, 1942, *New York Times*.

V. LIBERIAN SEX WORK

All the girls was arrested on Sunday morning – for examination by the doctor.

Then they asked: “Dear girl, will you give me your Jig-jig tag, because I am a poor doctor woman?”

Soon the doctor made me OK again and then I’ll go back to Paradise.

I will show you me no got fever for I am coming back to the village.

I no like it here without my doctor tag so if you lend me it, soon I’ll go back to Shangri-La.

~ George Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La and Other Stories of Sex, Snakes, and Survival from WWII*, 91.

In hopes of returning to work, Liberian sex workers with venereal disease sang the above song to try and convince non-infected sex workers to give the infected workers the medical tags issued by the United States army that the non-infected workers wore denoting their healthy status. George Abraham recounted this song in his memories of his time stationed in Liberia when he served “as a volunteer clerk in headquarters... [and] worked with the Army medics during inspections at the Shangri-La and Paradise prostitution camps on Sunday morning.”³⁶³ The army facilitated sex work in Liberia in an attempt to control venereal disease which rapidly spread among the soldiers once the army arrived in June 1942. They set up two tolerated villages near the US army base and controlled who gained access to the indigenous sex workers.³⁶⁴ An examination of the

³⁶³ Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La*, 79.

³⁶⁴ Annual Report of Malaria Control Activities at Robert Field, Liberia, for 1943, Colonel E.W. Billick M.C., Chief Surgeon to Surgeon General, January 25, 1944 [Malaria report]; Box 449; Geographic Series 1943-1944, Africa: Eritrea (F) to Africa: North Africa-369 (F); Records of the Office of the Surgeon General (Army), Records Group 112 (RG 112); National Archives Building, College Park, MD (NACP); Report of Investigation of Venereal Diseases among United States Army Forces in Central Africa, the Middle East, and India, Major William A. Brumfield to Assistant Chief of Staff, March 1943 [Brumfield report]; Box 438; Decimal File 1942-June 1946, 710 – 726.1; G-1 (Personnel); Records of the War Department, General Staff, Records Group 165 (RG 165); NACP; and Edward L. Rowny, Lt. Gen., *Engineer Memoirs: Lieutenant General Edward L. Rowny, Former Ambassador* (Alexandria, VA: Office of History, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1995), xi and 9.

discourse surrounding venereal disease reveals much more about US constructions of gender, race, and class as concrete absolutes than it reveals about controlling venereal disease. This analysis shows that the US army exported racial, gender, and class ideologies to portray Liberian women's bodies as licentious and infectious in order to maintain the construction of the African American infantry as irrational and lustful in an effort to justify control over African Americans' sexual behavior and to ignore European American officers' sexual privileges, which simultaneously increased women's value as a commodity and allowed the US army to industrialize sex work on an unprecedented scale.

Before analyzing army sex work in Liberia, it is interesting to note the names the army used for the women's villages, specifically "tolerated villages," "Paradise," and "Shangri-La" as these convey a sense of the army's attitude toward sex work, Liberia, and its people. The soldiers repeatedly described towns and villages as "dirty," "unsanitary," and "uninviting."³⁶⁵ Soldiers tolerated Liberia because they had to tolerate being at war, but they did not like Liberia. During World War II banning sex work near army bases for the most part only existed within the continental US, and that as an institution the army favored the notion that soldiers expected sex in return for risking their lives. While some army officers understood men did not need sex, even they resigned themselves to the fact that soldiers sought sexual gratification. The army expected upwards of eighty-five percent of the soldiers to likely engage in sexual activity and due to high venereal rates the army tolerated regulated sex work as a practical solution to a serious health crisis.³⁶⁶ Tolerance does not necessarily mean the army

³⁶⁵ Traenkle interview; and Brumfield report.

³⁶⁶ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 165.

approved of prostitution, but as long as the American public remained unaware and the soldiers continued to fight then the army allowed sex work and in the case of Liberia enabled sex work as long as it could also regulate sexual behavior.



Camp Shangri-La, home to three hundred Army-hired native girls.

Illustration 7: "Camp Shangri-La, home to three hundred Army-hired native girls." The women of Shangri-La dressed in American style clothing as seen in the above image and at other times wore G-strings and covered their bodies in mud. George "Doc" Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La and Other Stories of Sex, Snakes, and Survival from WWII* (New York: Vantage Press, 2000), 56.

Edward Said referred to European travelogues when writing about perceptions of the Orient as “imaginary utopias” full of exotic and sexual creatures.³⁶⁷ The very names for the tolerated villages, Shangri-La and Paradise, illustrate that American soldiers also viewed Liberian women as exotic and sexual creatures whose purpose was to bring them unimaginable pleasures. Abraham’s memoir supports this interpretation for the selection of the villages’ utopian names as he compares Liberian women to other women considered ‘exotic,’ “The personal beauty of the dusky belles of Shangri-La and Paradise was never like that of the South Sea Island girls romanticists tell of...[However,] their natural color, ranging from high mulatto to deep black, appeared fascinating to Americans, who were also startled by the girls’ naked simplicity. The red-beaded G-string was standard dress and went well with the mud-based mascaras of red, yellow, blue, white, and pink.”³⁶⁸ Abraham further wrote that “white soldiers could select the young creatures such as a Broadway producer would select talent for a production. The usual standard for the most fastidious of the white men was the firmness of the mammary glands. If she supported a sun helmet, the girl was considered good wife material and was selected to serve as a temporary mate.”³⁶⁹ Abraham most likely spoke about northern European Americans when referring to the women’s skin color as African American’s skin color resembled Liberian skin color; however, the soldiers also viewed the women as the exotic other based on the reference to their “naked simplicity” and beauty make up that differed from what the soldiers saw in the states. Abraham’s comparison of the soldiers with Broadway producers is also telling as it shows the men envisioned

³⁶⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 117-119 and 312-316.

³⁶⁸ Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La*, 95-96.

³⁶⁹ Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La*, 82.

themselves as creators of their own “imaginary utopias” able to cast the most exotic and alluring creatures in a role of the soldier’s choosing.

That the US army facilitated sex work during World War II is widely documented even though the army attempted to keep this knowledge secret from the American public at the time. In 1940, Major General Charles R. Reynolds called for the “authorized arrest, quarantine and treatment” of infected sex workers in an attempt to lower the number of men infected with venereal disease. His wish was granted with the Eight-Point Agreement of 1940 and the May Act of 1941, which outlawed sex work near army bases; however, while overseas and away from social scrutiny the army adopted a different policy.³⁷⁰ The army classified African Americans as a “syphilis soaked race” and those with venereal diseases as “the ignorant, the careless, the criminal and the social outcast” sent by “Providence for our sins.”³⁷¹

Apart from the continental US, the army turned a blind eye to or encouraged soldiers’ access to sex workers while also upholding social constructions of race and gender. Whether in Hawaii, France, or Japan, the army sought to prevent European American and African American soldiers from engaging in sexual activity with the same women. In Hawaii, they denied African Americans access to the sex workers on Hotel Street; in France African American soldiers risked execution for interracial sex; and in Japan the army created segregated entertainment areas. Throughout this system, the army privileged European American soldiers’ access to women of all races over the access of

³⁷⁰ Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 13, 62, 65, 165-166, and 195n17; and Charles R. Reynolds, “Prostitution as a Source of Infection with the Venereal Diseases in the Armed Forces,” *American Journal of Public Health and the Nations Health* 30, no. 11 (November 1940), 1281.

³⁷¹ “Draft Aids Syphilis Study,” *The Science News-Letter* 43, no. 26 (June 26, 1943), 409; and W. Lee Hart, Col., “Social Hygiene in War and Peace,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 29, no. 4 (April 1943), 220.

African American soldiers. The army simultaneously cast local (non-American) women as diseased, promiscuous, degenerates, taking advantage of war weary soldiers and also as the sexual rewards for men who risked their lives. As with African American soldiers, many sex workers were segregated from society. While society forgave men for killing other men in the name of war, society ostracized women for engaging in sex to survive war. These were, however, societies that devalued women's contributions to the labor force and that typically looked down upon sex work in general.³⁷²

JUSTIFYING SEXUAL CONTROL

Before examining sex work in Liberia as it existed under the US army's management, the weaknesses and strengths of the primary sources must be discussed. Most of the sources used for this research come from the medical department of the US army and as such the Liberian voice is missing. The only way to ascertain the Liberian sex workers' perspective is to hypothesize based upon what is known about African sex work in general. The same must be done when trying to determine how Liberian men might have reacted to American soldiers monopolizing local women's sexual labor for their own purposes. Since the available records were usually written by and filtered through a European American officer's viewpoint the African American infantryman's viewpoint is also lost. Even in those rare instances when an African American's voice can be found it usually belongs to one of the few African American male officers hired specifically to provide medical care for African American soldiers. Both of these

³⁷² Bailey and Farber, *The First Strange Place*; Kovner, *Occupying Power*; and Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*.

circumstances, the lack of Liberian voices and African American infantrymen's voices, provide insurmountable obstacles to a fair and balanced analysis, but the army records also provide an excellent source from which to analyze the US army's attitude toward race, gender, and class within a colonial context that recognizes the ability to colonize the body through appropriation and extends beyond the limitations of defining colonialism as a legal distinction within diplomacy.

Most of the information about sex work in Liberia comes from three European Americans. The aforementioned memoir written by George "Doc" Abraham provides the most comprehensive account, as it covers not only the tolerated villages, but also unregulated sex work in off-limit villages and brothels in the capital of Monrovia. Published fifty-seven years after he served in Liberia, the elapse of time raises questions about the accuracy of his memories, but several army reports verify many of his statements. The two main official reports used in this analysis come from a report written by Major Herbert L. Traenkle and a report written by Major (later Colonel) William A. Brumfield, Jr. Traenkle served as the Venereal Disease Control Officer (VDCO) over the Middle East Theater, under which Liberia, as part of the African command, was subsumed. Brumfield led the Civilian Collaboration Branch within the army's Venereal Disease Control Division. This branch served as a liaison between the army and civilians in their united quest to conquer venereal disease among soldiers. Although some of the information from Brumfield's report is found in overviews written and published by the army as part of their *United States Army in World War II* series, in this series the nuisance language used by Brumfield was filtered for space and more culturally and racially aware readers.

The main point of difference between Abraham's account of sex work and the army's official account lay with whether or not European American officers engaged in sexual activity with Liberian women. Abraham asserts mixed race sex occurred, while army sources for the most part deny it occurred. When comparing these accounts Abraham appears the more reliable. He wrote his memoir without passing through an army censor, which allows for a less reserved narrative. Abraham was also stationed in Liberia at Roberts Field for almost a year and volunteered in the medical department, which gave him more than enough time to gain intimate knowledge of what actually happened at the base. Traenkle served as VDCO for the Middle East Theater from November 24, 1942 to December 10, 1943, but was stationed at headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. Another thing to consider is that Liberia did not fall under his theater until September 1943. One has to wonder how often he visited in the four months he was responsible for the troop's venereal rates. Brumfield was called upon to conduct a report about the prevalence of venereal disease among troops in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. He left the US in October 1942 and conducted his investigation well into January 1943. He visited roughly twenty locations in Accra, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, and Palestine. His observations for Africa in general come from eight days spent on the Gold Coast in Accra from October 15, 1942 through October 20, 1942 and January 7, 1943 to January 8, 1943. The only time he observed conditions in Liberia was on January 9 to January 10, 1943.³⁷³ Clearly Abraham was significantly more exposed to the conditions in Liberia than either Traenkle or Brumfield.

³⁷³ Interview with Major Herbert L. Traenkle M.C., Venereal Disease Control Officer, December 23, 1943 [Traenkle interview]; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #1 to #50; Box 219; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; RG 112; NACP; Major Herbert L

Supplementing these accounts are interviews conducted with officers visiting surgeon general installations from 1943 to 1945. Transcriptions of these are found at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland. Those included here belong to Major Harry B. Baxley a regimental surgeon for the 41st Engineers, Captain John M. Garrett the malaria control officer for Roberts Field, Lieutenant Colonel F.C. Berardinelli the commanding officer of the 25th Station Hospital, and First Lieutenant Susan E. Freeman, the chief nurse of the 25th Station Hospital. Except for Lt. Freeman all of those interviewed were European Americans who only spoke about conditions at Roberts Field or within the 25th Station Hospital. None of them spoke about sex work outside of the tolerated villages except to say that is was an ongoing problem even after the creation of the tolerated villages.

INVESTIGATING THE TOLERATED VILLAGES

By all accounts, soon after arriving in June 1942 the army felt the need to control sexual behavior between the soldiers and Liberian women. Between forty to fifty villages with a combined total of eight to ten thousand villagers existed within a one-mile radius of the army base, commonly referred to as Roberts Field.³⁷⁴ Many soldiers made nightly

Traenkle, Middle East Venereal Disease Control Officer, to Chief Surgeon, USAFIME, Dec 4, 1943 [Traenkle report]; 726.1 Venereal Diseases and Reports, USAFIL, 1943-1945; USAFIL VD – USAFIME; Box 779; Decimal File 1941-1946, 721.5-728; Records of the Africa-Middle East Theater of Operations (World War II Army), Records Group 497 (RG 497); NACP; Brumfield report; Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La*; and Thomas H Sternberg, Ernest B. Howard, Leonard A. Dewey, and Paul Padgett. “Venereal Diseases” in *Communicable Diseases: Transmitted Through Contact or By Unknown Means*. Vol V of *Preventive Medicine in World War II Series*. Edited by Hoff, Ebbe Curtis. In *Medical Department of the United States Army in World War II Series*. Edited by Coates, John Boyd, Col. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1963, 150.

³⁷⁴ The military base was called Roberts Field erroneously, since Roberts Field was the name of the military air field a few miles away used as part of lend-lease agreements, Malaria report; and Traenkle report.

visits to the villages to engage in promiscuous sex, or “jig jig,” and each month approximately five hundred soldiers received overnight passes to the capital of Monrovia.³⁷⁵ When Task Force #5889 arrived the venereal disease rate of the troops stood at six percent. By August the rate rose to 58 percent and by September 96 percent of the soldiers contracted some form of venereal disease. In an attempt to better control venereal disease among the troops, in October 1942 the army in conjunction with the Liberian government created two tolerated villages for sex workers next to the base.³⁷⁶

Word soon reached Washington about the tolerated villages. In December, the chief of chaplains in Washington, William R. Arnold, sent a memo to the chief of administrative services. He wrote that both European Americans and African Americans visited “professional whores (natives) in our health center in a village built, and operated by the US army. It is called ‘Paradise.’ This thing is going to cause a great deal of trouble soon.”³⁷⁷ Before deciding upon any action, Washington wanted to wait until Brumfield Jr. filed his report about venereal disease among forces in the area. In March 1943, the Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Truman K. Gibson, Jr., an African American, also sent a memo stating,

Soldiers, both white and colored, early became the object of native exploiters who are reported to have soon developed a standard rate of eight dollars for a woman in a hut. To all practical intents the purchases made the women personal chattels of the buyers [and the army] concentrated the women already purchased and others in a specially built compound.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La*, 80.

³⁷⁶ Malaria report; Traenkle report; Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La*, 80 and 84; and Rowny, *Engineer Memoirs*, xi and 9.

³⁷⁷ Arnold to Chief of Administrative Services, memo, December 18, 1942; Box 438; Decimal File 1942-June 1946, 250.1; G-1 (Personnel); RG 165; NACP; and Handwritten Note from Unknown to White, December 29, 1942; Box 438; Decimal File 1942-June 1946, 250.1; G-1 (Personnel); RG 165; NACP.

³⁷⁸ Truman E. Gibson, Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, to Charles Poletti, memo, March 16, 1943 [Gibson memo]; File 2912; Box 447; Secretary of War December Files 1943-45; Decimal

He warned, "Far reaching consequences may be expected when the enemy makes use of this treatment of the native population for consumption by other colored peoples both in Africa and in the Pacific area." Gibson recommended the army close the villages.³⁷⁹

These memos reveal a social hierarchy that emerged from the structured control of venereal disease and sex in the army. First, a racial hierarchy emerged as the army found it alarming that both European Americans and African Americans engaged in sexual relations with the same Liberian women. While the writers disliked African American's behavior they seem more outraged by the prospect of interracial sexual relations because they specifically mention that *both* races engaged in sex with the local women. Their outrage is consistent with the army's unofficial policy against different races of men sharing the same women as was reported in Hawaii, France, and Japan, but it also indicates Washington's disapproval of officers engaging in immoral behavior. Gibson's memo also shows the gendered hierarchy in viewing sex work as the exploitation of soldiers when in the next sentence, he writes about the women as chattel. With this observation, he revealed some sympathy for the women, but he clearly cared more about soldiers spending too much money than he cared about the purchase of women as sex objects. He also seemed unaware of the exploitation and oppression women faced from men within their own villages and the labor burden placed upon them which shows his ignorance or lack of interest concerning gender relations and power struggles in Africa. While he recommended closing the villages, he recommended their closure because he cared more about how the enemy might use the information to turn

File Mar 1943-Nov 7, 1945, 253.13 to 300.4; Administrative Office, Under Secretary of War; Records of the Secretary of War, Records Group 107 (RG107); NACP.

³⁷⁹ Gibson memo.

“other colored peoples” against the US than he cared about the women. Nor did he seem to think that African Americans back in the states would care as he excludes them from the category “other colored peoples.”

Brumfield’s report about venereal disease in Africa, the Middle East, and India, filed a few days before Gibson wrote his memo, basically dismissed the occurrence of interracial sexual relationships using a white supremacist rationale premised on a racialized hierarchy of civilized behavior. “The natives are very dark skinned people, with coarse kinky hair, broad flat noses, and thick lips. They are of relatively low intelligence, uneducated, and truly primitive in dress, manners, and customs,” he wrote. “They are for the most part unattractive to the white men and consequently social intermingling between the natives and white soldiers is at a minimum.”³⁸⁰ He reasoned that as a result of “white men” finding African women unattractive venereal disease did “not constitute a major problem among white troops.”³⁸¹ In contrast, the European Americans stationed in the Middle East faced greater risks of venereal infection due to a greater “white” population whom Brumfield thought possessed a higher cultural level, greater intellect, better government, and better economic conditions. As a result, European American men found them more attractive than the “uncivilized” African women and, according to Brumfield, more likely to engage in sex while risking exposure to venereal disease.³⁸²

Two different accounts blame the rise in venereal disease in Liberia on the sexual attraction between African Americans and Liberian women. Brumfield wrote that African

³⁸⁰ Brumfield report.

³⁸¹ Brumfield report.

³⁸² Brumfield report.

women “are the prototype of the American negro and negro troops will associate with them, and sexual intercourse will be frequent.”³⁸³ He specifically pointed out the relationships that developed in Liberia between the women and the African American soldiers. Traenkle’s Report also justified the existence of the villages by casting Africans and people of African descent as perpetually lustful. Traenkle wrote, “The close proximity of native villages and the liberal mores of the obliging but venereally [sic] infected jungle folk constituted an irresistible attraction to the colored soldiers who took to the local girls like ducks to water.”³⁸⁴ Both men recommended keeping the tolerated villages open and while Brumfield found the villages “undesirable” they were “the most feasible solution in view of the natives’ mores and customs.”³⁸⁵

Many in the army commented on what they perceive as a lack of morals and sexual insatiability among the African and Liberian people. Brumfield wrote that “sexual promiscuity is more or less universal in Central Africa. Such promiscuity cannot be called immoral since by the native’s moral standards or lack of them, it is all right.”³⁸⁶ He claimed that governments tolerated and in some cases tacitly endorsed sex work “since these things do not conflict with the moral code.” He commented that it required far more years than the army was stationed in Liberia to change “deeply engrained” sexual attitudes that allowed unmarried women to “engage in sexual intercourse without social ostracism.”³⁸⁷ Major Baxley told the army’s medical department that the women in Liberia “were loose and a man could get a woman anytime he wanted to. The natives

³⁸³ Brumfield report.

³⁸⁴ Traenkle report.

³⁸⁵ Traenkle report; and Brumfield report.

³⁸⁶ Brumfield report.

³⁸⁷ Brumfield report.

have, some of them, several wives, and would run out for a wife about every month or week.”³⁸⁸ This characterization clearly denotes a lack of cultural understanding on the part of the US army regarding polygyny and sexuality in African society. The army imposed its own morals and ideologies about what constituted marriage and proper sexual behavior on the African people and deemed them unworthy. Army leaders also imposed this moral standard on their own African American troops and found them lacking as well.

The army’s repeated attempts to control African American soldiers’ sexuality met with resistance on the part of soldiers and women. Although the army chaplains lectured on morality and medical officers warned of the dangers of venereal disease, the soldiers continued to seek out companionship among Liberian women. The army increased recreational activities to stymie boredom and to keep soldiers from pursuing sex with Liberian women, but to no avail. They restricted off-base passes and “removed” all the villages within a one-mile radius of the base in hopes of dissuading sexual interaction, but the women continued to come on base and the men trekked deeper into the hinterland. Even after the army set up the tolerated villages, Baxley claimed the men’s lustful natures even drove those not admitted a pass to engage in sex through the fence by sticking their penis through the gaps in the wire.³⁸⁹ The army found themselves unable to effectively police the soldiers “unless prison discipline could be enforced [which] would have

³⁸⁸ During the war, the military’s medical department conducted a number of interviews with those under their command. Unless otherwise specified, any interviews referred to in this paper come from those conducted by the medical department. Interview with Major Harry B. Baxley M.C., Regimental Surgeon 41st Engineers, October 10, 1944 [Baxley interview]; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #91 to #120; Box 219; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; RG 112; NACP; and Brumfield report.

³⁸⁹ Baxley interview.

resulted in the creation of a veritable concentration camp with consequent deterioration of moral,” according to Traenkle.³⁹⁰ Brumfield elaborated and wrote, “Because of the low moral standards of the native populations of Africa and Asia, and the relatively low standards of the American negro it is believed inadvisable to send negro troops to these continents except for jobs which cannot be accomplished by white soldiers.”³⁹¹ He failed to designate what jobs “cannot be accomplished by white soldiers” and therefore required African American labor, but he clearly embraced white supremacy. The army believed African American men and the Liberian women cared little for their own health and lacked the ability to control their sexual behavior. Repeated attempts to eradicate sexual unions between the two met with resistance from both sides. As such, the army felt justified in regulating any sex that occurred between them. To accomplish this sexual surveillance, the army set up the tolerated villages.³⁹²

While Brumfield and Traenkle chastised what they considered loose morals, they both complimented the system of sex work that existed in Liberia and acknowledged it as labor. Brumfield explained, “Any ‘free’ women, that is, an unmarried post adolescent, is apt to engage in prostitution as a means of gaining a livelihood.”³⁹³ He rejected a comparison between prostitution in the US and Liberia. He wrote that in Liberia, “it could hardly be classified as prostitution” and instead referred to sex work as “promiscuity at a price.”³⁹⁴ Traenkle too characterized sex work as “different from the usual commercial prostitution in so called civilized countries.”³⁹⁵ He explained that

³⁹⁰ Traenkle report.

³⁹¹ Brumfield report.

³⁹² Brumfield report.

³⁹³ Brumfield report.

³⁹⁴ Brumfield report.

³⁹⁵ Traenkle report.

within the tolerated villages, instead of accepting fees on a per visit basis, each month soldiers gave the women money for clothes and food. The women made their own arrangements with the soldiers so no set monetary transactions existed. He applauded the absence of “pimps, madams, bondsmen or other leeches” when he wrote “These simple bush folks have not yet reached such degrees of depravity as found in more ‘civilized’ countries.”³⁹⁶ While he may not agree with sex work, he considered it more depraved to sell another person’s sexual labor than to barter for oneself. His preference for women’s self-employment without need of a male intermediary recognizes the women’s own agency and ability to negotiate on their own behalf, yet he still considered them in romantic and paternalist terms as “simple bush folk.” He later commented “Probably no where else but among the childlike natives of Liberia could such villages be maintained and segregated.”³⁹⁷ While he gives the women some credit, he in no way considered them very capable or intelligent. Throughout Traenkle’s report, he frames his own role as the patriarchal father looking out for his “children,” which is also reminiscent of the “benevolent” slave owner’s attitude toward his slaves or Rudyard Kipling’s famous “white man’s burden.” In contrast to Traenkle’s report, George Abraham, the medical volunteer stationed in Liberia, wrote “Brothers, fathers, and uncles did their part by acting as bookers and panderers.”³⁹⁸ Considering Traenkle was stationed in Cairo and only visited Liberia it is possible he never saw anyone act as a broker or because he sent his report to his commanders he may have glossed over less desirable details. Without more information, it is difficult to determine.

³⁹⁶ Traenkle report.

³⁹⁷ Traenkle report; and Brumfield report.

³⁹⁸ Abraham, *Bells of Shangri-La*. 82.

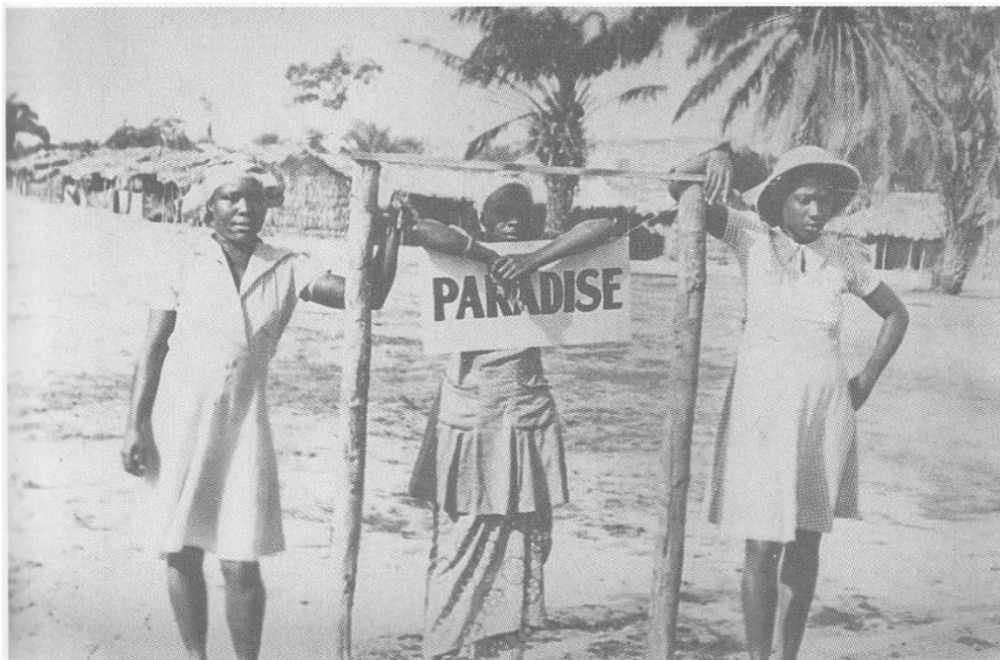
THE TOLERATED VILLAGES

Technically, the Liberian government controlled the tolerated villages, but in reality, the army managed the villages. Both villages, Paradise and Shangri-La, sat next to each other a few feet away from the base and covered about a half of a square mile. Accounts vary, but between 250 to 600 women worked in both villages. Some of the women wore “civilized clothing and some wore just bush clothes.”³⁹⁹ Women purchased either a one-, two-, or three-room thatched hut. The three-room huts cost fifteen dollars, but the cost for the one- and two-room huts remains unknown. A heavily policed barbed-wire fence surrounded both of the villages, the health center, the isolated treatment facility, and the prophylactic station. The villages contained latrines, gutters, waste disposal, a women’s recreation building, and every evening the army sprayed each hut with mosquito repellant and dropped Dixie cups with DDT in them throughout the village. The villages opened for customers at one o’clock in the afternoon and stayed open until nine or ten o’clock at night with an hour break between five and six o’clock.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ Interview with Captain John M. Garrett, Sanitary Corps, Malaria Control Officer, Roberts Field, July 13, 1944 [Garrett interview]; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #51 to #90; Box 219; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; RG 112; NACP.

⁴⁰⁰ History of the 25th Station Hospital, 1943 (25th station history, 1943); 25th Station; Box 266; WWII Administrative Records, 1940-1949; Records of the Office of the Surgeon General (Army), RG 112; NACP; Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 87; Interview with Lieutenant Colonel F.C. Bernardinelli M.C., Commanding Officer of the 25th Station Hospital, March 25, 1944 {F.C. Bernardinelli is on the cover page of the interview written by a transcriber who did not the officer; however, on the History of the 25th Station Hospital, 1942 prepared and signed by him he signed his name as S.D. Berardinelli; [Berardinelli interview]}; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #51 to #90; Box 219; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; RG 112; NACP; Interview with First Lieutenant Susan E. Freeman, Chief Nurse of 25th Station Hospital, December 24, 1943 [Freeman interview]; Report of Medical Department Activities in North Africa; Interviews, Nos #1 to #50; Box 219; Mobilization and Overseas Operations Division Inspection Branch, Interviews with Officers Visiting S.G.O. Installations 1943-1945; Operations Service; RG 112; NACP; Garrett interview; Traenkle report; Brumfield report; and George “Doc” Abraham interview in “The European Front,” executive producers Craig Haffner and Donna E. Lusitana, written and produced by Rhys Thomas in *Sex during Wartime: History under the Covers*, produced by Nancy Dubuc and Charlie Maday (A&E Television Networks, 2009).

Traenkle praised the women for helping to maintain morale and he particularly liked the Saturday-night dances. He wrote, “These daughters of the jungle undergo an astounding metamorphosis when arrayed in the shoes and dresses bought with their newly acquired wealth. Their appearance was neat and their manners pleasing and gracious. The whole affair would have done credit to many a college fraternity ‘hop’.”⁴⁰¹ Once the women changed their attire, Traenkle perceived them as possessing more manners and grace, showing how the US exported their own ideologies of civility and imposed them onto others.



Camp Paradise, also home to three hundred native girls

Illustration 8: “Camp Paradise, also home to three hundred native girls.” The conditions in the tolerated villages appear sanitary based on this image found in George “Doc” Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La and Other Stories of Sex, Snakes, and Survival from WWII* (New York: Vantage Press, 2000), 57.

⁴⁰¹ Traenkle report.

The army dictated who lived in the villages and who visited the women. Before women could enter the villages, army doctors examined them. If no “evidence of venereal ulcers or vaginal discharge” existed, the doctors photographed the women, gave them a tag, and allowed them to enter the camp. With the creation of the tolerated villages the army issued fewer off-base passes to the African American soldiers, who received passes to visit the villages instead. The army prohibited local men from entering the tolerated villages and soldiers entered through one guarded gate. The army conducted surprise “short arm inspections” in which they visually inspected a man’s penis for signs of venereal disease.⁴⁰² Any man suspected of being infected with disease was denied entrance. The doctors issued condoms for soldiers to use while visiting, but the heat compromised the latex and they easily broke. Before the army allowed the men to leave the camp each soldier visited one of the prophylactic stations located within the villages. From there they received a ticket to present to the guard verifying they used a chemical prophylactic. The army also forced those soldiers who claimed to abstain from sexual contact while in the village to endure the chemical prophylactics.⁴⁰³

According to Traenkle, on average two hundred men visited the villages each night, which means women averaged less than one visitor per night, but this does not necessarily represent the attendance throughout the villages existence. As mentioned earlier, Liberia did not fall under Traenkle’s command until September 1943 and he wrote his report in December shortly before reassignment.⁴⁰⁴ The majority of the Liberian Task Force left earlier in the year when the nurses arrived in March. Traenkle did not

⁴⁰² Traenkle report.

⁴⁰³ Berardinelli interview; Traenkle report; Brumfield report; and Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 88 and 162.

⁴⁰⁴ Traenkle report; Traenkle interview.

witness the tolerated villages while they operated at their peak, and therefore it is difficult to determine how many visitors each woman entertained before he assumed command over the operation. Abraham provides another way to guesstimate attendance at the tolerated villages claiming, “at first, the number of prophylactics taken in one month at the two controlled prostitution camps was more than 7,000 for 1,000 troops.”⁴⁰⁵ But, the army did not mandate the use of prophylactics in the tolerated villages until April 1943 after Abraham left. However, using the army’s estimations of how many soldiers likely engaged in sex the end result is still not very different from what Traenkle witnessed.

Based on troop size of two thousand and using the army’s own estimates that fifteen percent ($2,000 \times .15 = 300$) engaged in sex and fifteen percent ($2,000 \times .15 = 300$) did not engage in sex regardless of the army’s advice about abstinence, the army thought a total of one thousand four hundred were open to army advice about sexual activity.⁴⁰⁶ Of the remaining one thousand four hundred, the army estimated between fifty-three and sixty-eight percent engaged in sex with African Americans ten percent more likely than European Americans.⁴⁰⁷ Since all accounts indicate a high level of sexual activity within the Liberian Task Force, this calculation estimated seventy-eight percent of the one thousand four hundred engaged in sex, or 1,092 ($1,400 \times .78 = 1,092$). Adding the previously excluded 300 the army figured always engaged in sex to 1,092 means in Liberia approximately 1,392 soldiers engaged in sex. Some African Americans preferred visiting women in their off-limit villages instead of visiting the tolerated villages, so I

⁴⁰⁵ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 92.

⁴⁰⁶ Estimates of 15-15-70% referring to soldier’s likelihood to be open to army advice about sex in Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 165

⁴⁰⁷ Estimates of 53-68% of soldiers that did engage in sex after listening to army advice in Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 165.

estimate the three hundred that did not follow the army's advice about sexual activity were the soldiers most likely to continue to visit off-limit villages. This brings the number of soldiers that visited the tolerated villages back down to 1,092. While Abraham was stationed in Liberia six hundred women lived in both of the tolerated villages. Using these figures each worker averaged 1.82 visitors per day ($1,092 / 600 = 1.82$) which is considerably less than sex workers in Hawaii, who averaged one hundred men daily.⁴⁰⁸



Illustration 9: Health Center. No caption was provided by Abraham, but this shows the health center as part of the village compound separated from the soldiers as evidenced by the fence in the background. Based on the women's clothing, these women most likely acted as nurses' aides within the health center and were not sex workers. *George and Katy Abraham Papers*, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Used under Fair Use.

In order to live in the tolerated villages, the women had to consent to undergo weekly vaginal examinations to ensure they remained disease free. In the beginning the

⁴⁰⁸ Bailey and Farber, *The First Strange Place*, 100.

women received weekly exams at Firestone's plantation hospital conducted by a Firestone or an army physician. Later, the army enlisted an African American gynecologist to perform the exams. Records do not indicate exactly when, but the army eventually assigned a dedicated VDCO to the Liberian base. When the weekly exams proved insufficient (no explanation for why the exams were considered insufficient) the army set up a prefabricated building within the villages to conduct examinations on a more frequent basis and for the women to receive treatment (Illustration 9). The army conducted between forty and eighty exams during the week days and between one hundred and one hundred and seventy-five exams on Sunday.⁴⁰⁹

Abraham noted the exams only took about thirty seconds and Traenkle reported that although the exams were not thorough he considered them sufficient considering the number of women examined. Uninfected women received a metal tag, or "jig-jig tag" as the women called them, to wear denoting they carried no venereal diseases.

Unfortunately, the tags ensured no protection from venereal disease. Some infected workers showed no symptoms as it took twenty to forty days for a blood test to reveal an infection; in the meantime, they worked in the village. Even if the women were uninfected when examined, they risked infection before their next exam simply through sexual contact with a soldier as most workers "rejected strenuously to the use of condoms, believing they brought harm."⁴¹⁰ In spite of the groundbreaking development of antibiotics during the war, army doctors had difficulty curing the women found to be infected. Those infected forgot to take medicine everyday as prescribed, refused to postpone sexual relations, and uninfected men refused to abandon sex with infected

⁴⁰⁹ Traenkle report; Traenkle interview; and Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 89.

⁴¹⁰ Traenkle report; and Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 89.

women.⁴¹¹ European American army doctors believed that the lack of concern African American soldiers presumably showed for their health as well as the workers' superstition and distrust of modern medicine proved that people of African descent were an inferior and ignorant race in need of a firm hand to control their actions and save them from themselves.

Although some infected workers slipped by the medical inspections, the army provided treatment for those they discovered or suspected were infected. The army used many different adjectives for the treatment center, or "Idylewilde" as the soldiers called it, such as "isolation," "segregated," "separate," or "confinement;" Abraham described it as "a barbed-wire enclosure with huts...often guarded by MPs"; and the commanding officer of the 25th Station Hospital, Lieutenant Colonel S.D. Berardinelli, referred to it as "a compound within a compound" (see Illustration 10).⁴¹² Both descriptions sound more like imprisonment than a treatment center. By imprisoning the infected workers in what amounted to lock hospitals, the army showed they distrusted the men and women to take care of their own health and refrain from sex.⁴¹³ The army confiscated the women's "jig jig tags," while the women received sulphathiazol until symptom free. Since the army returned the tags to sex workers once their disease "abated" and allowed them to return to

⁴¹¹ As early as 1905, medical and social reformers exposed the fallacy of inspection specifically due to acquiring an infection between exams. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 35; Baxley interview; Berardinelli interview; Garrett interview; Traenkle report; Brumfield report; and Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 88-91.

⁴¹² Berardinelli interview.

⁴¹³ For more information about hospitals for sex workers, or lock hospitals, read Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Findlay, *Imposing Decency*.

the tolerated villages, some women thought the tags cured illnesses and they created a song to convince some disease-free sex workers to loan out their tag. Apparently, it worked; menstruating, inspected sex workers loaned their tags to uninspected or infected women. The uninspected or infected women used the borrowed tags to return to the tolerated villages while the military police remained unaware or uninterested in the petty fraud. Since women voluntarily worked within the tolerated villages, another significant problem was that sometimes they returned to their own villages rather than submit to imprisonment in Idleywilde. Within their own villages, the women catered to European American officers denied entrance into the tolerated villages, and to some of the African American servicemen.⁴¹⁴



Illustration 10: Idleywilde. The caption supplied by Abraham, “Idleywilde -- Camp were Army-hired native prostitutes with severe cases of venereal diseases were confined.” Note the guard at the entrance to restrict uninfected and infected workers from mingling. *George and Katy Abraham Papers*, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Used under Fair Use.

⁴¹⁴ 25th station history, 1943; Baxley interview; Berardinelli interview; Garrett interview; Traenkle report; Brumfield report; and Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 90 and 93.

In addition to providing health care to US soldiers, the army employed and provided medical care for roughly one thousand nine hundred Liberians who worked for various units. Records show that from 1942 to 1944 the 25th Station Hospital employed both women and men in a number of jobs including in the laundry room, mess hall, laboratory, and dispensary as well as ward orderlies, supply handlers, grass cutters, woodchoppers, and repairmen.⁴¹⁵ Many women chose sex work in order to maintain more control over their labor and their day-to-day activities including who they sold their services to, but the most likely reason women chose sex work instead of other types of work were the economics associated with supply and demand. When the soldiers arrived, women's value increased due to the demand for their companionship.

At first, only one village was located near the base with several more within a half mile radius. Men left their villages to work for the army leaving behind "at least a thousand lively girls "in the age brackets most interesting to soldiers," as one American health officer put it," according to Abraham. He further wrote that women "had no social stigma placed upon them for catering to the male trade for money. Conditions were ideal for them. The soldiers had plenty of time and plenty of money, plus connubial interests; the girls had plenty of time but no money."⁴¹⁶ Stories of the soldiers' wealth and lavish spending spread, and Liberians thought the Americans were "crazy...to pay for such a trivial commodity."⁴¹⁷ Women of all ages migrated to the coast where the soldiers lived

⁴¹⁵ History of the 25th Station Hospital, 1942-1944 (25th history); 25th Station; WWII Administrative Records, 1940-1949; Records of the Office of the Surgeon General (Army), Records Group 112 (RG 112); National Archives Building, College Park, MD (NACP).

⁴¹⁶ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 81.

⁴¹⁷ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 82.

to offer their services. Those who worked on farms left and “brought their daughters as close as possible to the military reservation,” and used the money they earned to buy food from shops at the Firestone plantation.⁴¹⁸ Men “act[ed] as brokers and panders” for “free-lance prostitutes” and “spirited street urchins who hung around camps picked up ten or fifteen cents for each head they sold.”⁴¹⁹ The number of villages around the army base grew and the stockades frequently overcrowded with soldiers willing to risk court martial in order to visit the off-limit villages for services the army did not provide.⁴²⁰

As demand for women increased so did their value. Parents that once accepted “a can of ...Spam” or shoes for “their maidens of marriageable age (12)” now collected “ten dollars a piece for daughters.”⁴²¹ Women recognized their value was more than the initial dollar per month they charged for their services and quickly “jacked the price skyward” according to Abraham.⁴²² How much women in off-limit villages earned is difficult to determine, and as discussed in the next section, soldiers made threats when they disagreed with off-limit villagers. The women within the tolerated villages profited greatly from their labor as they set their own prices and kept all of their earnings. Abraham’s memoir also hinted at a trust that developed between the soldiers and the women as they used each other to “hold” money as a bank might. An “officer” held the money for a woman who earned a thousand dollars in six months. A woman kept seven hundred dollars for a soldier who lost it when his battalion unexpectedly left, while another woman lost seventy-five dollars owed to her when her customer shipped out. At

⁴¹⁸ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 83.

⁴¹⁹ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 82.

⁴²⁰ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 85.

⁴²¹ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 82-83.

⁴²² Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 83.

least one woman's actions show sex work was a temporary means to obtain permanent economic freedom since she wanted to use the two hundred dollars she earned in one week in order to purchase a sewing machine. Whether she intended to start work as a seamstress before or after the war ended, the economic windfall associated with army sex work cannot be known, but it shows some women's strategic thinking in attaining their long-term career goals.⁴²³

While economics played a significant factor in women's decision to sell sex both within and outside of the tolerated villages, many women found the tolerated villages offered benefits beyond money. As mentioned, the army provided a more sanitary environment with gutters, malaria control, waste disposal, and a recreation center, amenities off-limit villages did not offer.⁴²⁴ Outside of venereal disease, the military also tested for "elephantiasis, sleeping sickness, malaria organisms, and other tropical germs."⁴²⁵ Saturday night dances also gave workers the ability to learn American social customs and dances and enjoy a banquet of calf, cakes, pies, beer, soda, numerous sides, and "all the trimmings." Rural women learned to speak English and acquired clothing and the necessary tools to take on a more "civilized" appearance. They dressed in "lipsticks, earrings, perfumes, and high-heeled shoes" imported from the US.⁴²⁶ Learning English and dressing "civilized" increased their appeal and market value among the soldiers, but it also increased their social status within Liberian society. Abraham claimed a "gaiety"

⁴²³ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 91 and 99.

⁴²⁴ 25th station history, 1943; Berardinelli interview; Garrett interview; Traenkle report; and Brumfield report.

⁴²⁵ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 94.

⁴²⁶ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 93 and 100.

existed within the tolerated villages that “contrasted sharply with the life most of the rest of the country knew.”⁴²⁷

Within the tolerated villages women also felt free to express themselves and show defiance. When a soldier catcalled at a woman to raise her skirt she told him “Go to hell, you fish head. I don’t ask you to pull down your pants.”⁴²⁸ Not all women appreciated the health checkups the army imposed and some found unique ways to express themselves. When a medical officer tried to collect blood for a malaria test one woman urinated on his shoes.⁴²⁹ The ability to freely show defiance without fear of retaliation also shows the army provided at least some level of protection from physical abuse. However, outside of the tolerated villages women and their villages faced threats of violence from soldiers.

RESISTANCE TO SEXUAL CONTROL

Although the army barred European American officers from visiting the tolerated villages, officers refused to be denied access to sex. Since the army’s official accounts dismiss the possibility of interracial sexual activity, most of the information about the sexual behavior of the European American officer corps comes from Abraham’s memoir. He claimed roughly three-quarters of the European Americans engaged in sexual activity with Liberian women. Although many brought their white supremacist views with them, racism never stopped them from satisfying their carnal urges. Abraham recalled one officer commenting, “When I got through with that black bitch, the first thing I wanted to do was choke the life out of her;”⁴³⁰ however, he continued to return night after night.

⁴²⁷ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 93-94.

⁴²⁸ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 93.

⁴²⁹ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 94.

⁴³⁰ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 126.

European Americans met women on base and in Monrovia for casual commercial encounters. Women snuck into soldiers' tents or invited them to go in search of somewhere hidden. A shed used to wash clothes doubled as a rendezvous spot.⁴³¹ Soldiers visited the brothels of the Liberian capital when granted weekend passes. Brothel workers warned soldiers to avoid the "bush girls [with] belly fever."⁴³² They wore gingham dresses and claimed to be cleaner and spoke better English than rural Liberians, but the brothels "were unsanitized and teemed with mosquitoes," according to Abraham.⁴³³ Nellie Hodge's Whore House, charged "two dollars a throw," and served as an example of the conditions inside with "about 75 to 100 small cots...The room was full of white soldiers mating with black teenagers. It looked like a sea of white moving up and down."⁴³⁴ The unregulated sexual activity caused a higher venereal infection rate among those with passes. However, soldiers had more to fear than just disease as one well-known sex worker in a brothel named Victoria hospitalized eight soldiers due to her "whimsical passion for biting the genitals of drunken soldiers."⁴³⁵ Abraham wrote that "the sorriest cases of hospitalization came as a result of weekend passes."⁴³⁶

Many European Americans and some African Americans kept "clandestine brides" or "pseudo-wives" in the local villages. They paid companions six dollars a month not to visit the base in order to gain what they believed were exclusive rights. Some of the women learned American dances and rudimentary English.⁴³⁷ Soldiers built their "brides" homes of varying quality based upon the soldier's level of commitment to

⁴³¹ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 129.

⁴³² Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 151.

⁴³³ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 151.

⁴³⁴ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 157.

⁴³⁵ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 150.

⁴³⁶ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 150.

⁴³⁷ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 127.

the relationship. Some made “flimsy...verminous huts...made of pole frames bound together with sheaves of flat thatch leaves...[that were] Rarely rainproof and never containing adequate ditching...the earthen floors and trails from hut to hut were perennially wet and slimy.”⁴³⁸ Most of the villages teemed with mosquitoes, but those with poor runoff were infested and often times destroyed by the army. Other soldiers built what Abraham described as a “cozy home, with stuccoed walls...which were lined with...newspapers from America. The floor was lined with a bamboo mat. There was a comfortable Army bed, a swinging hammock, and two GI kerosene lamps. Payment was made to the girls on the installment plan: \$1.50 a week plus Army canned goods, cigarettes, or woolen Red Cross socks.”⁴³⁹ Additional items stolen from base by soldiers for their companions were shoes, toothbrushes, and the women’s favorite item, soap.⁴⁴⁰ However, these relationships also put the women and their villages in danger.

Women who returned to their villages rather than work in the tolerated villages faced considerable reprisals if their prices or displays of autonomy displeased the soldiers. Since the army razed villages overrun with mosquitoes due to malaria, when women renegotiate their prices, the soldiers threatened local chiefs for failing to control the women. One “husky Texan” told the chief of the village “Talking Charlie” that “as long as you take good care of us boys, and don’t let the girls charge us too much, white man no burn down house to catch mosquitoes.”⁴⁴¹ Not wanting to rebuild his village, the chief agreed to set a ceiling price of one dollar whereas previously women earned as much as fifteen dollars a sex act. Some of the women resisted by striking, but they soon

⁴³⁸ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 125.

⁴³⁹ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 127.

⁴⁴⁰ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 86, and 126-128.

⁴⁴¹ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 132.

relented and accepted the rate.⁴⁴² Another soldier, “Rebel,” found out the woman he visited regularly and assumed belonged to him alone also received visits from other soldiers. Angered at not having exclusive access to what he considered “his,” the soldier burned down her hut.⁴⁴³ Another woman disarmed a drunk soldier who tried to stab her when she refused his advances. He continued to physically assault her until she found an axe and he ran off into the night. Shortly after she heard a gunshot, but neither the soldier nor his body were ever found.⁴⁴⁴ Based upon one soldier’s place of origin, Texas, and the other’s nickname of “Rebel,” their aggression was likely fueled by racism which posed a problem almost immediately after Troop #5889 arrived in Liberia. White supremacy depended on the threat or actual deployment of violence. As some women rejected the control of the tolerated villages, they cast off the protections against violence that army management offered.

The medical unit had only erected a tent hospital in June 1942 when in August their “first major surgical operation was performed on a soldier who was shot through the abdomen during an altercation with another soldier.”⁴⁴⁵ According to Abraham, base commanders first realized race relations posed a problem among the troops after a near fatal stabbing of a European American in the village of “Talking Charlie.” He does not provide a date for the stabbing except that it occurred not long after arriving. As Abraham recalls, the soldier said he knew he “didn’t have any business in the village at night...But you know how a soldier is. I was inside the shack talking to a girl when this husky,

⁴⁴² Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 131-132.

⁴⁴³ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 130.

⁴⁴⁴ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 158-159.

⁴⁴⁵ History of the 25th Station Hospital, 1942 [25th station history, 1942]; 25th Station; Box 105; WWII Administrative Records, 1940-1949; Records of the Office of the Surgeon General (Army), RG 112; NACP.

colored soldier, drunk from cane juice, ordered me out. I asked his name, but he just started to walk past me, saying nothing. Then he made a pass at my chest, striking the right side...The blood gushed down my belly.”⁴⁴⁶ Abraham’s description and time frame coincide with the shooting incident in August, which begs the question: is Abraham’s memory fuzzy and confusing a stabbing with a shooting or are these two completely different confrontations? One displays time’s effect on memory, the other points to a larger problem among the troops - a problem that appears to have escalated.

In Monrovia, the tables turned as the European Americans found themselves a minority and the African Americans realized in Africa they made up part of the majority. Unlike previous African Americans from the elite class, the majority of the African Americans in Liberia during World War II were from the poor and working classes. Oral history suggests the African American troops experienced liberties unlike anything they knew in the US. An account found on Facebook in 2013 from an unnamed observer, probably Liberian, claims that “When they [African Americans] discovered that whites couldn’t own property or become citizens in Liberia, they acted as if they owned the place...This is power! This is what freedom is all about...”⁴⁴⁷ While a Facebook post lacks credibility, it is the only source outside of Abraham’s corroborating the racism and competition for women as reasons for the underlying violence among the men since army records did not address violence within the troop except to acknowledge it. Racial tensions between African American and European American soldiers escalated to the point that the army barred soldiers from carrying weapons to Monrovia. African

⁴⁴⁶ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 137-138.

⁴⁴⁷ “WWII and the Waning of Social Segregation in Monrovia,” Kala Genesis Facebook Page; efforts to friend Kala Genesis to obtain more information went unanswered.

Americans “picked fights with white GIs and beat them up. Until the end of the war, white GIs were restricted to two or three bars.”⁴⁴⁸

A point of contention among the troops revolved around European American’s access to Liberian women. The observer claims, “at Yango Bar, when a white GI tried to pick up an attractive Liberian girl, a Negro GI walked over to the table and shoved him...the Negro GI threw the white GI out on the street, saying, ‘These are our girls! I couldn’t do this in Mississippi or Georgia cause you’d lynch me.’”⁴⁴⁹ The observer’s ethnicity as Liberian comes through not only by referring to African Americans as separate from the observer, but also in the observer’s lack of understanding about racism within the US. The observer didn’t understand why an African American private “lifted [a white sergeant] up off the ground with one arm” after the European American called the African American a “Nigger.” When the observer asked, “Why’d you do that to that white man?...He’s not a German. He’s an American like you.” The African American replied, “You never know what those guys’ll do. They’ll kill you in a minute without feeling. You got to show them...He’d rather kill me than a German and I’d rather kill him than a German.”⁴⁵⁰

Animosity between African Americans and European Americans did not necessarily mean an alliance between African Americans and Liberians formed. Abraham claimed African Americans “suffered the most fatalities as a price for the foolish indulgences. Several soldiers I knew of died of what was listed on the autopsy as ‘drowning.’ It was not uncommon for bloated bodies to be fished from the sluggish,

⁴⁴⁸ “WWII and the Waning of Social Segregation in Monrovia,” Kala Genesis Facebook Page.

⁴⁴⁹ “WWII and the Waning of Social Segregation in Monrovia,” Kala Genesis Facebook Page.

⁴⁵⁰ “WWII and the Waning of Social Segregation in Monrovia,” Kala Genesis Facebook Page.

slimy Farmington River. Unlike several white men who drowned while crossing the river in search of ‘black stuff,’ black drowning victims were believed to have been pushed into the river by native males who objected to outsiders making love to their ‘mammies.’”⁴⁵¹

The war progeny left behind by the soldiers posed another problem that arose between American and Liberian interactions. The picture below is the only known army record acknowledging the existence of the babies fathered by American Soldiers in Liberia. Any information about these children come from Abraham and a one Liberian newspaper. Abraham wrote, “At least two white soldiers in our company were proud papas. Both had babies, whom they were supporting at the village of ‘Kissy-no-Pay.’ The babies were nursed along on condensed milk stolen from the Army.”⁴⁵² A large number of women in the tolerated villages also gave birth. On one of his health inspections of the tolerated villages Abraham saw “at least fifty of them bulging with pregnancy. That same night, a young girl – maybe fifteen years old – had given birth to a baby in her hut. The mother delivered the baby herself with the aid of an attendant...The American officer instructed the attendant to secure condensed milk from the Army commissary...” because the mother had elephantiasis of the breast.⁴⁵³ He further claimed pregnancy never interfered with the women’s ability to work. He witnessed mothers and daughters who worked throughout their pregnancy. Some gave birth in the tolerated villages, while others left the village and returned “a few days” after giving birth. He witnessed a girl

⁴⁵¹ The 25th station histories corroborate a number of “accidental” drownings through the years; Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 86-87.

⁴⁵² Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 131.

⁴⁵³ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 94; A number of Liberians contracted filariasis of the breast and genitals. For more information read William F. Diller, “Notes on Filariasis in Liberia,” *The Journal of Parasitology* 33, no. 4 (1947), 363-366.

“no more than eleven years old, was expecting her baby within a week. But she continued to accommodate many men up to the time she gave birth.”⁴⁵⁴



Illustration 11: “War Progeny...of American Troops” was the description supplied by Abraham, as well as “American Colored Doctor and Native negro nurse hold progeny of American soldiers.” The use of “colored” to describe the American and “negro” to describe the Liberian evidences a perceived distinction between people of African descent based on nationality, skin color, or class. *George and Katy Abraham Papers*, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Used under Fair Use.

⁴⁵⁴ Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La*, 94.

This situation posed a serious problem for the Liberian government (as it did for the Japanese, German, and South Korean governments after US occupation). Some of the women received assistance while the army remained in Liberia, but that help evaporated when the army shipped out. The long-term support for war progeny became an apparent problem after the bulk of the soldiers shipped out in March 1943. An August 1943 issue of the *African Nationalist* pondered this dilemma when its author wrote about thirty babies at the tolerated villages and rumored plans to set up a clinic “for these unfortunate victims of war...[and] a very long chain of social and economic responsibilities. The children will have to be taken care of up to adolescence...The question is: upon whom will this burden fall?”⁴⁵⁵ Although army records freely address the tolerated villages, so far none of the examined army records refer to the natural product of these villages—war babies. As a result, nothing is known about what became of these unrecognized American citizens.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the soldier’s resistance to the army controlling their sexuality, the venereal disease rate dropped significantly after the introduction of the tolerated villages. Captain Alfred Thomas was credited with the success of the venereal disease program in Liberia. The following graph shows the dramatic decrease in venereal disease once the army implemented various restrictions (Figure 4). With a high of 96.5 percent of the men infected in September 1942, the rate dropped to 47 percent in December 1942 after the army started examining women and established Shangri-La, Paradise, and Idylewilde.

⁴⁵⁵ “Large Number of Expectant Mothers in Army Prostitution Camp: Social Problems for Liberian Government,” *African Nationalist*, August 14, 1943.

The infection rate further dropped to 17.8 percent in June 1943 after the army instituted compulsory prophylactics, and by October of 1943 the infection rate stood at 13.6 percent. By industrializing sex work with the establishment of the tolerated villages and mandating preventative measures, the army dropped the venereal disease infection rate 86 percent over about a year's time.⁴⁵⁶ However, the graph does not take into account that the bulk of the task force left in March 1943 which also likely contributed to the significant drop in venereal disease.

⁴⁵⁶ Traenkle report; Traenkle interview; and West interview.

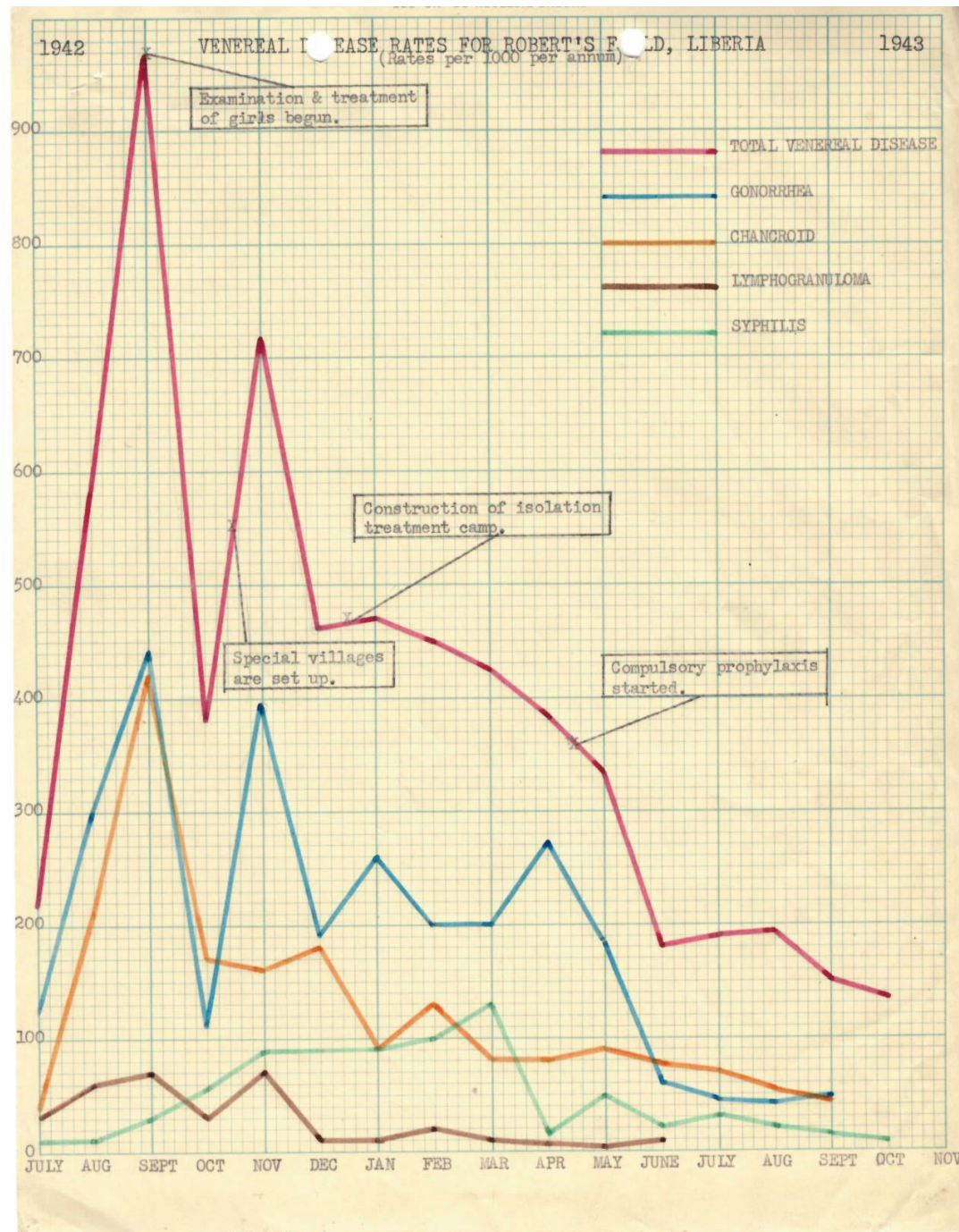


Figure 4: Documenting the declining number of venereal disease cases as new restrictions were imposed. It accompanied Traenkle's report to the Chief Surgeon. Major Herbert L Traenkle, Middle East Venereal Disease Control Officer, to Chief Surgeon, USAFIME, Dec 4, 1943 (Traenkle report); 726.1 Venereal Diseases and Reports, USAFIL, 1943-1945; USAFIL VD – USAFIME; Box 779; Decimal File 1941-1946, 721.5-728; Records of the Africa-Middle East Theater of Operations (World War II Army), Records Group 497; NACP. Used under Fair Use.

After the bulk of Task Force #5889 left Liberia for North Africa, the army continued operating the tolerated villages despite a reduction in manpower so dramatic the 25th Station Hospital dropped from a 250-bed hospital to a 75-bed hospital.⁴⁵⁷ The nurses left in November 1943 as male orderlies took over their duties. The force in Liberia further reduced and the 25th Station dropped to fifty beds, yet the tolerated villages operated throughout 1944 with an increase in venereal infections occurring the last months of the year as penicillin was made available to the 25th Station Hospital. In November, the remaining medical officers met and determined the increase resulted from more visits to off-limit villages and the army obtained permission from the Liberian government to test local women. Of the 222 women tested in ten villages near the army base only fourteen were disease free; 176 were infected with gonorrhea and 32 with “mixed venereal infections.” The army treated all the infected women and venereal rates among the soldiers decreased again.⁴⁵⁸ In June 1945, the army closed the tolerated villages. As expected the venereal disease rate increased, but by then the Allies had already secured victory in Europe and two months later Japan surrendered in August. Plus, near the end of 1944 the US sent a number of African American medical personnel to Liberia as part of a health mission who in turn started taking care of local diseases, including venereal diseases.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁷ 25th station history, 1943; Ivory-Bertram, *Nurse*, 89-90; and Rowny, *Smokey Joe*, 112.

⁴⁵⁸ 25th station history, 1943; History of the 25th Station Hospital, 1944; 25th Station; Box 266; WWII Administrative Records, 1940-1949; RG 112; NACP; History of the 25th Station Hospital from 1 January 1944 to 1 August 1944; 25th Station; Box 105; WWII Administrative Records, 1940-1949; RG 112; NACP; and History of the 25th Station Hospital for November and December 1945; 25th Station; Box 105; WWII Administrative Records, 1940-1949; RG 112; NACP.

⁴⁵⁹ History of the 25th Station Hospital, 1945; 25th Station; Box 266; WWII Administrative Records, 1940-1949; RG 112; NACP; and History of the 25th Station Hospital for November and December 1945.

When the US army arrived in Liberia they increased the labor and economic options available to Liberian women. Women chose to leave their farms and migrate to the coast near the army base. They chose sexual labor as opposed to washing clothes or cooking for the army. They chose whether they worked in a brothel, in the tolerated villages, or in their own villages. They chose to undergo medical treatment or not and cared for offspring. They chose the number of soldiers they entertained, bartered for goods, negotiated their own prices, and many prospered. They encountered violence, but also defended themselves. Liberian women found themselves on the receiving end of American ideals about race, ethnicity, class, and gender, but rather than hinder them as occurred to African American women in the US it raised their value as laborers, as companions, and as sex workers while also increasing their autonomy.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

“But the prostitution business took a decided turn as the youthful females became detribalized and “armyized” enough to fearlessly bring mats with them and cater to soldiers beneath a storage shed – for a better price.”

~ George “Doc” Abraham, *The Belles of Shangri-La and Other Stories of Sex, Snakes, and Survival from World War II* (2000)⁴⁶⁰

The above quote fairly encapsulates what occurred during World War II when the United States army sent a predominantly African American troop to Liberia. Abraham could easily substitute “colonized” or “civilized” for the word “detribalized,” and no doubt exist that “armyized” is another word for “militarized.” The only factor missing from Abraham’s statement used in this intersectional analysis is eugenics; however, the scientific racism associated with it under the guise of social hygiene permeates his memoir. When the US went to war, society was militarized along arbitrary racial, ethnic, gendered, and classed assumptions fostered under the pseudoscience of eugenics. As a product of American society, the army exported these arbitrary ideological assumptions as fixed absolutes to Liberia. Although not technically an American colony, the US none-the-less colonized Liberia. American colonization picked up during the war as the US appropriated the Liberian people, their labor, and their bodies. The intersectional forces of militarization, eugenics, and colonialism allowed the army to facilitate the creation and management of a segregated and industrialized system of sex work unparalleled in US history.

As the second chapter explained, eugenicists used faulty methodologies to determine evolutionary fitness. Social hygienists cast African Americans as unfit for a number of erroneous reasons including hypersexuality, immorality, and a lack of self-

⁴⁶⁰ Abraham, *The Bells of Shangri-La*, 82.

control. Under this fabricated premise several African American men lost their lives due to false accusations of raping European American women. In contrast, European American men were considered strong, protective, and virile, but in danger of being lured astray by deceptive and seductive women. Eugenicists cast women as less evolved physically, intellectually, and emotionally than men which justified the controls placed on women. Women who asserted themselves sexually or veered too far from the acceptable upper-middle-class narrative of female performance were considered unfit and accused of prostitution. These accusations disproportionately affected poor and working-class women. African American women experienced the oppression associated with both their race and their gender that deemed them the least evolved and most lascivious. The degrading oversexualization of African American women provided society with an excuse to ignore or accept European American men's sexual abuse of African American women. Elite African American women employed the politics of respectability to protect themselves against accusations of promiscuity, and used racial uplift as a way to assert their ideals of civilized behavior on other members of the African American community. The inherent racism, classism, and sexism within eugenicists' conclusions provided justification for a social hierarchy that placed African Americans below European Americans, the upper- and middle-classes above the poor and working-classes, and women under the control of men.

During the First World War and World War II, venereal disease decreased the army's manpower, or strength, and led to programs that attempted to control sexual behavior, such as docking a soldier's pay for absence of duty on account of venereal disease since infection was avoidable through abstinence. Social hygienists, as part of the

Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA), controlled the army's venereal disease policy during the Great War, and framed venereal disease as a moral failure. By associating venereal disease with morality, the upper- and middle-class reasserted their norms regarding race, ethnicity, gender, and class on society in order to reaffirm their own place at the top of the hierarchy. The CTCA attempted to eliminate the sexual double standard that held women accountable for their sexual behavior, but that did not also hold men responsible for failing to control themselves. Unfortunately, the CTCA's emphasis on wholesome recreation and abstinence as a means of balancing the gender scales backfired, and society scapegoated women, especially poor and working-class women, for spreading venereal disease. For the most part, the CTCA ignored the needs of the African American soldiers believing them to be less fit and too immoral to help. The African American community tried to entertain and provide facilities for soldiers, but economics made this difficult to duplicate on a scale similar to the CTCA and venereal disease continued unabated within the African American community.

While a social stigma lingered around venereal disease as the country prepared for the Second World War, a new surgeon general, Thomas Parran, advocated treating venereal disease as a medical problem instead of a moral problem. Venereal disease was widespread in society, and thusly the army as well. Once again, society blamed women for infecting soldiers and positioning the nation to lose the war due to troops too sick to fight, but the army's policy toward soldier's sexual behavior changed. Officially the army endorsed abstinence, but also acknowledged men's sexual urges. While some saw sex as a reward for men who put their lives in danger, others tacitly encouraged sexual aggression as a means of maintaining an aggressive edge in battle. Following Parran's

advice, the army developed practical guidelines to controlling venereal disease that included education and prophylactics, and near the end of the war the government repealed the act mandating soldier's forfeit pay for contracting venereal disease. Women continued to face charges of prostitution for sexual behavior, real or imagined, that digressed from the chaste narrative set forth by the upper- and middle-classes. The Eight-Point Agreement and the May Act made sex work near army bases illegal due to fears of wily women taking advantage of naïve soldiers. In contrast to excusing soldier's sexual conduct, servicewomen were expected to be asexual. The discourse around venereal disease in respect to European Americans changed to one of health, but social hygiene programs for African Americans continued to frame venereal disease as a moral problem. However, venereal disease disproportionately affected the African American community because of a lack of resources, not a lack of morals.

An African American's social class greatly affected their health. As with the European American community, the poor and working class had higher rates of infection. Those with greater economic resources, education, and access to quality healthcare had lower rates of venereal disease, and some African American community's venereal disease rates were comparable to or lower than European Americans. African Americans relied upon class and racial uplift to fight scientific racism and claims they were unfit and immoral. The talented tenth, or the elite African Americans, felt responsible for setting an example for others to follow and for lifting up the race as a whole in hopes of attaining respect from and equality with European Americans. Upper-class African Americans adopted the ideologies of upper- and middle-class European American social hygienists,

and the elite attempted to persuade the rest of the African American community to follow their example.

The philosophy of racial uplift carried over into the army. African American officers in the army experienced racial discrimination due to eugenics, and the upper- and middle-class African Americans combined social hygiene and racial uplift to fight venereal disease among African American soldiers. The African American physicians and nurses stationed in Liberia participated in the army's efforts to lower venereal rates through efforts to educate, prevent, and treat soldiers, as occurred in other theaters, but in Liberia the African American officers also helped industrialize sex work which was at odds with the army's desire for nurses to "make friends" with Liberians considering the army stigmatized sex work. Outside of militarization, colonialism influenced how African American nurses determined which Liberian women to befriend and which not to befriend.

Colonists often justify colonization by claiming to bring civilization to primitive people, but colonists use the metropole's ideologies as markers for civilized and primitive behavior. While imposing their own ideologies on the colonized, the colonizers simultaneously discount, at best, behavior that differs from their own and at worst attempts to completely eradicate what they deem as savage. Since the colonizers in Liberia had the same skin color as those they colonized most do not consider Liberia a colony, let alone an American colony. A cursory search of Liberia on the internet produces numerous websites claiming Liberia and Ethiopia as the only African nations never to be colonized. The impetus to view people with the same skin color as one group

is a hallmark of eugenics and persist to this day, but this mistaken view completely ignores the actions of the people that settled in Liberia and founded the nation.

When African Americans as free people of color and as former slaves from the US settled in Liberia they carried with them and retained US markers of civilization. They colonized the west coast of Africa and created the nation of Liberia using the US as a model. The colonists used US documents as templates for the Liberian Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of 1847. They established three branches of government based on the US branches of government and patterned the flag on the US flag. Rather than eat food indigenous to Liberia, the colonists imported food from the US. They erected homes similar to southern plantations and wore clothing better suited for the US than Liberia. And, when the “Scramble for Africa” occurred, Liberia participated just as surely as any European nation. Although it usually failed to demonstrate “effective occupation” as determined by the Brussels Act of 1890, it did participate in the Scramble. Liberia lost considerable land due to less than stellar efforts to colonize the hinterland, and was only able to fight off threats to its sovereignty with US support and intervention. This further solidified Liberia’s de facto colonization by the US. Just as Britain colonized Sierra Leone and France colonized Guinea and the Ivory Coast, so too did the US similarly colonized Liberia. The African American colonists strove to recreate an American society in Liberia with themselves, as Americo-Liberians, at the top of the social hierarchy and those they colonized, or the rural Liberians, as subordinates. When the African American nurses were stationed in Liberia, they too relied on US ideologies of civilized behavior to determine social hierarchy, and they did not consider sex work civilized.

Racial uplift in the US is easily related to colonialism when analyzing one of the underlying purpose of each which is to alter another's behavior to more closely match one's own. Within colonialism, colonizers impose their own ideas of civility on the colonized, and deem mores, behavior, and dress that differs from the colonizers as uncivilized. Within racial uplift, elite African American attempted to instill in working-class and poor African Americans their own ideas about civility as well, and deemed dancing, promiscuity, drinking alcohol, and a host of other activities as uncivilized behavior. In Liberia, the African American nurses were expected to conduct themselves in a wholesome manner, and to set an example for other to aspire to attain.

The army expected the nurses to befriend Liberians, but to avoid Liberians considered to be uncivilized. The nurses considered Liberians that adopted or were willing to adopt US customs civilized and befriended them as evidenced by Second Lieutenant Gertrude M. Ivory's visits with the Americo-Liberian couple and her teaching other women about home medicine. However, Ivory's narrative and interview completely ignore the sex workers as if they never existed. The workers adopted US customs such as dancing, drinking, and wearing make-up. Not only did the workers engage in sex, but they accepted compensation for doing so. The sex workers exemplified everything the African American nurses considered uncivilized, and thusly the nurses did not befriend them or any other Liberian women that engaged in the same type of behavior.

The army accepted prostitution away from the continental US as a means of pacifying the soldiers, and it provided health care to sex workers under the guise of maintaining soldiers' health, but the army's policy toward commercial sex in Liberia differed from its policies in Japan, France, and Hawaii. In Japan, soldiers legally

purchased sex at the Recreational Amusement Associations (RAA) set up by the Japanese government, but venereal disease rates increased and the army placed the RAAs off-limit. Sex workers took to the streets to meet servicemen and usually restricted their interactions to one group of soldiers based on the soldier's skin color. As troops marched across war-torn France, little temporary pockets of army facilitated sex work sporadically popped up based on individual commander's approach to sexuality. Since the army did not officially or unofficially recognize these operations no uniform management structure existed, and African American soldiers often found themselves being accused of rape when conducting business with freelance sex workers. In Hawaii, the army assisted the local government in maintaining a sex district that existed prior to the war. The city set up ordinances by which the brothels operated and the army provided medical care to sex workers to control venereal disease. To prevent European American and African Americans soldiers from using the sexual services of the same women, the city barred African Americans from accessing the brothels.

In Liberia, the US army controlled most aspects of the commercial sex available to soldiers and industrialized it. While the army had no control over Monrovia brothels, it controlled which soldiers received passes to visit the capital and how frequently the passes were issued. This effectively controlled which soldiers visited the brothels. The army placed villages beyond their control off-limits to soldiers and court martialed those who violated its orders. Despite the restrictions placed on them, soldiers continued to seek companionship with Liberian women. Under the scientifically racist notion that people of African descent were unable to control their sexuality, were unconcerned with their health, and that European Americans were not attracted to Africans the army

justified its creation of the tolerated villages and who gained access to them. Eugenics and militarization made African American nurses subordinate to male officers, but they were not colonized and the army tasked them with overseeing the Liberian workers.

The army recruited up to six hundred Liberian women to live in the tolerated villages and sell their companionship. It built huts to rent to the women and provided them with entertainment, sanitation, food, and medical care if the women agreed to abide by the army's rules and submitted to militarization. The army controlled who visited the tolerated villages, but the women negotiated their own terms and could refuse service to anyone. The army mandated weekly venereal inspections and isolated infected sex workers to provide treatment. It also mandated all soldiers that visited the villages administer a chemical prophylactic before leaving. The women profited from their labor, and left the tolerated villages if they felt the army placed too many controls over their labor. European American officers also resisted controls over their sexuality and continued to visit off-limit villages which the army largely ignored. The segregation of industrialized sex work increased racial tensions and Liberian women's commodification and value, but it also helped to lower the venereal disease rate among the soldiers and thusly the army considered this exceptional endeavor a success.

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