The James Blair Historical Review

The College of William & Mary’s Premier Undergraduate History Publication

Volume 8 (Fall 2017)
The James Blair Historical Review
Volume 8 (Fall 2017)

EDITORIAL BOARD
Barrett Mills, Editor-in-Chief
Keon Shahidi, Managing Editor
Abby Roberts, Managing Editor

PEER REVIEWERS
Abby Whitlock
Ben Israel
Riley Busbee
Molly Duke
Jacob Manvell
Ana Murias

Natalie White
Luke Campopiano
Zoë Connor
Sara Donovan
Samantha Slusher
Matthew Cohen

Taylor Galanides
Sara Clark
Sonja Sponholz
Grant Wong
Joe Teknus

FACULTY ADVISOR
Dr. Ayfer Karakaya-Stump
EDITOR’S NOTE

With this eighth volume of the *James Blair Historical Review*, our editorial board is proud to continue our journal’s long-standing tradition of publishing original, high-quality undergraduate research in the field of history. However, we also broke with tradition by accomplishing something never before seen in our journal’s history—producing a publication in the Fall of the academic year. Our journal has always published one volume per year in the Spring, but in an effort to enhance our journal’s impact, we resolved to pursue a Fall as well as a Spring issue. Soliciting submissions, training and assigning peer reviewers, selecting and subsequently editing the best articles—all of these processes which normally occur over an entire year, we had to complete in just one semester. While the task did not prove easy, our team of editors and peer reviewers worked tirelessly to achieve our formidable goal, and I cannot thank them enough for their efforts.

I would also like to thank all of the authors who submitted their work to us over the past few months. We received many great papers and enjoyed learning about a variety of historical topics throughout the review process. Unfortunately, we could only select four articles to publish in this issue, but I am extremely pleased with the results. The following papers truly embody the characteristics our journal cherishes the most—originality, depth, and impressive utilization of primary sources. Based on the variety of our included articles, I guarantee that you will learn something new by reading through this issue.

On that note, I would especially like to thank you, the reader, for taking the time to engage with our journal. We hope that you enjoy the subsequent 70+ pages of exceptional historical research, and we hope that your experience will lead to you to eagerly anticipate the next issue of the *James Blair Historical Review* when it is published in Spring 2018.

Sincerely,
Barrett Mills
Editor-in-Chief
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**The Map Without Geography:**
The Historical Interpretation of an Allegorical Map

*Gerardo Martinez Cordeiro* 6

**A Life After Bondage:**
The Hopes of Slave Spirituals and Prayers in the Antebellum South

*Astride Chery* 22

**Shocking New Imperialism:**
Italian Settlement and Development in Ethiopia, 1936-1941

*Shivani Dimri* 40

**Rolling Toward Integration:**
The 761st Tank Battalion in the Second World War

*Patrick Pacious* 57
**MEET THE AUTHORS**

**Gerardo Martinez Cordeiro** is originally from Puebla, Mexico, but grew up in Mexico City. He is currently a Junior at Boston College, where he is double majoring in International Studies with an Economics Concentration and History. Gerado is also a Classical Studies Minor. His academic interests include Mexican History, Spanish History, the History of the Roman Catholic Church, International Finance, Military History, and Diplomacy. He has studied abroad in Rome, Italy, and will be abroad in the Universidad de Deusto in Bilbao, Spain during the Spring 2018 semester. Gerado was granted an Advanced Study Grant at Boston College to study the Diplomatic Relationship between Spain and the Papal States between 1492 and 1571 using archival records.

**Astride Chery** is currently a Junior in the Boston College Lynch School of Education. She studies Applied Psychology & Human Development and History, and also has a strong interest in English Literature. As a former student of the National Institute of American History and Democracy’s Pre-Collegiate Program (hosted at the College of William & Mary), Astride is especially excited to contribute to the *James Blair Historical Review*. She plans on attending graduate school to earn a degree in Higher Education.
Shivani Dimri is currently a third year at the University of Virginia double majoring in History and Environmental Sciences. Her research interests include Italian colonialism, British colonialism, and environmental history. As a member of UVa’s History Distinguished Majors Program, she is beginning her thesis research on the role of aerial photography in the Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia from 1935 to 1941. Shivani is also an advisor through the University’s Asian/Asian American peer advising group and works as a moderator for an English as a Second Language class. Shivani is from Falls Church, Virginia and hopes to return to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area after graduation to pursue a career in public service.

Patrick Pacious graduated from the University of Virginia last May with a major in History. He helped launch the UVA Club Handball Team and played on it for all four years. When not reading (he recently finished Seabiscuit and The Boys in the Boat), Patrick spends his leisure time poring over his fantasy football team and avidly supporting the Redskins, although he unfortunately holds the latter responsible for his pessimistic worldview. Patrick wishes to avoid joining the American rat-race as a post-graduate, and while he tends to not take things too seriously, his article proves an exception of which he is quite proud.
The Map Without Geography: The Historical Interpretation of an Allegorical Map

By Gerardo Martinez Cordeiro

Mythological and allegorical interpretations serve to tell the story of an empire or civilization. Different symbols used to portray specific characteristics vary according to time, the actual standing of the country on national and international conditions or situations, and the particular nation depicting itself. The illustrations above the “Mapa de España y Portugal: dividido en sus actuales provincias y orlado con los de las posesiones ultramarinas españolas y los planos de las principales ciudades”—henceforth the Mapa—are no exception to these observations about allegorical representations. This map (featured above) was commissioned in 1852 for Queen Isabel II and is the craftwork of Pedro Martín de López. He became apprentice to Juan López, geographer and cartographer of the Spanish crown, and followed in his father’s footsteps in the art of cartography. As the title relates, the map takes as its subject Spain and Portugal including the provincial divisions, overseas territories, and principal cities of the Spanish

1 “Mapa de España y Portugal: dividido en sus actuales provincias y orlado con los de las posesiones ultramarinas españolas y los planos de las principales ciudades,” Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya.
2 “Martín de López, Pedro,” Biblioteca Digital de la Real Academia de la Historia.
Empire. Being a map designed for the monarch, it demonstrates a particular narrative that Queen Isabel II wished to portray about her country. More specifically, the allegorical representations and illustrative images present in the *Mapa* reflect how the Spanish monarchy wished to portray its nation’s glorious past along with the endless possibilities of a bright Spanish future. The simple fact that these illustrations—a map of Spain in and of themselves—are printed on a map speaks volumes about the implicit symbolism attached and parallels drawn between the images and the geographical places depicted below. Additionally, the presence of allegorical and mythological figures represents the might and power of the Spanish monarchy and empire, and while no other maps show the same amount and degree of imagery, parallels in other visual and verbal traditions exist. The cartographer, in including these images, aimed to tap into Spain’s rich past, powerful condition, and wealthy status to depict Spain and its empire in the nineteenth century.

**The Column Mythology**

Mythological symbolism abounds in the depictions of Spain in the *Mapa*, which tie back even to the country’s ancient Greek and Roman background. The famed pillars or columns of Hercules represent the predominant example of this allusion in the map. They function as part of the twelve labors of Hercules, in which the hero had to reach the end of the Mediterranean Sea to obtain the cattle of Geryon, an enormous red monster. Hercules eventually slayed the monster and its dog, and in reaching this extreme of the sea established the “end of the world.” The Spanish monarchy has utilized this mythological device since the sixteenth century. Charles I was the first to use it, and it represented both a connection to his lineage and office as well as a symbol of his conquests and the reach of his empire, spreading over the end of the known world and past the columns of Hercules into uncharted territory.

The Spanish monarchy as an institution adopted the columns as part of its mythology, charging them with allegory and symbolism and using them as a link to a more civilized past. Following the Greco-Roman tradition of tracing heritage back to a hero, the Spanish mythological account traces back to Hercules. The notion of this connection to the civilized Greco-Roman hero originates in the *Historia de rebus Hispanie*, or *Historia de los hechos de España*. The Catholic influence over Spanish culture, however, gives this account an interesting twist: the Iberian people, as per the *Historia de rebus Hispanie*, can be traced back to Tubal, the youngest son of Japheth, and grandson of Noah (I, I-III). Following the development of the stories of the Great Flood and the...
Tower of Babel, Tubal and his children crossed over the Pyrenees and settled in Spain. With the passage of time, these people received many rulers, one of which was Geryon. Following this account, we find that Geryon lived as a wealthy prince and herdsman who possessed three kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula: Galicia, Lusitania and Betica. The Historia de rebus Hispanie attributes this to the mythological characteristic of Geryon’s three heads (I, IV). Hercules, then, occupied all of Asia Minor and subsequently colonized Spain; he killed Geryon, conquered his kingdoms, built cities, (I, IV-V) and appointed Hispan, a nobleman he had raised since adolescence, as king of what he would name Spain after its ruler (I, V).7

The Spanish monarchs had successfully tied their right of power and rule to their lineage and office. Even if they were not direct blood relatives of Tubal, Geryon, or Hercules, the mythological allegory consolidated the authority of a monarchy that was instituted by a civilized Greco-Roman hero over an uncivilized people.8 The coming of a cultured Hercules, and the authority and superiority that developed from his civilized state, served as a justification for the nobility and monarchy to maintain control and dominion over the Iberian Peninsula. The coming of a civilized Hercules resembles the coming of the apostle Santiago, who would bring the Christian faith to the Iberian Peninsula, going as far west as Santiago de Compostela—a point widely considered the end of the world. This weaving of a Catholic tradition into the mythological Spanish background gives continuity to an overarching theme of mingling the Church with the authority of the State.

Ultimately, the columns speak of the colonizing power of Spain and its ruler, who was to channel the Herculean spirit of conquest of the savage and uncultured land. This, combined with the Catholic mission of the expansion of the faith and the salvation of the souls of those who did not believe in that faith, provided the backbone of the Spanish colonization expansion, also shown in the Mapa.

The Queen and the Lion: Monarchical Authority and Proto-Nationalism

The map’s center shows a woman grasping an olive branch and a staff with a sign that reads: “ISABEL 2da.” She rests over the Spanish coat of arms. The symbolism of this woman is twofold: it is both the Queen whose name is shown in the staff, Isabel II, and the nation personified as a woman over which she reigned. The items the woman touches harbor different symbolisms according to each of the interpretations. The lion and the coat of arms are but extensions of the allegorical symbolism of the queen and her authority.

---

The woman as a queen illustrates the symbolism commonly associated with Isabel II. She is crowned and dressed in impeccable clothing. She also possesses a staff that bears her name and, more importantly, an olive branch. Isabel II was closely connected to the olive branch, especially in the uncertain time the country faced. Queen Isabel II remained adamant about being associated with peace and even more so at the start of her reign, which was questioned from its beginning. At the moment of her rise to the throne, the Courts of Nobles wrote the following passage:

Those of us who lived in those fatal days, who lived with mourning in the heart and blushing in the forehead, under the Low Empire of the Castilian Monarchy, of that great and magnificent Monarchy, of seeing in the distance of history, when its lion carried with ease the crown of two worlds as if it were a light burden. Today its noble lion and its magnificent crown lie in the dust: the former without having one who sees or fears it, and the other without one who envies or lifts it, much in the way of a lonely jewel. That is the Monarchy, a fabrication of our Kings: that is the Monarchy, product of the revolutions. *Et nunc intelligite.*

Spain’s gradual decline necessitated the queen to associate herself with greatness. By the beginning of her reign in 1833, Spain faced many challenges to its imperial aspirations. The colonial possessions in the American Continent had, for the most part, gained their independence since the beginning of the nineteenth century, and Spain herself had just undergone liberation from Franco-Napoleonic rule. The rise of Isabel II to the throne constituted an end to a civil war which took place in the 1820s. The new queen demonstrated a willingness to correct the mistakes her predecessor made in an attempt to unite the Spanish people under one rule—her own.

This sentiment of unity and peace is also laid out in the allegorical play *La Oliva y El Laurel* (the olive and the laurel), which was commissioned by the queen for her inauguration to the throne. The play outlines the debate between the Genius of Peace and the Genius of War regarding the role of Spain in both. In his captivity by the Genius of War, the Genius of Peace reflects with Time and Good Faith, longing for his return to Spain. The play criticizes the lack of unity in Spain and the absence of peace from the kingdom, while at the same time praising Isabel II for the prospects her reign shall bring about. It concludes with the characters appearing at the palace of the Genius of Peace, where the two predominant features are the olive tree (denominated the tree “of peace”) and the splendor of Isabel’s smile, which floods the palace halls. Then, all the characters describe the ways in which they will favor her reign. The presence of the olive tree and Isabel’s illustriousness and glow—shown in her crown—reveals the extent to which the monarchy used these symbolisms, as well as the affinity that people would have to accepting these associations with the queen.

---

9 *Discusión de las Cortes*, 262.
10 D. Manuel Angelon, *Isabel II: Historia de la Reina de España*, 531-532.
The allegorical representation of Spain as a woman existed as part of a historical and cultural narrative, which was reinvigorated after 1812. This narrative trend followed the signing of the Constitution of 1812 and sought to show that Spain, with its particular culture, symbols, language, and values, claimed part to a pre-existing notion of a Spanish nation. Given the weak state of contemporary nationalism, the Spanish monarchy sensed that a sense of nostalgia could rejuvenate the populace. Moreover, the struggle against Napoleon, the gathering of the Courts of Cadiz, and the redaction of the new Constitution (1812) represent the appearance of a new Spanish national sentiment. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries experienced a mixture between the crisis and decadence and the struggle for reform and modernization, and from this combination arose a series of proto-nationalist intellectual reactions. This map—with the allegorical representations in the heading—claims part of that intellectual tradition, which countered the negative point of view from foreigners with imagery of glory and might.

**Progress and Pride: From the Train to the Printing Press**

Spain lagged behind in terms of the industrial revolution transpiring in the eighteenth century. Starting early on in England, the Industrial Revolution did not arrive in Spain until the nineteenth century. This comes as no surprise, since Spain had been rocked by war and turmoil for most of the early nineteenth century. The infrastructure that did exist desperately required improvement and updating, as it stood antiquated and inefficient by the standards of the time. Keenly aware of this reality, Queen Isabel II planned for great investment in the country’s future when the war and the pressures of her generals would allow. She diverted sumptuous amounts of money from royal gifts towards machinery for industry and forgave an almost equal amount of debt to raise an interest in investment in Spain from abroad. The queen aimed to construct a net of railroads to connect the different Spanish cities with each other and with the rest of Europe. She also sought to elicit nostalgia and pride from the pre-existing Spanish infrastructure, and one of the industries that most benefited from this attention was the Spanish printing industry.

The dream of a developed railroad network, which would see progress by the hand and leadership of Queen Isabel II, is evident in the background of the allegorical map. At the time, Spain was undergoing what was known as the “great moderate stage” in its economy. This stage proved crucial in Spanish economic life during the nineteenth century. The economic agenda of the moderates, spearheaded by Isabel II, began the

14 Carmen Llorca, Isabel II y su Tiempo, 126.
equipment of the modern industrial complex, supported the textile industry and financial capitalism, and favored the construction of railroads. Such initiatives arrived at a key moment, and are likely both cause and effect of a larger Spanish identity as interconnected with other Europeans. The train system also possessed importance for bringing the country together and for mobilization during the wars that made for a turbulent period in Spanish history. The creation and expansion of a railway system would also connect the industrious periphery of the nation with Madrid and the major cities and ports throughout the country. Lastly, the railroad industry boasted a sizeable proportion of the working population, allowing for businesses to bloom. The symbolic train appears in the background as it welcomes the viewer to the glory of the Spanish cities it connects and the enterprises it helped to grow.

Spain’s printing is also shown to substantial extent in the Mapa. A great printing press stands tall next to the lion. The machine reflected one of the most benefiting industries at the time. Its location to the left of the lion—representing the West on a map—is significant for the origins of Spanish printing. There are two attributed origins of lithography in Spain. The first theory assumes it traveled from Germany under the influence of Gutenberg. It would have been well developed past the point of Spanish printing, given its introduction into Spain by 1475, about 35 years after its creation by Gutenberg. However, the second (and more plausible) theory asserts that the Spanish printing press instead began by 1470 in Sevilla.

The Spanish printing method, originating in Sevilla, stood out from the German one in two particular ways: its Xylography (or wood edging) not found in the German production of the time, and its printing in Castilian Spanish, Valencian, Catalan, and Latin compared to the Germans who only printed in Latin due to a lack of demand of prints in the local vernaculars of Spain in the German market. The wooden plates are shown in the Mapa, resting against the press as if exhibiting their creativity in an artful manner, just as the coat of arms rests between the woman and the lion. It becomes an emblem of Spanish culture and technology. A plate that reads “Malaga” marks the press itself. Not only was the press made in Spain, but the whole process—from the making of the machine to the printing of books in Spanish or any of the local dialects—encapsulated a Spanish tradition, carrying with it a sense of pride and nationalism. The printing of books in the regional vernaculars is also exemplified in

15 Vives, Manual de Historia Económica de España, 557.
16 Vives, Manual de Historia Económica de España, 552.
17 Manuel Tuñón de Lara, La España del Siglo XIX, 104.
18 José L. Aranguren et al., Historia Social de España: Siglo XIX, 244.
19 Francisco Vindel, Origen de la Imprenta en España, 10, Map II.
20 Vindel, Origen de la Imprenta en España, 12, Map III.
21 Vindel, Origen de la Imprenta en España, 4.
22 Vindel, Origen de la Imprenta en España, 3; lamination 26.
the header, as the books printed in these languages stand as symbols of development and education.

The Spanish printing industry marked a truly unique process in the fifteenth century, and not many technological advances saw need to improve it. However, by the nineteenth century (as pointed out in the Mapa), a new development would revolutionize the trade. The printing press shown in the header is steam-generated. This allowed for a more efficient method of printing and facilitated a boom of scientific and technological advances that occurred throughout the nineteenth century.

Arts, Sciences, and the Universities

Closely related to the strength of the press, the contemporary Spanish academic world found itself greatly impacted by the wars. During this time, two main trends in terms of culture and education existed: a “republican” trend focused on the middle class—with increasing support from a moderate monarchy and the technical sciences—and an ilustrado trend with an emphasis on the humanities and social sciences from the Spanish intellectual and social elite.23 It is possible that the cartographer had knowledge of this rift in the academic system, as he includes elements within the Mapa designed for a bourgeois audience. The government of Isabel II wished to impulse this growing middle class, and thus it became part of the national narrative.

Queen Isabel II found fault over Spain’s lackluster education system, especially at the university level. In Isabel’s academic agenda as well as the many reconstruction plans that followed Spain’s armed conflicts, one thing proved constant: the domination of physics (then understood as the “useful” science) and technique, as demonstrated by the creation of astronomic observatories, physics laboratories, and engineering schools, in addition to the collections and assemblies of machinery.24 The Courts of Cadiz, for example, elaborated a general plan of Public Instruction that heavily favored the sciences when establishing the Ministry of Education. However, the exorbitant cost and a lack of political continuation hampered the plan’s ambitions.25 All the end goals of the Queen’s education agenda featured into the Mapa, in addition to the recognition that this educational development represented the key to economic success and industrial growth. Apart from numerous printed books, a series of beakers (used within scientific laboratories) lead to a factory. Measuring instruments, a compass, and a piece of paper with tracings also make an appearance in the illustration.

The presence of these instruments among the many others that portray culture and science accounts for the interest of the Spanish government at the time to promote these disciplines, seeing them as vital for the development of the already belated Spanish industrial revolution. The technical sciences, especially in the Universidad Central in Madrid, took a large step in catching up to the other European powers. The foreign ideal, however, remained. Spanish intellectuals still considered themselves inferior to other European thinkers, especially those of neighboring France and far-off England, where movements like the industrial revolution and the enlightenment blossomed. From this realization arose a movement of *ilustrados* who argued for schools to serve as the center of learning of “the first letters and the first truths.” Concern over the advancement of human and social arts and sciences featured prominently for these thinkers.\(^{26}\) The presence of the *ilustrados* is noted in the *Mapa* in the globe, the violin, the musical apparatus, the bust, the paints, and the quill and parchment. Overall, developments in the arts and sciences took place as universities reopened under the mantel of Isabel II. Such a renewal in the Spanish academic spirit and in the increased opening of intellectual possibilities is captured in the center-left of the *Mapa*.

**Commerce and Industry: Northeast Spain and the Contact with the World**

A sizeable toll on the Spanish economy stemmed from the exhausting nature of the Carlist War. The commercial bourgeoisie was weak, the country faced ideological division, and the Spanish economic sphere consisted of a network of isolated rural cells.\(^{27}\) With the advent of the industrial revolution and the increased connection of the railroad, a middle class gradually formed and certain industries in Spain started to pick up steam using new and improved methods of production. The Spanish northeast, and especially Catalonia, led the way in terms of industrial and commercial development during this time. Thus, as a region mostly loyal to Queen Isabel II, it is placed up upon a pedestal in the *Mapa* for its regional economic prowess.\(^{28}\) Three sectors of industry flourished the most during this time: the naval, metallurgic, and textile industries.

The War of Independence against France and the various movements for independence in the American colonies had left Spanish commerce depleted, and this in turn sank the naval industry and construction.\(^{29}\) During the 1830s, Spanish merchants no longer possessed the large colonial markets or the sources of gold and silver bullion that they had enjoyed in the previous century. They had also lost the greater part of their mercantile fleet and therefore grew heavily dependent upon foreign shipping. The

\(^{26}\) Gonzalo Anes, *Economía e ‘Ilustración’ en la España del Siglo XVIII*, 203.

\(^{27}\) Josep Fontana, *Cambio Económico y Actitudes Políticas en la España del Siglo XIX*, 17.

\(^{28}\) Jaime Vicens Vives, *Atlas de Historia de España*, Map LXXI.

increase in contraband trade after 1808 also brought the increasing competition of British and French merchants. Only the growth of the Spanish economy after the beginning of Isabel’s reign allowed the native commercial sectors to hold their own.  

30 Catalan shipyards were the first to respond, but only after the law “of the 1st of November of 1837,” which prohibited the importing of foreign ships and any contracts for building of ships in foreign dockyards. 31 The government of Queen Isabel II was well aware of the role the government had to take if it desired to push the national economy forward, and a protectionist attitude made for the crucial first part of this growth.

The naval industry, protected by the Queen and her government, is displayed by the anchor and the scales on the right-hand side of the Mapa (once again, the positioning of these images is relevant, as the most dynamic centers for trade were the Mediterranean and southern ports of Barcelona, Valencia, Alicante, Málaga, Sanlúcar and Cádiz32) as well as the ships transporting Spanish goods abroad (including an armored steam vessel proudly hoisting the Spanish flag). All this showcases the developments made possible by Spanish societies and associations of naval construction, which counted with the royal blessing.

The second industry that developed during this time, and especially because of government help, was the metallurgic industry. Three metals specifically contributed to the height of the Spanish metallurgical sector: copper, lead, and steel. 33 These industries were interrelated with other main sectors of the national economy, such as the railroad network for transportation of primary goods to factories, the investment of capital, the availability of commerce within Spain and with other nations, and the economic policy of the government. Copper and lead were the two most exported metals during the nineteenth century. 34 These industries, however, had already undergone development, thus there was not much registered growth out of the ordinary development of the economy with time.

Steelworks, on the other hand, grew rapidly within Spain and especially so in Asturias during the 1830s. Before the reign of Isabel II, the steel industry in Spain barely existed. However, drawing upon the four-stage theory of the history of steelmaking in Francisco Sánchez-Ramos’ La economía siderúrgica española, the growth of the industry predating the map becomes apparent:

30 Carlos Marichal, Spain (1834-1844), 22.
31 Vicens Vives, Manual de Historia Económica de España, 605.
32 Marichal, Spain (1834-1844), 19.
33 Vicens Vives, Manual de Historia Económica de España, 597.
34 Vicens Vives, Manual de Historia Económica de España, 601.
The first period, beginning by the turn of the century and ending in 1832, was characterized by a primitive steel mill. The difficulties, due to a lack of information, are large, but they follow a general trend of decadence from the XVIII century, characterized by a reduction of the number of steel mills throughout all of Spain.

The second period begins (1832) with the construction of high furnaces and cementation furnaces (based on vegetable coal) of Marbella (Málaga) by the Heredia firm called “La Concepción.” It was the most important one in Spain for thirty years. These types of furnaces spread first to Huelva and Sevilla and then others throughout the north of Spain, including the ones in Bilbao…

Simultaneously there was the establishment of great metallurgical workshops. Barcelona was the frontrunner in this effort… By the end of the period (1855), Spain doubled its consumption of iron.35

Copper and lead provided for a historical support of the metallurgical sector. Steel helped expand the Spanish mining and metal refinement processes, which experienced unprecedented growths and proved among the fastest growing in Europe, precluding other considerable mining sectors in the continent. This situation, emboldened by the great demand for copper, lead, and steel in the global market, manifested as a point of pride for the crown, and the large building in the central left of the map reflects such a sentiment. It could be the Marbella steel mill “La Concepción,” as it is in the fashion of other European steel mills of the nineteenth century.

The last, but certainly not least, important industry was the textile industry, which gave birth to the first industrial activity in Spain. It also represented the most predominant industry not just because of its history, but also because of the established network of capital and commercial flow within Spain and without. The textile industry embodied the greatest spirit of entrepreneurship, and as such kept close to the heart of national Spanish politics.36 During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the textile industry mainly operated as an artisan industry—it was not centralized but rather local in every town.37 However, the popularity of the trade and its presence in most towns and cities in Spain meant that it harbored a potential for growth and development on a national platform. Starting in 1832 and going well into Isabel II’s reign, a boom in the industry transpired primarily due to two factors: the mechanical loom and the steam engine. After these developments originated in Barcelona, the Catalan textile industry grew to unprecedented heights within the peninsula, with entrepreneurs modeling the industry, shaping its labor techniques, and paying close attention to foreign practices.38 During this time the Spanish textile industry consolidated, geographically grouping the factories and increasing their numbers of workers. The Catalan textile industry

37 Vicens Vives, Manual de Historia Económica de España, 607.
38 Vicens Vives, Manual de Historia Económica de España, 607.
successfully outperformed the peninsular competition and quickly developed into a Catalan staple. Barcelona, as the largest city and port in the region, provided for expert craftsmen, imported primary resources, and plenty of capital to construct factories and develop material. An exponential growth in the import of wool took place which, along with other factors in the production of Spain’s largest and most predominant industry, is avidly pointed out in the Mapa. The commercial crates and packets as well as other commercial symbols (even a weaving wheel) are visible on the right of the map, in the geographical area of Cataluña.

The three Spanish industries that developed the most at the time are all featured in the Mapa, and their representation with geographical accuracy further points to the conclusion that the heading reflects a symbolical map of Spain —and one that says much more about the country than the “ordinary” map below could.

**Agriculture: The Glorious Fields of Spain**

Prevalent in the northeast, and even more so in Cataluña, an agrarian revolution materialized in Spain. The new measurements passed by the government of Isabel II provided incentives to grow. A protection from tariffs or any other barriers of agricultural trade allowed for a quick, and therefore unchecked, expansion of certain agricultural sectors. The most predominant of these sectors was wheat. Salvador Millet defines the consequences of this process of growth: “Transitorily the cultivation of wheat made Spain independent from other nations abroad, but it made [Spaniards] permanently dependent of [their] poverty.”

A readjustment of production eventually compensated for the unregulated growth, but development arrived much later. The increased production of wheat proved helpful up to a certain point. The agricultural growth in general provided for job creation and an increase in wealth to certain sectors of the economy, in addition to providing for an abundant domestic production of food goods. This fact is demonstrated on the Mapa with the depiction of wheat bundles, the sickle, and two massive grain barns in the background. The location of these elements in the foreground is again geographically accurate, as the South boasted the predominant production of agricultural goods.

The presence of a bushel of wheat comes as no surprise, given its status as the most produced agricultural good in Spain during the nineteenth century. The labor in the fields, however, did not catch up to the post-industrial revolution technique, and competition from foreign powers could barely be maintained. At the time of the map’s creation, Spain still enjoyed a boom in terms of wheat production. The economic sector of Spanish agriculture was profitable and well maintained, and the high quality of

---

Spanish wheat served as a source of pride for the middle classes, who engaged with the process of manufacturing and the benefits of the outcome of wheat.⁴³

The Church, the Bull, and the Windmill

If three items associate most closely with the Spanish identity, they would be the Catholic Church, bulls, and windmills. Each play a key role in the national identity and have done so since their initial introductions into the culture. By the time the map was created in 1850, all three of these elements had been inculcated into the national identity.

Since the Middle Ages, the Church had proven central to the Spanish identity. The Camino de Santiago had drawn pilgrims to Compostela since time immemorial, Ferdinand and Isabel had gone down to history as “their Most Catholic Majesties,” and the Spanish monarchs ever since had considered themselves protectors of Holy Mother Church. Some backlash to the rough past of the Spanish Catholic Church occasionally cropped up, dealing primarily with the Inquisition and the aftermath of the Reconquista. Yet, to the common Spanish folk, the Church featured very much at the center of everyday life. Holy days were observed, bell towers from churches marked the hour and reminded all about Mass, and great basilicas and cathedrals rose from the skyline, almost as if reaching God. This last perception can be appreciated in the map—no Spanish city or town was complete without some trace of a church in its skyline.

Bullfights existed in Spain since the times of the Roman Empire. The Romans used gladiatorial fights and other such events as a means of giving back to the people of the empire, which included Hispania after its conquest. The spread of Roman culture and civilization inevitably brought in arenas where gladiatorial fights and animal fights took place. Moreover, the accessibility of animals in the region contributed to the prevalence of bullfights. Vast Spanish pastures made for perfect breeding grounds for bulls, and the increasingly profitable business of cattle breeding for “the games” served as one of Spain’s earliest economic sectors. This tradition of bullfighting prevailed for centuries, ingraining the practice into national culture. Since the mid-eighteenth century, Europeans engaged in an ongoing discussion of “national characters and identities”—about their existence, the factors that played into their formation, and their consequences for (and relationship with) social and political life of the different European kingdoms. Such discussions composed much of Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws.⁴⁴

By the 1840s, a large part of the Spanish literate elite—and it is safe to assume that this also reflects the intentions of the overall population⁴⁵—defended bullfights as something proper and characteristic of the country.⁴⁶ The attention that bullfights received among the literary elites and the great popularity of the fights further entrenched bullfights into the Spanish national narrative, a reality which did not escape the

⁴³ Vicens Vives, Manual de Historia Económica de España, 588.
⁴⁴ Xavier Andreu, “De cómo los toros se convirtieron en fiesta nacional: los «intelectuales» y la «cultura popular» (1790-1850),” 32.
⁴⁵ Andreu, “De cómo los toros se convirtieron en fiesta nacional,” 48.
⁴⁶ Andreu, “De cómo los toros se convirtieron en fiesta nacional,” 28.
The cartographer of the *Mapa*, who included some bulls in the background on the left-hand side. The placement of the bulls, grazing on a pasture right before the train and a large city behind, connects the Spanish past and its traditions with the future and its innovations. The greatness of Spain, as depicted in the *Mapa*, did not grow far from its traditions.

The windmill reflects another characteristic part of the Spanish identity. Apart from its symbolization of industry and agriculture, windmills were (and still are) an important part of the Spanish mythology, due to Don Miguel Cervantes de Saavedra and his transcendent work *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. Given the efficiency of Spanish printing but also in part the popularity of the book, *Don Quixote* established itself as a cornerstone of Spanish literature. The romantic story of a gallant—if delusional—knight who faced great challenges and adventures drew upon Spanish romanticism and creativity. *Don Quixote* also originated a new literary tradition, becoming one of the first novels in the Western literary canon and the most read book in Spanish, second only to the Bible. The protagonist’s likability and fame compelled him to become a type of character; “concept and object, type and individual, coincide in Quixote’s tilting at windmills and the rest of his ironic exploits… But one may also say with just as much accuracy, that “no one but Don Quixote would ever attack a windmill,” thus focusing on the metaphor’s specified and objectivized term.”

The *Mapa* makes reference to this timeless novel by a subtle reminder of it in the background in the form of a windmill. Upon seeing the windmill, the Spanish audience would recall hearing stories of Don Quixote and his fantastic adventures, thus quickly associating that wondrous imagination with the Spanish identity.

**Conclusion**

The *Mapa*, when referring to the header of the “Map of Spain and Portugal: divided in its actual provinces and surrounded by the Spanish offshore possessions and the plans of the major cities,” is in itself a map of Spain that tells more of the Spanish narrative and identity than any cartographical depiction could. It tells a story of the past of the country, of the influences to the culture, and the future that its monarch, Isabel II, envisioned for the greatness of the empire. In its depiction of methodically chosen images, allegorical representations, and symbolisms, the cartographer managed to craft a complete story of the Spanish reality in the nineteenth century, or at least that which the crown wished to convey to its subjects and foreigners alike.


Angelon, D. Manuel. Isabel II: Historia de la Reina de España. Librería Española, etc.: Madrid, etc., 1862. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/ucm.5309099578


Discusión de las Cortes sobre la Tutela de S. M. la Reina doña Isabela II y su Augusta Hermana, con otros Discursos y Documentos que Esclarecen. [Publicase a espensas de algunos ciudadanos, en homenaje de amor y gratitud á S. M. la Reina Viuda.] Madrid: Compañía Tipográfica, 1842. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044080132665


Martin de Lopez, Pedro and Alabern, Ramon. “Mapa de España y Portugal: dividido en sus actuales provincias y orlado con los de las posesiones ultramarinas españolas
y los planos de las principales ciudades.” Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya: Barcelona, 1852.
http://cartotecadigital.icc.cat/cdm/ref/collection/espanya/id/1050

http://www.jstor.org/stable/25759013


A Life after Bondage: The Hopes of Slave Spirituals and Prayers in the Antebellum South

By Astride Chery

As a slave child in South Carolina, Lina Anne Pendergrass tooted cold water and coal around her grandfather’s prayer meeting house. She and the other little girls gave the items to their elders that kneeled, listened, sang, and prayed in the house. In a 1937 interview, Pendergrass recalled that all of the enslaved people on the plantation attended such gatherings. Lina described what eventually happened at these prayer meetings, stating that “dey sot on benches, and den dey would git down on dere knees and pray… Atter while, dey git to singin’ and shoutin’. Den de Spirit done come down and tuck hole of dem. Dat would be when everybody get happy. De, ole rafters creak and shake as de Spirit of de Lord sink deeper and deeper in de hearts of the prayin’ folks…”¹ The ecstatic fervor Lina observed at these slave prayer meetings was not exclusive to her experience. Jenny Greer similarly recalled that “…dey would start shoutin’ en singin’ w’en we lef’ de church…Lawdy hab mercy, how we useter sing.”² Such prayer meetings served as a platform for enthusiastic religious expression in the slave community. Singing, shouting, and praying featured as components of slave spirituality.³ The enslaved shared sentiments reflecting their status and experiences in their spirituals. Moreover, the religious expression found in the songs and prayers, especially when performed in a rapturous camp meeting, provided something akin to temporary relief for the enslaved. Embedded in spirituals and prayers are the wishes and aspirations enslaved people harbored for their futures. With these wishes and aspirations, reflections on life and sorrows, and the consolation found in the performance of the songs, prayers and spirituals emphasize the hardships of life for the enslaved and the hopes for a life apart from enslavement.

Spirituals in particular represent a valuable part of slave testimony. Historian Albert J. Raboteau described spirituals as “religious music which expressed [slaves’] faith in ‘moving, immediate, colloquial, and, often, magnificently dramatic terms.’”⁴ The spirituals developed from an uncertain combination of African tradition, biblical stories, and Protestant, Anglo-American influence. Additionally, the songs served as forms of communication, expression, and resistance. As John W. Blassingame contended, spirituals often “reflect[ed] the day-to-day experience of the slave, his troubles, and his

¹ Lina Anne Pendergrass, South Carolina, LOC WPA; The WPA narratives can be found at the Library of Congress site: https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/, hereafter cited as LOC WPA, with the interviewee’s name and state, or volume number and state where the name is not given.
² Jenny Greer, Tennessee, LOC WPA.
⁴ Raboteau, Slave Religion, 243.
hopes of release from bondage...” In the voicing of hope for a life after enslavement and communications of secret meetings and sorrows, the spirituals acted as a form of psychological comfort and resistance to slavery.

As Lina Anne Pendergrass and Jenny Greer experienced, spirituals were usually performed in communal settings. At their prayer meetings, secret or not, the enslaved were physically and emotionally united in worship through song. The “intensely personal and vividly communal experience” offered relief to the enslaved in the form of joy, support, religious autonomy, and invocation. The meaning of any one spiritual, then, depended on the community and context in which it was performed.

Despite the ambiguity of interpretation, a careful reading of these songs reveals much about the slave community. Historian John White identified a particular disagreement surrounding the functions of the spirituals. Scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois, White noted, interpreted spirituals as purely religious expressions of escapist beliefs and otherworldly hopes for the future. This interpretation often attributes to the enslaved the characteristic of “excessive religiosity” or passivity in their plight. Others like John Lovell, Jr. contend that the spirituals were secular statements of resistance to enslavement and of earthly hopes for freedom. Such a social view of the spirituals may misrepresent the reality of the verbal and physical resistance demonstrated by the enslaved. Rather than communicating either one message or the other, the spirituals carried multiple meanings and the people singing or shouting the songs articulated both earthly and heavenly aspirations for their futures.

A study of the spirituals of the enslaved would benefit from a simultaneous examination of the prayers of the enslaved. As with spirituals, prayers are mobile methods of expression used both individually and communally. Prayer was also a fundamentally religious act during which the enslaved could communicate their deepest or most immediate worries and wants in a straightforward manner. Prayers and spirituals then held similar influence in the religious life forged during enslavement because they expose some primary concerns of the enslaved. Recognizing whether those concerns involved escapist dreams for the future (such as hopes for an afterlife or even simply death) or earthly aspirations (such as impending emancipation) would better our understanding of both the religious life and mentality of enslaved men and women.

This essay examines spirituals and prayers found in the narratives of ex-slaves collected by the Federal Writer’s Project, a federal relief effort for white collar workers

7 Raboteau, Slave Religion, 247.
during the Great Depression. These Works Progress Administration interviews, conducted from 1936 to 1938, are essential first-hand accounts of the institution of slavery from the perspective of the enslaved. Particularly for those interested in the study of slave religion, folk culture, and spirituals, the WPA narratives should prove useful since the Project focused “on the collection of African American folk customs, folktales, and songs.”

The emphasis on folk culture of ex-slaves does not render the interviews infallible as source material. A glaring issue is that they were collected more than 75 years after emancipation and during the Great Depression. The interviewees were likely to be poor blacks who experienced slavery as children or teenagers. While Historian Paul Escott argues that people remember “events that took place at critical junctures” in their lives, the memories of the interviewees could have been influenced by the length of time between Emancipation and their interviews, by their having experienced slavery in their youths, and by the economic depression of the 1930s. Ex-slave interviews were also primarily conducted by middle class white men and women from the South. Despite an interest in collecting an authentic memory of African-American folk culture, white and black people did not transcend the “contemporary state of race relations in the South” for the sake of these interviews. Instead, one must expect that ex-slaves would be reluctant to detail aspects of their society—most notably in regards to topics like resistance to oppression or beliefs surrounding race relations—to white interviewers. This self-preserving reluctance might limit the degree to which scholars can fully examine ante-bellum slave religion or folk culture using the WPA interviews as sources.

A significant issue that particularly pertains to the study of slave religion or folk culture is that many of the WPA slave interviews underwent various editing processes. What the white interviewers asked about and wrote down was motivated by the need to reinforce their idyllic, paternalistic interpretation of slavery, and the interviews were often biased from the outset. Editing aggravated this problem. The FWP compromised the reliability of the slave narratives by editing not only for the sake of popular publication, but also because they sought to portray a preconceived definition of “authentic” black culture. While the focus on black folk culture and religious and secular songs in the interviews are helpful to historians, one must remain aware of stereotypes and oversimplifications implied by interviewers and editors in the WPA narratives. As Paul Escott asserts in his article, the slave narratives are like other sources filled with problems and biases that could lead to skewed deductions about slavery and which require cautious use when employed for the study of the institution.


16 For scholars discussing the limitations and advantages of the WPA Narratives, see David Thomas Bailey, “A Divided Prism: Two Sources of Black Testimony on Slavery,” *Journal of Southern History* 46
A common thread that arises from the debate about the temporal and otherworldly meanings of spirituals is that slave religion frequently explored the possibility of life after slavery, whether in heaven or on earth. Surely the idea of life beyond bondage, no matter the means, appealed to the enslaved in the form of hope for the future and relief in the present. In this context, the religious songs of the enslaved did not simply project either a temporal or otherworldly worldview. Alternatively, the coexistence of the differing ideologies is made evident by and reflected in the spirituals and prayers themselves.

The prayer meetings Jenny Greer and Lina Anne Pendergrass experienced as children at times were necessary for having a regular, unsupervised religious experience. Access to churches varied from plantation to plantation. Some owners never allowed the enslaved to go to church, while others allowed the enslaved to sit in the back of the church or permitted black preachers to speak to their slaves on Sunday. Even in the most benevolent context, the two latter cases presented a major problem. Ex-slave Harriet Greshman observed that “the preacher must always act as a peacemaker and mouthpiece for the master, so they were told to be subservient to their masters in order to enter the Kingdom of God.” This perversion of religion and the lack of church or formal religious experience drove slaves to the same action Harriet Greshman reported: “But the slaves held secret meetings and had praying grounds where they met a few at a time to pray for better things.”17 Similarly, the enslaved at the plantation Fannie Moore worked on “Never have any church. Effen you go you set in de back of de while folks chu’ch. But de niggers slip off an’ pray an’ hold prayer-meetin’ in the woods…”18 By rejecting the religious contortion of a Christian message from the enslavers and forming their own religious community where full expression was allowed, the enslaved used secret prayer meetings as a form of relief and resistance. So refreshing and uniting were these meetings in Alice Sewall’s community that at the end of each gathering, the community would sing “Our little meetins ’bout to break, chillun we must part. We got to part in body, but hope not in mind. Our little meetin’s bound to break.”19

The spirituals and prayers of the enslaved also stemmed from the ever-present trials of their oppressed state. Praying specifically focused on the immediate problem of slavery and appealed to otherworldly forces for aid, guidance, and earthly freedom. Prayers offered relief in the venting of sorrows and desires, and comfort in the form of possible fulfillment. Fannie Moore described her mother’s emotional experience with prayer: “My mammy she trouble in her heart bout de way they treated. Ever night she pray for the Lawd to git her an’ her chillum out ob de place. One day she plowin’ in the cotton fiel. All sudden like she let out big yell. Den she sta’t singin’ an’ a shoutin’ an’ a whoopin’ an’ a hollowing’... 20” This enslaved mother’s singing, shouting, whooping, and

---

17 Harriet Greshman, Florida, LOC WPA.
18 Fannie Moore, North Carolina, LOC WPA.
19 Alice Sewall, Missouri, LOC WPA.
20 Fannie Moore, North Carolina, LOC WPA.
hollering was encouraged by the genuine comfort she found in realizing that her prayers would be answered and that her sorrows would be resolved. The desires for immediate relief from pain and fulfillment of subsequent aspirations proved sometimes inseparable in prayer. When former slave Victoria Perry was frequently awakened by her mother’s crying and praying, her mother “would tell her that her back was sore from the beating that her master had given her that day.” Her mother would also constantly remind her that “Someday we are going to be free; the Good lord won’t let this thing go on all the time.” Prayer for Perry’s mother served to express both her physical pain and her faith that “the Good lord” would end slavery.

While the mere disclosure of tribulations faced in enslavement and the desire for freedom might have comforted some, not all aspirations for divine and earthly action communicated such optimism. Cecelia Chappel told a story of a slave named Pommpy. Pommpy was “allus prayin fer de good Laws ter tek ‘im ‘way,” and hoped for the “Good Lawd” to “kum en tek Pommpy out ob his misery.”

The need for endurance through the trial of enslavement is most evident in the content of prayers and how often the enslaved prayed. Prayer featured as part of a daily regimen. Former slave Maggie Perkins followed a routine of waking up to “pray and ask Him to bless [her].” The enslaved furthermore did not only pray as a direct result of daily pain and suffering, but also to voice their desire for freedom. Some simply “jest prayed fer strength to endure it to de end.” On one plantation, another slave child was regularly awoken by the sound of “my Ma and Pappy praying for freedom.” Mingo White related that “in de event when de day’s wuk was done de slaves would be foun’ lock in dere cabins prayin’ for de Lawd to free dem lack he did de chillum of Is’ael.” Though he could barely remember her, Tom Robinson recalled that his mother would gather him and other children around the fireplace to pray. His mother prayed for a time when “everybody could worship the Lord under their own vine and fig tree—all of them free.” This biblical reference to “their own vine and fig tree” further emphasizes the strong plea for a time of freedom and a time for the enslaved to finally work for themselves on their own property. Not only did the enslaved verbally express an unwavering hope for temporal freedom through prayer, but they also demonstrated continual endurance through the act of constant prayer. Praying patiently and passionately for years, enslaved people who experienced earthly emancipation in some form could eventually feel that “the lord done heard us.”

Both individually and in community prayer meetings, persistence in prayer could additionally act as a form of resistance to enslavement. Most prayer meetings symbolized acts of defiance in their clandestine and divergent nature. The secret meetings and individual prayers for freedom were often forbidden by masters wishing to maintain a docile slave population. After overhearing a slave “ask God to change the heart of his

---

21 Victoria Perry, South Carolina, LOC WPA.
22 Cecelia Chappel, Tennessee, LOC WPA.
23 Maggie Perkins, Arkansas, LOC WPA.
24 Delia Garlic, Alabama, LOC WPA.
25 Charlie Richardson, Missouri, LOC WPA.
26 Mingo White, Alabama, LOC WPA.
27 Tom Robinson, Arkansas, LOC WPA.
28 Minerva Edwards, Texas, LOC WPA.
master and deliver him from slavery so that he may enjoy freedom,” Silas Jackson’s enslaver killed the praying man. Mary James disclosed that her grandfather had been sold solely because “he got religious and prayed that God would set him and grandma free.” Minnie Fulkes’s mother told her that at meetings where slaves sang and prayed together, “the paddy rollers would come an’ horse whip every las’ one of ‘em, jes cause poor soul were praying to God to free ‘em from dat awful bondage.”

Prayer and the prayer meetings held much importance to the enslaved. The meetings embodied the autonomous religious will of the slaves, provided a platform for full physical and verbal religious expression, and united the community in worship. The prayers offered comfort in sharing daily trials and suffering with a divine audience, and articulated the absolute desire of the enslaved for earthly freedom. Even under the threat of punishment or sale, many slaves convened and prayed. Former slave Mary Gladdy recounted the fate of Chuck, sold because of his excessive praying: “But, the more and the harder the infidel owner whipped Chuck, the more devout and demonstrative the slave became.” To Gladdy, this excessive beating of a Christian man rendered the white enslaver an unchristian “infidel.”

Slave spirituals are more likely to vividly illustrate the religious aspirations of the enslaved than are straightforward prayers. Since spirituals were composed, passed down, and influenced by experience, they offer better insight into the religious life of the enslaved. Many spirituals do not explicitly mention the institution of slavery. Instead, spirituals convey the sentiments of the enslaved through allusions, metaphors, and imagery. Even in the depths of analysis, the interpretation of any one spiritual can be ambiguous simply because we are neither able to experience the original performance nor able to fully understand the complex and emotional context out of which slave spirituals emerged and thrived.

Slave spirituals often were performed communally in prayer meetings. In the psychological struggle to endure and hope for a life after slavery, prayers complemented spirituals while spirituals complemented prayers. Invoking God to grant slaves freedom from bondage required finding and maintaining the strength to carry on until that time of release. To do so, some spirituals confessed a need for intense religiosity. Unlike prayers, which frequently communicated grief and implored God for relief, these religious songs contemplated the spiritual actions of the enslaved. One song especially encouraged the young to take up prayer:

You’d better be praying while you’re young,
You’d better be praying while you’re young,
You’d better be praying without waiting any longer,
You’d better be praying while you’re young.

---

29 Silas Jackson, Maryland, LOC WPA.
30 Mary James, Maryland, LOC WPA.
31 Minnie Fulkes, Virginia, LOC WPA.
32 Mary Gladdy, Georgia, LOC WPA.
34 Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 137.
35 Estella Jones, Georgia, LOC WPA.
Another verse also suggests that performers or listeners better seek religion while they’re young. The stern “you’d better be” and the repetition of the admonition demonstrates that the exhortation went beyond simple encouragement. The command to pray during youth also reveals that the enslaved constantly recognized the dangers of enslavement. Enslaved parents wanted their children to engage in religion and attain God’s favor. This particular enslaved community possibly directed their children toward the solace of religion with such admonitions to help the youth cope with their unfortunate condition.

The spirituals further emphasized the need for the enslaved to turn to God and revitalize their faith in their lowest moments:

My brother, where were you,
    My brother, where were you,
    My brother, where were you,
    When you found the Lord?

I was low down in the valley,
    I was low down in the valley,
    I was low down in the valley,
    When I first found the Lord.

Here, the narrator “I” responds to his brother’s genuine and repeated query about where he was when he “found the Lord.” In the reply that he “was low down in the valley,” the narrator reveals that he was at his lowest psychological, religious, or physical point in life. That he “first found the Lord” at his lowest point underscores a wish that seeking the divine would rescue slaves from their darkest hours. Past tense is used throughout the spiritual, implying that “the Lord” has guided the narrator from this valley and to his brothers who join him in song. With the heroic guidance this spiritual denotes, enslaved people might feel that they could rely on God or the Lord to both aid them in finding and strengthening the religiosity they needed to endure enslavement.

Some spirituals simply called out for closeness to God:

Let me nigh, by my cry,
    Give me Jesus.
You may have all dis world,
    But give me Jesus.

A relationship with Jesus is all the narrator requires to endure, as evidenced by her willingness to forsake “all dis world” for him. This spiritual exemplifies the type of zeal, fervor, and religiosity necessitated by the condition of lifelong enslavement. The enslaved harbored the responsibility to maintain their zeal in the face of daily and lifelong trials.

Fire, Fire, O, keep the fire burning

---

37 Fannie Gibson, Alabama, LOC WPA.
38 Mollie Williams, Mississippi, LOC WPA.
While your soul’s fired up,
O, keep the fire burning while your
Soul’s fired up;
Never mind what satan says while
Your soul’s fired up
You ain’t going to learn how to watch
And pray,
Less you keep the fire burning while
Your soul’s fired up

Old Satan is a liar and a cunjorer,
Too;
If you don’t mind, he’ll cunjor you;
Keep the fire burning while your
Soul’s fired up
Never mind what satan says while, your soul’s fired up.\(^{39}\)

In this song, the performer admonishes every listener to keep their “fire” (their zealous religiosity) strong or “burning” while they live. The goal was to “keep the fire burning” so one could “learn how to watch and pray,” which would fortify and intensify the religious fervor she has already safeguarded. Here, the enslaved person relies on neither man nor God, but rather herself to preserve her private religiosity. These lyrics might offer consolation in that a significant part of the enslaved person’s religious life remained completely under her control.

Spirituals and prayers, as noted above, are not entirely separate. Although these songs exemplified that religiosity acted as a facet of endurance through slavery, some spirituals simply reflected hope for an immediate earthly freedom. Rezin “Parson” Williams, a former slave, composed one such spiritual before the Civil War began:

\[\begin{align*}
I'm \text{ now embarked for yonder shore} \\
There a man's a man by law; \\
The iron horse will bear me o'er \\
To shake de lion's paw \\
Oh, righteous Father, will thou not pity me \\
And aid me on to Canada, where all the slaves are free.
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
Oh, I heard Queen Victoria say \\
That if we would forsake Our native land of slavery, \\
And come across de lake \\
That she was standin' on de shore \\
Wid arms extended wide \\
To give us all a peaceful home \\
Beyond de rollin' tide.\(^{40}\)
\end{align*}\]

\(^{39}\) Mary Gladdy, Georgia, LOC WPA.

\(^{40}\) Rezin “Parson” Williams, Maryland, LOC WPA.
According to the interviewer, this song expressed “what Canada meant to slaves at that time.” That “there a man’s a man by law” and “where all the slaves are free” are the only two descriptors of Canada affirms the extent to which the religious expression of the enslaved betrayed temporal desires for a life after enslavement and immediate relief from suffering. In these spirituals and prayers, there is a consistent wish to endure enslavement in hopes of an earthly life afterwards. They thus naturally proved to be a form of protest against the condition of enslavement by anticipating the inevitable arrival of earthly freedom. Mary Gladdy’s interviewer noted that at prayer meetings “the slaves would sing, pray, and relate experiences all night long. Their great, soul-hungering desire was freedom—not that they loved the Yankees or hated their masters, but merely longed to be free and hated the institution of slavery.”

The hope for a life of freedom and a life after slavery encompassed the afterlife. While some spirituals and prayers called for endurance, others reflected on the rewards that the enslaved could anticipate upon death. Songs emphasized the rest slaves would finally find after death. The longing for a heavenly reward revealed in the spirituals illuminated the endlessly tired and burdened condition of the enslaved.

I heard the voice of Jesus callin’
Come unto me and live
Lie, lie down, weepin’ one
Res’ they head on my breast.

I come to Jesus as I was
Weary and lone and tired and sad,
I finds in him a restin’ place,
And he has made me glad.

Here, Jesus invites the “weepin’ one,” the enslaved, to find “in him a restin’ place.” With his own biblical history of suffering, Jesus was something of a divine ally to the enslaved. He in particular could understand why they were “weary and lone and tired and sad,” and he wanted the weak and humble to find love in him. The enslaved sought the love, endurance, and reward that the biblical story of Jesus promised to those suffering on earth.

I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How he called little children like lambs to his fold,
I should like to have been with them then.

I wish that his hands had been placed on my head,
That his arms had been thrown around me,
That I might have seen his kind face when he said
‘Let the little ones come unto me.’

Yet still to his footstool in prayer I may go

41 Rezin “Parson” Williams, Maryland, LOC WPA.
42 Mary Gladdy, Georgia, LOC WPA.
43 Susan Merritt, Texas, LOC WPA.
In this song, the performer refers to a story about children forbidden from seeing Jesus by his own disciples. Jesus, however, invited the children to him and asserted that Heaven belongs to lowly people like them. Since they too were barred from receiving a true gospel, the enslaved could identify with the lowly children who would see blessings in heaven.

Jesus offered them the rest that enslavement inherently denied. In one song, Jesus, who brings about a peaceful death while one sleeps, is compared to the feathers of a pillow:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jesus can make you die in bed} \\
\text{He sof’ as downs in pillow there} \\
\text{On my bres’ I’ll lean my head} \\
\text{Grieve my life sweetly there.} \\
\text{In dis life of heaby load} \\
\text{Let us share de weary traveler} \\
\text{Along de heabenly road.}
\end{align*}
\]

It is also notable that the reward of rest was not something only to be hoped for or dreamt about in these songs. Rest (meaning death) was the result of a “life of heaby load,” and the people who enjoyed it arrived at that rest as “weary traveler[s].”

Even with an attention on the longing for the reward of rest, the spirituals also reflected a fundamental desire for divine rescue from an exhausting earthly life:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{‘Swing low, sweet chariot,} \\
\text{Freely let me into rest} \\
\text{I don’t want to stay here no longer;} \\
\text{Swing low, sweet chariot,} \\
\text{When Gabriel make he las’ alarm} \\
\text{I wants to be rollin’ in Jesus arm,} \\
\text{‘Cause I don’t want to stay here no longer.}
\end{align*}
\]

The afterlife that the enslaved anticipated further entailed visions of heaven and what it had to offer. Alice Sewell remembered how the white preachers “never did say nothing ‘bout a slave dying and going to heaven.”47 Heaven would then be not only a Christian idea, but also a reassuring image of the afterlife that the enslaved forged for themselves.

Many spirituals exhibit the belief that the enslaved would find a home in heaven. This home would allow an intimate relationship with the Lord.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I’s goin’ home to live with de Lord,} \\
\text{I’s goin’ home to live with de Lord,}
\end{align*}
\]

---

44 Clara Jones, North Carolina, LOC WPA.
45 Fannie Moore, North Carolina, LOC WPA.
46 Lorenza Ezell, Texas, LOC WPA.
47 Alice Sewell, Missouri, LOC WPA.
I's goin’ home soon in de mornin’.

O, de Lord is a-waitin’ for me,
O, de Lord is a-waitin’ for me,
I’s goin’ home soon in de mornin’.

Although their religious expression faced restriction, on earth, the enslaved sang of the everlasting praise that they would happily and freely offer to the divine once in heaven:

I want to be an angel
And with angels stand
With a crown upon my forehead
And a harp within my hand

And there before my Saviour,
So glorious and so bright,
I’d make the sweetest music
And praise him day and night.

In heaven, the enslaved would be adorned with rewards, such as robes and crowns that befit a people in God’s favor. A home in heaven also meant endless peace for the enslaved:

May I but safely reach my home,
My God, My Heaven, my all.
There shall I bathe my weary soul,
In seas of heavenly rest.
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast.

Heaven was also a destination where present pain would be alleviated in God’s presence. Weary feet would rest and heal in the home of the Lord:

My knee bones am aching,
My body’s rackin’ with pain,
I ‘lieve I’m a chile of God,
And this ain’t my home.
‘Cause Heaven’s my aim.

This song in particular unveils the duality of heaven in the eschatological outlook of the enslaved. In proclaiming “this ain’t my home,” the narrator embraces a home in heaven as a certainty. Such a declaration denies that the narrator’s condition on earth is legitimate, as she is “a chile of God.” Nonetheless, heaven, a place that she has reached with aching bones and a sore body, still reflects the “aim” of the performer. For the

48 Fannie Gibson, Alabama, LOC WPA.
49 Clara Jones, North Carolina, LOC WPA.
50 Susan Rhodes, Missouri, LOC WPA.
51 Minerva Edwards, Texas, LOC WPA.
enslaved, a conviction that the reward of heaven unquestionably awaited them in the afterlife supplemented another belief that heaven was a reward earned through endurance. Heaven also figures as a specific compensation for those who suffered:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Heavenly land} \\
\text{Heavenly land,} \\
I\text{’s gwinter beg Gawd,} \\
\text{For dat Heavenly land}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Some come cripplin’;} \\
\text{Some come lame,} \\
\text{Some come walkin’} \\
\text{In Jesus’ name.}^{52}
\end{align*}
\]

Notably, Jesus is again invoked in the reflection of the pain the enslaved experienced. Just as they identified with the suffering of Jesus, the enslaved related to the journey of the Israelites, who also endured slavery. As the chosen people of God, these biblical figures were promised a better future. The enslaved in the antebellum United States then could find solace in an association with the Israelites who constantly enjoyed the divine covenant to uplift them even in their trials. A spiritual referencing the Israelites’ forty years of wandering in the wilderness sang:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{We camp a while in the wilderness, in the wilderness, in the wilderness} \\
\text{We camp a while in the wilderness, where the Lord makes me happy} \\
\text{And then I’m going home.}^{53}
\end{align*}
\]

The enslaved likened their unnatural condition to the Israelites’ time “in the wilderness,” where they sought strength and happiness from “the Lord.” With the expectation that the performer would eventually be “going home,” the enslaved held a firm belief that their affliction would be resolved.

Another song glorified the journey to the Promised Land:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Climb up de walls of Zion} \\
\text{Ah, Lord,} \\
\text{Climb up de walls of Zion} \\
\text{Ah, Lord, Climbin’ up de walls of Zion} \\
\text{Ah, Lord.} \\
\text{Climbin’ up de walls of Zion} \\
\text{Ah, Lord,} \\
\text{Great camp meetin’ in the promis lan’}.^{54}
\end{align*}
\]

While the biblical Promised Land referred to an actual earthly destination, the promised land of which the enslaved sang about in the spirituals often denoted heaven. Ann Ulrich Evans recalled singing the lyrics:

---

52 Liza Jones, Texas, LOC WPA.
53 W.L. Bost, North Carolina, LOC WPA.
54 Thomas Goodwater, South Carolina, LOC WPA.
On Jordan’s Stormy Banks I stand,
and cast a wishful eye.
To Canaan’ fair and happy land, where my possessions lie...
No chilling winds nor pois’ nous breath,
Can reach that healthful shore;
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death,
Are felt and feared no more.
When shall I reach that happy place,
and be forever blest?
When shall I see my father’s face,
And in his bosom rest?”
I am Bound for the Promised Land.\(^{55}\)

Here, the promised land is a “happy place” of eternal blessing. The fear that the enslaved felt from “sickness and sorrow, pain and death,” as well as “chilling winds” and “pois’ nous breath” departs them once they reach this heavenly destination.

Still, the “promised land” meant something different to each individual slave. In other contexts, the phrase indicated an earthly place to which the enslaved wished to escape. Songs distinguishing the promised land as a destination emphasized the possible double meaning of the term:

\[
\begin{align*}
I\, &\, \text{am bound for de Promise Land;} \\
Oh!\, &\, \text{Who will arise an go with me?} \\
I\, &\, \text{am bound for the Promise Land;} \\
I’ve\, &\, \text{got a mother in the Promise Land,} \\
My\, &\, \text{mother calls me an I mus go,} \\
To\, &\, \text{meet her in the Promise Land.}^{56}
\end{align*}
\]

Earthly or otherworldly, the promised land was a reward that the enslaved awaited after a life in bondage.

Rest, heaven, home, and the promised land represented significant characteristics of the enslaved’s vision of the afterlife. These expectations infused the spirituals which in turn temporarily relieved present pain with future, heavenly goals of rest and reward. Anderson Edwards, a slave preacher, knew that “there’s something better for” the enslaved, yet he still implored his listeners to keep “prayin’ the Lord will set’ em free.”\(^{57}\)

Prayers, preachers, and spirituals that perpetuated the belief in a better otherworldly life did not invite complacency with slavery. Rather, they offered momentary comfort to the enslaved who, in spirituals specifically, could voice the sorrows of their current state and the happiness they would experience in their future life. While the songs themselves brought temporary relief, freedom from bondage created true joy. Harriet Greshman recalled a spiritual that her community sang immediately after their emancipation:

\[
\begin{align*}
T’anke\, &\, \text{Marster Jesus, t’ank ye,}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{55}\) Ann Ulrich Evans, Missouri, LOC WPA; This song appears in paragraph form in the WPA source.

\(^{56}\) Mary Frances Brown, South Carolina, LOC WPA.

\(^{57}\) Anderson Edwards, Texas, LOC WPA.
Discontent with the condition of enslavement is evident in the gratitude communicated in the song. The performers call for Jesus to “break slav’ry chain.” Still, the enslaved also expressed a steadfast belief that “heben gwinter be my home.” Hope placed in the afterlife and reliance on otherworldly forces supplemented the desire for earthly freedom.

When dwelling upon the end of their lives or their bondage, the enslaved incorporated the religious tradition of Judgment. The day of Judgment arrived only after death for some. “They all dead and gone to Judgment,” replied J.T. Tims when asked about his family. In one work song, the enslaved hummed “if you treat me good, I’ll stay til judgment day,” implying that they would stay until they died. The prospect of Judgment loomed over the worship of the enslaved. In a spiritual he performed daily, George Briggs sang the lyrics “‘First to de graveyard; den to de Jedgement bar!” Another spiritual challenged:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Chillun, wha’ yuh gwinna do in de jedgment mornin’?} \\
\text{Chillun, wha’ yuh gwinna do in de jedgment mornin’?} \\
\text{Oh Chillun, wha’ yuh gwinna do in de jedgment mornin’?} \\
\text{When ole Gable go down on de seashore?} \\
\text{He gwinna place one foot in de sea} \\
\text{En de udder on de land,} \\
\text{En declare tha’ time would be no more,} \\
\text{Chillun, wha’ yuh gwinna do.}\end{align*}
\]

While the enslaved asserted cautious awareness of Judgment through such spirituals, they also viewed Judgment as a day when wrongs would be corrected. Maggie Perkins expected that on Judgment day, Jesus would come to “separate the lions from the sheep.” Sinners would finally suffer the consequences of their misconduct. At church, Estella Jones sang about these sinners:

\[
\text{The wind blows east and the wind blows west,}\]

---

58 Harriet Greshman, Florida, LOC WPA.
59 J.T. Tims, Arkansas, LOC WPA.
60 Sam Polite, South Carolina, LOC WPA.
61 George Briggs, South Carolina, LOC WPA.
62 Washington Dozier, South Carolina, LOC WPA.
63 Maggie Perkins, Arkansas, LOC WPA.
It blows like Judgment Day.
And then all them sinners who have never cried
Will surely cry that day.
Let me tell you, sure to cry that day,
sure to cry that day,
All them sinners who have never cried will surely cry that day.  

In the most explicit sense, those who endured the cruelty of enslavement surely identified some of the “sinners who have never cried” as the slave-owners and their champions.

Sam Word envisioned an afterlife that lacked white people entirely. He described the otherworldly scene: “They was sitting on seats just like circus seats just as far as my eyes could behold. Looked like they reached clear up in the sky. That was when I fust went blind. You’ve read about how John saw the multitude a hundred forty and four thousand and I think that was about one-fourth of what I say. They was happy and talkin’ and nothing but colored people—no white people.”

Exclusion from the afterlife was a milder fate than most of what the enslaved predicted for their masters. When illustrating the efforts of slave-owners to keep the slaves from worship, Minnie Fulkes determined “God’s gwine ’rod dem wicket marsters. Ef hit ‘tain’t em whut gits hit, hits gonna fall on deir chillun.” Susan Merritt similarly recalled that owners shot and killed enslaved people who tried to escape to freedom during the Civil War. She resolved that “They sho’ am be lots of soul cry ‘gainst ‘em in Judgement!”

In short, Judgment served as a checkpoint between death and the afterlife. With the belief that only non-sinners would be allowed to enjoy the rewards of the afterlife, the enslaved could imagine a future of retribution against their owners. That the enslaved emphasized their own subjection to divine judgment provided further testimony to their conviction that God fairly took into account the sins of some and the suffering of others. “But I have a instinct,” explained ex-slave Manda Walker “dat God’ll make it all right over and up yonder and dat all our ‘flictions will, in de long run, turn out to our ‘ternal welfare and happiness.”

Not all of the enslaved subscribed to religion. For those who did, religion offered a crucial outlet for expressing, validating, and reconciling the discontent and misery experienced in the condition of enslavement. One spiritual, in fact, detailed the importance of religion in the lives of the enslaved:

Tis Faith supports my feeble soul,
In times of deep distress,
When storms arise and billows roll,
Great God, I trust thy grace.
Thy powerful arm still bears me up,
Whatever grieves befall;
Thou art my life, my joy, my hope,

---

64 Estella Jones, Georgia, LOC WPA.
65 Sam Word, Arkansas, LOC WPA.
66 Minnie Fulkes, Virginia, LOC WPA.
67 Susan Merritt, Texas, LOC WPA.
68 Manda Walker, South Carolina LOC WPA.
And thou my all in life.  

Spirituals, prayers, and prayer meetings were the means by which the enslaved practiced this soul-supporting religion. They consequently offer testimony to the experience of the enslaved. First, the spirituals and prayers attest to the emotional and physical tolls of nonstop work and cruel punishment. Such emotional trauma proved so severe that spirituals and prayers of the enslaved reveal a need for constant endurance. That some continued to organize and attend prayer meetings under the threat of physical punishment also emphasizes the emotional trauma of enslavement and the degree of temporary relief the enslaved could find in religion. Most importantly, the spirituals and prayers of the enslaved vehemently recognize and reject the unnatural condition of slavery.

A study of spirituals and prayers also uncovers that the enslaved yearned both for an earthly life after bondage and for an afterlife of heavenly reward. Spirituals referencing otherworldly aspirations often displayed an expectation that the enslaved would receive their deserved rewards in the afterlife. A need for fortitude was furthermore suggested by other spirituals, prayers, and religious actions of the enslaved. Many prayers found in the ex-slave testimonies of the WPA Narratives also declare a definite desire to escape slavery on earth. However, these temporal and other worldly outlooks on the future were not mutually exclusive. Rather, the beliefs complemented each other. While freedom from bondage reflected an immediate status the enslaved wished to achieve, a rewarding afterlife with the divinities that helped them survive their trial was simultaneously desirable. Neither conviction inspired a compliant mindset with their present condition. In the rejection of slave owners’ religious persuasion, the ever-present call for endurance and religiosity, and the expectation of Judgment for sinners and reward for the suffering, both the beliefs in an earthly life and a heavenly reward demanded that the enslaved be entirely discontent with their condition.

Above all, the religious expression of the enslaved through meetings, prayers, and spirituals sustained them through psychological stress. Slaves possessed more control over their spiritual practices and beliefs than most other aspects of their lives. Prayer meetings, especially those conducted in secret, extended this autonomy. Prayers offered relief in the form of venting burdens and of expecting fulfillment. Spirituals, performed with almost unimaginable feeling in the immediate context, gave solace in the enthusiastic expression and reinforcement of aspirations. In perpetuating hopes for the present and future, the spirituals and prayers ultimately provided to the religious enslaved the psychological comfort of a life after bondage, either in heaven or on earth. Whether temporal, otherworldly, or a combination of these two ideologies, the spirituals and prayers of the enslaved demonstrate an acknowledgement of the unnatural condition of enslavement, a psychological and verbal resistance to slavery, and an ultimate desire for freedom.

69 Susan Rhodes, Missouri, LOC WPA.
Bibliography


Shocking New Imperialism: Italian Settlement and Development in Ethiopia, 1936-1941

By Shivani Dimri

Introduction

On October 3, 1935, the Italian military invaded Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia), consequently driving out Emperor Haile Selassie while declaring the King of Italy as Emperor of Abyssinia by spring of 1936. On June 1, 1936, the Italian government united their older East African colonies—Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, occupied since the 1890s—with the territory of Selassie’s defeated empire, establishing the colony of Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI).¹ Benito Mussolini’s Partito Nazionale Fascista (Fascist Party) promised the Italian public that the annexation of Abyssinia would provide farmland for millions of Italians and minimize Italy’s dependence on wheat, coffee, and other agricultural imports. Likewise, the Italian government presented itself to Europe not as Abyssinia’s occupiers, but as its liberators by saving Africans from slavery and feudalism.²

The colony of AOI fell after only five years when in 1941 the British saw the Italian territory’s liberation as an opportunity to weaken the Axis powers during World War II, and thus finally answered Selassie’s pleas for assistance. The British returned power to Emperor Selassie and officially recognized Ethiopian sovereignty in 1942, at which point Selassie recommenced his modernization projects under the guidance of commissioned foreign advisors.³ From an Italian perspective, little came from the Ethiopian provinces of AOI; the number of Italian settlers never reached the millions that the Fascists promised.⁴ Although independent Abyssinia was relatively self-sufficient for food prior to Italian colonization, the colony imported wheat from Italy for an estimated five-hundred thousand Italians in Ethiopia rather than exporting grain to the peninsula.⁵ Historian Alberto Sbacchi argues that three factors led to Italian failure in Ethiopia: lack of preparation on the part of Italian colonial administrators, insufficient finances, and the Ethiopians’ will and desire to resist European imperialism. The colonial administrators’ disorganization was apparent in the Italian government’s misunderstanding and lack of respect for the diversity of Ethiopian land tenure and ownership systems, as well as in its unsystematic scientific research and development projects.⁶ This aspect of Sbacchi’s

⁴ In fact, the highest estimate for the total number of farmers settled by the state-sponsored colonizing agencies Ente Romagna, Opera Nazionale Combattenti, Ente Puglia, Ente De Rege and Centuria Agricola di Pre-Colonizzazione from 1936 to 1941 was just under 2000—far fewer farmers than the agencies expected to settle in Ethiopia; Table 12.1 in Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini, 109.
⁵ Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini, 99.
⁶ Ibid., 95-106.
argument—the colonial administrators’ disorganization and subsequent lack of understanding of Ethiopian agriculture—shows the limited extent to which previous historians explored Italian imperialism through the lens of environmental history.

However, Italian relationships with the environment played a more extensive role in the failed colonization of Ethiopia, starting with Italian motivations for colonization and ending with Italian postcolonial justifications for the empire. Italian Fascist environmental ideologies and policies in the years leading up to the 1935 invasion of Abyssinia informed the Italian government’s motivations for and justifications of demographic colonization, the importation of Italian agrarian society to the Horn of Africa. Moreover, the Italo-Ethiopian colonial experience can be redefined by addressing the nature of Italian imperialism in Ethiopia in light of global environmental history and of the history of European imperialism in Africa. Sbacchi’s three factors leading to the collapse of AOI, as well as Ethiopian landscapes themselves, triggered an attempted Italian reconciliation of unattainable “Neo-European” aspirations with an underlying racist argument for African development on European terms.

Environmental Motivations and Justifications of Italian Imperialism

Italian environmental policies and ideologies in the years leading up to the invasion of Abyssinia informed the motivations, goals, and decisions of the Italian colonial administration. In Italy, the Fascist Party simultaneously promoted a retreat from industrial cities to the countryside as well as an improvement of nature by a highly centralized state responsible for national food autarky. The Fascist regime’s bonifica integrale (land reclamation) and battaglia del grano (battle for grain) agrarian policies informed its motivations for and justifications of the colonization of Abyssinia. Both land reclamation and the battle for grain policies stemmed from the Italian Fascists’ desire for economic and resource self-sufficiency. Then, in the colonial setting, Italian civilians and the state gave birth to a new incarnation of the tensions defining Italian Fascist environmental ideology.

The Fascists promoted the modernization of industrial and agricultural sectors while also protesting urbanism. Both environmental perspectives served the regime’s aim to transform Italy into a populous, self-sufficient world power on par with Britain and France. For example, in his Ascension Day speech on May 26, 1927, Mussolini argued that the demands of rural life would combat the moral corruption and infertility plaguing Italian cities and encourage women to have more children. Not only would these numerous rural children produce the principle justification of the empire (to provide space for the growing population), but they would also grow up to create, as Marco Armiero and Wilko Graf Von Hardenberg suggest, “a large population ready to conquer an empire of its own”—that is, the Ethiopian Empire. Likewise, the modernization of

Willson, Women in Twentieth-Century Italy, 61, 65.
agrarian systems—the industrialization and mechanization of the countryside—would help achieve the regime’s goal of making Italy self-sufficient with regard to resources and food.¹¹

With Europe on the brink of war, food self-sufficiency and economic stability greatly concerned the Italian government by the mid-1930s. In 1932, representatives of British colonies and dominions signed an agreement in Ottawa, Canada adopting the economic policy of “imperial preference,” discouraging trade with countries outside the British Empire. The French followed suit with their colonies, thereby aggravating the Italian government, as they were then unable to easily buy and, more importantly, sell goods in British and French colonies.¹² Therefore, the Italian government anticipated Abyssinia to serve as a colony for selling goods and growing wheat to export to Italy, while avoiding the tariffs on grain from other countries and non-Italian colonies.

The Fascists’ belief that productive land management required the guidance of a strong centralized government motivated their desire to colonize Abyssinia. They argued that Abyssinia was a cluster of disorganized African fiefdoms under the vague supervision of Selassie, a ruler nominally in control of a vast territory three times the size of Italy who in reality only controlled the capital, Addis Ababa.¹³ While the Italian government overrode local interests in central Italy by draining the Pontine Marshes near Rome as part of bonifica integrale, they discovered from nineteenth-century European travelers’ accounts that farmers on the Shewa plateau only farmed between a fifth and a tenth of their land at a time. Getnet Bekele admits that that was “a figure that must have appeared preposterous to Italian colonial surveyors in the late 1930s,” whose government at home so eagerly sought to expand the amount of arable land on the populous peninsula.¹⁴ Yet just as the Italian colonial administration undertook unsystematic environmental studies and disregarded the interests of locals, the Italian government’s Pontine Marshes project failed, destroying the area’s natural humus soil to the locals’ dismay. State-sponsored land reclamation (the ripping out of old environments for new chemically fertilized forests and farmland) actually pushed Italy away from a pillar of Fascist environmental ideology: the romanticized agrarian world.¹⁵

Furthermore, as M.E.P. in the British Bulletin of International News notes, “at the same time as they were complaining of overcrowding crowding the Fascists were doing everything possible to stimulate an increased birthrate”; M. E. P, “The Italian Colonial Empire: A Note on Its Rise and Fall—I,” Bulletin of International News 21, no. 6 (1944): 211. In fact, the Fascists took measures to increase the Italian birthrate including public ceremonies to honor “prolific mothers” as in the establishment of “Mother and Child Day” in 1933, a “bachelor’s tax,” and tax reductions to families with at least 7-10 living children. During the invasion and colonization of Ethiopia, they tried new incentives like marriage loans and family allowances; Willson, 65. They tried to encourage Italians to have more children in order to enhance the justification of colonization and to acquire the numbers to populate a vast new territory.

¹⁴ M. E. P. “The Italian Colonial Empire: A Note on Its Rise and Fall—II,” 258.

The regime of the *Ventennio* viewed the demographic colonization of Abyssinia as an attractive means to acquire national prestige as well as natural resources. Geographic expansion, particularly into Abyssinia—the site of the Italians’ humiliating defeat at Adwa at the hands of Abyssinian Emperor Menelik II’s forces in 1896—would allow Italy to take its place among the European colonizing powers who long enjoyed their piece of the “magnificent African cake” since the Berlin Conference of 1884-85.\(^\text{16}\) Furthermore, the Fascists could use the potential prestige and well-being from demographic colonization abroad to distract the Italian public from the shortcomings of land reclamation schemes at home.\(^\text{17}\) Both individual colonial officials and the Ministry of Italian Africa upheld the notion that Abyssinia could be an ideal environment in which to cultivate the *uomo nuovo* (new man)—the modest, fascist farmer.\(^\text{18}\)

For example, in 1942 the Ministry of Italian Africa posthumously published the letters of soldier Vincenzo Ambrosio in which Ambrosio described his aspirations for the colony, which he viewed as the new Italy.\(^\text{19}\) Ambrosio’s responsibilities included the review of Italian land concession applications in Galla and Sidama. On his first day at work in Jimma on October 14, 1937, Ambrosio wrote to his father that he hoped to acquire agriculturally productive lands for farmers *and* to find farmers who would dedicate themselves to the land.\(^\text{20}\) In December 1937, he himself admitted feeling emotionally attached to the new territory, “with the affectionate carefulness that a farmer can show for an old plot [or] that a mountain dweller can show for his mountains.”\(^\text{21}\) By referencing the population idealized by the Fascists within Italy—hailed by the publication *Il Bosco* (The Forest) as the “race of the strong Alpine people”—Ambrosio not only promoted the export of Italian agriculture, but also the export of Italian identity.\(^\text{22}\) Meanwhile, while he wrote from Jimma that “The development of these lands will be long and difficult, but I’m not wrong to say that millions of Italians will live well here,” he expressed little regard for the welfare of the Oromo and other peoples of Galla and Sidama.\(^\text{23}\) The letters suggest the need for Italians to psychologically and physically attach themselves to the foreign land for the territory to become inseparable from Italian identity...at the expense of Ethiopia’s indigenous peoples.

The Fascist regime’s imagination of colonialism therefore relied on the accumulation of the Italian population on the peninsula and the release of a population pressure valve into Abyssinia: the geographic stretching of Italian society to cover the arable and mineable Abyssinia.\(^\text{24}\) In fact, Fabio Roversi Monaco highlighted the

---


\(^{17}\) Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini*, xx.

\(^{18}\) Gagliardi, “La mancata <<valorizzazione>> dell’impero,” 1-2.

\(^{19}\) Vincenzo Ambrosio, *Tre anni fra i Galla e i Sidama 1937-1940: Lettere di un funzionario coloniale e testimonianze della sua morte sul campo* (Roma: Ministero dell’Africa Italiana, 1942).


\(^{24}\) Gagliardi, “La mancata <<valorizzazione>> dell’impero,” 14.
uniqueness of Italian colonialism in East Africa in *Africa come un mattino* in 1969. In a section of the book entitled “Italian Occupation of Ethiopia: The Dissolution of a Feudal System,” Monaco argues that because Italy itself was a young country, the Italians approached their colonial venture in Africa “with an awareness that other nations lacked, still used to conceptualizing colonialism as organized robbery.”\(^{25}\) He identifies the typical nature of European colonialism as the extraction of raw materials from Africa, rather than the importation of white settlers to work the land themselves. Although the Italian government, military, and colonizing agencies confiscated Ethiopian-owned lands to accommodate Italian settlers, Monaco does not recognize this behavior as a form of robbery. Rather than “with an awareness that other nations lacked,” the Italian government approached their colonial venture with a motivation and context different from those of older European colonizers. Under the Fascists’ Italo-Ethiopian model, Italians would ideally migrate to more “Italy,” not the outside world, ensuring their continued loyalty to the *Patria*.

In an account of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the early months of the colony, British journalist and Fascist sympathizer Evelyn Waugh recognized the beginning of a new type of European colonialism in Africa. Near the end of Waugh’s travels in Abyssinia and the first months of Italian occupation, he discovered white farmers “hard at work on simple manual labor” in the fields, and wrote:

> To the other imperial races it was slightly shocking. To the Abyssinians it was incomprehensible...The idea of conquering a country in order to work there, of treating an empire as a place to which things must be brought, to be fertilised and cultivated and embellished instead of as a place from which things could be taken, to be denuded and depopulated; to labour like a slave instead of sprawling idle like a master—was something wholly outside their range of thought. It is the principle of the Italian occupation.\(^{26}\)

Waugh noted the novelty of this Italian model of colonization compared to those of other European powers, but he missed no opportunity to jab at the Abyssinian Crown. Compared to the enlightened and humble Italians, Waugh implies, Abyssinians were unindustrious and incapable of administering a government of their own. Additionally, Emperor Selassie (then called Ras Tafari) enacted an edict in 1918 banning the slave

---


trade to facilitate a capitalism-driven transition from slavery to free labor. European
governments, however, expected quick action to abolish slavery, not recognizing or
tolerating the Ethiopian Empire’s unique trajectory to a modern capitalist state.27 By
using the phrase “to labour like a slave instead of sprawling idle like a master,” Waugh
referred to one of the Italian Fascists’ justifications of the occupation: the immediate
destruction of slavery and feudalism. Moreover, the Italians’ assumption of the role of
“laboring like slaves” demonstrates the Italian desire to replace Ethiopians as the justified
stewards of the land to which they felt so newly connected.

Waugh’s description of the contrasts between British colonialism and Italian
colonialism in Africa reveals that the Italians intended to transform Ethiopia into an
idealized, Fascist extension of the metropole. Waugh suggests that the expansion of and
the opportunity to enter the aristocratic or capitalistic ruling classes characterized British
colonialism in Africa. To his surprise, however, he found that the Italian model
celebrated poor white men: the indefatigable middle-aged Italian farmers in the fields.28
According to Waugh, the main objective of Italian colonization was neither capitalistic
nor humanitarian. Italian aspirations for the occupation of Abyssinia more so reminded
him of the dispossession of Native Americans from their lands and the expansion of
white settlers to the American West.29 That is, the Italian government craved a “Neo-
European” colonial experience in Abyssinia.

However, applying Historian Alfred Crosby’s discussion of Europeans’
successful attempts at settler colonization in mid-latitude regions of the world to the
Italo-Ethiopian context reveals that Ethiopian geography disadvantaged Italian
demographic colonization. Crosby argues that former European colonies like the United
States and Australia—coined “Neo-Europes”—primarily developed because the
geography and climate of these places, all along the temperate latitudes of ~30-50°N/S,
were similar to those of Europe. Neo-Europes could not thrive solely by importing white
settlers, European weaponry, and agricultural technology. Rather, Neo-European
environmental conditions needed to favor European crops, animals, and even diseases.30
However, 1930s Abyssinia—with its tropical latitude, access to modern military
technology (albeit limited due to financial and political constraints), membership to the
League of Nations, and a large population already in contact with Sub-Saharan Africans,
North Africans, Middle Easterners, Europeans, and Asians—could never be a Neo-
Europe.31 These factors made settler colonization and the Italian Fascist “employment” of
nature by mechanizing agriculture even more unfavorable still—compounded by the
Italians’ delayed and inadequate scientific studies, disregard for Ethiopian land use

27 Tafari included additional initiatives to modernize and legitimize his central government, including
regulations requiring tax collectors to issue written receipts to peasants; Marcus, A History of Ethiopia,
120, 127.
Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (London: Bogle-L’Ouverture Publications, 1972), 15-
16.
28 Waugh, Waugh in Abyssinia, 248-249.
29 Waugh, Waugh in Abyssinia, 249-250.
30 Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900 (New York:
31 Marcus, A History of Ethiopia, 136-142.
practices, and the stiflingly centralized government in Rome impeding action by the colonial administration in Addis Ababa.32

**Addressing the Unattainable Nuova Italia, 1936-1941**

Abyssinia’s geographic location and the time of the Italian invasion equipped Ethiopians to resist Italian rule and to undermine Italian motivations for colonization. Crosby gives the timeframe of successful ecological expansion of Europe a (somewhat flexible) cut-off at the end of the nineteenth century.33 Meanwhile, the Italians claimed Abyssinia in 1936 and lost the territory to British and Ethiopian forces in 1941. The compression of the Italian colonial experience within geographic space and time, to non-temperate latitudes in Africa and to the end of the nineteenth century onward, respectively, disadvantaged Italian Neo-European aspirations in East Africa. Ethiopia would not become an Italian version of the previously-established British white dominions or the United States: lands occupied by white settlers and built on the oppression of indigenous peoples who quickly became too small in number to remain a viable threat to Neo-European society.

In fact, Italian soldiers and settlers alike felt threatened not just by Ethiopian guerrilla rebels, but also by Ethiopian landscapes themselves. Laura Nicoli, a former Italian resident of Addis Ababa, revealed the settlers’ anxiety in the Ethiopian governances of AOI in her piece “La casa in Africa” (1945), negating the sense of security Mussolini assured Italian citizens at the beginning of this colonial experiment. Nicoli did not attach herself to the land as colonial officials like Ambrosio hoped the civilians would do. She instead felt submerged in and trapped by a land that she recognized did not truly belong to the Italians.

Nicoli vividly described features of the environment of Addis Ababa, including eucalyptus plants and the sun, as intrusions on her space and reminders of her foreignness. For example, she wrote:

*The eucalyptus entered the house through the windows, their oriental smell mixing with the reek of sun-drenched land, to the indigenous stench that permeated the house only recently civilized. Velvet curtains, dusty multicolored baskets, dark round terracotta urns in the corners: here are the houses that greeted us in Ethiopia…In Italy the house is closed, is solid, leaves the world outside and hides its own inhabitants, always seems like a little fortress, a jail. Instead in Africa the house is always open to the wind and light: the sun arrogantly imposes*

---


Early research was limited to a number of scouting missions to determine ideal locations to settle Italian farmers; Bscachi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini*, 95.

Italian scientists conducted crop research near the end in the occupation of Ethiopia, namely Raffaello Ciferri’s 1938 national cropping survey and Emilio Conforti’s 1941 report on the Ethiopian Highlands; McCann, *People of the Plow*, 17-18.

Geographic and geologic studies relevant to mining were late, poorly funded and unsystematic; Gagliardi, “La mancata <<valorizzazione>> dell’impero,” 14.

33 This is apparent even in Crosby’s book title *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe*, 900-1900.
Ironically, it was the emperor who defeated the Italian invaders in the nineteenth century Italo-Ethiopian conflict, Menelik II, who imported eucalyptus to his new capital city of Addis Ababa. In the Ethiopian Empire, eucalyptus came to represent urban development and investment, not antiquity. To Italian women, it was almost as if the eucalyptus signified that previous rulers still grasped the city. Likewise, while the amount of sunlight in the tropical latitudes is high, the cloudiness, the invariable length of the days, and the scarcity of fertile soil among other factors disadvantage Neo-European agriculture and settlement. Thus, Nicoli and the other Italian women she represented found the sunlight psychologically and physically oppressive.

Nicolì’s writing suggests that Italian settler colonization did not flourish because Ethiopian environments distressed the Italians who moved there, even those in cities and in their houses. Nicoli cannot disconnect the eucalyptus or the sun from her colonial experience because her African home leaves her feeling exposed, anxiously aware of her foreignness. In fact, she commented:

Africa is more lively at night than it is during the day: in the day it is oppressed by the spell of the light, at night it acquires its mysterious power and lives its arcane life...The Addis Ababa of the whites sleeps under corrugated iron roofs that the moon brightens and seems to expand until uniting them in one large cloak, quietly sparkling. But in the true Addis Ababa, that of its ancient, authentic residents, does not sleep...

In contradiction to the title of her account “The Home in Africa,” Nicoli wrote, “You are not at home, you are in Africa.” She thereby confirmed the failure of Neo-European expansion by highlighting the settlers’ inability to attach themselves to the land how the Fascists imagined—a type of emotional, psychological attachment that would have justified the Italians’ presence and aligned with the Fascist claim of Italian racial superiority.

In spite of their deteriorating Neo-European aspirations, the Italian Fascists relied on another justification of colonization: African development, the emancipation of Ethiopians from slavery and feudalism, and the locals’ introduction into modern civil society. Historian Walter Rodney, however, argues that underdevelopment—based on...

35 McCann, People of the Plow, 241.
36 Crosby, Ecological Imperialism, 305.
37 Interestingly, Nicoli speaks of Addis Ababa as if what she witnessed was what the city always looked like, but Menelik II only founded the capital in 1896. She called her surroundings both “virgin” (perhaps ripe for change by outsiders) and “primeval”; Nicoli, “La casa in Africa,” 249-250. The influence of Fascist propaganda and potentially of courses on first aid and camping to prepare young wives for “colonial life” on Italian women’s perceptions and/or justifications of AOI must be considered; Willson, Women in Twentieth-Century Italy, 85.
and associated with the exploitation of African nations by European countries—inhomogeneously characterized European imperialism, and his assertion certainly holds for the understudied case of Italian imperialism in Africa. Rodney defines development as economic and social progress derived from a society’s capacity to deal with the natural environment using progressive labor organization and technologies. Varying natural environments and society superstructures—bodies of “beliefs, motivations and socio-political institutions”—explain why regions of the world develop at different rates. Thus, Rodney’s argument counters racist assumptions that broadly blame contemporary Africa’s underdevelopment on the backwardness of African peoples themselves. The Italian government did not uphold its claim to develop Ethiopia and instead contributed to its underdevelopment by failing to aid rural populations, exploiting Ethiopian labor, and imposing disadvantageous economic restrictions on Ethiopians for Italian benefit.

The East African colonial expression of Italian Fascist environmental ideology was more urban-based than the ideology in Italy itself. The Italian government certainly did not mandate scientific studies of Ethiopian agriculture, plan experiment stations, and equip settler-farmers with tractors for the sake of African rural development. Rather, the Italian government aimed to boost the agricultural productivity of the countryside to provide wheat to cities in AOI and ideally in its own country. The shift in importance of urban centers in Italian Fascist political strategy unsurprisingly came to Ethiopia rather than to Italy. The Italian soldiers were too few in number and Patriot groups too strong a source of resistance for the Italians to control more than a small amount of land at a time. This induced a rapid redirection of Italian energy to colonial urban centers.

The Italians’ new focus on urbanism in East Africa prompted Italians to ignore Ethiopian rural development. Italian colonial development schemes like road construction and mechanized agriculture were primarily intended to benefit Italian citizens, not locals. The Italian government tried to equip Italian settler-farmers with tractors, chemical fertilizers, and other agricultural technologies to turn a subsistence economy into one of surplus. Via newly constructed roads, Italian farmers could send their chemically- and mechanically-synthesized grain surpluses to AOI’s cities, where most of the Italian residents of the colony lived. Indeed, most Italian residents is Ethiopia worked not as rural farmers but as urban construction workers, business owners, professionals, colonial administrators, technical experts (agronomists, veterinarians, engineers, etc.), and soldiers. The shift to urbanism reflects how the Fascists’ promise of African development neglected rural people while only marginally helping residents of Addis

40 Ibid., 16.
41 Ibid., 30.
42 Ibid., 31.
43 McCann, *People of the Plow*, 241.
45 McCann, *People of the Plow*, 211.
47 Gagliardi, “La mancata <<valorizzazione>> dell’impero,” 7.
Ababa who received job and educational opportunities, medical services, and entertainment on an unequal, racially segregated basis.\textsuperscript{47}

In a 1992 interview with Historian James McCann, Ato Sahlu Berhane, an Ethiopian teenager in the Ada District near Addis Ababa during Italian rule, described how the Italians managed Ethiopian lands and peoples.\textsuperscript{48} Berhane shared his perspective on the colonizing agency \textit{Opera Nazionale Combattenti}’s project to house war veterans on twenty-five thousand hectares of Empress Manan’s land at Foka. He witnessed Italians using machines to sow seeds and to drain and irrigate land, converting forests and marshy areas into farmland. The Italians used fertilizer to grow teff and modified varieties of wheat, but Berhane recalls how the Italians never shared the fertilizer with locals, failing to support Ethiopian rural development.\textsuperscript{49} While the Italians did not collaborate with locals to learn, develop, or implement agricultural practices and technologies in the Ada District, they at least left locals largely alone. Only after two years did the Italians interfere with farmers near Bishoftu and impose a tax paid in grain, just as the Abyssinian rulers had done. From Berhane’s perspective, “The old legacy [of Selassie’s rule] continued without any change.”\textsuperscript{50}

Besides the wave of Italian farmers staking claim to the Abyssinian Crown’s land and the detriment to forests converted into Italian-owned farmland, two additional problems enabling African underdevelopment arose in AOI. For the Italians, 1) there was not enough land and 2) there were not enough Italian agricultural workers to fight their \textit{battaglia del grano}. The Italian government tried to remedy the lack of labor by turning Ethiopians into sharecroppers to help what few Italian farmers did settle there.\textsuperscript{51} Profiting off of Ethiopian labor also meant employing one of the common tactics of the European imperialist playbook: stealing land to create labor.\textsuperscript{52}

In other parts of the colony beyond where Sahlu Berhane resided, the Italians drastically intervened on Ethiopian land tenure and ownership systems. The Italian government hoped to settle Italian farmers on as much land as they could without angering Ethiopian farmers. Therefore, Italian land policy allowed for the confiscation of land that previously belonged to the imperial family, the Ethiopian Empire’s public lands, the lands of exiled \textit{races} (lords), and the lands of Patriot rebels. Yet the colonial

\textsuperscript{47} Monaco, \textit{Africa come un mattino}, 412-413.
\textsuperscript{48} Interview with Sahlu Berhane (Hiddi), 1 June 1992, in McCann, \textit{People of the Plow}, 211.
\textsuperscript{49} While growing and experimenting with their Italian varieties of grains, Italian farmers also grew teff, an endemic plant evolved through human selection beginning 7000 years ago to grow in the red loamy and black vertisol soils of the Highlands.
\textsuperscript{50} Gagliardi, “La mancata <<valorizzazione>> dell’impero,” 7.
\textsuperscript{52} McCann, \textit{People of the Plow}, 196-197, 205, 211.
authorities’ desire for more land for more farmers to promote the Italian Empire’s food self-sufficiency prompted them to ignore the land policy protecting Ethiopian private property from confiscation by the Italian military and colonizing agencies. 53 For example, the Italians claimed that all uncultivated land was public domain and therefore available for conversion into farmland for Italian settlers and soldiers. This logic dangerously failed to respect Ethiopian land management practices, considering that, for instance, Shewan farmers cultivated a fifth to a tenth of their land at any given time. 54 The Italians poorly compensated locals for their land by offering slow-coming payments and new land worth one-sixth to one-sixteenth of the value of the original expropriated territory. This inadequate compensation along with the unjust basis for the Italian seizure of land economically disadvantaged Ethiopians, fueling Ethiopian farmers’ resentment for Italians and support for Patriot groups in the countryside. 55

The Italians’ expropriation of Ethiopian lands and subsequent displacement of Ethiopians contributed to another source of underdevelopment and of Ethiopian resistance to Italian rule: sharecropping. Italian sharecropping contracts with Ethiopian farmers served two purposes for the Italian government: solidifying racial hierarchies and increasing food autarky by exploiting Ethiopian labor. Sharecropping was supposed to elevate the poor Italian laborer that Waugh witnessed in the months following the Italian invasion into a race-conscious European landowner and supervisor to the economically dependent Ethiopian peasants. Additionally, even with mechanized agriculture, there were not enough Italian farmers to feed Italians in the colony. Through sharecropping, Italian farmers prepared the land for cultivation with tractors while Ethiopian farmers performed the manual labor—sowing, weeding, and harvesting—and received only one-third of the crop despite completing most of the work. 56 Thus, this Italian-dominant form of labor organization served to suppress Ethiopians socially and economically. This sharecropping system is ironically reminiscent of the status of Selassie’s attempts to eradicate slavery in the Ethiopian Empire. Slaves became cheap labor, often for the people from whom they had been freed—a seemingly disingenuous attempt at abolishing slavery that shocked the Italians. 57 While both of the Italian government’s goals for sharecropping—upholding Fascist racial policy and, more largely, reaching food autarky—failed, the usage and exploitation of Ethiopian land and labor contributed to underdevelopment, or at the very least continued the flawed legacy of Selassie’s empire. 58

Moreover, Italian producers and consumers promoted underdevelopment by selling more goods to the colony than they purchased. Already an exporter of coffee,

53 Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini, 101-105.
54 Menelik II established taxes on Shewan farmers based on considerations of this land management system, using a lem/tef (cultivated/uncultivated land) ratio for tax rates. The Italians, on the other hand, were ignorant of the landholding, land management, and related tax systems varying from region to region in the Ethiopian Empire.
Bekele, “Contingent Variables and Discerning Farmers,” 96.
55 Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini, 105.
56 Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini, 100-101.
57 Marcus, A History of Ethiopia, 120.
58 Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini, 101, 170.
hides, grains, and other goods, Ethiopia was not introduced to the international economy by Italy. However, the Italians transformed the nature of international trade in the region to benefit Italians at the expense of Ethiopians. Originally in response to the League of Nations’ economic sanctions against Italy during the invasion, Fascist Party activists, particularly Fascist women’s groups or Fasci Femminili, encouraged women to participate in the autarky campaign as consumers and producers of Italian and Italian Empire goods. Nevertheless, the trade balance between Italy and AOI clearly favored Italian producers and to a lesser extent Italian consumers over Ethiopians. While the exports from Italy to Ethiopia grew to comprise a quarter of all imports to Ethiopia from 1935 to 1938, the exports from Ethiopia to Italy remained minimal. Italian producers primarily targeted the market of Italian migrants. They sold steel and iron for civilian and military construction projects, as well as grain and other foodstuffs to compensate for the lack of food self-sufficiency in the colony. Despite the propaganda pushes by the Fasci Femminili and other Fascist groups for a kind of “imperial autarky,” the average Italian consumer did not need empire goods, nor felt a sense of attachment to the empire. Instead, as Historian Alessio Gagliardi notes, “at times, mainly in the case of coffee, the exchange was ‘artificially’ supported by the regime for propaganda reasons: the arrival of a typically colonial product had to prove the immediate economic utility of colonial territories and feed the myth of the empire, rooting it in the habits of everyday life.”

What little the Fascists did to promote colonial goods like coffee was to their political benefit and to the economic detriment of Ethiopians, who faced skyrocketing food prices and restricted trade opportunities.

Postcolonial Reflections and the Italian Spirit

In the last chapter of Waugh in Abyssinia, British pro-Italian journalist Evelyn Waugh regards the Italian-built road from Massawa to Asmara as “the symbol and supreme achievement of the Italian spirit.” Waugh believed that the Italian road would bring “order and fertility” to desolate Africa for centuries to come. Yet in 1941 the British Pathé Gazette released a newsreel from the East African Campaign of World War II in which the Italian military bombed the road to Keren to slow the British advance. The roads leading to Keren—a city in AOI and present-day Eritrea—were “little better than tracks perched precariously on mountainsides…pounded by shell fire.” By the time of the Italian army’s final surrender to the British and Ethiopians at Gondar on November 27, 1941, the Italians wrecked more roads and bridges, which the Pathé Gazette suggested were “perhaps built to last as long as their empire.” Five years after the construction of Italian identity in Ethiopia through those fateful roads, Italian East Africa

59 Gagliardi, “La mancata <<valorizzazione>> dell’impero,” 10.
Marcus, A History of Ethiopia, 122.
60 Willson, Women in Twentieth-Century Italy, 85.
61 Gagliardi, “La mancata <<valorizzazione>> dell’impero,” 10-12.
Massawa and Asmara are located in modern day Eritrea, formerly territory of AOI.
63 Waugh, Waugh in Abyssinia, 243-244.
M. E. P. “The Italian Colonial Empire: A Note on Its Rise and Fall—II,” 262.
fell, destroying this “symbol of the Italian spirit” and the Fascists’ promise or means of bringing civility to Africa. Then throughout the twentieth century, Italian postcolonial memory reflected Italian relationships with Ethiopian landscapes through settlement and development schemes, as well as interpretations of the contemporary process of decolonizing Africa.

Fabio Roversi Monaco, the curator of a collection of memoirs on Italian colonial experiences entitled *Africa come un mattino*, celebrated the infrastructure and technological advancements that Italians made for East Africans, and what he saw as the unique ability of Italy among the European powers to engage in dialogues with the Third World. In 1969, Monaco argued:

> Everyone agreed that Africa will again need decades of capital, machinery and European technical experts to free itself from the archaic systems and traditional institutions incompatible with the demands of development of modern national societies. And what did we do, if not construct houses and hospitals? What did we start to teach, if not the rational development of enormous African natural resources?\(^6\)

Monaco’s book was not merely what he called “an act of love for Africa.” Informed by European anxieties over the inevitable “end of empire,” Monaco’s interpretation of the colonial experience evoked nostalgia for colonial East Africa to promote European, or better, Italian international development in place of imperial development.\(^7\) He continued a narrative that the Fascists used to justify the Italian invasion of Abyssinia thirty-four years before—that the West must direct the feudal Horn of Africa’s emergence into modernity.

Monaco noted that during the British occupation of Abyssinia in 1941, Italians, unlike the British, moved throughout the territory without fear of Ethiopian retaliation, and that some Ethiopians hid Italians from the British authorities trying to deport them.\(^8\) Monaco used these negative observations about the British as evidence for the merits of Italian colonial rule. In 1938 the British government legally recognized the Italian Empire, but later recognized the sovereignty of Haile Selassie over Ethiopia in 1941 during World War II.\(^9\) Yet, the British still believed that Ethiopians were not yet fit to rule themselves. The British government decided that it would need a transition period of an undefined duration to equip Selassie with sufficient state machinery and to prepare Ethiopian people for modern civil society and government. At the same time, the British discouraged Selassie from creating a complicated centralized government that would clash with Abyssinian social structures.\(^10\) As long as Ethiopia was only a sovereign nation when Westerners thought it was politically convenient to say so, Ethiopia had to wrestle

---

\(^{66}\) Monaco, *Africa come un mattino*, 419.  
\(^{67}\) Monaco, *Africa come un mattino*, 8.  
\(^{68}\) Monaco, *Africa come un mattino*, 7.  
\(^{69}\) Monaco, *Africa come un mattino*, 411.  
\(^{71}\) Sbacchi, “Haile Selassie and the Italians, 1941-1943,” 31.  
\(^{71}\) Feyissa. "European Extraterritoriality in Semicolonial Ethiopia," 119-120.

To what extent Selassie fairly represented all Ethiopians of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds both before and after the Italian occupation requires deeper study of Ethiopian imperialism and of independent post-World War II Ethiopia.
its way out of imperialism, whether Italian or British. The merits and humanitarian intentions of the British were questionable, but Monaco’s claim wrongfully applauded the Italian state rather than the factors that actually lead Ethiopians to spare Italian lives.\(^\text{72}\)

Selassie’s declaration on January 20, 1941, which pardoned the Italians rather than avenging those massacred by General Rodolfo Graziani after the Italian invasion of 1935, was a strategic political decision allowing for Ethiopia’s economic development on his terms rather than those of the British.\(^\text{73}\) Although Selassie declared that all Italians needed to leave his country as demanded by the British, he allowed Italians to leave slowly to minimize public disorder while keeping British imperialism at bay. Selassie kept the Italians for the sake of maintenance of roads, industries, and farms, and to staff the military and political administration. The Italians’ mechanized agriculture could help fulfill immediate local food needs and besides that, early during Italian colonial rule, Graziani’s military killed most educated Abyssinians in Addis Ababa, occasioning the initial need for foreign political administrative staff.\(^\text{74}\) Although direct Italian rule may have modernized parts of Abyssinia for the sake of Italian settlers, it was Selassie’s leveraging of the Italians to resist political dependency on the British, rather than direct Italian rule, which advanced development for Ethiopians to a greater extent. Arguably, the Italian colonial venture, too, was an instance of what Italian sympathizer Evelyn Waugh labeled Haile Selassie’s Abyssinia before the 1935 invasion: an instance of “abortive modernism.”\(^\text{75}\)

The Italian nostalgia and \textit{mal d’Africa} did not stem solely from the “spirit of collaboration” and “the stable, humane rapport of Italians with the native African element” that Monaco passionately promoted.\(^\text{76}\) In the 1981 memoir \textit{Ricordi d’Etiopia di un funzionario coloniale}, Pier Marcello Masotti, a colonial official who served in the Ministry of African Italy and in the Foreign Ministry, wrote that his feeling of \textit{mal d’Africa} indeed did not come from a sense of pride in local development schemes. Rather, the attachment to Ethiopia,

…which many say they feel and which should have formed from nostalgia for the life, the climate, the sunsets, the sense of grandeurs, always seemed to me rather centered on the easy earnings, the easy domestic service and the low cost as well as the merits of the local women. Also naturally the possibility to be someone more easily than in the immensely crowded Europe.\(^\text{77}\)

Masotti’s reflections after retirement from Italian government service and forty years after the loss of AOI finally, perhaps regrettfully, reveal that the heart of the colonial experience laid neither in Ethiopian development nor in respect for local natural and built

\(^{72}\) For example, Sbacchi suggests that the Ethiopians saved many Italians because average Italian citizens did not follow the policies of racial abuse and segregation that the Italian government issued: Sbacchi, \textit{Ethiopia under Mussolini}, 170.

\(^{73}\) Sbacchi, “Haile Selassie and the Italians, 1941-1943,” 29.

\(^{74}\) Sbacchi, “Haile Selassie and the Italians, 1941-1943,” 29-30.

\(^{75}\) Waugh, \textit{Waugh in Abyssinia}, 64.

\(^{76}\) Monaco, \textit{Africa Come Un Mattino}, 8.

environments. The Italo-Ethiopian colonial experience was the agricultural development of Ethiopia for the Italian battle for grain. It was also Italian personal enrichment and national economic development based on the racial hierarchy that the Fascist government tried to impose on both Italian settlers and Ethiopians. Of course, Italian benessere from empire was one of the very bases of the invasion of Abyssinia; Vincenzo Ambrosio, the soldier and colonial official in Galla and Sidama, wrote “L’Africa mi migliora”: Africa betters me. What arose and lingered in Italian postcolonial consciousness by the late-twentieth century was the exploitation of Ethiopians.

The Italian Fascists’ long-term goal for the expansion of the “strong Alpine race” through demographic colonization of Ethiopia substantiates Rodney’s argument that fascism strengthens a government’s tendencies towards institutional racism and imperialism already inherent in European capitalist development. Yet Africa Orientale Italiana did not and could not have become the Neo-Europe that Mussolini desired. As the Italians failed to create a food self-sufficient “New Italy” out of the Ethiopian Empire, the Italian version of European imperialism seemingly new to Africa manifested as yet another breed of African exploitation and underdevelopment. Moreover, Italian Fascist logic enabled poor environmental management decisions that ultimately underestimated and exacerbated the resentment of Ethiopians for Italian colonial rule, particularly in the countryside. The Italo-Ethiopian colonial experience was also marked by the disjuncture between the goals of the Fascist colonial administrators and the average Italian colonial citizens, who were largely construction workers, technical experts, businessmen, and adventurers seeking a brief escape from unemployment at home. As Italians at home became disenchanted by empire and as Ethiopian Patriots organized resistance amongst themselves and with the British and French, the Fascists’ attempts to cultivate both the tons of wheat and the uomo nuovo that motivated them to invade Abyssinia in 1935 crumbled.

---

78 Masotti also admits that AOI “used to be called a bit vainly the ‘Empire’”; Masotti, Ricordi d’Etiopia di un funzionario coloniale, 7.
79 Ambrosio, Tre anni fra i Galla e i Sidama 1937-1940, 11.
80 Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, 216.
81 Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini, 204.
Bibliography


Rolling Toward Integration: The 761st Tank Battalion in the Second World War

By Patrick Pacious

Introduction

On May 5, 1945, American tankers halted their vehicles on the west bank of the Enns River in the picturesque town of Steyr, Austria. After several days, they heard a soft but menacing rumbling across the river. An unfamiliar line of tanks emerged from the trees and halted before the bridge—the Russians had arrived. Both sides regarded each other with uncertainty as they clambered out of their armored steeds and slowly approached each other. Suddenly, Pvt. Leonard Smith found himself lifted off his feet as a burly female Russian gunner embraced him in a powerful bear hug, euphorically bellowing, “America! America!”

Leonard Smith was a soldier in the 761st tank battalion, the first black tank unit to see combat and one of several African-American units that served in combat during the Second World War. After experiencing discrimination by their own white countrymen throughout the war, Smith and the other soldiers of the 761st welcomed this incident on the bridge. The Russian tanker identified them first and foremost as Americans—not as black men, not as a second-rate people, but as Americans. For these soldiers, this episode confirmed their noteworthy contribution to their country. It vindicated their hardships and sacrifices, and reaffirmed their right and ability to fight for their country on equal standing with their white compatriots.

In popular memory of the Second World War, the United States fought a just war to preserve democracy and human rights. Yet even as America prided itself on keeping the torch of democracy lit abroad, the government refused to grant equal rights and opportunities to African Americans at home. Black community leaders highlighted this subversion of the American creed, with many focusing efforts on desegregating the military and incorporating more black units into combat. The 761st was one of these units. Amassing an impressive record in 183 continuous days on the front—serving in four major allied campaigns and in six different countries—the 761st tore down the notion that black soldiers were inferior to white soldiers. This study will examine how the 761st tank battalion fought for freedom abroad while simultaneously fighting the prejudices of its own countrymen. It will illuminate why the 761st grew so successful despite a discriminatory military in a country which largely did not believe in them. Finally, it will demonstrate how the 761st earned the respect of numerous other units through its feats on the battlefield, demonstrating its capacity to fight just as well, if not better, than white units. Ultimately, the 761st tank battalion’s contributions paved the way for the integration of the armed services and marked a failure by the War Department to institute small-scale integration during the war.

Racial Injustice in the Military prior to the 761st

---

The United States entered the Second World War with a segregated army. Throughout the conflict, the War Department and the federal government maintained a commitment to overall segregation, despite their insistence that everyone in the military and defense industries, regardless of race, received equal treatment. Many factors—political, social, and logistical—influenced this policy, several of which were tied to the systemic and institutionalized racism of the times. President Franklin Roosevelt, ever the consummate politician, sought to preserve a sizeable southern constituency of conservative democrats crucial to his continued power. Furthermore, a large portion of the military’s officer corps was composed of conservative southerners hostile to the idea of integration, rendering any attempts at the action futile.

From a more pragmatic standpoint, the War Department argued that integration would engender a disastrous social experiment, and that it would create a logistical nightmare that would destroy morale and efficiency, thus impeding the war effort. Those administering the war also feared a distracting and potentially costly backlash from the American people. Leaders such as George C. Marshall and Henry Stimson disputed the right to implement a policy of integration because it contradicted wider social norms. Why should the military risk creating a “social laboratory” while trying to fight in a global conflict? “War was a time too critical for experimentation.”

The race riots in cities and violence in camps between black and white soldiers throughout the United States also compounded the issue. Such racial friction only encouraged a policy of segregation.

The issue of black soldiers in the military delved deeper than an argument over segregation. Prevailing attitudes among military higher-ups revolved around the idea that the black soldier did not possess the capacity to fight as well as the white soldier. The legacy of World War I played a major role in reinforcing this view. Although many black soldiers had served with distinction in the Great War, disgruntled whites pointed to the mixed record of the 92nd infantry division in France during World War I to justify their view. These naysayers failed to realize that the lackluster results of that division emanated from poor training and a revolving door of indifferent and often incompetent white officers who steadily eroded the division’s morale.

Regrettably, a view of the black soldier as dim-witted, cowardly, and morally deficient transitioned into the next war.

The War Department spent years after World War I attempting to construct a policy whereby black manpower would be utilized in a practical way that considered racially charged attitudes of the times. Ulysses Lee, who authored the definitive work on government policy and public opinion toward black soldiers during this period, wrote: “With little access to the more technical products of social research, Army planners generally relied upon the testimony of World War I commanders and traditional public attitudes in judging the capabilities of Negroes and in determining possibilities for the use of Negro manpower in time of war.” Although the Army and the War Department

---


4 Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 15: Mainstream scholarly studies that really examined and contextualized the underlying issues of the “Negro problem” did not show up until late in the war or after
devoted time and resources deliberating over Negro troop policies—even flirting with integration in the 1920s—they entered World War II with essentially the same policy as the previous war: segregated units would serve under white officers. Moreover, the War Department placed the majority of black soldiers into service units (like quartermaster and engineering) in the attempt to exclude them from combat. Serving as janitors, truck drivers, and cooks kept black soldiers out of combat and the public eye. Even black soldiers with special education or training were still relegated to backroom positions.⁵

This hesitation to create and deploy black combat units stemmed partially from the disparity of education among whites and African Americans, especially in the South. Such a gap largely resulted from the legacy of slavery, the oppression and inequality of de jure segregation, and a lack of government and community aid. One report from the Department of Education highlighted this extreme educational disparity by demonstrating that $43,000,000 would be needed to raise the salary of black teachers in the South to attain equal compensation with white teachers.⁶ The War Department’s hesitancy on account of the education issue was understandable, yet this did not explain why many black soldiers with special training and high education were often grouped with others possessing lesser credentials.

The black community and civil rights activists continuously pushed back against the policy of the War Department and the prevailing attitudes at the time. Organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League, as well as the black press and individuals such as Eleanor Roosevelt, worked exhaustively to make the War Department see the error of its ways. For these activists, the questions of segregation and the role of the black soldier constituted focal points on which the fate of the African-American community hinged. The military provided an immense opportunity to prove their place as equal citizens. According to Ulysses Lee:

The Army and military life had long occupied a position of relatively greater concern and importance to the Negro public than to Americans in general. Soldiering had been an honored career for the few Negroes who were able to enter upon it. In the restricted range of economic opportunities open to them, the military life ranked high. Thus the Army and its policies remained a significant center of interest to Negro organizations, to the press, and to the public as a whole. It was one of the few national endeavors in which Negroes had had a relatively secure position and which, at least in time of war, could lead to national recognition of their worth as citizens and their potential as partners in a common undertaking.⁷

Consequently, civil rights activists labored tirelessly to end discrimination and dispel the myth of the African American as an inferior human being. If they could integrate more African Americans into the defense industries and the military, they could demonstrate that these marginalized persons truly cared for their country despite the barriers placed in front of them. Perhaps that would ensure their place as equal citizens.

---

⁵ McGuire, Taps, 49.
Although the War Department generally maintained its policy of segregated units throughout the war, black leaders did gain some traction through their relentless lobbying and protests. In 1941, A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and a crucial player in the eventual integration of the armed services, told President Roosevelt that he would organize a March on Washington with 100,000 protesters if actions were not taken to curb the discrimination in the military and defense industries. Roosevelt, not wanting to appear weak or impotent, could not afford to have this distraction while trying to administer the war. He also understood the importance of the African-American vote and recognized his need to concede a bit. Therefore, on June 25, 1941, he issued Executive Order 8802, which prohibited discrimination in the defense industries and established the Fair Employment Practices Commission.

The FEPC was tasked with setting guidelines for hiring in defense industries as well as investigating violations and enforcing the policy prohibiting discrimination. Unfortunately, policies from the top often do not translate into immediate practice. Roosevelt founded the FEPC in the summer of 1941, yet by the spring of 1942 a national labor report found that less than three percent of defense employees were black. This federal directive did not ease the life of the black soldier—in fact, it failed to even explicitly mention the armed forces. An order from Washington prohibiting discrimination in the defense industries represented a good start, but it alone could not erase a legacy of racism and segregation in the South.

In another move to placate the black community, Roosevelt appointed Judge William H. Hastie as Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War in 1940. Hastie, who had become the first African-American federal judge in 1937, took to his position with vigor, highlighting and investigating acts of discrimination in the military. After an investigative mission in the South, William Hastie wrote to Stimson saying that “bullying, abuse, and physical violence on the part of white Military Policeman are a continuing source of complaints…In the Army the Negro is taught to be a man, a fighting man; in brief, a soldier. It is impossible to create a dual personality which will be on the one hand a fighting man toward a foreign enemy, and on the other, a craven who will accept treatment as less than a man at home.”

Hastie’s insistent reports fell on deaf ears. The War Department proved unwilling to seriously address these issues. Members of the department often arrived at decisions without consulting the Civilian Aide, as evidenced by numerous papers that had “Not to be shown to Judge Hastie” written on them. Hastie ultimately resigned in frustration and published a pamphlet called “On Clipped Wings,” which highlighted the discriminatory effects of segregation in the Army Air Corps. The pamphlet prompted one prominent author to say, “It makes me feel like resigning from the human race.”

The NAACP, headed by Walter White, also played a major role in the fight for equal rights. Like Hastie, the organization declared its mission to instigate the collapse of segregation in the military. For these activists, segregated units only compounded the issue they hoped to resolve. The Association’s position was that “of unequivocal opposition to segregation and discrimination,” believing that “enforced segregation by its

---

8 Jabar, Brothers in Arms, 27.
9 Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 145.
very existence carries with it the implication of a superior and inferior group and invariably results in the imposition of a lower status on the group deemed inferior. Thus both principle and practice necessitate unyielding opposition to any and every form of enforced segregation.”\textsuperscript{11} However, the War Department proved just as unyielding in its commitment to segregation. For example, the department struck down propositions for a volunteer integrated infantry division (a creative and seemingly innocuous idea) on the grounds of violating military tradition and being potentially hazardous to military organization.\textsuperscript{12}

The NAACP, Hastie, and others realized they would have to compromise their ideals to make any headway. Although black soldiers existed on the front within service units and enjoyed some visibility from driving in the Red Ball Express, service units did not attract the attention of the press and the public. On a tour of the Pacific Theater, Walter White encountered this phenomenon. He was speaking with a white officer in a chemical warfare division emphasizing the significance of American engineering and logistics in the war. While explaining this to White, a black soldier walked by and the officer offhandedly remarked, “It was a waste of money to bring them over here.”\textsuperscript{13}

When White reminded him that it was primarily black soldiers completing these important engineering and logistical tasks, the officer appeared taken aback. The lack of black soldiers in combat meant a lack of recognition and only created a situation where many could justify their prejudices, pointing to the fact that these soldiers were nowhere to be seen on the front.

Therefore, Walter White and other activists realized that the next step in the pursuit of racial equality involved pushing for more black combat units. The presence of black units fighting on the front could reveal to white troops and citizens back home that African Americans also held a substantial stake in the conflict, and they could prove their capacity to fight on equal footing.

Efforts by White, Hastie, and others to counteract this situation was somewhat fruitful. The War Department proved more malleable on this front, although still hesitant to the point where White claimed, “At times it is evident that some Americans have a mortal fear lest, given an opportunity to prove his mettle as a soldier, the Negro [will] do so.”\textsuperscript{14} Still, the insistence by these activists caused the War Department to exert more pressure on all branches of the military to activate and train more African-American combat units. And thus, the 761\textsuperscript{st} tank battalion was born.

Battles at Home: The 761\textsuperscript{st} and Discrimination on the Homefront

The War Department ordered the activation of the 761\textsuperscript{st} on March 15, 1942, and the Army officially activated the battalion at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana on April 1. At this point, however, the War Department was really just trying to get these activists and the African-American press off their backs. The activation of the unit on April Fools’


\textsuperscript{14} Walter White, A Rising Wind (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1945), 48.
Day offers an unintentional explanation of how the War Department viewed this unit. They did not intend to send this unit into combat. The creation of the unit amounted to a public relations move to placate the black community. As will be seen, the trajectory of the war and the exceptional reputation of the 761st proved otherwise. But first, the 761st needed to survive the American South.

The experience of a black soldier training in the South was more often than not miserable. In some places, racism still raged with an antebellum-like fury. From the average white southerner’s perspective, the arrival of thousands of black soldiers constituted a threat that could topple their entire socio-political system. The black soldiers in turn, many of them from the Northeast or Midwest, had heard of these deeply held social convictions in the South but did not fully understand the reality or the danger. They would often innocently go into town to try new bars and meet women, only to learn that walking into a ‘white’ bar (or part of town) could result in explosive encounters with southerners who did not take kindly to African Americans impeding on their turf.

Black soldiers were keenly aware of the ideological contradiction of a Jim Crow South and a segregated army. If many chose to ignore it, other black recruits were keen on exposing the hypocrisy. Even while Roosevelt proclaimed his ideological war and extolled the Four Freedoms, black soldiers wrote to African-American publications describing the conditions in which they lived. One soldier wrote, “We cannot go to the church services on the camp. We have to be told when we can go and worship God…”

These soldiers were being prevented from exercising a right that Roosevelt had recently proclaimed fundamental for all people, a belief that stretched back to the days of Thomas Jefferson. Ultimately, some questioned why they should fight for a democracy which failed to include them. In spite of such discriminatory conditions in the camps, most colored soldiers retained a positive patriotic desire for unity and change. In a quote reminiscent of Abraham Lincoln, one private spoke out:

If there were ever a time that all racial prejudices and hatred should be put aside, now it is at hand, and the country should be unified in every possible respect…both White and Colored men are being called up and everybody is doing his or her bit to cooperate. Negroes like the Whites are quitting their jobs to increase the military strength of this Nation, because we all think that a nation worth being is worth fighting for. But in view of this so-called unity and National emergency the age-old Monster of Prejudice has raised his head high in the Army.

Like black soldiers throughout the country, members of the 761st faced discrimination both on and off their bases. While training at Camps Claiborne and Hood, they confronted substandard living conditions and restricted access to the main recreational areas and various officer clubs. To make matters worse, many white officers viewed their assignments to all-black units as dead ends, only staying long enough to

16 Ibid., 79-98.
17 Ibid., 4.
gain a promotion. Some white officers were heard strolling through the camps singing "I’m Dreaming of a White Battalion" to the tune of Irving Berlin’s “White Christmas.”

David J. Williams, a man who would prove an excellent leader of men and later a promoter of the 761st's story, describes the attitudes of these white officers in his memoir, Hit Hard. Upon arriving at Camp Claiborne and reporting to his commanding officer, Captain Barnes, Barnes told Williams, “Frankly, lieutenant, I think we’re just marking time down here. Personally, I don’t think these people belong in the tanks. They don’t learn fast enough, but the War Department backed down from all the pressure put on them by all them Nigra [sic] papers and Mrs. Rooseve...[19] As Barnes finished lecturing Williams, Sergeant Turley (an African-American) of C Company walked in and introduced himself. Williams, a well-educated and optimistic Yale man, warmly shook Turley’s hand. Barnes was horrified. His face ashen, fists clenched, and mouth tight, he reprimanded Williams for treating the black man as an equal: “A white man never puts himself on the same level.”

Williams again found himself confronting the monster of segregation when he decided to eat dinner with the first three black commissioned officers of the 761st. These officers ate alone at the rear of the mess hall, and one day he nonchalantly joined them. He talked of tank maintenance and maneuvers, of discipline and morale, ignoring the stares of other soldiers around him. Suddenly, Williams sensed the mess officer behind his back. The disgruntled officer stiffly informed him he was “out of line” and demanded that he return to the “white section.” Even interaction between commissioned officers was restricted.

While these soldiers dealt with prejudice on the bases, the towns outside these army camps proved especially dangerous. Civilians in the South lashed out both verbally and physically at these ‘intruders’ who did not know their place. A good number of 761st soldiers hailed from more progressive northern towns and did not fully understand the deeply rooted norms of the Jim Crow South. As the War Department put it, these new northern recruits lacked "the appearance of servility traditionally associated with the Southern Negro.” Many soldiers in the unit eventually learned that going into town usually meant trouble. Two months before arriving at Camp Claiborne, the “Lee Street Riot” had occurred in the nearby town of Alexandria. A large group of black soldiers had begun to throw rocks and bottles after seeing a violent and unfair arrest of one of their own, to which the local police and civilians responded in brutal fashion, apparently killing more than ten black soldiers and injuring many more.

This clash of cultures manifested itself most notably with regard to the bus transports between the military camps and the neighboring towns. Confrontations between white bus drivers and black soldiers became commonplace, often attracting the attention of MP’s unsympathetic to the black soldier’s plight. Truman Gibson, Hastie’s successor as Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, described the bus situation as “one of the most serious problems facing the army,” adding that “intercity travel is a source of

---

18 David Williams, Hit Hard (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1983), 34.
19 Ibid., 11.
20 Ibid., 12.
21 Ibid., 31.
23 Jabar, 27.
constant peril or uncertainty.” Black soldiers were only permitted to sit in the back, which typically held six to eight seats. As a result, they occasionally waited hours for a bus that might already be full. Even worse, drivers might refuse to pick up the black soldiers if they had a group of less than six. Sometimes bus drivers would randomly stop miles away from the camp and declare that too many people were on the bus. They would then kick off the black soldiers, forcing them to walk back to base. On such walks, each approaching headlight would trigger huge pangs of anxiety in these soldiers; in this part of the country, anything could happen to them. Ultimately, the 761st managed to escape the South as manpower shortages and tanker shortages on the European front prompted General Patton to call for the 761st.

Discrimination, although more muted, followed the men to Europe. American military officials and white soldiers attempted to maintain the US policy of segregation in England. White soldiers told British civilians that black soldiers were morally decayed and dim-witted. Their desperate desire to retain America’s racial construct came forth in claims that Negroes had tails, that their color resulted from disease, that they carried razors to attack innocent people, and that they would rape women with impunity. Yet, not blinded by institutionalized prejudice, many British soldiers and civilians came to finally meet these black Americans and get along with them. In fact, many disdained the idea that the Americans were trying to force their foreign social customs on their country. In one humorous anecdote that captured the spirit of the relationship between black Americans and Britons, white American soldiers had told the British that black soldiers were uncultivated animals who barked to communicate. Black troops then turned the insult into a joke, and began barking innocently at passersby, to which the English responded with barks in turn. As Floyd Dade of the 761st put it, “The Americans were the only ones who were prejudiced like that. Everybody else was glad to see you.” Members of the allied forces and civilian population noted the inconsistency in America’s self-proclaimed war for freedom. Why did the United States send two armies to fight a war for freedom, equality, and human rights?

For some, the discrimination itself was not as infuriating as the reasoning behind it. The major foundation of the racism and discrimination of the day emanated from a compartmentalizing or categorization of the “Negro” as not an individual, but rather as one cog in a race that could be defined and generalized as lazy, slow, dim-witted, cowardly, morally inferior, and so on. For many southern officers, “the Negro” could be placed in a box, although there might be rare individual exceptions. Studies and reports commissioned by the War Department and Army War College illustrated this categorization, providing almost hilariously broad depictions of the typical African-American. One southern Colonel, writing on how best to treat black troops, stated:

24 Jabar, 52.
25 Jabar, Brothers in Arms, 42.
26 Ibid., 51-52.
27 White, A Rising Wind, 16.
28 Ibid., 56.
29 Floyd Dade, Oral History Interview, http://www.tellingstories.org/liberators/fdade/
That colored soldiers are akin to well-meaning but irresponsible children. As such they have to be given the best possible care by their officers and at the same time be subject to rigid discipline. Generally, they cannot be trusted to tell the truth, to execute complicated orders, or to act on their own initiative except in certain individual cases. That among the peculiar characteristics of the colored race...influences such as excitement, fear, religion, dope, liquor or the accomplishment of something without their usual sphere, they individually or collectively can change form with amazing rapidity from a timid or bashful individual to brazen boldness or madness or become hysterical...the colored individual likes to ‘doll up’, strut, brag, and show off. He likes to be distinctive and stand out from others.31

**Priming the 761st for Success**

With this discrimination by civilians and white officers, and an increasing realization that they were not destined to fight, it is remarkable that the 761st grew so successful. Two prominent factors played into the unit’s fortune: leadership and training. Over time, many officers who did not believe in the experiment occurring around them either transferred to other units or came to understand the incredible thing of which they took part. In turn, the rank and file found a more optimistic, professional, and morale-boosting officer corps. David Williams proved to be one of these exceptional officers. Williams came to the 761st a proper, Yale-educated man who trained his men well. The men initially found him rather aloof and felt unsure about him. Once in combat, however, this changed. His men remembered him after the war as a small but fiery Irishman, unfazed by the chaos of battle, and one who cared deeply for his soldiers and shared a special kinship with them. Williams laid the foundation of this kinship when he inspired his men in their first engagement with “Harlamese” lingo, as war correspondent Trezzvant Anderson put it. He told them: “Now look here, ya cats, we gotta hit it down the main drag, and hip some of them unhepped cats on the other side. So let’s roll down ole Seventh Avenue, and kick ‘em Jack!”32 One member of the 761st lightheartedly quipped that Williams thought he was black until the day he died.33

Williams, although initially unsure about black combat troops, developed a profound respect for his men and a deep awareness of what they faced. Not only was he an effective leader in combat, but he also ferociously protected his men from unfair treatment. When they eventually saw combat, Lt. Col Hollis Hunt (the commander of the battalion at the time) involved Williams in a scheme to get a certain Lt. Barbour court-martialed. Barbour had been rattled by the deaths of several of his men the day before, and Hunt wanted to ensure that he would be court-martialed for cowardice. In retaliation, Williams insisted that Major Wingo, a white officer who had fled the field of battle, should then also be court-martialed. The double standard was clear. Williams risked his own position by taking a principled stand and telling Hunt, “I hope you try to court-martial me.”34 Williams would go on to become a major proponent in getting the 761st the recognition it deserved after the war.

---

31 White, Rising Wind, 17.
33 Floyd Dade, Oral History Interview, http://www.tellingstories.org/liberators/fdade/
34 Williams, Hit Hard, 196.
But it was Lt. Col. Paul Bates, commander of the battalion beginning in July 1943, who molded the battalion, instilled it with a sense of purpose, and led it from the staleness of the South to the fullness of the fight. Although Bates was wounded almost immediately in Europe, his influence in getting the 761st to this point was tremendous. An All-American football player in college and active in school leadership, Bates embraced the notion that he would make a great mark on the world—and this experimental unit offered a path to accomplish his goal. One historian describes the character of Bates thus:

He saw and treated the men of the battalion with a simple, direct humanity, and they responded in kind. Unlike other commanders of the battalion, Bates lived on the post with the soldiers. He went with them on marches and runs, listening to their comments and complaints. There was nothing he could do to alter the underlying attitudes of other white officers, but he did forbid any direct mistreatment of his soldiers, and he insisted that they be given nothing but the highest caliber of armored training. He believed in them.35

Unlike other officers who viewed their job in a segregated unit as a dead end, Bates treated it as an opportunity. He believed in his men, but he also knew that they had to outperform every other unit. Because they were African Americans, the Army, the War Department, and the press would scrutinize them intensely. As a result, Bates enforced strict discipline, intensive classroom work, and exhaustive field training. Many doubted that these black soldiers would see combat, but Bates would reveal that they were worthy. The men respected him for it and a strong esprit de corps resulted, which these soldiers maintained for the rest of the war.

Bates demonstrated his importance in one incident that could have spelled the end of the 761st. In March 1943, a passerby found the body of a black soldier cut in half on the railroad tracks in Alexandria, the town near Camp Claiborne. The authorities claimed the dead soldier had been intoxicated, so he stumbled on the tracks and knocked himself out. But others in the 761st remembered this man as a strict Baptist who never drank. This represented the last straw for some of the tankers. If the Army and the government refused to protect them, they had to protect themselves by lashing out against injustice and racism. Consequently, a group of soldiers hijacked six tanks and a half-track, and started down the road for Alexandria. Bates got wind of this vigilante convoy and raced to meet them at the camp gate. He persuaded them to turn back, reminding them that if they attempted to distribute vigilante justice, then they would jeopardize everything they had worked toward. As a sign of solidarity, Bates promised the men that if anything like this transpired again, he would lead them into town himself.36

Bates would be wounded and out of action from November 7, 1944 (their first day of combat) until February 17, 1945. During that time, he received several letters from his men hoping for his speedy return. In one powerful message, Corporal Louis Philips expressed the indispensable role of Bates to the 761st: “I have always held you in the highest esteem, and always will…The battalion has not only fought for the name, and advancement of the Negro race, as a whole. They have fought and are still fighting for you.”37 Another soldier wrote: “This man gave us the dignity, honor, and pride that

35 Jabar, Brothers in Arms, 29.
36 Ibid., 31-32.
37 Quoted in Dinicolo, The Black Panthers, 225.
America wouldn’t. With this we fought on to glory and honor few men have ever lived to see.” Bates would prove himself an able commander on the field of battle later on, but his leadership on the dusty, prejudice-ridden training fields of the South was vital in creating a competent, cohesive, and motivated unit that would remain that way through the rigors of combat.

It is necessary to note that in highlighting the key roles played by men such as David Williams and Paul Bates, other men are of course overlooked. Emphasizing the contributions of these two men should in no way be construed as belittling the achievements of others. Ultimately, many brave and skilled officers and enlisted men rolled into battle, made weighty decisions, and displayed acts of heroism. Furthermore, the 761st had a majority of black officers by the end of the war, some coming into camp from OCS and others earning battlefield commissions, who always appeared in the thick of battle, throwing their lives on the line to protect their men. Without such men as Bates and Williams, however, this battalion might never have seen combat in the first place, might have never held itself together in battle, and might have never earned the recognition it deserved.

But besides the leadership demonstrated by these men, extensive and exhaustive training also pointed to the future success of the unit. The War Department activated the 761st as a public relations move to placate the black community and calm the storm from the black press; it was not intended to reach the front lines. Instead of languishing in the military camps of a Jim Crow South, however, the 761st trained relentlessly. Naturally, some men began to feel sullen and failed to grasp the point. But Bates created a culture of motivation and morale. Ironically, because they were not expected to see combat, the unit trained for over two years—far longer than the typical three months. This prolonged training prepared them well for when they eventually deployed.

Their experience at Camp Claiborne proved especially fruitful for enduring the terrible weather conditions in Europe during late 1944 and early 1945. In regard to sloshing their tanks through the swamps of Louisiana, Sgt. Floyd Dade stated, “That was one thing that helped us so much in our combat experience, because we knew what to do when we were bogged down in the mud and rain and in those situations. When the terrain wasn’t fit for you to fight or travel in, we knew how to do it, maneuver in it.” On April 8, 1943, the 761st took part in Third Army maneuvers for almost two months, working alongside infantry divisions and practicing coordinated attacks. Both Generals Lear and McNair observed the 761st on multiple occasions during these training exercises. They liked what they saw and the 761st was ordered to Camp Hood in September for advanced armor training.

After the 761st engaged in another round of divisional maneuvers at Camp Hood, the Army designated it a medium battalion on October 29 and replaced its light Stuart tanks with the heavier and more formidable Shermans (except in one reconnaissance company). The bulk of their training at Camp Hood involved acting as enemy tanks to help train Tank Destroyer Units that were being pumped into the European Theater as quickly as possible. Despite reveling in their ability to consistently outmaneuver and outwit the tank destroyers, the men could not help feeling held back because of their race.

---

38 Ibid, 216.
39 Floyd Dade Interview.
They often heard other white officers refer to them as “Eleanor Roosevelt’s Niggers,” which highlighted the first lady’s agitation that black soldiers should be granted a chance. For the soldiers of the battalion, “the phrase implied that the 761st was a mascot existing only for show, that they weren’t going anywhere.”

One would think such constant prejudice would lessen morale. The fact that they retained their spirit and dedication in their training is a testament to both the leadership in the battalion and the strength of the character of these men.

The 761st on the Front Lines

The prowess demonstrated by the 761st through their training did not go unnoticed. On a visit to Camp Hood, General Lear stated, “All the reports coming up to Washington about you have been of a superior nature, and we are expecting great things of your battalion in combat.” Ultimately, manpower shortages on the front trumped any hesitation about employing the 761st in combat. Finally, on June 9, 1944, the 761st received its orders for deployment and arrived at Camp Shanks, New York on August 13, 1944. On the way, the MP’s went through and closed the window shades after hearing rumors that southerners would take potshots at the trains if they saw that they carried black soldiers.

At the time of departure on August 26, the 761st had 36 officers and 676 enlisted men. They journeyed to Avenmouth, England on the dilapidated HMS Esperance Bay, a British passenger ship converted to an armed merchant cruiser and then again to a troop transport. Segregation remained intact on the ship, and soldiers of the 761st found their quarters in the hold at the bottom of the ship, which made for a cramped living situation. Captain Peter Jacoby, the troop transport commander, commended the men for their conduct on the ship in a letter to Lt. Col. Paul Bates. He wrote:

I wish to express my appreciation to you and your officers for your hearty cooperation in making this voyage most successful and pleasant. I commend your unit for its discipline, military courtesy, high morale, and soldierly conduct throughout the voyage. It has been by far one of the disciplined units of its kind on this ship since the undersigned has been transport commander. My staff and I wish you Godspeed in your future missions and the best of luck and success to final victory.

The 761st landed at Omaha Beach on October 10, 1944, and were soon attached to the 26th “Yankee” infantry division of Patton’s Third Army. Previous attempts to replace trained tankers with hastily trained infantrymen had failed in a dramatic way, especially in the hedgerow country around Normandy. One historian notes that these replacement tankers “were often invariably slaughtered within minutes.” Thus, Patton heartily welcomed the highly trained 761st. He needed skilled tankers who knew their way around

41 Jabar, *Brothers in Arms*, 44.
43 Jabar, *Brothers in Arms*, 64.
44 Ibid., 17.
45 Ibid.
a Sherman. On November 2, Patton arrived to survey the battalion. Climbing atop the hood of a jeep he proclaimed:

Men, you are the first Negro tankers to ever fight in the American Army. I would never have asked for you if you weren’t good. I have nothing but the best in my army. I don’t care what color you are, so long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sonsabitches. Everyone has their eyes on you and is expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is looking forward to your success. Don’t let them down, and damn you, don’t let me down!⁴⁷

Patton’s appearance and inspiring speech provided a massive boost of morale. Several of the soldiers who gave accounts after the war had committed this speech to heart, proving able to recite it from memory. They saw themselves as “Patton’s Panthers” and took great pride in being recognized by one of history’s greatest generals.

Patton’s private views on black soldiers, however, did not accord with his speech. In his autobiography, he wrote, “Individually they were good soldiers, but I expressed my belief at the time, and have never found the necessity of changing it, that a colored soldier cannot think fast enough to fight in armor.”⁴⁸ He also wrote in his diary after the speech that the 761⁷th “gave a very good first impression, but I have no faith in the inherent fighting ability of the race.” Interestingly, Patton maintained different, commingling views. His lack of confidence in African Americans reflected a product of the times and was a testament to how deeply the issue permeated society. But his willingness to utilize these troops represented his pragmatism and desperation to win the war. It also pointed to the agonizingly slow social and political shift toward recognizing African Americans as equal citizens.

Patton, like Marshall and Eisenhower, saw the social issue as a distraction toward the ultimate goal—winning the war. Eisenhower echoed this idea, telling Walter White about an encounter with a New York journalist who chided him on segregation in the military: “He told me my first duty was to change the social thinking of the soldiers under my command, especially on racial issues. I told him he was a damned fool - that my first duty is to win wars and that any changes in social thinking would be purely incidental.”⁴⁹ This is not to say Eisenhower chose to ignore the race issue, but rather that he had a global conflict to win; facilitating desegregation did not sit high on the list of practical war aims. Eisenhower did believe that black troops would serve well as long as the CO proved to be competent, optimistic, and obedient. The problem remained that many prejudiced officers ignored or resisted orders prohibiting discrimination.⁵⁰

Despite having a solid cadre of good officers, the 761⁷th suffered its own issues with prejudice after deployment. Even after two years of training and demonstrations of impressive discipline, some officers within the battalion clung to their reservations about the performance of black soldiers on the battlefield. Upon hearing that the unit was being called overseas, Major Charles Wingo, executive officer of the battalion at the time, complained to Captain Williams: “What in the world is the War Department thinking

⁴⁷ Anderson, Come Out Fighting, 21.
⁴⁹ White, A Rising Wind, 63.
⁵⁰ White, A Rising Wind, 67.
about? These folks aren’t fit for combat.” This same Major Wingo fled in disgrace in the first major action that the battalion faced.

From November 8 until December 24, 1944, the 761st fought in the Lorraine Campaign, driving through and helping take towns such as Morville, Château-Salins, Obreck, Wuisse, Guebling, Dieuze and Honskirch. The battalion crossed the German border on December 14, but not for long as the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes prompted their move north to Belgium. Excessive rain during this time transformed the roads into swamps, but the extensive training back home had prepared the tankers for the challenge. They had not, however, necessarily prepared for operating in smaller units. As a “bastard” battalion, the 761st was not permanently attached to any division—it simply went wherever the need arose. Often, commanders of the division to which the tankers were attached would split the battalion by companies or even platoons. As a result, these subunits of the 761st often found themselves isolated, serving under officers who knew nothing about tank warfare. As one scholar pointed out, “In theory, the separate battalion pool provided for greater flexibility and adaptability for changing battlefield conditions; in practice, particularly for armored units, it often proved disastrous.” Despite these misguided tactics, the 761st did not falter. This situation provided a testament to the skill, adaptability, and composure of the battalion.

Even more to this point, Ulysses Lee highlights three events “which in a unit with less confidence and will to achieve, might have proved disastrous.” First, on November 7, 1944, a German patrol shot and wounded commander Paul Bates as he tried to reorganize the convoy after a French collaborator blocked the road. On the first day of combat, the 761st had lost the inspirational commander who had led the battalion through the trials of the South. The new commander of the battalion, the aforementioned Major Wingo, fled from their fight the next day. Lt. Col. Hollis Hunt then came over from the 17th armored to command the unit, but a mortar shell soon incapacitated him. A lesser unit might have collapsed into disarray after losing three commanding officers in such a short span of time, but not the 761st. It conducted itself admirably in these tumultuous days of fighting.

Stories of great heroism and sacrifice abound in this battalion’s history. In their first few days of combat, the tanks of Able Company came across a roadblock. As the soldiers determined how to overcome the obstacle, they slowly realized their increasingly vulnerable position. Understanding the need for urgency, Sgt. Reuben Rivers leapt out of his tank under heavy fire, crawled forward, and attached a cable to the roadblock. Still under fire, Rivers clambered back into his tank, removed the roadblock, and got the convoy moving again. Over in C Company during the bloodiest engagement of their first two days, the tanks ran straight into a massive tank trap near Morville. The Germans zeroed in on the tanks, raining hellfire onto the immobilized Sherms. Sgt. Samuel Turley and 2nd Lt. Kenneth Coleman stood out in the open, simultaneously firing on the enemy position while ferrying soldiers out of the stranded tanks. Both were killed. Turley

51 Williams, Hit Hard, 125.
52 Floyd Dade Interview.
54 Jabar 81-82.
55 Ibid.
56 Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 662.
57 Anderson, Come Out Fighting, 28.
allegedly went down firing a massive Browning 50 Cal that had been blasted off one of the tanks.\textsuperscript{58} A captured German at Morville exclaimed, “Such bravery I have never before, but once seen, and that was on the Russian front.”\textsuperscript{59}

Many others in the 761\textsuperscript{st} displayed great heroism during their service. The antics of Reuben Rivers encapsulate the courage of the men in the battalion and their awareness of how important it was to prove their ability on the battlefield to their fellow soldiers and those back home. After experiencing serious injury, Rivers refused to be treated and bravely spearheaded his company’s attack of Guebling on November 19. The battle turned south quickly. His tank was destroyed by enemy fire, but he simply joined another crew and kept fighting. The 761\textsuperscript{st} ran into heavy resistance and started to retreat, but Reuben (against orders) led his tank into the jaws of the enemy—ultimately to his death—in order to divert the enemy’s attention from the pinned down and retreating Shermans. For this action, he received the Congressional Medal of Honor…in 1997.

In mid-December, the 26\textsuperscript{th} infantry division, the 761\textsuperscript{st}’s accompanying division since early November, was released from the front. The 761\textsuperscript{st} received no such rest and rehabilitation. They instead pushed on, now attached to the 87\textsuperscript{th} infantry. This would be the story of their war. The 761\textsuperscript{st} only found a respite from the fighting while it transferred from one division to another. If anything, this demonstrated their proficiency and necessity to the war effort—and the infantry commanders whom they assisted recognized this. On December 9, 1944, General Willard Paul of the 26\textsuperscript{th} infantry division and General Manton Eddy of XII Corps praised the tank battalion for its adaptability to the horrible weather conditions and its gallantry while facing “some of Germany’s finest troops.”\textsuperscript{60}

On December 24, the 761\textsuperscript{st} received orders to move up to the area a few miles west of Bastogne. The Germans had caught the Allies completely unaware in the Ardennes Counter-Offensive, popularly known as the Battle of the Bulge. In Hitler’s last, desperate gamble to prolong the war, German forces stormed through the weak Allied lines in a race against time to split the allies in two and seize the crucial port of Antwerp. The Bulge became one of the costliest conflicts of the war, resulting in almost 170,000 combined casualties at a time when many thought the war was coming to a speedy conclusion.

Patton’s Third Army furiously sped to plug the gap and aid the beleaguered defenders of Bastogne. Soldiers of the 761\textsuperscript{st}, like so many others who fought in this major battle, highlighted the cold and chaos that defined the Bulge. Sgt. Floyd Dade described how the tanks often traveled at night in deep snow to make up ground. It was so dark that if the lead tank drove off a cliff, the rest would surely have followed. The tankers trailed the men in front of them by fixating their eyes on lighted cigarettes, which acted as flickering beacons igniting the way. The infantrymen accompanying them would hover around the exhaust of the tanks, seeking to obtain some warmth in the biting cold, however short-lived.\textsuperscript{61} For many, the Bulge was hell—and the 761\textsuperscript{st} plowed straight into it.

In order to relieve the pressure around Bastogne, the 761\textsuperscript{st} set out to take several towns to the west of the surrounded Americans and cut off German supply lines. At the

\textsuperscript{58} Anderson, \textit{Come Out Fighting}, 32, 34.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{60} Anderson, \textit{Come Out Fighting}, 42.
\textsuperscript{61} Floyd Dade Interview.
town of Tillet, Belgium, beginning on January 5, the 761st faced elements of two SS Panzer divisions. Along with the 87th infantry, the tank battalion faced staunch resistance for five days as the Germans incessantly beat back their attacks. The Germans, however, were not the only enemy the Americans faced. Sub-freezing temperatures and snow took a huge toll on not only the men, but also the tanks and infantry weapons. The battalion lost a significant portion of tanks to mechanized failure. Furthermore, the Shermans tended to sink deep into the snow and lose maneuverability, creating easy targets for the deadly German 88’s. The lighter Stuart tanks proved invaluable in the snowy mire.

Ultimately, the Germans withdrew, but not without inflicting heavy damage. As one historian remarked, the 761st “took Tillet with a whimper.” Rumors surfaced that they had just engaged and defeated the legendary “Führer Begleit Brigade,” but there is no credible evidence to support this. Nevertheless, the men had risen above their greatest challenge. They had refused to back down, exerting relentless pressure on a heavily armored enemy. Even though the 761st had been bloodied and certainly did not perform a glorious rout of the enemy, they had accomplished their job—they had helped relieve pressure on Bastogne.

Following the Battle of Tillet, the 761st attached to the 17th airborne division and rumbled toward Houffaliz and St. Vith. Together, the 761st and the 17th cut off the main thoroughfare from St. Vith to Bastogne in mid-January. Members of the 761st looked back fondly on their service alongside the 17th paratroopers. The two units developed a special chemistry owing to their extensive training. As war correspondent Trezzvant Anderson wrote, the paratroopers “thought a helluva lot about those colored troops.” Indeed, General Miley of the 17th allegedly claimed that he would prefer five tanks of the 761st over a massive number from any other unit.

Perhaps the greatest and most unrecognized achievement of the 761st occurred while involved in “Task Force Rhine.” Their old leader, Lt. Col. Paul Bates, had returned from his injuries on February 17, and Army HQ tasked the 761st with breaching the Siegfried Line alongside the 103rd “Cactus” infantry division on March 21, 1945. In only three days, the task force pushed through the towns of Nieder-Schettenbach, Erlenbach, Silz, Muncieier, and Klingenmünster. They killed 800 Germans and captured 3,000 more while destroying thirty-one pillboxes, forty-nine machine gun nests, twenty-nine anti-tank guns, and 450 enemy vehicles. Their actions alongside the 103rd infantry during these few days gave rise to the first major breach of the Siegfried line, opening a hole through which the 14th armored division could smash and flood the Rhine plain with American forces. But despite the unit’s incredible accomplishment, Paul Bates could not help feeling that the efforts of his unit went unnoticed. He wrote, “We will never get the real credit we deserve for it as others won’t think it possible to do what we accomplished.”

In early April, the 761st joined the 71st infantry for the final drive through Germany, helping to take Coburg and Goering’s castle at Neuhaus. They also fought

---

63 Ibid.
64 Anderson, Come Out Fighting, 52-53.
65 Ibid., 73-76.
66 Quoted in Dinicolo, 241.
alongside the 71st to ultimately destroy the fabled 6th SS Mountain Division Nord. They engaged in mopping-up operations all the way to the town of Steyr, Austria where they eventually met up with the First Ukrainian Army in early May. For many in the 761st, their service to the country had come to a close.

**Perceptions of the 761st in the War’s Aftermath**

From November 7, the 761st had fought for 183 continuous days on the front in four major allied campaigns and in six different countries. It operated in Patton’s army alongside the 26th, 71st, 79th, 87th, 95th, and 103rd infantry divisions. It also served with the 17th airborne and elements of the Seventh and Ninth Armies. It received numerous commendations from high-level commanders and ultimately won 296 purple hearts, seventy bronze stars, and eleven silver stars. The 761st had proved itself again and again, winning over the respect and even admiration of white units who initially observed them with uncertainty or outright disgust.

Yet the soldiers of the 761st returned to a country where many did not know, did not care, or refused to believe that black soldiers had fought valiantly in combat. The War Department downplayed the role of black soldiers to preserve the status quo and avoid backlash. Major news publications wrote next to nothing about the feats of the 761st. Much of its coverage came from Trezzvant Anderson, who published in the Pittsburgh Courier, the largest African-American newspaper at the time. Horace Evans, a member of the 761st, highlighted how war correspondents and journalists would march right by the 761st after a battle to interview any other unit. One soldier summed up the situation quite well, saying, “Well, the first time after seeing all our boys killed over there and you come back to Hampton, Virginia and get off a boat and go to a camp to see where they are to send you and they tell you you can't go in the PX but then they let the prisoners of war go in there. That doesn't go down too good, see.” The soldiers of the 761st, after witnessing the walls of prejudice dissolve on the battlefield, came back shocked to find that everything still seemed the same.

At the same time, however, their service laid the foundation for the integration of the armed forces. In December 1944, the traditional segregationist policy of the War Department began to crack. In an attempt to solve the issue of manpower shortages on the front, SHAEF issued a call for volunteers from the service units in the ETO. Almost 5,000 black soldiers applied, half of which were accepted. Eisenhower ordered their integration into white rifle companies (segregated by platoon), and after a period of concentrated training, they reached the front line in February. In a post-war survey of 250 white officers in these integrated platoons, Army interviewers found that over 80 percent of these white officers believed these black soldiers “performed well” in combat, and that 77 percent held more favorable attitudes toward the Negro soldiers after serving with

---

them. Furthermore, a majority of the white officers claimed that they got along “very well” with the colored soldiers. Many of the men believed that integrated companies would “encourage friendly competition” and “improve racial understanding.”

The War Department and several generals hesitated to publish the results, claiming that the sample size of the survey was too small. They did not want to give the African-American press or the NAACP any more reason to rabble-rouse. But the writing was on the wall, and Marshall believed it needed to be “followed up.” This survey helped expose the fallacy that black soldiers could not fight on equal footing with their white compatriots, and further illustrated the theme of prejudice dissolving on the battlefield—integrated units would not collapse owing to racial friction. Soldiers fighting in these temporarily integrated units found themselves in a battle-forged brotherhood that transcended racial squabbles, at least during combat.

The 761st found this to be the case as they fought and died alongside men of various divisions, winning over the respect of prejudiced or doubtful white soldiers. The skill and heroism of the 761st combined with the camaraderie of battle helped alter the attitudes of many white soldiers. Examples of this phenomenon abound. A paratrooper of the 17th Airborne described a harrowing situation near Bastogne where the Germans held the high ground and had pinned his unit down. His unit began taking heavy losses, and the odds of survival looked grim. All of a sudden, he heard the rumbling of tanks—the 761st burst into view. One tanker opened his hatch and jovially called down to the paratrooper, “You’ll need some help.” The 761st turned the tide of the battle and led a counter-attack by raining devastation on the enemy machine gun nests. Seeing these “angels of mercy” come to the rescue, the paratrooper experienced a sudden realization: “That blood was the same color, from the black man as it was from the white man…and for me that meant so much in clearing away some of the haze.”

American soldiers, black and white, united on the battlefield for the simple reason of keeping one another alive. As one soldier of the 78th division stated, “There’s—there’s nothing and there’s no thing that you can do at home or prior to give you the true depth of your feelings of dying. Nobody wants to die.” Johnnie Stevens, a soldier of the 761st, recounted a tale where his tank struck a mine and he ejected out into the middle of a firefight. A white sergeant raced up to him to make sure he was okay, and then rolled him into a ditch out of the line of fire. Stevens looked up from his cover to witness his noble savior gunned down. Sgt. Floyd Dade summed up this combat-forged equality, saying, “That nobody had any remorse for each other or anything, we were just glad to see each

---

71 “Opinions About Negro Infantry Platoons in White Companies of 7 Divisions,” July 3, 1945, Record Group 220: Records of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces, Army, Negro Platoons in White Companies, Harry S. Truman Library.


73 “The All Black 761st Tank Battalion: General Patton's Black Panthers WW2,” History Channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ill0TZW3WmA

74 Albert J. Boehnlein Collection, (AFC/2001/001/01513), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

75 “The All Black 761st Tank Battalion: General Patton's Black Panthers WW2,” History Channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ill0TZW3WmA
other and shaking hands. When you up there being with that stuff coming at you, you glad to see anybody. Any help you can get, and we did a hell of a good job.”

Breaking the color barrier on the battlefield did not immediately translate into dissolution of prejudice back on the home front, but it certainly helped. Progress toward equality was agonizingly slow during and after the war, but isolated incidents confirmed that progression was occurring. In Florida, a group of white soldiers offered their seat to a wounded black veteran as he boarded a bus, prompting the agitated driver to assert that he should either go to the back or get off. The soldiers turned to each other and then one told the driver, “Either he sits down and you drive on or we’ll throw you off the bus and I’ll drive.”

One New York serviceman became so appalled by the racism in the military that he donated his first month’s compensation to the NAACP. Many fighting abroad condemned the race riots transpiring at home as directly opposed to what they were fighting for:

We who are doing the fighting, and will do the fighting to preserve this country from such acts of discrimination; we who recognize no discrimination in the trenches, and foxholes; we who shed the same blood—one kind of blood—red. Things like race riots and strikes makes us fighters think—what are we fighting for? Americanism means everything to us, but is swiftly turning to be an unfounded word.

These incidents signaled a changing course in American attitudes in the military, but the War Department and the American public still lagged behind. They had seen that black combat soldiers could fight well. Surveys and government commissioned reports had even labeled the US military’s refusal to fully utilize black manpower as impractical. And yet, many Americans remained unconvinced concerning desegregation. Consequently, civil rights activists used successful units like the 761st and the integrated rifle companies to promote integration. The 761st, along with other legendary black units such as the 99th Pursuit Squadron (the renowned Tuskegee Airmen), provided an arsenal of evidence that poked major holes in traditional beliefs. Proponents of integration eagerly utilized such evidence to justify their case. For example, A. Philip Randolph founded the Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service (later named the League for Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Against Military Segregation) and exerted consistent pressure on Harry Truman after the war. Truman eventually signed Executive Order 9981 on July 16, 1948, which effectively ordered the desegregation of the armed services.

Conclusion: The 761st’s Legacy

The 761st did more than just pave the way for integration. It served as an example of micro-integration that the War Department refused to follow up, and further represented a missed opportunity for the War Department to begin continuous small-scale integration throughout the war. Although the 761st was technically a segregated unit, it operated in close cooperation with white units and earned their respect. The 761st

76 Floyd Dade Interview.
77 White, A Rising Wind, 124.
78 Ibid., 128.
79 Ibid., 125.
demonstrated that black and white units could fight together and that this “social experiment” did not prove a hindrance to the war effort.

The story of the 761st tank battalion is not one that is well known. Much of the research surrounding it has only emerged within the last twenty years. Its lack of recognition stems partly from the battalion’s tactical nature. It rarely fought as a whole battalion; instead, division commanders often divided the battalion by company or even platoon to serve with different units. Given its position as a small, detached, and rotating battalion, few higher-up commanders were connected with it who would have possessed the sway and influence to place the unit on the map. However, this does not entirely account for the 761st’s relative obscurity, especially considering that it received several commendations and served with a plethora of divisions.

Its lack of recognition assumedly resulted more from the bigotry of the times, and efforts by military officers and the War Department to downplay the role of black soldiers in the war. Several notable officers of the 761st repeatedly tried to obtain awards for the men, with some submitting evidence demonstrating the battalion’s warrant for a unit citation. Such efforts either faced rejection or stalling tactics in the form of convenient misplacements of paperwork. The unit’s achievements were finally recognized more than two decades later in 1978 when Jimmy Carter issued a Presidential Unit Citation. It would take almost another two decades for an individual to be recognized, with Reuben Rivers receiving a Congressional Medal of Honor in 1997.

The unit was deactivated soon after the end of the war, providing further evidence of the attempt to downplay the role of these soldiers. Why deactivate a highly successful unit that had performed well with white units in the war, and which could have offered a template to work with for integration? An article appearing in the Washington Post in 1946 illustrated this point, noting that the battalion “has done much to spread the democratic ideals which we so loudly proclaim because of the fact that all of its attachments, both administrative and operational, were with white units. As a result of these attachments many lessons in inter-racial harmony were learned.” The writer of the article went on to decry the breakup of the unit, as it only appeared logical for the battalion to continue serving “because of its excellent combat and occupation record, because of the pride which the Negro race has in it, and because it reflects only the highest credit upon the United States Army.”

At the very least, this paper intends to highlight the long-overlooked contributions of these pioneers. The 761st tank battalion served honorably for 183 consecutive days on the front with numerous divisions and armies, earning several commendations from superior officers throughout their deployment. The lengthy amount of time they spent on the front testifies to their exceptional skill and heroism, and poked major holes in the prevailing attitude that African Americans did not possess the capacity to fight effectively. Though technically a segregated unit, the 761st supported white infantry units throughout the war, simultaneously earning their respect and smashing the walls of prejudice. They fought bravely for a country that refused and hesitated to acknowledge their contributions. Although their service went largely unrecognized by the public, and

---

the path to equality would still long and arduous, the 761st helped lay the seeds of integration which in turn provided the pivotal first step towards the Civil Rights Movement.
Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES


R.L. Vann to Ernest H. Wilkins, March 4, 1938. Record Group 220: Records of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, General Correspondence. Truman Library Online.


“The All Black 761st Tank Battalion: General Patton's Black Panthers WW2.” History Channel. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ill0TZW3WmA

SECONDARY SOURCES


