PLAYING AMERICAN: RACE AND CITIZENSHIP IN AMERICAN THEATRE AND
PERFORMANCE DURING THE GREAT WAR, 1917-1919

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre with a minor in European Union Studies in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016

Urbana, Illinois

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This dissertation explores the intersection of race and citizenship in American theatre and performance during US active engagement in the Great War through focusing on performances by and about German immigrants and African American soldiers. Quickly after President Woodrow Wilson requested a declaration of war against Germany, the American homefront became a site of coercive patriotism supported by an extreme nationalistic rhetoric. A vital aspect of military preparedness would be the conformity of opinion, political expression, and outward signs of loyalty. Those who could or would not fit into the newly defined narrow view of proper American citizenship expression found themselves in the dangerous position of being outsiders. Those of German descent and recent German immigrants were suspected of disloyalty. Through a racialized process of enemization, Germans lost their access to the safety and security provided by White privilege. The performances examined in this dissertation derive from this brief period where the construction of race, and in particular the instability of Whiteness, stands out precisely because Germans were now considered White. Wartime German enemy construction was created through the modes and means of American anti-Black racism connecting xenophobic suspicions with deep-rooted racial ideologies of White supremacy. Against the backdrop of the striking spectacle of violence that was the Great War there were more intimate performances of violence that linked the minority subject to the nation.

Through an interdisciplinary analysis rooted in theatre history, performance studies, critical race/ethnic theory, American studies, and utilizing archival research these chapters foreground how performed acts of violence constructed and circulated notions of race and citizenship on the theatrical stage and in everyday performance. The chapters of this dissertation discuss and analyze a theatrical event and a performative event for both German immigrants and African American soldiers including (1) an analysis the play *Friendly Enemies* (1918) by Aaron Hoffman and Samuel Shipman and its production and critical history, (2) the lynching of German immigrant Robert Prager in Collinsville, IL, (3) the African
American soldiers charged for mutiny and murder for their participation in the Houston Riot, and (4) an analysis of the play *Mine Eyes Have Seen* (1918) by Alice Dunbar Nelson and its production history. Taken together, these chapters demonstrate how the hyper-patriotic wartime American landscape offers a productive site for examining the role of violence in racial and citizenship formation.
For Mom.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the staff, faculty, and students in the Department of Theatre at the University of Illinois. My years spent in the cornfield will always hold a special place in my heart and I am honored to have taught and learned many lessons while in Champaign-Urbana. Thank you to Valleri Robinson for guiding this project across the finish line.

Thank you to all my Illinois colleagues and friends who have provided support through this process. BJ, Abby, and Carrie – I would have never made it through without our evenings of dinner, games, and bad movies.

This project would not have been possible without many conversations with Joshua Chambers-Letson. I am continually honored by your mentorship and your friendship.

My family has always been supportive of my work in the theatre and has come to everything I was involved in, even when it was terrible. Their love and support has meant the world. Thanks, Dad, for being a constant advocate for enjoying life to the fullest.

Zack – your partnership makes it all possible. If not for you...

Marshall, you will never know how much of this project you were involved in – from kicking me in the ribs while I wrote to sitting on my lap while I typed the last of the bibliography. You were and still are a constant reminder that if I want the world to be a better place for you I have fight for it.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

American theatre history and performance scholarship is virtually silent on the First World War. There are no comprehensive American volumes that equal the broad scale, depth, and quality of the works on British theatre, L.J. Collins’s Theatre at War 1914-1918 (1997) and Gordon Williams’s British Theatre in the Great War (2003), or address the range of performances in an American context in ways similar to European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918 (2002) edited by Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites. Even the classic The Great War and Modern Memory (1975) by American scholar Paul Fussell focuses solely on British novels and poems. The many American events commemorating the start of the war in Europe in the fall of 2014 demonstrated a desire to re-discover the influence of the war and analyze its connection to the contemporary moment. This dissertation contends that the renewed interest in this period could not come at a better time as many of the socio-political conflicts that haunted the homefront - the role of immigrants and refugees in American society, the justification of police and state violence, and a narrowing of acceptable expressions of American citizenship – are once again highly visible in a nation still fighting on foreign lands. As the centennial of American engagement approaches in 2017, this dissertation is part of a newfound interest in exploring the enduring American legacy of the conflict in Europe and on the American homefront.

Quickly after President Woodrow Wilson went to Congress on April 2, 1917 to request a declaration of war against Germany, the American homefront became a site of coercive patriotism supported by an extreme nationalistic rhetoric. Wilson, elected on the platform of keeping Americans out the war, was now proclaiming that the country had no choice but to build a massive military infrastructure, raise an army, and send young men to the bloody battlefields of Europe. To take America on this journey, Wilson and his administration would need to fight a war for the minds and hearts of
Americans as much as it needed to wage war against the Central Powers. A vital aspect of military preparedness would be the conformity of opinion, political expression, and outward signs of loyalty. Those who could or would not fit into the newly defined narrow view of proper American citizenship expression found themselves in the dangerous position of being outsiders. Pacifists, socialists, anarchists, suffragettes, and conscious objectors all found themselves at odds with the changing political and social landscape as the government attempted to silence dissent through legal punishment. Local communities also took up the charge of wartime conformity requiring and enforcing declarations of national loyalty, the monitoring of behavior and speech, and the reporting of actions they found suspicious to the authorities (Capozzola 8-10).

Those of German descent and African Americans were highly suspected of being disloyal and were vulnerable to extreme acts of violence, each due to a reason that was out of their control – their race. Those of German descent in the US became enemies of the state overnight when the country went to war against their former homeland. While many Whites believed that due to racial oppression, African Americans harbored less allegiance to their country and would be susceptible to the influence of German spies. This study is guided by conceptions of race in this period, the ramifications of racism, and their relationship to American citizenship. How will those who have been historically oppressed reconcile the request for military sacrifice from a nation who has treated them so poorly? What will happen when the home country of the largest ethnic group in the nation becomes the enemy? These questions are not hypothetical ones but historical realities, lived experiences, and fundamental queries about the relationship between the individual and the state. This dissertation takes up these questions through examining American theatre and performance about Germans in America and African American soldiers at the nexus of race and citizenship.

My dissertation, Playing American: Race and Citizenship in American Theatre and Performance During The Great War, 1917-1919 examines the understudied area of American theatre history and
performance during the First World War pairing it with critical race theory and performance studies in order to foreground how performed acts of violence constructed and circulated notions of race and citizenship. In the four chapters of this dissertation, I look at two groups: German immigrants and African American soldiers and analyze a case of a theatrical performance and a performance of violence outside the aesthetic frame in relationship to each group. I do not advocate for the utility and productivity of the study of American theatre and performance during the Great War, as it was known in its time, simply because there is a lack of research in the area. I am drawn to this period because it reveals profound questions about the role of race and citizenship in a time of war and the role that violence plays in the formation of minority citizenship.

This dissertation asks the question: How did American theatre and performance circulate and contest notions of race and citizenship during the Great War? Specifically, what were the opinions, perceptions, and assumptions that these works presented about the role of African Americans and German immigrants in the nation during the war? What was the role of multiple kinds of violence in these performances? What were the varied responses to these productions and performances from audiences, newspapers, federal and state governments, and legal institutions, the police and the military? How did these messages or the perceptions of these messages reflect back into these communities? How did they respond? Finally, how does the study of race and citizenship in American theatre and performance in this period allow for a greater reflection on our contemporary moment as the nation?

As an interdisciplinary study, I utilize multiple methods to examine the performances for this dissertation. The inclusion of both theatre history and performance studies chapters allows for a layering of historical analysis, archival research, close reading, and theoretical application. My primary method for examining these performances is through critical race theory as I foreground the construction of race and its influence in the period. Through archival research and the use of scholarly
sources, I historically situate the performance within the racial dynamics of the period. Next, I examine how that performance demonstrates specific concepts of race paying particular attention to the role of violence in the shaping of minority citizenship. Finally, I present the response of those conceptions within the period through discussing responses, modes of resistance, and short and long-term historical effects.

My focus on the US as a nation undergirded by a history of race is indebted to the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant who argue that America is a racial state. In their now classic text *Racial Formations in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (1994) they argue that the United States was structured by a racial order with racial subjection as its main objective and that the country’s racial policy was one of repression and exclusion (79-81). I argue, following Omi and Winant’s theoretical formation, that the US maintains its racial hierarchy through violence, in the form of repression and exclusion, making violence a fundamental characteristic of the relationship between the minority subject and the state. Minority citizenship, the multi-faceted relationship of the racialized individual to the state, is consistently formulated and re-formulated through acts of violence in a variety of forms.

In response to these acts of violence there has always been resistance and rebellion. Omi and Winant point out that despite the high levels of subjugation racial minorities “were always able to counterpose their own cultural traditions, their own forms of organizations and identity” (80). The formation of minority citizenship is crafted through violence but subjects make efforts to transgress and resist through a broad range of responses when possible. Throughout this dissertation, I acknowledge these modes of resistance and acknowledge the ways in which performance can offer possibilities for liberatory expressions. This possibility is particularly true for minority subjects whose lack of access to the traditional modes and processes of power (financial security, legal means, or even physical safety) preclude their ability to resist in the same ways undertaken by majoritarian subjects. Instead, as scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz have argued, minority subjects can use performance as a form of resistance
“capable of providing a ground-level assault on a hegemonic world vision” (196). Performances of resistance may not immediately upend a violence racial order but they provide moments of relief, sometimes necessary for survival, and reveal the potential for a different world. That the performances of violence and resistance I examine occur because of and under the historical umbrella of the First World War concertizes their enduring relationships to state violence on a mass scale.

To look at the history of the Great War is to examine a world in flux. The war is frequently described as part of the long 19th century that brutally ended the old world of Europe supplanting it with new national boundaries, technological warfare, and the coming end of the rule of monarchies in Europe. The sheer loss of over eight million soldiers, and additional millions of civilians, from 1914-1918 fundamentally altered the cultural and political life of Europe and the sense of loss and despair brought about the looming presence of the graves of the ‘lost generation’ (Howard, “Appendix”). The Great War also called ‘the war to end all wars,’ of course, was not the last war. The mistakes made in the peace process would create a situation so volatile and unsustainable that the next war in Europe would demonstrate levels of inhumanity that made the previous war seem, by comparison, almost forgettable in its violent uselessness. That would be in the future; to focus on the Great War as a historical moment is to concentrate not on the world to come but the process of its becoming.

In an American context, the years of active engagement in the European war (1917-1918) altered the political character of the nation. The actions of 18th and 19th century had brought about the solidification of the dream of ‘Manifest Destiny,’ as the western and southwestern borders of the country were established through the systematic attempt to annihilate Native American populations and multiple battles leading to a war with Mexico, which established the southwest borders. US colonial interest rose in this period with the war in the Philippines from 1889 to 1902 and the occupation of Haiti starting in 1917. The First World War brought America onto the global stage and established a new political vision for the country as a powerful world leader and an interventionist nation.
Despite very different historical trajectories from the countries of Europe, the US was also in a period of dynamic socio-cultural change. The rise of immigration throughout the last half of the 19th century was changing the demographics of the country as cities abounded with new residents who sought economic and political stability. On the west coast, Chinese immigrants arrived to find prosperity in the California Gold Rush only to have racism force them into lower paying jobs. The eventual reaction to this rise in Asian immigrants was the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act that placed a moratorium on the immigration of Chinese labors for ten years. The act, under a variety of different names, was renewed well into the twentieth century denying citizenship status to Chinese immigrants until 1943 (Daniels 246). This legislation demonstrates a profound success for nativist rhetoric that characterized Chinese immigrants as outsiders whose exotic ways were a danger to the nation. While on the east coast, transoceanic transportation made it possible for waves of immigrants from Western, Southern, and Eastern Europe to make the arduous, but now economically possible, voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. Between 1881 and 1920, more than 23 million immigrants came to the US, mostly from Europe (Daniels 124). The increasingly presence of new immigrants who were Catholics, Jews, and Asians challenged existing ideas of the Anglo-based national character. The period between the end of the Civil War and the start of the First World War was a period of transformation in defining what it meant to be American.

By 1917 Germans were the largest ethnic group. When America entered the war in Europe, there was an immediate shift to re-frame Germans as the enemy on the warfront and the homefront. Those of German descent and recent German immigrants were suspected of disloyalty. They were humiliated, harassed, and even murdered. Through a racialized process of enemization that I chart, Germans lost their access to the safety and security provided by White privilege. The performances that I examine come from this short period where the construction of race, and in particular the instability of Whiteness, stands out precisely because we know Germans are considered White now.
During this same period there were fundamental changes for African Americans in the nation. The conclusion of the Civil War in 1865 ended slavery for four million people but the failures in the policies of the Reconstruction allowed for White landowners to maintain power in every sphere. Economically, much of the African American population in the South still worked the same land they had before the war. The widespread use of sharecropping never allowed former slaves to accumulate enough wealth to purchase their own land. This structured lack of economic advancement allowed for political and social inequity to thrive in southern states as the ‘black codes’ governed interracial interaction and decimated the brief period of African American civil liberties after the war. These policies would later become codified, and legalized, as the policies of ‘Jim Crow’ segregation. The majority of the ten million African Americans in the country were highly affected by these policies because ninety percent of them lived in the South, and seventy-nine percent of them lived in the rural South (Mkagkij 1).

The ten percent of African Americans in the North generally lived in urban cities where racism left open only the most low paying jobs in factories or domestic positions for women. Racist housing policies, later called ‘redlining,’ forced the majority of African Americans to live in a separate area in poor conditions where White landlords had a monopoly and could charge extremely high rents (Mkagkij 10). However, there was a small population of an African American middle and elite class, in both the South and the North, primarily teachers, doctors, and lawyers who would create much of the infrastructure of African American life that still continues today (Mkagkij 13-15). Class certainly determined opportunity but racial violence effected African Americans regardless of where they lived including everything from daily humiliations to lynch mobs. Yet, the First World War would cause a dramatic change in the lives of African Americans as thousands migrated from the South to the North in search of economic prosperity and physical safety during ‘The Great Migration.’ The war meant a drastic decrease in European immigrants and a significant amount of men leaving the US to fight overseas, in
response to these labor storages northern industrial owners invited thousands of African Americans to come work in the urban north. This ‘Great Migration,’ roughly 500,000 African Americans between 1914 and 1920, would reconstitute the racial geography and dynamics of American life.¹

The First World War was a pivotal moment of change in the trajectory of African American racial advancement. African American elites, most significantly W.E. B. Du Bois, advocated that wartime participation would demonstrate African American honor, loyalty, and humanity and would lead to an increase in civic rights. Individual African American men who volunteered or who were drafted had to negotiation their own conceptions of American citizenship as they served in a racially segregated military, where racial violence was not uncommon, for a country that systematically denied them even the most basic civil rights. In the post-war era, Whites responded to this migration and to the returning soldiers, who demanded the racial equality they experienced in Europe, with violence. Although wartime participation was not the panacea that would end racial segregation, the war did have far-reaching effects for African Americans. The performances that I examine from this period depict the role that African American soldiers played in this vital moment of transition.

Three primary concerns animate this study, chief among them is my conviction that the crucial role of American theatre and performance during the Great War has been under researched and under valued as a productive site for examining political, cultural, and racial conflicts. Scholars of American theatre have overlooked the influence of the war instead focusing on the inter-war years and the rise of European modernism. Yet, this period was replete with productions and performances that addressed the war directly and indirectly. In *The Emergence of the Modern American Theatre 1914-1929* (1997),

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¹ This ‘Great Migration’ was just beginning in the early 20th century as the process of migration would not fully conclude until the 1970s when more than half of the 90% of all African Americans who lived in the South would move North. See Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*. New York, NY: Random House, 2010. Print.
the sole theatre history text that offers a comprehensive chapter on theatre during the Great War, Ronald H. Wainscott argues against the faulty narratives that discount the role of the war. He argues:

...The parade of World War I plays professionally produced in New York alone numbered at least twenty-eight from the outbreak of war to the American declaration of war on April 6, 1917. From this date to the Armistice, another thirty-four war plays were added. And yet another thirty-four were produced before *What Price Glory*” in 1924 (8).²

Wainscott’s significant assessment is solely based on commercial productions in New York and does not include non-New York productions, amateur productions, and pageants, or performative events such as protests and trials. Never the less, he argues that the lack of recognition for the effect of the First World War on American theatre is due to the genre of the works since the majority of these productions would not be considered “weighty drama” but rather comedy, farce, patriotic musicals, and overtly propagandistic fare (9). This dissertation does not provide a thorough accounting and analysis of all American theatre during the First World War, a project that would surely be of vital service to the field, but instead considers Wainscott’s call to examine how the period shaped American drama, performance histories, and American identity.

This study’s second and third focuses are interrelated as I articulate the interplay between race and citizenship and their relationship to violence. My examination of American theatre and performance foregrounds histories of race and racism connecting them to the ways in which war fundamentally alters their relationship to the nation. In bringing together race and citizenship, I call attention to how the Great War changed the national landscape in ways that effect diverse racial minorities distinctly. I narrow my focus further by considering violence and performances of violence as the primary mode of connection between race and citizenship. The First World War was a ferocious conflict but rather than

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² Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings’s *What Price Glory?* opened on Broadway in September of 1924. It was deemed as the first play to accurately reflect the experiences of soldiers during the war and reflect on the senselessness of the conflict’s violence. See Wainscott 30-31.
focus on the brutality of the battlefield I choose to center on the often-overshadowed violence of the homefront. Violence becomes a common thread in all the cases I examine: violence is undertaken in the name of peace, experiences of violence from the past influence decisions in the present, violence is executed for the entertainment of a crowd, and violence is undertaken as retaliation. Against the backdrop of the striking spectacle of violence that was the Great War there were more intimate performances of violence that linked the minority subject to the nation.

My study focuses exclusively on American theatre and performance from 1917 to 1919. Active American engagement in the war began in April of 1917 with President Woodrow Wilson declaring war with the support of Congress. The end of the First World War was November 11, 1918 however my study extends the frame of warfare to include the direct ramifications in 1919. Although the fighting ended in 1918, the influence of the war continued in its immediate aftermath. In addition, this dissertation is spatially limited to the US and does not analyze how these notions of citizenships produced and demonstrated by theatre and performance travelled abroad.

The chapters of this study take African American soldiers and German immigrants or German-Americans as their subjects. My focus on these groups allows for an examination of two racialized groups but demonstrates that the process and result of their racialization is quite different. Additionally, I focus on two examples of theatrical productions – one commercial, *Friendly Enemies* and one amateur, *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, and two examples of violent performance – the Houston riot and Robert Prager’s lynching. In selecting these cases I have brought together seemingly disparate performances in order to connect them to a specific moment when the social construction of race and notions of citizenship were shifting.

In order to properly analyze these cases, I utilize several intersecting fields of study as well as original archival research. General First World War texts have been consulted to contextualize the political, historical, and social climate and the historiography of the period. These texts include *The Guns

I utilized several texts to provide the historical scholarship on the American homefront during the war. Christopher Capozzola in *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (2010) argues that the First World War altered conceptions of citizenship in the US. Capozzola uses the work of Michel Foucault to discuss how local communities during the war enforced an atmosphere of obligations to the state and regulated behavior of those outside the norm of wartime citizenship. Nancy K. Bristow’s *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering During the Great War* (1996) provides an acute analysis and critique of the role of Progressivism and social engineering in the War Department and its programs. Bristow’s work centers on race and racism as a significant factor in the politics of military readiness.


My chapters on those of German descent are also indebted to work in critical race studies, particularly those that take up critical Whiteness. I examine work by critical race scholars including Matthew Frye Jacobson’s *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and Alchemy of Race* (1998) that provides a historical overview of Whiteness as a constructed category from the colonial to the antebellum period. While the important work of David R. Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991) and *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (2005) aid in understanding the intersections between the construction of Whiteness, labor, and race in the 19th and early 20th century. Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s *Racial Formation in the United States* (1994) provides vital insight into how Whiteness is formed and entrenched in interdependent systems that form the US as a racial state. Ian Haney Lopez’s *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (2006) examines the law and Whiteness by analyzing how the legal system constructs and supports White supremacy.

My use of materials from Performance Studies includes classics of the field including, Erving Goffman’s analysis of the performative aspect of everyday interactions and presentations in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and José Esteban Muñoz *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999). In addition, I consult interdisciplinary texts that incorporate discussions racial performance such as *A Race so Different: Performance, and Law in Asian America* (2013) by Joshua Chambers-Letson and *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (2013) by Harvey Young. I include a more extensive listing of the literature in this field in my discussion on defining performance and its methodology.

As there is very little scholarly research on American theatre during the war I consulted the few texts available. The only American study with significant scope on the period is Ronald Wainscott’s *The Emergence of the Modern American Theater, 1914-1929* (1997). This text provides solid original research
on the period’s theatre and focuses on the First World War as a pivotal, yet overlooked, moment that is crucial to understanding shifts in the 20th century theatre. Wainscott’s work focuses on Broadway productions and the theatrical industry. My research will interpret some of Wainscott’s research through the lens of American citizenship and race expanding on it. Additionally, I consulted Weldon B. Durham’s *Liberty Theatres of the United States Army 1917-1919* (2006) and *First World War Plays* (2014) edited by Mark Rawlinson. My study will contribute to the small area of First World War studies in the field of theatre history and through its interdisciplinary focus will further contribute to research in performance studies and multiple areas in the humanities.

Performance, citizenship, race, and violence are the major concepts that guide this dissertation and each term requires a brief discussion of their history and how they will be applied in this study. Each of these terms will be discussed through their distinct histories and usages. Additionally, I’ll begin to discussion how these concepts will intersect in this study.

The term performance is used to address performative, or para-theatrical, acts that are both within and outside the frame of the established designation of the theatre space. The genealogy of the field of performance studies represents a web of overlapping influences emerging out of multiple fields of study. For the purposes of this study, it is imperative to discuss several key concepts of the field used to analyze specific events.

In Richard Schechner’s *Performance Theory* (1977), the primary text that helped to establish the academic field of Performance Studies, Schechner bridges his work as a theatre practitioner with research from other fields including anthropology, primarily from Victor Turner’s work on ritual and community, and sociology, primarily from Erving Goffman’s dissection and analysis of everyday performances. Goffman’s dramaturgical observations in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) provide a framework for interrogating social interaction as a mode of performance and provide a broad definition of social performance:
A ‘performance’ may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute to the other performances as the audience, observers, or coparticipants (15).

Theatre becomes the metaphor through which role-playing, social relationships, and interactions are analyzed. Thinking through specific moments in everyday life as a performance allows for a broader mechanism to analyze how meaning is being construction and presented – for whom and by whom – and what it communicates. In bringing Goffman into conversation with anthropologic discussions of community through ritual, games, and play Schechner advocates for performance as a social necessity of the individual, a mode of group communication, and vehicle through which meaning is construction and re-interpreted (1). In examining every-day interactions and relationships as performance, the field of Performance Studies allows for a mode of considering the implications of these connections reading them in ways akin to moments in a theatrical production.

Performance studies scholars have also expanded the utility and implications of the field by investigating how concepts, systems, and institutions are performative and aid in constructing identity formations and the power dynamics they represent. J.L Austin’s work on performative utterances, or speech acts, in How to do Things with Words (1962) offers a way to analyze the power of language to do or to perform an action. Words, as Austin demonstrates, are performative through their expression as his oft-used example of the wedding vow demonstrates in its solidification of the marriage (Austin 5).³

³ The example of the marriage is far more complex as it incorporates not just language and hierarchies of power but also the law – as one finds out when they, perhaps, signs on the wrong line of their marriage certificate. The ceremony, the performance, may create the marriage in the mind of the couple and their audience but under the law it is meaningless if not legally executed correctly. Marriage, in this way, is a negotiation between the performance of the ceremony and making of a legal contract – a performance in and of itself that can fail in the eyes of the state without the possibility of its re-performance. If one were to be in such a situation they would
This concept of linguistic performance was further utilized by scholars to analysis how language aids in the construction of identities and hierarchies of social power. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) uses speech act theory in order to analyze the construction of gender and sexual identities advocating that there is nothing essential or natural about being a woman, for example, and that these identities are socially constructed through modes such as language. Sex and gender are brought into being not through the biological association of naturalness but through a process of “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 25). Language does not “‘describe’ or ‘report’” sex or gender but constructs and constitutes it (Austin 154). In bringing together the power of language to perform with the construction of identities, Butler articulates performativity as a mode of manufacturing these unstable identities while also recognizing that their social construction has material consequences that produce and re-produce systems of inequality. This study examines the ways in which language can be a form of violent performance and its relationship to the construction of identity.

In considering the racial construction, scholars of color have argued that Butler’s critique neglects to incorporate the means through which racial formation and identity construction function in similar and dissimilar ways. As scholars in Black Feminism have articulated race, sex, and gender cannot and should not be seen as separate. In her discussion of intersectionality, Kimberle Crenshaw argues, “racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people” but “seldom do in feminist or antiracist practices” (1242). This multidimensional approach maintains that analysis and advocacy to foreground intersections of identity formation as well as continue to question how they interact and how they are constructed and performed.

Turning towards a genealogy of performance scholarship derived from Black Feminism, Third World Feminists, and radical women of color, José Esteban Muñoz, in *Disidentifications* (1999),
discussed the construction of race as a category of identity shaped by “the cultural logics of heteronormativity, White supremacy, and misogyny” calling it a “fiction” that minority subjects – in Muñoz’s study minority performers and cultural workers – need to “work with/resist” as mode of survival (28). Performance is a mode of negotiation, a strategy, employed by minoritarian artists to “resist and confound socially prescriptive terms of identity” a process he discusses as disidentification (Muñoz 28). As many scholars of color have discussed performance is a means of crafting, expressing, resisting, and playing with racial assumptions and constructions. In turning towards performance theory and its methodologies in order to analyze performances inside and outside the theatre space, I focus on the relationship between race and performances of violence and advocate that they shape minority citizenship.

This study will focus on citizenship as a historically constructed and performed connection to or negotiation with a given nation that has legal, social, and cultural aspects. Scholars in the field of Citizenship Studies define the term ‘citizenship’ in a multitude of ways that emphasize particular ideologies about the role of the individual within the state. The primary definition as being the subject of a particular nation has been broadened to include the complexities of national belonging, differing claims to nation and regions, and expanded concepts of supra-national arrangements, like the ‘European’ citizenship status provided by being a citizen of an European Union member country. Terms such as cultural identity, community, or communitas have allowed for a re-assessment of the centrality of the nation in political, social, and cultural identity.

As important as the democratization of notions of kinship are, it is equally important to continue to consider the role that the state plays in attempting to dictate the lived realities of its subjects, significantly for those in minority populations. In “Citizenship Studies: An Introduction” Engin Isin and Bryan Turner present a definition of citizenship that is still linked to the state but includes an expanded idea of the complexities of rights. They write that modern notions of citizenship are a combination of
rights and obligations “allocated to individuals under the authority of the state” (3). These include, to a greater or lesser degree, “civil (free speech and movement, the rule of law), political (voting, seeking electoral office), and social (welfare, unemployment insurance and healthcare)” (3). I view the enactment of these rights and obligations as embodied performances, for example the right to vote is a given by the state but the act of voting is a performance of citizenship. However, Isin and Turner also caution that these rights are almost always “cast in the language of inclusion” but routinely and “systematically [have] made certain groups strangers and outsiders” (3). What makes one a citizen is not solely based on nation but also on the ability to access the basic rights the state purports to universally provide. This study recognizes that legal, or documented, citizenship status does not unequivocally bestow the rights of citizenship. Citizenship, then, is a relationship between exclusion and inclusion and is deeply connected to a historically specific performance of capital, in a variety of forms, within the nation.

My discussion of race centers on the relationship between racial formation, racism, Blackness and Whiteness, and violence. This dissertation contends that race and racism are, and also have been, a predominant factor in American life. Claims to American citizenship cannot be extricated from determinations of Whiteness as the very ways in which the relationship to the state is imagined and experienced is predicated on a historical relationship between the White (male) citizen as a representative of the body politic and thus a representation of the country itself. That Blackness, through the African American body, performed the labor – physical, economic, social, sexual – of the Republic through their forced enslavement was, and still is in many ways, erased and overlooked. However, in order to consider race and racism in an American context and the role of African Americans in the nation it is vital to elucidate the tactics of Black erasure, the process of self-emancipation and its ramifications, and the continued political and social utility of the denial of Black life even in the continued omnipresence of African Americans in the making and re-making of the nation.
Blackness is the framework for this dissertation. My discussion and theorization of Whiteness during the First World War is constructed against Blackness, the Black body, the African American soldier, and White fantasies and delusions about Blackness. To place Blackness at the center is a political act to advocate for its centrality to American histories of theatre and performance and to contend that it is essential to illuminate the seemingly invisible operations of White supremacy. In considering this temporary moment of racialization for German immigrants I contend that they are re-fashioned as Black subjects through the very modes that have historically constructed and attempted to narrowly defined Blackness – propaganda, science, and the law. Another way of thinking about this dissertation is as an exploration of the resulting performances in accordance with or in reaction to White supremacist discourses during the Great War.

Race and its categories are not static, are not biological, and are not predetermined but a social construction that is a process that changes over time and is historically specific. In Omi and Winant’s *Racial Formation in the United States* they define racial formation as the “sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (54). There are two clear demonstrations of this historical reality seen in the methodological choices in this study. I use the term ‘race’ throughout this dissertation. In our contemporary terminology it would be more commonplace to use the term ‘ethnicity’ when discussing immigrants from Europe, such as Germans. However, this would be anachronistic as there was virtually no usage for the word ‘ethnicity’ until the 1940s and it would undermine the way in which race was understood during the period of the First World War. As David Roediger cautions in *Working Towards Whiteness*, historians who so easily rely on the term ethnicity, “despite its nonexistence,” to discuss immigration in America pre-1940 “remind us of the historical forces that caused us to forget the racial history of new immigrants” (18). Additionally, I have also chosen to capitalize White, and its variants, as it refers to race since African American or Black, and its variants, is generally capitalized and both are of equal weight in their level of construction.
The period of American engagement during the war years was highly influenced by the mid 19th century obsession with race and scientific inquiry in order to determine biological races. In his series of published lectures, *Races of Europe (1899)*, social scientist William Z. Ripley sought to delineate racial categories by recording the “general proportions of length, breadth, and height” of human heads. Ripley found his experiment to be successful calling his discovery a “phenomenon, both in principle and in practical application, that it may readily be of use to the traveller and the not too superficial observer of men” (37). The cephalic index, the specific measuring of certain ratios of the skull, is an example of the range of scientific experiments that sought to classify and rank groups of people in racial categories. The wave of scientific racism would lead to the Eugenics movement that rose in popularity just after the First World War. This socio-political movement sought to improve the genetic stock of a nation through encouraging procreation between those with desirable qualities and discouraging or preventing those from procreation who had non-desirable elements. For Eugenicists, it was important to keep races separate because their testing on intelligence demonstrated that “Negroes and immigrants were mentally ‘subnormal’” (Slotkin 229). The fact that this conclusion also corresponded to the already accepted expectation of these groups did this not alert these scientists that their tests were based on pseudo-science, flawed assumptions, and biased questions. Due to their findings, Eugenicists were a vocal group of proponents for American immigration bills that limited the quota of undesirable immigrants in the 1920s. Scientific racism during the period of the First World War is a small part of a broader trajectory of the construction of racial difference and the privileging of races on a hierarchical scale with far-reaching ramifications.

Histories of racial classification or formations, like the Eugenics example listed above, cannot be bifurcated from its relationship to racism and violence. In order to contextualize racism and violence within the sphere of this dissertation I turn to interdisciplinary American studies and environmental science scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore who wrote in *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition*
in Globalization in California (2007) that her definition of racism was “the state-sanctioned or extra legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (28). To consider racism in this way is to recognize the structural and institutional processes that the continued promotion of privileging the social construction of the White race has engendered. Gilmore’s definition focuses on the role of violence through state violence, extra-legal violence, and exploitation as the mode through which racism is maintained and the resulting “premature death” as the product of this continued and ubiquitous violence. Performances of racial violence – whether in the theatre or through everyday performance - are part of a deeply entrenched racial ideology. For Gilmore, and for this study, violence is not just the product of racism but racism is in and of itself is a form of violence.

In this study, violence takes multiple forms that overlap in their aesthetic and material consequences including personal acts of violence between people or groups, structural kinds of violence embedded in systems towards groups, and multi-faceted forms of violence like the war itself. Lucy Nevitt argues in Theatre and Violence (2013) that, “violence tells us things about the culture that produced it: the kinds of power relationships on which it is built, the attitudes and values that it takes for granted” (36). Violence communicates and performs through its enactment and subsequent response the ideological underpinnings of an historical circumstance. In analyzing the performative dimensions of violence I argue that violent acts on the theatrical stage and ‘real world’ acts on violence should be interpreted in similar ways. I do not advocate for an analysis of on-stage violence as less meaningful or less ‘real’ because the victims, the oppressors, and witnesses to acts of violence are playing a part on stage or that the audience is less emotionally or psychologically moved by the event. Joshua Chambers-Letson, in A Race so Different, advocates for a similar relationship between aesthetics and performance when he argues that “culture shapes reality, sometimes confirms it, and at times supplants it” (22). The relationship, then, is not one of ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ but instead as kinds and acts of performative violence that might have a multitude of results and responses. I place the focus on what
we might learn from analyzing and interpreting these acts and what they communicate about their historical circumstances.

In returning the relationship between race, racism, and violence, I believe it is imperative to foreground violence as a central experience in the lived reality of minority subjects in America. In focusing on German immigrants and African American soldiers during the Great War I analyze moments where performances of violence communicate the relationship between citizenship and race in the period. These performances demonstrate a broader advocacy for examining violence as fundamental and continuing force in minority citizenship formation.

This dissertation is organized to reflect the two populations, those of German descent and African American soldiers, with a theatrical production or performance at the center of each chapter. All the performances I examine are not static and single events but unfold over the course of the war years, overlapping and intersecting at various points, making the rigidity of chronological organization a less effective means of presenting the cases. Instead, chapters are chronological between the groupings in order to facilitate an understanding of the historical trajectory of events that affect my analysis of the work.

In starting with the two chapters on Germans in the US, I establish the distinctiveness of racial construction and enemy constructions of Germans in the period. I begin by demonstrating the abrupt transition for Germans, as they became enemies in the eyes of the majority of Americans. In chapter one, I analyze Aaron Hoffman and Samuel Shipman’s 1918 comic melodrama Friendly Enemies. This commercial play dramatizes the assimilation of Karl, a German immigrant, who begins the play as a loyal German and ends as a steadfast American singing “My Country Tis of Thee.” I begin with this play in order to establish the placement of the war on the American homefront and the distinct positionality for those of German descent. I examine several key points in Karl’s journey through a close reading of the text and historical contextualization. I also examine the audience and critical reception of the work and
its intriguing interpretation as both pro-German and pro-American propaganda. Throughout this chapter, I argue that Karl’s transition from German to American relies upon his ability to act the part of a loyal subject during wartime by embracing the accepted signs of American citizenship. Although he is German, and thus the enemy, Karl is still able to fully assimilate because, despite the racialization of Germans, his Whiteness allows him become invisible and join the common ideals of ‘proper’ White citizenship.

In the next chapter, I turn to the lynching of German immigrant Robert Prager, in a small coal-mining town in southern Illinois in April of 1918, and the trial of his lynch mob. I utilize scholarship from African American studies and Performance Studies to discuss Prager’s murder as a performance of violence at the intersection of the racial enemization of Germans and anti-African American violence. I contextualize the event through the history of vigilante violence, the history of lynching, and the prevalence of humiliation and harassment of Germans in the US during the war years. I contextualize the event of Prager’s death through a discussion of how he came to be suspected of being a German spy, his harassment, his torture – what I call ‘patriotic torture’ since it utilized national objects- and his death by lynching. The trial of the lynch mob ended in a not guilty verdict when the jury sided with the defense, believing their argument that the unwritten law of ‘patriotic murder’ made the crime an act of self-defense. Both the lynching and the trial terrified German immigrants who now knew that violence could be enacted upon them without any punishment by the government, an understanding that African Americans were already quite familiar. Returning to Gilmore’s definition of racism, Germans now had a “group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”

In the next two chapters, I focus on African American soldiers in order to examine a performance of violence and a theatrical production regarding the role of citizenship during the war. In chapter three, I examine the Houston Riot, a night of violence in July of 1917, where African American soldiers entered the city and murdered White civilians and police officers. Within the context of what
has been called American ‘race riots’ this is the only event where more Whites were killed than African Americans and none of the African Americans died by White hands. I contextualize this event through an examination of the incidents of racial violence that led to this resistance and retaliation and the aftermath – three courts-martial, including the largest in American history, as a total of 118 African American soldiers were arrested and charged with mutiny and murder. In this chapter, in ways similar to the Prager chapter, I examine how the legal system acts as a performance of violence.

Finally, I look at Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s 1918 play Mine Eyes Have Seen that dramatizes the conflict of an African American man drafted into the war. This play, published in the NAACP’s magazine The Crisis edited by W.E.B. Du Bois, was written for amateur African American actors to be performed in churches, schools, and community centers. First, I contextualize the work by discussing the history of African American soldiers during the war. Next, I undertake a close reading of the play and scholarship of the work examining the question of whether the main character, Chris, decides to enlist or asks for an exemption and its implications. I then provide an analysis of the role of The Battle Hymn of the Republic since it plays an important role in the play and serves as the inspiration for the title. I also examine the production history of the play and uncover new productions through my archival research never found by other scholars. Through this chapter, I examine the role of violence in the play as it shapes the experience of the minority subject and its relationship to the nation.

In the conclusion, I extend to 1919, after the Armistice, in order to argue that the end of the war was fundamentally different for Germans and African Americans. As quickly as Germans became the enemy they were just as quickly accepted back into the community of White citizenship. While, African Americans were heading into the Red Summer of 1919 that saw racial violence throughout the country and the growth of pivotal cultural and political movement, including the burgeoning Harlem Renaissance. Importantly, I return to our contemporary moment in order to consider how many of these
conflicts continue to influence the American landscape as the struggle for who gets to be American and the proper modes of expressing citizenship are still debated.
CHAPTER 2
FROM ‘HYPHENATED IMMIGRANT’ TO 100% AMERICAN:
THE TRANSFORMATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF ASSIMILATION IN FRIENDLY ENEMIES

Imagine a man who loves his country but lives in another. A man who misses the culture, the food, the sights, the smells, and the people he left behind. Although nostalgic, he has lived happily in his adopted home. He has a beautiful family. He has made more money than he ever could have dreamed. He finds happiness in reminiscing with the other men from his mother country. They speak their native tongue together. They read newspapers in their own language about home. They share food prepared like they remember; it’s never quite the same. They worry their children will never know the old world; they seem so firmly implanted in the new one. He lives between the two worlds for decades. A shot in a foreign land leads to war. His motherland is invading countries. He hears reports travel back of brutal atrocities against women and children. He does not believe them. The newspapers from home proclaim they are lies, propaganda from the enemy. Everyday there is more talk of war. He hopes the war will not come to his door. He will be disappointed. His two homes are fighting. He is in the middle. Quickly, the middle becomes dangerous, vulnerable, and deadly. The middle, he is told, does not exist anymore.
Where does he belong?

The scenario above is the opening premise of Samuel Shipman and Aaron Hoffman’s 1918 First World War melodramatic comedy, Friendly Enemies. Karl Pfeiffer is a German-American immigrant, a ‘hyphenated American,’ trying desperately to hold onto his loyalty to his homeland as the American war machine calls for ‘100% Americanism.’ The popular terms of the period ‘hyphenated American’ and ‘100% Americanism’ were both coined by Theodore Roosevelt who spoke and wrote extensively about the potential for immigrant disloyalty. Roosevelt first spoke of ‘hyphenated Americans’ in a speech on October 12, 1915 in reference to the new series of terms that utilized the hyphen for ethnic pride (German-American, Italian-American, etc.). His use of ‘100% Americanism’ came directly out of a speech
just a few months after the US entered the war. He proclaimed at the 1918 Republican convention that, “There can be no fifty-fifty Americanism in this country. There is room here for only 100% Americanism only for those who are Americans and nothing else” (The Roosevelt Policy, Vol 3., 1919). Friendly Enemies provides a dynamic look into the changing notions of race and citizenship during what historian Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht has argued was “an American reign of terror” for those of German descent. Productions across the country, and even internationally, of the play were wildly successful and made its producers and lead actors rich men. Yet the play, its production history, and critical debates surrounding the production have been overlooked as a vital site in which to understand how popular culture explored the role of German immigrants during the war. In this chapter, I focus on the theatrical depiction of the process of assimilation through Friendly Enemies’ main protagonist, Karl Pfeiffer.

In this chapter, I examine the text of the play, its production history, and its popular and critical reception as a compelling and complex cultural text that explores the newly racialized citizenship of German immigrants in the period. I chart several moments along Karl’s path of assimilation in order to demonstrate how the text transitions Karl from a ‘hyphenated American’ (German-American), who was assumed to have divided loyalties, into a 100% loyal patriotic American. In contextualizing these moments in their historical period, I argue that the process of enemization for Germans was reliant upon an established discourse that linked the racialized body to inferiority, suspicion, and danger. Karl’s ability to supersede this temporary moment of racialization for Germany immigrants demonstrates his racial privilege, even while at war with the country, as he assimilates into the melting pot of hegemonic White citizenship.

I further elaborate on this process of assimilation through my examination of the play’s popularity and critical reception. Friendly Enemies was a wildly successful play that spawned multiple touring and sit-down productions nationally and internationally. It is one of the few wartime plays

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whose popularity extended into the interwar year. In a July 1918 feature article about the production, “Five Fortunes from Five Days of Work,” The New York Times wrote that “[i]t is the consensus of theatrical people that ‘Friendly Enemies,’ when the complete returns are in, will be found standing well up among the great money makers of theatrical history...at present the play is the envy of the theatrical world (“Five Fortunes from Five Days of Work”). Its success resulted in a wide range of local and national reviews available for examination. Reviewers overwhelmingly felt compelled to consider why this play had so captured the American psyche during a time of war. My analysis of these reviews reveals that many theatre and cultural critics wrestled with the play’s focus on German characters. I highlight that reviewers were split on their interpretation of the play— all were convinced it was a propaganda play – but intriguingly they debated whether it was pro-American or pro-German propaganda. Through my analysis of Friendly Enemies’ production history and critical reception, I demonstrate that discussions of Karl’s assimilation became a mode through which to debate the underlying questions of who is able to acquire the full rights and privileges of American citizenship.

I focus on Karl’s assimilation precisely because it mirrored debates about German immigrant loyalty already in the zeitgeist and exposes a crisis in White anxiety over German immigrants. The Great War presents a brief moment when those of German descent were ripped out of the safety of Whiteness and molded; through the use of a variety of legal, scientific, and social tools of racial construction; into a new racialized enemy. It is in this moment, these kinds of moments, where the social construction of race and the generally invisible markers of Whiteness become highly detectable.

The ability of Germans to be considered White immediately after the war, and still, concretizes the ways that Whiteness is mobilized as a tool and proof of loyalty and in the ways it determines friends and enemies of the United States. Unlike non-White subjects, German immigrants could transition from

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5 Whiteness is still a crucial factor in establishing immigrant loyalty. For example, the Tsarnaev brothers, who executed the Boston marathon terrorist attack in April of 2013, provide a contemporary example of this mobilization of Whiteness as a debate about loyalty or disloyalty. Despite their being literally from the Caucasus
hyphenate (German-American) to 100% American through performances of American citizenship that demonstrated their loyalty. These performances are only open to Germans in this period because of their ability to be folded back into the predominate Whiteness of the American citizenship. As Friendly Enemies demonstrates, assimilation was an embodied practice that was only available to some and not to all. It presents the narrative of one German immigrant that follows this path and, like his fellow Germans, will arrive both American and White.

THE ROAD TO WAR: MAKING A GERMAN ENEMY

As discussed in the introduction, the United States did not officially enter the war until 1917 but incidents like the sinking of the Lusitania, the Zimmerman telegram, and America’s ‘special relationship’ with the battered and bruised Britain all contributed to its entrance into the war.\textsuperscript{6} The US arrival into the European theatre of the First World War was a significant shift in political ideology, the decision to be an interventionist nation continues today, and the Wilson administration recognized that Americans would need to be convinced to shift from neutrality to active wartime engagement.

One method for motivating this shift was the creation of a German enemy that would rouse American masses to want to fight in Europe. President Wilson in his Proclamation of War on April 02, 1917 was steadfast in his commitment that Americans of German descent and recent German region, media accounts quickly moved to assess whether they should be deemed White as a determinant of their belonging to the nation. As columnist and political scientist Peter Bienart argues in his piece, “Are the Tsarnaevs White?,” for The Daily Beast in July of 2013, “At base, the reason it’s so hard for people to accept that the Tsarnaevs are White is because, since America’s founding, being White has meant, both culturally and legally, being one of us.” The race of the Tsarnaevs’ only became important in order to place them into an already established framework of “friends,” Whites, or “enemies,” non-Whites.

\textsuperscript{6} A German U-boat torpedoed the British RMS Lusitania in 1915, killing almost two thousand civilians including over hundred Americans, helping to turn American public opinion towards the Allies. The Zimmerman Telegram and its ramifications are discussed in chapter three but it too was instrumental in turning the tide away from the German side of the war. Winston Churchill coined the term ‘special relationship’ in 1946 to describe to the close partnership between the England and America however this partnership was widely recognized prior to the use of the term.
immigrants in America should not bear the brunt of the actions of the German government. He stated the following about the relationship between Americans and Germans:

We shall, happily, still have an opportunity to prove that friendship in our daily attitude and actions towards the millions of men and women of German birth and native sympathy, who live amongst us and share our life, and we shall be proud to prove it towards all who are in fact loyal to their neighbours and to the Government in the hour of test. They are, most of them, as true and loyal Americans as if they had never known any other fealty or allegiance. (Wilson, “Transcript of Joint Address to Congress Leading to a Declaration of War Against Germany”)

However, Wilson’s discussion of affinity is couched in coded language as he qualifies the friendship as existing if Germans are “in fact loyal” and that “most of them” are true and loyal. These qualifiers were a harbinger of the wartime climate to come. Immediately after war was declared, Congress, at the behest of the White House, enacted a series of laws to limit civil liberties. These laws targeted anyone who disagreed with the war including pacifists, anarchists, and conscious objectors but it had sweeping implications for Germans in the US.

The Espionage Act of 1917, the first federal law concerning loyalty since the Sedition Act of 1798, was written primarily to protect military information from falling into enemy hands, but it included several sections that limited free speech that was deemed against the war. As early as 1915 President Wilson began arguing for the bill. In his State of the Union address that year he said:

There are citizens of the United States, I blush to admit, born under other flags but welcomed under our generous naturalization laws to the full freedom and opportunity of America, who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life... I urge you to enact such laws at the earliest possible moment and feel that in doing so I am urging you to do nothing less than save the honor and self-respect
of the nation. Such creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy must be crushed out” (Wilson, “State of the Union Address”).

Once passed by Congress and signed by the President, the law created severe penalties for speech deemed disloyal including the possibility of up to twenty years in prison. This law included giving the Postmaster General broad authority to interpret what material would be deemed disloyal and confiscated and its creators prosecuted. The law also made it a wartime crime to willfully convey false reports that interfere with military success; promote the success of wartime enemies; cause or attempt disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal of duty in the military; and obstruct recruitment or enlistment (Stone 146-153). Next, Congress passed the Alien Act of 1918, inspired by the Alien Acts of 1798, which bestowed the legal designation of ‘enemy alien’ on citizens of German descent living in the US. Men, and later women, over the age of fourteen became ‘enemy aliens’ making them subject to immediate apprehension or deportation; government seizure of their property; and the surrender of firearms, weapons, and wireless radios. Their movement was limited by regulations that prohibited living or travelling within ½ mile from military installations, munitions factories, or seaports (Capozzola 177-179).

There is evidence to suggest that there were Germans in the US with sympathies to the German government. It would be foolish to assume otherwise. However, the question – as it always is in a time of war- is if the actions taken in the name of security supersede the actual threat level and/or break the laws or values on which the nation was supposedly founded. There are two known violent actions taken by those sympathetic to Germany. In July of 1915, in response to American aid to the Allies, Harvard German professor Erich Muenter attempted to blow up the US Capital building and the munitions boat the S.S. Minehaha and assassinate banker J. P. Morgan, Jr. Muenter’s explosion damaged a window and chandelier in an empty reception room in the Senate chamber, created a small but manageable fire on the boat, and gave Mr. Morgan a minor groin injury. In addition, German ambassador to the US Count Joann Heinrich von Bernstorff was suspected of orchestrating a German spy ring that was most likely
behind the explosion on Black Tom Island, off the coast of New York City, in July of 1916. Von Bernstorff is suspected of recruiting Slovakian immigrant Michael Kristoff to destroy a massive cache of weapons stored on the island in an explosion that was felt as far as Philadelphia. The damage to the torch of the Statue of Liberty would be the impetus to keep it closed indefinitely. However, the charge by President Wilson that Americans needed to be on the look-out for “vicious spies and conspirators” was a over-reaching estimation of the real damage any of these German spies were actually doing in their actions instead causing a level of paranoia and suspicion that fell on German immigrants.\(^7\)

These legal actions were combined with the creation of a German enemy that would foster American patriotism against a common foe despite the long history of Germans in the US and their significant part in American history.\(^8\) The legal designation of ‘alien enemy’ was part of a larger process of separating Germans from their legacy in America and formulating them into an ‘othered’ enemy. Racialization played a key role in this practice because visually Germans were virtually indistinguishable from non-Germans. The Whiteness of Germans made them inscrutable and easily hidden within a sea of racial homogeneity. Wartime propaganda supported the enemization of German as outsiders in the US through the creation of a non-White, and thus dehumanized, enemy – the German ‘Hun.’ This new otherworldly monster would be attacked on the battlefields of Europe and on the homefront as a wave of anti-Germanism swept the nation. Those of German descent and new German immigrants were forced to hide their background or risk accusations of disloyalty potentially resulting in imprisonment by

\(^7\) See “An Eclectic Criminal: The Case against Erich Muenter” in Terrorism on American Soil by Joseph T. McCann and The Detonators: The Secret Plot to Destroy America and an Epic Hunt for Justice by Chad Millman.

\(^8\) German-American history begins at the very start of settler colonialism in the New World. Eight German glassmakers and carpenters arrived to the permanent settlement of Jamestown in 1608 on the ship the *Mary and Margaret*. The first German settlement was founded in 1683 as Germantown, Pennsylvania, a city that would become a center for German culture and immigration. Those of German descent were deeply integrated with British settlers in the establishing of the nation. Fredrick Muhlenberg, of German descent, was the first Speaker of the House and, as such, the first signer of the Bill of Rights. Those of Germans descent were in every facet of American life for over 300 years before they were vilified during the First World War. See *The German-American Experience* by Don Heinrich Tolzmann 30-120.
their government or violence by their neighbors. Many Germans assimilated, embracing their new country, for their very survival. This is the climate in which Friendly Enemies was written, performed, and observed by audience around the country.

**FRIENDLY ENEMIES: ESTABLISHING THE WORLD OF THE PLAY**

*Friendly Enemies* is the story of Karl Pfeiffer’s transformation from pro-German to Pro-American. The play takes place over only two days in the fall of 1918 in the living room of the affluent New York City townhouse of the Pfeiffers. Act I establishes Karl’s loyalty to Germany by using assumptions and stereotypes that circulated about German immigrants. In Act II, Karl is told his son, William, has enlisted in the US Army. He is devastated and provides money to a German spy. The act ends with the mistaken impression that William has died from a bomb built with Karl’s money. In Act III, the grieving Karl comes to understand his treasonous action, fully embraces America, and finds out his son is still alive. The play conforms to many of the conventions of the comic melodramas of its time using stock plot devices (during the war this was primarily the use of spies or spy rings), exaggerated emotional characterizations, an extremely brief amount of time for emotional development, and the physically broad humor of vaudeville (Wainscott 8). However, the work is telling about its period and is historically distinct despite its literary flaws. I agree with Ronald Wainscott in *The Emergence of the Modern American Theatre* that “to explore the impact of the [First World War] only through the weighty drama and to dismiss the comic and traditional fare is to miss the import of the catastrophic events of

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9 In chapter 3, I discuss several of these incidents of violent anti-Germanism in order to contextualize my analysis of the lynching of German immigrant Robert Prager, in Collinsville, Illinois in 1918, as a performance of racialized violence.

10 The stage directions state “5:30pm. Fall of the year” (1). Since the US sent its first troops overseas during the summer of 1918 it seems logical to assume that the play occurs during the following fall.

11 This chapter will not discuss the use of comedy in the text but it does add another dimension to Karl’s transformation. The use of vaudevillian broad comedy is used to humanize Karl and depict him as a bumbling fool rather than a vicious or manipulative ‘Hun.’ Lead actors Sam Bernard and Louis Mann were known for their physical comedy.
1914-1918 on the American public” (9). Karl’s journey is located within the domestic sphere but it represents larger issues about immigrant loyalty.

Members of the Pfeiffer family are Karl, the pro-German father; Marie, his obedient wife; and their son, William who has recently and secretly enlisted in the US Army. Their next-door neighbors are Henry Block, Karl’s oldest friend from Germany, who has firmly embraced his American homeland and his daughter June who is engaged to marry William Pfeiffer. Block is the assimilated mirror of Karl Pfeiffer. Both are of similar ages and from the same town in Germany. Block, already assimilated, refuses to use his German name, Heinrich, instead going by Henry. As the sole holdout for the Germans, Karl is presented as headstrong and slow to accept reality. Additional characters are Nora, the Pfeiffer’s servant, and Anton Miller (whose covert spy American spy name is Walter Stuart) a German spy leader.

INTRODUCING KARL: GERMAN SONGS AND SECRET NEWSPAPERS

The first moment I explore in the text focuses on the initial entrance of Karl Pfeiffer to the world of the play. My close reading and analysis of this moment reveals the complexities of German enemization and racialization in period. The playwrights crafted this moment to introduce Karl’s character to the audience, a character created through his stereotypical German-ness and demarcated through its potential for disloyalty and ability for subterfuge. In this initial entrance, German-ness and deception are framed as intricately related.

Early in Act I, Karl enters his home from a busy New York City street. Before he is seen, he is heard. In this first moment, Karl is presented through his embodied performances of German culture and his own public concealment of his allegiance. The stage directions state:

Pfeiffer’s voice is heard offstage, singing some simple German song. He enters breezily, joyously. He is a man about fifty-two years of age, well preserved, a loving husband and
father, but a typical stubborn, hide-bound Teuton. He has a German paper covered by a New York ‘Journal.’ (10)

As Karl moves from the public world of New York City to the interior of his house, he reveals that he knows how to negotiate his own surveillance and engage in resistive practices in public. I see this moment as a performance of survival. However, Karl, despite having the ability to deceive, is not characterized as a ‘Hun’ but as a loving family man who is too stubborn to give up his old ways. He is different. Karl holds within him the possibly for assimilation. It is precisely the balance that the playwrights strike between portraying Karl as both a current enemy and a potential friend that makes the text a compelling example of his brief period of anti-Germanism. As I chart the arc towards his eventual assimilation, this moment establishes Karl as having the ability to choose his path.

Before he speaks a word Karl communicates his affinity for his German culture through his “simple German song.” However, this affinity can only be openly expressed within the safety of his own home. He is constantly aware of the surveillance of his behavior in public concealing his German-ness through the act of the hidden newspaper. The performance of a German song introduces Karl’s strong affinity for his culture. German music, as a product of German culture, was not illegal but it was seen as a socially contraband expression of the enemy. The American Defense Society, a hyper-patriotic wartime organization, promoted that German music was “one of the most dangerous forms of German propaganda, because it appeals to the emotions and has the power to sway an audience as nothing else can” (Traxel 316). By fall of 1917, Philadelphia had announced they would no longer play German music, the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York would not perform German works, and California public schools were instructed to tear the pages out of books that contained German folk songs. In one of the most extreme cases, Dr. Karl Muck, the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, was arrested and interned at Fort Oglethorpe where he stayed from March of 1918 until August of 1919 after which he
was sent to Copenhagen (Luebke 249). The tune that Karl sings may be simple but its meaning is not. The nameless German song that signals his entrance introduces the character and indicates the transition from the public world outside to the private domestic sphere, as Karl now feels safe to express his German culture in his own home.

Next, the stage directions describe Karl, and signal to the actor to play him, as a “typical stubborn, hide-bound Teuton” (10). Here, the playwrights rely on German stereotypes before and during the war. Prior to the war, German immigrants were the largest non-English speaking ethnic group entering the United States; at its peak there were 1,700,000 Germans who emigrated between 1881 and 1892. Data from the 1910 census, the last before the war, demonstrates that there were about 5.7 million American-born people with at least one parent born in Germany (Luebke 29). By the time other Southern and Eastern European groups had just started to establish themselves in the US, Germans had multi-generational families with deep connections in both their native and adopted homeland. In the pre-war years, Germans gathered in local and national meeting halls, erected statues to prestigious German literary and cultural heroes in parks and churches, and create daily publications in order to keep their connection to their homeland (Luebke 67).

As was typical of the period, science and social science researchers claimed to know the innate traits of racial groups constructing racial categories and ranking these groups on scientific hierarchy. Not only were German immigrants numerous but, for the most part, they were seen as superior to other

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12 Almost 4,000 Germans were interned at this Georgia military camp many of which were artists of various kinds. They busied themselves with productions and performances including Beethoven’s symphony “Eroica” and Henrik Ibsen’s play Ghosts. See: “Foreign Prisons of War,” by Susan Copeland, New Georgia Encyclopedia. Similar to German music, German language theatres were similarly under attack. Theatres closed in Milwaukee and St. Louis under pressure of violence. In 1917, anti-German protestors aimed a machine-gun at the front entrance of the Pabst Theatre in Milwaukee shutting down a German language production of Friedrich Schiller’s Wilhelm Tell. (See “Milwaukee’s German Renaissance” in Wisconsin: Land and Life edited by Ostergen and Vale, 393)

13 This reference to the “typical” German is also indirectly communicating that Karl and his family are not Jewish. The majority of Germans that arrived as immigrants during the height of Germany immigration were Jews. This group would have faced a more complex process of assimilation and, as such, would complicate Karl’s ability to fully assimilate at the end of the text. See “Assimilation in the United States: Nineteenth Century” by Ewa Morawska in Jewish Women’s Archive.
groups of immigrants. In early pre-war 1917, noted sociologist Howard Woolston published in the
*American Journal of Sociology* that scientific data on race had determined that Germans were second to
native-born Americans in areas of self-control, moral integrity, and perseverance on this hierarchy
(Luebke 66). However, this pseudo-scientific data was accompanied by a negative assessment that
Germans harbored excessive pride in their heritage. Once the war began, scientific studies changed to
align themselves with the political climate. The once preferred German was now, curiously, much lower
on the racial order and the once benign stereotype of pride became a serious wartime threat. The
privileges that Germans in the US had always enjoyed were slipping away embolden by new arguments
that threaten their proximity to Whiteness.

Leading evolutionary biologist and paleontologist, and long-time president of the American
Museum of Natural History, Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn best represents the sweeping trend of
pseudoscience that ushered in the new reality for Germans. Osborn, also a well-known eugenicist and
proponent of immigration reform,\(^{14}\) presented his research on measurements of the shape and size of
skulls, the cephalic index, to explain what he called the “Prussian Ferocity in War” (Slotkin 217). Osborn
argued that Prussians had round skulls that were close to Asiatic races while those of Teutonic lineage
had long skulls. He extrapolated that the gentle racial disposition of the Teutons, the obvious roots of
White American descents, had been later influenced and perverted by Prussian influences which
resulted in the violent characteristics found in contemporary Germans (Slotkin 217). Germans became
both legally and scientifically suspicious.

\(^{14}\) In the early 1920s, Osborn would lobbying for the Johnson Reed Immigration Act which sought “to preserve the
idea of American homogeneity” through the banning of Asian and Arab immigrants and the decreasing of
immigrants quotas already in place. He, and other proponents of the legislation, frequently quoted his speech as
President of the Second International Society for Eugenics, in 1921, where he discussed the “right of the State” to
preserve the racial integrity of the nation. Osborn wrote to Albert Johnson, cosponsor of the Johnson Reed Act, to
congratulation him stating, “I think that there are good and desirable immigrants to be found in every country. But
all these countries are now striving to keep the desirable people at home, and are sending the undesirable,
especially the Jews, to America. This is why it would pay for the United States to have observers at all consulates
abroad” (See *Race Unmasked: Biology and Race in the Twentieth Century* by Michael Yudell, 33).
Next, the playwrights’ use a theatrical device of a German newspaper hidden inside an American newspaper in order to explore the rising suspicion of these papers, contemporary debates about the use of the German language, and the surveillance of Germans. In 1901, the National German American Alliance was created to advocate and organize over forty-seven state and local heritage groups and by 1918 it had over three million members (Holzmann 263). This organization prioritized education in the German language and the circulation of German language newspapers as a primary means of community cohesiveness. Germans, who otherwise might have stopped speaking Germans or opted to only speak English to their children, were encouraged to maintain the language both in private and in public in addition to learning English. The organization successfully lobbied to add German language education in public schools and by 1915 German was taken by 24% of all public high school students (Schmidt 204). The policy by the National German American Alliance to maintain the German language in the US was highly effective. The 1910 census, the first to ask about mother tongue languages, demonstrated that German was spoken by 28% of all non-native English speakers equal and 11% of the national population or over 9 million people (Rippley 222).

When the war came and anti-German hysteria took over, the German language was a primary target of attack in a war between primarily White bodies. In this climate, the German language was now seen by many to be the barbaric tool of the enemy. Half of the states in the country soon enacted laws that banned the teaching of German in public schools. University professors who taught German language or culture were denounced, attacked, and dismissed as German textbooks burned across the country on university grounds (Schmidt 221).

The attack on the German language decimated German language newspapers. In 1910, there were 554 such papers but by 1920 there were only 234 (Rippley 224). The federal government’s enactment of The Espionage Act of 1917 was the primary reason for this decrease. German newspapers had been the voice of the German government throughout the years of US neutrality particularly once
the official German news cable to America has been cut by England. Mainstream newspapers only printed British information on German affairs, a viewpoint found clearly bias by Germans in the US. Local German papers filled the void by gathering information from family members, churches, and local organizations about the war to provide a German point of view (Holzmann 272). In order to comply with The Espionage Act, German language papers had to translate all articles about the war into English so local postmasters could make a determination about the information it conveyed. Even if the postmaster verified individual issues as loyal it was extremely difficult to circulate the papers. Either out of their own conceptions of wartime loyalty or fear that they might be breaking the law most post offices refused to accept or distribute them or many newsstands refused to carry them. The lack of circulation and the fear of accusations of disloyalty caused the majority of advertisers to drop out intensifying the decline of the German press in America (Holzmann 284).

In the play, Karl’s reveal of his hidden German newspaper is a telling action because it exposes his negotiation of his public and private self for his own survival. It is a private act performed publically for the audience in order to establish his German loyalty but more importantly to establish his ability and willingness to hide it from the outside world. Hiding the paper is a resistive practice to the wartime anti-German hysteria where police harassment or vigilante violence threatened anyone seen reading a German paper. Karl understands the ramifications of being found with these materials so he crafts an illusion of American loyalty to maintain his personal safety, the cover of a fictitious American paper, the New York Journal.

Karl’s fear of violence is central to this deceit. A few moments after his entrance, Anton Miller, the secret German spy, tells Karl of the violence being done to Germans in the US:

They [Germans] are being hounded and persecuted; they are being barred from certain zones, they are being deprived of making a livelihood. Soon they will loot their stores;
burn their property, and even take their lives— and why? Just because they are German.

(14)

In response, Karl reveals his secret German paper to Anton Miller stating, “You see, I can’t even carry a German paper through the street without covering it up with an English paper...” (14). Once Karl knows he is with a fellow loyal German, he can reveal his paper without fear of violence. Miller, for his part, now knows Karl is still loyal to Germany and that he might help the German cause, despite it being treasonous to do so. Karl agrees to give Anton $50,000 to be used to create and distribute pro-German propaganda in American newspapers believing that this will help create a safer environment for German in the US. Karl, nor the audience, would know that Anton Miller is actually a violent German spy with intentions of using the money to kill American soldiers. Regardless, the action of giving the money would be illegal under the Espionage Act no matter what its usage. Karl's action is illegal, treasonous, and punishable by – at the very least – a significant prison sentence. However, it is important to understand that Karl’s decision to give the money is not intended to be violent but to prevent more violence. The playwrights present Anton Miller as the true enemy who uses his charms to trick Karl into funding domestic terrorism under the guise of elevating the reputation of German in the US. Miller is revealed, over the course of the play, to symbolize the innate cruelty of Germans in both his violent actions towards American troops and his duplicitous conniving of Karl.

Karl’s entrance singing a German song and holding his secret newspaper is a small action, but it is far from trivial. His singing demonstrates his loyalty to Germany and demonstrated the liberation he feels in his own home to sing the German songs that please him. This action would be potentially dangerous in public. The reveal of the German paper symbolizes the world of immigrant loyalty debates unfolding on stage as issues of allegiance, suspicion, and surveillance enter the world of the play. The action of hiding the paper expresses Karl’s understanding of the vulnerability of being German in public
and is a form of resistance to the pressure to conform to mode of ‘proper’ citizenship. Karl begins the play as an enemy who can disguise himself as a friend.

GERMAN MEN ARE THE ‘HUN’: FEMALE LIBERATION AS WAR PROPAGANDA

The playwrights present Karl’s assimilation as beneficial to his family as well as the community. There is a compelling moment towards the end of Act I where his absence allows for a discussion between women about the brutality of German men. It is only because Karl is absent from the scene that his wife, Marie, and her future daughter-in-law, June, can openly discuss the differences between marriages in Germany and America. The moment is vital in establishing that the negative characteristics of Germans are equally detrimental within the home, particularly in their oppression of women. This moment is not a minor detour into women’s liberation but a calculated moment that plays upon the already established image of the German ‘Hun’ as an animalistic sub-human brutalizer, particularly of innocent women and girls. This scene demonstrates that Karl’s future assimilation benefits the family as a whole by liberating his wife from the brutality of German male control and elevates the American marriage as a liberating institution. It allows the play to demonstrate Karl’s potential for Germanic violence through the silencing of his wife without having to show it, an action that would make him too unlikeable to target audiences when he ultimately becomes American.

Karl’s pro-German behavior (such as singing, buying German newspapers, supporting German organizations) is upsetting the household and there is an increasing fear that his demonstrations of pride will endanger the family. In a moment alone, Marie and June discuss the situation. June encourages Marie to tell Karl that she wants him to tone down his Germanic pride. Marie responds:

Well, you’re different. You’re an American girl. I’m left over from Germany yet.

American women have the gift of speech, but when a German woman marries, her
husband makes her one fine present - silence. But some day soon the silence over there will speak so loud it will be heard over here (10).

Marie distinguishes herself as a German woman unable to embrace the American values that allow women to freely disagree with their husbands. She locates female subjectivity as American and the war as a means of liberation for gender oppression in Germany. Karl and Marie’s marriage, and by extension all German marriages, are depicted as innately oppressive for women because they silence the wife into submission. Marie creates a direct link between defeating Germany and liberating women from this control. This brutality against women was the primary depiction of Germans as the beast, the German ‘Hun.’

The popularization of the term and the image of the ‘Hun’ as a negative term for Germans came directly out of British war propaganda and adapted for American race consciousness. The term ‘Hun’ was pulled from Kaiser Wilhelm II’s speech to German troops leaving for China to put down the Boxer Rebellion. He referenced the 5th century Attila, leader of the Hunnic Empire, telling troops to be as ruthless as their distant ancestors against their enemies. The term re-emerged in the war years thanks in part to writer Rudyard Kipling’s use of the term in the 1914 poem, “For All We Have and Are.” The term was a key part of a two-pronged Allied propaganda strategy: 1) to encourage enlistment and 2) to dehumanize the enemy. The German invasion of Belgium gave the British an event that could be easily used to support the narrative of the monstrous German. Far from the Germans of the Enlightenment, these Germans, as the rumors would report, would crucify Belgians, defile churches, and murder babies. The British rhetoric and images of the German ‘Hun’ spread through the Allied nations being adapted by governments to fit their own national psyche (Waterfield, “Here Comes the Hun: How First World War Cemented a Popular Term for Germans”).

The American war propaganda posters depicted the ‘Hun’ as a large dark male body dehumanized through animalistic traits accompanied by bloody bats and knives. This propaganda was
supported by the suspicion raised by the legal designation of “enemy alien” and the scientific work previously discussed that separated the Germanic history of the US from its current German enemies. The crafting of the ‘Hun’ relied on creating an alternative racial lineage for Germans that would result in defects that hitherto were unknown. Richard Slotkin, historian of the First World War, argues in Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality (2006), that the image of the ‘Hun’ connected Germans with Asiatic roots and re-aligned them with already established non-White categories: the barbarian, the savage, morally and sexually deviant, and the already deemed racially different and inferior - Jews, African Americans, and Asians (217). Slotkin went on to argue that, “as ‘Huns’ the Germans were akin to Indian-like Asiatic barbarians; as apes, they recalled the mythical Negro rapist, whose menace justified the rage of the lynch mob” advocating that the image of the ‘Hun’ was used in American war propaganda through assumptions about the dangers of African American male body (217).

The reference to sexual violence is the nexus between racist anti-African American propaganda and anti-German propaganda. Paranoid fantasies of the ‘Hun’ raping White women were not just similar to the depictions of African American men raping White women they were purposely entangled as the use of White women as props in White supremacist propaganda was profoundly concertized in this period. The most popular example of this was D.W. Griffith’s 1915 film Birth of a Nation, screened by President Wilson in the White House. This technically sophisticated film gave images to the rhetoric of ferociously rampant and violent African American rapists always ready to attack innocent White women. US war propaganda used these kinds of images from race propaganda to craft the ‘Hun’ in an American context. Women, as Tiina Lintuen argues in “Filthy Whores and Brave Mothers: Women in War Propaganda,” have frequently been used to represent the purity of the nation and the embodiment of family and national honor in war propaganda. Lintuen argues that depicting physical and sexual assaults on women, or potential assaults, were meant to shame the nation and the men within it who should be
performing their traditional masculine duty of protection (17). When women and young girls were used in war posters they were routinely depicted as White female bodies kidnapped, brutalized, and vulnerable to sexual assault. Many Allied war propaganda posters used graphic images of drowned and crucified women, murdered children and babies, and half-naked women with German soldiers ominously placed about to strike.

The 1917 “Destroy this Mad Brute” poster by Harry Ryle (H.R.) Hopps, a stage and film designer, serves as the best example of the use of women in war propaganda and race propaganda. The enlistment poster depicts a brutal gorilla wearing a German pickelhaube, spiked helmet, with the word “militarism” emblazoned across it. He holds a bloody bat in his right hand marked kultur, a new insult that referenced Germans as culturally bellicose and cruel while simultaneously nodding to German culture as a tool of German propaganda. The gorilla holds in his left hand an anguished White woman in a torn green gown, her breasts exposed, with her hands covering her eyes. The background is a ruined Europe as the gorilla, having crossed the Atlantic, arrives on American shores. The top of the poster reads, “Destroy this Mad Brute” and on the bottom “Enlist” and “US Army” overlapped. These brutes, these ‘Huns,’ were coming to the shores of America and no one, particularly no woman, would be safe. The woman in the image also bares a resemblance to the prominent lady in green who sits in the Atlantic facing Europe, the Statue of Liberty.

The image aligned the fear for women’s sexual and racial purity with a masculine discourse of nationalism. The image of the gorilla holding a woman viciously in his clutches had already been established as a metaphor for the potential for the coming horde of black bodies waiting to attack White women. In 1887, sculpture Emmanuel Fremiet won the prestigious Medal of Honor at the annual Salon for his massive, “Gorilla Carrying Off A Woman” which depicted a nude woman being held helplessly by the animal, mouth agape. As Sarah Watt has argued in her text about Theodore Roosevelt’s obsession with proper masculinity, Rough Rider in the White House (2003), the international reputation of the art
The work represented the two greatest fears of the Victorian Era: the combining of human and animal and the fear of the African American man (90-98). Although, there is no historical record of Hopps basing his poster on Fremiet’s work, both use the gorilla as a stand in for the exotic brute eager to attack defenseless women. An image that would forever be cemented by King Kong’s capture of Ann in the 1933 film *King Kong* written by Merian C. Cooper, a former pilot in the First World War who was held captive by Germans as a prisoner of war for the majority of the conflict.

![Poster](image)

**Figure 1** Harry R. Hopps, *Destroy This Mad Brute - Enlist U.S. Army, 1917*

These were the depictions of Germans that circulated during the war. When Marie discusses the relationship between German men and their wives, she is referencing a menagerie of images that had been created to depict the German man as a brute towards women. In *Friendly Enemies*, an American audience hears the confirmation of these traits straight from a trusted source, a German woman. The independence and autonomy of American women is placed in stark contrast to the oppressive structure of German marriage. German women are victims of German men, and these women’s liberation, signified by their literal voices, will come when Germany is defeated. This moment also demonstrates that Karl is completely alone in his German affinity; his wife stays silent because she fears her husband’s wrath if she disagrees with him. Karl’s pro-German stance is actively persecuting his wife and his assimilation will lead to *her* as well as his liberation.
*Friendly Enemies* also hopes to entreat women in the audience through an appeal to female liberation for German women and a national pride in American female freedom. To embolden female audience members through a discussion of female liberation retains the propagandistic trope of female victimhood while also playing into the growing movement for expanded rights for women: voting, jury duty, recognition of marital rape and domestic abuse, and legal autonomy. In a play that is primarily about Karl’s transformation this scene between Marie and June explores the familial ramifications of his German allegiance and positions German men as innately ‘other,’ brutal and oppressive.

**FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM: THE SECOND GENERATION GOES TO WAR**

In Act II, Karl’s German loyalty is tested when he discovers his own son, William, has enlisted in the US Army. This decision forces Karl to consider the real possibility that his son might kill members of their family still living in Germany. He feels betrayed, angry, and confused. In concordance with the convention of the comic-melodrama, time moves quickly and as soon as William has announced his decision, he prepares to ship out overseas. William presents himself to his father in his US Army uniform. Karl tries to convince his son not to go to war. The scene between father and son is highly emotional. Each is convinced of their own unwavering righteousness. In a modern context, the language of the scene is so staunch that it leans towards comical in its lack of subtlety and strong patriotic fervor. However, the dialogue utilizes the rhetoric and imagery of Allied propaganda through its presentation of American moral virtue in the war. This moment is pivotal in Karl’s movement towards American loyalty because his own son presents him with American morality as superior to German villainy. It is in the face of his defeat against William that he will provide money to the German cause that ultimately leads to his assimilation.

This scene between father and son begins with a calm discussion during which each attempts to explain his point of view, but it quickly devolves into an argument in which one heatedly defends
Germany and the other America. Karl is attempting to understand why his son enlisted when he knew he would eventually be drafted. William’s answer, “Any man with red blood in him would rise against a nation that would commit the atrocities that Germany has” provokes his father to immediate anger (52). Karl flies into a rage that reports of atrocities are lies by the Allies to get the world to hate Germans. He attempts to humanize Germans for his son, “I’m German people, too. You know your father. Would you say that I could do this?” For William, Karl is different not just because he is his father but because Williams seems him as already American, even if Karl doesn’t know it yet. As the scene progresses, Karl reminds his son of all their relatives still in Germany and asks his son repeatedly if he thinks they could commit war crimes. William finally responds, “They are guilty of every outrage they are charged with. The whole world has branded them, their record of savagery is written with human blood in the ashes of Belgium and France... It is the testimony of the whole world, and it is beyond dispute” (53). Although William believes he is advocating the American position of humanism and liberal democracy it is Karl who consistently reminds his son of the humanity of Germans.

William begins to exit unable to get through to his father but Karl stops him and tries once again to get his son to see the good in their heritage. Karl tries to give his son the affective and diasporic longing that he has for Germany and his family still there. Karl sits William down and calmly asks him, “Who are you going to kill? My sister Emma’s boys – Fritz and Rudolph and Otto? You want to kill them? You think because they are far away they are not near me – in my heart...I should say you should kill your own blood” (54)? William answers simply, “Yes.” Karl responds to his son, “Yes? Then you are the savage!” Karl cannot convince his son that Germans, even the Germans who are his family, are worthy of being seen as individuals. Williams believes that Germans are collectively guilty for war crimes in Belgium and France and all the actions of the military and the government.

However, William sees his father as different and it is this difference that will eventually allow Karl to declare himself as American. William wants to make his father understand why he has joined the
US Army, so that he might see the error of his pro-German position. William presents an overtly patriotic argument that articulates the evils of Germans, completely defends the war, and broadens his scope to convey that all US wars have been for solely democratic reasons. William states, “The German thinks only of himself, his own blood, his state, his family, his territory – of their own aggrandizement, of themselves. The American ideal is the exact opposite. We think of people first” (54). William compares the rhetoric of German militarism with what he sees as American values, the emphasis on the selfless value of community. Although it is not stated directly, William is implying that the American ideal of “people first” is the motivation for an interventionist military strategy because it means Americans are concerned about the welfare of others, not political or economic gain. This argument also conflates “the German” with the government of Germany allowing for an easy slippage that uses the militaristic strategy of wartime Germany as evidence of the innateness of German brutality. The conflict between the countries is used as a foil for the conflict between the father and son. William’s desire is twofold: to show his father the evils of Germany and to get him to give his blessing as he leaves for war.

William continues his advocacy further through linking the First World War to the American Civil War as a way of establishing a lineage of military engagement as proof of American moral superiority. He argues, “In the Civil War White men set upon each other, brother fought brother, father fought son so that black men might be free” (54). This highly simplistic summation of the Civil War is used by William to demonstrate the innate desire of Americans to fight for freedom over oppressive forces. The inconvenient truth of who created and profited from the American slave trade is erased and African Americans are striped of agency and self-determination in favor of an argument that places White American men as the champions of liberty wherever they choose to fight. William continues his comparison, “Once more we face the eternal struggle for human liberty. Is our spiritual stature any less in 1918 than in 1861? No! We can still give our lives for a principle, and that’s something Germany cannot understand” (54). The North and the South are now recast as the US and Germany. The
militarization of Germany is tantamount to the system of chattel slavery and Americans have a moral and spiritual obligation to fight them. Germans could never understand the moral fortitude of the American psyche that seeks only to advocate for liberty at home and around the globe.

The altercation between Karl and William garners the attention of the rest of the family and the neighbors. Karl’s friend, Henry Block, enters the scene. They were both children in Germany together and emigrated to the United States at the same time, but Henry has assimilated, seeing himself as American not German. Just as Karl is pushed to the breaking point with his son, Henry reminds his old friend that the Germany of his memory is based on nostalgia not the present barbarism that has enveloped the nation. Henry becomes frustrated when he hears Karl’s convenient mis-remembering their decision to emigrate. Henry reminds Karl:

I tell you why you came over...you was sitting in a cellar fixing cast-off shoes for six marks a week- out of which the Government taxed you back three-quarters for the army. That’s why you packed up your own torn shoes and came to me and said, “Heinrich, come let us go to America, where the new shoes grows on the trees,” and I listened to you, and I ain’t sorry, and you ain’t neither, and you know it!...And you remember after that long voyage, fifteen days in the steerage-with only ten pfennings in our pockets that we didn’t let the Kaiser know we had. Remember when you first saw the outline of the shore of Brooklyn, how you jumped for joy? (57)

Henry’s use of the rhetoric of opportunity is meant to persuade Karl to supplant his longing and affinity for Germany with gratefulness and loyalty for what he’s received in America. His words batter away at the foundations of Karl’s affective longing and the positive memory of Germany. Karl does remember his joy at seeing New York for the first time and turns to William, “Yes – I always said America was great country... I always says I much obliged to this country until they begin to fight with Germany” (58).
Together, Henry and William attempt to dismantle Karl’s German loyalty. William utilizes a patriotic tactic that relies on concepts of civic loyalty and American nationalism while Henry uses their communal memory to remind Karl of all the opportunities America has given him. Karl’s argument is weakened by this two-pronged attack, but he is unwilling to allow this softening to change his mind about the decisive conflict of the moment: he does not believe that his gratefulness to America should be paid through his son’s military service. It is precisely this idea of sacrifice that becomes the crucial lynchpin in his eventual full assimilation. It will also be a point of great contention in critical interpretations of the work.

In the final moment of the scene, Karl will not capitulate in his position but does stop arguing with his son. Karl refuses to see his son off to the boat that will take him to France. In the final moment of scene, William turns to his father and offers his hand to shake, “Good-bye Papa – Auf Wiedersehn!” Karl refuses but quietly he whispers to his son, “Auf Wiedersehn!” The stage directions dictate that Karl sits on stage alone quietly crying “broken hearted, but voiceless” (63). This scene crushes Karl’s sense of himself. William and Henry’s argument change him, soften his tone, and remind him of the opportunities he has found for himself and his family in America. Karl’s sense of certainty in his righteous German loyalty has been shaken. In response to this upsetting vulnerability, though, he follows through with his commitment to give money to Anton Miller hoping to protect Germans in the US and in hope that he might help end the war and bring his son home.

In the next scene, Karl meets with Anton Miller, the secret German spy, to give him the $50,000 they discussed early in the play. Karl does not know the full extent of his betrayal but he does know that he is giving money to a pro-German cause. It is this moment that his actions progress from nationalistic to disloyal, but it is imperative that the audience still retains their compassion towards him. Karl is not presented as a violent ‘Hun’ but as a man who is struggling to give up his old allegiances and form new national attachments. The one-dimensional villain is not Karl but the evil Anton Miller who tricks the
foolish and stubborn Karl into handing over the money and supporting a violent action he would not otherwise. In a quick turn of events, Miller quickly uses the money to purchase a bomb that sinks a deploying American army ship; it is William’s ship. Karl believed Miller was using the money to create propaganda that would repair the good name of Germans in the US and never dreamed that it would be used for this kind of violence.

At the end of Act II, Karl fully understands what he has done and proclaims that his boy was killed by “Huns! Huns! Miserable Huns” (74)! His grief is two fold: he has now lost his faith in Germany because Miller showed him the true duplicitous nature of Germans and for his son, whom he believes has died due to his own accidental act of treason. His use of the insult ‘Hun’ demonstrates his disassociation from his own German-ness as he bifurcates himself from his heritage. The line can also be read as an accusation of his former self. Karl might also be the ‘Hun’ who killed his son as his money was used to build the bomb.

KARL’S PERFORMANCES OF CITIZENSHIP

The top of Act III begins with Karl already in mid-transition having begun to identify what changes he needs to make to successfully enact his assimilation, to perform his new American-ness. Karl uses performance as a mechanism to embody and enact conceptions or assumptions about what it meant to be American. I argue that these conceptions or assumptions are deeply intertwined with the embedded history of Whiteness as the necessary mandate of ideal citizenship in the American context. The ideal American that immigrants are asked to play, or perform, is always and already based on the assumed White original. Through this concept, I consider how performance is internal to the process of assimilation and highlight that conceptions of what is or is not considered proper American performances are always part of a larger performance of the idealization of White citizenship. Karl’s assimilation is the most precise example of this concept in the dissertation as he quite literally crafts
himself as a new American through external changes and embodied actions. To add to this, Karl’s performance of assimilation is layered through its contextualization as a theatrical performance.

Karl’s initial action to assimilate is the destruction of his German identity. The act begins with Karl burning everything German in his house including his picture of the Kaiser and piles of German newspapers. He replaces what he has burned – bringing in pictures of Presidents Washington and Wilson and ordering a subscription to the New York Times. This process of annihilation is intensified by a new request by Karl. In order to establish his new sense of self and project it to the world, he asks for his family to begin to call him by a new American name, Charlie. Through this change of name the external factors that make Karl recognizable as German are gone and in its place is Charlie.

Karl’s assimilation includes a re-contextualization of William’s death by his father. Karl’s arguments against his son’s enlistment from the Act II fade and morph into a rhetoric of shared national sacrifice. This sacrifice is complicated by its duality – both for America and for Germany. When Marie mourns the death of her son, Karl/Charlie comforts her with his newfound American patriotism and asserts that the death is for America and a post-war Germany, “we gave our boy for the country that gave us shelter, support and thirty years of happiness...We gave him to the cause, that wipes out that damnable Hindenburg and bring back the beautiful Germany we used to know...” (91-92). Through his second-generation liminal status, William becomes a sacrifice for both countries. Karl/Charlie still acknowledges his German heritage, but it is now secondary to his new home. In asserting a future “beautiful Germany” as a return to the past, Karl/Charlie is stitching back together the broken relationship between the two countries. Karl is able to successfully transform himself from the persecuted and harassed German to the patriotic American simply by deciding to act differently. He models the potentiality of the performance of American citizenship through his successful re-birth and his reward is the return of his son, miraculously surviving the explosion.
The play ends with Karl/Charlie setting a trap for Anton Miller as a way to stop him from tricking any other good Germans into betraying America. Miller’s arrest demonstrates the defeat of a nefarious German spy ring, also validating suspicion of their existence, and projects a future win for the Allies. 

*Friendly Enemies* ends with the Pfeiffer family enacting and performing their American-ness for each other and as a presentation to the audience. Charlie/Karl yearns to be American and wants his wife to feel the same so he instructs their son to teach them American citizenship through patriotic songs. As the curtain falls, William educates them on the words of “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” and Charlie and Marie repeat every word.

Karl is given the opportunity to assimilate after all he has said and done. He has declared his loyalty to Germany, defended his homeland, given money to a German spy, accidently funded terrorism and the murder of American soldiers and then decides to become American, to change his name to Charlie, to burn his German newspapers, and still recall the Germany of his youth while declaring his new allegiance to America. Karl is able to re-invent himself despite the wartime racialized of Germans and the creations of the image of the ‘Hun.’ He is able to successfully transform himself from the persecuted and harassed German to the patriotic American simply by deciding to act differently. This is possible because Karl is never positioned in the text as a ‘real’ German enemy, a ‘Hun,’ but rather an old nostalgic man whose memory of home leaves him vulnerable to the manipulative and evil German spy, Anton Miller. This temporary status is supported by the resurrection of William.

Karl is only able to complete this assimilation because he is White and his performance of the ‘proper’ modes of American citizenship will allow him to easily blend into the population of other White citizens. If we imagine this play with a clearly non-White family, in a contemporary context perhaps a family of Muslim refugees from Syria or an Iraqi-American family, the idea that the kindly old father would be able to believably assimilate as a loyal American even after helping to committed an act of terrorism seems unlikely. This is because even the most believable performance of American loyalty
when enacted by minority subjects is still routinely seen as inauthentic and potentially duplicitous imitation. As I will demonstrate in chapters three and four, despite the desire to prove their allegiance to America, and the willingness of many to put calls for equality aside, routinely African American soldiers were routinely suspected of disloyalty. Karl’s ability to assimilate is a parallel to ability of Germans to re-assimilate back into Whiteness in the post-war. The racialization of Germans, although violent, was a brief moment where they experienced the processes and material consequences that non-White groups consistently live with but unlike these groups, German were able to perform their way to Whiteness.

CONTEXTUALIZING FRIENDLY ENEMIES: PRODUCTION HISTORY AND CRITICAL RESPONSES

Friendly Enemies was a wildly successful play and a locus for debates about the role of German immigrants in America. However, a popular commercial play that took as its lead a German immigrant, who emphatically defended the German cause, was still quite controversial. Samuel Shipman began developing his idea for Friendly Enemies in 1916 as a story of British-German immigrants, but it quickly became apparent that the US would be entering the war. He attempted to get theatre producer and future Boston Red Sox owner Harry Herbert (H. H.) Frazee interested in the play, but Frazee firmly rejected the concept that would “place a pro-German character on stage” (“Five Fortunes from Five Days of Work”). After being rejected, Shipman realized the only way to get his idea off the ground would be to find known actors to attach to the project. He approached Sam Bernard, a vaudeville and musical actor, and Louis Mann, a dramatic actor, who were both interested in starring in the yet unwritten vehicle. Mann, who would play Karl, had been a successful child actor in German-language plays in New York working his way into dramatic supporting parts but had returned to his roots playing the German
type in comedies (Adler and Vizetelly, “Mann, Louis”). Sam Bernard, who would play Henry, was a British-German vaudeville star that became a popular Broadway musical comedy actor, who also specialized in German character parts (Cullen 100-101). Mann and Bernard were highly recognizable Jewish actors with Germanic backgrounds who had spent their youth together working with the renowned vaudeville comedy team of Weber and Fields. Both men were such significant stars that when Friendly Enemies eventually opened on Broadway their names, both listed as leads, would alternate in order on the marquee from night to night to give each their due time being listed first (“The New York Stage”).

Shipman’s ability to attach these stars caught the attention of theatre producer A.H. Woods who wanted to produce the show but only gave Shipman two weeks to write it. The quick deadline necessitated a writing partner and the team settled on Aaron Hoffman. After much negotiating, which took up half their short writing time, both men and a stenographer left for Atlantic City to write the play. Rehearsals for Friendly Enemies began in less than two weeks, and three weeks after that it opened in Atlantic City at the Apollo Theatre (“Five Fortunes from Five Days of Work”). The production then travelled to Washington D.C.’s National Theatre for a one week engagement that concertized the show as the go-to patriotic war play of the year. In what would be used in advertisements for the show throughout its tenure, President Woodrow Wilson, known to be an avid playgoer (“THE THEATRE IN REVIEW: The Theatre Goes to War”), stood from his box and addressed the theatre after the second act. He proclaimed, “[a]ll that I can say has already been said most admirably in this beautiful play; all the sentiments I could express have been admirably represented; sentiments that I hope will soon sweep the world” (“Wilson Boosts play that will Open Theater”). Several news reports agreed that actor Louis Mann, after a highly extended curtain call and speech, was the one who potentially pressured the

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15 Bernard changed his name from Barnett to appear more ethnic and fit into the Vaudeville circuit. See Vaudeville Old & New by Cullen, Hackman, and McNeilly, page 101.
President to make a remark. Regardless, newspapers of the period recorded this as the only time in recent memory that a current president had given a speech during a performance.\textsuperscript{16}

As the production gained praise from the president for its message of ‘100% Americanism,’ theatre critics were noting how the play reflected an increasingly xenophobic nationalistic discourse on immigrants and a silencing of any criticism of patriotic display. The \textit{Washington Post’s} “At the Local Theatres” column on March 5, 1918 critiqued the content of the play for its reliance on melodrama but quickly noted that the patriotic climate that surrounded the production meant “an adverse opinion of the play should be regarded as something between blasphemy and high treason.” This anonymous critic even joked that a poor review of the production might place him in jeopardy of being sent to Fort Oglethorpe, the German internment camp discussed previously. This review exposes the creeping influence of coercive patriotism that was already causing critics to self-censor their responses to the play. This heightened sensitivity to all things that might be preserved as pro-German reveals the narrow boundaries of self-expression and exploration produced by the wartime climate.

In its move to Chicago, for a week of performance at the brand new Wood’s Theatre on Randolph and Dearborn,\textsuperscript{17} the play received high praise from reviewers who focused on Mann and Bernard’s comic timing and the high entertainment value of the production (“The Billboard Archive,” 55). O.L. Hall’s review for \textit{The Journal} embraced its wartime theme of loyalty through anti-Germanism, “It was, and is, a timely and essentially a truthful document in which German dialect is turned against itself and in which Hun venom is used as its own antidote.” Although the leads certainly added to the success of the production in Chicago, \textit{Friendly Enemies} continued to be highly profitable after Mann and


\textsuperscript{17} The theatre was not named for producer A. H. Woods but for deceased theatre manager Col. J.H. Wood but he quickly capitalized on the double name by selecting the theatre for the production. In 1990, the theatre was razed to put up an office park that never materialized and eventually the land became part of the site of the Goodman Theatre complex. See “Woods Theatre,” Cinema Treasures by Bryan Krefft and Ray Martinez.
Bernard left on July 7th for a short break prior to the Broadway debut of the show on July 22nd (“The Friendly Enemies Ask A Vacation”).

In the sweltering hot summer of 1918, Friendly Enemies opened the Broadway season at the Hudson Theatre a full two weeks prior to any other production and it exceeded expectations in popularity and financial success (“‘Friendly Enemies' Opens the Season”). Friendly Enemies played on Broadway until August of 1919, 440 performance, and retained its production in Chicago, added multiple touring and sit-down productions in cities across the country and the world including performances in England, Australia, and India. Reviewers of the Broadway production had mixed reactions to the play and its success. The New York Times named it an “instant hit” focusing on the skillful comic interplay between Mann and Bernard who, despite not playing “highly realistic characters,” combined “verbal slapstick” with “deep humanity and irresistible freshness” (“Friendly Enemies' Is An Instant Hit”). Positive reviews were also seen over the next month from The Billboard, in August, calling it “interesting, humorous, and gripping” and the New York Times quoted the Cincinnati Enquirer as naming it as one of the “most artistic comedies” (“Season Opens: New York Sees Louis Mann and Sam Bernard...”).

There were many reviews that emphasized that while Friendly Enemies was not great dramatic literature it was timely and necessary for the war effort. Others decried Friendly Enemies as either overly patriotic tripe or too sympathetic to the German immigrant experience. The traditionally liberal New York Times review articulated the play’s lack of literary quality due its reliance on patriotism but emphasized the irrelevance of this deficiency due to its greater qualities:

As dramatic literature the play may, perhaps, not win any high rank. It is a comedy-drama of the older sort, verging always toward farce on the one side and melodrama on the other. Like most of our native drama, it is not what is called a “written” play. But it

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18 The British production was renamed, Uncle Sam.
has the rarer virtues of broaching a new, vital, and timely subject, and of handling it throughout in a spirit that is wholesome and invigorating. Among the many plays touching upon our part in the war it stands quite alone (“Season Opens: New York Sees Louis Mann and Sam Bernard in Patriotic...”).

While the reviewer for historically conservative The Cincinnati Enquirer, quoted in the New York Times, argued the opposite:

[the] play is not melodramatic, not written solely, with the view of catching the fancy of the melodramatic-loving public. It is drawn with a fidelity to life and with a knowledge of human nature that are too infrequently encountered either on stage or in the present-day literature (“Season Opens: New York Sees Louis Mann and Sam Bernard in Patriotic...”).

Heywood Broun of the New York Tribune honed in on the role of melodrama by accusing the play of being emotionally manipulative to audiences already in “emotional moods” over the war. He also argued that the play was "not profoundly amusing" and bordered on offensive in its depictions of “the problems of German-Americans” through “the dialect and the methods of Weber and Fields,” a negative reference to the popular vaudeville comic of which both Mann and Bernard were associated (“Drama: "Friendly Enemies" Gets a Greeting Warm as the Night”). While The Christian Science Monitor found it to be patriotic fluff for popular audiences, writing that it “has very little depth, but a great many of the ‘sure-fire,’ flag-fluttering bits which catch the fervid fancy of the average playgoer who is daily on the surface of these times” (“New York Notes”). Burns Mantle in The Chicago Tribune gave the New York production a positive review but articulated concerns about the German characters, writing:

The story of the hyphenates...once it has passed the personal feelings of the popular comedians, and the sympathetic but discreet pro-German crowd that every large American community harbors these days, will find the remainder of the public less
responsive. The war is a pretty serious affair...and there is a growing current of pro-Americanism that does not react enthusiastically, even to a human and skillfully disguised plea for the hesitant loyalist of alien enemy extraction ("Burns Mantle's New York Letter").

Mantle was clearly wrong. The play found a very responsive audience during and after the war. Although it had its detractors and poor reviewers, audiences were drawn to Karl and his journey of assimilation in cities across the country. I believe it is precisely because the playwrights skillfully constructed Karl, even as a German enemy, as a friend who had to discover his true nature within himself. A key part of that journey is the reason behind his assimilation.

Critics debated the motivation behind Karl’s change of heart attributing it to either the recognition of the evilness of the Germans or the loss of his son. This debate over exactly why Karl assimilated is embedded in discourses and ideologies of immigrant loyalty and provides vital insight into the ability that Germans in America had to negotiate their own survival. Reviewer Percy Hammond did not have a problem with audiences finding compassion with German immigrants but he did argue that Karl’s assimilation could not be trusted. He wrote of Louis Mann’s performance of Karl, “Mr. Mann was not made a loyal American by American principles of unselfishness and altruism...the [thing] that changed him was...his son. Thus, Friendly Enemies emphasizes not so much the patriotic as the paternal emotion” (“Interesting Play; Handsome Theater”). Hammond reasoned that if Karl’s assimilation was based on affection than it was capricious and easily manipulated.

Reviews of the production were so widely disparate that noted New York Times drama critic and former assistant editor of Harper’s Magazine John Corbin devoted his column on August 25, 1918 to examine the critical response to the play and his own interpretations. In “Shall We Sing the 'im of 'ate?,” Corbin credits the comic “genius” of actors Mann and Bernard for humanizing the German immigrant for American audiences. He argues that the ability of Americans to feel for Germans is a positive indication
of the great moral fortitude and charity of the American character. Corbin’s primary objective in his article is to dismantle the argument by critics that play was too pro-German. In so doing he outlines the three main arguments used to label the play as German propaganda: 1) it contains no arguments against the Hun 2) it shows that there are certain “loveable domestic qualities” in the German character 3) it represents a German secret agent (Anton Miller) as brave and...patriotic (“Shall We Sing the 'im of 'ate?”). His response to these arguments is nuanced and demonstrates the highest level of theatrical criticism as he uses dramatic literature and the theatrical experience to reflect on his contemporary moment, the smothering landscape of wartime xenophobic nationalism. As such, it deserves an extensive analysis in order to fully contextualize the play and its meaning within its historical period.

Corbin refutes the first argument that the play offers no ill words against the ‘Hun’ by using the text of the play. He argues that there are several moments in which the evils of Germany are presented, including moments I have discussed in this chapter. He posits that critics who level this condemnation are actually looking for highly didactic exposition against German villainy. Corbin argues that these critics do not understand the basic rules of “dramatic craftsmanship” that privilege action and character over exposition (“Shall We Sing the 'im of 'ate?”). He anchors his analysis by advocating that those that are looking for political speeches are only interested in propaganda, not theatre.

Corbin refutes the second argument, that the play provides too positive an image of German characters, by examining the wartime obsession with broadly de-humanizing the enemy. He argues that unmitigated enemization that seeks to vilify all Germans is ineffective because “mere hatred is blind and narrowing, and so, in the long run, futile” (“Shall We Sing the 'im of 'ate?”). He advocates hating one’s enemy does not inspire “true courage” which should be the goal of a solider in wartime (“Shall We Sing the 'im of 'ate?”). His point of view is that the role of a society at war is to inspire soldiers to fight for their country not to fight against the enemy.
His third argument examines the criticism that it is a deficient of the play that the German spy Anton Miller is depicted as brave and patriotic to his country. Corbin asks, “Since when has it been a virtue to deny that an enemy is brave, or inspired by a fervor of patriotism less that one’s own” (“Shall We Sing the ‘im of ‘ate?”). He connects this concept to his earlier argument about the role of wartime drama to inspire the soldiers’ courage asking, “what has a soldier to gain, in fame or inward satisfaction of spirit, by denying that his enemy also is brave” (“Shall We Sing the ‘im of ‘ate?”). Corbin is refuting not just theatre critics who are requiring their plays to thoroughly dehumanize the enemy but his contemporary culture that characterizes Germans in ways that are simplistic and inhuman. Corbin advocates that acknowledging the facts of the enemies’ desire as equal to one’s own emboldens the sacrifices of war.

Corbin concludes his criticism by establishing the stakes of his reasoning during wartime. He argues that Germans living in the US and American soldiers of German descent should not be vilified on American stages. He acknowledges the power that mass hatred and fear can have to create new enemies out of former friends. Corbin supports his belief with a reliance on patriotism arguing that it is beneath American values to be “blind and bitter” towards enemies at war (“Shall We Sing the ‘im of ‘ate?”). He argues that the success of the play is due to its depiction of proper American values. American audiences want to see the story of Karl becoming American. Corbin argues that seeing Friendly

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19 The proclivity to frame an enemy as cowardly re-emerged after the attacks of September 11, 2001. In response to President Bush’s rhetoric that the US would “hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts,” Politically Incorrect host Bill Maher remarked in early 2002 that, “We [The United States] have been the cowards. Lobbing cruise missiles from two thousand miles away. That’s cowardly. Staying in the airplane when it hits the building. Say what you want about it. Not cowardly.” Left-leaning Maher lost sponsors and eventually his show over the sentiment but he was far from the only one to dispute the idea of cowardice or use the term brave about the attackers. Those as different in political ideology as liberal Susan Sontag and the conservative editors of both the American Spectator and The National Review questioned the reality and utility of not acknowledging the bravery that comes with ardent beliefs of one’s righteousness and the willingness to die for them. See “Terror Attacks Spark Cowardly Debate” by Josh Gertein, ABC News Online 25 Sept. 2002.
*Enemies* is an antidote for the un-American, cruel, and practically unwise anti-Germanism sweeping the nation.

The critical debates that surrounded *Friendly Enemies* did far more than examine the literary and aesthetic qualities of the play and the performances of its actors. As propaganda, the play was seen as a part of a larger American cultural shift towards an unquestionable nationalism. A cursory glance at the text might lead to a simplistic understanding that Karl’s assimilation and performance of American culture would be deemed a wholly pro-American text. However, as a vehicle that humanizes its central German character the play solidifies the potential of German immigrants to become American through their performances of loyalty, embodied practices that provide a potential gateway to inclusion despite racialization. The duality of the accusation of being both pro-American and pro-German reveals the anxieties over who gets to be incorporated into the nation.

**CONCLUSION**

My analysis of *Friendly Enemies* has focused on key moments from the text in order to analyze how the pro-German Karl becomes the American Charlie. I establish Karl’s initial German-ness through an analysis his introduction to the world of the play demonstrating both the dangers of being German and his potential for deception. I have argued that the moment of the hidden newspaper allows for a discussion of resistance and survival as Karl navigates the dangers of the hyper-nationalistic wartime climate. Next, I discussed a scene between Marie and June as they locate differences between German and American marriages as a site for national discourse. This moment relied upon the image of the ‘Hun,’ this grotesque German enemy that drew upon already codified notions of the danger of the African American male body. This work created the image of the ‘Hun’ through the framework of the previously established racist fantasies of the vulnerability of White women building a sense of the innate
brutality of the German akin to the assumptions of biological deviancy and criminality of African American men.

Then, I examined the scene where Karl attempts to stop his son from going to war. Through his scene Karl’s allegiances begin to shift. In response to the upsetting moment of his son’s departure, Karl continues with his plan to give Anton Miller money to end the war and bring his son home. It is only when he finds out his money was used to build a bomb that has killed his son that Karl decides that he must assimilate into American culture. Karl’s assimilation is created through external factors and embodied performances of American citizenship. This transition is only possible because assimilation was possible for Whites that could fit into conceptions of American citizenship.

*Friendly Enemies* was highly financially successful and its production history speaks to its popularity around the country. Due to the success of the play, many American theatre critics wrote about the work allowing for a variety of responses. These reviews and criticisms demonstrate the wartime climate and its debates about the role of German immigrants. Critics were split as to whether the play was American or German propaganda due its ability to balance humanizing German characters with its firm ending in the embrace of American values.

The domestic and international success of *Friendly Enemies* meant that the show was one of the only wartime plays that continued to be produced after the war’s end. Even in the interwar years the debates about the play’s meaning continued as its production crisscrossed the nation and internationally. In 1920, Louis Mann was still answering questions about his performance as Karl. Mann recounted that he “was astounded to observe how the newspaper critics...had failed completely in their interpretation of the real psychology” of his character (“He Explains Karl Pfeifer”). Mann’s interpretation of the text, and thus what he attempted to perform, was that:

[Karl] converted because the Kaiser’s own agent [Anton Miller] used me as his unwitting tool in perpetrating one of the crimes which I have been claiming to be newspaper
talk...My eyes are open and my soul revolts...Why, my one purpose after the transport is sunk is to bring my deceiver to justice, and put an end to Germany’s damnable propaganda in America. Yet critics would have the public believe that I am a silly, sentimental old fool.

The reference to his sentimentality is based on the criticism that Karl’s transition was only in response to his grief over his son’s death and so should be seen as fickle. Mann’s discussion of his character’s motivation shows unwillingness, a disparaging, of any notion that the death of his son would be any motivation for change. It is possible that Mann has simplified his position after two years of articles attacking the patriotic loyalty of the play and his performance but this cannot be known. Despite his claim, I think it’s obvious that a compelling choice for an actor would be to consider the combination of factors that would result in this change of heart and nationalistic loyalty. The text holds within it the potential for an actor playing Karl to perform complex and conflicting emotions and responses. Karl can feel the betrayal of Anton Miller and by extension his Germany homeland. Karl can recognize for the first time the realities of German atrocities. Karl can learn that his actions caused, what he believed to be, the death of this son. All of these can be motivating factors for his transition to becoming American. However, his performance is only believable, is only debatable, because he is White and thus can return to Whiteness after his brief wartime enemization. Karl’s Whiteness allows him, through embodied performances, to transition into American culture. Wartime propaganda used established images of the dangerous African American male bodies and racist ideology to create a temporary but nonetheless powerful image of the German as innately inferior, brutal, and immoral. Karl’s assimilation asks fundamental questions about how immigrants become Americans and who gets to receive the privileges of citizenship.
Bluff Hill sits at the intersection of Highway 40 and Route 157, just outside of Collinsville, Illinois, providing a panoramic view of the small coal mining towns that dot the landscape of the southern part of the state. It was there, on the outskirts, they brought the frightened man. In his last terrifying moments German immigrant Robert Prager had to look into the eyes of the mob that brought him to this place. The men who surrounded him were his co-workers and his neighbors, people he saw everyday, who were now demanding to know if he was a German spy. He was scared. The men in the mob yelled questions at him loudly and quickly and it was hard for him to understand their English. They made him kiss the American flag and sing patriotic songs into the cold night air.

The first time, they botched the lynching, forgetting to tie his hands. Prager tried to wrap his fingers around the rope and make room to breathe. The men in the mob watched him twitch and struggle as they lowered him back to the ground. In this brief moment of reprieve, Prager begged to write a note to his parents in Germany, a last goodbye. Once completed, the men placed the noose back around his neck and remembered to tie his hands this time. All the vigilantes’ hands were placed on the rope as it slid across the bark of a large hackberry tree; Robert Prager’s body flew into the air. As the rope tightened around his neck, there is no way of knowing what he was thinking. Perhaps, as he looked into a sea of men he had formerly trusted, he thought about what little threat he was to them. This great sea of American men so committed to defending their town, their country, and their way of life now found themselves on Bluff Hill having killed their neighbor, a slight foreign man with only one eye. Prager’s friends followed his final wish to have an American flag draped over his coffin during his funeral. They buried his body in St. Louis, Missouri away from the town that turned on him. The epitaph on his gravestone reads, “The Victim of a Mob” (Weinberg 142). The power company took down the
hackberry tree almost fifty years after the lynching. Like so many sites of violence in America, so many sites of lynchings, there is nothing that marks what happened in this place.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on anti-Germanism in America during the First World War frequently discusses the brutal lynching of Robert Prager, a young German immigrant coal miner who was murdered in Collinsville, Illinois on April 5th, 1918. In Over Here: The First World War and American Society (2004), preeminent historian of the period David Kennedy has called it “the war’s most infamous case of vigilantism” (68). Prager’s death is the paramount example of the rise of anti-German mob violence and hyper-patriotism that marked the entrance of the US into the Great War. As I will discuss, the American wartime landscape was replete with instances of harassment, persecution, humiliation, intimidation, and acts of torture towards those deemed outside the acceptable bounds of embodied citizenship. Groups and individuals under attack included conscious objectors, pacifists, labor union organizers, radicals, anarchists, and suffragists; however, those of German descent and African Americans, discussed in the last two chapters, had their loyalty questioned because of their race. Instances of anti-Germanism, although numerous, were rarely fatal leading scholars to argue that Prager’s lynching was an isolated event of deadly violence. Instead, I argue that it was an evitable outgrowth of the process of creating a German racialized enemy and, therefore, within the context of histories of minority racial formation in American life. Prager’s lynching was the most extreme act of anti-Germanism in the period but once contextualized within the broader context of violence inflicted on racialized bodies in the service of continuing White supremacy; it is one event in a long and continuous history.

Throughout this chapter, I analyze Prager’s murder as an embodied performance of coercive patriotism, patriotic acts enacted under force or threat; what I call ‘patriotic torture,’ the use of national symbols as instruments of torture; and the use of lynching, which connected German immigrants to other acts of racialized violence. My use of the term torture, inflicting pain for the purposes of gathering information, and the term ‘patriotic torture’ allows for a way to demarcate a distinctive form of violence being enacted on Prager’s body through the use of national objects, in his case the American flag. This term also demonstrates a connection with the term ‘patriotic homicide,’ the word used by the lynch mob’s defense to describe Prager’s killing during their trial. Prager’s death, and the overall practice of lynching, is connected to the role of violent vigilantism that attempted to maintain White supremacy through the public execution and the display of racialized bodies. I examine the similarities and the differences between the lynching of African Americans and Robert Prager’s lynching in order to develop a more complex analysis of the role of performances of violence in the formation of minority citizenship and the crafting of a racialized German enemy. In lynching Prager, the vigilante mob used the most brutal and violent instrument of American White supremacy and racial terror as a mode of codifying civic loyalty. Their decision to use lynching, and its ritualistic power, cannot be separated the use of the American flag as a weapon to humiliation, harass, and torture. The noose and the flag are metaphorically braided together in this moment.

I analyze Prager’s death through the lens of performance studies as well as historical scholarship of the event, my own archival research, discussions of patriotism and torture, and recent work in African American Studies. In focusing on performance theory as a methodology for examining this event I foreground lynching’s symbolic power, the role of ritual, the use of symbolic objects of American nationalism, and its connection to the history of vigilant violence and lynching. My argument advocates that the lynch mob that killed Prager utilized the embodied ritual of lynching, a kind of choreographed script of the actions, adapting it with emerging anti-German practices.
Prager’s death demonstrates that anti-German harassment was not meant to teach or confirm immigrant loyalty but rather was a performance of humiliation meant to ostracize the outsider and codify the boundaries of the community, a practice that – as I will demonstrate – functioned very similarly to African American lynching. I will show that Prager did all he could to perform his loyalty in order to save his life but despite this, the mob did not believe him. However, the event does differ from the majority of lynchings in important ways. Prager was given opportunities to demonstrate acts of patriotism, to answer the questions they asked him, and finally to write a final letter to his parents. These chances to prove his worthiness and reverence for the country as well as the chance to say goodbye were not given to African Americans when they were attacked by mobs. Prager, even in his racialized death, still held a small piece of his White privilege.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss this history of vigilantism and the role of the lynch mobs in order to contextualize the prevalence of extra-legal practices and performances that dominated American life. Lynching was an invention of American vigilante culture. The end of the Civil War and beginning of the Reconstruction engendered a vast wave of violence and vigilantism symbolized most profoundly through the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, the most notorious vigilante White supremacist group in American history. Many White southerners turned to these performances of hate, including lynching, as devices to reclaim power over the bodies of newly freed African Americans. I discuss lynching as a specifically anti-African American practice of White supremacist violence while demonstrating how it connected to the growth of anti-German violence.

The period of the Great War saw a confluence of events that led to federal and state governments encouraging everyday citizens to decide what constituted loyal or civic behavior and undertake punitive actions without oversight. The state requested that its people monitor their neighbors for disloyal behavior and encouraged regular citizens to detain, harass, shame, or arrest those who were deemed suspicious. As Christopher Capozzola has argued in *Uncle Sam Wants You* (2008), this
level of community surveillance was easily accomplished due to the already established respect for community policing and vigilant justice. The prevalence of lynching is a result of Americans' traditionally high level of comfort with extra-legal actions in the name of homeland security.

Whether by the Klu Klux Klan or by local White communities, the horrific public murder of African Americans served to keep the White supremacist racial order intact while providing legitimacy to the role of the mob in community policing. Town leaders and local police frequently participated in lynch mobs knowing that they were traversing the law and frequently allowed the mob to remove men from their jail cells to be murdered in the streets, as would happen with Prager. This mode of operating set the stage, as it were, for wartime hysteria and coercive patriotism. Communities, already familiar with the surveillance and regulation of African American behavior quite easily, with the help of federal and local governments, added those of German descent to their surveillance. An analysis of the role of vigilantism provides a vital insight into the culture of race in early 20th century America.

In the next section, I bring together scholarship in a diverse set of fields in order to establish the analysis of lynching as a performance. In advocating for the use of performance as a methodology in which to consider this very specific form of violence I utilize research from scholars in a variety of fields including History, Sociology, American Studies, African American Studies, and Performance Studies. My examination argues that reading the act of lynching as a performance provides a mode of understanding its symbolic power. I also account for and reject arguments that discount the ability of performance theory to adequately encompass the realities of embodied acts of violence. The use of lynching was meant to be public, communal, violent as well as symbolic, and when the citizens of Collinsville used it, they connected Prager to a history of racialized violence. The lynch mob, Prager, and onlookers were all part of a wartime performance of race and citizenship that demonstrated the climate of narrow enforcement of normative values.
Next, I specifically examine the less frequent instances of the lynching of non-African American bodies. This occurrence, although rare, allows for an understanding of Prager’s lynching as part of a continuum of racial violence that extends into other minority communities. The lynching of non-African Americans, such as Prager, used the ritualistic aspects of the act but adapted it to handle perceived violations of community standards. I will demonstrate in this section that a more thorough understanding of the lynching of non-African Americans has been overlooked because several prominent scholars of lynching have assumed a historical rigidity to racial categories that negates the fluidity of race. My analysis here foregrounds notions of race as part of a socio-historical process, or formation to use Omi and Winant’s terminology, that is constructed for specific reasons at specific times which cannot be assumed to be stable in a given period. Many of these cases were lynchings of people who came from backgrounds where their claims to Whiteness were debatable. An examination of the history of the lynching of non-African Americans offers a model for understanding the performative dimensions of Prager’s death.

I then discuss the increased climate of anti-Germanism. I argue that the federal government, in particular the Wilson administration, knowingly encouraged anti-German vigilantism in the name of wartime vigilance. Private citizens were asked to monitor and report behavior. Vigilante groups were empowered by the federal government to investigate and arrest those who fell outside the bound of assumptions of ‘proper’ citizenship. Certainly, private individuals were primarily responsible for incidents of harassment but their government created a climate of suspicion and paranoia and waited far too long to speak out against mob violence. The war on the homefront was over the minds and hearts of the people and their government did not want to encourage any sympathy for the enemy, or anyone who might look like, sound like, or talk like the enemy.

In the next two sections, I contextualize and analyze Prager’s harassment, torture, and lynching as a performance. In Prager’s case there was a mob of men, several of whom had Germanic
backgrounds, who attacked a German immigrant. They tortured him with the American flag and then killed him with the most terrorizing tool of racial violence. I discuss the specific historical and social factors in Collinsville, Illinois and how Prager came to live in this small town. I also present why suspicion fell on Prager and why he was accused of disloyalty. I describe and examine the events that led to Prager’s death focusing on the performative elements and pay particular attention to the elements of his murder that are similar and different from the rituals of African American lynching.

In the final section, I discuss the aftermath of the event. I focus on the trial of the lynch mob, a rare occurrence in histories of lynching, and examine the legal defense of an extra-legal action. This defense included a claim by defense lawyers for the mob that they should be found innocent because it was a ‘patriotic murder.’ The jury agreed. The publicity surrounding the trial of those accused of Prager’s murder made national headlines and the acquittal of all defendants sent a clear message that, although deemed as overreaction, the murder of German immigrants would not be punished. In addition, the trial fell in the midst of the Congressional consideration for the Sedition Act of 1918 causing the event to be thrust into debates over mob violence, immigrant loyalty, and wartime encroachments on civil liberties.

STANDING YOUR GROUND: VIGILANTISM AND THE POWER OF THE LYNCH MOB

Vigilantism is not a rare occurrence in American history. The narratives of extra-legal acts, or unregulated actions, by vigilantes take a significant place in American historical and cultural life from cowboys to superheroes. First World War historian Christopher Capozzola has defined the term through its connection to the law: “To be a vigilante is to operate outside the structures of law as articulated by the legitimate regime, even if the aim is to establish social order on its behalf” (120). As American studies scholar Lisa Arellano argues in Vigilantes and Lynch Mobs (2012) the historical past of vigilantism is deeply connected to our contemporary moment through the continued glorification of “an organized and evenhanded” community responding to “uncontrollable criminal conditions” and being “applauded”
for their actions (1). The line between community watchdog and vigilante is highly dependent on the context of the event and the historical circumstances. But Americans have frequently seen vigilantism and operating around and outside the law as part of their rights and regularly argued that this behavior more closely corresponds to community vigilance than its frequent product, violence. Between 1767 and 1951 there were 5,400 killings by organized or unorganized groups performed as part of the vigilante culture of community policing, including lynchings the most popular and gruesome forms of American vigilantism (Capozzola 119).

Although the definition of lynching has been contested, the common criteria is an act of violence which ended in the death of the victim; the victim had to be killed outside the rule of law; it had to be carried out by a group; and the murders had to be driven by justice, race, or tradition (Waldrep 78). This definition, from 1940, was not in place at the time of Prager’s death in 1918. However, the events of his murder do correspond to the criteria. A more general but historically specific definition can be provided by Philip G. Peabody who applied to the NAACP for a grant to study lynching. Peabody defined lynching in his application as “murder sanctioned by a community” (Waldrep 79). Prager’s death also fits into this definition. As I will discuss, the lynching of non-African Americans was uncommon but did happen and being African American was not required for the definition of lynching at any point despite its ubiquitous use as a tool of racial terror.

The rise of lynching was in direct response to increased rights and civil liberties for African Americans after the Civil War and continued as a means to terrorize African American communities. As Wood argued in Lynching and Spectacle (2009) the practice of lynching “held a singular psychological

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21 A firm definition for lynching has been historically contested both by racially motivated Whites who sought to reframe racist violence as normative acts of self or community defense and by infighting between African American political groups who offered conflicting definitions coming from differing politically positions. In “War of Words: The Controversy over the Definition of Lynching, 1899-1940” Christopher Waldrep argues that solidifying a definition was an essential part of ending the predominance of the practice by allowing differing anti-lynching groups to provide cohesive information that could not be undercut by seeming statistical inaccuracies. Waldrep argues that the most common definition for lynching was established in 1940 at an anti-lynching conference organized the NAACP at Tuskegee Institute (Waldrep 78-79).
force, generating a level of fear and horror that overwhelmed all other forces of violence” because it was extraordinary in its highly public display of power (1). Former Confederate soldiers gathered in social clubs throughout the South and quickly formed community groups who claimed to protect White people, mostly White women, from the dangers of now freed slaves. These “paramilitary organizations ... drew members from all sections of White society” seeking to reverse the civil rights gained during the Reconstruction (“Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror,” 8). Lynching was the performance that sought to maintain a White supremacist racial hierarchy.

A 2015 report from the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) has drastically increased the presumed number of lynchings in America through meticulous archival research. Scholars had estimated that between 2,805 and 3,200 African Americans, mostly men, were lynched from 1880 and 1940 (Woods 3, Tolnay and Beck 1). This new research found over seven hundred more lynchings than previously known. The EJI found 3959 lynchings of African Americans in twelve Southern states between 1887 and 1950 (“Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror,” 4-5). This era of lynching demonstrates the massive utilization of a form of murder that operated for decades in full public view.

In Tolnay and Beck’s A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930 (1995) they outline the variety of complex reasons that drove the lynch mob to action. Frequently, the mob felt they were responding to perceived weaknesses in the law or lack of authorial control. This motivation was primary when the victim was accused of a crime or had been found guilty and the mob believed the severity of the punishment would not correspond to the severity of the crime. Many Whites perceived an “increasing black-on-White crime” rate and believed the courts were “too weak, slow, and uncertain” to serve the White community’s needs for order (Tolnay and Beck 61). In reality, the southern legal system was already extremely weighted against African American defendants and they were particularly vulnerable to being given the death penalty (Tolnay and Beck 62). This use of lynching was called

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This number does not take into account other forms of violence including urban race riots, murders by non-mobs or single assassins, harassment, injury, and humiliation.
‘popular justice’ since lynch mobs and communities who attended lynching spectacles could convince themselves that African American victims were criminals who would not have been punished by any other means. This was, of course, was not the case.

In fact, the majority of what could incite a lynch mob was uncertain. According to Tolnay and Beck, “It was not, in fact, at all clear what behavior would lead to mob violence, and it was this uncertainly that would have created terror within the black community” (19). The authors argue that the overwhelming commonality between incidents of lynching was not what African Americans did or did not do but rather how Whites felt about that behavior, particularly if they felt threatened. The authors expand on this point to argue that within the racially segregated environment of the South “Whites were then predisposed to react violently to even the slightest provocation - or to invent provocative acts where none existed” (3). When considering Prager’s death it is vital to contextualize the historical moment in order to understand what provoked the mob to action. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the primary reasons that scholars believe the men of Collinsville turned on Prager, but it is important to also see Tolnay and Beck’s point that the cultural moment was one where feelings, particularly feelings of being threatened, drove violent action. Prager was lynched around one month after he arrived in Collinsville.

LYNCHING AS PERFORMANCE

Throughout this chapter, I examine Prager’s lynching as a performance by grounding my research in the work of scholars in varying fields who have examined lynching and its socio-cultural impact. Many of these scholars do not consider themselves scholars of Performance Studies and make little or no reference to theories of performance; however, their work is, in fact, profoundly about visuality, spectacle, affective and symbol import, embodied ritual, and language. I read their work as about performance even if they would not categorize their work as such. This is not a critique of their
excellent and needed scholarship but a further recognition that there is a known identification that lynching has performative or theatrical dimensions. Additionally, works in Theatre, Performance Studies, and African American Studies have expanded the field of lynching scholarship in ways that advocate for a clearer understanding of its power through the methodologies of performance. In bringing scholarship from various fields into this chapter, I am providing an interdisciplinary analysis of lynching and adding to the small but important collection of works in Performance Studies or works that I think have performative resonances that have examined lynching.

In Vigilantes and Lynch Mobs (2012), Lisa Arellano focuses on the narrative structure and circulation of lynching stories within White communities and the resistance by African Americans to the popularity of these stories as a justification for lynching. Throughout her text she refers to lynching as “a set of violent practices,” “a perverse public spectacle” and a “bizarre public ritual” (16, 120). These terms offer just one example of the highly performative language used to describe the event.

In Lynching and Spectacle (2009) historian Amy Louise Wood brings together visual culture and lynching history in order to articulate the power of spectacle in the act and its role in creating a climate of terror for African American communities Wood argues:

...the cultural power of lynching - indeed, the cultural power of White supremacy itself - rested on spectacle: the crowds, the rituals and performances, and their sensational representations in narratives, photographs, and films (3).

In focusing on the power of spectacle, her examination rests on the flow of photographs and the taking and displaying of bodily mementos that extended the performance event and created witnesses to lynchings that were never physically present. Wood argues that the circulation of these items from lynching spectacles expanded the definition of witnessing forming White audiences into a community that surpassed divisions of geography, generation, and class (8). Whites who were not present at a lynching were able to identity with the lynch mob and take a sense of power into their own communities
learning from the mementos that there would be little or no punishment for their actions. Although Wood does not directly engage with performance theory, her articulation of spectacle, audience and witnessing, and visual culture she provides a foundation for examining lynching as a performative action. In expanding the definition of witnessing to those who engaged with the mementos and not the event itself, Wood considers how a performance and its remains circulate ideology.

While in *Loyalty in a Time of Trial* (2011), Nina Mjagkij discusses the advertising of lynchings in newspapers in ways similar to theatrical productions. In discussing the “elaborate public spectacles” she describes the scene, a historical scenario so akin to spectators at an outdoor theatrical event that it deserves to be seen in its full inhumane detail:

> Local newspapers advertised upcoming lynchings, and there were special excursions trains to the events, which attracted food and souvenir vendors who catered to thousands of spectators, including women and children. Exuding the leisurely atmosphere of county fairs, replete with family picnics, these public slaughters offered their audiences the thrill of witnessing the prolonged torture and death of a black victim, often inflicted by hanging or burning at the stake. Spectators had the opportunity to have their picture taken with the victim or even purchase parts of the charred body (5-6).

Mjagkij’s intervention is to articulate that the public-ness of lynching and its far-reaching spectacle should have brought about legal punishment for the mob and the spectators but the violence of White supremacy made this event seem normative. She does not advocate a connection to theatre or performance but in her depiction of these events, she describes an atmosphere that mirrors the role of the crowd in a performative live event.

Unlike Wood and Mjagkij, African American studies and Theatre scholar, Daphne A. Brooks has referred specifically to the performance dimensions of lynching. In *Bodies in Dissent* (2006), she argues
that the “ritualistic ceremony” of lynching created a “production of black monstrosity” based in the postbellum myth of the ferocity of the African American rapist. This ritual, or performance, “rejuvenate[d] the power and preservation of the White body (politic)” (57). In Living with Lynching (2001), African American studies and Theatre scholar Koritha Mitchell examines “lynching drama,” African American dramatic literature with acts of lynching at their center. She argues that African American playwrights felt compelled to address the issue because of its prevalence and brutality as well as the disinterest that authorities had for punishing lynch mobs. Mitchell sees lynching as “theatrical” and refers to the horrific but frequent occurrence of White mobs taking souvenirs of their victim’s bodies as a desire for “props” to demonstrate their White mastery. She argues, “African Americans viewed lynching as a theatre of mastery in which Whites seeking (not assuming) racial supremacy used the black body as muse, antagonist, and stage prop” (3). Mitchell demonstrates that African American playwrights who wrote lynching dramas were engaging in counter-performances that sought to re-affirm the precise principles that were attacked by the mob: African American humanity, family ties, and achievement (8).

Theatre, Performance Studies, and African American Studies scholar Harvey Young writes in Embodying Black Experience (2010) of the taking of bodily souvenirs from African American victims after a lynching. His intervention acknowledges the wealth of scholarship on the performative or ritual aspects of lynching in “African American studies, English, history, sociology, and performance studies” and instead turns to the “lynching keepsake” as an understudied area (168-169). He calls the lynching souvenir “a spectacular performance remain or, more accurately a remain of the performance spectacle” (169). Young acknowledges the turn in the field of Performances Studies from the “ephemeral to the remaining,” particularly through the work of Rebecca Schneider, arguing that “the performance remain gains its social value and meaning through an accompanying narrative provided by its possessor, a person who bore witness to the original performance” (187). The lynching souvenir is a
performance remain which conjures "the possibility of an imagined, personal interaction with the original body" and has the potential to “reactivate the expired performance event “(188). Young writes:

...when we are confronted with a dismembered finger, we are compelled to imagine the hand and, by extension, the body from which it was taken. We similarly are invited to restage (in our minds) the process of its removal (187).

His text acknowledges arguments that advocate that lynching can be discussed as a performance and extends that work to discuss how the spectacle functions into the mind of the person who sees or engages with a lynching souvenir. Young’s work on performance remains is similar to Wood’s argument for lynching for the extended role of witnessing. Each argues that the performance, or spectacle in Woods’s case, of lynching was not just a product of a brutal racist ideology but also a productive mode of re-affirming these ideas through their circulation of objects and ideas. In advocating for a methodology of performance in analyzing Prager’s lynching, I am connecting his death to broader arguments about the act and its performative power in nation.

In my use of performance as methodology, I am also demonstrating its utility in interpreting violence, lynching in particular, as a performance and arguing against misconceptions about the inability of the field to consider the realities of violent lived experience. Carl R. Weinberg, whose text on Prager’s death is invaluable as a historical reference of the event, argues that examining the ritualized or performative aspects of lynching “can obscure the essential brutality involved” in the action (132).

Weinberg then offers a summation of the work of Suzanne Desan, without using her name, who argued that “[to] say that a riot is a ritual is almost to smooth over its violence or to deflect attention from the sheer power struggles involved in this killing in the streets” (132). Weinberg goes on to argue that it is essential “to view the killing of Prager not merely as a ritualized event with deep roots in history but instead as an inevitable result of the mobilization for war” (132). In his determination to advocate for historical specificity and contextualization of the event itself, which I agree with, Weinberg excludes the
possibility that an examination of the ritualistic, or performative, aspects of lynching could provide an additional lens through which to understand the historical moment and its dynamics.\textsuperscript{23} Weinberg’s diminishing use of “obscure” and “smooth over,” from Desan’s work, demonstrates an egregiously flawed understanding of performance. In advocating for historical contextualization \textit{instead of and not with}, as I would argue is needed, Weinberg suggests outdated ideas about performance: 1) that this type of analysis is without scholarly rigor or research and 2) that discussing violence as a performance elevates it to an aesthetic realm of delicate beauty deadening its brutality. I advocate unequivocally throughout this chapter and this dissertation that both these claims are flawed.

MOB VIOLENCE ON NON-AFRICAN AMERICAN BODIES

Prior to discussing Prager’s lynching in detail, it is imperative to contextualize the performance within histories of mob violence on non-African American bodies. Lynching was a regulating instrument of a White racial hierarchy predominately, but not solely, used on the African American community. However, many histories of lynching have overlooked that incidents of lynching on non-African American bodies were still very much about racialization, including Prager’s death. Tolnay and Beck’s study provides crucial insight into these types of actions but they causally refer to these moments as “White victims of White mobs” (93-98). This categorization assumes the stability of Whiteness that simply is not present and was particularly in flux during the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Their study too easily bifurcates White and African Americans without acknowledging the complexities of the history of Whiteness and racial formation in a US context. They argue:

The most common explanation that White mobs cited for lynching other Whites was murder; almost 60 percent of White victims were accused of the crime. The sensational

\textsuperscript{23} I do not expect Weinberg to have access to texts written after the publication of his book in 2005, like Harvey Young’s \textit{Embodying Black Experience} (2010), but it seems clear from his writing that his discounting of performance and its ability to interpret violence at least suggests an anti-theatrical, or anti-performance, argument that demonstrates that works these works might be of little interest to him.
lynching of Leo M. Frank in 1915 for the murder of Mary Phagan and the mob killing of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891 are probably the best known examples of White-on-White mob violence... (94.)

Instead of considering the role of race or ethnicity, Tolnay and Beck focus on the common denominator that in almost all of these cases the victims were accused of murder, vastly different from the small amount of African Americans who were lynched under that accusation.

While Tolnay and Beck focus on the differences between crime accusations, they miss the more complex commonalities that lynching was still prominently about White supremacy. The authors overlook that Leo Frank was a Northern Jewish factory owner in Atlanta accused of raping and murdering one his employees, a thirteen year-old Irish girl. Now, perhaps, most known for its dramatization in the musical Parade (1999), the case was charged with racial, religious, class, sexual, and regional conflict from its start. Spencer Blakeslee, sociologist of anti-Semitism and the history of Jewish advocacy groups, writes in The Death of American Anti-Semitism (2000) that Frank’s murder trial was the peak of anti-Semitism in America (81). Blakeslee adds that the case was the most significant political moment in the life of the nascent Anti-Defamation League, established in 1906, allowing it to ascend to it heights as the “best-known Jewish agency in the United States to publicly combat anti-Semitism” (79). In Frank’s case he was only lynched after he was found guilty, served time in prison, and had his sentence commuted by an exiting governor. Since he was Jewish Frank’s Whiteness would have been questionable but he still had an opportunity for a trial, was able to fully serve his prison time, and was personally selected for early realize. African Americans who were lynched were accused of a great many crimes, many social crimes rather than legal crimes, but were rarely given the chance for a trial let alone the full process of the judicial system.

Tonlay and Beck also reference the lynching of Italians in 1891 but also ignore the racial dynamics of the situation and the racialization of Southern Italians, the majority of Italian immigrants to
the United States. This lynching was, again, in response to a murder and the perceived lack of severity of punishment in the justice system. The lynching occurred after New Orleans Chief of Police David Henenssey, who was Irish, was murdered outside his home. It was assumed to be the work of the Sicilian criminal element most likely the Provenzano family rivals of the Matranga family who supported Henenssey. In response to Henenssey’s death, the police rounded up around 250 local Italian men hoping to uncover the truth. After several months of intimation and harassment 231 of the men were freed while nineteen, including a fourteen-year-old boy, were held with very little evidence of their involvement in the crime. The trial of these men took place in a climate of high anti-Italian sentiment and the New York Times even proclaimed that the city of New Orleans was “on the eve of a bloody race riot” (“To Hunt The Assassins; Excitement Over The Murder of Chief Hennessy.”) Since there was very little evidence, the jury found eight of the defendants not guilty and declared a mistrial for the other three. In response, a crowd of 10,000 came to the jail and shot nine of the men as they tried to run and dragged the other two out of the building and lynched them in front of the crowd and mutilated their lifeless bodies. The racial component of the lynching is summed up best by local New Orleans resident, John P. Richards who paradoxically told the New York Times after the lynching, “They [Italians] are treacherous, revengeful, and seek their revenge in most foul and cowardly manners” (“The Lynching Justifiable”).

Through these examples, and how Tonlay and Beck overlooked them as racial incidents, it is clear that discussions of the lynching of non-African American bodies requires considering the racial dynamics of the historical moment and location. There has been some scholarship in lynching that has attempted to do just that. For example, Lisa Arellano cites attacks on Mexican laborers and Chinese mine workers in Northern California during the late 19th century. She argues that the narratives of these accounts are “unsurprising to anyone familiar with southern lynching narratives and confirm the relatively recent scholarly suspicion that we must attend to issues of racial and ethnic difference in
studies of lynching in the West” (Arrelano 99). While Michael J. Pfeifer in *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society 1874-1947* (2004) presents an appendix of known lynchings and near lynchings from 1874-1947 using the following racial categories: Black, American Indians, Mexicans, Sicilians, Spaniards, Chinese, Whites, and Unknown. Although, this work is essential to documenting the history of lynching and its use as tool of racial subjection, Pfeifer provides little information on the criteria for these racial categories (“Appendix,” 155-183). To assume that Jews and Italians were always considered White or that their Whiteness was not in flux during periods of racial tension negates the historical processes of racial formation.

However, it is vital to include a caution also addressed by historian and critical Whiteness scholar David Roediger that, “no European immigrant group suffered anything like the terror that afflicted people of color” and that these infrequent moments of brutality are “utterly incommensurate with the racist violence visited on thousands of Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century” (Roediger 106). In turning to the violence inflicted on Germans during the Great War, I argue that an examination of the instability of Whiteness in a given period creates productive knowledge about racial formations and racial violence.

THE RISE OF VIOLENT ANTI-GERMANISM AND THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Private citizens undertook anti-German acts of harassment because they were embolden, if not supported, by the actions taken by their government to create a German enemy. Cecilia O’Leary in *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* argues that during the Great War, “the government became an active participant and catalyst in mobilizing the patriotic movement and in promoting a particularly intolerant and authoritarian blend of patriotism” (221). I have demonstrated in Chapter 1, and previously in this chapter, that those of German descent in the US were subject to a range of practices that separated them from the body of White citizenship. In this climate, it should not be
surprising that Germans were subject to harassment or that this harassment utilized the tool of the nation as props in this patriotic torture.

In August of 1915, Russian immigrants shot Rev. Edmund Kayser as retribution for his support for his home country of Germany. The Lutheran pastor from Chicago had been begging for a special police escort for a month because he feared for his life but his request was denied (“Rev. Kayser Found Shot; Talked War”). America, still two years away from joining the war effort, was already a site of violence towards German immigrants. The federal government did not participate in this kind of violence but it did not discourage it or publicly admonish it until almost the end of the war. During the war years, it was common for private citizens to encounter varying degrees of harassment and humiliation at the hands of strangers, neighbors, and co-workers who were encouraged to do their civic duty by maintaining the safety of the homefront.

The Wilson Administration did very little to protect those of German descent in the US instead encouraged men to take the law into their hands in the guise of protecting the country, as I will discuss more later in this chapter. One of the clearest examples of this is the Administration’s encouragement of the American Protective League (APL) in Chicago, IL. This organization of amateur enforcers was given $275,000 from the War Department budget to monitor enemy aliens and draft dodgers. US Attorney General Thomas Gregory even had official-looking badges made for each man which read, “American Protective League-Secret Service,” a prop which came in useful when questioning their suspects (Kennedy 82). The APL organized two massive “slacker raids,” designed to catch men who had not registered with their local draft boards, were “slacking” from their national obligation to serve their country, and unregistered enemy aliens. In three days in July they interviewed over 100,000 men in Chicago requesting to see the draft cards of men coming out of trains, jobs, restaurants, and theatres. This disruption led to the arrest of 1,200 men and each and every case dismissed (Capozzola 44).
After several other smaller raids with similar results, the APL organized another large-scale event in New York City for September this time with more help from the Justice Department. In advance of the raid, the Justice Department shut down the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the New York Bureau of League Advice; two agencies that had publically questioned the government’s endorsement of private citizens harassing the public in the name of wartime loyalty. In three days, the APL questioned between somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000 men effectively closing down whole blocks, train stations, and disrupting rush hour commuting.

As another example, APL’s interruption of the performance Yip Yip Yaphank at the Lexington Avenue Theatre threw the show into chaos. Just before the intermission, the APL entered the orchestra pit and demanded to see draft cards of the audience. Since the show was written and performed by soldiers-actors, there was some confusion as to who was required to show their papers. Irving Berlin, the creator of the show, composer, and musical director was able to get the APL to wait until the end of the show but was furious at the whole event (Capozzola 47). Of the over 60,000 who were arrested in total by the APL, 199 were determined to have evaded their duty and would eventually serve in the military (Capozzola 47).24

After the declaration of war, these anti-German incidents increased in frequency and now included the use of patriotic national symbols. In Staunton, Illinois, Fritz Monat was dragged to a local park, publically whipped, and forced to kiss the flag. Maximilian Von Hoegan, in Connecticut, was taken to a nearby square, beaten, forced to kiss the flag and sing “The Star Spangled Banner (DeWitt 1,59). A Lutheran minister was publically flogged in Bishop, Texas. In Canton, Ohio twenty shop workers wrapped a fellow worker in an American flag, dragged her through the streets to the local bank, and

24 After the massive New York raid the APL was no longer needed. There were no more drafts after September of 1918 and the influenza panic made the organization more wary of interacting with so many unknown persons. The Justice Department also rejected them once their services were no longer needed. They even collected all their badges, citing confusion of the use of “Secret Service,” but they never delivered the new badged as promised. The men of the APL returned to their normal lives believing they had served their country in a time of war (Capozzola 52).
forced her to purchase $50 Liberty Bond (Capozzola 10). Reports of tarring and feathering, dunking in syrup, beatings, the painting of homes of German immigrants with skulls and bones, and suspicious fires started to be reported on an almost daily basis somewhere in the United States.


Robert Prager was born in Dresden, Germany in 1888 and immigrated to the US in 1905 but little else is known about his life before he arrived in the Midwest. If he was conflicted about being a German immigrant when the US entered the Great War he did not show it. In 1917, he applied for American citizenship and attempted to join the navy. He was most likely rejected for two reasons: a 1912 conviction of theft in Indiana and that he was missing an eye using a glass eye instead. 25 Instead of joining the military, he left the growing anti-German sentiment in Nebraska and registered as an enemy alien in St Louis, Missouri (Luebke 4). He began looking for work as a coal miner.

Collinsville lies in southwestern Illinois just fifteen miles east of St. Louis and thirteen miles from East St. Louis, the site of the horrific riot that will be discussed in chapter three. 26 Throughout the early 20th century, the population of this area increased due to the availability of work in factories and coalmines. The 1910 census records a population of just fewer than 7,500 residents but by 1920 the population had increased to around 9,750 (Petterschak and Scheel 54-55). This growth in the area was partially due to the influx of African Americans leaving the violence in the south for better jobs and safer environments for their families. What would come to be called The Great Migration, also discussed in chapters three and four, brought a racial and class tension to these cities that surrounded St. Louis. The

25 Prager was arrested and convicted of theft in Jeffersonville, Indiana but his court records do not indicate what he stole. He was sentenced to eight years but was out of jail in fourteen months. (See Weinberg 27)

26 The Cahokia Mounds State Historical Park lies partially in Collinsville. The Cahokia ‘Monk Mounts’ are the largest man-made earth work in North America, one of only 23 UNESCO World Heritage Site in the United States, and considered by archeologists to be the most complex historical sites in North America. To discuss Prager’s lynching and its implications for examining race, violence, and American citizenship and to ignore that its staged on this important land of the Cahokia tribe overlooks a potential intersection with discourses of empire and settler colonialism. In future iterations of this research I will explore this subject further.
Great War exacerbated this situation as 350,000 young men, mostly White, from Illinois left to go overseas. New African American residents and immigrants quickly picked up their positions in the factories and coalmines of Southern Illinois and the St. Louis area (Scheel and Petterchak 54-55).

In chapter three on the Houston Riot I will discuss the 1917 East St. Louis riot and the violence inflicted on the African American community but due to its proximity, both temporally and geographically, to Prager’s lynching it is important to briefly mention this incident to consider how these two moments intersect and to contextualize Collinsville as a site of racial turmoil. Collinsville, although smaller, was not unlike East St. Louis in its rejection of African American workers. Like most of the towns in the area, Collinsville was a ‘sunset town’ meaning it unofficially, but nonetheless unequivocally, barred African Americans from White parts of the town after sunset (Weinberg 22). Weinberg argues that African American workers were referred to as “invaders” in the working environment of the coalmine (82). The situation grew worse in 1917 when African American workers crossed the picket line while the coal mining union, only open to White workers, was out on strike. In October of 1917, County Sheriff Jenkin Jenkins arrested all strikebreakers, mostly African Americans, in a sweeping and illegal move to put pressure on the mine owners to settle with White workers (Weinberg 83). This incident was only a few months after the July race riot in East St. Louis that was initially set-off by the factory owners attempting to employ 10,000 African American workers (Scheel and Petterchank 54-55).

Collinsville’s residents were in direct proximity to the riots and watched as not one White person was charged for destroying an African American community and killing several of its residents. African American residents of Collinsville were attacked in the rioting as they passed through East St. Louis on their way home. African Americans fleeing the violence came through Collinsville looking for safe shelter. The clearest example of the connection between these two events – the riot and Prager’s lynching - is through Wesley Beaver. Beaver was a saloon porter who directly participated in the violence in East St. Louis and hid in Collinsville in order to evade police questioning. Beaver would go on
to drag Robert Prager from the safety of the Collinsville City Hall Jail into the hands of the mob waiting outside (Weinberg 85). Beaver was also a defendant accused of participating in the lynch mob in Prager’s murder trial. Wesley Beaver participated in two of the worst chapters of American racial violence during the Great War and was not punished for either. This area has a long running history of unpunished racial violence and Robert Prager’s death is a part of that history.27

Collinsville also had an extremely high German population. In 1812, Germans immigrants arrived from Pennsylvania and established the town of Collinsville by building churches, schools, and social clubs. German descents both old and new lived throughout the town and the surrounding area. In fact, Illinois had the largest population of German immigrants of any state in the country. By 1918, 13.7% of the general population of Illinois was born in Germany and 51% of Collinsville residents had some familial connection to the country (Weinberg 12). Prager, a German immigrant, was killed in an area with a large German population, but it was common for those of German descent to make large public displays of their American loyalty. Cecilia O’Leary calls these individuals “superpatriots” as she recounts the story of German brewery employees who purchased American flags and forced their Austrian-born co-workers to salute it. When one refused, they got him fired (175). In 1917, two thousand German-Americans marched through Enid, Oklahoma displaying American flags to their own town to demonstrate their loyalty (Capozzola 197). German American intellectuals and elites also made public displays of their loyalty. During the war, for example, the prominent German-born financier and philanthropist Otto Kahn publically stated that Germany was “not a nation, but an evil spirit” (Capozzola 198). Thousands of those of German descent joined the armed forces and those that still spoke or understood German were used as translators, for both wartime military cables and German language publications in the US (Capozzola 198).

27 Collinsville is also less than twenty-five miles from Ferguson, Missouri the site where protests over the killing of an unarmed African American man, Michael Brown, at the hands of a White police officer continued the momentum of the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2014.
After being rejected from the military, Robert Prager moved to the Midwest in the hopes that being surrounded by a larger German population would provide relative safety from harassment. He came to Collinsville, Illinois in March of 1918, just about a month before he was killed, and found a job at Donk Brothers Coal and Coke in the nearby town of Maryville. Despite what later occurred, Prager actually impressed his fellow coalminers and was able to get three other employees to vouch for him on his union card application (Weinberg 141). His application was not processed quickly and Prager came to believe that union president Jim Foreno held something against him. Quickly, events escalated although scholars are hard pressed to known with any certainly exactly what events motivated the betrayal by his co-workers. 28

The primary reason that the miners turned on Prager, and the one to which scholars do agree, is directly connected his German-ness. Prager had a thick German accent and regularly spoke German to the older people of the town. Despite the high population of those of German descent, there were few new immigrants who could still speak the language. Prager briefly held a job at Lorenzo Bruno’s bakery, prior to finding work in the mine, and was known to speak in German while people purchased their goods. These interactions must have been special to Prager, having left Germany at seventeen, and for the older generation of residents who most likely found the young man a kind reminder of their homeland. It was well known that many of the elderly residents still harbored loyalty to Germany but they were deemed non-threatening due to their age. The young Prager, despite his expressions of loyalty, sounded threateningly more German than American (Weinberg 114).

28 The two primary scholars of Prager’s lynching, Luebke and Weinberg, differ on other reasons as to why the coal miners seem to turn on their fellow worker. Luebke argues that Prager was seen as a drifter, a foreigner without a family, who would have been out of place in a small town. While, Weinberg argues that labor history of the period demonstrates that a new man in town with an erratic work history would not have been uncommon (Weinberg 113). Much has also been made of Prager’s identification as a Socialist but here Luebke and Weinberg also disagree. Luebke argues that Prager told friends that he was being harassed for being a socialist since their platform was anti-war. Instead, Weinberg believes that there is very little evidence to believe this sentiment was actually voiced by Prager. Weinberg’s argues that many of the miners were socialists and that despite the anti-war platform it was not incompatible with pro-war patriotism in a working-class mining town (Weinberg 115-116).
The second, and more serious, accusation against Prager was that he had expressed a desire to blow up the mine potentially with the miners inside because he was as a covert German spy. The rumor of rampant spies was overwhelmingly the product of the wartime imagination brought about by propaganda and the enemization of Germans. There were rumors of spies putting ground glass in bakery products, cutting secret holes in gas masks bound for France, and attempting to gain access to explosives. This fear of explosives in the hands of German spies was exacerbated by a law, signed by the Wilson Administration in December of 1917, stipulating that only native-born or naturalized citizens could handle the dangerous substances (Weinberg 102). In this climate, German-born miners would have been particularly suspicious if they expressed an interest in explosives. This fear is a reflection of the incredibly dangerous work these men did. Coal mining accidents were not uncommon and there were three major ones in the area in the month before Prager arrived in Collinsville (Weinberg 103).

On top of Prager’s inability to handle dangerous materials due to his enemy alien status, there were two other incidents that made the people of Collinsville concerned he was a German spy. The first was a rumor that a trove of blasting powder had gone missing around the time he put in his application for union membership. This rumor was never proved nor disproved. The second was a serious charge by the mine examiner, John Lobenad, that Prager had peppered him with questions about the mine and its safety. Lobenad reported that Prager was interested in becoming a mine examiner and asked questions about the air supply, noxious gas fumes, and what kind of damage an explosive would do to the mine. The conversation was suspicious to Lobenad, so he told many of the other miners and reported it to his superiors (Weinberg 117). It’s possible Prager did want to eventually become a mine examiner and thought he found in Lobenad a person who could educate him. It’s also possible that Prager heard of the recent mining accidents and wanted to learn more about the safety of the mine. There is simply no way

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29 It might seem curious that the Wilson Administration would create a law specifically to prohibit explosives from being in foreign hands if there was no real threat to public safety however when seen in the context of laws that prohibited the ownership guns and the restriction of proximity to wartime manufacturing for enemy aliens the law was a precautionary measure not a reaction.
of knowing what he was thinking in asking his questions, but he must have been oblivious to the suspicion that was growing around him.

On April 3, 1918, in response to conversations with Lobenad and union president Jim Foreno, the miners of Maryville surrounded Prager as he was getting off of work and forced him to march through the town. They forced him to kiss the American flag, accused him of being a German spy, and told him to leave town immediately. Kissing the flag was a common act in the broader performances of coercive patriotism in German harassment. In fact, just weeks before many of these same miners had attacked Theodor Schuster, a German American who worked in the mine in much the same way. This demonstrates that the miners were familiar with the routine of forced performances of loyalty and this incident was not unlike the majority of incidents of anti-German harassment across the country. In forcing Prager to kiss the flag, the miners were creating and re-creating performances of proper American loyalty and performing for each other, solidifying and emboldening a narrow enactment of loyalty. Although, this harassment was most likely frightening for Prager, he did not leave his job or the town of Collinsville. Given that the intense anti-German climate rarely resulted in death, it is perhaps reasonable that Prager would not have feared for this life when harassed by his fellow workers. He believed, wrongfully, that he could reason with the miners if he demonstrated his fraternity and loyalty. He wrote and publically posted an open letter, “Proclamation to Members of Local Union No. 1802,” about his union membership, which effected his ability to work more hours and transfer to a different community. He also confirmed his American loyalty. He wrote:

An honest workingman as myself, I am entitled to a fair hearing of your committee. I ask in the name of humanity to examine me to find out what [sic] the reason I am kept out of work... In regards to my loyalty I will state that I am heart and soul for the good old U.S.A.... I am of German birth of which accent I cannot help and also declared my intention of U.S. citizenship, my second papers are due to be issued soon if I am
Prager’s desire to ingratiate himself with his co-workers clearly did not work as they came back to attack him that evening. He still had a copy of his open letter in his pants pocket when he was cut down from the lynching tree in the early morning of April 5th.

On the evening of the April 4th a group of Maryville miners came to Prager’s home in Collinsville and called him to the street. He agreed to go with the miners on the condition that they not hurt him. They agreed and quickly took to humiliating him as they had the day before but with more severity. In the cold night, the mob stripped Prager of his hat, coat, and shoes, and covered his body with the American flag. They then forced him to march down Main Street in Collinsville singing patriotic songs. The mob again made him kiss the flag but included a new performance wherein Prager was literally draped in the flag. The removal of his clothes was a stripping away of his former self, assumed by the mob to be disloyal, the flag encompassing and becoming the formation of his new self, loyal to America. Undoubtedly, this stripping of Prager was also a form of humiliation as the mob forced him into the dark, cold night without any of warmth but the flag. Prager was being physically and verbally harassed in order to create what the mob deemed proper visible signs of citizenship, to be wholly and completely shrouded by the nation. Still, sadly, this was not all together unique for anti-German harassment or the use of the American flag in acts of harassment.

The American flag, like all national flags, is a symbol of the country. It is an evocative prop in ritual performances including the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance, its use at sporting events and the singing of the National Anthem, the planting of a flag to signify land ownership and conquest, and the displaying of the flag at half-staff to honor the death of a national figure. Social scientist Michael Billig argues in *Banal Nationalism* (1995) that the US has a distinct relationship to its flag. Billing writes:
The US legislature has decreed strict laws about how the flag should be displayed and what is forbidden to be done, on pain of penalty, to the precious pattern of stars and stripes. Desecration of the flag is met with reactions of outrage. Of all countries, the United States is arguably today the home of what Renan called “the cult of the flag” (39).30

The distinctness of the national character to prominently and ubiquitously display flag is amplified during times of war. In “Sowing Patriotism, but Reaping Nationalism?: Consequences to Exposure to the American Flag,” social scientists Markus Kemmelmeier and David Winter argue that “in times of crisis or war Americans attachment to their country is most clearly visible in the frequent display of the American flag – the prime symbol of a highly patriotic nation” (859). Flags emerge in wartime to demonstrate loyalty and allegiance marking the body or the house as a loyal subject of the nation. This marking is a performance because it communicates; it speaks its cultural meaning. In the First World War, this meaning was a combination of national unity with suspicion and surveillance, exemplified by the creation of Flag Day in 1916.

President Woodrow Wilson declared June 14th 1916 in honor of the adoption of the national flag on the same date in 1777. Flag Day, a holiday that still continues today, celebrates the American flag and encourages patriotic exercises as a reminder of national cohesiveness. However, during the First World War this expression of patriotism and unity was also tinged with a suspicion for disloyal immigrants. In his inaugural Flag Day Address, Wilson stated that his new holiday was a symbol of continued “strength of national feeling” that would enforce the importance of loyalty to the flag. Wilson stated:

There is disloyalty active in the United States, and it must be absolutely crushed. It proceeds from a minority, a very small minority, but a very active and subtle

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30 Billing refers to historian and philosopher Ernest Renan’s coining of “the cult of the flag,” in his speech “What is a Nation? (1882),” where he differentiated between the Ancient Grecian mixture of state and religion with the contemporary dedication to the nation, the flag.
minority...That is the sort of thing against which the American Nation will turn with a
might and triumph of sentiment which will teach these gentlemen once and for all that
loyalty to this flag is the first test of tolerance in the United States. That is the lesson
that I have come to remind you on this day—no mere sentiment. It runs into your daily
life and conversation. Are you going yourselves, individually and collectively, to see to it
that no man is tolerated who does not do honor to that flag (“Address on Flag Day”)?

Wilson’s idea of honoring the flag includes demonstrations of loyalty as the very basis, “the first text of
tolerance,” of living within the United States. He is very clear that he does not mean “mere sentiment”
but that Americans need to take action. In asking Americans to “individually and collectively” take on
the burden of seeing “to it that no man is tolerated who does not do honor to the flag,” Wilson asks
regular citizens to teach those they presume to be disloyal the lessons of patriotism through respect for
the flag. It should not then be surprising that German immigrants were forced to salute, kiss, or sing to
the American flag as demonstrations of their loyal. President Wilson gave instructions for individual and
communites to do just that during his Flag Day speech. Although, Wilson does not advocate force or
violence it is easy to see that his vague words of seeing that “no man is tolerated” provides for a wide
range of retributive actions towards those deemed not to honor the flag.

Perhaps this is why when the Collinsville police and the mayor saw the mob and the
performance they saw no reason to stop the mob.31 Mayor John H. Siegel later told the court that it was
“orderly” and that “there was no disturbance” during the initial harassment (Weinberg 121). However,
fellow coal miner John Hallworth became concerned for Prager’s safety. It was he who convinced police
officer Fred Frost to place Prager in the City Hall Jail in order to protect him. Next, the police attempted
to get the crowd to disperse. Their action in this regard was a deadly misstep for Prager. The police
decided to shut down all the saloons in the area in an attempt to clear the area of people.

31 The account of Prager’s lynching is taken from Weinberg 121-128.
Unfortunately, this choice backfired as the majority of men in the saloons rushed into the street around 10pm. Joseph Riegel, himself of Germanic background, was one of the men who left a saloon and would go on to be a leader in the lynch mob that killed Prager.

Riegel left a Collinsville saloon, ironically named Schiller’s, and joined the crowd outside the City Hall Jail that had grown to over 700 all having heard that a captured German spy was being held by police. Wesley Beaver, the participant in the East St. Louis riot, arrived to the scene with a large American flag and waved it in the crowd. The police tried to get the crowd to disperse but made another error by telling the growing mob that Prager had been secretly taken to another location. Although some of the crowd left, Riegel and a smaller group didn’t believe the police and were determined to see Prager. Mayor Siegel, who had now returned to the scene, allowed Riegel’s group into the jail most likely because the police assured him that Prager was securely hidden in the basement. The group entered the jail and finally found Prager and dragged him out of the building. Riegel’s group forced Prager to march towards the outskirts of town. Officer Frost attempted to rescue him but took the wrong way out of town and lost the crowd. Four other police officers did follow the crowd but ceased their surveillance once the mob reached the town limits and Prager was no longer their legal responsibly.

Prager’s harassment would quickly come to an end as the mob began to intensify their acts of violence. They continued to harass him as they decided what to do next. Riegel later told authorities, “[W]e were making Prager kiss the flag and sing, though about all the singing he did was to repeat over and over the Star Spangled Banner and Three Cheers for the Red, White, and Blue” (Weinberg 124).

Interestingly, this quotation seems to demonstrate some form of disappointment in Prager’s singing, that he should have known more patriotic songs to enhance his performance. Perhaps, the mob became bored and wanted a different kind of vicious entertainment. Perhaps, they were drunk and angry filled with propaganda and rumors about rampant German spies. Perhaps, since many of them had German background, they wanted to demonstrate their loyalty by punishing someone who seemed more foreign
than themselves. Perhaps, some believed Germans were innately cruel and wanted revenge for wartime atrocities in Belgium and France. Perhaps, some had lost brothers and friends in a war across an ocean and wanted someone to blame. Perhaps, some wanted to walk away or stop what was about to happen but they thought if they did their loyalty would be questioned and that might have seemed more important than a man’s life.

In later accounts, members of the mob had different ideas of what might happen once they got to Bluff Hill. One man went to look for tar and feather but came back empty-handed. Another man found a rope. A noose was run up the large hackberry tree. An unknown voice called for all the members of the mob to touch the rope, a common ritualistic occurrence in lynching symbolizing their collective responsibility and ownership of the act. The rope was tied around Prager’s neck.

In this moment, Prager’s harassment turned into a more specific act of torture as they questioned him about his allegiances and attempted to gain information from him about other potential German spies. Prager knew nothing because he wasn’t a German spy but the mob inflicted pain in order to gain information, an act of torture. The term torture is not generally used when discussing incidents of anti-Germanism; however, Prager’s death offers a clear picture that what he was forced to do went beyond intimidation into the infliction of pain for the purposes of gaining information. I am using the internationally recognized definition from the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in order to delineate acts of harassment from acts of torture. The definition of torture is:

... any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or
suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity... ("A Legal Definition of Torture").

The mob asked as if, or assumed that, Prager was a German spy and questioned him about his associations, a potential cell of local German spies, and stolen materials from the mine. They were attempting to obtain information or a confession. Additionally, the members of the mob were inflicting this pain because he was a German immigrant, a form of discrimination, and the action was undertaken with the acquiescence of local and federal authorities. They took their version of consent from local authorities that allowed the act to continue but also from federal authorities that systematically encouraged and overlooked the harassment of German immigrants.

I am calling these actions ‘patriotic torture’ in order to foreground the use of the rhetoric of patriotism and the use of national objects and rituals in acts of torture. In coining this term, I advocate for the continued discussion of the role of performance in discourses of torture for the purposes of national security. The term corresponds to the idea of ‘patriotic murder,’ the concept used by the lynch mob’s defense to re-frame Prager’s death as a form of community self-defense. The term also demands that consideration be paid to the use of signs and symbols of patriotism in acts of torture both historically and in our contemporary moment.

Since Prager had no information to provide the mob he eventually stopped defending himself and resigned to his fate. The leader Riegel called out, “Come on fellows, we’re all in on this let’s not have any slackers here” as he instructed the men to place their hands on the rope as they pulled Prager into the air (Weinberg 127). It quickly became clear that they had forgotten to tie his hands as he grab for his neck. They let him down to tie his hands. Prager asked to write a letter to his parents in Germany. He dictated the address in Dresden to one of the members of the mob, but he was allowed to write the letter himself. His note, written in Germany, translates to “Dear parents, I must this fourth day of April,
1918, die. Please pray for me, my dear parents. This is my last letter and testament. Your dear son and brother, Robert Paul Prager” (Weinberg 127). One of the members of the mob, who could read German, translated and read the letter aloud to the crowd. After they were satisfied that it was not a German spy communication they brought him back to the noose. Prager asked for a moment to pray and a soft muffled German prayer was heard. They tied his hands and wrapped the noose around his neck. His last words were “All right boys go ahead and kill me, but wrap me in the flag when you bury me” (Weinberg 127). His body was dropped three times according to a participant “one for the red, one for the White, and one for the blue” (Weinberg 127). It is estimated that twenty-nine people participated in the final lynch mob and thirteen has some aspect of Germanic background. In the end, eleven men would be charged with his death and all acquitted.

THE TRIAL AND THE AFTERTMATH

Prager’s death quickly made news with the Cincinnati Enquirer, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Chicago Daily Tribune, New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, Baltimore Sun, The Atlanta Constitution, and the Detroit Free Press publishing at least one article on the incident within the week.\[32\] Media reports on the incident responded in a variety of ways. In general, mob violence was not overtly encouraged but for every article that expressed tragic regret there were others that discussed the inevitability of violence and offered a rationalization for German harassment. The New York Times called for justice for Prager in order to “vindicate the name of America” but other news sources bifurcated the murder from legal and

social policies towards German Americans (Luebke 11). While, the Edwardsville Intelligencer called Prager’s lynching “an unlawful and unjustifiable act,” it also felt compelled to compare the act with perceptions of German brutality “[a] traitor over there is dealt with summarily” (Luebke 11).

The St. Louis Post Dispatch became the paper that broke the majority of stories on the Prager incident because of its proximity to the events. On April 6th the St. Louis Post Dispatch published “Coroner Says he knows Five of Prager Lynchers,” an article about the local Collinsville coroner who was desperate to find a local judge willing to issue arrest warrants for men who took part in the mob. After four other justices refused to be involved, Judge Louis Bernreuter finally agreed to issue warrants and accept the case. This article, just days after the event, describes the main justifications for the lynching that existed in the community. The reasons are described in the article in order to demonstrate why there was very little interest in Collinsville in prosecuting members of the lynch mob.

The article argues that the mob believed their actions were justified as patriotic citizens. Moses Johnson, a member of the District Board of the United Mine Workers, stated that he would produce the evidence that caused the mineworkers to “think their action was justified” (“Coroner Says He Knows Five of Prager Lynchers”). This evidence never materialized at trial but considering Johnson’s position his reference could have been connected to Prager’s expressed interest in the workings of the mine or the accusation of stolen explosives. The second reason given is that Prager’s death prevented an escalation of violence and rightfully directed brutality towards a foreign element. Members of the town were quite honest that Prager was a convenient scapegoat and they were grateful. It was believed by many that the lynching prevented further violence on local residents. The Chief of Police Tony Staten stated:

In one way I believe it is a good thing they got Prager. If he had been spirited away by police I believe the mob would have vented its rage by hanging two or three Collinsville
persons who have been suspected of disloyalty ("Coroner Says He Knows Five of Prager Lynchers").

Staten suggests that police could not, or would not, have prevented the mob from undertaking other acts of extra-legal violence. It was just a matter who and how many. Prager was able to focus the attention of the mob preventing the violence from expanding and re-focusing on local residents, who seemed to not include Prager despite his residence in the town and whose lives are presumed to be more worthy by Staten.

The final reason given was that the federal and local government agencies were responsible for the mob violence because they did not appropriately handle cases of disloyal individuals.\textsuperscript{33} The mayor of Collinsville, Dr. J. H. Siegel even wrote to United States Senator Overman, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee to encourage stronger legislation against disloyalty. Siegel wrote:

\begin{quote}
The lynching of Robert Prager was the direct result of a widespread feeling in this community that the Government will not punish disloyalty...We have repeatedly reported to the federal authorities cases of disloyalty where no action has been taken...all local officers are opposed to such lawlessness, but its spirit can be overcome only by such legislation and its enforcement ("Coroner Says He Knows Five Of Prager Lynchers: Collinsville Official ...").
\end{quote}

These three arguments were used to justify the killing of Robert Prager by the members of the mob and much of their community: 1) it was their patriotic duty to defend their town, 2) it prevented greater violence, and 3) it provided a service not delivered by the federal authorizes. These arguments would be supported in the trial by a legal defense that proposed that Prager’s killing was justified by the unwritten law of ‘patriotic murder.’

\begin{footnotes}
\item[33] I will discuss this concept in more detail in the chapter in reference to the Sedition Act of 1918.
\end{footnotes}
As national papers picked up the story, it was decided that local authorities in Collinsville were not capable of administering justice in this case. The state of Illinois took over the prosecution of the mob and identified eleven men to stand trial for Prager’s death.\textsuperscript{34} Jury selection began at the Madison County circuit court in Edwardsville, IL on May 13, 1918. Newspaper articles from these first days demonstrate that the process of \textit{voir dire} included a struggle to find adequate impartial jurors. The \textit{Los Angeles Times} wrote that of the 180 men brought in during the first three days of jury selection only three were found to not have already formed an opinion about the case. The number would get as high as 648 before the final jury was selected (“Judge in Prager Lynching Trial Charges Perjury: Declares Veniremen…”).

Once the jury was selected, the prosecution presented a strategy that attempted to dismantle the press coverage that the mob undertook their action out of a sense of national loyalty instead arguing they were vicious murders that ruthlessly killed an innocent man. The defense, successfully, argued two conflicting ideas: that none of the defendants were active participants in the lynching and that if they were present the act was not illegal. The defense seemed not to be challenged by the fact that the majority of the members of the mob had already given interviews confessing to their crime. One of lynch mob’s most prominent members Joseph Riegel confessed to killing Prager prior to the trial to the \textit{St. Louis Dispatch}. Riegel discussed his state of mind after the lynching:

\begin{quote}
As I walked home, I began to wonder a little why we had done it. The liquor in me I suppose was dying down and I was getting sober. I had never seen [Prager] before and I didn’t know any harm he had done... But it didn’t worry me any, I thought it was kind of foolish, that was all (“Asserts Prager Lynching Made Kaiser Happy: President Wilson and Gov.”).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} An unnamed twelfth man was also to be charged but he left the country. See Weinberg 85.
Despite his later denial, many witnesses at the trial stated that they saw the Riegel and the other defendants as part of the lynch mob.

The jury found the defendants not guilty. In all likelihood, the jury was simply more convinced that the actions of the mob were justified. In arguing for the “unwritten law” of “patriotic homicide,” the term “patriotic murder” was also used during the trial, the defense utilized the popular history and reverence for American vigilante culture (“Patriotic Homicide Plea of Accused in Prager Lynching: Defense Aims to Show Killing Was an Act of Loyalty”). Their argument did not rest on established law but on the socio-cultural environment that valued the role of the vigilante to defend the homefront from threats. Judger Bernreuter, in order to clarify that this “unwritten law” was not a law at all, informed the jury of his understanding of wartime self-defense. He told the jury, “In war time any citizen has a right to take the life of a man actually caught in acts of violence toward this country...But in my view, if the man is disloyal only in word he is ‘still in the peace of the people’ (Weinberg 147). Although Judge Bernreuter disallowed any discussion of Prager’s loyalty during the trial his instructions to the jury sent a mixed message about its role in deciding the verdict. In his opening instructions to the jury, Judge Bernreuter said, “It isn’t necessary for the defense to prove Prager a spy if it can be shown that the defendants thought him one, that would be sufficient to mitigate the crime and lessen their punishment” (Weinberg 147). The defense continuously demonstrated that their clients believed they were punishing a German spy and the prosecution had no evidence to contradiction this and, in fact, it may well have been true for some (“Attorneys Wrangle Over Defense in Prager Lynching”). The jury acquitted all the defendants on June 2nd in deliberations that took 45 minutes. The freed men made a tour of several saloons in Collinsville where they received congratulations. The “unwritten law” of “patriotic murder” was now codified as established legal precedent.

As the national press covered the verdict, it quickly became clear that the case would become a legal precedent for allowing mobs to enact violence simply based on their beliefs without any fear of
arrest or prosecution. Even those articles that celebrated the acts of the mob were decidedly wary about how the country would fair with legal mob violence. The New York Tribune published “The Remedy” on June 3rd, an article that proscribed interning Germans as the best solution to stop mob violence. The argument presented was that mob violence was “deplorable” and brought “discredit to the nation” but that with the new legal precedent the state could not protect enemy aliens from local communities (“The Remedy”). Internment would provide the protection that the state was required to provide with the advantage of being “the cheaper and better method of insurance against espionage, sabotage, and injurious propaganda” (“The Remedy”). As discussed in chapter one, the US government had already begun interning a small amount of Germans and German immigrants at the beginning of active US engagement. Widespread internment had already been determined to not be feasible considering the vast amount of Germans and those of German descent spread across the country. That Prager’s death would bring internment back to popular consciousness is a demonstration of the twin fears of German spies and of lawless mobs. Although internment was not deemed feasible, the federal government was in the process of passing legislation that it hoped would demonstrate its authority and prevent acts of local extra-legal violence.

Prager’s death became central in debates about the Sedition Act of 1918. The House had already voted to pass the bill, by a margin of 293 to 1, but the Senate was still debating its merits. The letter from Mayor Siegel of Collinsville to Senator Overman discussed previously was in regards to Siegel’s support for enhanced wartime legislation against disloyalty. As Geoffrey R. Stone discusses in Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime (2004), Attorney General Gregory asked Congress to amend the Espionage Act of 1917 in order to clarify prohibitions against the obstruction of military operations and “expand the prohibition of dissent” (185). The new amendment became known as the Sedition Act of 1918. This bill called for a wartime suspension of civil liberties, also discussed in chapter one, including prohibitions against: the printing or publishing of disloyal materials, the use of language intended to
bring scorn on the country and its representative, and the curtailment of war production or recruitment (Stone 186). Gregory argued that passing the bill would prevent more acts of violence because it would discourage disloyal speech. He presented an argument that mob violence would not be provoked because those who were disloyal would already feel silenced by the federal government. Senator Overman agreed with Gregory and read Mayor Siegel’s letter from the Senate floor as evidence that the bill must be passed lest every town descent into the mob violence of Collinsville.

There were others who wished to debate the legislation’s constitutionality and motivations since, as Stone points out, “for 120 years, from the expiration of the Sedition Act of 1798 until America’s entry in World War 1, the United States had no federal legislation against seditious expression” (145). Senator Lawrence Sherman from Illinois did not take too kindly to his state being used as the precedent for sweeping wartime changes to civil liberties. Sherman argued that Mayor Siegel had allowed the mob to “wreak its bloody purpose upon the helpless victim” and now, under the attention of media publicity, was eager to place the blame anywhere but on himself (Stone 189). He found the Sedition Act to be unnecessary and most likely unconstitutional since he believed these liberties could only be curtailed in the case of domestic rebellion or invasion and not for actions in a foreign war (Stone 189).

Senator James A. Reed of Missouri also argued against the bill. His criticism focused on how the Sedition Act of 1918 was a more extreme version of the Sedition Act of 1798 because it removed the terms “falsity and malice” that were formerly required for conviction under the bill. He helped to write an amendment that would rectify this issue, one that delineated free speech that was true and “justifiable” with free speech that was libelous, but it failed. Reed’s response to the failure is telling, he said “strange that we have just defeated an amendment that would have done nothing more than protect a right that was protected even under the abominated and execrated Sedition Law of 1798” (Stone 190). After much debate, the Sedition Act of 1918 was finally approved by the Senate in a vote of 48 to 26 and signed into law by President Wilson in May of that year. The performance of lynching and
Robert Prager’s death was used to pass a piece of legislation that in no way curbed the violence towards German immigrants but did have far reaching implications for the infringement of civil liberties in a time of war.

The Odd Fellows Lodge of St. Louis Hormonie, a lodge where Prager was a member, accepted his body. Only days after Prager’s death the fraternal order made a resolution that they “most profoundly deplore and most emphatically denounce this barbarous act and call upon all those in authority to employ all legal means at their command to bring the guilty parties to the bar of justice” (Weinberg 141). Lest there be any question about their stance, the group also added a new requirement to solidify that their respect for Prager was not a sign of disloyalty. Every member old and new would be required to pledge allegiance to America as a condition of membership. The Odd Fellows Lodge in Collinsville, where Prager sometimes attended meetings, refrained from making their stance public but did paid for Prager’s body to be sent to the St. Louis chapter. Although this may seem like a minor action, it was significant considering there were members of the organization present outside the jail the night Prager died and present at some parts of the lynching. In addition, Wesley Beaver – the man who attacked African Americans during the East St. Louis riot and who was one of the defendants in the lynching – was the son of one of the lodge’s most prominent member, Wesley Beaver Sr. (Weinberg 142). At his funeral, Prager’s coffin was draped with an American flag in order to honor his last request made to the men who killed him. The use of the flag on a coffin signifies an honorable death for the nation. In his final moments, Prager thought to create a performance of his loyalty speaking from beyond the grave to demonstrate his patriotism.

CONCLUSION

The events that encompass Prager’s death concertized what Germans living in America had been learning since the start of the war; that they were not safe in their communities, that the
government would not protect them, and that their lives were in constant jeopardy. In using lynching to kill Prager the mob had linked German immigrants to the experience of African Americans who were already keenly aware of the lack of government intervention in mob violence. In examining the history of lynching and anti-Germanism, Prager’s murder is distinct because it combined the racialization of the German enemy with the most brutal instrument of racial violence and terror. Although Prager was German, the racialization process that turned Germans into non-White enemies also functioned to align them with other minorities and outsiders, the perennial targets of vigilante violence and the victims of lynching. Prager was killed for being a German spy but almost half of his killers had some amount of German background and at least one could read enough German to understand this farewell note.

This situation adds an important complexity to Prager’s racialization. Sloktin argues that German-Americans proved their loyalty through “obeying the American law and consenting to conscription” but they were still suspected of being innately German. Slotkin continues, “the theory of nationality prevalent among the political and cultural elites and mass culture held that national politics and culture were expressions of racial character” (Slotkin 215). Under this “logic of racial nationalism” if you were a German immigrant being accused of being pro-German, anti-American, or un-American it was not divorced from conceptions of race (Slotkin 217). The German Americans who killed Robert Prager claimed they were protecting their country from a German spy out of American loyalty. In rejecting Prager as one of their own, both an American and a trusted German immigrant, they calcified his racial otherness. Prager was German and they were American. Through the course of the alchemy of their assimilation the Germans in the mob, in ways similar to Karl Pfeiffer in Friendly Enemies, had come to believe their own performance of American citizenship. However, the logic of racial nationalism meant that their actions would also be scrutinized more than a non-German and they could not provide total assurance that they were not Germany spies due to their background. I believe that they murdered Prager, through the racailized instrument of lynching, to prove to themselves, their community, and
their nation that they were Americans and not Germans. In so doing, they were fighting their own racialization as Germans. That these men choose lynching, the instrument of White racial violence, as their means of murder is a demonstration of all they had learned about American race relations in the process of their assimilation. Prager’s sad and brutal death adds to the complexity of German racialization and enemization and its use of performative symbols of the American nation as he was forced to enact the idealization of American values.

The men who killed Robert Prager were found not guilty at their trial because the jury believed that their actions fell under the unwritten law of ‘patriotic murder.’ The mob framed their murder as a form of national defense because they claimed to believe Prager was German spy. The jury decided that the fear held by members of the mob and their feelings of duty to their country supplanted Prager’s due process, his legal right to defend himself in a court of law. Prager’s death was legally sanctioned because his murders felt threatened despite the fact that there was no evidence that he committed a crime or that he would commit a crime. In examining this moment I see it as the result of two interwoven factors: increasingly violent acts of coercive patriotism enacted on immigrant bodies and the prevalence of the racial violence and lynchings against African Americans. Both of these actions were rarely, if ever, punished by law and in many places were socially endorsed.

In looking at Prager’s death, acts of violence were not encouraged but were not discouraged by the state. Federal and local government agencies suggested that individuals use surveillance to watch their neighbors, to report activities they found suspicious, and to “teach,” as Wilson proclaimed in this Flag Day speech, those who did not conform. The incidents that led to Prager’s death began as harassment, moved into torture, and ended with his death by lynching. In considering these performances together, patriotic torture and lynching, I am foregrounded the quick transition from enforced performances of American loyalty to violent spectacles of White supremacy.
Congressional lawmakers used the Prager case to argue that the federal government needed to further tighten its surveillance and decrease civil liberties. These legislators echoed the sentiment of the Mayor Siegel, the Collinsville mayor, who argued that the murder “was a direct result of the widespread feeling in this community that the Government will not punish disloyalty” (Luebke 20). The death of Robert Prager was used to promote the enactment of the Sedition Act of 1918 that further restricted civil liberties for many groups and increased a climate of fear, suspicion, and violence for American citizens of German descent.

As performances of anti-German violence created a landscape of wartime vigilantism that punished anyone outside the hegemonic idea of what an American citizen should do, express, or believe the state saw individuals increasingly uncontrollable by authorities. Organizations utilized by the government, like the APL, were deemed to be too fringe once the war was over and the debates about the Sedition Act of 1918 were a significant aspect of the encroachment of state power in the post-war years. World War I historian Christopher Capozzola has argued that prior to the First World War, Americans were accustomed to a certain high level of community policing. He states that the mobilization for war rallied this surveillance towards a common goal of defeating Germany in ways that were sanctioned by the state and in ways that were not sanctioned but also largely unpunished. He has argued that the American wartime climate of vigilance and vigilantism was so profound, and profoundly disturbing, that it exposed the vulnerability of the state to regulate behavior causing a post-war shift to increase the power of the state. Capozzola argues that during the war, “the state did not hold a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force” but that the turbulent homefront resulted in a shift from the “lawless violence that characterized the nineteenth century American political culture” to the “emergence of a powerful – if more latent and noiseless – state” in the post-war twentieth (13-16, 117). The performative act of Prager’s lynching was a significant moment in this trajectory.
CHAPTER 4

THE HOUSTON RIOT: VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE IN A TIME OF WAR

Regardless of Justice, and Law; regardless, even, of Murder; it is not an easy thing to see human beings die, especially when they are young; and never had their full and complete chance; and when they die at the hand of the State that, somewhere, never quite did for such people what its Constitution and law have pledged themselves to do for them.


In the last moment of darkness on December 11, 1917, surrounded by bonfires, thirteen African American soldiers exited the truck to a small clearing along the Salado Creek in San Antonio, Texas where the Army Core of Engineers had hastily constructed a gallows. As the secluded site filled with a small group of witnesses, the condemned men, who had all refused blindfolds, saw their own bare wooden coffins lined in front of open graves. In the quietness of the solemn event the men began to sing to each other, “I’m coming home, I’m coming home,” a refrain from the hymn “Lord I’m Coming Home,” sung in White and African American churches and camp meetings in the period (Haynes 3-5). The song had a reputation for bringing the lost and the sorrowful to their feet and driving them to the altar to accept salvation. In this moment, the men called upon its power to strengthen their resolve and demonstrate their hope for a better world after death. As the sun rose, they were placed upon the platform with nooses around their necks, again, together in song; they were dropped into the air.

Mexican laborers hired to dispose of the bodies placed an old soda bottle in each coffin with a slip of paper marking the name, rank, date, and location of death. Once the bodies were in their resting place, the workers quickly dismantled the gallows and burned the lumber.35

Hoping to avoid protests, the Army kept all the information regarding the sentencing and execution a secret and neglected to tell family members, who were unable to say their goodbyes. Later

35 African American labor battalions were frequently used for the burial, exhumation, and re-burial of wartime dead. However, in this instance, the military hired a different racialized labor force to take over the grizzly job of burial allowing the Army to, quite literally, keep their hands from getting dirty.
on the 12th, the Army shocked everyone by announcing that the men been sentenced to death and were already dead and buried in unmarked graves. The death penalty, the result of the largest court-martial in US history, had not only been kept from the African American community but also been withheld from the Secretary of War and the President. This choice demonstrates the extreme anxiety felt by the Army as its leaders attempted to end the five-month long ordeal of dealing with the men who had effectively commanded the only riot in American history where more Whites were killed than African Americans, the Houston Riot.

Introduction

All but forgotten now, the Houston Riot was a profound performative event during the First World War lying at the nexus of racial and citizenship formation. Although it was one of five significant violent racial incidents, commonly called ‘race riots,’ that occurred during 1917, it differed dramatically in scale to other events, the East St. Louis riot being the only one comparable in size. I purposely avoid the use of the term race riot to discuss the Houston Riot for two reasons: 1) ‘race riot’, as a term, tends to favor an ideology that assumes that the violence was equal on both sides but this was not the case as White on African American violence was the norm and 2) the term ‘race riot’ tends to obscure discussions of specific factors that predicated violent actions, particularly in the case of the Houston Riot since it has unique characteristics. ³⁶ I also include the events of the mutiny, riot, and the courts-martial in the term Houston Riot for ease. Due to the distinct nature of the Houston Riot is has a significant symbolic value. This chapter examines the climate around the camp that led to these events and the most brutal of their violent actions, the murder of a police officer and the mutilation of his body, in

³⁶ The Houston Riot has also been referred to as the Camp Logan Riot but that too is a bit of misnomer as the riot occurred in Houston and not at the camp. The term the Houston incident or Houston Mutiny has also been used as a way of emphasizing the larger conditions of racial inequity over the riot. Although I understand the intention, as Audre Lorde has argued “anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change (“The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism”).” To erase the role of violence from the narrative of the Houston Riot is to ignore its more powerful message.
order to analyze the performances of violence by the local community, the police, and the soldiers and what they communicate about race and citizenship during the war.

The Houston Riot was, and still is, the only ‘race riot’ in US history where more Whites were killed than African Americans (Hayes 435). On August 23rd, 1917 over a hundred African American soldiers went against the orders of their commanding officers, stole guns and ammunition, left their military camp, and entered the city of Houston. At the end of the evening, sixteen White civilians, including four policemen and four African Americans, were dead. The military prosecuted 118 soldiers, although they originally charged 156 soldiers, for these crimes in three separate courts-martial. The men were accused of violating four Articles of War: 1) the 64th Article of War equal to willfully disobeying orders, 2) the 66th Article of War equal to mutiny, 3) the 92nd Article of War equal to murder, and 4) the 93rd Article of War equal to assault. This chapter primarily discusses the first of these trials, United States V. William C. Nesbit, Sergeant, Company I, 24th Infantry, et al. (Nesbit case), the largest court-martial in US history at 63 defendants. In this case, the military attempted to gather all of those they accused of being ringleaders and primary actors in the mutiny and riot. Both sides presented their cases from November 1 through November 25, 1917 using a total of 194 witnesses covering 2165 pages of testimony. The military argued successively that their individual actions were irrelevant – exactly which soldier pulled the trigger didn’t matter – they were all guilty as a collective of men who embolden and supported each other in their actions. They were collectively responsible for anything that occurred as a part of the Houston Riot. It took a little over a day for the panel of officers to find 54 of the 63 guilty of

37 Four African Americans were killed but none of their deaths were caused by White assailants – most died from accidentally shootings by fellow officers. It is also unique because unlike all other riots it did not involve African American civilians but rather soldiers using government-issued weapons.
38 Sergeant William C. Nesbit was the highest-ranking soldier prosecuted so his name was listed first on the case and as such is the name of the trial.
all charges.\textsuperscript{39} The panel of officers sentenced thirteen to the death penalty as ringleaders giving the majority life in prison with hard labor, four guilty of lesser charges, and five acquitted. When knowledge that the death penalties were executed without appeal, without the ability to reach out to family members, and without observation by the African American press, representatives from African American newspapers and wartime organizations quickly moved to lobby the government hoping that they could prevent the death of soldiers in the following two courts-martials.

The men who participated in the insurgency in Houston were soldiers from the 24\textsuperscript{th} Infantry, 3rd Battalion sent to guard the building of Camp Logan. Between late July and late August of 1917, they had witnessed and experienced more incidents of humiliation and brutality, discussed throughout the chapter, than most had seen in their lifetimes and certainly more than they imagined they would receive wearing US Army uniforms. Although there were several incidents that led to the riot, it was a particular incident of police brutality, the attack on Corporal Charles W. Baltimore, shocking in its viciousness and disregard for human rights, which motivated the men. On August 23, 1917, in the wake of the abuse, they gathered in small groups within the camp and began to imagine possibilities for retribution. Incidents over the next several hours exacerbated the situation as White military leaders clumsily attempted to quell the visible tension. In response to an order to hand in their guns, a rumor of a White mob coming to kill the soldiers emerged and panic ensued as shots were fired into the dark and rainy night. A mutiny began as men disregarded their superior officers’ orders and marched toward Houston looking for the police officers who had inflicted harm. In the process, the men killed and maimed White civilians who got in their way (Mjagki 66-67). The riot lasted only a few hours, but it exposed the tragic disappointment and devastation that many African American soldiers experienced during the First World War. Support for the war efforts, enlistment, military uniforms, discussion of shared sacrifice, and

\textsuperscript{39} The panel of officers are the presiding judges in a court-martial that function as a jury, composed of higher ranking officers, given additional freedoms to questions witnesses, attorneys, and defendants for clarification through the trial.
patriotism would not be the cornerstone on which racial equity would be built. It would be self-determination, through both non-violent and violent means, that would fundamentally alter the course of race relations through the 20th century.

This chapter utilizes the methodologies of performance studies to analyze and interpret aspects of violence that occurred before, during, and after the Houston Riot. This argument allows for an analysis of everyday life and public spectacle as cultural and political performances that can and should be examined critically alongside and on par with theatrical performance. In my first section, I offer the theoretical foundation for my argument in performance studies, critical race theory, and legal studies. These scholars turn to historical cases that demonstrate how the juridical is a vital site in which to consider the performative aspects of the law and their contribution to American racial formation. In my analysis, I layer these methods with scholars who have examined the performance dimension of the physical space of the courtroom, the symbolic weight of the law, and the material consequences of its decisions as performances. Together these approaches allow for a method to examine the Houston Riot as a violent performance event that is part of a continuum of racial formation through US law.

In the next section of this chapter, I historicize the Houston Riot through race relations in the wartime climate of 1917 America, and more specifically, within the city of Houston prior to the arrival of the soldiers. I anchor my analysis on the historically specific in order to contextualize the events of the Houston Riot as a result of both the concurrent activism in African American communities and the racial conditions within Houston. The First World War created an opportunity for African American activists to expose the hypocrisy of the governmental use of the slogan “Making the World Safe for Democracy” while still denying fundamental civil rights on the homefront. This protest strategy to utilize the rhetoric of the wartime ideals of liberty, freedom, and democracy for foreign nations to demonstrate the lack of access for African Americans emboldened resistance and provided a rallying cry in which to demand rights in exchange for sacrifice. However, in spite of the efforts of wartime activists, the War
Department opted not to engage in ‘the race question’ but instead require that the laws of racial
segregation and the social mores they created remain undisturbed. Houston became the powder keg for
this increasing conflict between racial oppression and the demand for equality.

In the third section, I analyze the violent actions undertaken by the White community in
Houston in the name of White supremacy that directly led to the actions of the 24th. I discuss three
strains of racist violence that propelled the Houston Riot: racial abuse in Camp Logan, racial segregation
in Houston, and police brutality. Although the prosecution and the defense in the Nesbit Case
acknowledged these factors, both sides severely underplayed their influence on the events that
unfolded. I argue that each of these strains functions as a performance of racial domination that was
allowed to continue through the incompetency, apathy, or animus of Whites elites. Far from being
minor events, as suggested in the courts-martial, the sources of racial tension are essential in order to
understand how the performance of violence operated and to understand the motivation behind the
resulting violent resistance.

In the fourth section, I discuss the murder of Officer Daniel Sparks and the mutilation of his body
during the Houston Riot. Although three other police officers were killed, Sparks was a specific target of
the soldiers since he and his partner, Officer Rufus Daniels, were the main culprits in the brutal beating
of company soldiers and were known for harassing the African American community. The murdering of a
police officer holds, as it still does, a symbolic value as an attack on a person of heightened value and as
an assault on the symbolic rule of law. This action is a performance of African American anger directed
both at the person who inflicted the abuse and the system that failed to protect its citizens. The
Houston Riot provides an example in which to analyze and understand violence as a performative tactic
of resistance and to contextualize it within the violence that surrounds it.

At the end of this chapter, I will return to the moment of the soldiers’ deaths discussed in the
opening in order to focus on the resistive performance practices they enacted as they faced death.
Certainly, the end of their lives at the hands of the government they had sworn to serve is a dramatic conclusion, but by focusing on resistance I consider the soldiers as actors against, as well as victims, of White supremacy. Spoken plainly, to understand their deaths we must understand their lives. To position them solely as victims obscures performance practices of resistance and survival that have and continue to form the experiences of minority subjects as they encounter being a product of and subject to the law on which American society is founded.

PERFORMANCE, RACE, AND VIOLENCE

In beginning this chapter with the public execution of the African American soldiers found guilty for events occurring during the Houston Riot, I foreground violence enacted against racialized bodies purportedly in the name of justice. Implicit in this analysis is a question of how this justice was mediated and the processes through which these men came to be executed. This case is an example of a broader reality: racial violence is central to the American minority experience of citizenship and that the system of laws that govern the Republic supports this violence and punishes minority resistance. To separate the violent actions of these men during the riot from the everyday violences of racial segregation and unpunished police brutality does not adequately contextualize the lived experience of African Americans during the First World War, particularly the specific experiences of the men of the 24th.

Legally sanctioned racial segregation and the actions of the police, acting as the manifestation of the rule of law, are the central instruments of White violence, so it should come as no surprise that resistance would be found in ways that disregard the validity of the law. The law, in this chapter, has an expansive definition including both its physical manifestations – the courtroom, the police, incarceration, sentencing and punishment – and its more indirect but equally significant elements - military and civilian procedure, legal precedent, and lasting socio-cultural effects. The law is enacted through a series of embodied actors as much as it exists within the operations of institutions, their
systems, and what they represent. I ground my analysis of this event and weave together scholarship from different fields that compliment each other in recognition that the law is primary in US racial formation. Although the scholars I discuss are anchored in sociology, performance studies, critical race theory, and legal studies – and many do not use the term performance - they all demonstrate the law as a living, performing, entity that constantly evolves in its relationship to White supremacy.

Several leading critical race scholars in sociology have focused on the law as an instrument of racialization analyzing the implications of significant cases in constructing and defining racial categories. A reminder, Omi and Winant define racial formation as the “sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (54). I will examine how the law is a vital aspect this process through defining racial categories and, by extension, access to rights and privileges of citizenship.

It is telling that Omi and Winant open their chapter on US racial formation with a legal case. In 1977, Susie Guillory Phipps applied for a passport only to discover that her Louisiana birth certificate said she was ‘colored.’ Phipps, who had 3/32nd of African American ancestry, was shocked telling the New York Times, “I am White. I am all White. I was raised as a White child. I went to White schools. I married White twice” (“Slave Descendants...”). Phipps petitioned the state arguing that the ‘one drop rule,’ that any amount of African American heritage essentially diluted Whiteness into blackness, was unconstitutional. She lost. It seems clear that Omi and Winant open this section with the narrative of Phipps because of its spectacle; the drama of a court case that questions the seemingly solid ground of racial identification. It is also a juridical performance. Through its declaration of her blackness, the court, despite Phipps own identification, altered racial identity in ways akin to Austin’s example of the speech act of the marriage vow. Phipps is African American because the law proclaims it is so.

40 In 1983 the law was repealed but it was not retroactive.  
41 For additional examples see Ian Haney Lopez’s White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race (2006) that seeks to expose “the imprecisions and contradictions inherent in the establishment of racial lines between Whites and non-Whites” demonstrating that “the law constructs race at every level” (1).
Critical race scholars have explored cases like these because they offer dynamic examples of how race is constructed through legal argumentation and reasoning in order to perpetuate itself through the institutions of the state. The Phipps case, one example out of hundreds, exposes that the construction and formation of race is seemingly set on the firm and reasonable foundation of juris prudence is also full of oddities, inconsistencies, and arbitrariness. It may seem that the Houston Riot is unrelated to issues of racial classification - there is no part of the case that questions the African American-ness of the soldiers – but it is part of a legal continuum. The maintenance of racial segregation, legal in this period, can only occur when the boundaries of race are clearly defined. The Houston Riot is enmeshed in the racial hierarchies of Texas during the early part of the century and a product of the legality of racial segregation and the cultural world it created.

Scholars in performance and theatre studies are also keenly invested in how the law functions in a socio-political imaginary. These scholars cover two distinct but overlapping strains of thought: 1) that the courtroom is itself a site of performance physically and symbolically and 2) that the law performs and perpetuates ideologies through its performance. In Performing South Africa’s Truth Commission: Stages of Transitions (2010) Catherine M. Cole argues that South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) was a socio-political performance and that the implications of its performative dimensions allow for a greater understanding of its public enactment. She sees these elements “as a literal and figurative stage for South Africa’s political transition” through the staging of the proceedings in a theatre-like setting, the power of its storytelling, and its function as a ritual (Cole xvi). Cole discusses the physical manifestation of the court as theatre-like referencing the frequent metaphor of the trial as a theatre, a site that provides and evokes the drama, spectacle, theatricality, and, sometimes, artificiality (Cole 1). To see trials as a theatre-like site is to understand its physical and symbolic power. In this analysis judges, witnesses, attorneys, and defendants are all theatrical players in the unfolding drama as they perform their enactment of roles. The courts-martial of the soldiers for the Houston Riot
provide a specific instance in which to see the courtroom as playhouse, a physical stage on which the questions of the nation are performed.

In addition, performance theory allows for a methodology to analyze the law and its mechanisms as performative and examine how it shapes racial hierarchies and experiences of minority subjects. As performance studies Joshua Chambers-Letson argues in his echoing of Austin, the law is performative because it is “composed of linguistic utterances and acts (statutes, policies, executive memos, judicial opinions) that do more than describe the world, because they produce a doing in it through their very utterance or inscription” (14). The doing that it engenders matters not just to the primary actors initially effected but to the wider circles of those impacted, the precedents that are created by court decisions, and in the making of the relationship of citizens to the state. The law becomes a key instrument in maintaining White supremacy performing a literal and metaphoric violence on the minority body since the lines that define race are linked so deeply to the ability to survive and thrive in America.

The examination of the performance of the courtroom and law using critical race theory and performance studies allows for an analysis that takes into account how ideologies of racial formation and state formation function together to embolden White supremacy at the expense of minority subjects. It can also elucidate how performances of violence might embolden, represent, negotiate with, react to, rebel against, parody or mimic White supremacy. These performances might take many forms across a spectrum of socio-political positions including the violent racist spectacle of lynching, the minority performances of disidentifications described by José Muñoz that work “on and against domain ideology” (11), and the violent uprising and resistance of minority populations against their oppressors. As Lucy Nevitt argues in Theatre and Violence (2013):

Violence tells us things about the culture that produced it: the kinds of power relationships on which it is built, the attitudes and values that it takes for granted. A
representation of violence can reiterate or it can challenge existing social structures (36).

The performances of violence – whether in the theatre or through everyday performance - are part of a deeply entrenched socio-political ideology. The Houston Riot serves as a rich example of a historical performance to observe and interpret the ideologies that brought young African American soldiers to the gallows.

1917: PRIMED FOR RESISTANCE

Robert V. Haynes, the preeminent historian of the Houston Riot, argued in A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917 (1976) that the actions undertaken by the African American soldiers on the evening of the riot were “the earliest manifestations of [a] spirit of militant self-defense” that would come to define the post-First World War era of civil rights progress (319). Resistance to enslavement, racism, and oppression have been present since the earliest days of the arrival of slaves on what would become the United States of America and have continued to our present day. However, the 20th century would mark a turning point in the sweeping efficacy of these endeavors. The Houston Riot was an event that shaped how African Americans would respond to the racial violence that was enacted against them. It undoubtedly functioned as one of several events during the war that emboldened African American resistance.

The year 1917 was one of riots including many minor altercations and several large-scale events prior to the Houston Riot. These events were brought about by a rising tide of paranoia as White communities attacked African American communities across the country including in Chicago, New York, and Newark, Delaware and in Danville, Lexington, and Waco in the South all culminating in a barrage of violence in East St. Louis, Illinois on July 2nd, 1917 (Bristow 140). In Illinois, White workers felt threatened by newly arriving African American laborers from the South, so they responded by setting fire to over
200 African American homes and murdering thirty-nine African Americans. The event was so shocking that it was covered in both the African American and the White press. This was due to the ferocity of the attacks on unarmed African American women and children and the clear desire to eradicate the entire community (Ellis 38).

In response to the violence the NAACP organized a silent parade down New York’s Fifth Avenue with 8000 marchers who tied their message of racial equality to wartime slogans of freedom and liberty. Marchers carried signs with slogans that directly connected domestic racial violence with the rhetoric of wartime patriotism for example, ‘Mr. President, Why not make AMERICA Safe for Democracy?’ Prominent African American elites constantly connected American racial violence and the war effort calling attention to the hypocrisy of decrying torture and atrocities in Europe but not in the US. In response to the East St. Louis riot Huber Harrison, a prominent Harlem radical and one of the few public African American Socialists in the period, wrote in the publication he ran, Voice: A Newspaper for the New Negro, that “the White people, who are denouncing the Germans as Huns and barbarians, break loose in an orgy of unprovoked and villainous barbarism which neither German nor any other people have ever equaled” (Ellis 40). While James Weldon Johnson of the NAACP pronounced, “The Germans ain’t done nothing to me, and if they have, I forgive ‘em,” a notion that emphasized that many African Americans felt they had no motivation to be involved in a war against Germany when their real enemy was right in front of them (Ellis 79).

Despite the sympathy many Whites had for the victims of the East St. Louis riot, they were not compelled to activism. Most Whites saw these protests and their connection to the war effort as proof of African American disloyalty fueling rumors that African Americans were being encouraged to revolt by German spies. According to Mark Ellis in Race, War, and Surveillance: African Americans and the United

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42 For a later comparison to the Houston Riot only eight White people died at East St. Louis (Ellis 38).
43 The aftermath of East St. Louis also taught these elites that the government lost interest in investigating wrongdoing by Whites once it was determined that the violence was not brought about by a ring of German spies.
States Government during World War I, White fears of racial disloyalty seemed to be supported by the appearance of the Zimmerman Telegram in March of 1917 (7). This message to the Mexican government from the German War Department extended the opportunity for an alliance between the two countries if the United States entered the war in Europe. After receiving the decoded and translated document from the British, the government of the United States made the missive public. The idea for this alliance was based on a circulating scheme conceived by radical Mexican activists in southwestern Texas called the ‘Plan of San Diego.’ This strategy sought to bring together Mexicans, African Americans, and Native American tribes as a coalition army that would attack the US in order to claim a separate and independent country carved out of the Southwestern states. By bringing the possibility of a wartime alliance into the plan, Germany suggested that this rebellion would cause the US to fight a two-front war ensuring a German victory. Although the US government had known of the ‘Plan of San Diego’ for over two years, and discounted its possibility, the Zimmerman Telegram prompted a serious re-consideration of the ability of the US to trust the loyalty of its racial minorities. Through national press coverage, particularly in Texas, Whites throughout the Southwest and Southern states were now aware of the play to court minorities into a Germans alliance feeding fears of disloyalty (Ellis 8).

Powerful White elites, particularly politicians from the South, used this growing paranoia to publically argue that African Americans should not serve in the military because they would be unable to control their own desire for revenge (Slotkin 38). This position relies on a remarkable re-assessment of African American subjectivity. Whites were suddenly acutely aware that White supremacist violence might have detrimental consequences. The claims that African Americans desired revenge hinged primarily on a fear that if the US armed, trained, and encouraged African American to kill enemies of the US abroad they would using their new skills on Whites when they got home. Southern congressmen openly discussed their fear that the military training of African Americans would result in a populace that would eventually upset the delicate balance that allowed racial segregation to continue to exist.
House Representative Richard S. Whaley of South Carolina proclaimed on the floor that African American soldiers “would bring down upon the districts, where Negroes far exceed the Whites in number, a danger far greater than any foe.” While known White supremacist Senator James K. Vardman from Mississippi fought the enlistment of African American soldiers saying that there would be “no greater menace to the South than this” (Ellis 11). Although these men were coming from a racist ideology, on this point, they were correct as the training and housing of African American soldiers in the South would provide the climate for the resistance of the Houston Riot and that the experiences in the war would be a part of the larger dismantling of racial segregation fundamentally altering the South.

While many southern White elites attempted to exclude African Americans from the war altogether and the War Department maintained the policy of segregation, African American elites fought for the right to serve and attempted to craft a unified vision of African American enlistment. Although there were radical sentiments, mostly from socialists, that advocated for African Americans to excise themselves from the war effort as protest most elites saw military participation and active support as a means to accomplishing long terms goals for equality. Once it became clear the War Department would not de-segregate the military, African American elites had to carefully consider how to proceed since supporting participation would be seen as, at worst, supporting segregation and, at best, capitulating to it. The majority of prominent African American leaders deemed that since African Americans had already been targeted as potentially disloyal or vulnerable targets of German spies they would need to demonstrate their commitment to the nation through military service as a means of proving loyalty. The Tuskegee Institute’s James Weldon Johnson expressed “cautious optimism” for the “right to fight for one’s country” since it was “one of the fundamental rights of citizenship” (Ellis 14). Emmett Scott, who had been Booker T. Washington’s secretary and would go on to publish The Negro in the War, offered to be a liaison between the African American community and the War Department because he understood that since the War Department refused to challenge Jim Crow laws, there would
be inevitable conflicts between Northern soldiers and the Southern cities. The hope was that this conflict would cause stress to Jim Crow racism as well as demonstrate that African Americans, in particular men, were worthy of civic equality though their military service (Slotkin 49).

In the First World War, as with previous conflicts, the history of African American military service was coupled with institutional racism on the federal level through the policies of the War Department and on the state and local level through draft boards policies and procedures. During the start of the Great War, African American soldiers were disproportionately selected for service, were less frequently given exemptions, and subject to the racism of local draft boards and police authorities. Of the 23.8 million American men who registered from 1917-1918 about 2.3 million (almost 10%) were African American. From within this group, 1 million were selected for service and 557,000 (52.6%) deemed Class I for immediate call up. In comparison, of the 9.5 million White men selected for service only 3.1 million (32.5%) were deemed Class I (Ellis 76). By the end of the war Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina had all drafted more African Americans than Whites despite their making up only a small part of the total population of the states (Ellis 76).

When African Americans asked for exemptions or reduced statuses they were less likely to receive it when compared to Whites. Many draft boards justified denying African Americans with dependents as exempt because their military payment for their classification as Class I was equal to or exceeded their normal earnings. It was deemed by many draft boards that their families would be financially better off with them as soldiers. Histories and personal experiences of racism distanced many African American men from the desire to serve and many chose the possibility of jail time over fighting for a country that provided very few civil rights. African Americans disproportionately evaded the draft with over 100,000 failing to register or registering but not reporting when called up. The delinquency and desertion rate was almost 10% for African Americans compared to just over 3% for Whites (Ellis 76).

However, this high figure for delinquency may be slightly misleading. There was rampant abuse
across the southern states due to the War Department’s policy of offering a $50 reward for any delinquent delivered to an army camp; money that was deducted from the new recruit’s paycheck. Southern draft boards and local sheriffs deliberately withheld information about draft notices from African Americans to claim monetary rewards. In Georgia and Virginia, government agencies found reports of African American delinquency so high (in Georgia it was over 40 times that of Whites) that there was no other explanation except widespread racism and fraud across the state (Ellis 77). African Americans volunteered to fight, were drafted, or resisted wartime enlistment like their counterparts of other races but these decisions were complicated by histories of racism and racist policies both legal and extra-legal.

The men who were tried and convicted of the Houston Riot were from companies in the 3rd Battalion of the historic all African American 24th Infantry. The seeds of the unit began during the Civil War but it was not officially named the 24th until 1869 when Congress united two all-African American infantry regiments, 38th and 41st, into one unit due to a shortage of White officers who the army felt could lead an all-African American group (Haynes 8-9). A comprehensive history of the 24th Infantry is not necessary here, but it is important to note that the majority of its military successes were in defense of US colonial endeavors including Native American tribes on the border with Mexico in 1877, with Theodore Roosevelt during the Spanish American War in 1898, and in the Philippines, however its members were consistently harassed by the White communities that resented housing them. Despite remaining in the US during the First World War, their historical trajectory would persist.

On July 26, 1917, the 645 soldiers in the 3rd battalion, Companies I, K, L, and M, left for Houston

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44 This was in addition to the creation of the all-African American 25th Infantry and 9th and 10th cavalries (Haynes 8).
45 The men of the 24th saw many of their “enemies” differently then their White compatriots but rarely refused to perform their duties; there were only six men of the 24th who out rightly refused to fight against Filipinos. William Howard Taft, when he became governor of the island, requested the US remove all African American troops fearing that the two races had already established too great a bond and could foment a joint insurrection. Despite this ban, African American troops were welcome back in 1906 and in 1911 to put down additional rebellions on the islands. Taft’s fear was, perhaps, a bit correct as several of the soldiers married Filipino women and created mixed-race families and communities on the island (Haynes 12-13).
to guard the building of Camp Logan (Haynes 16). The federal government leased over 7600 woodland acres five miles west of Houston in Harris Country for the building of the camp, one of sixteen training sites for the National Guard (Christian 150). Although many citizens were eager to do their part for the war effort, local business leaders and political elites courted the project for its ability to increase economic development for local businesses. It probably never crossed their minds that the War Department would place hundreds of African American men just outside the city. However on July 23, what would be just a month before the night of violence, it was announced by a local newspaper that “the troopers ordered here to serve as guards are negroes from the 24th U.S. Infantry,” but the article also emphasized that commanding officers would still be White (Christian 146). Local White citizens became concerned about what the soldiers might do and the effect they might have on the local African American community, the largest population in the state. City leaders, fearing that community support for the camp might start to dwindle, enlisted the local press to re-assure the public that the 24th had a glorious history of discipline and stressed the “short duration of their assignment,” only six weeks (Christian 147). Leaders in Houston also reached out to the military to guarantee the city would be welcoming. James George, the secretary for the Houston Chamber of Commerce, wrote to War Department:

The people of Houston are not negrophobes... [the] negro soldiers... will be properly received and... their comfort will be given due consideration. ... You need anticipate no trouble as long as they comport themselves as soldiers should. (Christian 148)

However, what would be defined as proper soldier behavior for George, and many of his fellow Houstonites, would turn out to be what they perceived as proper African American behavior in an

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46 This would include an all African-American unit of National Guardsmen from Illinois that would, in the weeks after the riot, become a great point of controversy.

47 1910 census lists the African American population of Houston as 78,800 but it dramatically increased to 138,276 (just over 30% of the total population) by the 1920 census (Christian 146).
extremely racially segregated city. George’s statement provides a window in the mindset of the racial segregation in the South as he seemingly offered hospitality while only assuring “due consideration” conditional on acceptable modes of behavior. Undoubtedly, he hoped – as did the War Department – that the soldiers of the 24th would accommodate themselves to the racial laws and social codes of segregation without complaint.

Following the policies of the War Department, it was deemed safer by commanding officers that life at Camp Logan would accommodate the racial segregation of Houston primarily through ignoring race as much as possible and restricting soldiers’ behaviors and interactions with White locals. The War Department had already created federal rules banning alcohol in all areas near military camps, called the “White zone,” but local military officers were free to create additional rules for governing behavior in communities. Despite concerns that African American soldiers might agitate the local community, both the War Department and local White elites deemed it a preferable risk to inter-racial contact in the city. Local African American community members were given almost free access to the camp in the hopes that this would encourage soldiers to remain in its confines. In addition, routine passes to enter the city were only to be given out to highly disciplined soldiers. Once in the city, soldiers were subject to an 11pm curfew, a strict regulation that prohibited more than three African American soldiers from congregating on city streets, and a rule restricting weapons, even for military police (Christian 148-150). Despite the history of the 24th and its accomplishments, it was in yet another situation, and a more hostile situation, where the White community that housed the unit resented it for being there. This time, with the growing strength of concern for African American civil rights, these soldiers would respond differently than ever before.

INCITING INCIDENTS

The racial environment of Houston and the month-long series of events that directly preceded
the Houston Riot created a collection of concentrated experiences of oppression for the African American soldiers stationed at Camp Logan. In its final verdict in the Nesbit Case the panel of judges included a brief section pertaining to these events:

> It will be instructive to remark upon some events that took place, and certain conditions which existed prior to the mutiny and violence of the defendants on the night of August 23, 1917. These events and conditions in no wise [sic] justified or extenuated the offenses committed, but they do serve to throw some light upon how the outbreak [sic] occurred (Nesbit Order 1299, 7).

These events and conditions were: 1) acts of racism within Camp Logan, 2) racial segregation in Houston, and 3) police brutality. The prosecution, the defense, and the panel of judges all agreed that the conditions were present and these events occurred. In their defense, the accused soldiers all plead innocent to the charges, so a discussion of the abuses against them could not be used to justify actions they claimed they never undertook. Still these events, briefly described in the trial and the final verdict, do more than just “throw some light upon how the outbreak occurred” as the panel of judges state in their report above. I argue that they demonstrate an incredibly violent and volatile environment where these soldiers were systematically disrespected, humiliated, and brutalized.

In this section, I use primary and secondary sources that have examined these events in order to interpret them as performances of violence in the service of White supremacy. Although the lawyers and judges were willing to admit that together these events establish a consistent pattern of abuse, they were unwilling to investigate the role of that violence or to introduce the idea that these abuses somehow justified the soldiers’ actions. In discussing these events as performances, I argue for their

48 The benefit to including these events but not really discussing them would have been two-fold: 1) it locates the conflict between the soldiers and the people of Houston removing any sense of blame from the War Department and 2) it excises the companies of the 24th that were in Houston from the rest of the 24th, and other African American units, stationed around the country that were badly needed for military support.

49 I will discuss their plea of innocence later in this chapter.
affective and symbolic power in order to provide a more complete picture of the motivations for
Houston Riot.

RACISM WITHIN CAMP LOGAN

As previously discussed, the War Department imagined that if the racial policies of
military camps corresponded to that of the cities that housed them then there would be little trouble as
long as African American soldiers patiently accepted segregation as a temporary inconvenience.
Although the War Department hoped Whites would treat African American soldiers well in respect for
the military, the primary interest was in not allowing “the race question” to slow down the war effort.
The military overwhelmingly accepted the policies of racial segregation and maintained them as part of
their wartime policy. The military camp became contested ground offering a physical and symbolic
manifestation of the War Department’s decision to ignore the racial conflict in favor of supporting racial
segregation and White supremacy (Slotkin 7).

The War Department’s policy, that the First World War would not be “the occasion for solving
the ‘so-called race problem,’” meant that it would honor state and national laws of racial segregation
(Slotkin 7). The hope of many of the social reformers in the Wilson Administration was to erase race as
an issue trusting that all parties involved would focus on the war effort. However, in their attempts to
negotiation between the inclusion of African Americans and the fears of Whites, they tended to ignore
the very real implication of the racism and racial violence rampant in military camps and units around
the country.

In Camp Logan, the issue was not the racial segregation of troops but rather the interaction
between African American soldiers guarding the camp and local White laborers sent to build the camp.
The men of the 24th functioned as guards “instructed to protect all government property, to keep a close
lookout for fires, and to prevent unauthorized persons from entering the camp” (Hayes 72). The
majority of White workers were insulted that they were monitored by armed African American soldiers, but, more importantly, the workers resented the authority of the soldiers as rightful conduits of legal military authority (Haynes 73). The camp, assumed to be a space modeled on the cities that housed the soldiers, was not corresponding to codified and social laws of racial hierarchy the placed African Americans below Whites in their ability to control the environment in which they lived and worked. In response, White workers rebuked and disregarded the military law that gave authority to the soldiers and enforced their own civilian law that re-asserted their White dominance.

In one telling example, the African American soldiers were responsible for standing at the main gate and checking the credentials of all who desired to enter the camp. Problems quickly arose as White laborers refused to show their identification to the soldiers on duty, which the workers saw as an abdication of their racial superiority. The White workers began circumventing the gate and sneaking into the camp rather than comply with military policy, a policy these men, correctly, saw as a demonstration of the African American soldiers’ authority within the sphere of the camp. However, it was not just the workers who responded negatively to military policies that placed African American soldiers in positions of authority. Community elites who worked in the camp also balked at the legal authority of the soldiers. E.E. Sands, a city engineer, complained to the military that he “was not in the habit of showing his pass to negroes” (Haynes 73). The military could have supported the authority of the soldiers to execute one of their key duties and advised the Whites working on the project to conform to military codes. Instead, military authorities changed the policy to satisfy the demands of Whites. The new policy created an additional position at the gate, a White gatekeeper, who checked the credentials of White workers while African American soldiers oversaw the interaction without the power to check the credentials themselves.

The exchange of racial actors demonstrated a physical and symbolic shift in the role of authority. The exchange of the African American soldiers for a White gatekeeper was a clear re-arrangement to
satisfy the demands of White workers and to re-affirm a racial hierarchy that was deemed out of balance. Military and civilian personal chose to alleviate the issue at the gate by acquiescing to White demands instead of affirming the power of African American soldiers to execute military policy. Their choice to nullify hostilities in this particular incident contributed to an environment where White supremacy was maintained through an alteration of military policy to disempower African American soldiers. The controversy over the gate was just one of many incidents in which superior officers and civilian authorities neglected to recognize that they were compounding, over a very short time, a situation that would lead to a more significant altercation.

Although these incidents of humiliation managed to forestall more hostile or violent interactions, there was little anyone seemed to be able to do about the most rampant issue that caused racial friction in the camp; the use of the word ‘nigger’ by White workers. Although the use of ‘nigger’ as a reference to African Americans was common, particularly in Texas and throughout the South, it was and is a word that does something; a linguistic performance of violence and a verbal symbol of a history of brutal racial subjection.

In considering the performative nature of ‘nigger’ it vital understand not just its historical connotations within the period of the First World War but also its presence as the enduring racial slur in American society. ‘Nigger’ did not start out as slur. Originally derived from the Latin work for black, niger it became a way to reference black bodies. In an American context, the word has always been here. John Rolfe, in his journal, wrote of the first arrival of African slaves to Virginia in 1619 as “negars.” Randall Kennedy in Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome World (2003) writes that there is no clear point for exactly when ‘nigger’ became pejorative but by the 19th century it was “a familiar and influential insult (4).” Kennedy contends that ‘nigger’ “has seeped into practically every aspect of American culture” including popular music, children’s rhymes, and jokes (6). In discussing its ubiquitous use as an insult for African Americans, Kennedy recounts a story that provides context the use of the word during
the Great War. In 1918, African American Lieutenant George Schuyler was in his Army uniform and went to get his boots shined at Philadelphia railroad station. The bootblack, an immigrant from Greece, refused him service and proclaimed that he would not serve a “nigger” (Kennedy 14). Schuyler was not just refused service because he was an African American but he was also insulted. This story is also telling because Kennedy references that the bootblack was an immigrant demonstrating that one of first things he learn about being American was his ability to insult African Americans. As Slotkin notes in his discussion of immigrant soldiers ridiculing African American soldiers during the Great War, “That ‘niggers’ could be routinely ridiculed was something most White Americans took for granted, a self-evident fact, and each new act of ridicule reinforced the assumption that everything about Negroes, including their pretension to civil equality and human dignity, was inherently laughable” (113).

The soldiers resented being called ‘niggers,’ insisting that they be called “colored men” but most White workers, including the local police, used the word frequently to refer to the soldiers in Camp Logan particularly when insulting them, threatening them, and demeaning them (Haynes 74).50 In the opening statement of the Nesbit Case, the defense stated:

The soldiers of the 24th Infantry took particular offense to being referred to as “Niggers,” even when this term was used without intention of casting any slur on them. The word “Nigger” appears to have been employed in connection with almost every case of disorder and was invariably met by angry responses, outbursts of profanity and threats of vengeance (11). In the moment above the defense does a poor job of discussing the real ramifications of the abuse.

Whites are rendered ignorant to the issues, “without the intention” of causing offense, while the soldiers’ reactions are emphasized as violent and angry. Despite this being the argument presented by the defense it implies that African American soldiers potentially overreacted to being called niggers

50 This is particularly visible in the trial transcript as White witnesses from Houston almost universally refer to the African American soldiers as “niggers” while the other members of the court use the term “colored” or “negro.”
because they didn’t possess the knowledge of the intention of the Whites. The defense implied that its potential for injury is connected to the intentionality of the speaker.

As the defense notes there were several altercations that stemmed from White use of the word ‘nigger’ to refer to the soldiers. On one occasion of note, W.T. Patterson, an African American soldier, argued with the White paymaster of the Houston Lighting and Power Company who called him a ‘nigger.’ Patterson responded, “I want you to understand that we ain’t no niggers. I am no nigger” (Haynes 75). His reaction demonstrates that ‘nigger’ is not a meaningless word or referent but an insult that Patterson resists for himself and his fellow soldiers. Patterson’s assertion, “I am no nigger” is a powerful denunciation that he couples with “I want you to understand” in an attempts to bridge any question of intentionality. However, denouncements from Patterson and other soldiers were primarily ignored.

Even when authorities knew there was an issue the situation was too challenging to control some in authority. Chief of Police Clarence Brock was only a temporary replacement from the Parks Department and not a seasoned police officer. Due to this, Brock did not command the respect generally given to his post and was thus unable to control his officers when he saw a problem. After several altercations between African American soldiers and local police Brock issued an order for all police officers to stop referring to all African American soldiers as “niggers.” The police officers ignored the order without punishment (Haynes 101).

In absence of any effective reprimand from Whites in authority, African American soldiers resisted and defended themselves by referring to the White laborers as “White bastards” and “god-damned sons of bitches” (Haynes 77). The soldiers’ linguistic self-defense quickly escalated the hostility as White laborers complained to civilian and military authorities that these words “terrorized” them and some White laborers even quit their jobs, they claimed, out of fear for their lives. The White laborers’ invocation of terror comes directly out of their fear of armed African American men defending
themselves (Haynes 77-78).

The White officers charged with dealing with the complaints from both the soldiers and the laborers were ill equipped to understand the larger ramifications of these moments. In their failure to act aggressively to resolve racial conflict the situation grew volatile and eventually deadly. According to Haynes, “The White army officers, who found themselves caught in the middle of an impossible situation, tried to placate both sides and ended up pleasing neither” (79). Many of the African American soldiers believed that the White officers were incapable of judging the conduct of other Whites and effectively remedying the situation, leading them to stop reporting instances of racial conflict. The soldiers stopped complaining to their superiors because they saw little hope of change. This led the officers to believe the situation was improving when it was actually getting worse (Haynes 80). The African American soldiers stationed at Camp Logan felt they were on their own as the secure space of the camp was subject to a constant barrage of insults and racist incidents, and there were no trusted superiors officers who seemed to be able to permanently handle the issue.

THE EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL SEGREGATION IN HOUSTON

Soldiers from the 24th were from all around the country, so it would be incorrect to assume that none of them had experience with racial segregation. The companies being sent to Houston were told things would be difficult, but they were unprepared – if one could be prepared - for the level of hatred, humiliation, and dehumanization they would experience. The city, instead of providing stimulation, entertainment, and a respite to the drudgery of camp life, offered a more centralized location for consistently racist interactions. However, similar to inside the camp, African American soldiers resisted.

The system of racial segregation that divided Whites from African Americans was a law codified by custom and re-enforced by the threat of harassment, humiliation, and violence. Racial segregation did far more than bifurcate one race from the other; it endorsed White superiority and allowed African
American disenfranchisement in a variety of public and private spheres. Racial segregation was a legal performance marking White supremacy on the physical world and through minority bodies. In *The Long, Lingering Shadow: Slavery, Race, and Law in the American Hemisphere*, Robert Cottrol argues that racial segregation, or Jim Crow laws, “prescribed an etiquette of discrimination...reinforced by reaffirming ritual dictating [a] list of separations [that] would become ingenious and endless” (186). The US Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* found that ‘separate but equal’ policies were constitutionally legal and that anyone who violated those policies could receive fines and imprisonment. In thinking through how racial segregation is a performance of White supremacy, it is important to call attention to the exceptions in the decision. The justices in the majority opinion upheld an exception for nurses attending children of another race as an accommodation that solely benefited White families who hired African American women to watch their children. African American women were able to traverse the seemingly inflexible line of racial segregation solely when their work benefited White families. Their roles as nannies and nurses allowed for White families, and in particular White women, to continue the economic exchange that brought African Americans into intimate relationship in family units but neglected to provide basic civil rights. In its exception, as Justice Harlan pointed out in his dissent, it is possible to see the motivations at play behind the performance of racial segregation (*Plessy*, “Dissenting Opinion”).

Since the end of slavery, Houston – like other cities – had enacted a series of laws in order to limit African American civil rights, regulate behavior, and maintain a racial hierarchy. Houston was actually “two separate societies – one White and the other black” which “took shape, first by custom and later by legislation” (Haynes 25). The large African American community in Houston created its own institutions, businesses, and entertainments including schools, churches, movie houses, saloons,
baseball teams and annual celebrations that ran parallel to White celebrations (Christian 146). However, sites of racial mingling – in particular streetcars – were loci of hostility as African Americans endured constant humiliation by White conductors and riders who knew they were supported by a racial majority and the rule of law. The potential for violence, resistance, and revolt was omnipresent. As such, it should be no surprise that African American soldiers focused the majority of their resistance to segregation on the streetcars of Houston.

African American soldiers frequently got into altercations with streetcar conductors when Jim Crow segregation was enforced in their vehicles. On several occasions the soldiers destroyed the “WHITE” and “COLORED” signs that marked the cars, sometimes even removing them entirely, and in one incident tossed the screen that literally divided the races from the door of the streetcar (Christian 149). This disregard for the physical markings of segregation was an annoyance to Whites but what was even more troubling was the disregard for the legal and social rules of segregation as African American soldiers sat in seats reserved for White passengers (Haynes 64).

For instance, this issue was deemed so serious that local leaders, both military and civil, felt they were forced to respond. In ways similar to alleviating disruptions in Camp Logan, these authorities simply tried to nullify the immediate conflict instead of looking at the underlying issues. In order to rectify the perceived problem they agreed to add more streetcars during peak hours and to instruct conductors to move the racial dividers up to make more room for African Americans at the back of the bus if the need arose. The soldiers also received a lecture by Colonel Bill Newman who tried to teach the “proper mode of behavior in Houston” including information about obeying the segregation laws of Texas and reminders that conductors were solely responsible for maintaining law and thus should not be

51 African Americans established the celebration De-Ro-Loc to mirror the local White holiday No-Tsu-Oh, Houston spelled backward (Haynes 27).
52 Although Houston had a slightly better record on lynching than other major Southern cities the recent lynching of Jesse Washington in May of 1916 in nearby Waco emphasized the potential for brutal torture that lay just below the gentile surface of the “Magnolia City” (Christian 89).
held responsible for its perceived injustices (Haynes 80). These solutions did temporarily ameliorate the outright racial conflicts on the streetcars but did little to alleviate the feelings of African American soldiers who had to live with the dehumanizing ramifications of segregation. In addition, the soldiers came to more deeply understand the experience of the African American community in Houston knowing that it was unlikely that these changes, the additional streetcars and the ability to move the dividers to accommodate more African American passengers, would remain in effect after they left the city.

POLICE BRUTALITY IN HOUSTON AND THE “KILLING” OF BALTIMORE

Of the three reasons that contributed to the violent events of the evening of August 23rd, the most direct cause for the incident was that of police brutality. Police brutality was, of course, nothing new for the African American residents of Houston who lived constantly under the threat of false charges, arrests, and beatings. They routinely accused the police of using racial slurs and employing extreme violence in reaction to false or minor infractions. The city police force was disproportionately White considering the significant African American population. There were only two African American police officers out of 150 in 1917; not nearly enough to patrol their own neighborhoods and these officers lacked the power to arrest anyone White without a White officer present at the scene (Christian 146). The officers at the center of the events of the 23rd, Lee Sparks and Rufus Daniels, were known by African Americans to be cruelly racist and best to be avoided (Haynes 92). Sparks, who proudly proclaimed he was a “negro bater,” was recently coming off a ten-day suspension for having used abusive language in a front of an African American woman while arresting her son (Haynes 93).

On the morning of the 23rd, Sparks and Daniels were patrolling the San Felipe District, an African American neighborhood, when they encountered two young men playing dice in an alley. According to

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53 Description of events compiled from Haynes 92-108 and the Nesbit Case.
Haynes, Sparks chased one of them into the home of Sara Travers, a housewife busily ironing her clothes in her housedress. Sparks asked Travers, “Did you see a nigger jumping over that yard?” to which she responded, “No, sir” and Sparks proceeded to search her home (92). In the commotion, the neighbors came outside to investigate the police presence and asked Travers what had happened; she responded, “I don’t know; I think they were shooting at crap-shooters.” Sparks took issue with the implications that he had attempted to shoot the suspects and responded to Travers, “You’re a God damn liar. I shot at the ground. You all God Damn nigger bitches. Since these God damn sons of bitches of nigger soldiers came here, you are trying to take the town” (Haynes 92). Travers, then, objected to the entrance into her home and in response, Sparks slapped her and dragged her from her house. In Sparks’ version of the story, he did inflict this violence on her but only after she resisted arrest and used abusive language against him.

As the crowd gathered for her arrest, Private Alonzo Edwards of L Company in the 3rd Battalion, 24 Infantry, tried to intercede on Travers’s behalf. Edwards later freely admitted that he was still moderately drunk from his 24-hour pass in the city. Sparks responded to Edwards’s questioning by beating him over the head with his gun several times until Edwards passed out on the street. Travers was eventually let go but Edwards was sent to the city jail and booked for interfering with arrest. He remained in jail until August 25th after the riot.

This incident caused the next to occur, Haynes notes that Corporal Charles W. Baltimore, a highly esteemed African American soldier who happened to be getting off a streetcar in the San Felipe district heard what had happened to Edwards (96). Baltimore ran to question Sparks who struck the Corporal over the head with his gun, the same as he had with Edwards. Baltimore, still conscious but wounded, ran into a nearby home and hid under a bed. When Sparks found Baltimore, he continued beating him over the head with his gun and sent for another wagon to bring him to jail. In Sparks’s account he claimed Baltimore requested information “arrogantly,” used profanity, and was too
physically imposing. He denied beating him and explained Baltimore’s severe injuries as the result of him running “scared” into the house (Haynes 97-98 and Smith 91).\(^{54}\) Although Daniels story is unlikely considering Baltimore would have no reason to lie, there is no way to fully corroborate Baltimore’s story since it was just the two of them alone.

Quickly Camp Logan was overrun with talk of what had happened to Edwards and Baltimore. As demonstrated by both Haynes and Smith, rumors spread as the camp got word from both African American civilians and soldiers at the scene that Baltimore had died from his injuries; this was incorrect but the report was most likely the result of seeing him bleeding and lying down at the scene.\(^{55}\) Despite the fact that White superior officers knew that Baltimore was still alive, they neglected to communicate this to the soldiers from the camp that requested information about Baltimore. Allowing the rumor of Baltimore’s death to persist increased the agitation of the soldiers. The majority of the soldiers’ ire was aimed at the police, but the racist conditions within Houston had also demonstrated to them that all of White Houston was to blame for its deplorable race relations.

In the meantime, as Hayes recounts an officer was dispatched to pick up Baltimore and bring him back to camp where he was requested to tell the men that the incident was not serious. Although Baltimore had been a model soldier, he could not comply with this order (109).\(^{56}\) It was only among his own men, when he returned to camp, that he divulged the truth of his story and displayed his anger at the injustice. As Smith notes, the desire for resistance and retaliation flourished, the White officers who supervised the African American soldiers simply had no idea what was happening in their own camp and

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\(^{54}\) Daniels corroborated his partner’s version of events but did contradict that Baltimore used any profanity.

\(^{55}\) Oddly, two other police officers arrived in the camp to look for a stolen shoeshine kit. Although they had nothing to do with the incidents with Edwards and Baltimore their presence helped to verify the rumors that they were sent to inform the superior officers of Baltimore’s death.

\(^{56}\) Baltimore’s anger was also made worse by the fact that no one told him if Sparks would be punished despite military authorities negotiating yet another suspension. It would be completely within the realm of possibility that Baltimore believed that nothing would happen to Sparks and that he was being told it was his responsibility to lie to his men to calm them down. It was only hours later that information about the punishment was given out allowing even more time for anger to percolate in camp.
by the time they started to take precautions, it was too late (92).

Police brutality, excessive force or physical or psychological intimidation, is illegal but police officers must determine if the amount of force they use is excess or appropriate. If an officer determines their use of force was necessary for the situation then their actions becomes legal. In deciding what amount of force to use in a given interaction, police are not just representative of the state and its law but also interpreters of the law for the state. Police brutality is a performative aspect of the law. When police brutality is undertaken as a method to maintain White supremacy, it builds upon the legal framework of White domination. New York Times columnist Charles M. Blow recently wrote about police brutality in our contemporary context:

The very ubiquity of police officers and the power they possess means that the questionable killing in which they are involved creates a terror that rolls in like a fog, filling every low place. It produces ambient, radiant fear. It is the lurking unpredictability of it. It is the any- and everywhere-ness of it (“Police Abuse is a Form of Terror”).

Although Blow’s description is affective, one of fear and terror, his discussion of the inescapability of police violence allows for a consideration of the relationship between state power, the law, and racism. There is no way to know if the soldiers of the 24th felt as Blow does but his portrayal demonstrates that it might be difficult to disentangle one moment of police brutality from a history of state-sponsored violence. An act of police brutality cannot be seen as a singular incident but as a moment connected to the historical and institutional forces in communities compounding and exacerbating old wounds.

The police abuses of August 23rd and the “killing” of Baltimore provided the critical incident that sparked the Houston Riot precisely because the brutality was the climax of a month of abuses that were all legally sanctioned. Officers Sparks and Daniels executed the law through their behavior and are supposed to determine for themselves – in the moment - what constitutes legal and illegal behavior and act accordingly. Police officers can be reprimanded or punished at a later time but in the moment of
their interaction with citizens they are the enforcement of the law.

Although racism at Camp Logan and in Houston created a foundation for racial animosity, the violent actions of the Houston police against African American civilians and military motivated the men of the 24th to violent action against the police and civilians of Houston. The judges who presided over their case would not consider these facts as relevant but it is crucial to understand what motivated the events. The soldiers undertook their own violence as an embodied performance of resistance to the White supremacy and a rebellion against the consistent erasure of the violence perpetrated by Whites that surrounded them.

THE RIOT’S MOST DESIRABLE KILL: THE MURDER OF OFFICER RUFUS DANIELS

By 1917, police officer Rufus Daniels had acquired the nickname “Daniel Boone” for his “mammoth size and threatening physique” two imposing factors that made many African American residents of the San Felipe District avoid him at all cost (Haynes 92). The “hot-tempered” Daniels and his partner Lee Sparks, who patrolled the streets on horseback, terrorized the African American community and had nasty reputations for unrepentant violence (Williams, 33). It was this violence, particularly the attack on Baltimore, which was the last of a series of abuses that set the stage of the Houston riot. The violence he performed was received and was responded to with reciprocal performances of violence. Police brutality is a key way to examine this relationship because the violence officers undertake is undertaken under the legal authority of the state making them physical and symbolic manifestations of violence. They are the localized guardsmen of the regime maintaining the rule of domination on a micro scale. Daniels’ murder and mutilation during the Houston Riot reveals the

57 It very likely that Daniels was immortalized in Huddie William “Leadbelly” Ledbetter 1934 adaptation of the traditional Southern folk song, “Midnight Special.” “Leadbelly” reflecting on his time spent in prison outside Houston in 1918 wrote “If you ever go to Houston, boy, you better walk right/And you better not squabble and you better not fight/Bason and Brock will arrest you, Payton and Boone will carry you down/ And you can bet your bottom dollar oh Lord you’re Sugar Land bound.” Brock being a reference to the Clarence Brock chief of Houston police during the Houston Riot and Boone being a reference to Daniels’ nickname “Daniel Boone” (Steptoe 19, 68).
effects of police brutality and the reasons for violent retaliation.

Martha Gruening’s in her NAACP investigation of the riot for *The Crisis* argued, “The primary cause of the Houston riot was the habitual brutality of the White police officers of Houston in their treatment of colored people” (*Crisis*, Nov 1917, 14). Several witnesses in the Nesbit trial including White officers, African American and White civilians, and African American soldiers who participated in the riot (who testified for the prosecution in exchange for a lighter sentence) supported the argument that police violence played in galvanizing the soldier to resistance. Several African American civilian witnesses in camp testified that they were warned to leave and be in a safe place when it got dark. E. Hartwell, temporary captain of the government firehouse, testified that he was told in camp, “…the police in town had shot one of their number. When they left camp they said they were going to the police station to get revenge” (Schuler 232). Private Leroy Pinkett, one of the participants who testified for the prosecution, reported that after the soldiers heard about Baltimore’s supposed death they proclaimed, “Let’s go get the man that shot Baltimore…”(Schuler 323). Daniels’ death was the intended result of the Houston Riot – a performance meant to communicate the deep feeling of anger, rage, hurt, and disappointment felt by the men.58

After the men left camp, Sergeant Vida Henry took a column of soldiers towards the San Felipe District shooting at the houses and cars of White civilians on their way. The group of forty-five soldiers made it to the area where Baltimore had been attacked that morning, just after 10pm. It was at that spot the group ran into two policemen, Ross Patten and W. H. Long, who immediately shot at them. Patten’s horse was killed and he was shot in the arm and twice in the leg. As the police ran for cover, a car approached with a driver and four policemen including Rufus Daniels. One of the soldiers in the column called out, “Here comes some more police; let’s get them” (Nesbit 550-555). In response,

58 Undoubtedly Sparks was also an intended target but ironically his behavior against Baltimore meant that he was suspended and thus wasn’t called to put down the riot.
Daniels ran towards the column with his pistol and was immediately gunned down the soldiers. The soldiers quickly discovered their kill was the infamous Officer Daniels who was still alive, although it is unknown if he was conscious. One soldier was reported to have said, “There is the White trash we got” in reference to Daniel’s body (Haynes 155). The soldiers then attacked the body battering it with the end of their guns or “plunging bayonets into his olive-drab uniform” leaving the body in the road after mutilating it” (Haynes 155). Daniels’s body was eventually brought to the morgue where city detective H. A. Spadley and undertakers Leo H. Weadock and E.P. Corbett examined the body. Weadock testified at the court-martial to the brutality of the wounds. He described that the weapons used on him had “torn up” his insides and severed his shoulder (Nesbit 334). Corbett agreed that there were cuts consistent with bayoneting; a “clean out” not “ragged like a bullet wound” (Nesbit 392).

The act of mutilating Daniels’s body was a demonstration of communal rage – a physical manifestation of the anger aching to come out. The body, through its pain, is the messenger of the performance. Mirroring ways that lynch mobs mutilated and dismembered their victims, these soldiers understood the symbolic import of desecrating the sanctity of the body. The violent thrusts of their rifles and bayonets made manifest their resistance to White supremacy. As Haynes has argued these soldiers, “…resorted to what they regarded as the only system of justice available to them” (316). Daniels was surely paying the price for his own brutal actions but additionally as he was attacked as a physical manifestation of the law that rendered the African American population legally powerless to stop state-sponsored violence. Mutilating Daniels’s body was also a performance for each other as the soldiers crafted a collective voice of radical resistance against a history of collective violence. In the

59 In addition to Daniels, officer Moody was also mortally wounded by gunfire that severed his leg and led to massive blood loss.
60 Daniels was one of five police officers killed and one of two whose bodies were mutilated. The funeral for Daniels took place on August 26th with Lee Sparks serving as one of his pallbearers. That same day as the funeral Sparks shot and killed an African American man named Wallace Williams. Despite the testimony of two witnesses, both African American, that the killing was unprovoked Sparks was found not guilty in a one-minute deliberation (Roth and Kennedy 76).
wake of their trial they would quite literally create a communal voice of resistance.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) anti-colonial philosopher Franz Fanon discusses the role of collective violence by oppressed peoples, or what he called counter-violence, calling it a force with “positive and creative qualities” that “binds [oppressed peoples] together as a whole” (88). Fanon argues that violence by oppressed people is a reaction to the violence of the oppressor:

> The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity… The development of violence among the colonized people will be proportionate to the violence exercised by the threatened colonial regime. (88)

Violence is in reaction to the repressive domination of the colonizer who determines the systems and institutions that govern the lives of colonized subjects. The law is one aspect of the system crafted by the colonizer to maintain and advance colonial power over oppressed peoples. Fanon’s analysis allows for a way to understand how circles of violence perpetuate themselves but holds the colonizer ultimately accountable for the initial and continual violence. 61 Contemporary sociologists on urban riots, Feagin and Hahn, in their study *Ghetto Revolts; the Politics of Violence in American Cities* (1973), sounding much like Fanon, have argued that, “the image and role of police officers in urban ghettos are not unlike that of an occupying army in a colonial territory, primarily serving the alien and dominant White authorities…” (152). They cite that it is common for police to be involved in “riot-precipitating incidents” that seem, to outside observers, to be “routine police practices” but that are actually part of a longer history of animosity (152).

The murdering of a police officer has long been a crime that evokes a higher level of anger, anxiety, and performances of grief. An example of these affective responses is the pageantry that surrounds the death of police officers – the gathering of local officers, the guarding of the body, and the

61 Nonviolent resistance has, of course, also been used and been effective but that is not the focus of this study.
playing of bagpipes – all taking on a greater significance when the person in question has been killed in the line of duty. The parade of grief over the murder of a police officer is a performance that seeks to call attention to the violation of the rule of law and re-affirm a commitment to the rightful social order. These performative elements create a symbolic privilege that turns the body into a representation of the law and those that killed the officer into violators of the most basic of social contracts. Judith Butler in *Frames of War* (2010) argues that public grieving demonstrates a political bifurcation between the lives that are deemed grievable and those left out of public view arguing that “the differential distribution of public grieving is a political issue of enormous significance” (Butler 38). In calling attention to the murder and mutilation of Officer Rufus Daniels during the Houston Riot, I examine his death as a performance of violent rage undertaken by the soldiers to call attention to the lives that have been rendered “ungrievable,” in the Butlerian sense. The “ungrievable” lives include not just the idea of Baltimore’s potential death but also a broader sense of lost African American lives due to acts of violence. If we consider Gilmore’s definition of racism at the start of this work, she links her conception of the term to the idea of “premature death.” The soldiers of the 24th created their plan of retribution in response to believing Baltimore was dead but they did not alter their plan when they found out he was alive. The murdering and mutilation of Daniels was a political and performative act of revenge meant to communicate that the law itself was corrupt and that the social contract would be forcibly re-written. In this sense, Daniels’ death should be contextualized within political philosophies of resistance and the racialized violence experienced by those that murdered him. It was this hostile relationship between the police, the local African American community, and the soldiers of the 24th that created the anger focused on Officer Daniels.

COMING HOME

In returning to the last moments of the thirteen soldiers who went to their deaths, I examine
their embodied performance of singing as a defiant action of resistance to their punishment. Haynes, and other scholars, has remarked that the soldiers’ singing of the hymn “Lord, I’m Coming Home” was a dramatic ending to a tragedy. I argue, instead, that it was an action of resistance. I analyze this moment through the work of African American scholars who have discussed the role of music as a performative practice, what Fred Moten has called a “musico-political tradition” (2). The singing of “Lord, I’m Coming Home” is part of a continuum of African American musical traditions that have focused on expressing and exercising emotion as a mode of resistive performance.

There is no telling how many soldiers participated in the Houston Riot. The military accused 156 men based on poorly maintained check-in lists and rumors that circulated camp. The soldiers that did participate hoped – and they were mostly right – that the darkness of the night and the anxiety of the moment would prohibit them from being identified as individuals. In fact, the majority of witnesses to the Houston Riot could not identify the faces of even one of the men accused and several selected the wrong individual out of the group. The military would have had no case if not for the few soldiers who turned on their fellow men and testified for the prosecution in exchange for leniency. The rest maintained their innocence and the majority were found collectively responsible for the Houston Riot.

Despite this focus on collective responsible all of the men were not punished the same. The judges of the Nesbit Case agreed with the prosecution’s identification of the ringleaders – including Seg. Henry and Corp. Baltimore – and this group of thirteen men were singled out for death while the majority of soldiers were sentenced to life in prison at the US Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas. The

62 Seg. Vida Henry was the exception. Once the men had realized they had no choice but to head back to camp Henry asked the soldiers under his command to shoot him in the head. When they refused, Henry took his own life by the railroad tracks on the outskirts of Houston. Haynes posits that since Henry was a career soldier who until this point was the model of African American military success he completely understood – more than anyone else – what his punishment would be for leading a rebellion and simply didn’t want to be taken into custody alive only to be killed by the state.

63 The witnesses in the trial re-affirmed the stereotypical White refrain of ‘they all look the same’ through their utter inability to identify even one participate correctly routinely proclaiming their knowledge only to be told they had identified the wrong man.
sentences were decided on November 25th and then sent for review to a single military official. The soldiers were not told of their sentences until December 9th. On that day, the thirteen soldiers who were sentenced to death were informed but were not given a precise date, time, or method for their execution. The men wrote letters to their families and met with clergy waiting for their fate that would come in a few days by the Salado Creek.

Due to the secrecy surrounding the event, the main account of what transpired is from a White soldier C.E. Butzer who told his version to the Houston Chronicle on December 13th. Butzer recounts the role of singing and noting that the men sang the same song at two intervals. The first time it was while they sat on folding chairs having nooses tied around their necks. He heard a hymn “low and soft” and the words “I’m coming home, I’m coming home.” The second time he heard the same song “as if by preconcerted plan” while the men stood on the gallows. There are obvious questions that arise in the analysis of this moment. Did one man start the song as his noose was tied and the others joined in? Or did it begin as a communal action? Had they sung this song before? Was it planned as Butzer hints at? This is all unknown. However, it is easy to imagine the fear that these men faced. The collective performance of the song was a craving to embody something known and the desire to claim subjectivity in a powerless and terrifying situation.

The song that Butzer heard was “Lord, I’m Coming Home” by William J. Kirkpatrick, a composer and Methodist camp musician. Kirkpatrick wrote the hymn for a soloist at his camp meeting who routinely left before the sermon was over. As the story goes, Kirkpatrick became obsessed with trying to get the young man to stay in order to save his soul. One evening, while praying for the young man, Kirkpatrick claimed he was overcome with the words and the melody for what would become, “Lord, I’m Coming Home.” He brought the song to the soloist the next day and asked him to sing it in front of the congregation; he was so overwhelmed he remained for the sermon and accepted Jesus as his savoir
The gospel song was published in *Winning Songs: For Use in Meetings for Christian Meetings or Work* (1892), one of fifty collections of hymns written or edited by Kirkpatrick. It quickly became popular at White and African American camp meetings and churches around the country.

“Lord, I’m Coming Home” is a call to conversion asking the mournful and longing to step towards the altar to be saved. Each of the six stanzas focuses on a desire for salvation. The use of “Home” doubles as god’s love and mercy after a time of great distance and the spiritual salvation of heaven. The distance between the singer and god is sung through the opening lines of the first stanza “I've wandered far away from God” and the second, “I've wasted many precious years.” The third through fifth stanzas recount the sins of the singer and their hope for repentance through God’s “love” and the “word.” The final stanza calls for a new baptism in Jesus’s “cleansing blood” that will “wash” the singer “Whiter than the snow.” The refrain, clearly heard by Butzer, “Coming home, coming home/Nevermore to roam/Open wide Thine arms of love/ Lord, I’m coming home” is repeated after each of the six stanzas to solidify the new spiritual connection between the lost soul and their newfound salvation (Sweney 141).

Although the selection of the song is significant, I will focus on the act of singing as a performance of defiance, resistance, and survival deeply connected to African American performance traditions. Music has frequently been used in the African American tradition as a mode of defiance and a vessel through which oppression can be expressed and exercised. The development of spirituals came directly out of slavery as the themes of Christianity were placed in traditional modes of African performance including call and response and the ring shout. However, White audiences saw only what they wanted to see and the concept of the happy singing slave became part of the stereotypes of blackface minstrelsy. African American intellectual, and former slave, Fredrick Douglas discussed the

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64 The song maintained its reputation. In 1956, African American intellectual Horace Mann Bond spoke at the State Teachers Association in the midst of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in their city. In his speech he recounted his interaction with two death row inmates, Charlie Washington (African American) and Johnnie Birchfield (White), together the three of them sang “Lord, I’m Coming Home” on the way to the death chamber. Bond uses it as an example of vocalizing dignity in the face of a lost cause (Houck 181).
role of music in slave life and disentangled the action of singing from the stereotype of the happy slave, writing:

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness... The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears... The singing of a man cast away upon a desolate island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion. (29)

Douglas’s analogy of the song of slaves as the tears of sorrow crafts a comparison whereby the performance of the song is the tangible and communicable result of the affects of human bondage. In emphasizing the performance of sorrow, Douglas counteracts the use of musicality as a performative device to craft the minstrel stereotype of the happy slave instead advocating for the expression of sorrow as a manifestation of relief, if only temporarily.

This use of sorrow is picked up by W. E. B. Du Bois who further explores the notion of “Sorrow Songs,” in The Souls of Black Folk (1903). These songs, he states, “are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways” (207). Du Bois connects with Douglas’s use of sorrow in naming his “Sorrow Songs” but offers an idea of hope that is absent from Douglas’ description when he writes:

Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope – a faith in the ultimate justice of things... Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their
souls and not by their skins (Du Bois 213-214).

Although the minstrel stereotype of the happy slave was still prevalent, Du Bois’s discussion of “Sorrow Songs” differs from Douglas’s because it focuses not on White listeners to the songs – an abolitionist strategy Douglas uses to connect with White audiences - but on the performative work of the African American singers. Du Bois’s reading of the songs recognizes its sorrow but also emphasizes them as a performance of hope and faith in a future of racial equality. These songs are both a performance of this hope and a rehearsal for the new reality, “insisting on and demonstrating that *something better* is possible” (Chambers-Letson 24).

The performance of “Lord, I’m Coming Home” stands in contrast to the treatment of the soldiers by the Army. These men didn’t ask for pity or beg for mercy from the White men who executed them.\(^6\) Their only request had already been denied. Prior to the trial, as a group, the soldiers had asked that if any of them should receive the death penalty that they wished to be shot by firing squad. This means of death was seen as more noble according to the *Army Field Manual* (1916) which stated that hanging was a “more ignominious than death” (Haynes 160). These men were even denied a proper burial. Families were simply told that their loved ones remains were buried “near the place of execution” and there were no visible markers (Haynes 1). Returning to the Bulterian terminology of the grievable and ungrievable, the men of the 24th were rendered ungrievable as an attempt to deny that their resistance ever occurred.

In collectively singing “Lord, I’m Coming Home” they enacted their own funerary performance of grieving for each other, onlookers, and their executioners. They defiantly served as their own mourners in the absence of their families that had been denied the chance to grieve with them and for them. The War Department hoped all that would be remembered was the price they paid for resistance, their

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\(^6\) Their last words, “Good-bye boys of Company C” were to the White guards who had watched over them and then they softly sung together. Butzer states that after they were dropped from the gallows they didn’t struggle instead they seemed “relaxed in death” (Haynes 5).
deaths, not the actions they took to resist racial violence. However, we know that the final deed of their lives was to stand together in song; a collective that sought, through a mode of performance with deep historical resonance to African American culture, to share in a common experience of sorrow, defiance, and hope.

CONCLUSION

The Nesbit case fundamentally altered how death penalty cases are treated in the military judicial system. The controversy over General Ruckman’s decision to announce the verdict and sentences after they had been carried out and without the approval of higher military authorities followed military protocol but made for shocking publicity. In January of 1918, Ruckman reported that five more soldiers had been sentenced to die in the Washington Case but this time he announced it before their deaths and conferred with the War Department and the White House. Thus began a concerted effort by the African American press and the NAACP to bombard the Wilson administration with requests to intervene on behalf of the men. The White House opted to suspend the death sentences in the Washington Case until the results of the third court-martial, the Tillman Case, were known. In this final case, 11 of the 40 soldiers were sentenced to hang and General Ruckman approved those on May 2, 1918. Undoubtedly, the consistent press coverage was jeopardizing the War Department’s confidence in the morale of African American troops and the White House couldn’t risk losing support for the war effort.

The pressure by the African American press and community organizations forced the War Department to admit that they had handled the death sentences in the Nesbit Case poorly. The Cleveland Gazette wrote the executions were “the South’s Pound of flesh” (Haynes 274). While W.E.B. Du Bois, discussed extensively in chapter four, wrote in The Crisis in January of 1918 that although these men “broke the law” they did so due to respond to:
[T]he shameful treatment which these men, and which we, their brothers, receive all our lives, and which our father received, our children await; and above all we raise our clenched hands against the hundreds of thousands of White murderers, rapists, and scoundrels (Du Bois, “Thirteen” 114).66

In Black Newspapers and America’s War for Democracy, 1914-1920 (2001), William G. Jordan states “most editors in the black press knew that commenting on the mutiny [Houston Riot] would be for them a dangerous proposition and thus treated it gingerly” (94). The role of African American community groups and advocacy groups stepped into try to negotiate leniency for the remaining soldiers while still demonstrating wartime loyalty. The New York chapter of the NAACP circulated and presented a petition with 12,000 signatures to President Wilson asking for clemency for the five soldiers sentenced to death in the second court martial. In response to this and growing controversy, President Wilson issued an order that acknowledged that all three courts-martials were fair but also commuting ten of the sixteen death sentences to life imprisonment (Haynes 323). Additionally, in January of 1918, the War Department passed General Order Number 7 requiring all death penalty military cases to be examined and confirmed by the judge advocate general and the President of the United States, an order still in effect today.

An examination of the Houston Riot offers a compelling case in which to understand the complexities of African American citizenship during the First World War. The violence inflicted on African American communities in a series of riots in 1917 coincided with the ramp up to war that required African American soldiers to accept unfair treatment throughout the country as a price of participation in the military. These two factors created an environment where African Americans were acutely aware of how badly their country needed them to fight in the war effort and how disinterested their country was in fighting for them on the homefront. The War Department’s policy of ignoring race

66 Du Bois’s indignation at the treatment of the 24th by the Army and the War Department did not, at least publically change his belief that war participation was a means of gaining racial equality.
entirely amplified these conditions by asking African Americans to simply accept racial segregation and overlook racist taunts, behavior, language, and actions that would never be allowed to be tolerated if focused on White soldiers. The 24th Infantry knew the racism in Houston would be the worst they had ever experienced but they were not and could not have been prepared for the constant humiliation and physical brutality that took place in Camp Logan, in the city, and by the local police.

The assault on Corporal Baltimore, in particular the rumor of his death, was the critical incident that compelled the men to funnel their rage and frustration into collective action. Even once Baltimore returned alive the men were primed to resist the White supremacy that ruled their lives. The murder of Officer Rufus Daniels and mutilation of his body was a performance of violence that demonstrated the anger towards the police. The performance of “Lord, I’m Coming Home” was an act of resistance that demonstrated the desire to claim subjectivity. Examined through Du Bois’s notion of “Sorrow Songs” the performance falls under a tradition of African American performance that both expresses the affective experiences of oppression and calls forth a desire and hope for better world.

Rioting is a performance of collective rage that disregards conceptions of legality since the law is determined to be useless under the circumstances. In *Ghetto Revolts: Politics of Violence in American Cities (1973)*, sociologists Joe Feagin and Harlan Hahn examine the history of violence in American cities by asking: “What do minorities do when they cannot make significant gains by utilizing the traditional machinery such as electoral politics and the legal system?” (v). They argue that when the answer is rioting it should be seen as a part of historical trajectory and as one of many tactics utilized to alter the “shape of the power structure in American society” building towards full civil and citizenship rights (81-91). Although they are writing about the later half of the 20th century they could be easily be discussing the events in Houston in 1917.

The Houston Riot was an embodied performance of insurgency; a resistive practice that utilized violence as an expression of rage. In a year of brutal White violence, and during a decade that had
already seen a massive upswing in lynching, this moment stood as a public and profound example that African American resistance was emboldened by a new rhetoric of nationalism, of self-determination, and of racial pride. The deaths of African American soldiers would not be easily forgotten and the organizing efforts that were undertaken to save the lives of many of these men provided political and organizing training that would be used for the coming decades to secure rights around the country. Their actions echoed through the African American community as a clear example of how the war would not be a panacea for the country’s racism. It would take more than demonstrations of patriotic loyalty to claim equality in the 20th century. It was this path of activism and action that led to the Black Arts Movements, to the Harlem Renaissance, to the Civil Right Movement of the 1960s, to the Black Panther Party, and to Black Lives Matters. All of which must acknowledge the Houston Riot as a radical performative event that re-defined African American resistance.
CHAPTER 5

THE THEATRICAL VISION OF ALICE DUNBAR-NELSON’S MINE EYES HAVE SEEN:
INTERROGATING THE DILEMMA OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MILITARY SERVICE DURING THE GREAT WAR

Faintly through the thin walls, Chris can hear Lucy and Dan talking about the past. Just outside the door, he knows his brother and sister are waiting for him in their tiny apartment. Chris can hear the ache in their voices as they talk about everything they’ve lost. In silence, he’s been worrying about the future. Since the day he registered for the draft, Chris had hoped this day would never come. When he saw his draft number in the paper he was heartbroken, then angry. It’s not the Germans who lynched his father. It’s not the Germans who burned down their house and forced them north, to this dirty city teeming with people. It’s not the Germans who broke his mother’s heart, who made her weak and sick, who killed her. It’s not the Germans that have taken everything away him and his siblings, orphaned away from the only home they’ve ever known. No, it’s not Germans who anger Chris and it’s not Germans who are to blame for his pain. He can’t go to war. He won’t go to war. Besides, he is the one who is responsible for Lucy and Dan. He is the one who works, who brings home food, and pays the rent. They are need him at home not off in war killing people he doesn't care about. He will just tell Dan and Lucy, they’ll understand.

In Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s Mine Eyes Have Seen (1918), Chris shocks his family and community by proclaiming that despite being drafted, he has no intention of serving and will request an exemption allowing him to take care of his siblings, Lucy and Dan. This complex and open text is the first play to be written, published, and publically performed by an African American during active American participation in the First World War and one of the earliest plays ever published by any African American woman (Egging 32).67 As the one-act progresses, neighbors enter their cramped tenement apartment

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67Scholars such as Nellie McKay and Beatrix Tauman have claimed that Mine Eyes Have Seen was the first play published by an African American woman. This is not the case since the AME Book Concern published two plays by
attempting to convince Chris that it is his duty to serve in the Great War. However, Chris’s experience of racial violence has so damaged his relationship to the nation that he feels no national sense of obligation, loyalty, or patriotism. His arguments against participating in the war are intelligent and convincing, full of anger and disappointment. He cannot imagine dying for a country that he believes does not want him to live. Mine Eyes Have Seen articulates the role that violence plays in separating the individual from the nation and fundamentally re-constituting the relationship. My analysis of the text advocates a new argument about the text that foregrounds the role of performance and the use of ambiguity to allow for multiple readings of the work. It is through this openness of the text, and its varied possibilities in production, that Dunbar-Nelson provides a theatrical vehicle allowing for African American communities to perform their complicated and often times conflicted relationship with the nation.

In this chapter, I will contextualize the play within the life of its creator Alice Dunbar-Nelson and through her work on behalf of the First World War. Next, I situate the text as a work of early 20th century periodical drama contextualizing it through its publication in The Crisis. Then, I analyze the dramatic text and its use of ambiguity advocating that text and performance can be read as an open work. As part of this section, I also discuss the role of The Battle Hymn of the Republic, from which the play takes its title, in the action of the play and how its use in the work demonstrates a continuation of its imbrication with war history and histories of race in an American context. Finally, I discuss performances of the play and offer new archival evidence that demonstrates that more productions occurred than previously argued in scholarship on the play signifying that the play was more popular than previously known. Through examining Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s Mine Eyes Have Seen (1918), I chart the conditions under which the play was written, published, and produced in order to understand how

Katherine D. Chapman Tillman, Fifty Years of Freedom; or From Cabin to Congress (1910) and Aunt Betsy’s Thanksgiving (1914) and, although not published until 1920, the first performance of Angelina Weld Grimke’s anti-lynching play Rachel began in 1916 (Beach 103).
theatre was used to dramatize the conflicts of citizenship and military participation for African Americans during the war.

Through focusing on Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s *Mine Eyes Have Seen* I am considering its multiplicity of meanings on the page as dramatic literature and in theatrical performance. The play centers on a primary question: Will Chris, the youngest brother, respond to his draft notice by reporting for duty or ask for an exemption since he is the only breadwinner for his two siblings? Scholarship on the play has been mixed with most scholars arguing that the play is pro-war encouraging African Americans to serve in the military while other scholars argue it is anti-war. Almost all scholars of the play have decided that Chris ultimately decides to enlist. Throughout this chapter, I will discuss why this assessment is based on faulty assumptions and a lack of consideration for the play’s potential in performance.

However, the majority of evidence, as I will discuss in this chapter, suggests that performances of the work during the Great War were done with a heavy patriotic flare and its publication in *The Crisis*, a magazine that supported the war, is further evidence that it should be read as a pro-war play. I concede that this is an accurate reading of some productions of the play and provides an important context to understanding the play in its time. Despite this, text of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* offers a more nuanced approach than the scholarship on the play suggests. Koritha Mitchell has noted that “a close reading of the script troubles” the certainty with which the majority of scholars have claimed it is a pro-war text (85). Mitchell argues that play:

reveals a deep anxiety on Dunbar-Nelson’s part that she could not consciously articulate while remaining committed to the war effort...this anxiety...

acknowledges, even if unconsciously, that blacks are being asked to make unreasonable wartime sacrifices, given the nation’s treatment of them (85).

I agree with this assessment and explore it more fully in this chapter. Instead of foregrounding the ‘will he or won’t he’ decision I argue that the text is ambiguous and open to interpretations by readers and
performers who would not have access to production histories or personal papers. A discussion of the play in performance is helpful here in anchoring the openness of the play to its potential as a political production that can be manipulated to work in different venues and political climates. To examine *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, along with the other plays and performances in this dissertation, is to ask how theatre reflects and refracts a complex negotiation between race and belonging that connects citizenship, assimilation, and violence during the First World War.

THE PLAYWRIGHT: ALICE DUNBAR-NELSON

Alice Dunbar-Nelson, the playwright of *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, was a prominent activist for African American causes, particularly for African American women, in the first half of the 20th century. *Mine Eyes Have Seen* is a representation of her consideration of the dilemma of African American military service and her support for African American soldiers during the First World War despite their, and her, experiences of racism. Her life experience and writings have a direct influence on the circulation of this text and her motivation to advocate for what she saw as the best mode of garnering racial equality, military service. Dunbar-Nelson’s work for African American soldiers was so well known that she wrote the chapter, “Negro Women in War Work,” in Emmett Scott’s *Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (1919) that has been an essential source in understanding the lives of African American women in this period.

Born in July of 1875, Alice Dunbar-Nelson was the daughter of Patricia Moore, a former slave in Texas who returned to her home in New Orleans to take work as a seamstress and raise her two daughters. Little is known about Alice and her sister Mary Leila’s father, Joseph Moore, who was either a merchant marine or a seaman. Whether it was her father’s lineage or her mother’s Native American ancestry, her pale skin made her part of the mixed-race Creole society of New Orleans (Hull 34-35). Dunbar-Nelson could easily pass for White but she consistently and publicly articulated herself as an
African American woman. (Hull 17). From an early age, she combined what would be the great pursuits of her life: teaching, writing both fiction and non-fiction, and being an advocate for her race, in particular African American women. Although, Dunbar-Nelson wrote several articles for newspapers and magazines and copious letters, she produced only two published volumes of fiction: Violets and Other Tales (1895) and The goodness of St. Rocque and Other Tales in 1899 (Plastas 57). Mine Eyes Have Seen is her only published play.

Despite her work as a fiction and journalistic writer, she is most known for her 1898 marriage to writer Paul Laurence Dunbar, a relationship that fascinated the African American literary and artistic world. This relationship thrust her into the public sphere where she would stay for the rest of her life. Gossip and innuendo followed their tumultuous marriage and eventual break up. Dunbar-Nelson’s primary biographer Gloria Hull writes in Color, Sex & Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance (1987) that Paul was an alcoholic and a heroin addict and Alice was seen as a demanding woman in her time. Whatever the reasons for their riotous union, in 1902 Paul Dunbar viciously physically attacked his wife and Dunbar-Nelson left him. Dunbar used his connections within the African American literary world to spread rumors about his wife’s character and Hull mentions that one particularly “vile” rumor followed her for quite some time (47). This marriage greatly enhanced her public profile, although it often overshadowed her own work. Throughout her lifetime, Dunbar-Nelson was able to use her public persona to bring attention to the causes she cared about partially through her continued association as Paul’s widow, even after she married Robert Nelson in 1916 (Hull 63).

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68 In 1894, at the age of 19, Dunbar-Nelson wrote a biographical sketch to accompany an article she had written that included that she was the “only colored female stenographer and type-writer in this city” and a “prominent and efficient school teacher” writing “excellent articles in behalf of race and sex” (Hull 36).
69 Dunbar-Nelson also wrote for the Chicago’s Daily News, the New York Sun, and the Wilmington Advocate later serving as the associate editor and syndicated columnist (Plastas 57).
70 Hull believes that the rumor was potentially about Alice’s lesbian desires since she had several sexual relationships with women in her life but it is only, at best, a guess. (Hull 47).
The domestic abuse she suffered in 1902 drove Dunbar-Nelson to take a position at Howard High School in Wilmington, Delaware where she could relocate with her sister and mother in a large and thriving African American community away from the growing popularity of her husband and his work. This African American high school is where she worked until she was fired for her political work in 1921 (Hull 66). She was highly involved in political advocacy and activism including working to promote the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill in 1918. In response to the disappointment of its failure to pass Congress she registered thousands of African Americans to vote in order to successfully unseat Delaware Representative Caleb R. Layton who voted against the bill. Dunbar-Nelson consistently advocated for the rights of women and particularly against the erasure of African American women’s voices in discussions of suffrage, a fight she began participating in 1915. Dunbar-Nelson held office in the Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs and helped to craft the “Platform of the Colored Women of American” at the Tuskegee Institute in July of 1920 and became the first African American woman to be a member of the Delaware Republican State Committee in 1920 (Plastas 66-71). Alice Dunbar-Nelson continued to be a passionate activist for women’s political participation and African American causes until her death at 60 in 1935. Her public persona allowed her greater access and a louder voice in the issues that mattered to her, including the role of African Americans in the First World War.

ALICE DUNBAR-NELSON AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Alice Dunbar-Nelson primarily work was political and social activist for African American soldiers; Mine Eyes Have Seen is an outgrowth of that work. She was an activist in The Circle for Negro War Relief but she wanted to go France and help soldiers more directly on the warfront, requests were denied multiple times. On the homefront, she and other African American female service workers wrote letters, knit, raised money, and staffed integrated and segregated military camps. Dunbar-Nelson saw
herself as helping African American soldiers but as a public figure her war service was of great value to the military.

Dunbar-Nelson’s First World War work began in Jan 1918 when she founded a chapter of the Circle for Negro War Relief. In her papers at the University of Delaware is included a letter dated January 18, 1918 from Mrs. Hapgood of The Circle for Negro War Relief asking “Alice” to start the chapter in Wilmington, Delaware. Hapgood writes, “I am especially happy to have this offer of help to the Circle coming from you because I know just what influence you have and what you can do. Wont [sic] you start a unit there?” (Hapgood, “Letter”) Dunbar-Nelson accepted her request. In her chapter, “Negro Women in War Work” in Emmett J. Scott’s Official History of the American Negro in the World War (1919), Dunbar-Nelson writes The Circle for Negro War Relief created chapters around the country for “the purpose of promoting the welfare of Negro soldiers and their dependent families as they might be affected by the emergencies of war” (388). Dunbar-Nelson’s Wilmington chapter was one of sixty that focused their work on the specific needs of their local community in addition to general needs of patriotic knitting and letter writing to soldiers (Dunbar-Nelson “Negro Women in War Work” 388).

Under the auspices of her work as leader of her local chapter she organized a Flag Day parade on June 14, 1918 through the streets of Wilmington, Delaware. Melinda Plastas’s in A Band of Noble Women: Radical Politics in the Women’s Peace Movement (2011) states that the parade drew around 6000 African Americans and was described by the Philadelphia Tribune as the “greatest day in the history of colored people... where the loyalty of the Race to the American flag was the gist of many brilliant and patriotic addresses” (60). Titled “Colored Patriotic Demonstration” the massive parade created a dynamic performance of African American loyalty and war support. Due to her work with The Circle for Negro War Relief, including the parade, Dunbar-Nelson was selected as one of fifteen

Unfortunately, there is very little information on what occurred during the parade. None of the many texts I have encountered on Dunbar-Nelson expand its performative dimensions. This would be an area for future archival research in papers of African American elites in proximity to Delaware.
women as a field representative of the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense (WCCND). From August to October in 1918 she organize patriotic and wartime relief efforts with other African American women across the country.

Despite this honor with the WCCND, she truly wanted to go overseas to aid African American troops in France but was rejected by the committee. She next asked if the Philadelphia Public Ledger, where she sometimes published, would send her as a war journalist but she was told “it would be impossible” for them to send another writer to France. Dunbar-Nelson believed it was racism that kept her from her desire to be of greater service (Plastas 68). In “Negro Women in War Work,” Dunbar-Nelson wrote of women passing to work on the battlefield describing that “300 colored nurses were on the battlefield, though their complexion disguised their racial identity” and she wrote her 1921 poem, “I sit and stew” about frustration over the racism that was ubiquitous during the war (Dunbar-Nelson “Negro Women” 379).72

Even though Dunbar-Nelson was clearly frustrated by her inability to go overseas she worked diligently to support African Americans serving in the war. Her service work caught the attention of major local and national organization as well as average African American women who were inspired. Miss. Hazel B. McDaniel wrote to Dunbar-Nelson on August 30, 1918 to ask where she was most needed to help with the war effort. McDaniel explained to Dunbar-Nelson that “she was compelled to enter this field for two reasons: first to serve a democracy which may some day realize that the negro is one of its important factors; second to serve my people” (McDaniel “Letter”). This letter, saved with Dunbar-Nelson’s personal papers, demonstrates her influence as a public figure while also providing insight into the reasons, at least one, African American woman decided to support the war effort.

72 It was this experience with racism that eventually changed her political philosophy turning her into a public advocate for peace. In a 1930 speech she said, “Clear-eyed, the Negro stands now and sees war for what it is - an economic conflict. Greed and capitalism, reaching out to acquire more and yet more - and little ones of the earth, the peasant and the proletarian - and the mass of negroes is ... the infinitesimal grains of black powder which fire the Bertha of commerce” (Plastas 68).
McDaniel wanted Dunbar-Nelson to know that her desire for service was sincere. Her first reason was aspirational as she connects her service to the nation with her hope that it will one day acknowledge the worth of African Americans. Her second reason focused on the good of serving African Americans exclusively. This one letter presents a small but compelling example of how wartime service for African Americans was not solely about national loyalty but importantly about service to the race. McDaniel’s letter helps to complicate any simplistic notions of loyalty and service. When placed in the context of Dunbar-Nelson’s wartime service Mine Eyes Have Seen become one important aspect of her service to African Americans during the First World War. Her patriotic work for the war effort also corresponds to the political strategy of many African American elites, discussed in the next section, who felt that military participation would demonstrate loyalty and valor and provide an impetus for increased civil rights and liberties for African Americans. The publication of Mine Eyes Have Seen in The Crisis, edited by Du Bois, demonstrates a connection between this work and this political strategy; however, Dunbar-Nelson leaves the text open to interpretation allowing for the work of other activists with differing opinions to engage with the play.

THE PUBLICATION OF MINE EYES HAVE SEEN IN THE CRISIS OF APRIL 1918

Editor W. E. B. Du Bois published the play in the April 1918 issue of The Crisis, the official magazine of the nascent NAACP, recently organized in 1909. The Crisis founded by Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, who edited the magazine until 1934, and Oswald Garrison Villard, J. Max Barber, Charles Edward Russell, Kelly Miller, W.S. Braithwaite, and M. D. Maclean began in 1910 had an initial circulation of 1000 gaining 15,000 in its first year alone.73 Readership rose steadily and by 1919 it had an average readership of 75,000 and 100,000 (Moon 321). The influence of W.E.B. Du Bois as a writer, historian, and thinker on race in the 20th century cannot be overstated. His legacy as the editor of The Crisis demonstrates a

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73 Its original title was The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races.
remarkable commitment to providing a consistent locus for African American political engagement and artistic and cultural expression. In this section, I discuss the publication of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* in the magazine in order to place the work within the specific world of African American readership in April 1918. The publication of *Mine Eyes Have Seen in The Crisis* is not incidental to its history but rather a constitutive element of how the work needs to be analyzed in the period.

*The Crisis* is often seen as a pivotal instrument of the Harlem Renaissance, the African American cultural movement that began just after the First World War. Part of this is derived from its early goal to circulate literary and artistic works that promoted African American writers and artists. In its first issue, Du Bois outlined the goals of the magazine:

...it will record important happenings and movements in the world which bear on the great problem of inter-racial relations, and especially those which affect the Negro-American. Secondly, it will be a review of opinion and literature, recording briefly books, articles, and important expressions of opinions in the White and colored press on the race problem. Thirdly, it will publish a few short articles. Finally, its editorial pages will stand for the rights of men, irrespective of color or race, for the highest ideals of American democracy, and for reasonable but earnest and persistent attempts to gain these rights and realize these ideals... (*The Crisis “Editorial” Nov 1910*)

The content of the magazine consistently crafted a conversation on current events through opinion pieces, journalism, and creative work modeling a fusion of racial politics, artistic, and cultural achievement. Although, Du Bois was active in the promotion of African American theatre there were only a small number of plays published in *The Crisis*. Between the first issue in 1910 and Du Bois’s last as editor in 1934, only seventeen plays were published (Woodley 68). As such, *Mine Eyes Have Seen* provides a significant lens into the kind of theatre that Du Bois felt would speak to his audience – by
African American authors, for the African American community, and easily producible by amateurs in schools, churches, and a community centers.

As such, *Mine Eyes Have Seen* should be contextualized as published work within the magazine since it is a literary and cultural product that demonstrates how African American communities deliberated their role in the nation during the First World War. These arguments were positioned within the context of the political and philosophical world of the magazine in April of 1918. Examining the play as an aspect of print culture at the turn of the 20th century also allows for a discussion of the play as part of a trend in the printing of plays in periodicals.

Susan Harris Smith argues in *Plays in Periodicals, 1890-1918* that plays in American periodicals are an overlooked body of dramatic literature “central to the American project of self-conscious class and nation formation” (xii). Her text analyzes the popularity of the form examining over 125 dramatic texts in fourteen American general interest periodicals published in her time frame (“Preface”). Her central argument is that these plays were an “important site of public deliberation, contestation, and intellectual circulation” (xi). In bringing in Smith Harris’ argument about the importance of the genre of dramatic literature in periodicals, I advocate for the significance of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* as a dramatic text published in *The Crisis*. Unfortunately, she fails to include a discussion of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* in her study, despite it being in her time period, because she discounts the import of plays published in *The Crisis* for a number of reasons.

Smith Harris limits her study by excluding plays that they were written for amateurs and that were published in “special interest” magazines, her example being *Ladies Home Journal* for a primarily female audience (43). It would be plausible, but still a bit narrow, to argue that her text simply cannot encompass a study of periodicals that reached out to a less “general” audience. However, instead of simply speaking of the limitations as pragmatic Smith Harris justifies her choice by under-valuing these works. She argues that plays in “special interest” periodicals or for amateurs “did not engage with
serious cultural issues affecting class and nation formation” (43). Although, Harris Smith certainly foregrounds class and nation rather than race, her claim that plays like Mine Eyes Have Seen or other works in special interest magazine such as The Crisis, “did not engage with serious cultural issues affecting class and nation formation” is not accurate (43). Issues such as lynching and mob violence, segregation, racism and colorism, poverty, labor and workforces issues, and unequal civil liberties deeply affected both class and nation formation by articulating that African Americans should be fully and equally regarded as citizens.

Aside from falling into the category of “special interest,” Mine Eyes Have Seen, as well as a wealth of plays in periodicals for an African American readership, would also be excluded because they are primarily written for a non-commercial actors and venues. Koritha Mitchell argues in Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays Performance, and Citizenship 1890-1930 (2011) that to discount the very intentional decision to write for an amateur audience is to miss the point of the political and social goals of the many of these plays. She advocates that these many plays in African American periodicals were purposely created for performance in schools, churches, and private homes in order to create what she calls “community-centered cultural work” (Mitchell 13). Bringing the work of Smith Harris in conversation with Mitchell demonstrates that Mine Eyes Have Seen represents the processes of “public deliberation, contestation, and intellectual circulation” that Smith discusses as common in plays in periodicals (xi) and Mitchell’s contention that plays in African American periodicals were “...articulating a vision for black identity” (12). In examining Mine Eyes Have Seen through its presence in The Crisis, I argue that text is deeply connected to the political philosophy of the magazine and has been understudied as a part of the history of dramatic works in periodicals.
CHARACTERS IN *MINE EYES HAVE SEEN*

To further expand on the importance of the context of the play as a published work in *The Crisis* I examine the accompanying material seen with the text in order to examine how Dunbar-Nelson crafts the world of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* for the reader or those who are encounter the text as a performer. The text is supported by illustrations by Laura Wheeler who draws the character of Lucy and the final scene from the play. Wheeler’s image of Lucy is concerned, sad, and a bit frumpy. While, the drawing of the final scene is at the final moment with Chris alone in the center of the apartment.

The central characters in the family are the siblings: Lucy, Dan, and Chris. However, Dunbar-Nelson lists her characters not in order of appearance, alphabetically, or a logical order of centrality to the text but in order of the traditional gender roles of a patriarchal family. The first listed is Dan, the eldest brother, who is described as “The Cripple.” The second listed is Chris, who is described as “The Younger Brother” and is the central character of the drama. Their sister, Lucy is listed third as “The Sister.” Dan’s status as the older brother is supplanted by his status as “The Cripple” in ways that other scholars of the text have investigated, particularly through the lens of masculinity (Dunbar-Nelson 271).74

Dunbar-Nelson provides that Dan and Lucy are “brown-skinned” and from the context it is clear that both Chris and his girlfriend, Julia, are both African American. Race is really only a primary factor in the character descriptions when the characters are not African American. The family’s neighbor Mrs. O’Neill is listed as “An Irish Neighbor” as emphasized by her Irish dialectic written into the text. In a similar way, another neighbor Jake is listed as “A Jewish boy.” Even from the characters descriptions Dunbar-Nelson demonstrates that the community in which the African American family lives is multiracial. The use of an Irish and a Jewish neighbor also allows for readers and performers to quickly place more marginal characters into the realm of racial and ethnic stereotype since the length of the

74 See Egging 40-47.
play prohibits the fully dimensionality of these characters. Dunbar-Nelson uses character monikers, “An Irish Neighbor” or “The Cripple,” to enhance the world of the play by balancing individual characters with seemingly universal characteristics. It would be too extreme to argue that the text is allegorical but in its use of general characteristics Dunbar-Nelson optimizes her time in the one-act by using generalizations about characters. Dunbar-Nelson also uses relationships and professions as defining characteristics for peripheral characters. Julia is listed as “Chris’ Sweetheart,” while Bill Harvey is “A Muleteer,” and Cornelia Lewis, “A Settlement Worker” both linked by their professions (Dunbar-Nelson 271).

Whether it be the traditional patriarchal family, race, relationship, or profession the characters descriptions should be seen as practical instruments that reveal the priorities of the text. These short character descriptions provide instruction to the reader or director to think about characters as both individuals and more general ideas of characters. The reader of the play will be able to quickly understand the characters through their simple descriptions. Since the play was written for amateur performers these descriptions are practical for casting, acting, and understanding of the text for less experienced directors and actors.

SETTING AND THE GREAT MIGRATION IN MINE EYES HAVE SEEN

Dunbar-Nelson links her text to the Great Migration of African Americans to the North in order to craft a work that depicts the current socio-economic climate for many in the community. The setting for Mine Eyes Have Seen “a manufacturing city in the Northern part of the United States” (271). By using an unspecific Northern city, Dunbar-Nelson again opts to provide more general information to the reader allowing for the work to be set in Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia or a great number of Northern cities. Information provided in the scenic description for the first scene reveals that Dan is “about thirty” and Lucy is “about twenty.” This means they were born around 1888 and 1898 with Chris just slightly
younger (271). This is the demographic of the sons and daughters of freed slaves leaving the South for the possibility of economic prosperity and freedom from violence.\footnote{What has become known as The Great Migration was a mass exodus from the agrarian South to the urbanized North from roughly 1915 to 1921. During this period, it is estimated that by 1921 700,000 African American had uprooted themselves North, rising to 1.5 million by 1930. Decreased immigration due to the war and xenophobia cause a need for additional workers in these major Northern and Midwestern cities and African Americans eagerly used the opportunity to escape the segregation and oppression in the South (Lentz-Smith 34).}

The use of an urban Northern city not only provides temporal and spatial insight into the text but also is a pivotal aspect of the family’s experience. As the play progresses it becomes clear that these young adults are alone in an alien city. Their father was murdered in the South by a White mob while their mother died from a broken heart and exhaustion in the North. Dunbar-Nelson, a product of living in both Louisiana and the Northeast, does not demonize the South nor idealized the North. Her main characters are orphaned because of violence against their race in the South and the horrors of urbanity and industrialization in the North. By losing a parent to each location, the South and the North, these siblings have to rely on each other and a small community of equally isolated outsiders to the White elite establishment.

SETTING THE SCENE

All scenes in the play take place in the kitchen of the tenement that serves as the home for the central family. Dunbar-Nelson’s stage directions state that all details should “emphasize sordidness” (271). By locating her play in a dirty tenement, Dunbar-Nelson immediately communicates the class and living conditions of her characters. These crowded multi-family lodgings were relegated to sub-sections of the city and placed working poor families of different backgrounds in close quarters. It also demonstrates Dunbar-Nelson’s desire to depict the struggle of African American young people trying to craft a life for themselves without the roots of their geographic home, without connections to their family, and at the verge of a difficult dilemma about citizenship and their role in the war.
In describing the characters in the opening scene, Dunbar-Nelson writes that Dan is in a “rude imitation of a steamer chair,” a common treatment for patients with ailments so they could recline and reserve their strength. Lucy is “frail,” “slight” with a “pathetic face” and a “slight limp” who is busily preparing lunch for her brothers, a behavior that fits with the traditional gender roles of the period (271). Her description gives the impression that she is almost too weak to work but she keeps going dragging her injured leg around the apartment. Dunbar-Nelson begins her play with two characters, Dan and Lucy, who are presented as physically broken but they continue to have their dignity and work for the good of the family.

The temporal reality of the text is both historical and current. Dunbar-Nelson describes the time as: “Now (271).” In its initial publication, now would be 1918. However, Dunbar-Nelson did not publish her text with 1918 as the time instead by making the year of the play as always now. Certainly, considering that is was written for a periodical and for amateurs is may be reasonable to assume that it did not occur to Dunbar-Nelson that her play would be performed past the context of the war itself however, her choice of “now” instead of 1918 opens the text up to comparisons between the past and the present.

OPENING WITH THE PAST: LUCY AND DAN

The opening scene is a pivotal moment as it provides expository for the background of the family, most importantly the racial violence they have experienced. It is a crucial moment in order to understand why Chris does not feel any affective belonging to the nation but instead rejects the call for military service due to his experience of racial violence. The scene begins with Lucy preparing lunch for Chris who is running late. His tardiness incites feelings of instability, fear, and vulnerability. The exposition of their family background is delivered through the opposing lens of Lucy, the nostalgic view, and Dan, the pragmatic view. The dialogue functions as dueling monologues in which each character
presents what they remember about their home in the South. Lucy recalls the peaceful home, domesticity, and family life. Dan remembers violence, death, and destruction. In this moment, Lucy and Dan discuss three different primary institutions of the past: the home, their parents, and Dan’s formerly whole body. Each part represents an aspect of what has been lost. Lucy begins her discussion of the home:

wasn’t it better in the old days when we were back home—in the little house with the garden, and you and father coming home night and mother getting supper, and Dan and I studying lessons (271)...

She nostalgically recalls the ideal family life focusing on the domestic peace and productivity of their former home where they “didn’t have to eat and live in the kitchen (271).” In response, Dan reminds her that the life she remembers so fondly was full of violence including “the notice posted on the fence for us to leave town because niggers had no business having such a decent home (271).” Lucy refuses to hear Dan instead focusing on “the wonderful books” they had and how she planned for her future. Dan reminds her again that these plans literally and metaphorically went up in smoke as a White mob burned their home.

Once the memory of the home has been acknowledged, Lucy confronts her memories of their deceased parents. When she notes the kindness of her father, Dan interjects that he was “shot down like a dog for daring to defend his home (272).” Lucy recalls that her mother called her “Little Brown Princess” while Chris plainly says that their mother, who brought them North, died of pneumonic and heartbreak “in this bleak climate (272).” Lucy still refuses to hear Dan as he reminds her of the reality of the violence and loss they have experience in the destruction of their home and the death of both of their parents.

Lucy’s desire to remember their family and home idealistically is only broken in the face of her brother’s injuries. She cannot block out her reality as she can with her past since she must face her
brother, his injuries, and the pain he feels over his loss of mobility. Lucy recalls their experiences of working in the factories in North saying, “That when you---” but she trails off as Dan again asserts the reality of the situation, “Maimed for life in a factory of hell! Useless-Useless-broken on the wheel.” The stage directions indicate that his voice breaks as Lucy comes out of her trance and runs to Dan, “poor Danny, poor danny, forgive me. I’m selfish.” Dan responds, “Not selfish, Little Sister, merely natural (272).”

Conceptions of the ‘natural’ are employed in dual ways in this moment. Lucy’s selfishness is seen as natural because of her sex, as a woman she is assumed to possess a seemingly natural proclivity to ignore anything but the domestic sphere. It is also natural that Lucy would want to forget the pain of the last few years and linger in the nostalgia of the time before they lost their home and their parents. In this brief expositional scene, Lucy and Dan explore the relationship between violence, trauma, and memory. Lucy’s desire to selectively remember their past is not uncommon for people who have suffered experiences of extreme violence and trauma. The First World War would bring about the popularity of the term “shell-shock” to describe the condition of soldiers who suffered a variety of mental and physical ailments following the brutal trauma of warfare. There was no equivalent in the period for an equivalent of “shell-shock” in a racial context, no term that so attempts combine the physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual ways a person responds and changes – both temporary and permanently – as a victim, witness, or survivor of specifically extreme racial violence. In The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration (2011) Isabel Wilkerson crafts an in-depth narrative of Great Migration as a diasporic journey of refugees being driven from their homes by acts of extreme violence and its resulting economic instability. Although Wilkerson does not use the term diaspora or trauma when discussing her subjects she foregrounds the expressions of nostalgia, similar to Lucy’s, and the great silences that haunt the books. In her book talks she explains that it look eleven years for her to complete the text not because of a challenge in finding sources but instead due to the
many family members of the central figures who quite simply were reticent to recollect the violence they endured. At her talk at the University of Louisville on March 2, 2016, Wilkerson discussed that these painful silences motivated her to continue in writing the book because several years into the project she was just starting to gain the trust of her subjects. Lucy, if she were a real person, could be a subject of Wilkerson’s book who had survived through forgetting. Dan, both by personality and by his injured condition, is a physical reminder of all they have lost. His self-description of “useless” ties together traditional modes of masculinity with his desire to use his labor to support his family economically. In the face of his perceived emasculation and the harm done by the supposed safe space of the North, Lucy is forced to remember and re-live their experience with violence.

In this opening scene, through establishing the experience of being African Americans in the US in the period, Dunbar-Nelson creates the foundation on which Chris’s decision to become a soldier relies. His understanding of his civic obligations to the nation cannot be bifurcated from experiences of racism. Dunbar-Nelson’s work demonstrates that any expectation that African Americans would ignore the violence inflicted against them and their limitations on citizenship as they contemplate national military service is erroneous. Violence becomes the foundational experience of African American citizenship instead of rights and affective belonging. Notions of gender, sexuality, immigrant status, religion, ability, class all play a role in how this violence is enacted and how it is received but racial violence and inequality are the primary factors in this play. This opening scene presents unpunished violence by Whites enacted at every level from the individual, the White mob, the factory, and the draft becoming a constitutive aspect of how African Americans experience their citizenship. Dunbar-Nelson anchors her text about the dilemma of civic obligations through an opening scene that recalls multiple kinds of violences including more direct experience and more indirect like economic hardship and institutional racism. These violence experiences are primary in her vision of how African Americans feel towards the nation they are being asked to kill or die for.
THE DILEMMA OF THE DRAFT: CHRIS COMES HOME

In this section I discuss Chris’s revelation to his siblings that he has been drafted and his proclamation that he will refuse to join the military. Chris’s entrance communicates quickly that something has occurred. He enters “roughly and unceremoniously,” and seeing his siblings huddled together he “shrugs his shoulders” and “seats himself at the table...his face dropping on his hand (272).” Lucy brings Chris his lunch but reminds him of his tardiness. Chris responds, “I have bad news. My number was posted today... I’m drafted (272).” In shock, Lucy drops the food proclaiming, “They won’t take you away from us! And shoot you down, too?... (272)” Immediately, Lucy links the death of her father to the potential death of her brother. Her connection between the death of her father and Chris’s draft notice demonstrates that the fear of violence is also connected to the separation of family members and communities. One of the primary modes of dismantling African and African American communities through American history is the forcible destruction of families and kinship connections, from the horrors of chattel slavery to current unpunished police violence, drugs laws, and incarnation rates. By linking together these events Lucy taps into the fragility and vulnerability of African American family life.

Chris proclaims, as he strikes his hand on the table, “I’m not going (272).” This moment of defiance is profound and radical since any open criticism of the military could be prosecuted. Slowly over the course of the text Chris’s reason for his refusal change slightly as he moves from using his family as the primary reason to a more direct discussion of racism but even in this moment he is frank about his lack of affective belonging to the US. Dan immediately declared in shock, “Your Duty-“ but Chris quickly interjects, “is here with you. I owe none elsewhere. I’ll pay none (272).” Chris is the only person working and his contribution is essential to their economic survival. His addition that he does not “owe none elsewhere” is a profound distancing of himself as a subject of the nation. He advocates a
family-centric citizenship that overrides conceptions of national loyalty and obligation. He also sets up an idea of exchange, having been given nothing from the government; he owes nothing and thus should not pay with his service and potentially his life. It is an equation that is fundamentally uneven and he refuses to participate.

Although, Chris argues that his motives are primarily economic, he cannot help but demonstrate his anger at the racism he has experienced. He asks why must he go and fight for a nation that left him without “a fragment of an education, and no chance...” and attempts to convince Lucy by asking her, “What is there in life for you?” It is clear that Chris has already made his mind up about his choice before he enters his family’s apartment (272). Lucy’s response is consistent with the first scene; she is fearful. However, Dan who earlier recalled the racial violence his family experienced does not believe these actions have any relationship to the obligation towards military service if the country calls. Dan is the first to present a conception of citizenship where the experience of violence at the hands of Whites can be separated from duty.

BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE: THE COMMUNITY JOINS IN

All the characters of the play become invested in Chris’s choice. Through the play, they present their own arguments about why they think Chris should enlist. In this section, I historically contextualize the arguments for enlistment and for exemption and how they are constructed in the text. As discussed in chapter three and this chapter, African Americans responded in different ways to calls for the wartime participation including volunteer enlistment, draft enlistment, asking for an exemption, not registering for the draft, and not responding to being called when drafted. According to Christopher Capozzola, the war was deeply unpopular with many of the national population (8). The passage of the Sedition Act and Espionage Act made public anti-war displays rare but they did still occur, including that of Socialist party leader Eugene V. Debs who served almost three years in jail for prosecution under the
Espionage Act. Within the African American community, there were very few public conscious objectors,\textsuperscript{76} pacifists, or even openly anti-war African American elites (Capozzola 64). Capozzola notes that there were only a small number of African American Quakers who registered as conscious objectors and few African American socialists who spoke out against the war (64).

Socialists internationally were vocally opposed to the war but American socialists had to contend with the limitations of free speech imposed by government in the Sedition and Espionage Acts. In one example of public African American socialists, A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen, editors a magazine called the \textit{Messenger}, garnered the attention of the government for their third issue in the summer of 1918. An undercover Bureau of Investigation agent (the precursor to the FBI) arrested Randolph and Owens at an interracial socialist meeting in Cleveland. They were arrested under charges of violating the Espionage Act in their publication for writing about, ironically, undercover government operatives at Socialist and NAACP meetings. Randolph and Owens argued that anti-German propaganda and the war were diversions from the real issues of African American inequality and class oppression. The government called this “Pro-Germanism among the Negroes” in their arrest warrants (Ellis 110). The two men received legal counsel and bail funds from the Socialist Party but the case was never brought to trial. Randolph later wrote that he had the impression that the government let them go because of racist assumptions. Randolph wrote that the government just “couldn’t believe we were old enough, or, being black, smart enough, to write that red-hot stuff in the \textit{Messenger}. There was no doubt that the White Socialists were using us, that they had written the stuff for us (Ellis 112).” Although, the government attempted to silence African American socialists during the war years Chris echoes their beliefs in his anti-war arguments.

\textsuperscript{76} To be considered a conscious objector during the war one had to have a religious conviction prior to the war and reject all wars. As the policy applied one would need to be a member of a religion that had these views, the obvious example would be the traditionally pacifist Quakers, not simply a religious person who harbored these views (Capozzola 70).
I begin with Dan’s point of view and how he advocates for his brother to fight in the war. Dan argues, as the stage directions indicate “half rising in his chair,” “Hush! Have I come to this, that I should be the excuse, the woman’s skirts for a slacker to hide behind? (“Mine Eyes Have Seen 272.”)

Masculinity, again, plays a key role in the framing of this debate as Dan presents himself as the “woman’s skirts” and Chris the “slacker (272).” Both Dan and Chris are re-positioned as feminized in this metaphor; an attack that Dan knows will engender a response from Chris. However, it is also pivotal that Dan uses the term “excuse,” he does not believe that family obligation is Chris’s reason for wanting to claim exception from the draft. He is driving Chris to articulate a stronger reason for his desire.

In response, Chris re-asserts that he is needed at home but finally declares a stronger anti-war reason:

I’m no slacker when I hear the real call of duty. Shall I desert the cause that needs me – you- Sister – home? For a fancied glory? Am I to take up the cause of a lot of kings and politicians who play with men’s souls, as if they are cards – dealing them out, a hand here, in the Somme – a hand there, in Palestine – a hand there, in the Alps—a hand there, in Russia – and because the cards don’t match well, call it a misdeal, gather them up, throw them in the discard, and call for a new deal of a million human, suffering soul?

And I must be the Deuce of Spades? (272)

Chris asserts that he is not slacking on his presumed duty as a man but rather that his manhood should be judged by his devotion to his family. This is supported by his argument against the war, a card game where soldiers are traded and discarded without consideration by powerful world players. Chris does not see any glory in war and thus does not associate it with duty, obligation, or service. Again, Dunbar-Nelson has Chris say incredibly radical words. Her decision to place Chris’s speech in his home surrounded by his family provides him with a domestic protection. The play within The Crisis also added a dual layer of protection as we might imagine African American readers would feel for Chris’s dilemma.
The central focus on the family is disrupted when a neighbor enters the apartment to voice his opinions on the situation. Jake, a “Hebraic youth,” overhears Chris’s speech and enters their apartment proclaiming that Chris “is talking like the men at the social meeting (272).” Dan and Lucy are surprised but Chris “defiantly” responds, “Well?” Dunbar-Nelson craftily suggests that both Chris and Jake have been to Socialist meetings (272). Dunbar-Nelson does not elaborate on this point but, as discussed previously, they were anti-war. Jake also confirms that getting an exemption is “Easy-if you don’t want to go (273).” He communicates that it would be possible for Chris to get an exemption and thus there is a legal mechanism through which Chris can get permission to not serve in the war. Dunbar-Nelson uses this as a plot point to strengthen the choice Chris has to make since he can reasonably not go in order to care for his family. It is presented that he has a choice.

In this moment Jake is on Chris’s sides but the columns are quickly balanced with the entrance of Mrs. O’Neill “An Irish Neighbor.” Mrs. O’Neill is the only character that is written in a specific dialect, her thick Irish brogue written, to demonstrate her immigrant status. She enters to tell Lucy that there’s a sale on potatoes but hearing the conversation she confides in Lucy, “Chris has to go to war (273).” Her character is closest to the characterization of a typical working Irish immigrant in dramatic literature of the period, including having five hunger children to feed. She is presented as profoundly sad and in “deep mourning” due to the death of her husband who was fighting in Europe (273).

The entrance of Jake and Mrs. O’Neill shifts the focus of the conflict from a small family dispute to a broader discussion of wartime loyalty. They are both insiders and outsiders in the world of the family. As neighbors they are a part of the world of the family but not of it and as undesirable Whites (Irish and Jewish) they have experienced racism but from a very different history. Dunbar-Nelson creates a multi-cultural world of poverty and a shared understanding of struggle and adversity. Gloria Hull has argued that their presence represents the NAACP’s increased move towards interracialism (72). In addition, Egging notes that the use of both African American and White characters demonstrate the
complexities of the issues of war in a broader context with particular emphasis on their almost total support of anti-Germanism (48). Instead of making singular the experience of African Americans, Dunbar-Nelson places them in conversation with the experiences of other marginalized groups creating a vision for an integrated community that relies and respects each other. She even has her character draw comparisons between their experiences of persecutions and that of the African American characters.

Jake supports Chris’s analysis of the war by critiquing the racism of the state by creating a parallel between the persecution of Jews in Russia and the treatment of African Americans in the US. Jake argues that African Americans are being treated like “Jews in Russia,” and that “[there] isn’t a wrong you can name that your race has endured that mine has not suffered, too.” Instead of thinking about the veracity of this claim it is more useful to think about its utility in the text. The comparison concertizes a universal idea of oppression but disregards the specificity of the African Americans experience of racial inequality. Depending on one’s political ideology Jake could become a less appealing character since he so easily conflates two experiences of violence or a more appealing character since he recognizes a corollary between the two groups and presents hope for the future. Jake argues, “But there’s a future...we younger ones must be in that future—ready for it... (273)” Jake’s does not inspire Chris who responds, “Future, Where? Not in this country? Where? (273)” This moment quickly ends as Julia, his former girlfriend, enters in fear that Chris might be going to war. He repeats his refrain now directly to the new character on stage, “I’m not going, Julia (273).”

Hearing Chris once again assert this choice, Dan seeks a new tactic to convince his brother of his duty and obligation. Dan, who earlier in the play served as the pragmatic voice of the realities of White violence, now seems to idealize the history of military service for African American men:

Dan: Our men have always gone, Chris. They went in 1776.

Chris: Yes, as slaves. Promised a freedom they never got.
Dan: No, gladly, and saved the day, too, many a time. Ours was the first blood shed on the altar of National liberty. We went in 1812, on land and sea. Our men were through the struggles of 1861.

Chris: When the Nation was afraid not to call them. Didn’t want’em at first.

Dan: Never mind; they helped work out their own salvation. And they were there in 1898 –

Chris: Only to have their valor disputed.

Dan: ---And they were at Carrizal, my boy, and now--- (273)

Dan seeks to connect service in the First World War to a history of African American military service creating a lineage to which Chris can become a part. But as Dan presents each conflict Chris’s knowledge of the racism in that moment is presented. Although Chris is not convinced by his brother’s argument, Dan does allude to a history of African American military service articulated through self-determination. He supports this with his example of Crispus Attucks, the first casualty of the Boston Massacre in 1770, mythically recalled as the first American death of the Revolutionary War. Dan articulates that African American soldiers were key in advocating and establishing their own self-emancipation during the Civil War. He continues his lineage in the 20th century including Spanish American War of 1898 and the Battle of Carrizal in 1916. Dan is not at all interested or seemingly troubled the racism that Chris discusses instead focusing on the presence of African American men at these events. Dan believes that the visibility of these troops in war will prove to White men that they, and by extension all African Americans, deserve to be treated as full citizens of the nation. Chris is unconvinced. This allows Dunbar-Nelson to position Chris between multiple positions on the war and for her to introduce pro-war and anti-war arguments. It is this balance of positions that opens the text up for interpretation in performance.
THE FRONTLINE COMES TO THE HOMEFRONT

In this section, I discuss the arrival of Harvey, “a muleteer” on leave from the European front to gather more supplies. He presents the only perspective of the war based on personal experience. He incites a discussion of the realities of warfare and describes the German brutalities he has witnessed. The debate between the brothers momentarily pauses as Harvey and Mrs. O’Neill discuss the atrocities of warfare. Harvey describes the war as “Mules, rough-necks, wires, mud, dead bodies, stench, terror!...Its a great life—not. But I’m off again, first chance (273).” Mrs. O’Neill responses to this evocative report, “They’re brutes, eh?...[whispering] They maimed my man, before he died (273).” Harvey responds simply, “They crucified children (273).” It is no surprise that the play uses the torture of children as the most vile of actions of Germans. Stories circulated about the brutality of the Hun army consistently connected to extreme violence against women and children. However, it is the exchange that follows between Dan and Chris that depicts the anger that White racism creates in those it oppresses.

Dan listens to the exchange and is horrified, “Little children? They crucified little children (273).” However, Chris’s sympathy for the children is overwhelmed by his experience of violence. He states, “Well, what’s that to us? They’re little White children. But here our fellow countrymen throw our little black babies in the flames... (273-274)” This moment begins a turning point in the text. Chris refuses to validate a hierarchy that places Germany brutality as worse than White American brutality. His linking of the two is a dynamic comparison that ties together the results of state violence on civilians rather than separating them by nationhood. His response lacks sympathy for European children and puts him at odds with the predominate articulation of general horror by the group. Instead of thinking about the connections Chris is making, Jake sees his response as self-pity saying, “don’t you get tired sitting around grieving because you’re colored? (274)” Chris states that he’s proud to be “numbered with the darker ones” not ashamed as Jakes seems to insinuate (274). Both Jake and Mrs. O’Neill, the White characters,
then advocate that both of their races have been persecuted but they remain loyal to America. Dan joins them to advocate that if he could serve he would prove his worth through military service. The beliefs of Jake, Mrs. O’Neill and Dan intersection because they all see military service as way to prove worthiness, a tool of establishing proper citizenship in a world that they all feel has treated them unfairly. Only Julia supports Chris’s anti-war stance:

…What have we to do with their affairs? These White people, they hate us.

Only today I was sneered at when I went to help with some of their relief work.

Why should you, my Chris, go to help those who hate you? (274)

She does not support him solely out of love or a desire to protect him but justifies her beliefs through her worldview and lived experience. Julia, as an African American woman, was made to feel unwelcome when she provided service as a relief worker. This experience solidified her belief that all Whites hate African Americans. As mentioned earlier, Dunbar-Nelson frequently expressed her desire to do more for relief work but that racism prevented her from being of more service.

Julia and Chris are now in a defiant position against the group but Harvey, again recounts what he has seen, “If you could have seen the babies and girls—old women—if you could have” as the stage directions indicate he should “Cover his eyes with his hand (274).” Chris is still unmoved, “Well, it’s good for things to be evened up somewhere” continuing his connection that White Europeans and White Americans are the same to him (274). He is not advocating violence but he is demonstrating an unwillingness to see these children and women as outside the world of White supremacy. In using innocent women and children as her example, Dunbar-Nelson is able to demonstrate and acknowledge the level of anger and frustrated that African Americans felt in the US in the early 20th century. Dan again tries to convince his brother that “it is not for us to visit retribution (274).” He uses the story of women and girls to convince Chris of his duty but also to elicit Julia’s emotional response so that Chris will lose his one supporter. Dan argues:
Can’t you be big enough to feel pity for the little crucified French children – for the ravished Polish girls, even as their mothers must have felt sorrow, if they had known, for our burned and maimed little ones? Oh, Mothers of Europe, we be of one blood, you and I! (274)

It is Dan and not Jake or Mrs. O’Neill who consistently separates innocent Whites from the racist Whites who attacked their family. By focusing on women and girls, Dan re-frames his argument as not just a duty to the nation but also duty as man. Dan asserts that it is the women who understand suffering, both their own and the suffering of others. This causes Julia to break away from Chris, and he turns towards the window alone.

Dunbar-Nelson increases the pressure on Chris to join the war effort by adding in the voice of Lucy who has remained silent listening to the argument between her brothers. She finally steps in:

We do need you, but your country needs you more. And above that, your race is calling you to carry on its good name, and with that, the voice of humanity is calling to us all. (274)

She crafts a hierarchy of duties, rooted in Christianity, where family is the lowest priority while national obligation, then racial kinship, and finally humanity are higher callings. If Chris chooses to get an exemption for his family, he will fail in his duty to the other three. Lucy sees Chris not as one man but as a representation of African American men that can serve as an example of worthiness, dignity, and valor. To her, moral righteousness is the highest form of duty but Lucy only articulates it through military service. He must go to serve his family, nation, race, and mankind.

Chris is shocked at the idea that his weak and lame siblings could survive without him, but Dan argues that Chris is the one who is weak and should be pitied, calling him a “slacker and a weakling” (274).” At this Chris lunges at his brother’s chair but holds himself back from hitting him turning again to the window in frustration. Julia, once his ally, argues that “it is our country – our race” but she is
interrupted by music from the outside (274). The “Battle Hymn of the Republic” plays at an increasingly loud volume and the music comes over the characters.

This leads to grand patriotic finale as Dan begins to sing, “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord (274).” Chris responds, “And Mine! (274)" Cornelia sings a verse, “as he died to make men holy, let us die to make them free (274).” While Mrs. O’Neill makes up her own version to fit the tune, “an’ ye’ll make the sacrifice, me boy, an’ ye’ll be the happier,” saying to Chris that her new line “could be a version of the song (274).” Jake chimes in, “No sacrifice for him.. Ah, if they would only call me, and call me soon (275).” Lucy supports this and re-asserts the family will survive, “We’ll get on, never fear. I’m proud. Proud!” as her voice breaks but she stays strong (275). As the rest of the characters move to the window to listen to music Chris stands alone. He does not have the final word but Dunbar-Nelson provides stage directions that state that he should remain in the center with a rapt look on his face. Dan wants to rise but then sinks back beating his hand to the tune of the music. The play ends with a martial crash as the song concludes. Chris is still in the middle, alone, and the only African American man on stage in the position of being drafted. His choice is not certain in the text.

CHRIS’S DECISION AND ITS MESSAGE

In this section I discuss the ambiguous ending that has divided critics in two respects: first, Chris’s final decision; and second, the message of the play. Almost all critics, including Mitchell, Perkins, Miller, and Beach routinely decide that Chris does ultimately decide to enlist. However, these scholars do not derive this decision from the ending of the text but rather an archival document from Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s papers. Scholars then circulate this narrative between themselves without ever questioning the validity of the claim. An example of this is from Koritha Mitchell in her outstanding work, Living with Lynching: African American Lynching plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930 who argues, “Chris never articulates agreement, but his eventual silence allows one to believe that he is
persuaded by patriotic rhetoric (87).” Chris’s silence may well led readers and audience members to assume he enlists but the silence allows for another reading. Despite a lack of clear textual evidence, the conclusion that Chris ultimately decides to enlist is the major critical narrative of the work.

The sole evidence for Chris’s decision is a short note on a manuscript of the play in the Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s papers at the University of Delaware. The section summarizes the actions of the play through the lens of Chris:

His first impulse, because of the wrongs done to his race, and the helplessness of his brother and sister, is to secure exemption, but the brother, sister, friends and a returned muleteer from France show him the cowardice of such a proceeding. He decides to go, because he has seen ‘the glory of the Lord.’ (“Manuscript,” Alice Nelson Dunbar Papers).

This note was not published with the text and thus was not available to reader or audiences. It seems just as likely that the text was written as part of the submission process to the publishers since its also includes the character and setting descriptions that were provided with the published text, but it was clearly cut from the published version. However, it is also possible that Dunbar-Nelson wanted to insolate herself from any indication that she wrote a play with a disloyal character. It is only theatre scholars co-authors Hill and Hatch in Black Theatre U.S.A. and Koritha Mitchell in Living with Lynching who acknowledge the openness of the text. Hill and Hatch argue that the play “leaves the final decision squarely in the minds of the audience (188).” Mitchell states that Chris’s final decision is “left ingeniously ambiguous” because the audience “does not know what seeing the glory of the coming of the Lord means for Chris (93).” I agree with these interpretations and wish to expand it. To understand the life of Mine Eyes Have Seen as a piece of theatre we have to embrace the ambiguity in the text and explore how it opens up new meaning for the work. In foregrounding the nature of theatre, Hill, Hatch,
and Mitchell understand that it needs to be considered from the position of performance. I agree with their reading and more fully develop their critical responses to demonstrate that the play is purposely ambiguous about Chris’s decision.

Despite the almost unanimous conclusion that Chris goes to war, scholars have argued about the tone of the work and its overall message with a debate as to whether it is pro-war or anti-war. Scholars who advocate that it is pro-war include Hull who states that the play has a “blatant intent is to persuade black people to support the war” (71). Kathy A. Perkins in Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950 (1989) interprets that in the end Chris “concludes that America is his country also, and in spite of all the injustices, he must go off to war and defend his land” (10) and Beech also supports this pro-war reading when she writes that the play is “definitely a recruitment play” (118).

However, Nellie McKay has argued that is an anti-war play and a “biting satire...that keeps people from seeing how they participate in and help to perpetuate their own oppression” (McKay 137-138). In McKay’s view the play mocks propaganda plays through its use of extreme rhetoric and debate, the use of stereotypically ethnic characters, that would have been played in Whiteface, and an overly patriotic ending with group singing. I find this reading of the text extremely challenging to support but in performance certainly a satirical tone could be created to create this vision. Marilyn Elkins also sees the paly as predominately anti-war and argues that its main objective is to demonstrate a message of “unfairness” in the “appeal for black enlistment (Elkins 59).” Egging, who concedes that the ending is ambiguous, also affirms Chris’s enlistment but also argues that it is both pro-war and anti-war since it provides elements of both arguments. She argues that the play spends “the first three-fourths of the play presenting convincing reasons why [African Americans] should not serve” and that this “information that is hard to forget” as a reader or viewer (Egging 37). I support a reading that makes

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77 Unfortunately, Hill and Hatch also re-statement the error that it was performed at Dunbar High School on April 10th 1918 that will be disputed later in this chapter (189).
central that Chris’s decision is ambiguous and as such the message of the text is open to interpretation. It is this openness from which the play derives its most compelling message.

I argue that the ending focuses on wrestling with the ramifications of living in a White supremacist country and having to live as a subject to its laws. Even if Chris chooses to serve in the military it will be in a war that he does not believe in, it will be in a racially segregated military, trained in military camps where racist violence is common, and it is unlikely he will ever actually be shipped to overseas to fight. As previously discussed on the chapter on the Houston Riot, local draft boards were notoriously capacious. Chris’s reason, that his family would need him for financial support would have been entirely discounted. Local draft boards gave very few young healthy African American men exemptions for this reason because army pay was equal to or exceed normal monetary earnings; it was deemed families were better off with them as soldiers. His exemption would be given by the state, he would need to prove that he falls under the category and the draft board would need to approve it. To argue whether Chris enlisted or was exempt is to miss the layered message of the play: when there are no good choices because all choices are narrowed by racism, it is a defiant decision to survive. As a play the text’s openness allows productions to manipulate the ending from any spectrum of the political sphere while still maintaining its allegiance to the vision of the work.

**MINE EYES HAVE SEEN AND “THE BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC”**

If scholars who articulate that Chris decides to go to war are correct, an essential element of his decision must come in the final moment when the rousing music of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” so fills the room with patriotic fervor that he is overcome. The title even takes its name from the first line, “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” However, if this song were vital to Chris’s transition why has it been overlooked in scholarship on the play? No other scholar of the play has thoroughly discussed its choice by Dunbar-Nelson or its cultural significance in the world of the play. In
this section, I examine the choice of this song through its cultural history and as a historical signifier of African American and White US race relations in order to establish why I believe the song was chosen by Dunbar-Nelson.

The history of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” provides a lens through which to understand American cultural production establishing a through line from African American spirituals in the 1800s, to permutations during the Civil War, to the re-circulation of the song at the start of the First World War. It is a song that has been adapted over centuries to fit with different historical moments, creating a musical legacy of the complexity of race and nation. It is deeply connected to the openness of the text signifying a history of complex racial negotiation, self-determination in the face of oppression, and the rousing power of unity in the face of enormous opposition. To see the song simply as a patriotic tune missed the complex history that Dunbar-Nelson points to in emphasizing its use.

Even before its transformation into “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” during the Civil War, the song was already explicitly connected to the race; the very foundation of the song demonstrates the inextricable bonds of Whites and African Americans in culture and national identity. The music of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” is based on a revival spiritual “Grace Reviving in the Soul” found in a collections of hymnals edited by Methodist preacher Seth Mead in 1807. Historians Stauffer and Soskis argue in The Battle Hymn of the Republic: A Biography of the Song That Marches On that Mead’s version is "as much African as White American" with its call and response style, popular with African American spirituals. They argue that Mead, who frequently held interracial revival camp meetings, preached to slaves and would have heard their sacred music (24). It was during the US Civil War that the tune was attached to a new set of lyrics and titled “John Brown’s Body.” It was this version of the song that was transformed by Julia Ward Howe into “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

It was the mocking of their differences that provoked the creation of “John Brown’s Body” by the men of the Twelve Regiment, Second Battalion, Light Infantry in Boston, in 1861 that sought to
ridicule a lowly Scottish Union soldier with the same name as a radical rebellion leader and abolitionist John Brown. The song increased in popularity with the explosion of popular song and sheet music, particularly in military encampments and was quickly re-purposed as a pro-Union rallying cry (Stauffer and Soskis 44-52, 54) through its association with the Union Army, the song also offered an instrument for taunting the south and a justification for holy violence that would restore order to country. It was particularly poignant for African American soldiers including the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts, the first black regiment, and the First Arkansas Volunteer Infantry (African Descent) who frequently sang the song. Even Fredrick Douglas, while persuading African Americans to join the war effort, used the song to define the work of these soldiers who he said would march down Broadway “timing [their] footsteps to the time honored music of old John Brown.” (Stauffer and Soskis 59) After the Fourth Michigan Cavalry captured President of the Confederate States of America, Jefferson Davis, it marched through Macon, Georgia singing the song, including a frequently used alternative lyric “We’ll hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree/ As we go marching on.” (Stauffer and Soskis 67, 70) Moments and lyrics such as these that focused on retribution made White elites desire a more elevated version that would highlight John Brown’s martyrdom over his use of violence to end racial inequality. Although several cleansed alternative versions of “John Brown’s Body” existed it is Julia Ward Howe’s rendition of the music with more overt Christian imagery that held the most enduring influence. That she also had an indirect relationship with John Brown makes her coining of “The Battle Hymn of the

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78 This is not to suggest that all or even most Union soldiers joined the war as abolitionists. The popularity of the song was no doubt increased by the hardship of bloody battles that by the fall of 1861 had slowly convinced a majority of Northern that slavery was the cause of the war and emancipation and abolition was the instrument that could end it. (Stauffer and Soskis 63)

79 The First Arkansas Volunteer Infantry (African Descent) was also known for their own version of the song with radically militant lyrics written in dialect “Dey will jab to pay us wages, the wages of sin/ Dey will jab to bow their foreheads to their colored kith and kin/ Dey will hab to gib us house-room, or de roof shall tumble in/ As we go marching on” (Stauffer and Soskis 61).
Republic” an even more compelling sentiment to the anti-slavery cause and a call for a reformed patriotism under the collective banner of a unified nation.  

Howe was on a trip to Massachusetts, with her husband, Chev Howe, who coordinated relief efforts for Northern soldiers, when on November 18, 1861 her carriage was stuck with slow moving regiments being sent back to the city. The members in the carriage and the soldiers outside passed the time by singing popular songs including “John Brown’s Body.” At the conclusion of the song, it was suggested to Howe that she should “write some good words for that stirring tune.” (Stauffer and Soskis 83) Her song, like its predecessor “John Brown’s Body,” became popular in Union camps and particularly with Rev. Charles Cardwell, the singing chaplain of the 122d Ohio Regiment of Volunteers who recalled, “I have sung it a thousand times since and shall continue to sing it as long as I live. No hymn has ever stirred the nation’s heart like [it].” (Hall 69) It is the origin myth of the song that Howe awoke in the middle of the night at Willard’s Hotel and wrote the majority of what would become her masterpiece, a song whose creation was transferred from the work of an individual published writer to providence of divine inspiration, “the song that wrote itself.” (Stauffer and Soskis 84) The history of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” demonstrates a cultural process whereby the original tune from slave songs transitioned to a song about abolition eventually being reformulated into a race-less amalgamation that placed God as paramount in decisions of justice.

Patriotic tunes were commonly sung throughout the First World War in community groups, religious services, and meeting halls. Group singing was even seen as a military tool for teaching soldiers teamwork and unity while reinforcing nationalism. Military songbooks included “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” in every training camp across the nation as well as Southern favorites and popular tunes from

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80 Howe met John Brown on more than one occasion. Her husband, Samuel “Chev” Gridley Howe, was one of the “Secret Six” that had supplied funds to Brown. Chev described Brown to his wife as a man who intended to “devote his life to the redemption of the colored race from slavery, even as Christ had willingly offered his life for the salvation of mankind.” Both Chev and Julia denied to authorities they had any prior knowledge of the raid on Harper’s Ferry and Chev briefly escaped to Canada to avoid further questioning (Hall 35).
blackface minstrelsy. New versions were written like, “The Battle Hymn of 1918” published in the New York Tribune September 4, 1918 with the opening stanza, “Mine eyes have seen the horrors of the coming of the Hun, He has trampled out the breath of life, whenever he has won, He has torn the flesh of children, as a sample of his fun. His crime goes marching on!” Dunbar-Nelson was only one of many who re-purposed the song for her reasons in her own time.

WHAT MINE EYES HAVE SEEN?

The “Battle Hymn of the Republic” is a Christian call to the power of God as a weapon of divine retribution within the context of Civil War era antislavery. The history of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” demonstrates a cultural process whereby the original tune from slave songs and later lyrics about abolition were eventually reformulated into a race-less amalgamation that placed God as paramount in decisions of justice and retribution. When considering why Dunbar-Nelson selected this song, it is pivotal to consider that she is one of many artists to re-purpose the song for their political ends. Patriotic tunes were also commonly sung throughout the First World War in community groups, religious services, and meeting halls. In returning to the final moments of Mine Eyes Have Seen through the context of the song’s history, it is clear that race and nation are tied together but sometimes not overtly. The openness of Dunbar-Nelson’s text allows for several readings of this final moment.

In Mine Eyes Have Seen, the window serves a place of escape. Chris turns towards the window when he is confronted and right after he almost attacks his brother, Dan. In this final moment, when Chris is turned toward the window, a band is heard outside playing “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and the tune builds to an epic crescendo. The window, Chris’s only mode of escape is now closed and in its place is blaring patriotism that reverberates within the tiny apartment. The sound stifles the debate that has lasted from Chris’s first declaration that he would not go to war. In its place is the tune of nationalism, of heavenly vengeance, of Civil War camps, and a history of national sacrifice for freedom.
In its place is the outside world where patriotism and nationalism are not chosen but legally proscribed and monitored. In its place is a country where men who have chosen not to or cannot serve in the military are mocked, vilified, and sometime beaten in the streets.

As Dan sings, “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!” Chris turns from the window “straightens his shoulders” and responds “And Mine!” From this moment, it could be read that Chris has now been convinced that he will serve. His response could be seen an echo of patriotism, national belonging, and dignified acceptance. However, the open ending makes this less clear if we examine this moment in the light of the history of the song selection. As the majority of characters race to the window to see the band and Dan is in his chair beating his hand with the music, Chris is in the center “rigidly at attention, a rapt look on his face” as the “swells to a martial crash.” In the text, the words “rigidly at attention,” “rapt,” and “martial” all signify that Chris seems to be surrounded by a new militarism. Koritha Mitchell has also noted, “Chris is the only able-bodied character who has not gone to the window to admire the band (92).” Mitchell’s interpretation of the ending is that “there is no question that blacks were sincerely patriotic, but being so required an intellectual negotiation far more complicated than wholesale acceptance of mainstream rhetoric (94).” Chris could very well desire to stand against the state that asks him to choose war but will not provide him equality. This moment is forever locked in its ambiguity making its performance all the more vital to understanding the play.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The materiality of the play as a part of the circulation of The Crisis anchors the text as an object that was primarily experienced through reading and not performance but it was produced several times during the war. The production history of Mine Eyes Have Seen has been plagued by inaccuracies that have created the wrongful impression that work was only performed once and even this acknowledged singular performance holds incorrect information.
Most scholars have cited a single production of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* in April 10, 1918 at either Howard High School, where Dunbar-Nelson taught, or at Dunbar High School, named for her late husband.\(^8\) Katherine Egging in her dissertation “Home Front as Warfront” examines this error and uncovers its source. Egging’s research reveals that this incorrect date is most likely derived from a misreading of a statement by Gloria Hull, Dunbar-Nelson’s first major biographer, in *Color, Sex, and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (1987). Hull states, “Dunbar-Nelson granted the Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., permission to stage the work” on April 10\(^{th}\) 1918 (72). This is technically correct but as Egging points out, and I have confirmed, this is simply the date of the letter held in her papers at University of Delaware was written and not the date of production. Hull’s statement about the play has been misinterpreted and repeated.

The letter in question is by Thomas Posey who writes, “A club of Junior Students in the Dunbar High School has been formed for the purpose of raising money for the Red Cross. We have noticed your play, “Mine Eyes Have Seen” (sic), in the current issue of the Crisis (sic), and desire to produce this play at Dunbar some time in May” (Posey “Letter,” 4 April). Dunbar-Nelson’s paper at the University of Delaware have no record of her writing back to Posey and a future letter seems to imply that she may not have. Posey wrote again to Dunbar-Nelson on May 2, 1918 to update his request, “The Junior Class wishes to produce your play “Mine Eyes Have Seen,” for their rhetorical on May 21, instead of for the Red Cross, as was originally intended” (Posey “Letter,” 2 May).

This production in May at Dunbar High School has been confused with a production that most likely did occur at Howard High School. This production is known because Hatch and Shine note in their introduction of the play in *Black Theatre U.S.A.* that Dunbar-Nelson’s niece, Patricia Young, stated in 1917 that Dunbar-Nelson “taught us English in high school. She produced her play and we all took parts.

\(^8\) Egging correctly states scholars Brown-Guillory, Burton, Hatch and Shine, Hill and Hatch, Perkins and Stephens all list this as the first performance while Beach (2004) refers to April 10, 1918 at Howard High School as its only production (Egging 35).
The audience loved it” (170). However, a very complete search has been undertaken to find the interview and seems to have been lost. It is clear that Dunbar-Nelson was fired from her job at Howard High School in 1920, so the performance would have taken place between 1918-1920. All major scholars prior to Egging in 2010 refer to a performance on April 10, 1918 that did not occur at Howard or Dunbar High School.

Egging’s dissertation brings to light new research of productions of the play.82 She lists that the play was also performed at the Pilgrim Baptist Church, St. Paul Minnesota on three occasions. This church was founded in 1863 and is Minnesota’s oldest and largest predominantly African American site of worship. These performances of Mine Eyes Have Seen are known only through a single newspaper article in the African American newspaper The Appeal. This article discusses the performance in July and mentions the previous two performances in May and June. The first May 9, 1918 for the May Pageant of the Invincible Sunday School Class, the second June 14, 1918 for the benefit of the 16th Battalion Drum Corps, and the third July 18, 1918 to help raise money for decorating the Social Game Room of Uncle Sam’s Club (“Mine Eyes Have Seen,” The Appeal). The July article titled “Mine Eyes Have Seen” discusses the pageantry that surrounded the final performance. The description is undoubtedly patriotic and demonstrates the additional elements added to create an evening of war-themed performances. The evening’s benefit entertainment began with group singing of the Star Spangled Banner by the actors and the audience, then the singing of folk songs, followed by Miss Swan from the War Department giving an “instructive address on ‘baby welfare’” that was deemed appropriate by the writer, and ending with the “patriotic playlet” of Mine Eyes Have Seen. (“Mine Eyes Have Seen,” The Appeal). It was produced by members of the Invincible Sunday School Class and directed by Mrs. W.T. Francis who was the president of the Everywoman Suffrage Club.

82 Both Egging and Beech discuss also a later production in May of 1926 at The Stevens School most likely in Washington, D.C., for a “dramatic festival” (Egging 43, Beech 118). I have also found an additional production in 1927 in Uniontown, Pennsylvania at the St. Paul A.M.E. Church by the students of the Semper Fidelis Sunday school class. (“Uniontown, PA,” The Pittsburgh Courier, 4 June 1927).
I have found two additional productions not listed by Egging or any other scholar of the play. These additional productions tell a more complete story about the circulation of the text and the desire for its performance. On May 25th, June 1st, and June 5th the *Kansas City Sun* ran notices advertising the production of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* at Lincoln High School in Kansas City, Missouri as part of their graduation week festivities in mid-June. The notice reads:

Wednesday Evening, June 5th Alumni Entertainment and play “Mine Eyes Have Seen,”
Alice Dunbar-Nelson; eight characters. The local Alumni is making elaborate plans for a fine program on this evening. Lincoln High School Auditorium. Admission free.

(“Graduation Notice,” *Kansas City Sun* 6 June 1918).

This African American school, first organized in 1865, brought students from around Missouri together for their education. I also found an additional production listed in July 1918 edition of *The Crisis*, oddly several scholars who list this issue in their bibliography because it holds Du Bois’s “Close Ranks” missed the notice at the back of the magazine. It reads: “Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, New York City, has celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Among other things it gave the play, “Mine Eyes Have Seen” by Alice Dunbar-Nelson, recently published in *The Crisis*” (“Horizon,” *The Crisis*, 137 July 1918). This listing in the “Horizon” section of the magazine, a general of listing educational and cultural monthly events, is under the Church category. This African American church, started in 1876, has been housed in Harlem since 1925 but briefly occupied a building on 161 West 53rd Street where this performance of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* most likely took place.

This additional research of the production history makes clear that there were confirmed performances at high schools in Delaware, Washington D.C., and Kansas City, MO and multiple productions at churches in St. Paul Minnesota and in New York City. Even without other productions, which most likely occurred but were not recorded, this pattern demonstrates that the work circulated in major Northern and Midwestern cities with large black communities. These performances conform to
the precise ways that Mitchell stated that plays in African American periodicals would be performed; at schools and churches and by amateurs.

PERFORMANCES OF MINE EYES HAVE SEEN

In this section, I examine these performances from a variety of perspectives to think through the ramifications of considering the work as a performed text while unearthing the utility of the new archival research about the number and circulation of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* during the First World War. These performances were community-centric, performed by amateur actors, and primarily, if not exclusively, in African American settings. Despite greater knowledge of the number of productions and their variety of locations there is very little archival evidence about the performance choices in these productions. It is this dearth of information that has resulted in scholars of the play ignoring elements of performance in favor of a literary analysis of the work. New knowledge of productions makes it necessary to engage with the possibilities of how these performances were enacted and anchor textual analysis with the realities of performance.

PERFORMANCE LOCATION

The play was performed at all African American high schools in Delaware, Washington D.C. and Kansas City, MO and African American churches in St. Paul, Minnesota and in New York City. All performances were amateur and most were done as part of larger celebrations in the community including high school graduations, the 40th anniversary of the Mt. Olivet Church, and patriotic benefits. The only information that is known is that the play was publicized by the organization either in the local African American newspaper or in *The Crisis*. Since the play is listed as part of these celebrations it seems clear that the play was known in African American communities, people were familiar with the work and would have looked forward to its performance. These locations demonstrate that African
American communities sought to utilize the play as a way to articulate their relationship to the nation during the war through the practice of performance. The openness of the texts allows for multiple possibilities of how African American citizenship may have been articulated, but it is apparent that the work was important as an exploration and presentation of this citizenship.

THE ACTORS AND DIRECTORS OF MINE EYES HAVE SEEN

There is little knowledge about who performed in Mine Eyes Have Seen but the majority of performances of the play would have been by young people, though there is not enough evidence to say this for the Mt. Olivet church performance. The Dunbar High School performance was performed by students in the junior class, as evidenced by Posey’s letter, and the Howard High School performance involved students in Dunbar-Nelson’s English class including her niece, Patricia Young. The Pilgrim Baptist Church, St. Paul Minnesota performances were performed by the Invincible Sunday School Class, most likely the young men and women who were still in high school and attended the church and its weekly religious school. While the listing looking for actors for the Lincoln High School in Kansas City, Missouri performances does mention age it is likely that since the production was for a high school graduation weekend, organized by a recent alumni, actors would be current and former students.

Since high school students enacted the majority of performances, it is obvious that the majority of the student-actors were only slightly younger than their characters. In the text, Lucy is around 20, Dan around 30, and Chris is youngest but his age is not provided. Importantly, the young men in the show would have been or would be in a very similar position to Chris as they approached their requirement to register for the military under the Selective Service Act. What would it mean for a young African American man so close to being drafted or enlisting to enact the conflicted character of Chris? How might the final moment of Chris’s decision be altered as the actor processed his own feelings about war, military service, family and national obligation? How might performing the text provide an educational
experience about debating civic issues in the private space of the home and the public space of theatre? The audience would also be in the position of seeing both Chris but the refracted image of their own children, brothers, friends, and neighbors as both the play and the actors within it explore what it means to leave for war.

The production for which we have the most information is the final July performance at the Pilgrim Baptist Church, St. Paul Minnesota. *Mine Eyes Have Seen* was one piece of an evening of entertainment that helps to contextualize the play within both the community in which it was performed and the period of the war. Students from Invincible Sunday School Class produced and performed the play and it was directed by Nellie Francis, her husband was prominent African American lawyer W. T. Francis, who was the president of the Everywoman Suffrage Club. This club was an all African American women’s club in Minnesota that lobbied for voting rights and the political and education advancements of African American women. The evening began with the singing of the Star Spangled Banner by the actors and the audience. This primary performance element demonstrates that the line between actor and audience are already blurred. The singing of patriotic songs became of more popular activity during the war as a method to demonstrate and establish national loyalty. In introducing this evening of performances with a nationalistic and flag-centric song the group established their connection as a loyal American community in a time of war. The newspaper notes that next section of performance was the singing of folk songs but unfortunately it does not give specifics.

The addition of an “instructive address on ‘baby welfare’” may seem out of place but child welfare was one of the aspects of the work of African American women in the war effort. As Dunbar-Nelson states in her “Negro Women and War Work” chapter, more women entering the hard labor of the workforce was seen to have a potentially devastating impact on their children. She wrote:

This employment of the women could not but react upon the child, with a consequent lowering of child vitality and raising of infant mortality. It was this condition which the
Council of Defense ...[wanted] to forestall... Hence the establishment of stations where babies were weighed, measured, tested, and placed under weekly supervision with competent nurses in charge. (Dunbar-Nelson, “Negro women” 386).

Increasing child welfare became part of a patriotic mission because women had to leave the home to work the jobs the men had left and there was great fear that children would suffer without the constant attention of their mothers. In the context of the church community, patriotic and folksongs; family instruction; and war-themed theatre are brought together as an evening of patriotic entertainment.

LINGERING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Unfortunately, there is no information about production choices for any of the known performances. There is no information on actors or their choices, design elements, or reception. In order to gain a clearer understanding the play in performance, I directed a staged reading of Mine Eyes Have Seen with African American actors from the University of Illinois Department of Theatre and community actors from Champaign-Urbana in the fall of 2014. My experience directing the production can solely be in a contemporary context but as a piece of theatre the questions and challenges the play raises are, sadly, still quite relevant. The actors involved in the production debated Chris’s decision by carefully examining the arguments presented by each character. They also discussed their own conflicts with national belonging and social inclusion including experiences with racism, microaggressions, and resistance. Many of the actors spoke of family members who served in the military and their own complicated relationships to African American patriotism. I did not provide actors with any historical background on productions of the play or the notation by Dunbar-Nelson in her manuscript and encouraged them to come to their own decision about the end of the play. I did provide them two columns by Du Bois, “Close Ranks” (1918) and “Returning Soldiers” (1919), both published in The Crisis, which provided historical and affective context for the period. I circulated these materials in order to
demonstrate that *Mine Eyes Have Seen* was part of larger conversation about African American military service during the Great War and that theatre was part of those dialogues on race and citizenship.

I was particularly interested in the tablework discussion with the actors playing for Mrs. O’Neill and Jake, the two non-African American characters in the play. Due to racial segregation and the spaces these plays were performed in, schools and churches, it would be extremely unlikely that these parts would have been played by White performers. In enacting White characters, actors would have been able to explore what Whiteness meant to them, what Jewish or Irishness meant to them, and what it would mean to act a racialized part that was not of their race. Certainly, Mrs. O’Neill’s thick Irish dialect written to the script would signal to an actor how to mimic the intonation of a stage Irishman but how would Jake’s continual use “eh” to punctuate his sentences manifest Jewish on stage? How might Mrs. O’Neill and Jake’s discussion of how both of their peoples, the Irish and the Jews, were oppressed and persecuted be performed and received when played by young African Americans? The African American actors cast in these roles were intrigued by the opportunity to consider the use of these characters in the narrative and how to create their performance.

Both actors’ first inclination was to create an exaggerated stereotype. However, their performances felt disconnected from the rest of the actors leading to comic interactions. Furthermore, it was challenging to transition into the dramatic moments for their characters once they had embraced the use of stereotype. Since this work was written for amateur performers there is a distinct possibility that actors might choose to maintain the comedic aspects of the work. In our production, the actors decided to perform these characters as realistically as possible, akin to the choices of the other actors. Nevertheless, Mrs. O’Neill and Jake were always oddly displaced as if they belonged in a different play, a different world. I believe that Dunbar-Nelson crafted a multi-racial world in order to bring together broader debates about national loyalty and military service. In relying on some elements of stereotypes to create these characters, she made it easier for amateur actors to understand these characters when
they might not have known any Irish or Jewish people. However, these characters are also at a distance. They are in the world of the play and they offer significant arguments for the war while also re-affirming that race and class add complexities to national loyalty. In creating a play where amateur African Americans actors would portray Irish and Jewish neighbors, Dunbar-Nelson allows for an exploration, both by the actor and with the audience, about the way that the African American experience is distinct from the White immigrant experience.

In my production, all of the actors expressed that the script allowed for a multiplicity of meanings and has an enduring resonance. Koritha Mitchell has argued that Mine Eyes Have Seen is a part of larger process of negotiation in racial citizenship for African Americans. Mitchell states that, “it is only because blacks found way to vent their doubts and anxieties about being loyal to the nation that they could muster any verbal loyalty at all (94).” The actors involved in this production debated whether Chris chose to go to war, as I imagine audiences would have in 1918 and after, examining the details of the plays to better understand its ending. This is the power of the ambiguous ending on the page and in performance. Scholars who have decided and communicated that Chris must go to war, through the use archival evidence that would not have been known to the average reader or audience members and evidence and from one newspaper article, take away the real power of the play to engage the audience in Chris’s decision.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter, I have analyzed Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s Mine Eyes Have Seen, the only African American play to be written, published, and performed during US active engagement in the First World War in order to assess the ways in which is depicts notions of race and citizenship during the period. I focused on Dunbar-Nelson, her biography and war work in order to argue that her writing of the play was part of broader commitment to African American activism and her conflicted feelings about
the Great War. I discussed the publication of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* in *The Crisis* in April of 1918, her only published play, comes out of this period of her life and work and dramatizes this conflict between racism and citizenship.

In analyzing the play itself, I have argued that it demonstrates a marked ambiguity that remains unresolved leaving it up to reader, performers, and audiences to decide Chris’s fate. The dramatization of Chris’s dilemma, whether he will commit to the draft and serve in the military or apply for exemption, is surrounded in the play by experiences of racism, conceptions of loyalty and duty, family obligation, and the history of African American military service. In focusing on the openness of the text, I expose the how debate of whether he serves obscure the intentions of the text and miss its desire to activate the audience in the decision-making process. I link this to history of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and the history that Dunbar-Nelson signals in using the song as the title and in the final moments of the text. Although, the song discusses valor in war it also calls upon a history of US racial violence and an appropriation of African American history. I advocate that in the context of the play it is not clear what Chris’s eyes have seen but it is clear that his choices are limited. He is not pulled toward the window with the other characters that support the war but stands alone, at the center, attempting to survive in oppressive circumstances.

My discussion of productions and new archival evidence of additional performances demonstrates the desire by African Americans to create, circulate, read, and stage cultural products about their place in the war effort. In adding to the number of productions and its variety of locals there is now a more complete picture of the history of this text in performance. Undoubtedly, there were other performances that were not recorded in major African American newspapers that are now lost. In high schools and churches the play help to gather people together in support of and in celebration of events and causes that affected the community. Amateur performers and directors presented the play
demonstrating their interest in tackling the question of citizenship in a time when coercive patriotism pressured groups to conform without discussion or exploration of their status in the nation.

My analysis of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* provides a significant demonstration that African Americans used theatre to discuss and debate their relationship to the First World War. The play offers insight into the complex negotiations of racial identity and citizenship by depicting Chris, his family, and his community as they argue about what it meant to be an African American in America at the height of the war. The openness of the text demonstrates Dunbar-Nelson’s commitment to acknowledging conflicting feelings of belonging and rightful anger directed toward the nation. In the context of the rash of violence that was directed at African American soldiers both during and after the war, including the Houston Incident and the bloody conflicts during The Red Summer of 1919, it is clear that even if Chris chooses military service it will not protect him from being a target of racism. In leaving the audience to decide Chris’s fate, Dunbar-Nelson asks the audience to position themselves, like Chris, at the center of things considering their choice in the face of only difficult paths. If there is any hope in the text is only communicated in the final moment of dignified silence where Chris and each individual audience member chooses to claim their own vision of what their eyes might see in the future.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

The official moment of the Armistice for the Great War was celebrated on November 11, 1918 at 11am, Paris time. In the early morning hours, crowds of thousands of New Yorkers gathered at the shoreline to witness the illumination of the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of global peace (Capozzola 206). On the battlefields of Europe, soldiers held their breath not quite believing the truce would be honored. By nightfall of the 11th, these men, still at their posts, built massive fires—long forbidden at the front—for warmth, companionship, and celebration (Kennedy 202). On the American homefront, fire also took a prominent place in Armistice celebrations as effigies of the German Kaiser burned on stakes paraded through streets. For example, celebrations in New York quickly changed from one of peace to performances of retribution as the residents of the area of Yorkville, in Manhattan, held a mock trial for the Kaiser. The mob carried an effigy of the figure into the local courthouse, a men’s night court, and demanded the judge try the case and render sentencing. The judge maintained the verisimilitude of the event and only handed down the maximum sentence under his authority, a disappointing six months in a workhouse. The crowd balked and brought the effigy into the street for burning as a band played, “There’ll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight (Capozzola 206).” In Preston, Idaho, the small town dismantled their outhouses and brought them to the town square for burning calling it “Schitty of Berlin.” In Burrton, Kansas, a Mennonite farmer narrowly escaped lynching for skipping the Armistice celebrations relieved that the mob settled for burning “buggies and things (Capozzola 206-207).” Fire offered the opportunity for the same communal gathering as it did on the battlefield but on the homefront it was also paired with a destructive glee. This obsession with fire offers a compelling symbol for considering the war itself—a site where patriotism was reinforced through destruction and violence. The heat of the flame served as a comforting feeling for those who could belong in its warmth and safety and an imminent threat of the violence for those who could not or would not belong in the
gathering of community. That the celebration of peace used a weapon of violence is only surprising if one assumes the end of war immediately and abruptly concluded the desire to annihilate the enemy.

The most enduring element of First World War anti-Germanism was the Volstead Act of 1919 that prohibited the manufacturing and sale of any beverage with more than 0.5 percent alcohol. The Eighteenth Amendment was a product of war hysteria as the brewery industry was predominately German and drinking in beer gardens and social clubs was a significant aspect of German-American culture. The legislation brought together the growing strength of women’s organizations, particularly the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), with the fear of German disloyalty. Temperance groups maintained that criminalizing drinking would help women by ending men’s immoral, distressing, and embarrassing behavior including domestic violence and martial rape, extramarital affairs and the potential spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and homo-social exploits of public rowdiness and unruly behavior. That the law would end the major business of the German elite in the US and destroy the heart of German communities in the post-war was not something missed by those who advocated for the passage of the bill (Tolzmann 298-299). In 1919, the Senate sub-committee on the Judiciary held a series of hearings investigating The United States Brewers’ Association, a collection of German brewers operating in the US. The committee’s report, Brewing and Liquor Interests and German and Bolshevik Propaganda, charged German brewers with using their economic and cultural influence during the war years to spread anti-American propaganda (Tolzmann 298-299). Soon, those of German descent would be identified with the growing post-war fear of communism.

In pairing this investigation with a search for Bolshevik influences, the Senate sub-committee, the first congressional committee to investigate Communism, signaled the future hunts for Un-American activity in the 1930s and 1940s. The fear of Bolsheviks would only increase through 1919 and 1920 as Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer launched his campaign against radicalism in his “raids.” Palmer created the First Red Scare with the help of the young but ambitious head of the Bureau of
Investigation’s new General Intelligence Division, J. Edgar Hoover (Morgan 74). The sub-committee’s work demonstrates that the mechanisms through which Germans were constructed as disloyal, duplicitous, and anti-American served as the convenient template for the creation of the Communist enemy. Historian Christopher Capozzola has argued that the easy slippage from accusations of “pro-German” loyalty to “Bolshevik” sympathies was “seamless...because both culture and institutions had made the terms synonymous (201).” That the dying embers of German harassment should overlap with the burgeoning hunt for Communists reveals the political utility of having an enemy of the state.

Prohibition lasted from January 16, 1920 to December 5, 1933 when the 18th Amendment was repealed. The law was seen as a resounding failure that opened the country up to organized crime and made the vast majority of everyday American lawbreakers. However, like the targeting of German language education, the German press, and other German cultural productions, the law was successful in destroying the economic power of German business owners and was a primary factor in the decline of the prominence of German community groups (Tolzmann 300).

Although Germans would never again, even in the Second World War, have the same vulnerability to violence, or as Ruth Wilson Gilmore would say a “vulnerability to premature death (28),” the desire to harass, humiliate, torture, and kill those who were deemed as irrevocably unable to assimilate would continue. The racialization of Germans was temporary; a condition of the war years to create an enemy out of a people whose history on American land was as old as any other European group. New German immigrants and particularly patriotic Germans were easy targets but this enemization sought to surpass the visible markers of difference in order to argue that Germans were innately inferior. Through changes in laws, scientific racism, and wartime propaganda, the German enemy was created both on the battlefields of Europe and on the American homefront. The end of widespread harassment of Germans after the war is a testament to the effectiveness of wartime racialized propaganda. As quickly as Germans were pushed out the community of American citizenship,
they were just as quickly allowed to return to the fold, albeit with one source of their livelihood eliminated. The war years quickened the process of German-American assimilation as Germans changed their last names, stopped speaking their language and teaching it to their children, and saw the end of German language papers. The violence of the war ultimately made Germans more American as they assimilated to survive and solidified their inclusion as White Americans in the post-war era.

However, 1919 would be very different for African Americans as the assumption that providing military service would lead to increased civil rights failed returning soldiers miserably. At first African Americans were publically thanked for their service by the federal government and the public, both White and African American. For example, on February 17, 1919, a racially integrated crowd of tens of thousands welcomed home almost 3,000 African Americans soldiers in a parade down New York’s Fifth Avenue, just one of the celebrations of this kind. Expressions such as these were demonstrations of wartime gratitude but they were not a harbinger of a general change in racial attitudes. Military leaders and the Wilson Administration were actually quite knowledgeable that returning African Americans soldiers would have expectations for greater civil rights and attempted to prepare them for their disappointment. Many of these soldiers were given a YMCA pamphlet, “A Greeting to our Colored Soldiers” which contained advice for re-integrating into civilian life. It also included a call for patience with racial equality so that “not all at once- perhaps, but slowly and surely – a better day will dawn for you and your children (Mjgkij 143).” The prominent African American activist and writer of The American Negro in the World War, Emmett J. Scott, remarked that he felt “personally a deep sense of disappointment, of poignant pain, that a great country in time of need should promise so much and afterwards perform so little (Mjagski 145).” As recognition for military service and sacrifice African American soldiers, and the community, expected to receive greater civil rights but instead were instructed to have patience. In response to this disappointment many African Americans now reasoned that equality would not be given by the State and took on greater actions towards self-determination. In
response to this wave of African American autonomy, Whites across the country would react with violence. 1919 would be a year of racial violence on a mass scale so brutal and bloody that African American activist James Weldon Johnson would call that summer and early fall, the Red Summer (McWhirter 13).

In 1919, there were seventy-seven lynchings, up from sixty-three from the prior year, and twenty-six riots where White communities attacked African American communities. The worst of these violent altercations was in Chicago. On a hot July day, seventeen-year-old Eugene Williams splashed in the waves with his friends and he forgot, for just a moment, the invisible line in the water that separated the races. Swiftly, Whites on the shore saw that he had violated the color line that separated the 25th street African American beach from the White 29th street beach. They grabbed rocks and threw them at the young man’s head until it could no longer been seen above the water. Williams’s drowning would set off five days of violence in the city, mostly on the south side, as roving mobs attacked each other in the streets. In the end, twenty-three African Americans were dead, fifteen Whites were dead, and there were over 500 injuries, the majority by far were African American (Armstrong, “The 1919 Race Riots”). The riot also led to over a million dollars in property damage and left more than 1,000 families homeless, mostly African Americans (Mjagski 145). The Hamburg Athletic Club, an Irish immigrant gang named for the German roots of the South Side neighborhood of Bridgeport, instigated the majority of the violence. The future mayor of Chicago, Richard J. Daley, was a member of the Hamburgs at that time but, although questioned several times, would not address what role he played in the attacks on Africans Americans (Armstrong, “The 1919 Race Riots”). This period of anti-African American violence was a rejection of increased visibility and economic vitality and a way for Whites – from various backgrounds – find a common enemy in the African American community.

Similar violent incidents occurred all over the country in response to minor violations of the color line, a reaction to the broader change sweeping the nation. Returning White soldiers came home
to cities and towns where large populations of African Americans now lived, due the Great Migration, and found these men working their former jobs. For example, Chicago had so many unemployed White veterans that local factory owners attempted to convince African Americans to return south through propaganda notices, but most new residents were not responsive to this request (McWhirter 19). The North was now a dangerous place, but it was no more dangerous than the rural south and only the North could provide higher paying jobs. The summer and fall of 1919 would not stop the Great Migration, but the war changed economic and social relationships between the races and the violence sent a clear message that any hope of achieving racial equality would not given by the White majority and would need to be achieved through revolutionary action.

The war had changed things. Historian Richard Slotkin argues that from 1880 onward African Americans rarely defended themselves during race riots because even the smallest actions of resistance were used as an excuse to destroy whole communities (436). In the aftermath of war, this was no longer the case as veterans led armed groups of African Americans in defending their homes and neighborhoods, many times using German guns and ammunitions seized during overseas military service (Mjagkij 146). This new militarism, an armed African American resistance movement, was a response to the disappointment of the lack of rights provided in the post-war period as much as it was a response to the violence of the race riots. Jamaican immigrant poet Claude McKay’s 1919 poem “If We Must Die” responded to the Chicago riot and advocated this new approach to achieving equality. The poem ends, “Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack/ Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!” as McKay brings together the affective language of war with the demand for civil rights. This new mode of bold rebellion, the New Negro Movement, was supported by a larger cultural and political crusade that sought to create a seamless integration between politics and the arts. The Harlem Renaissance brought together African American intellectuals and artists striving not for assimilation but “intellectual thought...in the form of a reform-oriented, cultural nationalism (Allen 52).” The arts would emerge as
the vital place for promoting and maintaining a vision of African American community and advocacy providing the music, the novels, the poems, and the plays that would provide the foundation for the next generation of civil rights artist-activists. Quite distinctive from the harassed German-immigrant population that quickly folded into the mainstream of American society following the war, African Americans were fueled by the war to take greater steps towards self-determination and defiant resistance to White supremacist violence.

This study, *Playing American: Race and Citizenship in American Theatre and Performance in the Great War, 1917-1919*, has focused on the brief period of active American engagement in the First World War demonstrating the centrality of theatre and performance in this period. I have focused on those of German descent and African American soldiers in order to analyze how performances and practices reflected, responded to, and reacted against conceptions of those outside the notion of the White American citizen. In examining the role of race and citizenship I argue that performed acts of violence were central to the experience of minority citizens. In examining German immigrants, I locate the period of the Great War as a moment in which the construction Whiteness is highly visible. The racialization of Germans in the period served to create a non-White enemy that dehumanized the population and placed them in serious danger. The acts of violence taken against Germans were part of a broader process that worked to dismantle the influence and vitality of German American communities as a means of emboldening narrow conceptions of acceptable citizenship. Many of those of German descent were able to assimilate because despite their racialization their White skin gave them the ability to successfully perform the patriotic rituals that kept them safe. Others either could not or would not assimilate and were more vulnerable to the ever-present mob ready to re-enforce what behavior was deemed acceptable during wartime. An examination of *Friendly Enemies* and Prager’s lynching offers two cases of the choice before Germans in the face of coercive patriotism through performances of violence.
African Americans were already historically outside the community of White American citizenship. Their participation in the war was based on a desire to demonstrate honor in the hopes of greater self-determination. Performances of violence terrified many German immigrants into assimilating, but terror was the inescapable reality for African Americans, particularly in the South. The period of the First World War was a turning point in the role of violence and a source of productive anger, rage, and fuel for the desire for self-determination. The violence of the war provided the state’s need for soldiers and the African American elite hoped that the conflict would be an opportunity to show valor and gain respect. This strategy came with complex negotiations that asked African American men to serve in a racially segregated military for a country that denied them full civil rights. The military draft offered little in the way of choices as African Americans who were called up either enlisted or tried their chances with local draft boards that rarely provided exemptions. *Mine Eyes Have Seen* is an example of the challenge of this situation. Once in the military, African American soldiers were frequently housed in White communities that did not want them and racial tensions emerged. The Houston Riot stands out as a moment when incidents of violent racism enacted by Whites were returned with violence. In *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, Chris is on the precipice of change while the men of the 24th pushed back against the White supremacist violence with his own opinions and advocating for self-determination. The Houston Riot demonstrates the revolutionary potential of the resistance and provides a brief glimpse into the future where more than ever before African Americans communally responded, through violent and non-violent means, to White supremacist violence.

In chapter 1, I analyzed Aaron Hoffman and Samuel Shipman’s 1918 *Friendly Enemies* contextualizing and examining key moments throughout the text in order to chart how the pro-German Karl assimilates into the American Charlie. I emphasized that despite the racialization of Germans, Karl’s transition from enemy to friend is possible because he ultimately decides to act, to perform, the modes of American citizenship that are deemed acceptable in a time of war. His
performances of citizenship are perceived as truthful because he is visibly White and able to traverse the boundaries of his racialization and be accepted as fully assimilated citizen. My argument focused on four key moments in the text examined through close reading, historical contextualization and critical analysis including discussions of the enemization of German culture, the creation the German ‘Hun’ as wartime propaganda, debates about American loyalty, and finally, Karl’s transition to full American assimilation. These moments demonstrate the vitality of the play as a cultural product of German racial enemization.

My discussion of the domestic and international success of the play demonstrates that this work had resonance in a wartime climate rife with debates about immigrant loyalty. Critical responses varied but the majority were split on two main issues: Did Karl assimilation due to his guilt over the death of his son or because a German spy has demonstrate the innate brutality of Germans? Was the play anti-American or anti-German? The public debates on these questions demonstrate that the play historically functioned within a stringent political landscape with a narrow view of citizenship performance. I argue that the actor playing Karl has the potential to offer a level of complexity through negotiating his conflicted feeling and dual allegiances. I contend that play’s popularity and legacy demonstrate that even during wartime there was a desire to see German immigrants living in the US accepting America as their home. Karl, despite his status as a racialized German enemy, is still depicted as a desired member of American society. Karl’s Whiteness allows him, through embodied performances, to transition into American culture. Despite this temporary moment of racialization, Germans were able to fully assimilate and continue to receive the privileges of American citizenship.

In chapter two, I focused on the racialized enemization of German immigrants through the harassment, torture, and lynching of Robert Prager and the subsequent trial of the members of the mob in Collinsville, IL in April of 1918. The violence that exists on the unseen margins of Friendly Enemies did not need to be fully explained to audiences who would have been familiar with the incidents of anti-
German harassment during the war years. In contextualizing Prager’s death, I examine the use of lynching as performance of violence that imbricated anti-Germanism with the brutal and terrorizing spectacle that targeted African Americans and their communities. I discuss the role of vigilantism, the rise of the lynch mob in American culture, and scholarship on lynching as a performance. Next, I historicize Robert Prager’s murder through examining significant events and how he came to be suspected as a German spy. I analyze Prager’s lynching as a violent performance of racialization meant to embolden White supremacy and American patriotism. I turn to the trial of the lynch mob in order to investigate how it became a discussion of patriotic loyalty and relied not on what Prager was or did but if his murders perceived him as a threat. In finding the members of the mob “not guilty” the jury demonstrated that Germans could be murdered simply for being suspected of disloyalty and mobs that undertook this violent vigilantism would be seen as taking preemptive actions toward homeland security.

Prager’s death has broader ramifications for the history of American civil liberties as his case was discussed in congressional debates regarding an amendment to the Espionage Act of 1917 that came to be known as the Sedition Act of 1918. Lawmakers who argued for the bill asserted that it was the perceived weakness of the federal government in punishing disloyalty that motivated the mob to kill Prager. The bill would demonstrate that the state was the arbiter of definitions of disloyalty and provide the ability to sentence those found guilty to jail time. Prager’s lynching was a moment when German racialization was performed using the most brutal mode of anti-African American violence and it provided a crucial step towards the encroachment of state power and the narrowing of conceptions patriotism and citizenship.

In chapter three, I focused on the Houston Riot and the first court-martial, the Nesbit case, in order to examine this performance of violence and resistance by African American soldiers in August of 1917. Through the methodology of performance, I examined the three primary factors for the riot: 1)
racial tension in Camp Logan, 2) racial segregation in Houston, and 3) the role of police brutality, in particular the vicious assault on Corporal Baltimore. My analysis of the first court-martial, the Nesbit Case, focused on the acknowledgement by the court of the incidents that led to the riot without considering how those incidents separated African American soldiers for their national allegiance. The actions of the 24th demonstrated that there were fundamental flaws that in the military's plan, flaws that the courts-martial would attempt to remedy through harsh sentences and the death penalty as deterrents against future insurgencies. I ended this chapter by discussing the performed resistance of the thirteen soldiers sent to their death in the first court-martial. Their communal performance of the hymn “Lord, I’m Coming Home” was an act of resistance that demonstrated their own humanity, defiance, and dignity. In focusing on this moment of resistance, I advocate for a re-framing of the soldiers as both victims and resisters of White supremacy whose final action sought to claim their own subjectivity.

The Houston Riot and the Nesbit case demonstrate the role that violence plays in formation of minority citizenship. The War Department created an untenable situation by placing African American soldiers in racially segregated cities, a situation made profoundly worse by the lack of support and empowerment by military superiors. The soldiers of the 24th could not possibly have been prepared enough for the situation they would encounter and they suffered for the military's unrealistic expectations. The mutiny and riot was an embodied performance of insurgency, a violent performative call for recognition. The moment would echo through the African American press and the community as a demonstration of the complex negotiation needed to serve the nation and advocate for equality. Drawing from scholarship that brings together performance studies and legal studies, I have argued that the law itself is performative and examined the theatricality of the trials themselves. African American soldiers were not exempt from the routine and hegemonic violence of White supremacy within the law and its interpretations. Instead, for Whites these men became performing symbols that circulated the
dangerous potential of providing the full citizenship rights to African Americans. The government only halted their deaths out fear of the publicity it engendered and the probable effect on African American troop recruitment and retention.

In chapter four, I analyzed Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, published in the April 1918 issue of *The Crisis*, the only play by an African American to be written, published, and performed during active US engagement in the war. The play offers insight into the complex negotiations of racial identity and citizenship by depicting Chris, his family, and his community as they argue about what it meant to be an African American at the height of the war. I advocated for an analysis of the text that foregrounded its openness in performance focusing on the ambiguous ending and the use of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” I argue that several critics of the work base their reading of Chris’s decision to go to war on a piece of archival evidence not available to readers or audience members of the work. As such, their assessment is fundamentally flawed. Only theatre and performance scholars Koritha Mitchell and co-authors Ted Shine and James Hatch argue for this reading of ambiguity. I support their reading and expand on it to consider how the performance of the work could engage the audience in Chris’s decision-making process allowing for multiple readings of the text. I support this reading through an analysis of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” at the critical juncture of the play’s ending. The song’s placement is not just simply patriotic but references a history of racial progress towards equality as part of a Christian call to future reckoning. It is not readily apparent what Chris sees in his future. Ultimately, both of his choices – to enlist or to ask for exemption affirm state power of the racialized body. The final moments lingers in its ambiguity as a testament to survival.

My analysis of the play is supported by a discussion of its production history and new archival evidence. I established productions across the east, south, and midwest at schools and churches and analyze the scant information available about those productions. I also addressed the lack of vital information about how production choices were made by discussing my own direction of the work. The
openness of *Mine Eyes Have Seen* demonstrates Dunbar-Nelson’s commitment to acknowledging conflicting feelings of belonging and rightful anger directed toward the nation. I advocate that the performance of the work allows for multiple interpretations of those feelings. This ambiguity engages the audiences to actively consider their own choices and their own relationship to the nation.

Throughout this dissertation, I have examined these cases individually nodding only when necessary to the ways that these events intersect. Further examination of the connections between events in these chapters in future irritations of this study will shed light on the relationships between the formation of race and American citizenship during and after the war. I’ll briefly turn to the dynamic potential for comparing these cases and some common themes throughout the study.

Each chapter discusses a piece of music and, to varying degrees, utilizes ethnomusicology as means of contemplating the events of the First World War in the United States. The use of communal singing is in all my cases. *Friendly Enemies* ends with a moment of communal singing of “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” as a demonstration of Karl’s transition into American citizenship. *Mine Eyes Have Seen* also utilizes a patriotic song and communal singing of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” to reinforce the patriotism of some characters over others. In the lynching of Robert Prager patriotic songs are used as an instrument of harassment and torture as Prager is focused to sing for the amusement of the mob. Finally, the resistive use of the hymn, “Lord, I’m Coming Home” is used by the soldiers on their way to death for their participation in the Houston Riot. This strain of musical performance in the study allows for a further consideration of the role of performance and the use of song as a method for creative cohesive national identities.

Both theatrical productions are centered in the domestic sphere of the family home of the racial minority. Expanding on my argument about Karl’s ability to express himself more freely once he enters his home in *Friendly Enemies*, home creates a space for discussions that are not possible or desired in public. Both also focus on a central figure whose ideology puts them at odds with the vast majority of
the characters. However, despite the dangerous climate for oppositional beliefs, the private space of the home provides safety and the freedom to debate ideas no longer possible in the public sphere. These homes are made public through their enactment on the stage as the private world enters through performance space. In using the domestic world as a site to discuss social problems, these plays are part of a historical continuum of dramatic literature that has utilized the home as a site of racial, political, and social contestation. That both plays have been read as pro-war and anti-war propaganda demonstrates vast possibilities for debate within the family space. The role of the home also figures prominently in discourses of exile and diaspora enriching a further investigation of performances of citizenship.

In both performances of violence, rumor plays an important role in progressing the act of violence on the racialized body. Robert Prager may have garnered attention for speaking German or having a heavy accent but it was rumors of his questioning about explosives and the rumor of the missing explosives that propelled fellow miners to single him out. The collective rage of the Houston Riot was incited by the belief that Corporal Baltimore was murdered by White police officers. Even when it was shown to be untrue, the rumor was so powerful because it could have been true. Both incidents occurred in an environment where racial instability is ever-present and the tension between groups is building. It takes one month, in both cases, from the initial contact of the outsider(s) to the area to the performance of violence. Rumors propel and accelerate latent violent impulses despite their validity. This is particularly true in a time of war when propaganda has instructed the citizenry to maintain constant surveillance and to suspect anyone who looks or acts differently.

This study is also limited by temporal and thematic boundaries but makes way for future scholars on the subject. This work is not a comprehensive text for American theatre during the Great War and certainly one is needed. There are ample plays and performances that dealt directly with wartime themes during active engagement and many that touched on the war without fully engaging
with it directly. A study of this kinds would go far in counteracting the myth the First World War was not vital to American theatrical or performance traditions. This study does not engage with military theatre during the conflict and the use of entertainment in military camps. Weldon Durham’s *Liberty Theatres of the United States Army, 1917-1919* (2006) offers a significant contribution to this area but his focus is on the complexities of the infrastructure in building the theatre and economic negotiations between the federal government, the military, and theatrical producers. There is ample room to consider more thoroughly the content of the plays performed and the creation of amateur entertainment by soldiers.

Additionally, this study focuses on the nexus between race and citizenship and offers little in the way of discussion of gender, sexuality, or class. Considering the critical social issue of women’s suffrage and the significant political work of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) there are further complexities to this time period might be more fully explored. For example, performances such as the ones by the “Silent Sentinels,” suffragettes who continuously protested in front of the White House for over two years as a political statement, or the trial of Eugene W. Debs charged under the Espionage Act for giving a speech that federal government charged aided the enemy. These moments during the war years add to the wartime climate and discussion on citizenship. Additionally, historians such as Nancy Bristow and Mark Ellis have discussed the role of masculinity in wartime rhetoric, and much of the previous scholarship on *Mine Eyes Have Seen* also focused this topic, but a further consideration of the concept would allow for compelling comparisons between chapters.

There are also legacies of the Great War that are still active in contemporary America. Although there is no longer an active military draft, young men on their eighteenth birthday register themselves, under a process based on the Selective Service Act of 1917. However, what I find to be the most troubling legacy of the First World War was not seen until the early 21st century. In 1920, Congress quietly repealed the Sedition Act of 1918 but the Espionage Act of 1917 still remains in effect. Between the end of the First World War and 2010, only three people had been charged under the act but since
that time an additional eight, most notably Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning, have been charged with Espionage under the Obama Administration (Shell and Dennis, “11 ‘Leakers’ Charged with Espionage”). The administration, despite journalistic inquiry, has not responded as to why it has opted to increasingly utilize this wartime legislation to prosecute individuals who expose government operations and classified information. The answer is, at least partially, dependent upon the perpetual state of war that allows the government to utilize already broad wartime legislation and the wide breath of government surveillance legalized through the post-9/11 passage of the PATRIOT ACT. That the two most notably individuals charged recently, Snowden and Manning, claim that they were attempting to expose the ramifications of both legal and illegal government surveillance and they published this information – and did not sell it or trade it to US enemies – is an enlargement of an already extremely general definition of espionage.

That the majority of individuals charged with espionage prior to 2010 were eventually found to be providing information for the public good, including Daniel Ellsberg who was charged in 1971 for leaking the Pentagon Papers which exposed government deception its carrying out of the Vietnam War, allows for a broader consideration of the history of American decision-making during wartime as being frequently severe and regretful. Throughout this study, I have considered how theatre and performance are instruments of racial and citizenship formation during a time of war. This is a process of identifying, creating, and maintaining the classification of enemies and friends, us and them, and insiders and outsiders. After the First World War, many recognized that the climate of coercive patriotism created wartime hysteria and government overreach but seemed to forget these lessons in the next war. In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt gave amnesty to the last of the prisoners arrested under espionage charges stemming from the First World War. In less than ten years, he signed Proclamation No. 2537 facilitating the beginning of Japanese immigrants and Japanese-Americans to be isolated in concentration camps. It
seems in wartime it was easy to ignore the regrettable actions of the past, even the recent past, creating violence performance to shape another generation of racialized subjects in America.

In conclusion, I turn to someone who did learn from the lessons of the First World War. During the war, philosopher-educator John Dewey advocated for the suppression of dissent under the Espionage Act as a pragmatic way to codify civic loyalty. After the war, he re-considered. Dewey observed, “that the attack on freedom of speech is most likely to come from those who are entrenched in power and who fear that the general exercise of civil liberties ‘will disturb the existing order’” (Stone 230). His experience during the war years showed him that Americans were far too willing to “condemn as seditious every opinion and belief which irritates the majority of ‘loyal’ citizens” (Stone 230). Those outside the status quo were easily labeled radical or subversive becoming “enemies of the nation” (Stone 230). I believe John Dewey’s wisdom about the American character is still accurate today. It is still true that those who challenge the existing social order find themselves vulnerable to a multitude of violent actions but I also believe that, just as during the Great War, Whiteness provides privileges of power and safety even for the most radical or subversive. Throughout this study, in plays and performances, I have examined violent actions that are undertaken by or against minority populations in order to consider the ways that the war dramatically changed the racial history of America. My study, then, shows an examination of how theatre and performance, during the period of American engagement in the Great War, were crucial in constructing and circulating notions of race and citizenship, using violence as a primary method of enforcing and policing the boundaries of Whiteness.
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