

Recruiting posters for African American soldiers, 1918

Introduction

These two World War I recruiting posters aim to encourage African Americans to enlist. The first poster, "True Sons of Freedom" invokes the memory of Abraham Lincoln and the bravery of black troops to inspire African Americans to sign up. It frames the war as a struggle for freedom akin to the Civil War. In the second, "Colored Man Is No Slacker," against a background of African American patriotism, self-sacrifice, and courage, a black soldier takes his leave. Both posters position the war as an opportunity for African Americans to prove their patriotism and serve their country.

More than 350,000 African Americans, trained and deployed in segregated units, served in the US military during the war, of whom 42,000 saw action in Europe.

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction and view both images. Then apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

1. Explain how patriotism was incorporated into both enlistment posters.
2. In both posters, only African American soldiers are depicted. Why would African Americans enlist in an army that was segregated?
3. Why was Lincoln's image incorporated into the poster "True Sons of Liberty"?
4. Further research: To what extent did enlistment posters attempt to attract other ethnicities?

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Image



Colored Man is No Slacker, print by E.G. Renesch, Chicago, Illinois, 1918. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC06134)

Recruiting posters for African American soldiers, 1918

Image



True Sons of Freedom, broadside by Charles Gustrine, Chicago, Illinois, 1918. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC09121)