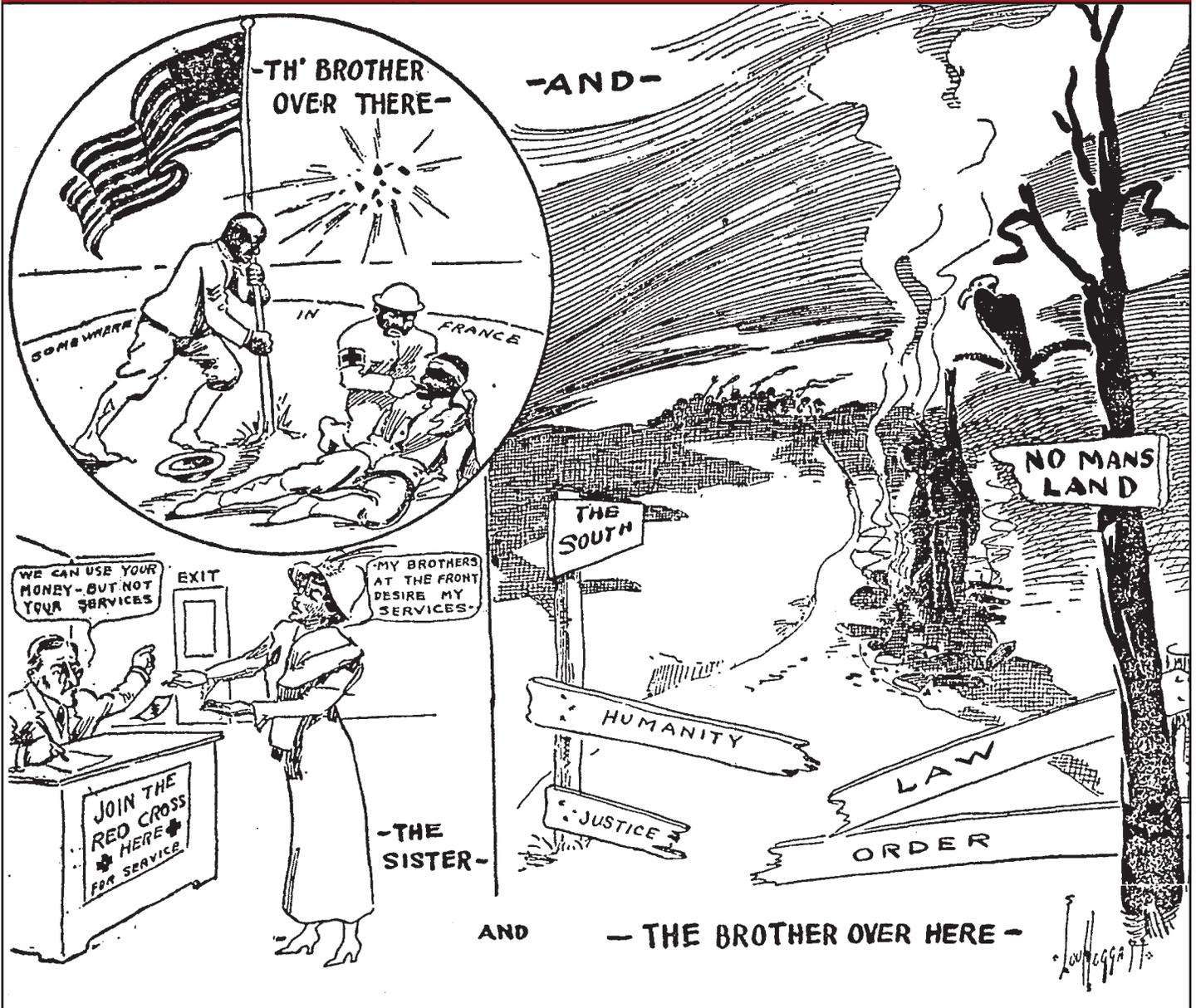


World War I, African American Soldiers, and America's War for Democracy



"As We Bow Our Heads in Prayer" by Lon Hoggatt, Chicago Defender, March 23, 1918

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BY RON NASH

OVERVIEW

This lesson is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These resources were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original documents of historical significance. Students will practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned viewpoints on these source materials.

This lesson provides an opportunity to analyze written texts and political cartoons in order to both understand the participation of Black soldiers in World War I and sharpen literacy skills related to the distinction between *imply* and *infer*, an essential skill tied to both historical thinking and literacy.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze a primary source document using close-reading strategies
- Summarize the essential message of a text
- Demonstrate understanding of both literal and inferential aspects of text-based evidence
- Draw conclusions based on direct evidence found in the text
- Interpret, analyze, and demonstrate understanding of political cartoons

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did World War I affect the lives of African Americans?
- To what extent did the patriotism of African Americans in World War I result in greater civil rights and racial justice?

NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS: 1–2

GRADE LEVEL: 7–12

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

See the student handout on page 5.

MATERIALS

- Historical Background 1: African American Soldiers in World War I: Excerpts from Jami L. Bryan, “Fighting for Respect: African-American Soldiers in WWI,” *On Point: The Journal of Army History* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2002–2003): 11 – 14 and Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010), 5–7, 59.
- Note to W. E. B. Du Bois about an African American Officer, undated, W. E. B. Du Bois World War I Papers, University of Massachusetts-Amherst
 - o Transcript
 - o Images
 - o Guide Questions
- Activity Sheets
 - o Analyzing a Cartoon activity sheet
 - o Implication/Inference activity sheet
- Cartoons
 - o Cartoon #1: “Loyalty” by George H. Ben Johnson, *Richmond Planet*, June 16, 1917, Virginia Chronicle, virginiachronicle.com
 - o Cartoon #2: “The Dawn of a New Day” by George H. Ben Johnson, *Richmond Planet*, June 23, 1917, Virginia Chronicle, virginiachronicle.com
 - o Cartoon #3: “Speak Out, Mr. President!” *New York Age*, July 19, 1917, newspapers.com
 - o Cartoon #4: “Real Democracy,” *New York Age*, November 29, 1917, newspapers.com
 - o Cartoon #5: “Contraband Goods” by Lon Hoggatt, *Chicago Defender*, February 2, 1918, ProQuest Historical African American Newspapers
 - o Cartoon #6: “The Old Mob and the New Keeper” by Lon Hoggatt, *Chicago Defender*, February 16, 1918, ProQuest Historical African American Newspapers
 - o Cartoon # 7: “As We Bow Our Heads in Prayer” by Lon Hoggatt, *Chicago Defender*, March 23, 1918, ProQuest Historical African American Newspapers
 - o Cartoon #8: “Will Uncle Sam Stand for This Cross,” *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1919, ProQuest Historical African American Newspapers
 - o Cartoon #9: “Wake up Uncle or You Are Going to Fall,” *Baltimore African American*, August 8, 1919
 - o Cartoon # 10: “The Mark of the American Hun,” *Baltimore African American*, January 24, 1919
 - o Cartoon # 11: “A Tip from One Who Knows,” *Chicago Defender*, December 13, 1919, ProQuest Historical African American Newspapers
- Key Word/Summary activity sheets
 - o “Close Ranks” by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Crisis* 16, no. 3 (July 1918): 111
 - o “Returning Soldiers” by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Crisis* 18, no. 1 (May 1919): 14–15

PROCEDURE

1. Review the historical background and the history of African American soldiers in World War I with the class. You may distribute the Historical Background reading or discuss material the class learned before this lesson.
2. Take a few minutes to engage the students on the concepts of *inference* (infer) and *implication* (imply). It is best to start with simple examples such as the meaning of a stop sign or other familiar images. You can also have students bring newspaper headlines to class or you can provide headlines using the Newseum website (<http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/>) in order to gauge initial student understanding of the concepts.
3. Distribute copies of the note written to W. E. B. Du Bois and the Guide Questions for the note. You may provide the images of the original document as well. For purposes of this lesson, paragraph numbers have been inserted to chunk the note for the students. The students can work individually or in small groups.
4. “Share read” the note with the students by having the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
5. The students should now reread the text and answer the Guide Questions as they read. If you are having students work with partners or in groups, have them negotiate their answers.
6. Break the class into small groups, if you did not do so for the first exercise, and distribute copies of the first five World War I cartoons from the Black press.
7. Distribute the activity sheets for students to record their findings. You may use either the Analyzing a Cartoon or the Implication/Inference activity sheet or both, depending on the time available. If you use Analyzing a Cartoon, the students will answer the questions provided for each cartoon. If you use Implication/Inference, the students should record in the chart what the creator was implying and what they can infer from the cartoon.
8. Reassemble the class and lead a discussion on their responses. Ensure that everyone has demonstrated an understanding of *imply* and *infer*.
9. Provide the students with copies of the remaining six cartoons to analyze for homework and enough activity sheets to complete the assignment. Debrief the homework during the next lesson.

ASSESSMENT AND EXTENSION

Assessment and Extension 1: The students can compare and contrast the different documents (the note and the cartoons) and develop an overview of the complexity related to the lesson’s Essential Questions:

- How did World War I affect the lives of African American soldiers?
- To what extent did the patriotism of African Americans in World War I result in greater civil rights and racial justice?

Students should choose one of the questions to respond to and use evidence from the text and the cartoons to support their answers.

Assessment and Extension 2: Distribute the two *Crisis* magazine editorials written by W. E. B. Du Bois, “Close Ranks” (1918) and “Returning Soldiers” (1919). You may follow the close-reading strategies suggested earlier in this lesson or extend the literacy component by using the key word strategy activity sheets. Students can work individually or in groups to complete the activity sheets. They must select 8 to 10 key words in each of the three chunks of text, use those words to write a brief summary of the text, and then restate the summary in their own words in order to demonstrate their understanding of Du Bois’s main points.

Historical Background: African American Soldiers in World War I

Jami L. Bryan, “Fighting for Respect: African Americans in World War I,” *On Point: The Journal of Army History* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2002–2003): 11–12.

When the United States declared war against Germany in April of 1917, War Department planners quickly realized that the standing Army of 126,000 men would not be enough to ensure victory overseas. The standard volunteer system proved to be inadequate in raising an Army, so on 18 May 1917 Congress passed the Selective Service Act requiring all male citizens between the ages of 21 and 31 to register for the draft. Even before the act was passed, African American males from all over the country eagerly joined the war effort. They viewed the conflict as an opportunity to prove their loyalty, patriotism, and worthiness for equal treatment in the United States. . . .

When World War I broke out, there were four all-black regiments: the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry. The men in these units were considered heroes in their communities. Within one week of Wilson’s declaration of war, the War Department had to stop accepting black volunteers because the quotas for African Americans were filled. . . .

Although technically eligible for many positions in the Army, very few blacks got the opportunity to serve in combat units. Most were limited to labor battalions. The combat elements of the U.S. Army were kept completely segregated. The four established all-black Regular Army regiments were not used in overseas combat roles but instead were diffused throughout American-held territory. There was such a backlash from the African American community, however, that the War Department finally created the 92d and 93d Divisions, both primarily black combat units, in 1917.

Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010), 5–7, 59.

The place of black soldiers in the war has too often been treated as tangential to the larger history of American involvement and the place of the conflict in American memory. The war experience of black soldiers, and African Americans more generally, has been characterized as one of disillusionment and dashed expectations because of the resilience of white racism. . . .

While acknowledging this reality, the story of African American servicemen in the war does not end here. African American soldiers, as combatants and noncombatants, made important and in many instances truly heroic contributions to the war effort. Most significant, black soldiers were complex men, with complex identities, and as such responded to military service in a variety of ways that did not always hinge exclusively on race and their confrontations with racism. . . .

Without question, the democratic framing of the war and its racial politics profoundly affected many black soldiers, who linked their service to larger questions surrounding the future of the race and its condition. . . . Charles Brodnax, a farmer from Brunswick County, Virginia, stated with confidence that he “belonged to the Government of my country and should answer to the call and obey the orders in defense of Democracy.”

Transcript of a Note to W. E. B. Du Bois about an African American Officer

1. Captain Leonard W. Lewis M.C. 370 Inf is now the ranking colored officer in the U.S. Army in America and is temporarily on duty at Camp Stuart.
2. Captain Lewis is supremely optimistic on the outlook of the Negro in America both during and after the war and has the vantage ground of both soldier and civilian as a viewpoint.
3. He says the men in his regiment who are “over there” went over very sanguine to do their bit for their country and their people. They are “Torch Bearers” to make the world safe for Democracy and America especially, by being men in the truest sense of the word compelling a reluctant recognition from both friend and foe.
4. We must forget and temporarily overlook every thing tending to bar progress, not be sensitive, but be strong and patient.
5. We must think of going into this war with the inspiration that characterized “the Crusades.” With half a million colored troops now in France with the Allies, America is the only country who has sent [colored] men ranking as commissioned officers.
6. This is Our country right or wrong.

Source: Note to W. E. B. Du Bois about an African American Officer, undated, W. E. B. Du Bois World War I Papers, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Images of a Note to W. E. B. Du Bois about an African American Officer, ca. 1918

A³²-28

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W. E. B. Du Bois World War I Papers, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

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 This is our country right or
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W. E. B. Du Bois World War I Papers, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

NAME _____

PERIOD _____

DATE _____

Guide Questions for the Note to W. E. B. Du Bois about an African American Officer

1. What is the tone of the document?

2. How is Captain Lewis portrayed in the first two lines?

3. What is implied in the statement “has the vantage ground of both soldiers and civilian as a viewpoint”?

4. What does the writer imply by saying “to do their bit for their country and their people” in section 3? What does the phrase “Torch Bearers” imply? What can you infer? What is your reasoning?

5. What can you infer from the statement “compelling a reluctant recognition from both friend and foe”? Give reasons to support your conclusions.

6. What does the writer imply in section 4? What do you infer from this section?

7. What is implied in the sentence “we must think of going into this war with the inspiration that characterized ‘the Crusades’”?

8. Why capitalize “Our” in the last sentence? What can you infer from the last sentence?

NAME _____

PERIOD _____

DATE _____

Analyzing a Cartoon

Cartoon # _____

Give the cartoon an original title:

What is the significance of the central figure(s) or object(s)?

What action is taking place in the cartoon?

What mood or tone is created by the cartoon? What in the image is creating that mood or tone?

What is the artist's message to the viewer?

Cartoon # _____

Give the cartoon an original title:

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What action is taking place in the cartoon?

What mood or tone is created by the cartoon? What in the image is creating that mood or tone?

What is the artist's message to the viewer?

NAME _____

PERIOD _____

DATE _____

Implications and Inferences in WWI Political Cartoons from the Black Press

Implications	Inferences
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Implications	Inferences
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.
11.	11.

Cartoon #1



Richmond Planet, June 16, 1917

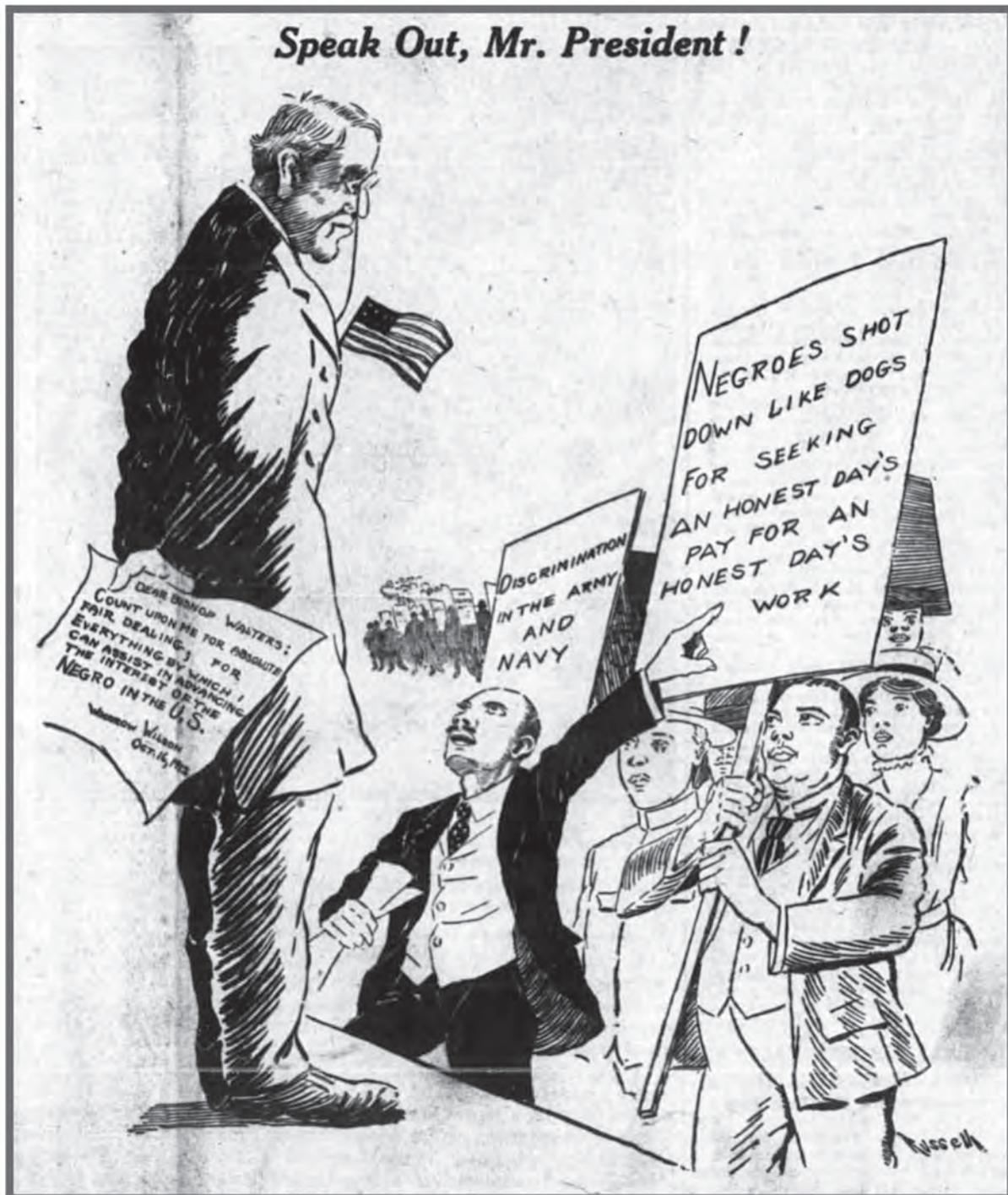
Cartoon #2

THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY



Richmond Planet, June 23, 1917

Cartoon #3



New York Age, July 19, 1917

Cartoon #4



New York Age, November 29, 1917

Cartoon #5

CONTRABAND GOODS



Chicago Defender, February 2, 1918

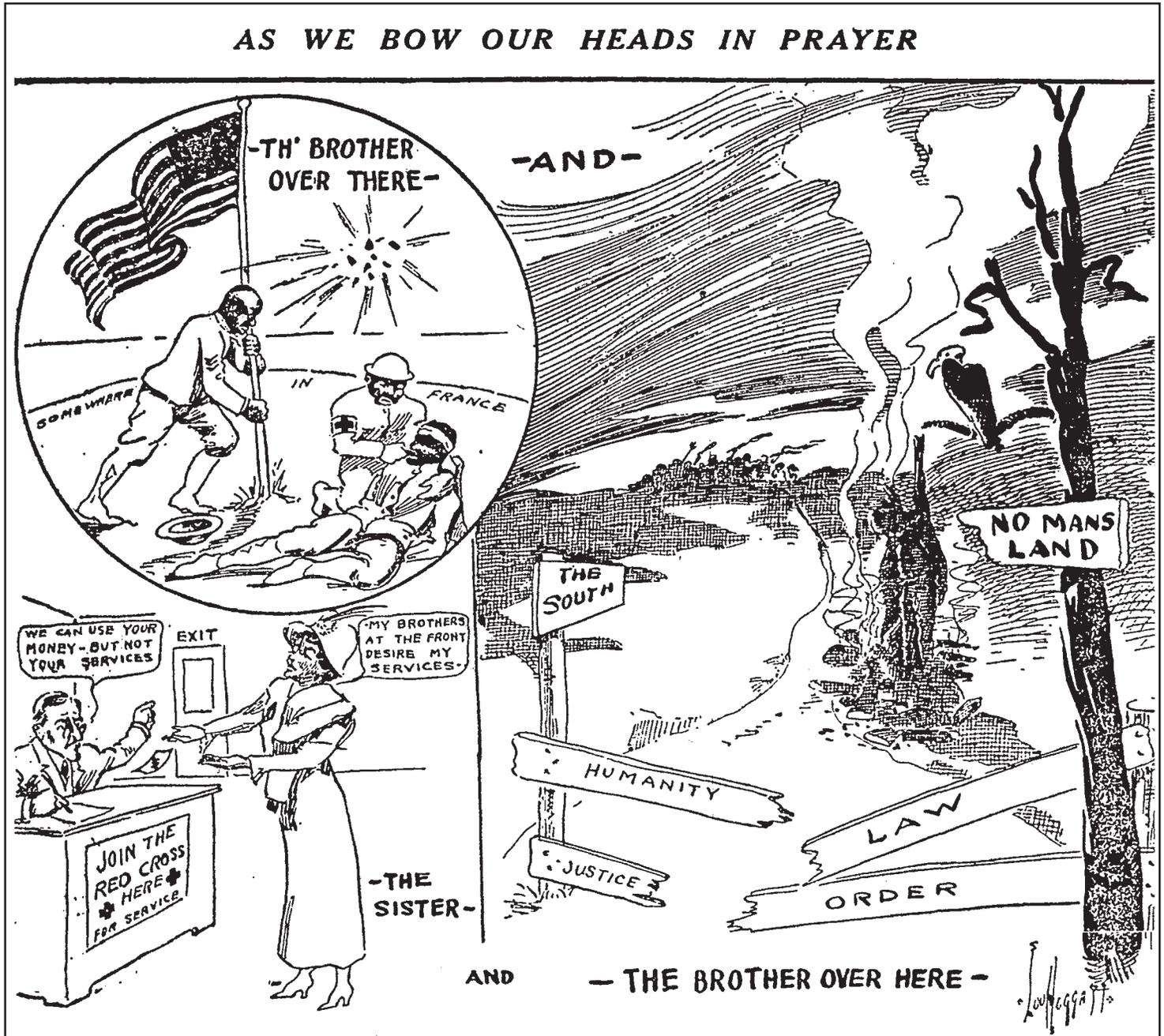
Cartoon #6

The Old Mob and the New Keeper



Chicago Defender, February 16, 1918

Cartoon #7



Cartoon #8

WILL UNCLE SAM STAND FOR THIS CROSS?



Chicago Defender, April 5, 1919

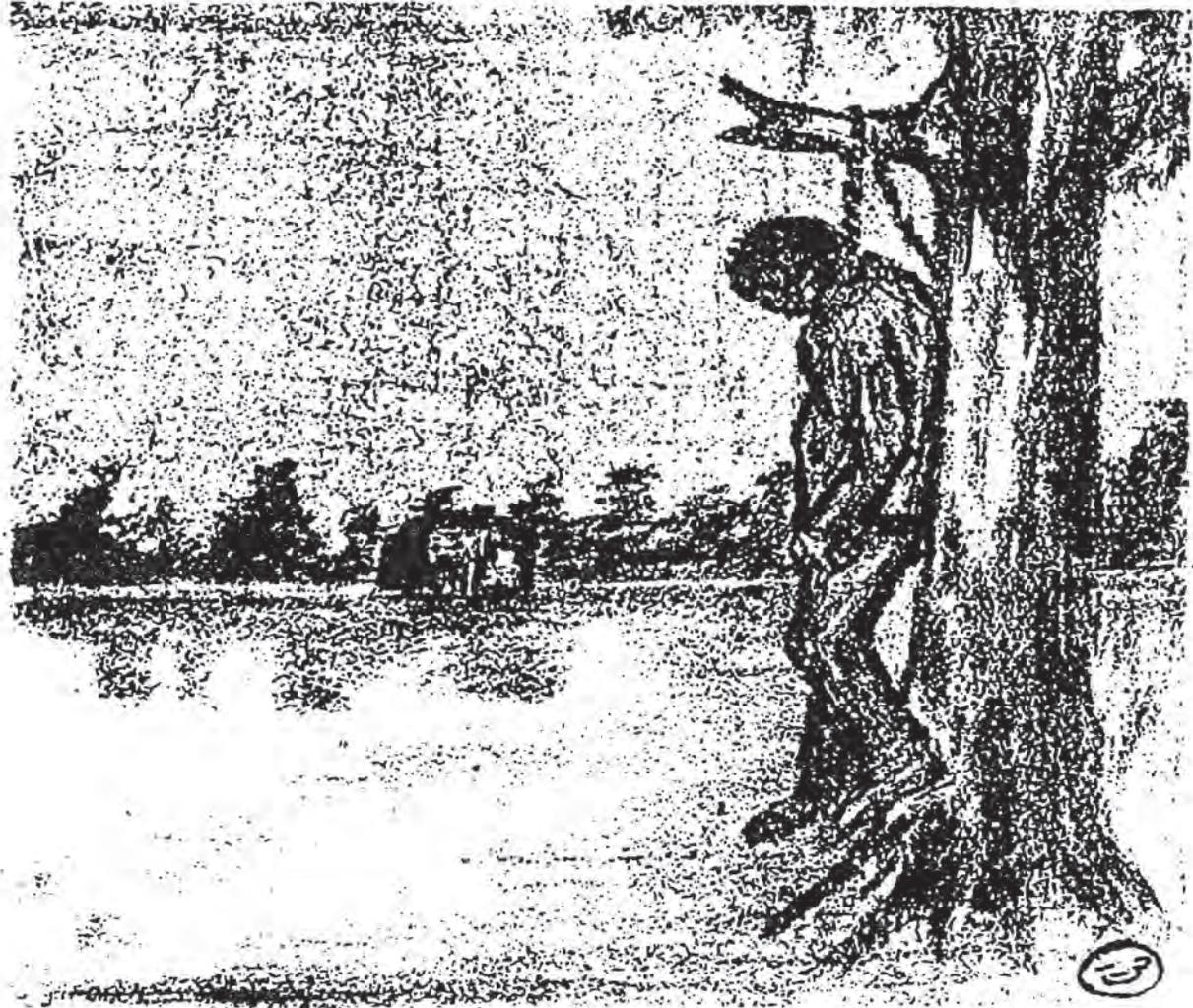
Cartoon #9



Baltimore African American, August 8, 1919

Cartoon #10

THE MARK OF THE AMERICAN HUN—BLOT IT OUT



Baltimore African American, *January 24, 1919*

Cartoon #11

A TIP FROM ONE WHO KNOWS



Chicago Defender, December 13, 1919

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

“Close Ranks” by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Crisis*, July 1918

Original Text:

This is the crisis of the world. For all the long years to come men will point to the year 1918 as the great Day of Decision, the day when the world decided whether it would submit to military despotism and an endless armed peace—if peace it could be called— or whether they would put down the menace of German militarism and inaugurate the United States of the World.

We of the colored race have no ordinary interest in the outcome. That which the German power represents today spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom and democracy. Let us not hesitate. Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly with our eyes lifted to the hills.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

#1: “Returning Soldiers” by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Crisis*, May 1919

Original Text:

We are returning from war! *The Crisis* and tens of thousands of black men were drafted into a great struggle. For bleeding France and what she means and has meant and will mean to us and humanity and against the threat of German race arrogance, we fought gladly and to the last drop of blood; for America and her highest ideals, we fought in far-off hope; for the dominant southern oligarchy entrenched in Washington, we fought in bitter resignation. For the America that represents and gloats in lynching, disfranchisement, caste, brutality and devilish insult—for this, in the hateful upturning and mixing of things, we were forced by vindictive fate to fight, also.

But today we return! We return from the slavery of uniform which the world’s madness demanded us to don to the freedom of civil garb. We stand again to look America squarely in the face and call a spade a spade. We sing: This country of ours, despite all its better souls have done and dreamed, is yet a shameful land.

It *lynches*.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:

#2: “Returning Soldiers” by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Crisis*, May 1919

Original Text:

And lynching is barbarism of a degree of contemptible nastiness unparalleled in human history. Yet for fifty years we have lynched two Negroes a week, and we have kept this up right through the war.

It *disfranchises* its own citizens.

Disfranchisement is the deliberate theft and robbery of the only protection of poor against rich and black against white. The land that disfranchises its citizens and calls itself a democracy lies and knows it lies.

It encourages *ignorance*.

It has never really tried to educate the Negro. A dominant minority does not want Negroes educated. It wants servants, dogs, whores and monkeys. And when this land allows a reactionary group by its stolen political power to force as many black folk into these categories as it possibly can, it cries in contemptible hypocrisy: “They threaten us with degeneracy; they cannot be educated.”

It *steals* from us.

It organizes industry to cheat us. It cheats us out of our land; it cheats us out of our labor. It confiscates our savings. It reduces our wages. It raises our rent. It steals our profit. It taxes us without representation. It keeps us consistently and universally poor, and then feeds us on charity and derides our poverty.

It *insults* us.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:

#3: “Returning Soldiers” by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Crisis*, May 1919

Original Text:

It has organized a nation-wide and latterly a world-wide propaganda of deliberate and continuous insult and defamation of black blood wherever found. It decrees that it shall not be possible in travel nor residence, work nor play, education nor instruction for a black man to exist without tacit or open acknowledgment of his inferiority to the dirtiest white dog. And it looks upon any attempt to question or even discuss this dogma as arrogance, unwarranted assumption and treason.

This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return. This is the fatherland for which we fought! But it is *our* fatherland. It was right for us to fight. The faults of *our* country are *our* faults. Under similar circumstances, we would fight again. But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.

We return.

We return from fighting.

We return fighting.

Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:
