AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE AUTO INDUSTRY

1917

World War I begins

The Great War, later named World War I, had been well under way in Europe since 1914, before the United States became involved on April 6th, 1917. Conflicts began with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which caused tensions between Austro-Hungary and Serbia. What escalated was a war involving most of the major powers of Europe, with Germany fighting against France and England. In the United States the war encouraged further migration to Detroit and other Midwest cities to fill jobs that soldiers had left behind in factories.

Detroit was very beneficial to the war effort. In the first year of involvement in World War I, 120 ships were built in Detroit, as well as 19,000 engines for war machines. Ten million dollars were spent to help Detroit factories better create munitions for the war.

[1] U.S. Army troops lined up for inspection.
  Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, photograph by Harris & Ewing, [LC-DIG-hec-10025]

[2] Sergeant Henry Lincoln Johnson
  National Archives and Records Administration

[3] African American Soldiers
  National Archives and Records Administration

[4] Camp Custer
  Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division

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Credits:

Tucker, Spencer C. *World War I: A Student Encyclopedia*. California: ABC-CLIO, 2006. Print.

Carl, Christopher J. Carl. "Michigan Manual 2009-2010." Michigan Manuals (2010): Chapter 1: Michigan History.

Keywords/Topics:

Wars/Military

Questions:

1. What conflict led to World War I?

2. How did African Americans contribute to the war effort?

3. Why was Sergeant Henry Lincoln Johnson awarded the Croix de Guerre?

4. How did the war benefit those African Americans who did not directly participate?

Links to Internet Websites:

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohtml/exhibit/aopart7.html

http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/369th-infantry/

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_African_Americans

http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(nlfihh24qcwpb255teav3a31))/mileg.aspx?page=PublicationHomePage&PublicationHomePage=16 (accessed September 22, 2010).

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Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, photograph by Harris & Ewing, [LC-DIG-hec-10025]

The United States stayed neutral for the first two years of the war, but when a German submarine sank the *Lusitania,* which carried American passengers, the United States declared war against Germany.

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Sergeant Henry Lincoln Johnson, along with Neadham Roberts, held off an ambush in one night of no less than 20 German soldiers, killing and wounding several in the process. He and his partner at the post were the first blacks to receive the Croix de Guerre by the French, the highest Medal of Honor in the French Military.

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Though African Americans volunteered to join the army when America went to war, many were turned away. Eventually the U.S. Army and Navy allowed the enrollment of African American men, but only to support such functions as ditch digging, mess boy, road construction, and sanitation. Many African Americans contributed to the war effort by buying war bonds.

1917 **World War I begins**

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By 1918, there were over 135,000 men from Michigan fighting in the war. Near Battle Creek, Camp Custer was established to train soldiers from around the country.

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