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Soldiers of Democracy: Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1921

Steven A. Reich

This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return. . . . 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 reasons why.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, *Crisis*, May 1919

The world can never be made safe for democracy as long as America is unsafe for its own citizens.

—C. F. Richardson Jr., *Houston Informer*, June 7, 1919

On the night of December 8, 1918, Black residents of Kildare, an unincorporated hamlet nestled in the northeast corner of Texas, gathered at the local African Methodist Episcopal Church to hear a lecture “on the War and after the War.” The audience, composed mostly of farmers and sharecroppers who struggled to make a living out of the stubborn piney woods soil, listened to the preacher describe how, despite their bravery abroad and sacrifice at home, Blacks were “still being treated badly by the White man.” The United States, he grieved, “forced the Negro to go 3000 miles away to fight for Democracy when they should have been fighting for Democracy at home.” Now that the war was over, Blacks must no longer “close ranks” with whites but demand their rights as citizens, even if

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The lumber industry in East Texas relied heavily on Black labor. As mobilization for World War I intensified, Blacks abandoned sawmills and lumber camps for better employment opportunities in southern shipyards and northern defense industries.

Severe labor shortages threatened lumber production and precipitated several strikes in the industry.

*Courtesy Stephen F. Austin State University,
Forest History Collections.*

it meant opening “another war for Democracy, right here at home.” Black veterans, he envisioned, would lead this fight for citizenship. Although whites drafted “our boys against their will,” they also armed them and taught them lessons of combat. “When our boys return,” he warned, a disciplined army of “trained officers, of men not afraid to die” and experienced “in killing white men,” would invade the South. He urged his listeners to “arm themselves with Winchester rifles” and join the returning soldiers of democracy in a united stand against white supremacy.¹

This call to arms stands out as neither an isolated incident nor the wishful fantasy of a deluded preacher. On the contrary, African Americans echoed these themes in churches, fraternal societies, union halls, and social settings across Texas and throughout the South from 1917 to 1919, the years during and immediately following American involvement in World War I. They took such ideas seriously, seizing upon the idealistic rhetoric of President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points

¹L. H. Henry, Local Officer, Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigation, Texarkana, Texas, to C. E. Breniman, Division Superintendent, San Antonio, Texas, Jan. 7, 1919, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917–1925): The First World War, the Red Scare, and the Garvey Movement*, ed. Theodore Kornweibel Jr. (microfilm, 25 reels, University Publications of America, 1986), reel 10, frame 11.

to claim new rights at home. In a multitude of ways—withholding their labor, fleeing the state, evading the draft, stockpiling arms, forming local chapters of political organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)—African Americans resisted their oppression, posing a formidable threat to the status quo. Indeed, during these years southern Blacks mobilized in opposition to white supremacy to an extent that historians have not yet appreciated. Privileging the views of Black elites, most narratives assume that African Americans submerged demands for citizenship, closed ranks, and hoped that whites would reward them for their service and patriotism, a faith that turned out to be misguided.² If historians have assumed that African Americans remained patient during the war years, the men and women who applauded the preacher at Kildare were not quiescent. Nor did the Department of Justice's newly created Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) remain complacent. It found the preacher's comments serious enough to demand "any action . . . necessary."³

The story of African American resistance during the war and immediate postwar years challenges prevailing interpretations of Black politics in the age of Jim Crow. Much race relations scholarship posits that the system of Jim Crow was powerful enough to preclude any substantive challenges to it. In an era of declining electoral rights, growing segregation, and rising negrophobia, African Americans, according to this view, remained politically apathetic. For most Blacks, as the historian Lester C. Lamon concluded, "the obvious answer" was simply to ignore elections, "follow the line of least resistance and stay at home." Accordingly, African American history tends to concentrate on arenas where Blacks presumably exercised more agency: community development, family life, emigration, and migration. When this scholarship turns to the politics of the disfranchised, it focuses narrowly on the activities of a few Black Republican party functionaries in their struggle to claim delegate seats to national conventions, combat the influence of lily-whites within the party, and retain control over patronage distribution. This model of an active Black elite and a passive working class contributes to the impression that African Americans consciously separated issues of economic advancement and social justice from politics and that they abandoned serious political struggle between 1877 and 1954. In his pathbreaking study on the origins of segregation, C. Vann Woodward remarked that after southern legislatures passed disfranchisement laws, "Many of the Negroes became apathetic and ceased political activity altogether." Despite over a generation of interest in African Americans as subjects of historical study, such assumptions continue. For example, in his otherwise impressive synthesis of Reconstruction, Eric Foner writes that in the post-Reconstruction South,

² Among the few accounts acknowledging widespread Black resistance are Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana, 1989), 302–17; Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, "African-American Struggles for Citizenship in the Arkansas and Mississippi Deltas in the Age of Jim Crow," *Radical History Review*, 55 (Winter 1993), 33–51; and Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York, 1994), 26–30.

³ Henry to Breniman, Jan. 7, 1919, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917–1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 10, frame 11. The Office of Chief Examiner was established in 1908; four name changes and 27 years later, it became the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). It will be referred to as the FBI throughout this article.

“black activity turned inward,” assumed “a defensive cast,” and “concentrated on strengthening the black community rather than on directly challenging the new status quo.”⁴

Other historians, however, insist that African Americans did not remain politically passive under Jim Crow. Black workers in the South, for example, recognized that demands for higher wages and shorter hours rang hollow without the attainment of full citizenship rights. Recent scholarship on coal miners in West Virginia, waterfront workers in New Orleans, and Communists in Alabama reexamines the several ways Black workers struggled to improve their lives in the Jim Crow South. Historians have also begun to analyze African American women as political actors. Paula Giddings argued for a genuine radical tradition among African American women, many of whom understood the dynamic relationship between sexism and racism. These women recognized that women’s rights were empty if Blacks remained crushed under the heel of a racist power structure and, conversely, that women’s rights had to be secured in order to assure Black liberation. In a recent pathbreaking article, Robin D. G. Kelley argued for an expansive definition of Black political action. Southern Blacks did not separate politics “from lived experience or the imagined world of what is possible.” In fact, political action and resistance among African Americans was going on all the time. Through countless “unorganized, evasive, seemingly spontaneous actions,” Kelley writes, Black workers battled “to roll back constraints, to exercise power over, or create space within, the institutions and social relationships that dominated their lives.” Such everyday struggles informed African American participation in moments of broader political insurgency.⁵

⁴ Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900–1930* (Knoxville, 1977), 37. On the Black community, see Darrel E. Bigham, *We Ask Only a Fair Trial: A History of the Black Community of Evansville, Indiana* (Bloomington, 1987); Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Philadelphia, 1980); John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900–1920* (Urbana, 1977); Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*; and George C. Wright, *Life behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865–1930* (Baton Rouge, 1985). On family life, see Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York, 1976); and Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985). The classic works on emigration include William E. Bittle and Gilbert Geis, *The Longest Way Home: Chief Alfred C. Sam’s Back-to-Africa Movement* (Detroit, 1964); and Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890–1910* (New Haven, 1969). On migration, see Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks’ Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916–1930* (Urbana, 1987); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago, 1989); Florette Henri, *Black Migration: Movement North, 1900–1920* (Garden City, N.Y., 1975), and Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York, 1976). For examples of discussions on Black politics, see Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era*, 90–109; Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 37–58; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 57–71; I. A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968* (Columbia, 1973), 160–61; and Wright, *Life behind a Veil*, 176–93. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1966), 80. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York, 1988), 598.

⁵ On Black workers, see Joe William Trotter Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915–32* (Urbana, 1990); Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863–1923* (New York, 1991); and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, 1990). Works that examine the politicization of Black women include Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter . . . The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York, 1984); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895–1925* (Knoxville, 1989); Jacqueline Anne Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope,*

American participation in World War I proved such a moment. Subterranean resistance briefly erupted into above-ground, organized political action. Local activists understood the implications of a worldwide struggle for democracy and self-determination. The metaphor of a war for democracy, the heroics of Black troops in France, and the anticolonial struggles of Africans served as a powerful basis for organized political action, empowering Blacks to expand their vision of what was possible. They linked their everyday challenges to white supremacy to those of Blacks not only in other parts of the South but in Chicago, New York City, the Caribbean, and Africa. The possibility that daily, unorganized challenges to white supremacy might cohere into something national, even global, in scope threatened the nation's white establishment, who mustered legal and extralegal authority to smash the emergence of such a movement.

A case study of Texas during the war and immediate postwar years brings these themes into focus. A rich and varied collection of sources informs the study, including Texas Black newspapers, extensive NAACP branch files, and investigative reports conducted by the FBI and the Military Intelligence Division of the War Department. A careful reading of these sources uncovers a wide spectrum of African Americans—male and female, urban and rural, working-class and professional, comfortable and destitute—involved in political action. These men and women risked their lives to demand social change in a state notorious for lynching and political violence. An examination of the fortunes and failures of these activists can thus serve as a window on power relations in the New South and reveal the “reasons why” African Americans were unable to fulfill W. E. B. Du Bois's call to “make way for democracy.”

Mobilization for the Great War in 1917 and 1918 presented southern Blacks an unprecedented opportunity to escape white control. African Americans fled Texas in droves, seizing new opportunities in wartime industries and military service. Elijah C. Branch, a Black minister from Galveston, established the International Relief Company in 1917 to secure loans for Blacks who wished to leave. Northern Black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* enjoyed a wide circulation in Texas and informed readers of the opportunities available in the North. The letters of the migrants reveal the energy and determination of southern Blacks to improve their lives, not only economically but socially and politically as well. Most migrants likely agreed with the Houston freight handler who wrote to the *Houston Observer*

Black Southern Reformer (Athens, Ga., 1989); and Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Black Women in United States History*, vol. XIV: Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890–1920* (Brooklyn, 1990). In fact, throughout the Jim Crow era, Black women fought on the front line in resistance to segregation. See Willi Coleman, “Black Women and Segregated Public Transportation: Ninety Years of Resistance,” in Hine, *ibid.*, vol. V: *Black Women in American History: The Twentieth Century*, 295–301. Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History*, 80 (June 1993), 76–78. For an important study that adopts some of Kelley's insights and interprets the 1917 lynching of Ell Persons in Memphis, Tennessee, in the context of ongoing struggle and resistance, see Kenneth W. Goings and Gerald L. Smith, “‘Unhidden’ Transcripts: Memphis and African American Agency, 1862–1920,” *Journal of Urban History*, 21 (March 1995), 372–94.

that he would move anywhere north "so long as I Go where a man is a man." Others willingly joined the army, as military service promised relief from repressive conditions at home. By the summer of 1918 the Dallas Exemption Board announced that "more negroes . . . responded to the calls than could be sent to camp." Black enlistees expected to receive good clothes, three meals a day, shelter, some money, and the chance for travel and adventure.⁶

Migration to the North and the draft precipitated an intense labor shortage, giving those who remained greater leverage in negotiating wages. On some plantations, farm laborers, by withholding their labor, compelled planters to increase daily wages from \$1.50 to as high as \$4.50. Unregulated by government price controls, cotton prices soared to 35 cents a pound in 1919, as compared to 8 cents and less in 1914. For rural Blacks, the prospects of moving up the tenure ladder and of escaping debt and dependence on oppressive landlords never seemed brighter. Nate Shaw, an Alabama tenant farmer, recalled that "the war was good to me because it meant scarce cotton; and scarce cotton, high price." In 1918 Shaw raised enough money from selling cotton to pay off a five-year debt to his landlord. Other Black workers organized collectively to exploit the labor shortage. At Jefferson, in Marion County, Texas, washerwomen refused to take in laundry for less than two dollars, prompting white women to complain "that it is practically impossible to secure domestic help" because Black women are "so organized and demand so much." Employers in the state's railroads, sawmills, logging camps, and shipyards complained often of labor shortages during these years.⁷

African Americans wedded their aspirations for higher wages and better working conditions to broader demands for civil and political rights. In a letter to the *Fort Worth Record*, an anonymous Black man announced, if "you think that we are going to war, bleed and die and come back here and still be a step stone for you unthankful people, not so." The Black press in Texas and elsewhere across the South celebrated Black soldiers as symbols of a new, more militant race pride. "'Black Devils' Are Sounding Death Knell to Trench Warfare—Germans in Deadly Fear of Our Black 'Boys'" ran one typical headline. Such stories carried an implicit message: Blacks at home should exhibit the same assertiveness as did the troops abroad. The *Galveston New Idea*, a Black paper, echoed this theme, declaring

⁶ *Houston Observer*, May 11, 1918, in *The Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. John W. Kitchens (microfilm, 252 reels, Tuskegee Institute, 1978), reel 244, frame 648; Dallas Exemption Board quoted in Bruce A. Glasrud, "Black Texans, 1900–1930: A History" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Technological College, 1969), 70. Several historians have demonstrated that Blacks moved north not only to seek better jobs but also to gain social and political freedoms: see Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way*; Grossman, *Land of Hope*; McMillen, *Dark Journey*; Joe William Trotter Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915–1945* (Urbana, 1985); and Joe William Trotter Jr., ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington, 1991). See also Emmett J. Scott, "Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916–1918," *Journal of Negro History*, 4 (July 1919), 290–340; and Emmett J. Scott, "Additional Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916–1918," *ibid.* (Oct. 1919), 412–65.

⁷ Woodruff, "African-American Struggles for Citizenship," 36; Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (New York, 1974), 161; *Marion County News* reprinted in *Dallas Express*, July 5, 1919. Cotton prices are from George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913–1945* (Baton Rouge, 1967), 33, 60. On the economic effect of the war on agricultural laborers, see Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York, 1986), 203–6.

that "patience will cease to be a virtue" if lynch law and prejudicial juries continued to tyrannize Blacks. Now that America needed to stand united, Blacks should press "to rectify the wrongs done us" by "the bloody, savage vampires of the white race."⁸

Such declarations fed white fears that Black soldiers would return from France to start a social revolution across the South. Indeed, few images haunted the white supremacist's imagination more than a Black man in uniform. African American soldiers exposed potent contradictions within the Jim Crow social order and raised critical questions about the very foundations of citizenship. Could United States soldiers stationed in southern cities be denied seats on a bus, at a lunch counter, or in a theater? What authority did civilian police have over servicemen who violated Jim Crow laws? Could a liberal democratic government compel citizens to sacrifice their lives in battle yet continue to deny them the franchise? Would Black soldiers who faced the horrors of death on the battlefield, asked the *New Republic*, "accept the facts of white supremacy with the same spirit as formerly?" And did not white opposition to Black conscription confirm that the southern social order rested on nothing more than fear? The *Houston Chronicle* thought so. In defending the military's decision to station Black battalions at Houston's Camp Logan, the editor wondered, "Can we conscientiously ask our allies to quarter soldiers whom we ourselves profess to be afraid of?" To ban Black troops from the city, he concluded, would be an open admission that Texas governed through an indefensible form of discrimination.⁹

Black soldiers played a crucial role in defining the implications of military service. As Eric Foner noted in reference to the Black troops of the Civil War, "military service has always been a politicizing and radicalizing experience." Rather than patiently waiting for a grateful nation to grant them the rights and privileges of loyal citizens, Black servicemen proudly assumed the authority of their uniform. Black soldiers stationed in Houston defied the symbols of white supremacy by tearing down "colored only" signs in segregated restaurants and taking seats in "whites only" sections aboard city streetcars. According to United States military intelligence reports, discharged Black soldiers organized secret societies to "protect the interests of the colored race," to combat "any white effort, especially in the South, to re-establish white ascendancy," and to "maintain and strengthen the social equality between the races as established in France." As one Black Texan serving in France wrote, "I have but one desire, and that is to be able to go all over our land and tell of my experiences in the democratic France, and the manly qualities displayed by our soldiers under conditions so very foreign to those at

⁸ Anonymous of Menard, Texas, to Editor, *Fort Worth Record*, July 23, 1918, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 10, frame 16; *Houston Observer*, Sept. 14, 1918, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 244, frame 477; *Galveston New Idea*, Oct. 6, 1917, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 10, frame 69. Efforts to locate issues of the *New Idea* from this period failed. The federal government, however, extensively investigated the *New Idea* as a seditious publication. Transcriptions of several articles are in federal case files.

⁹ "Negro Conscription," *New Republic*, Oct. 20, 1917, p. 317; *Houston Chronicle*, July 18, 1917, quoted in Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge, 1976), 53.

home." Much as their Civil War predecessors had, Black veterans of the Great War used military service to justify bold, forthright demands for equal citizenship.¹⁰

From the beginning of the war, white Texans acted swiftly with a campaign of terror and violence to restrict the social implications of military service. In August 1917 Black soldiers stationed at Houston's Camp Logan, responding to reports of police brutality against a Black soldier, clashed with armed civilians and police in a riot that left seventeen whites and two Black soldiers dead. The military moved quickly to punish Black suspects. In a court-martial in December 1917, thirteen Black soldiers were found guilty, sentenced to death, and hanged without public notice or opportunity to appeal.¹¹

Southern whites also tried to deny returning Blacks the right to continue wearing their uniforms for three months after discharge. When appeals to the War Department went unanswered, whites took matters into their own hands. Nate Shaw recalled hearing stories of how whites would meet discharged Blacks "at these stations where they was gettin off, comin back into the United States, and cut the buttons and armaments off of their clothes, make em get out of them clothes make em pull them uniforms off and if they didn't have another suit of clothes . . . make em walk in their underwear." Shaw insisted that these were not isolated incidents as "I heard too much of it from the ones that come back to this country." Through these acts of public degradation, vigilantes tried to devalue the meaning of Black loyalty and service to the nation. As Shaw explained, "nigger come back, he aint recognized more than a dog. . . . didn't give you no credit for what you done."¹²

White responses to Black soldiers were inconsistent, however, and underscored the logical contradiction of white supremacy. Whites feared Blacks in uniform, yet vigilantes pursued Black draft dodgers with vengeance. Some Blacks resisted the draft. T. P. Terry confidently asserted that "he knew how to get around the white people, that when all the white boys went to war he would have a good time here." Doubtless, more than a few Black Texans shared the sentiments of Monroe Bean of Buna, who openly declared that "If I have to go to war, I will not fight for the United States but for Germany, for they will equalize themselves with me and the people of the United States will not." Near Huntsville in 1918 whites murdered George Cabiness, who resisted arrest for evading the draft. When his brothers vowed revenge, the white men of the community organized a citizens' posse, surrounded the Cabiness home, and commenced firing when the family

¹⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 9; Haynes, *Night of Violence*, 63–68; D. E. Nolan to Acting Director of Military Intelligence, memo, Jan. 20, 1919, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917–1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 21, frame 231; Horace G. Burke, France, to Editor, *Houston Observer*, Oct. 19, 1918, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 244, frame 659. African American participation in the Spanish-American War raised similar questions among Blacks over domestic concerns about race, citizenship, and political rights. See George P. Marks III, *The Black Press Views American Imperialism* (New York, 1971); and Willard B. Gatewood Jr., "Black Americans and the Quest for Empire, 1898–1903," *Journal of Southern History*, 38 (Nov. 1972), 545–66.

¹¹ For a comprehensive study of the riot, see Haynes, *Night of Violence*.

¹² F. Sullens to Major Brown, Nov. 30, 1918, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917–1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 21, frame 175; Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers*, 161.

refused to surrender. The occupants fought back, but the cabin caught fire in the midst of battle, forcing Cabiness's mother, Sarah, to carry the bodies of her four dead sons and wounded daughter out of the flames and into the yard, where she was shot and killed.¹³

Local draft boards used the selective service system as a vehicle for confiscating Black property. As one Texan explained, whites targeted Blacks "who had just purchased little farms, so that the property would soon return to the original owners." Draft agents would then scour the countryside and gather Blacks "up everywhere" so they could avoid drafting "their white boys." As the man admitted, "the Negroes didn't know any better and just thought they had to come." Not surprisingly, then, a disproportionate number of the state's draftees were African Americans, ironically assuring white Texas a large number of returning Black veterans.¹⁴

As draft agents and vigilantes tried to restrict the meaning of military service, employers imposed tighter controls over Black workers who sought to exploit the wartime labor shortage. Sheriffs assisted in enforcing laws against vagrancy and idleness. At McKinley, the sheriff arrested Blacks who refused to harvest fields for three dollars a day as part of a campaign to see that no Black "idlers are permitted to go unmolested." When the Black exodus from the piney woods compelled the Kirby Lumber Company temporarily to shut down its planing mills at Brownel and Call, east Texas newspaper editors cooperated with company officials by giving prominent coverage to the 1917 East St. Louis race riot and other negative news about the North. Lumber operators also hired a conservative Black lecturer to tour sawmills and logging camps and deliver addresses designed to discourage Black employees from migrating north.¹⁵

Local postmasters aided in controlling the flow of information by intercepting publications of Black protest such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Crisis*. "Please don't allow the word *Crisis* to appear" on my mail, wrote a farmer from Mumford. If it does, "I may not get them at all." The *New York Age* reported that one Texas sheriff objected "so strongly to the circulation in Texas of The New York Age that he . . . constituted himself a Board of Censors and in that capacity . . . issued orders to The Age representative to stop handling the paper in his commu-

¹³ T. P. Terry quoted in B. C. Baldwin, memo, Aug. 3, 1917, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 9, frame 630; Monroe Bean quoted in J. J. Lawrence, memo, Aug. 22, 1917, *ibid.*, frame 688; *Houston Chronicle*, June 2, 1918, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 244, frame 744.

¹⁴ Addie W. Hunton and Kathryn M. Johnson, *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces* (1920; New York, 1971), 199. Despite constituting only 16% of the state population, Blacks made up 25% of the conscripts from Texas—about 31,000 men. See Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of Negroes in Texas, 1528-1971* (Austin, 1973), 115. On Black resistance to the draft, see Theodore Kornweibel Jr., "Apathy and Dissent: Black America's Negative Response to World War I," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 80 (Summer 1981), 334-36.

¹⁵ *Dallas Journal*, June 7, 1918, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 8, frame 35; C. P. Myer, Assistant General Manager, to B. F. Bonner, Vice President and General Manager, June 25, 1917, box 338, Kirby Lumber Company Records, Forest History Collection (Ralph W. Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Tex.); Bonner to Myer, June 1, 1917, *ibid.*; and Bonner to I. W. Crawford, June 6, 1917, *ibid.*



Black troops arrive in France during World War I. Reprinted from W. Allison Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War: His Splendid Record in the Battle Zones* (1919).

nity.” The sheriff apprehended the *Age*’s traveling representative, who tried to circulate the paper. Despite these threats, the agent vowed not to back down, declaring that the *Age* had reached “every hole and corner in this country,” that “it has put some pep where it was badly needed,” and that it “cannot afford to die here.”¹⁶

The wartime labor shortage intensified racial conflict in the Texas countryside. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, thousands of white farmers throughout the Southwest slid into permanent tenancy. Many experienced their impoverishment in racial terms. Consider Red River County in northeast Texas. In 1900 the number of whites who owned and rented farms was equal. Twenty years later, the number of owners remained unchanged, but the number of tenants had increased by 58 percent, driving the overall white tenancy rate countywide to 65 percent. During the same period, tenancy among Black farmers remained constant — 78 percent — but the number of Black farm owners climbed 12 percent. Landless whites increasingly competed with Blacks for access to tillable plots. Hoping that the wartime cotton boom might offer a chance to escape dependence

¹⁶ T. C. Smith to National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Dec. 1919, Mumford Branch File, box G-205, Branch Files, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.); *New York Age*, Nov. 1, 1919, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 10, frame 254.

on absentee landlords, white tenants struck back at Black farmers, who, they believed, benefited from these conditions at their expense. In February 1918, white tenants of Red River County "organized for the purpose of terrorizing Negro farmers." In "operations that extended clear across the county," these vigilantes attacked Black settlements and burned their dwellings, churches, and schoolhouses, forcing many to abandon their farms.¹⁷

Similar violence erupted just south of Red River County. There, one prominent landowner had over 350 acres under cultivation. "Owing to scarcity of white labor," he constructed several "little houses" and hired a number of Black families to work the plantation. In a series of attacks, a posse of backcountry farmers descended on the plantation and fired upon the Black workers. These assaults forced the planter to send his Black workers "back to town for their own safety" and left him without hired hands, turning "this large crop" into "a total loss." In both cases, federal authorities investigated the bloodshed. In Red River County they jailed seventeen white tenants, charging them "with violating the national defense act." As one sheriff explained, "the labor situation is too critical to permit such action on the part of dissatisfied men." These and numerous other incidents reveal how, under wartime labor conditions, class conflict among whites could explode into open racial warfare.¹⁸

Although African Americans might find federal authorities willing to protect them from roving bands of discontented white tenants, they could not rely on local lawmen or landlords for protection. Planters, just as quickly as white tenants, resorted to violence against Blacks who sought to cash in on the wartime cotton boom. In November 1918, Charlie Shipman, a sharecropper under contract to Ollie Senior of Fort Bend County, gathered and weighed his cotton, paid off his debt to Senior, loaded his wagon, and set out with his wife in search of more favorable living conditions. About two miles from the plantation, Senior accosted the two migrants and attempted to force them to return. When Shipman resisted, Senior declared, "You Black son-of-a-bitch, I've got a notion to kill you right now." Senior rode off about twenty yards, turned, and fired three shots at Charlie, striking him once. Shipman returned fire, but Senior was out of range. Shipman then fled to his mother's house. Shortly thereafter, Senior and five accomplices stormed the house, dragged Shipman into their car, and drove him to a wooded

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Compendium of the Twelfth Census: 1900*, vol. V: *Agriculture*, pt. 1 (Washington, 1902), 128–29; Bureau of the Census, *Compendium of the Fourteenth Census: 1920*, vol. VI: *Agriculture*, pt. 2 (Washington, 1922), 681. For lucid testimony of the struggles of one white tenant in neighboring Lamar County during these years, see U.S. Congress, Senate, Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report and Testimony*, 64 Cong., 1 sess., vol. 9 (Washington, 1916), 9006–43; *Dallas Express*, Feb. 23, 1918, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 7, frame 617. For an analysis of class conflict in this section of the rural Southwest during the early twentieth century, see James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895–1943* (Baton Rouge, 1978).

¹⁸ William Houshoffer, investigative report, May 22, 1918, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917–1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 10, frame 15; *Dallas Express*, Feb. 23, 1918, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 7, frame 617; *Dallas Journal*, Aug. 10, 1918, *ibid.*, reel 8, frame 47. For a brilliant account from South African history of how class conflict between marginalized white farmers and capitalizing landowners erupted into violent racial oppression of Black tenant farmers, see Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924–1930* (Johannesburg, 1987), 186–212.

lot where they shot him. Senior told Shipman's mother to retrieve her son's body and bury him as "the law was not coming" to "hold an inquest."¹⁹

The pervasiveness of violence throughout the war years parallels what Eric Foner described in his study of Reconstruction as the "'politicization' of everyday life." Following emancipation, Foner explains, "a seemingly insignificant incident" could rapidly escalate "into violence and acquire political meaning." At a moment when "established power relations and commonly understood rules of conduct" had been swept away but not yet replaced with a new social order, everyday encounters between Blacks and whites "became infused with tension" as each group attempted to define in its own way the meaning of freedom.²⁰ In much the same way, mobilization for World War I created a situation in which Blacks and whites battled to redefine social relations.

An incident at Kerens, Texas, in 1917 illustrates this development. According to federal investigators, Mary Monroe, an African American resident, provided room and board to Edward Chambers, a Black itinerant minister. One afternoon while Monroe and Chambers chatted on the porch, Shelton, a white man and "one of the oldest residents of the county," passed by. Since Shelton knew Monroe "since slavery times," he often paused to speak with her. This day, he stopped in his usual manner, commented on the war, and wondered if many local boys would have to serve. Chambers immediately launched into a verbal attack. He accused newspaper editors of covering up the truth, insisting that "white people did not want the negroes to know [the United States was] being whipped by the Germans." He declared that "President Wilson needn't call on the negroes that they did not intend to fight, that they had no country and no flag." Cursing and shaking his finger at the old man, he predicted "that when the Germans won the negroes would own the country." Since "white people . . . had subjected the race to cruelty . . . the negroes would now have their turn." Chambers's remarks caused an immediate stir throughout town. Suspecting that area whites might accuse her of complicity, Monroe asked Chambers to leave. The local constable contacted the FBI for assistance in apprehending Chambers. Federal agents hunted down Chambers in a deserted cabin on the edge of town and threw him in jail.²¹

The Reverend Chambers's bold defiance of racial etiquette is a powerful example of how international events shaped everyday encounters and reverberated into the deepest corners of the New South. In the context of mobilization for war, Shelton's commonplace visit to Mary Monroe erupted into a tense confrontation. The war gave Chambers the vehicle through which to express openly a lifetime of injustices, to reject the patronizing demeanor of a paternalistic white elder, to explode the myth that Blacks trusted their government, and to imagine a world in which power relations were reversed. Whether she agreed with him or not, Monroe

¹⁹ Dicie Shipman, affidavit, Nov. 14, 1918, San Antonio Branch File, box G-204, NAACP Papers; Aunt Leah Shipman, affidavit, Nov. 14, 1918, *ibid.*

²⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 122-23.

²¹ J. H. Harper, report, Aug. 29, 1917, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 19, frames 769-70.

distanced herself from the preacher, fearing that vigilantes would retaliate against Blacks indiscriminately. Finally, the case reveals how local lawmen, upon only the slightest hint of trouble, knew they could rely on federal authority to preserve power relations.

In response to this spreading racial violence, African Americans across the state, beginning in San Antonio in 1918, started organizing branches of the NAACP. As a branch organizer from Mart explained, “we are in need very much of strong organization” so “that we might be protected.” Activists quickly enlisted a broad base of support for this organization dedicated to civil rights. The *Dallas Express*, a Black weekly, urged readers, “JOIN NOW AND FIGHT FOR JUSTICE—Lynching, Jim Crowism and Denial of Civil Rights Must Cease.” The Fort Worth Branch circulated leaflets and handbills and advertised its meetings in Black-owned grocery stores and drugstores. The Dallas Branch sent representatives to the city’s Black churches, where they spoke on the benefits of membership and enrolled new members. Activists distributed the *Crisis* and the *Branch Bulletin*, the NAACP’s monthly journal of chapter news, placing them in Black-owned businesses and churches and selling them at association meetings where they reportedly “went like ‘hot cakes.’”²²

Through these and other tactics, branches aroused mass support, enlisting recruits outside of the Black business and professional classes. At Galveston, Blacks of the International Longshoremen’s Association No. 807 organized a branch, recruiting not only waterfront workers but other laborers as well. Elsewhere, janitors, laborers, letter carriers, housekeepers, laundresses, seamstresses—even the butler at the governor’s mansion—joined the ranks of the NAACP. “The people are worked to a ‘fever heat,’” exulted the San Antonio Branch secretary. That branch grew from an initial membership of 52 in March 1918 to over 1,700 by the summer of 1919, making it the second largest branch in the South, behind only that in Atlanta. Given the size of some of these branches and the occupational profile of the African American population, the Black working class likely constituted the core of the membership.²³

The national NAACP office assisted in boosting the Texas movement. In the fall of 1918, Mary B. Talbert, president of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACW), toured Texas and Louisiana to organize NAACP branches. Talbert dedicated her life to the eradication of mob violence, Jim Crow, and

²² Bradford Hammonds to James Weldon Johnson, June 1, 1919, Mart Branch File, box G-204, NAACP Papers; *Dallas Express*, May 24, March 1, Feb. 8, 1919; B. K. Maynard to Walter F. White, March 25, 1918, San Antonio Branch File, box G-204, NAACP Papers.

²³ C. B. Johnson to James Weldon Johnson, April 8, 1918, San Antonio Branch File, box G-204, NAACP Papers; San Antonio Branch, publicity release, Oct. 18, 1918, *ibid.* The NAACP’s national office sent charter applications to potential branches at this time, requesting that branches list the names and occupations of charter members. Although the applications are somewhat uneven in their listing of occupations, enough information survives to indicate a significant working-class membership. Branches did not submit the names and occupations of subsequent enlists. Total membership numbers are drawn from membership file cards, Auxiliary Files, box L-45, NAACP Papers, Series II.

colonial domination of Africa, and she agitated for penal reform, education, and protective legislation. An acclaimed orator who “held the undivided attention” of audiences, Talbert delivered her trenchant message to some forty thousand people during her three-month trip, sparking enthusiasm for the NAACP. She raised several thousand dollars, formed eight new branches, and led membership drives at existing ones. Texas “is thoroughly aroused,” she wrote; “everywhere they are anxious to join the Association.” Thanks to Talbert’s “two sterling addresses,” she “will long be remembered in Beaumont,” reported Aaron Jefferson; “her convincing argument gained many whom we could not interest.” In addition to organizing branches, Talbert recruited volunteers to continue building the Texas NAACP after she returned to New York. “Texas will have 50 branches,” she predicted; “of the people I talked with, [many] do not go to sleep.”²⁴

The work of Mary Talbert demonstrates the centrality of women in building branches. Women took the lead in organizing several branches and constituted the core of the membership in many of them, and at least ten served on branch executive committees (see table 1). Talbert expanded branch membership by appealing to women through the Texas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs (TFCWC). As president of the NACW, Talbert strengthened the relationship between the national organization and its state branches through frequent visits, creating a nationwide network of women who supported and implemented NACW initiatives. Talbert called upon such contacts to build the Texas NAACP. Since the founding of the TFCWC in 1905, women of that organization strove to alleviate social ills in an era of diminishing civil and political rights and struggled to provide for the Black masses what white society systematically denied them. At its fourteenth annual convention in 1919, the TFCWC debated the role Black women should play in reconstructing race relations in the postwar period and gave vigorous support to the NAACP’s antilynching campaign. Thus many of the women who joined the Texas branches of the NAACP had experience in social activism. These women sponsored programs of special interest to the branches’ female members such as lectures on “The Value of the NAACP to the Colored Women of America.” And the San Antonio Branch succeeded in securing the employment of a hundred of the city’s Black women in the Quartermaster’s Department at Fort Sam Houston.²⁵

²⁴ Hallie Q. Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (1926; Freeport, N.Y., 1971), 217; Mary B. Talbert to James Weldon Johnson, Dec. 29, 1918, Special Correspondence Files, box C-76, NAACP Papers; *Branch Bulletin* (Dec. 1918), 62; Talbert to Johnson, March 15, 1919, Special Correspondence Files, box C-76, NAACP Papers. In Texas Talbert organized branches of the NAACP at Galveston, Silsbee, Orange, Austin, Corsicana, Marshall, Texarkana, and Gonzales and conducted membership drives at San Antonio, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Beaumont. For details on her trip, see Talbert to John R. Shillady, Dec. 23, 1918, *ibid.* For a more extended summary of Talbert’s work for the NAACP, see Salem, *To Better Our World*, 176–79. For a good biographical sketch of Talbert, see Lillian S. Williams, “Mary Morris Talbert,” in *Notable Black American Women*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith (Detroit, 1992), 1095–1100.

²⁵ Mrs. C. E. Adams, president of the Texas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs (TFCWC), belonged to the Beaumont Branch and assisted Talbert in doubling branch membership. Mrs. H. E. Williams, vice president of the TFCWC, and Talbert chartered the Corsicana Branch. See Application for Charter, June 6, 1918, Beaumont Branch File, box G-201, NAACP Papers; Application for Charter, Dec. 10, 1918, Corsicana Branch File, *ibid.*; *Galveston News*, July 4, 1919, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 11, frame 140; Minutes of the Organization Meeting of the Fort Worth Branch, April 20, 1918, Fort Worth Branch File, box G-202, NAACP Papers; *Branch Bulletin* (June–July 1918), 30. On Talbert and NACW (National Association of

Activists also sought recruits in rural areas. Farmers and laborers composed the bulk of the rural branch membership. Most of the members of the Silsbee Branch were railroad men, including its president, a switchman, and its vice-president, a brakeman. Farmers swelled the ranks of several rural branches. Some, such as many members of the Leggett Branch in Polk County, owned their farms. Most, however, rented, such as the men and women who organized the branch in Mumford. Professional men and women formed the executive committees of some of the branches in smaller communities. In Wharton, three teachers directed the branch, yet farmers from the surrounding area formed the core of the branch's membership. Some of these branches drew impressive numbers. The branch in the small community of Wharton began with 84 charter members but recruiting quickly brought the total to 345. The hamlets of Jones Prairie and Baileyville combined to form one branch of 158 members. And Mumford, a rural village in Robertson County, enrolled 315.²⁶

Letters from rural branches reveal an eagerness for political activity and a faith in democracy among poor people. Not since Reconstruction had an organization emerged that connected Blacks in these isolated regions to the larger struggle for citizenship. Through the NAACP, rural Blacks learned of civil rights battles occurring beyond the confines of their community. "What is the peace council doing, what is the world doing for the negro," asked the Mumford secretary, J. E. Turner; "send me . . . information to advise my people." Enthused at the prospects of real change, Black Texans were, as Grant Burleson of Waelder proclaimed, eager "to be willing workers." Grant Derry promised to "do my very best to get as many joiners as I can"; Turner declared, "I am uneducated, but I want to do some good for my people"; and T. C. Smith reported, "I am working to make 800 members" and pledged to travel "where ever . . . to establish this association." Such zeal sparked a flurry of activity across the Black belt, inspiring rural Black Texans to seek political change. These letters convey the kind of utopian spirit that Eric Hobsbawm described as the millenarian strands "necessary . . . for generating the superhuman efforts without which no major revolution is achieved." Indeed, many African Americans expected that the war now made it possible to complete the unfinished revolution of Reconstruction. "Send me a copy of the 13th, 14th, 15th amendment," requested the Mumford secretary, for "the time has come that the white man and the black man to stand upon terms of social equality."²⁷

Colored Women's Clubs) initiatives, see Williams, "Mary Morris Talbert," 1097, 1099. On the founding and early years of the TFCWC, see A. W. Jackson, *A Sure Foundation* (Houston, 1940), 292-93. On the involvement of women in the early years of the NAACP at both the national and local levels, see Salem, *To Better Our World*, 145-80.

²⁶ Application for Charter, Sept. 8, 1918, Silsbee Branch File, box G-205, NAACP Papers; Application for Charter, Feb. 1, 1919, Wharton Branch File, *ibid.* Membership numbers are drawn from membership file cards, Auxiliary Files, box L-45, NAACP Papers, Series II.

²⁷ J. E. Turner to Shillady, March 25, 1919, Mumford Branch File, box G-204, NAACP Papers; Grant Burleson to Oswald Garrison Villard, May 31, 1919, Waelder Branch File, box G-205, *ibid.*; Grant Derry to Shillady, June 26, 1919, *ibid.*; Turner to Shillady, March 25, 1919, Mumford Branch File, box G-204, *ibid.*; T. C. Smith to Villard, April 2, 1919, *ibid.*; Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York, 1965), 60-61; Turner to Shillady, March 25, 1919, Mumford Branch File, box G-204, NAACP Papers.

Table 1
Women in the Texas NAACP, 1918–1919

<i>Branch</i>	<i>Number of Charter Members</i>	<i>Number of Women</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Austin	75	34	45%
Baileyville*	89	36	40%
Beaumont	50	1	2%
Benchley	50	12	24%
Bryan	58	12	21%
Caldwell	59	13	22%
Corsicana	61	34	45%
Cuero	115	0	0%
Dallas	169	63	37%
Fort Worth	117	7	6%
Galveston	50	17	34%
Gonzales	50	23	46%
Greenville	111	31	28%
Hearne	59	14	24%
Highbank	92	14	15%
Jones Prairie*	50	10	20%
Leggett	64	12	19%
Marlin	51	3	6%
Marshall	50	22	44%
Mart	50	5	10%
Mumford	61	5	8%
Orange	186	56	30%
Palestine	129	36	28%
San Antonio	112	36	32%
Seguin	50	7	14%
Silsbee	58	24	41%
Temple	58	0	0%
Texarkana	104	46	61%
Waco	56	3	6%
Waelder	50	11	22%
Wharton	84	29	35%
Yoakum	50	4	8%

SOURCE: Applications for Charter, Branch Files, boxes G-200 to G-205, NAACP Papers.

* Organizers in Baileyville and Jones Prairie submitted separate applications for charter; they later combined to form one branch.

Returning soldiers stimulated the idealism feeding the Texas NAACP. Many NAACP branches sponsored lectures by ex-soldiers, especially during membership drives. Lt. C. C. Taylor aroused interest in organizing a branch in Wharton with a talk on "The Negro and the War." Taylor discussed his war experiences, but he also "dwelled extremely" on topics such as "Race Pride, Suffrage, Leadership, Segregation, Housing Conditions, and the Color Line." The people of Corsicana

“turned out enmasse” to hear Lt. B. A. Jackson and Pvt. W. F. Porter address the local NAACP. In a spirited session that lasted “well into the night,” the two veterans related their experiences on the “bloodsoaked fields of the war ground of the world . . . exhibited gas masks . . . and in other ways greatly enlightened” the standing-room-only crowd. The Reverend Jeems Lewis concluded the meeting with a “roof raising speech right behind the fighting men, demanding the rights of the race which had been bought by blood.” Such declarations gave the movement broad appeal. Laborers, laundresses, and farmers, as well as professionals, attended the gathering and applauded the demand for action.²⁸

A new, aggressive Black leadership emerged during these years to articulate the grievances and aspirations of the Black working poor. Clifton F. Richardson Jr., newspaper editor and secretary of the Houston Branch, was such a political activist. Richardson co-founded the *Houston Observer* in 1916 and then established his own paper, the *Informer*, in 1919. In his editorials, he inveighed tirelessly against segregation, disfranchisement, racist reporting, and mob violence. Considering himself an “agitator” and a “radical,” he demanded “justice, equality before the law, education, decent wages, living conditions, suffrage rights and privileges” and insisted that Blacks wanted “a man’s chance—nothing more, nothing less.” The vituperative editor continuously criticized Houston’s Black elite as self-interested “Huns of ebony Hue” who neglected the needs of the city’s Blacks. As an activist, he used his paper as a recruiting tool for the NAACP and encouraged Black labor unions to report their activities in his weekly. His paper had broad appeal and circulated well beyond Houston.²⁹

With an energetic membership and aggressive leadership, these newly organized NAACP branches launched a campaign against racial injustice. The mayors of several Texas cities banned the racist film *Birth of a Nation* after NAACP branches presented petitions protesting the film that had been signed by hundreds of Black residents. The San Antonio Branch secured similar petitions protesting the inflammatory *San Antonio Harpoon*, whose editor slandered Black soldiers. Branch activists succeeded in convincing Secretary of War Newton Baker to pull the racist sheet out of circulation at Camp Fort Sam Houston and Camp Travis. The Dallas and Corsicana branches conducted voter registration drives. When Texas granted limited suffrage to women in 1918, the Houston Branch prepared petitions and secured the services of a local Black attorney in overturning a Harris County decision to exclude Black women from registering to vote in the July 1918 primary election. The

²⁸ *Dallas Express*, Feb. 8, April 19, 1919.

²⁹ For examples of Clifton F. Richardson’s energetic rhetoric, see *Houston Informer*, June 28, 1919. For an example of Richardson’s efforts to criticize Houston Blacks he considered “antebellum Sambos,” see James M. SoRelle, “The Darker Side of ‘Heaven’: The Black Community in Houston, Texas, 1917–1945” (Ph.D. diss., Kent State University, 1980), 79–81. On Richardson’s career as an editor, political activist, and civic booster, see Howard Beeth, “Houston & History, Past and Present: A Look at Black Houston in the 1920s,” *Southern Studies*, 25 (Summer 1986), 177–81; and Howard Beeth, “A Black Elite Agenda in the Urban South: The Call for Political Change and Racial Economic Solidarity in Houston during the 1920s,” *Essays in Economic and Business History*, 10 (June 1992), 41–55.



This map identifies cities and towns in Texas with NAACP branches in 1919.

Austin Branch orchestrated an effective boycott of a store whose owner bludgeoned a Black patron. When a clerk in a San Antonio shoe store struck a Black woman with a shoe, the local branch succeeded in getting the offending clerk fired, tried, and fined and also won \$250 in damages for the victim.³⁰

³⁰ Clipping from *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, March 3, 1919, Fort Worth Branch File, box G-202, NAACP Papers; *Dallas Express*, March 15, April 5, 1919; San Antonio Branch to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, petition, April 18, 1918, San Antonio Branch File, box G-204, NAACP papers; J. A. Grubles to W. E. B. Du Bois, April 22, 1918, *ibid.*; *Dallas Express*, Dec. 20, 1919; C. F. Richardson to Walter F. White, July 2, 1918,

Branch activists conducted their most vigorous campaigns against mob violence. They investigated lynchings. They also assisted Blacks unjustly accused of crime. In rural Gonzales County, for example, a Black sharecropper fired upon a gang of white terrorists who invaded his home. The cropper escaped to the home of W. J. Porter, secretary of the Gonzales Branch, who harbored the fugitive from vigilante justice. Other branches raised funds for Black defendants, and activists flooded the governor's office with petitions demanding the apprehension of lynchers and pleading for the pardon of Black convicts. In 1918 several Texas branches united to push an antilynching bill. J. F. Hawkins, a Black attorney and member of the Austin Branch, drafted a tough antilynching bill. Hawkins urged Gov. William P. Hobby to endorse the bill "as a fitting tribute" to the "black boys who died to maintain the honor of their state and dignity of their nation." Hobby even appealed to the legislature to pass an antilynching measure in the current session. Despite the governor's endorsement and the support of several leading white daily newspapers, the bill failed to pass.³¹

The advent of the NAACP in Texas generated vigorous debate among the state's African Americans. Some questioned the value of organizing. Skeptics charged that the NAACP would heighten, not ease, racial tensions and that it would isolate, not redress, Black grievances. Within branches, members quarreled over strategies and tactics. Some preferred to steer a cautious course. Others advocated a more militant approach.

The most heated intraracial conflict emerged in Houston. In the wake of the Houston riot, the city's established Black elite formed the Civic Betterment League (CBL), an organization that aimed to work with city and county officials in promoting racial harmony. The controversy began when the CBL applied for an NAACP branch charter in June 1918 and found that a group led by C. F. Richardson, the militant newspaper editor, had already initiated the formation of a branch. Richardson's group had begun legal proceedings against two white policemen who shot a Black man allegedly escaping arrest. E. O. Smith, a school principal and secretary of the CBL, criticized this approach as counterproductive. As he explained to the national office, "conditions are not so serious that we need to be unduly hasty." He urged Walter F. White of the NAACP national office not to grant a charter to a group of men "whose temperament and reputation would likely defeat our purposes and render the work of the national association unpopular if not impossi-

Houston Branch File, box G-203, NAACP Papers; P. A. Williams to Shillady, July 1, 15, 1919, Austin Branch File, box G-200, *ibid.* *Branch Bulletin* (June-July 1918), 30.

³¹ Walter F. White of the NAACP national office recruited G. N. T. Gray, president of the Fort Worth Branch, to investigate the lynching of Bragg Williams at Hillsboro in January 1919. Gray enlisted informants who helped him uncover the names of the perpetrators. G. N. T. Gray to Walter F. White, Feb. 14, 1919, Administrative Files, box C-368, NAACP Papers. The Austin, Houston, and San Antonio branches also investigated mob violence, secured affidavits from victims and witnesses, and pressured the governor to take action. C. F. Richardson also employed the resources of the *Houston Informer* to investigate mob action against African Americans: for two examples, see *Houston Informer*, June 7, 1919. W. J. Porter to Shillady, June 12, 1919, Legal Files, box D-1, NAACP Papers; J. F. Hawkins to W. P. Hobby, Jan. 8, 1919, reprinted in *Dallas Express*, Jan. 25, 1919; *Dallas Morning News*, Jan. 21, 1919. J. F. Hawkins's bill required, among other things, that all lynching cases be tried in Austin and be prosecuted by the attorney general, that the county in which the lynching occurred pay a \$10,000 indemnity to the heirs of the victim, and that lynching be defined as taking the life of a citizen without due process. For a full text of the bill, see *Dallas Express*, Jan. 25, 1919.

ble.” Although Smith promised to fight “hard and relentlessly,” he pledged to “exhaust every honorable means” to “avoid legal combats.” In contrast, Richardson defended his group’s aggressiveness. Since the NAACP “is a fighting as well as enlightening force,” argued Henry Lucius Mims, president of Richardson’s group, the national office must ally itself with Blacks willing to use the courts, press, and pulpit to fight for their rights. White avoided entangling himself in this bitter rivalry and gave recognition to Richardson’s group since it had applied first. The CBL, realizing that it was unable to outmaneuver the fiery editor, withdrew its application and, in a spirit of “team play,” urged its members to join the local branch.³²

The conflict between Richardson and the CBL reveals the many tensions within the movement. More than a debate over strategies and tactics, the dispute reflected a generational conflict that was occurring not only in Houston but in other cities across the country.³³ Like other old-guard elites, CBL leaders depended on their ability to compromise with whites to maintain their jobs and status. Hence, they favored working for municipal improvements and proceeded toward political ends only with “proper tact and diplomacy.” Richardson, an outsider, younger, self-employed, and less established, had less to lose. As Mims explained, the officers of his group were “employed in an independent way” and, unlike the CBL leadership, did “not depend for a living upon the city administration.” According to Mims, Smith would not “take any steps to remedy crying evils” since he could not “antagonize his source of income.” Conflicts continued to erupt, and within a year Richardson resigned. The temporizing forces of the old CBL soon gained control of the branch, and, under Smith’s tenure as president, the branch pursued a more cautious course. Consequently, Richardson gave the branch no exposure in the *Informer*, and the branch lost much potential popular support.³⁴

Several historians fault the NAACP in this period for failing to capitalize on the popular ground swell for mass organization. Too often, these scholars complain, the association’s agenda ignored the immediate problems of the poor and focused narrowly on the interests of Black business. According to this view, the NAACP and other racial organizations of the period failed to sustain a mass movement because of their commitment to what historian Judith Stein calls the “elite model of progress.”³⁵

³² E. O. Smith to White, June 10, 1918, box G-203, NAACP Papers; Henry Lucius Mims to Shillady, July 5, 1918, *ibid.*; CBL open letter in *Houston Observer*, Aug. 10, 1918, clipping, *ibid.* For a more detailed summary of the controversy between the CBL and Richardson, see SoRelle, “Darker Side of ‘Heaven,’” 361–66.

³³ Kenneth Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870–1930* (Urbana, 1976), 230–43; Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890–1920* (Chicago, 1967), 51–90; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 80–114, 123–28. On factional disputes as generational conflict in Houston, see SoRelle, “Darker Side of ‘Heaven,’” 357–58.

³⁴ Smith to White, June 10, 1918, Houston Branch File, box G-203, NAACP Papers; Mims to Shillady, July 5, 1918, *ibid.*; *Houston Informer*, Aug. 2, 1919, May 1, 1920.

³⁵ Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge, 1986), 5. See also Judith Stein, “Defining the Race, 1890–1930,” in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York, 1989), esp. 95–97. Robin Kelley attributes the failure of the Birmingham NAACP in the 1920s to its focus on the city’s Black business interests rather than on “racial violence, denial of civil liberties, and the immediate problems confronting the poor”: Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, xx.

Such a perspective overlooks the subversive aspirations of these activists and, by stressing elitism, ignores how working-class African Americans interpreted such a movement on their own terms or otherwise found meaning through membership. True, many branch activists maintained a faith in liberalism, capitalism, progress, and Christianity. But as historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham forcefully reminds us, "it is not uncommon for oppressed peoples to adopt the values of their oppressors for reasons of their own."³⁶ Whether protesting *Birth of a Nation*, challenging police brutality, or agitating for antilynching legislation, Texas activists distinguished themselves by demanding the active intervention of the state to protect the citizenship rights of all Americans. Moreover, Black workers energized this movement, exploiting the wartime emergency by migrating, withholding their labor, or seeking political self-activity through participation in the NAACP. In fact, it was not these activists' elitism that proved fatal. On the contrary, their very assertiveness prompted threatened whites to launch a concerted campaign of violence and intimidation aimed at destroying this nascent civil rights movement.

By the summer of 1919, Black activism became increasingly risky. In July a white mob at Longview assaulted a Black man who allegedly accused local officials of covering up a recent lynching. The mob retaliated against Blacks who came to the victim's defense by burning several stores and homes in Longview's Black neighborhood, killing one man. Racial tensions worsened when a score of white and Black longshoremen clashed in Port Arthur just three days after the violence at Longview. At Waco, Blacks aroused public sentiment by soliciting signatures to a petition that proclaimed that the "last war made [Blacks] the equals of the white race, and that this stand must be enforced." From Austin, the branch secretary, P. A. Williams, wrote that "the boys that are returning from over seas are telling of their mistreatment, discrimination, etc. by the Americans thereby arousing a racial feeling that is likely to give vent to rioting upon any provocation." The men "have returned to old homes but are not going to submit to old conditions." And the *Galveston New Idea* called upon Blacks "everywhere to get good guns plenty of ammunition and meet the damnable mob with the same thing the mob meets you."³⁷

This resistance among Blacks fed white fears that outside agitators and Black Texans had allied to overthrow the state's racial order. Felix McCord, the state representative from Longview, blamed the "ill feeling" between the races in Gregg County on newspapers "advocating social equality for Negroes." Federal agents in Galveston targeted the *New Idea* as a source of racial enmity. According to

³⁶ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women's History," *Gender & History*, 1 (Spring 1989), 59.

³⁷ For accounts of the Longview riot, see William M. Tuttle Jr., "Violence in a 'Heathen' Land: The Longview Race Riot of 1919," *Phylon*, 33 (Winter 1972), 324-33; Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-in, 1919 and the 1960s: A Study in the Connections between Conflict and Violence* (Garden City, N.Y., 1966), 12-16; and *Crisis*, 18 (Oct. 1919), 297-98. *Dallas Morning News*, July 15, 1919; Assistant Director and Chief, Bureau of Investigation, to R. W. Timothy, Waco, Texas, Aug. 9, 1919, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 10, frames 22-23; Williams to Shillady, July 15, 1919, Austin Branch File, box G-200, NAACP Papers; *Galveston New Idea*, July 28, 1919, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917-1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 6, frame 219.

FBI investigators, articles “scathing against the white race” convinced “well-thinking people” in Galveston “that these agitators have the negroes in this community in such a state of mind that but the slightest friction is necessary to participate a race war.” The FBI investigated reports that the city’s Black waterfront workers maintained a stockpile of “high-power rifles and ammunition” at the “Negro Screwman’s Union Hall.” Throughout July city officials prepared for an emergency. “Owing to an inadequate police force,” they requested federal assistance “should the race war break, as they expect it to.”³⁸

The return of Black veterans throughout the summer further convinced establishment whites of the plausibility of an impending revolution. In August 1919, a terrified white resident of Paris, Texas, reported to federal investigators that he had learned from his African American washerwoman that Black soldiers were conducting meetings with Black residents. She warned him to stay away as “there could be trouble.” Alarmists in the War Department’s Division of Military Intelligence feared that similar incidents would erupt not just in Texas but across the South. One intelligence officer advised that Black soldiers assumed “new ideas and social aspirations” while serving in France and would no longer “be the same sort of negro” as before “donning the uniform.” He insisted that there was a “strong probability” of “numerous racial clashes in the South,” the blame for which he placed on “strutting” Black soldiers “inclined to impudence and arrogance.” Should Black veterans “attempt to carry those ideas back into the South,” he warned, “an era of bloodshed will follow as compared with which the history of reconstruction will be mild reading, indeed.”³⁹

Fearing imminent racial bloodshed, Governor Hobby enlisted the federal government’s help in defending white supremacy. In late July, he requested the assistance of the FBI “in the matter of investigating Race Riot propaganda in Texas.” Hobby believed that Bolsheviks, or “some sinister source,” sought “to array the negroes against constituted authorities, both State and Federal.” After meeting with federal investigators and national guardsmen, Hobby ordered the Texas Rangers to journey through the “Black Belt and sound out the situation,” paying special attention to the circulation of Black newspapers and the activities of the NAACP, both of which he believed were now stirring Black Texans into “a frenzy against the government.”⁴⁰

Whites across the state now prepared for race war. On his tour of the state, Texas Ranger Frank Matthews urged local sheriffs to prepare for trouble. In some places, as at Fort Worth, law enforcement officials seemed unaware of the activities of local Blacks. After Matthews showed the Fort Worth sheriff the *Crisis* and told him “how extensive they were organized,” the sheriff pledged to “keep up with

³⁸ George Ohler, “Background Causes of the Longview Race Riot of July 10, 1919,” *Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas*, 12 (1981), 50; Report of J. L. Webb, July 28, 1919, *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917–1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 6, frames 228–29. The FBI summarized its six-month investigation of the Negro Screwman’s Union in W. A. Wiseman, report, Nov. 30, 1919, *ibid.*, reel 13, frames 350–51.

³⁹ Bureau of Intelligence, report, Aug. 3, 1919, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917–1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 12, frame 391; Sullens to Brown, Nov. 30, 1918, *ibid.*, reel 21, frames 175–77.

⁴⁰ Report of Special Agent McCaleb, July 31, 1919, *ibid.*, reel 12, frame 389; Hobby to A. Mitchell Palmer, July 29, 1919, Papers of the Governor, box 391, Record Group 301 (Texas State Library, Austin).

the negroes from now on” and “ordered a dozen sawed off pump shot guns.” At neighboring Dallas, lawmen assured Matthews that assistance from the Rangers was unnecessary since a number of white volunteers were “armed” and instructed “to form together on demand” of the police. Whites at Marshall organized a vigilance committee and advised Matthews that they had the “negroes under pretty good control.”⁴¹

Vigilance committees elsewhere took even more forceful measures to bring Blacks “under control.” Whites in Leggett, a sawmill town in deep east Texas, compelled Black residents to attend a citizens’ council and listen to its resolutions. The council issued a manifesto that set a curfew, prohibited Blacks from holding evening fraternal meetings and worship services, and banned them from the railroad depot and post office. Leggett whites then announced that “if you ‘niggers’ do these things you can stay here: but five families must leave.” The council banished, among others, T. S. Davis, organizer of the local NAACP. Leggett whites regarded the NAACP as revolutionary, fearing it would force “white folks do what [Blacks] wanted them to do.” To destroy the organization, a mob waylaid Davis’s son in broad daylight. That night, the mob besieged Davis’s brother’s home, sending a fusillade of bullets into it. Davis managed to escape to Houston and then to Ohio. Those who failed to evacuate were subject to further intimidation and ambushing. The Leggett NAACP Branch had barely been organized a month when whites crushed it.⁴²

In August 1919, only fifteen months after the first Texas branch of the NAACP was chartered, the governor’s office moved to terminate the association’s activities in the state. The state attorney general subpoenaed the records of the Austin Branch, contending that it was operating in violation of state law as it was unchartered to “do business” in Texas. Informed of these developments, the white executive secretary of the NAACP, John R. Shillady, traveled to Austin to defend the local branch, explaining to officials that since the NAACP was a nonprofit organization, it did not require a state charter to operate. The next morning a band of men, including a county judge and a local constable, assaulted Shillady outside his hotel, beating him nearly unconscious. The attackers shoved him on the next train north, warning him, on pain of death, not to set foot again in Texas.⁴³

Shillady’s ill-fated visit to Austin had a disastrous effect on the thirty-three branches of the NAACP in Texas. Within days of the assault, the Austin Branch notified state authorities that it would no longer operate. Fearing reprisals, many branches hesitated to call meetings. In early 1920 the Fort Worth Branch reported that it had experienced “chaotic conditions since Austin affair.” Efforts to reorganize

⁴¹ Ranger Frank W. Matthews, report, Aug. 18, 1919, in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans (1917–1925)*, ed. Kornweibel, reel 10, frame 28; Matthews, report, Aug. 16, 1919, *ibid.*, frame 27; Matthews, report, Aug. 15, 1919, *ibid.*, frame 26.

⁴² *Houston Informer*, Aug. 16, 1919, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 10, frame 404; T. S. Davis to Shillady, Aug. 11, 1919, Leggett Branch File, box G-203, NAACP Papers. See also T. S. Davis to James Weldon Johnson, Oct. 24, 1919, *ibid.*

⁴³ The assault on Shillady in Austin is recounted in several places; see especially Mary White Ovington, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York, 1947), 172–75.

the branch failed. The incident left several branches doubting the NAACP's legality in Texas. Despite contrary instructions from Shillady, several branches applied for state charters. Doing so exposed them to state authorities, who then used legal intimidation to terminate their operations. A farmer from Highbank recalled some years later that the attack on Shillady "stop our Progress," and the "law" confiscated "our books and for that Reason we went Down." Shillady solicited the San Antonio Branch's help in assisting those branches that "may be timid and . . . find it difficult to operate." He urged the branch president to write them and "stiffen their backbones and give them confidence to go on."⁴⁴

Such efforts were of no avail. By the end of 1921 all but 7 of the 33 branches had disbanded. Fear of violence frustrated attempts to reorganize branches. Although the Dallas Branch continued to survive after the tragedy at Austin, the Ku Klux Klan's ascent in the early 1920s discouraged branch officers from calling meetings. Despite the efforts of some members, the branch failed to sustain operations. In 1921 the national office sought Mary Talbert's help in reviving the Texas branches as part of a southern tour to renew interest in the NAACP. Talbert agreed to go but only under the auspices of the NACW. "None of us can afford to go to Texas as NAACP," she warned; "such Jim Crow travel is not only hard but *hazardous* in that part of *Hell* where we should work." New York heeded her advice, leaving Texas off the itinerary of its southern tour.⁴⁵ From a membership of nearly 7,700 in 1919, the Texas NAACP maintained fewer than 1,100 in 1921 (see table 2).

African American political activism encountered violent suppression elsewhere in the South. Blacks in Georgia and Mississippi also organized NAACP branches during 1918 and 1919. Death threats, lynching, and other acts of terror, however, forced these branches into inactivity. By the end of 1919, nine of Georgia's fifteen branches had ceased operations. To prevent further organizing efforts among Blacks, the Mississippi legislature passed a law prohibiting the distribution of literature intended "to disturb relations between the races." In Phillips County, Arkansas, Black sharecroppers, many of them ex-servicemen, organized a union to force equitable crop settlements from landlords. Fearing an insurrection, Delta leaders requested and secured over 2,500 federal troops. White vigilantes joined the troops in a massacre of an estimated 250 sharecroppers. Delta officials arrested over 1,000 Black men and women, indicted 122, convicted 79, and sentenced 12 Black men to death.⁴⁶

⁴⁴J. Gentry Horace to NAACP, May 22, 1920, Fort Worth Branch File, box G-202, NAACP Papers; S. R. Carter to William Pickens, Feb. 18, 1931, Highbank Branch File, box G-203, *ibid.*; Shillady to Grumbles, Jan. 15, 1920, San Antonio Branch File, box G-204, *ibid.*

⁴⁵George F. Porter to James Weldon Johnson, Jan. 30, 1923, Dallas Branch File, box G-201, *ibid.*; Robert Bagnall to Porter, Feb. 6, 1923, *ibid.*; Porter to Bagnall, March 13, 1923, *ibid.*; Bagnall to Porter, March 10, 1923, *ibid.*; Porter to Bagnall, June 6, 1923, *ibid.*; Bagnall to Talbert, Sept. 17, 1921, Special Correspondence Files, box C-76, *ibid.*; Bagnall to Talbert, Sept. 19, 1921, *ibid.*; Talbert to Bagnall, Sept. 22, 1921, *ibid.*; *Branch Bulletin* (Dec. 1921).

⁴⁶Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era*, 206–7; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 314–16; *Crisis*, 21 (Dec. 1920), 67–68. For an account of the massacre in Elaine, Phillips County, see Richard C. Cortner, *A Mob Intent*

The fate of African American activism in Texas and throughout the South illustrates that no southern Black protest movement, no matter how vigorous, could survive in such a hostile political environment. The continuing dominance of plantation agriculture and low-wage industry ensured that state and local officials would assist in combating labor shortages. National elites remained uninterested in the aspirations of local African Americans. By investigating the NAACP and other civil rights groups as subversive organizations, the federal government assured white southerners that it would not intervene to overthrow Jim Crow. The press also defended the status quo. In justifying the attack on Shillady, the *New Orleans States* insisted that any organization that championed "a demand for absolute equality" and that tried "to stir up the colored people of the South to demand and fight" for it "is only inviting ill-feeling and disorder."⁴⁷

Such were the conditions that proved conducive to the terrorism that delivered the fatal blow to the nascent civil rights struggle of the postwar years. At Longview, Leggett, Austin, and elsewhere, vigilantes, sheriffs, and federal agents pursued and terrorized Black activists without fear of reprisal. Yet most scholars, as Robin Kelley observed, continue to underrate "the role violence played in quashing radical movements" in the South.⁴⁸ The events in Texas, however, reveal that force was an integral means of suppressing Black activism under Jim Crow. The political violence of the postwar years also contradicts characterizations of African Americans as politically indifferent. White Texans may have blamed the unrest of 1919 on outsiders in an effort to restore the fiction that "the great mass of Southern negroes harbor no ideas and no aspirations which challenge the supremacy of the whites or their sense of superiority."⁴⁹ But their actions indicated that they thought otherwise. The extent of anti-Black violence attests to how southern whites had become paranoid about Black assertiveness. In fact, the campaign of terror is difficult to explain if we accept images of African Americans as timid, apolitical, or following the path of least resistance.

The campaign of terror, however, did not defeat Black activism entirely. Black resistance and struggle continued, just as it had before the war, in countless ways at the subterranean level. The struggles of 1917 to 1919 left an imprint on participants, and although the NAACP died, memories persisted. Twelve years later, in 1931, the former Highbank Branch secretary remembered the NAACP as "one of the Best orgination Ever were organise in Texas" and that his branch had

on *Death: The NAACP and the Arkansas Riot Cases* (Middletown, 1988), 1–56; and Woodruff, "African-American Struggles for Citizenship."

⁴⁷ *New Orleans States*, Aug. 30, 1919, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 9, frame 980.

⁴⁸ Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, xiii. Kelley emphasizes antiradical violence *ibid.*, 57–77, 159–75. Other historians who attribute significance to antiradical violence include McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 224–56; Woodruff, "African-American Struggles for Citizenship"; and MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 149–73. For a recent study of racial unrest in the South during World War I that overemphasizes the cultural and ritual functions of anti-Black violence, as opposed to the political motives that are stressed here, see J. William Harris, "Etiquette, Lynching, and Racial Boundaries in Southern History: A Mississippi Example," *American Historical Review*, 100 (April 1995), 387–410.

⁴⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, Sept. 7, 1919, in *Tuskegee Institute News Clippings File*, ed. Kitchens, reel 9, frames 987–88.

Table 2
The Rise and Fall of the NAACP in Texas, 1918–1921

<i>Branch</i>	<i>Date Organized</i>	<i>Charter Members</i>	<i>Total Membership</i>			
			1918	1919	1920	1921
San Antonio	March 1918	112	970	1746	607	177
Fort Worth	April 1918	117	166	267	267	0
Beaumont	June 1918	50	94	475	47	95
Houston	July 1918	301	372	606	123	280
Dallas	September 1918	169	169	1152	317	278
Orange	November 1918	186	186	182	0	0
Gonzales	November 1918	50	50	50	0	0
Silsbee	November 1918	58	58	85	0	0
Galveston	November 1918	50	50	173	259	15
Corsicana	December 1918	61	61	117	70	33
Austin	December 1918	75	75	279	0	0
Texarkana	December 1918	104	104	183	74	196
Marshall	January 1919	50	–	97	0	0
Wharton	February 1919	84	–	345	0	0
Seguin	March 1919	50	–	50	0	0
Temple	March 1919	58	–	58	0	0
Palestine	April 1919	129	–	129	0	0
Marlin	April 1919	51	–	51	0	0
Mumford	April 1919	61	–	315	0	0
Bryan	April 1919	58	–	172	6	0
Benchley	May 1919	50	–	78	0	0
Highbank	May 1919	92	–	121	0	0
Mart	May 1919	50	–	84	0	0
Waelder	May 1919	50	–	50	0	0
Cuero	June 1919	115	–	123	14	0
Waco	June 1919	56	–	99	0	0
Yoakum	June 1919	50	–	103	49	0
Leggett	June 1919	64	–	64	0	0
Greenville	June 1919	111	–	111	0	0
Caldwell	July 1919	59	–	83	0	0
Hearne	July 1919	59	–	86	0	0
Jones Prairie	August 1919	50	–	67	0	0
Baileyville	September 1919	89	–	91	0	0
Total		2,774	2,355	7,692	1,827	1,074

SOURCE: Applications for Charter, Branch Files, boxes G-200 to G-205, NAACP Papers; membership file cards, box L-45, L-47, NAACP Papers, Series II.

been “sound” and over “100 strong.” Activists lost their vehicle of organization, of connecting to broader national and global struggles, but anti-Black violence, as two historians recently pointed out, never succeeded in its “attempt to crush

the African American community, which continued to grow and assert itself." Race relations remained unsettled.⁵⁰

African Americans struggled to convert the war to make the world safe for democracy into a fight for citizenship at home. By migrating in search of more favorable economic and political climes, by withholding their labor, by defying the draft, by serving in the military, and by organizing NAACP branches, Blacks waged a political struggle that contested not only exploitative working conditions but segregation and disfranchisement as well. To the state's planters, industrialists, and elected officials, African Americans, politicized and organized, posed a formidable threat of open rebellion. By deploying the coercive resources of both state and federal governments, the powerful defeated these soldiers of democracy and, for the moment, made Texas safe for white supremacy.

⁵⁰ S. R. Carter to William Pickens, Feb. 18, 1931, Highbank Branch File, box G-203, NAACP Papers; Goings and Smith, "'Unhidden' Transcripts," 376.