

Mr. Saccullo

Name _____

8th Grade Social Studies

Period _____

The Changing lives of African Americans: Letters from the Great Migration (1917)

Houston, Texas, 4-29-17.

Dear Sir: I am a constant reader of the "Chicago Defender" and in your last issue I saw a want ad that appealed to me. I am a Negro, age 37, and am an all round foundry man. I am a cone maker by trade having had about 10 years experience at the business, and hold good references from several shops, in which I have been employed. I have worked at various shops and I have always been able to make good. It is hard for a black man to hold a job here, as prejudice is very strong. I have never been discharged on account of dissatisfaction with my work, but I have been "let out" on account of my color. I am a good brassmelter but i prefer core making as it is my trade. I have a family and am anxious to leave here, but have not the means, and as wages are not much here, it is very hard to save enough to get away with. If you know of any firms that are in need of a core maker and whom you think would send me transportation, I would be pleased to be put in touch with them and I assure you that effort would be appreciated. I am a core maker but I am willing to do any honest work. All I want is to get away from here. I am writing you and I believe you can and will help me. If any one will send transportation, I will arrange or agree to have it taken out of my salary untill full amount of fare is paid. I also know of several good fdry. men here who would leave in a minute, if there only was a way arranged for them to leave, and they are men whom I know personally to be experienced men. I hope that you will give this your immediate attention as I am anxious to get busy and be on my way. I am ready to start at any time, and would be pleased to hear something favorable.

Philadelphia, Pa., Oct. 7, 1917.

Dear Sir: I take this method of thanking you for yours early responding and the glorious effect of the treatment. Oh. I do feel so fine. Dr. the treatment reach me almost ready to move I am now housekeeping again I like it so much better than rooming. Well Dr. with the aid of God I am making very good I make \$75 per month. I am carrying enough insurance to pay me \$20 per week if I am not able to be on duty. I don't have to work hard. dont have to mister every little white boy comes along I havent heard a white man call a colored a nigger you no now--since I been in the state of Pa. I can ride in the electric street and steam cars any where I get a seat. I dont care to mix with white what I mean I am not crazy about being with white folks, but if I have to pay the same fare I have learn to want the same acomidation. and if you are first in a place here shopping you dont have to wait until the white folks get thro tradeing yet amid all this I shall ever love the good old South and I am praying that God may give every well wisher a chance to be a man regardless of his color, and if my going to the front would bring about such conditions I am ready any day--well Dr. I dont want to worry you but read between lines; and maybe you can see a little sense in my weak statement the kids are in school every day I have only two and I guess that all. Dr. when you find time I would be delighted to have a word from the good old home state. Wife join me in sending love you and yours.

I am your friend and patient.

African Americans during WWI: "I Did My Bit for Democracy"

Andrew Johnson was an African-American veteran interviewed by a WPA worker in 1938. In the excerpt below, from *American Life Histories, 1936-1940*, he describes some of his experiences serving in the military.

The news came that every male between the ages of 21-31 was to go to one of the numerous Local Draft Boards set up in every part of the country.

I registered with the Local Draft Board, Swarthmore, Pa. on June 5, 1917 and was given a card with the number 1493. If this number were drawn out of a large glass bowl in the Quarter-master General's Office in Washington, then I was told to report back to the L. D. B. This was the beginning of nearly a year-long period of reporting to one place or another, both in American and France.

All Summer long I anxiously scanned the daily papers for the list of numbers as published by the War Department. In September I accepted a teaching job in Virginia, but had been there hardly a month when 1493 appeared, so back I came to report to the Local Draft Board and claimed exemption because I was the sole support of my aged widowed mother and two sisters and a brother. Then, too, all teachers were supposed to be exempt from military service.

But my claims for exemption were denied. I found out later, that the chairman of the Local Draft Board, a coal yard operator named Green, had summarily placed my name on the list of men to go to war because he had exhausted the exemptions allowed and was compelled to fill out the quota.

A special train came through one day in October and I said good-bye to my family and climbed aboard, with eight other colored men from my town. Every town the train passed through contributed its quota of young men, so that when we reached Admiral, Maryland, the train was crowded with wildly cheering, excited heroes-to-be.

Alighting from the train, we were told to line up and follow several military-appearing men. The contingent, composed of men dressed in old clothes and carrying suitcases, straggled up the road several miles until we came to a cantonment called Meade, named after a Civil War general.

Here we were lined up again, told to file into a large mess hall where we found that the Army ate other vegetables besides beans. After mess we lined up again for medical inspection, then marched off to a supply station and issued Army uniforms and equipment. Dress shoes and heavy hob-nailed field shoes, an O. D. tunic, shirt, trousers, underwear, socks, a necktie, handkerchiefs, towels and soap. . . .

Captain Queen sent for me the next day, the orderly who gave me the order told me to report to company headquarters. As I came up the walk, I passed an armed guard standing in front of a large flag, and he brought his gun to the ready and asked, "Hey, buddy, where's your manners? Don't you know better'n walk past the colors without saluting?" He patted his gun suggestively so I turned toward the colors, as he called it, and gave the only salute I knew, a Boy Scout salute learned as a child. The guard looked at me rather disgustedly, and commented, "You're in the army now and we'll make a soldier out of you yet." I reported at the door and was sent to Captain Queen. "You wanted to see me? I inquired. The captain cut in on me. "Soldier. When you are told to report to an officer, always salute until recognized, saying "Corporal Johnson reporting, sir." then stand at attention."

"Yes sir." "I see by your draft board that you can use a typewriter. I'm making you a company clerk, with rank of corporal. You'll report to Lieut. Hinkson, in charge of headquarters platoon. Dismiss." I managed a credible salute, turned on my heel and marched out. In the Army one day and already a

corporal. I went over to the supply sergeant, drew my chevrons, and walked over to the barracks where I commenced sewing them on. Then, feeling very proud of my new rank, reported to headquarters platoon. This time I had everything right. I saluted as I passed the colors, had a soldier point out Lieut. Hinkson, walked over to him, saluted and said, "Corporal Johnson reporting for duty as ordered by Captain Queen, sir."

The Lieutenant gravely returned my salute, glanced at my sleeve and said "Corporal, You're chevrons are quite new", he said. I answered proudly, "Yes sir, Lieutenant." "Well, they're sewn on upside down," he snapped, "Go to the company tailor and have them adjusted properly." . . .

I soon learned the distinction between an officer and myself. I studied the Army Manual, The School of the Soldier, learned how to clean and care for a rifle, how to execute "order arms" without smashing my toes. I learned the difference between a canteen and a latrine. Being in the headquarters platoon, I was able to find out news of impending troop movements. In fact, I typed the order canceling all leaves and ordering the men to report to the parade grounds with packs and in full marching order. We were reviewed, inspected, and then marked direct to a waiting train. Once on the train we were issued cards on which we wrote, Am leaving for somewhere in France. Goodbye. We detrained at Hoboken. When we arrived, darkness had fallen and it was raining a little. In the drizzle we were marched up the gang-plank of a transport and told to stay below decks until we were well out to sea. . . .

The North Atlantic was cold and dismal. In fact, the whole business was rather grim and uninspiring, but we reached Brest without incident, didn't even have one submarine scare on the way over. . . .

We went into intensive training and after six weeks we marched up to the town of Nancy in the Department of Douliard. We marched at night, rested in fields by day and noticed the almost solid lines of truck headed toward the Front, and passed troops returning from a tour of duty in the front line trenches.

In each squad, in addition to the riflemen there were [grenadiers?] who carried hand grenades. While we were marching we had the first casualty in our company. A grenadier, a belt of hand [grenadea?] strapped around his middle, stumbled and fell, the grenades exploded, everybody who could, jumped into ditches or flattened themselves on the ground. Total score, three dead and eight wounded.

Of the dead we buried two, but the third, the grenadier was blown to bits, nothing left but a hole in the road.

We were in the [Argonne?] Forest when the pig push started on September 26, 1918 and we stayed in there five days, part of the time we were shelled by our own artillery in support, the 349th Field Artillery Regiment. We had no battle flags, no shears to cut barbed wire entanglements, our liaison [men?] (runners with messengers) were all killed or wounded trying to get through with messages. . . .

Enemy airplanes flew over us several times, dropping pamphlets addressed to us. "Colored Americans. We have no quarrel with you. We are your friends. Throw down your arms and cover over to our side. We will treat you better than you are treated in the South." However, I do not remember a single case of desertion.

After the [Argonns?], we went up into the [Vosgen?] Mountains, where it was rather quiet. We needed it for we had been cut up pretty badly. Replacements (soldiers sent to a unit to replace the dead and wounded) were sent us, and I was promoted to Sergeant. . . . Armistice Day found us before Metz. We were waiting to storm a great walled city which would have cost us many men, as we would have to cross a level plain about two miles long.

