

# Woodrow Wilson House Scholars Program

## The African American Experience during WW1



Ayrrika James





# About me

My name is Ayriika James. I live in Southeast, Washington, DC. I am a 11th grader at Thurgood Marshall Academy. I am interested in studying Sociology and Business. My top three schools that I want to attend is George Washington University, George Mason University and William and Mary.

# Work experience

Throughout this program, I learned a lot from my experience here. Even though I was a remote intern, I still had an experience. I learned how to be professional. How to research and pay attention to detail. How to take constructive criticism. The importance of using the resources around me. During my time here I learned how to make a professional introduction. How to present and talk during meetings. These skills and lessons are vital for my future.



# Inspiration

My inspiration came from my love for activism and black history. My teacher Mr. Hunt always encouraged me to learn more. He taught me to share my history.

Ms. Stacey my advisor was a big inspiration in the creation of this project.

She helped me combine my creativity with the connection to Woodrow Wilson.



# Introduction

My project is about the African American struggle during World War 1. World War 1 was apart of the Wilson era during his term as president. World War 1 was a war where all minorities fought for America. But in this presentation we are going to focus on African Americans. I want to show you why they felt like America didn't appreciate them. It shows the perspective from the soldiers and mother of a soldier's point of view. This gives you as the viewer an insight on how they felt. You as the reader get to see and feel what they went through. You get to see what they really wanted to say.

# Soldier's Poem

This poem is shown from the perspective of a black soldier. It's about his journey from the war then back to America. This poem the narrator starts to speak about experiences that the African American community went through in those times. This poem describes how America treats black Americans. However, it's important to keep in mind this is a community's perspective. But it speaks through one voice.

# “Boom” “Bang” “Pow”

By: Ayrrika James

“Boom” “Bang” “Pow”

“Boom” “Bang” “Pow”

You have been drafted into World War I

Walking into this foreign land

Fighting for a country that see my skin as char  
from a fire pit

See me as a property not a citizen

Spit, yell and demean me everyday

I walk in this foreign land with more respect than  
my own country

That's the country i'm fighting for

Over there felt like a dream

I felt like a human

Got treated with respect

Appreciated for my work

But then I came back to the military

On my base we were segregated

Even though we're fighting the same cause

We are still apart

As a black soldier we were assigned to the low  
level positions

Afraid a black person hold a gun

Scared that we would kill our white  
counterparts

I thought if we were forced in this war

At least we can fight in this war

Never were looked as equal

It's the same as America but on enemy lines

The ones that did make it

Never got there credit

The army loved to take our success as their  
own

# Family's Poem

This poem is shown from the perspective of a black mother. It shows her writing to the army or as it was called back then Uncle Sam. She is pleading for her husband and sons. Talking about how America is a scary place without them. The mistreatment and violence sent towards her for just being black. This poem shows the perspectives of black mothers. It's important to keep in mind this is a community's perspective. But it speaks through one voice.



# Dear Uncle Sam

By: Ayriika James

Dear Uncle Sam,

Why did you take my husband and sons?

Sending them to this foreign land

Where it's kill or be killed

What did we do to deserve this?

Do you only see us when you need fresh bodies

Shields that you can place over those white angels

What are we to you?

Since slavery it has made my people a fraction

Telling me since the day I was born what we are worth

Made my people beg for freedom

But never gave me back my people's dignity

Stole my people's worth as if it was it's own

How can I claim a country that won't recognize me

I live in fear everyday

Scared that you would call me with that call

The call that will shatter my heart

Making me feel like a mirror broken into a

thousand pieces

It's like a crushing weight

It won't lift until the war ends

I'm scared that my boys will be sent back to me

in a box

That I won't spend my last with my husband

Why did you have to force all the men into this

war

You took my safety away

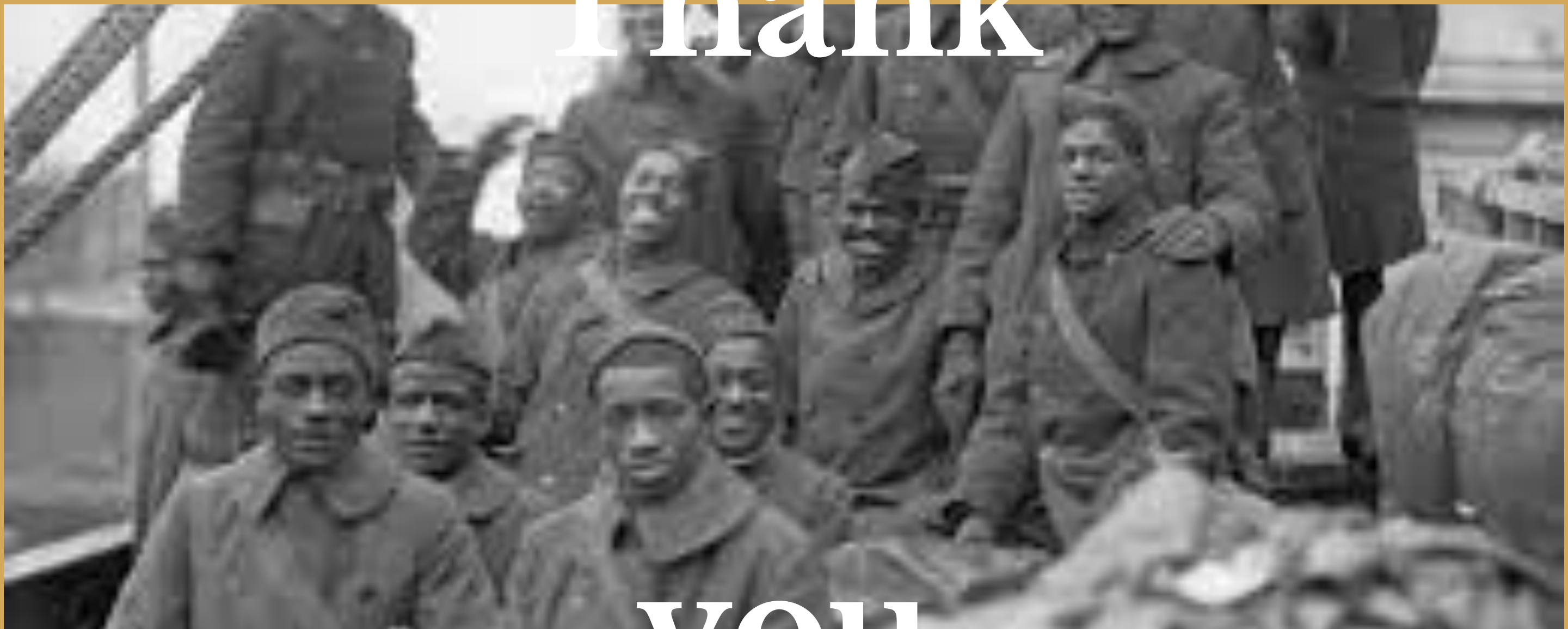
Here in America people don't care for me

I'm scared that someone would come after me

# Process Paper

For my final project, I had to find a way to tie it to Woodrow Wilson. My main focus was to connect my work and the history of African Americans to my projects. African Americans during World War I were America's frontier. They have taken this country to a new level. From Harlem Hellfighters to creating employment opportunities in industrial businesses. These men changed the fate of the African-American workforce. I did my research by studying the history of African Americans during World War I. On the other hand, I researched African American families in America during World War I. World War I was an integral part of the evolution of black people. However, racism in America prevented this achievement. Although this war gave African Americans opportunities in larger industries such as industrialization. It also created an even worse social environment for African Americans. This culture took place mainly in the south. My theme celebrates the struggle that African-Americans went through in the war and how it made them feel...but it also shows the family side of the fight. How did your family feel that this country treated the sacrifice of a loved one as worthless? how it unsettled them. These things didn't really seem to change. It just really got worse.

Thank



you