Woodrow Wilson House Scholars Program

The African American Experience during WW1

Ayrrika James
About me

My name is Ayrrika 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: Ayrrika 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