Shifting Loyalties:
World War I and the Conflicted Politics of Patriotism in the British Caribbean

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
History in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how the crisis of World War I impacted imperial policy and popular claims-making in the British Caribbean. Between 1915 and 1918, tens of thousands of men from the British Caribbean volunteered to fight in World War I and nearly 16,000 men, hailing from every British colony in the region, served in the newly formed British West Indies Regiment (BWIR). Rousing appeals to imperial patriotism and manly duty during the wartime recruitment campaigns and postwar commemoration movement linked the British Empire, civilization, and Christianity while simultaneously promoting new roles for women vis-à-vis the colonial state. In Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the two colonies that contributed over seventy-five percent of the British Caribbean troops, discussions about the meaning of the war for black, coloured, white, East Indian, and Chinese residents sparked heated debates about the relationship among race, gender, and imperial loyalty.

To explore these debates, this dissertation foregrounds the social, cultural, and political practices of BWIR soldiers, tracing their engagements with colonial authorities, military officials, and West Indian civilians throughout the war years. It begins by reassessing the origins of the BWIR, and then analyzes the regional campaign to recruit West Indian men for military service. Travelling with newly enlisted volunteers across the Atlantic, this study then chronicles soldiers’ multi-sited campaign for equal status, pay, and standing in the British imperial armed forces. It closes by offering new perspectives on the dramatic postwar protests by BWIR soldiers in Italy in 1918 and British Honduras and Trinidad in 1919, and reflects on the trajectory of veterans’ activism in the postwar era.
This study argues that the racism and discrimination soldiers experienced overseas fueled heightened claims-making in the postwar era. In the aftermath of the war, veterans mobilized collectively to garner financial support and social recognition from colonial officials. Rather than withdrawing their allegiance from the empire, ex-servicemen and civilians invoked notions of mutual obligation to argue that British officials owed a debt to West Indians for their wartime sacrifices. This study reveals the continued salience of imperial patriotism, even as veterans and their civilian allies invoked nested local, regional, and diasporic loyalties as well. In doing so, it contributes to the literature on the origins of patriotism in the colonial Caribbean, while providing a historical case study for contemporary debates about “hegemonic dissolution” and popular mobilization in the region.

This dissertation draws upon a wide range of written and visual sources, including archival materials, war recruitment posters, newspapers, oral histories, photographs, and memoirs. In addition to Colonial Office records and military files, it incorporates previously untapped letters and petitions from the Jamaica Archives, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados Department of Archives, and US National Archives.
Dedication

To my grandparents,
Ellie Banks Conley, James Monroe Conley (1915-2007), and
Gertrude Elizabeth Goldthreate Sowell (1934-2008),
for sparking my love of history.

To my parents,
Clarence Michael Lee Goldthree and Judy Goldthree,
for giving me much more love, support, and encouragement than any one person deserves.
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Introduction

On May 2, 1919, Sir Leslie Probyn, Governor of Jamaica, stood on the deck of HMS *Helenus* to address the first contingent of British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) soldiers to return from World War I. Welcoming home the group of over 1,200 enlisted men and officers, he congratulated them for demonstrating Jamaica’s unfailing loyalty to Britain. Assuring the returning soldiers that the colonial government appreciated their sacrifice, the governor promised an unprecedented array of state-sponsored work, welfare, and land settlement programs for soldiers and their families. Governor Probyn closed his brief address by linking the fate of Jamaica to the soldiers’ postwar progress: “I want Jamaica to become prosperous; and I want all people, in the future, to reckon that this prosperity began to run from the day on which Jamaica’s brave sons came back home from the War.”

While Governor Probyn valorized the BWIR troops as paragons of imperial loyalty and duty, Jamaican-born writer Claude McKay envisioned ex-soldiers as the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle in the Caribbean. Visiting with demobilized BWIR troops, black U.S. Army veterans, and Indian laborers at a soldiers’ club in London in 1919 and 1920, McKay documented the discrimination and marginalization non-white soldiers experienced during World War I. In a provocative article published in Marcus Garvey’s *Negro World* newspaper, the socialist McKay proclaimed: “[W]e should rejoice that Germany so blundered, so that Negroes from all parts of the world were drawn to England to see the Lion, afraid and trembling, hiding in cellars, and the British ruling class revealed to them in all of

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1 “Welcome Given By The Governor, on Behalf of all Jamaica, to the Men of the British West Indies Regiment on their Return Home, May 2nd,” CO 318/348, file 38685, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew Gardens, England
its rottenness and hypocrisy.” McKay insisted that although the war in Europe was over, the battle to sever the chains of imperialism had only begun. 

Despite sharply different points of view, both Governor Probyn and Claude McKay positioned BWIR veterans at the center of the social and political landscape of the postwar British Caribbean. Thirteen years later, C.L.R. James, the young Trinidadian writer who would become the most prominent West Indian radical intellectual of the twentieth-century, likewise argued that ex-soldiers would play a pivotal role in the political awakening of the region. “A detailed history of the B.W.I. Regiment in the War,” James predicted in 1932, “will be told some day.” A comprehensive account of the “efforts and disappointments” of BWIR servicemen, he insisted, was a “necessary piece of West Indies history.”

At the outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914, men and women of the British Caribbean, particularly the region’s white and colored elites, had responded quickly to calls for assistance and provided material, military, and moral support for Britain. In addition to establishing official war relief funds and making donations of tens of thousands of pounds, colonial legislatures throughout the British Caribbean also offered gifts of tropical staples, cigarettes, and hand-sewn woolen wraps and uniforms to assist in the war effort. Despite sustained wartime price inflation of basic consumer goods, individuals and private groups continued to contribute to the war effort through private donations of cash and crops. In

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2 *Negro World*, March 13, 1920, magazine section

3 C.L.R. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (Nelson, Lancashire: Coulton, 1932), 27

4 For the financial contribution of the British Caribbean colonies to the war effort, see Table B.1 in Glenford Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002), 203-204
addition, groups of women traveled to Britain to volunteer as nurses for the duration of the war, while many others spearheaded fundraising efforts and patriotic celebrations on the homefront. Even Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), founded in Kingston, Jamaica, only three days before Britain entered World War I, quickly passed a resolution supporting the war effort and proclaiming the organization’s “love for, and devotion to, His Majesty and the Empire.”

Despite the initial reluctance of the British Colonial and War Offices to accept black and coloured troops, tens of thousands of men—including future Rastafari founder Leonard Howell, labor leaders Arthur A. Cipriani and Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler, Jamaican Chief Minister Norman Washington Manley, and even a young C.L.R. James—volunteered from the Caribbean colonies or the migrant zones of Panamá to fight for “King and country” in Europe. After the BWIR was officially established through a royal proclamation in October 1915, massive recruitment rallies were staged in the British Caribbean territories and Panamá to fill the ranks of the new regiment. On November 8, 1915—less than a month after King George V’s appeal to colonial subjects to fight on behalf of the Empire—the first contingent of volunteers from Jamaica, British Honduras, and the Bahamas sailed to England to serve in World War I. At its height, the BWIR included 15,601 officers and enlisted men organized

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5 Marcus Garvey, Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League to Rt. Hon. Lewis Harcourt, September 16, 1914, CO 137/705, file 41210, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew Gardens, England

6 In September 1914, the Colonial and War Offices announced that no contingents from the British Caribbean territories would be accepted to fight with the British Army in the First World War. However, in May 1915, the War Office notified the Colonial Office that West Indian volunteers would be accepted for service.

7 In October 1915, King George V issued an official call for volunteers throughout the Empire. King George V’s appeal was read aloud in every church in Jamaica on Sunday, October 31, 1915 and was widely circulated in the other British Caribbean colonies.
into twelve battalions (see table 11). While men from the British Caribbean had fought under the Union Jack since 1795 when enslaved Africans were impressed to defend British possessions during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, the voluntary enlistment of thousands of men during the First World War was the largest military mobilization in the modern history of the English-speaking West Indies.

Foregroundering the social, cultural, and political practices of BWIR soldiers, this dissertation examines how the crisis of World War I impacted imperial policy and popular claims-making in the British Caribbean. Appeals to imperial patriotism and manly duty during the wartime recruitment campaigns, as well as the fevered postwar commemoration movement, linked the British Empire, civilization, and Christianity while simultaneously promoting new roles for women vis-à-vis the colonial state. In Jamaica and Trinidad, the two Caribbean territories that contributed seventy-five percent of the troops, discussions about the meaning of the war for black, coloured, East Indian, Chinese, and white residents sparked heated debates about the relationship among race, gender, and imperial loyalty. How did men and women in the British Caribbean conceptualize their relationship to the metropole and their rights and responsibilities as British subjects? How are we to understand why thousands of men from the region volunteered to serve with Britain in World War I? Given the tremendous ethnic diversity in the British Caribbean, why was the BWIR almost exclusively staffed by black and coloured recruits, while East Indian and Chinese men

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8 In addition to the 15,601 soldiers from the British Caribbean colonies who served in the BWIR during the First World War, nearly 30,000 men from the French Caribbean colonies of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique also fought in the war with the French Army. Unlike the all-volunteer BWIR, the French Army conscripted men from their colonies in the Caribbean.

9 For a discussion of the early West India Regiments, see Roger Norman Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979)
remained on the homefront? To what extent did the violent uprisings by BWIR soldiers in Italy in 1918 and British Honduras and Trinidad in 1919 shift the locus of loyalty, signaling a redefinition of patriotism from below? Lastly, how did West Indian veterans and civilians seek to be rewarded—politically, socially, and financially—for their wartime sacrifices on behalf of the Empire?

**Historiographical Intervention**

In contrast to the outpouring of scholarship on the impact of World War I on British identity, culture, and imperial policy as it stood in 1914, there has been insufficient interest in elucidating the social, cultural, racial, and gendered impact of the war on Britain’s “ancient colonies” in the Caribbean. This historiographical lacuna is indicative of the broader neglect

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10 Extant scholarship on the impact of World War I in the British Caribbean has paid insufficient attention to the ways in which indentured and formerly indentured migrants from India and China responded to, and participated in, the local war effort.


by historians of the decades between the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 and the labor protests that erupted across the region in the 1930s.

The two earliest scholarly treatments of the BWIR investigate the violent protests by soldiers in Italy in 1918 and in British Honduras (Belize) and Trinidad in 1919.\(^{12}\) In a powerful account of the BWIR riots of 1918 and 1919, W.F. Elkins (1970) highlights the institutional and interpersonal racism BWIR soldiers experienced during the First World War. Citing V.I. Lenin’s famous dictum about the radicalizing effect of imperialist war for colonial peoples, Elkins places BWIR troops at the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle and insists that the Taranto mutiny in 1918 was the “modern advent of mass resistance by West Indians to British rule.”\(^{13}\) Similarly, Cedric Joseph (1971) proposes that military service forged a new collective West Indian identity among BWIR soldiers and catalyzed anti-


\(^{13}\) Elkins, “Black Nationalism in the Caribbean,” 103
colonial and black nationalist movements in the postwar years. While these accounts offer groundbreaking insight into the ways in which soldiers responded to racial discrimination, the dramatic snapshot provided in these two articles cannot adequately address the deeper roots or long-term implications of the 1918 and 1919 riots.

It is encouraging that the two recent monographs on the BWIR by historians Glenford Howe (2002) and Richard Smith (2004) offer richly detailed accounts of the social and political origins of the BWIR, providing much needed context for soldiers’ experiences during their tours of duty in Europe, East Africa, and the Middle East. In doing so, both scholars introduce a wealth of new popular accounts from gleaned from British Caribbean newspapers, which compliment and enhance the reliance on Colonial Office documents and official histories of the war in previously published works. Moreover, while adopting different methodological approaches, Howe and Smith both trace the political, social, and geographic trajectories of BWIR soldiers from the outbreak of war in August 1914 to demobilization in 1919, pushing the chronological scope of BWIR studies beyond the tumultuous period between 1918-1919.

Howe’s wide-ranging history of the BWIR presents the first regional overview of the processes of recruitment and mobilization for World War I and delivers a rich institutional account of BWIR battalions’ varied contributions to the war effort. In his focus on the lived experience of soldiering in diverse geographic contexts, rather than simply on soldiers’ protest strategies, Howe illuminates how the internal structures and routines of military life transformed BWIR servicemen. Howe’s ambitious effort to capture the regional dynamics of

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the BWIR—which places the mobilization for war in the larger territories of Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and British Guiana in dialogue with similar processes in the understudied colonies of the Eastern Caribbean and British Honduras—provides a new model for transcending the insularity that often obscures shared policies and problems in the region.

Nicely supplementing Howe’s institutional focus, Smith’s discursive study analyzes the military service of the BWIR within the framework of the “new imperial history,” narrating developments in Britain and the Caribbean colonies as mutually constituted and inexorably linked. Using the Jamaica contingent of the BWIR as a case study, Smith investigates how “masculine rhetoric and imagery” and the “wartime crisis of white masculinity” in the metropole shaped official policies towards, and popular representations of, West Indian servicemen. ²⁵ Building on insights from cultural and gender studies, he argues that white colonial bureaucrats and British Army officers held similar views of West Indian soldiers from “subject races” as physically strong and resilient, yet emotional, childlike, and dangerously virile. ²⁶ These racial stereotypes, not objective assessments of military necessity, Smith contends, frequently dictated what roles the BWIR could play in major campaigns (particularly in battles against white troops in Europe). Thus, Smith urges scholars to pay greater attention to the ways in which “white and black identities—in the military context, particularly masculine identities—were imagined in relation to each other” and subverted the “pre-war Imperial race and gender order.” ²⁷

²⁵ Smith, Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War, 4
²⁶ Smith, Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War, 4, 100-121
²⁷ Smith, Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War, 7
Even as Howe’s and Smith’s monographs stand out among recent efforts to grapple with the legacy of West Indian military service as we approach the centennial of World War I, both scholars’ unrelenting focus on the BWIR—and the relationship between military service and masculinity—precludes them from uncovering the larger societal dynamics and shared political debates that informed and shaped civilians and enlisted men alike.¹⁸ Moreover, although both scholars conclude that BWIR volunteers were radicalized by their fraught experiences as soldiers, their engagements with the postwar period do not account for the varied trajectories of BWIR veterans after demobilization or offer in-depth insight into the continuing salience of imperial patriotism. By paying greater attention to internal colonial dynamics—including the full complexities of race, color, class, gender, and political position—we can better understand the debates and transformations within the black, coloured, East Indian, and white communities regarding military mobilization and loyalty to the Empire. Most importantly, through this more nuanced approach, we can fully elucidate the remarkable postwar ascendance of BWIR veteran Arthur A. Cipriani, the white Trinidadian populist described by C.L.R. James in 1963 as the “greatest politician in the democratic tradition whom the West Indies has ever known.”¹⁹

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¹⁹ James repeated this assessment of Cipriani in 1967 during a series of public lectures to West Indian students and activists in Montréal, praising the BWIR veteran as the “most remarkable politician of the British West Indies during the twentieth century.” David Austin, ed., *You Don't Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 46; For the in-text quotation, see C. L.
Recent scholarship on the BWIR is replete with references to patriotism, imperial patriotism, and loyalty, as scholars seek to understand how the political and affective bonds of empire were transformed in the crucible of war. Along with the work of the earliest chroniclers of the BWIR, Howe and Smith suggest that the dramatic crisis of war, combined with the stirring rhetoric of imperial patriotism and widespread esteem for Britain and Britishness, led West Indians of all races to rally uniformly to serve the “Mother Country.” The war, Howe contends, fostered an “atmosphere of overwhelming patriotism,” which transcended the fraught ethnic, racial, and class divisions of colonial Caribbean society.\(^{20}\)

Echoing Howe’s conclusion, ex-British Army officers Humphrey Metzgen and John Graham argue that the outbreak of the Great War elicited a “patriotic fervour” throughout the Caribbean colonies that “gladdened the heart of jingoists.”\(^{21}\) In a similar vein, historian Kelvin Singh writes in his seminal study of politics in twentieth-century Trinidad, “The onset of the First World War temporarily diverted working class attention to the call of imperial patriotism.”\(^{22}\)

Studies of colonial rule in the British Caribbean have revolved around the concept of imperial patriotism, invoking the term as shorthand for the range of ties that linked West Indians to the metropole and other British colonials during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As an ideology, imperial patriotism affirms the shared historical, cultural, and

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\(^{20}\) Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 8

\(^{21}\) Metzgen and Graham, *Caribbean Wars Untold*, 87

political bonds between colony and metropole and stresses personal allegiance to the empire. Forged during centuries of British rule, imperial patriotism was produced through collective and ritualized celebrations of British justice, fair play, and fraternity as well as a shared view of the sovereign as a benevolent protector. Since at least the mid-twentieth century, nationalist activists and historians have increasingly insisted that the symbols, rituals, and rhetoric of imperial patriotism provided an ideological justification for Britain’s colonizing and civilizing missions in the region.23 According to preeminent political scientist Gordon K. Lewis, for example, “Colonialism generated in the Caribbean mentality a divisive loyalty to the metropolitan culture that explains the historical tardiness of the final arrival of national independence.” The “continuing dependency of thought and sentiment,” Lewis insisted, “also explains why, ironically, the British West Indies were the first to join the British Empire and the last to leave it.”24

Popular and scholarly commentators in the post-colonial Caribbean have often condemned BWIR soldiers for their assumed fealty to the empire, suggesting that the ideology of imperial patriotism stymied the development of robust national and racial identities. “There has been a tendency by some laymen and historians alike,” Glenford Howe rightly notes, “to suggest that these black soldiers were misguided patriots who lacked any sense of race and class consciousness and who, therefore, do not deserve to be recognised in

23 For example, cultural historians Brian Moore and Michele Johnson have richly documented the effort to foster imperial loyalty through public celebrations, rituals, schooling in colonial Jamaica, see Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920 (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004); Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, They Do As They Please: The Jamaican Struggle for Cultural Freedom After Morant Bay (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2011)

24 Gordon K. Lewis, Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900 (University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 239-240
West Indian society as heroes who fought for a great cause.” Drawing inspiration from the Black Power movements that swept through the region beginning in 1968, scholars writing about the BWIR in the 1970s, for example, brusquely dismiss colonial subjects’ expressions of imperial patriotism as a form of false consciousness and highlight soldiers’ uprisings in 1918 and 1919 rather than their contributions to the imperial war effort. Problematically, accounts of the World War I British Caribbean published in the last two decades still read imperial patriotism as a highly evocative, yet fundamentally dishonest, discourse of belonging, which colonial “mimic men”—to use V.S. Naipaul’s infamous phrase—readily imbibed. Hence Richard Smith suggests that popular enthusiasm for the war effort reveals the degree to which individuals in the region had “internalized certain values of Empire,” while Winston James describes BWIR recruits as “good colonials” who volunteered because they had “been schooled and socialized to believe that they were British.” In their 2007 survey of British Caribbean military history, Humphrey Metzgen and John Graham write that “years of indoctrination” led colonial subjects in the Caribbean to “view themselves as a part of the British Empire” and to support the war effort. Even Howe, who deserves praise for condemning efforts to denigrate BWIR soldiers as “latrine cleaners,” has suggested that indoctrination and alienation caused West Indians to volunteer for military service.

25 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, xv
26 Smith, Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War, 44; Winston James, Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America (New York: Verso, 1998), 53
27 Metzgen and Graham, Caribbean Wars Untold, 88
28 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 1-2; For the controversial reference to BWIR soldiers as “latrine cleaners,” see Barbados Daily Nation, November 12, 1986, p.7, quoted in Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, xv
Writing a more nuanced history of popular claims-making and mobilization in the World War I British Caribbean requires that we rethink traditional conceptions of imperial patriotism. Instead of taking articulations of imperial patriotism as evidence of internalized identities, this dissertation contends that these public displays are perhaps best understood as part of a dynamic political language deployed by elite as well as subaltern groups. Building on the insights of historians of colonial West Africa, particularly the recent work by Gregory Mann, this study argues that the language of imperial patriotism provided a common set of “words, images, ideas, and expressions of sentiment” with which individuals with highly unequal access to power could articulate claims for political rights and social and economic privileges.\(^\text{29}\) Although the language of imperial patriotism initially emanated from metropole, it was constantly reinterpreted and reshaped through exchanges with a wide variety of actors in the colonies, often with unexpected results.

By reading declarations of imperial loyalty as strategic political maneuvers, instead of transparent expressions of personal sentiment, we can begin to question the modernist “assumption of an inherent opposition between national consciousness and imperial loyalty” that marks historical scholarship on the origins of nationalism.\(^\text{30}\) Rather than pitting imperial patriotism against proto-national patriotism, this dissertation will show how West Indians’ nested local, regional, and diasporic identities coexisted with notions of imperial belonging during this period.\(^\text{31}\) Moreover, by critically interrogating the relationship between discursive


articulations of imperial patriotism and varying social, cultural, racial, and gendered formations in the colonies, it will demonstrate how public declarations of loyalty were shaped within the context of patron-client ties and social norms for black, coloured, and white subjects in the Caribbean. It is only in this fashion that we can move beyond misleading accounts which position black West Indians as unquestionably loyal—or irredeemably hostile—to the colonial order.

My approach to analyzing expressions of imperial patriotism as a strategic political language follows the methodological shift pioneered by scholars of subaltern politics, including political anthropologist James Scott and historian Robin D.G. Kelley. In his classic study of domination and resistance, Scott reminds us that “[m]ost of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites.” This insight is particularly relevant for highly undemocratic, colonial societies like World War I-era Jamaica and Trinidad, where the realm of formal electoral politics was both governed by patron-client ties and extremely limited in size and scope. As British Crown colonies, each island was administered by a governor who was officially appointed by

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31 Popular commentators have long recognized the ways in which subjects hold both imperial and proto-national allegiances. In a speech before the House of Commons in April 1886, Prime Minister William Gladstone remarked: “The Irishman is more profoundly Irish, but it does not follow that because his local patriotism is keen, he is incapable of Imperial patriotism.” William Ewart Gladstone, *Speeches on the Irish Question in 1886* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1886), 51

32 Unlike traditional definitions of ideology, the notion of a political language does not assume that the ideas being expressed are internalized or held by those who articulate them. On the four competing definitions of ideology, see Michael J. Cormack, *Ideology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 9-13

the Crown and answered to the Colonial Office in London. In Trinidad, every member of the Legislative Council was nominated, and the popularly-elected Port of Spain Borough Council was abolished from 1898-1917 after its members had the temerity to question local fiscal policies.\textsuperscript{34} In Jamaica, only three percent of the population met the qualifications to vote, and the majority of the members of the island’s Legislative Council were nominated rather than elected. Thus, social and cultural histories of politics during this period must be attentive to the range of strategies that colonial subjects employed to advance their interests with the exceedingly small cadre of decision makers and should consider the ways in which British ideals of patriotism, justice, fairplay, and loyalty provided a shared vocabulary for women and men with a dizzying array of political agendas.

This study also comes at an exciting moment in the development of the historiography on gender and imperial policy in the British Caribbean, as scholars have begun to map the transatlantic circulation of gender ideologies between Britain and the colonies. Recent studies by Catherine Hall and Diana Paton on Jamaica and by Bridget Brereton and Rhoda Reddock on Trinidad have conclusively demonstrated that bourgeois gender ideologies were at the heart of the colonial project to remake former enslaved laborers in the British Caribbean after emancipation.\textsuperscript{35} In the post-emancipation period (1838-1865),

\textsuperscript{34} An elected borough council was reestablished in stages between 1914 and 1917. By 1917, all of the members of the council were elected. O. Nigel Bolland, \textit{The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean: The Social Origins of Authoritarianism and Democracy in the Labour Movement} (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2001), 140; Kelvin Singh, \textit{Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad 1917-1945} (Calgary, Alta., Canada: University of Calgary Press, 1994), 14

non-conformist missionaries from the United Kingdom and Canada, abolitionists and bureaucrats in England, and colonial officials in Jamaica and Trinidad all attempted to transform newly freed women and men into civilized “Christian black subjects.” For black men, this meant becoming “responsible, independent, industrious, domesticated Christian” wage laborers, while black women would “no longer be sexually subjugated to their masters but properly dependent on their husbands” as wives and mothers. Rejecting the domesticating thrust of this European civilizing mission—and yielding to the economic realities of colonial society—most women of color continued to labor outside of the home as independent marketers of foodstuffs, as domestic servants, or as plantation wage laborers and did not legally marry their male partners. Thus, gender relations in the post-emancipation Caribbean, as Janet Momsen insightfully argues, were a “double paradox of patriarchy within a system of matrifocal and matrilocal families and of a domestic ideology coexisting with the economic independence of women.” Just as colonial West Indian society was defined by the simultaneous existence of loyalty and disloyalty, official gender ideologies also often departed from the lived experience of black, coloured, East Indian, and Chinese subjects.

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36 Catherine Hall, “Gender Politics and Imperial Policies,” 54


This exciting body of research on the construction of gender systems in the post-emancipation period has broken new ground, but very few scholars have explicated the shifts in official gender ideologies or the transformations in gender relations from the turn of the twentieth century to the land and welfare initiatives launched for veterans and their kin in the 1920s. The paucity of archivally-based historical studies of this period has led scholars to conclude prematurely that constructions of gender remained “stable” and largely uncontested during the early twentieth century. For example, in her widely-cited 1998 article on gender and modernity in the Caribbean, Eudine Barritteau argues that prior to 1940 “major social groups mounted no organized, widespread challenge to either ideological or material relations of gender.”

Yet, the period from 1900 to 1930 was marked by tremendous upheaval. Historians estimate that as many as 20,000 Jamaicans migrated to Panama to work on the US-led canal project; 43,000 Jamaicans labored in the banana plantations of Limón, Costa Rica, and Bocas del Toro, Panama; 10,000 Trinidadians ventured to the oilfields of Maracaibo, Venezuela; and tens of thousands of workers from throughout the region headed to Cuba to participate in the “dance of the millions” in the sugarcane plantations, while others ventured north to the United States. While some women found work abroad as domestics, prostitutes, plantation

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hands, and dockworkers, the overwhelming majority of migrants were male. As men flocked to jobs abroad, often working outside their home territories for months or years at a time, women became the primary target of renewed gender anxiety in a moment of ever-increasing change. This dissertation offers a much-needed analysis of the profound ways in which the mobilization for World War I and the postwar efforts to reincorporate BWIR soldiers impacted constructions of gender in the British Caribbean while providing new openings for women to articulate claims for political and material concessions from the colonial state.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Based on over twenty months of international fieldwork, this dissertation incorporates primary sources drawn from 12 archives and libraries in Trinidad and Tobago, England, Jamaica, and Barbados as well as visual materials housed in the United States, which have not heretofore been cited. In order to situate the social, cultural, and political dynamics of BWIR soldiers within the rapidly changing context of the wartime British Caribbean, it combines information gleaned from colonial government reports, military documents, police surveillance accounts, consular files, and newspaper articles with previously untapped soldiers' letters, petitions, memoirs, oral histories, and declassified correspondence from archives in the Caribbean. Given that a stark boundary between the civilian and military worlds did not exist, the present study is especially attuned to the trans-local circulation of ideas, policies, people, letters, and goods within the British Empire and beyond during the war years.
For many BWIR soldiers, especially the nearly 2,100 West Indian recruits who volunteered from Panamá, military service was part of a larger cycle of internal and overseas labor migration.\textsuperscript{41} Thus, the history of the BWIR must be understood in the context of growing urbanization and translocal labor migration in the early decades of the twentieth-century. During this period, the declining price of tropical staples, the concentration of desirable lands in the hands of multinational corporations such as the United Fruit Company, and the over-taxation of smallholders pushed many West Indian men and women to seek better fortunes overseas or in the cities. West Indian men often sought work abroad while women typically abandoned agricultural labor and moved to urban areas to work as domestics and higglers.\textsuperscript{42} Between 1881 and 1921, approximately 146,000 Jamaicans migrated to the Spanish-speaking circum-Caribbean and the United States, while others moved to Kingston in order to escape the declining agricultural economy.\textsuperscript{43} Likewise, in Trinidad and Tobago limited opportunities in the agricultural sector led to high levels of migration and urbanization (by the early twentieth century, Port of Spain was home to over one-fourth of the island’s total population).\textsuperscript{44}

Drawing on notions of imperial patriotism, historians have repeatedly explained the willingness of West Indian men to fight in World War I by emphasizing their unfailing devotion to the British Empire. Glenford Howe argues that “centuries of alienation, indoctrination, creolisation, and suppression of the remnants of African cultural

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\textsuperscript{41} Lucas, ed., \textit{The Empire At War}, 349
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\textsuperscript{42} Michaeline A. Crichlow, \textit{Negotiating Caribbean Freedom: Peasants and the State in Development} (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 52
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\textsuperscript{43} Crichlow, \textit{Negotiating Caribbean Freedom}, 53
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\textsuperscript{44} Bridget Brereton, \textit{Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870-1900} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 12
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practices…created staunchly loyal black Britishers in the colonies,” who had been thoroughly “conditioned as faithful patriots” by 1914.45 Similarly, Brian L. Moore suggests that by the early twentieth century, all Jamaicans were united by their devotion to the monarchy and empire and that black and coloured Jamaicans readily enlisted at the onset of World War I because they linked the defense of the monarchy with the protection of their personal liberty.46

In Chapters 1 and 2, this study reveals the complexity of the push and pull factors that encouraged men to enlist in the BWIR and also provides new insights into the ways in which colonial officials engaged women as allies in their mobilization efforts.47 Despite their public celebrations of a nineteenth-century domestic ideal for women, colonial officials quickly realized that women would play a pivotal role in recruitment efforts. When appeals to patriotic duty and imperial pride failed to convince women in Jamaica and Trinidad that their male partners should join the BWIR instead of working in better paying jobs abroad, administrators in both colonies led successful efforts to allow unmarried female partners of BWIR soldiers to qualify for separation allowances for the duration of the war. Reversing eight decades of imperial and local policy against recognizing unmarried couples and illegitimate children, colonial policymakers in Jamaica and Trinidad conceded spousal rights

45 Howe, Race, War, and Nationalism, 1
46 Moore and Johnson, Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920, 310
47 All men who served in the BWIR volunteered to do so. The only attempt at compulsory service was made in Jamaica, where the Legislative Council passed the Conscription Law on March 6, 1917 that required all males between the ages of 16–41 to register for military service. Although over 122,000 men registered as a result of the law, the colonial government never conscripted men for military service.
to female partners of BWIR soldiers and established a precedent for unmarried women to claim spousal and child support from their male partners and the colonial state.

While the men of the BWIR expected to battle the Germans on the Western front, most soldiers served in France, Italy, or the Middle East as manual laborers, not combat soldiers.\(^{48}\) Describing themselves as “King George’s Steam Engine,” soldiers from the BWIR transported artillery, worked as stevedores, laid railroad tracks, and built roads and trenches.\(^{49}\) When a group of BWIR servicemen from British Honduras requested to participate in combat missions alongside British Tommies, they were informed that it was “against British tradition to employ aboriginal troops against a European enemy.”\(^{50}\) Indeed, the only BWIR soldiers who participated in front-line action were men from the First and Second Battalions who battled Turkish troops in Palestine and Jordan. Furthermore, the War Office’s policy that only men of “unmixed European blood” could become commissioned officers meant that white soldiers led the battalions of the BWIR while coloured and black men could not advance beyond the rank of sergeant. Despite their largely non-combatant role in the war, over 1,200 men of the BWIR lost their lives, and more than 2,500 were

\(^{48}\) All extant official military records state that BWIR soldiers stationed on the Western Front did not serve as combat troops. However, in a 2002 interview, George Blackman, a 105-year-old First World War veteran from Barbados, stated that he participated in combat missions along with white troops while in France. Blackman served in the Fourth Battalion of the BWIR. See Simon Rogers, “There were no parades for us,” Special Report: The Military: Soldiers of the Empire, Guardian, November 6, 2002, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/military/story/0,834475,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/military/story/0,834475,00.html)

\(^{49}\) Ramson, “Carry On!” or Pages from the Life if a West Indian Padre in the Field, 47

\(^{50}\) “The Clarion and the Contingent Committee,” Belize Independent, August 13, 1919, in Report of the Commission appointed by the Governor to enquire into the origins of the riot in the Town of Belize which began on the night of 22nd July 1919, Appendix N, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
wounded. Eighty-one soldiers received medals for bravery and courageous service and forty-nine men were mentioned in official dispatches.51

Chapter 3 explores how BWIR soldiers vigorously challenged the discriminatory policies of the War Office by sending numerous petitions to the colonial administration in Britain and the colonies, writing heated letters to editors of West Indian newspapers, and staging dramatic protests at home and abroad. On December 6, 1918, BWIR soldiers stationed in Taranto, Italy, revolted, attacking a white officer and beating a black sergeant. Insisting that they had been “humiliated and badly treated,” the men refused to work for several days and petitioned the Secretary of State for the Colonies to protest discriminatory pay and promotion policies and demeaning fatigue duty assignments.52 The insurgent soldiers also rallied in protest against the racist attitudes of their fellow British servicemen. Despite their faithful service to the war effort, complained an anonymous Trinidadian sergeant, black troops had been treated “neither as Christians nor British Citizens, but as West Indian ‘Niggers’ without anybody to be interested in or look after us.”53 Alarmed by the troops’ growing militancy and fearful of greater unrest, the British War Office quickly disarmed all eight BWIR battalions stationed in Taranto and arrested over fifty men

51 While many BWIR soldiers were recognized for their exemplary service during the war, some were only acknowledged several decades later. In 1999, Eugent Clarke, a BWIR veteran from the parish of Clarendon, Jamaica, received France's Legion d'Honneur for meritorious service in World War I. Clarke was 105 years old when he received the award. “Pieces of the Past: Jamaica and the Great War,” Gleaner, November 12, 2001, [http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/pages/history/story0014.html]


53 Letter to Roland Green, July 27, 1918, CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Roland Green to Secretary of State for the Colonies, October 25, 1918, CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom
suspected of coordinating the revolts. Most of the arrested men were convicted of mutiny and sentenced to three or five years in prison. The two privates accused of spearheading the revolts received more severe punishments: One was sentenced to twenty years in prison while the other was initially sentenced to death before the base commandant commuted his sentence to twenty years in prison.

Despite the quick repression of the Taranto mutiny, hundreds more BWIR veterans participated in major demonstrations in British Honduras and Trinidad and Tobago in the months following their demobilization and return home in 1919. Yet, the widely-publicized protests of BWIR soldiers in months following the Armistice did not produce any lasting nationalist organizations, nor were there any additional violent veterans’ disturbances in the region during the next two decades. In order to understand the origins of this period of civility and political negotiation, Chapter 4 analyzes these dramatic protests as well as the colonial state’s attempt to reincorporate BWIR soldiers and their kin into postwar society through political concessions, patriotic war commemoration efforts, and economic programs. In Jamaica, all BWIR veterans, regardless of their economic status, were granted the right to vote in the first election following their return home, and propertied women were also enfranchised in May 1919 as a result of their contribution to the war effort. There was also groundbreaking electoral reform in postwar Trinidad, as the Legislative Council was

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54 For discussions of the riots of returning BWIR soldiers in 1919, see Howe, Race, War, and Nationalism, 172-199; Tony Martin, “Revolutionary Upheaval in Trinidad: Gleanings from British and American Sources,” Journal of Negro History, Vol. Iviii, No. 3 (July 1973); Report of the Commission appointed by the Governor to enquire into the origins of the riot in the Town of Belize which began on the night of 22nd July 1919, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom.

55 Approximately 3,000 middle and upper class women were enfranchised in May 1919 when propertied women were granted the right to vote in Jamaica. Linnette Vassell, “The Movement for the Vote for Women 1918-1919,” Jamaican Historical Review, Vol. 15, No. 11 (1993): 40-54
reorganized in 1925 to include elected members, and the colony held its first island-wide elections. In addition to this unprecedented expansion of the electorate, colonial officials in both Jamaica and Trinidad launched major public campaigns to construct war memorials to honor the BWIR soldiers during the 1920s. Departing from previous works on the BWIR, this study contends that the experiences of racism and discrimination soldiers faced overseas heightened claims-making on the imperial state, revivifying the language of imperial patriotism and mutual obligation. In the aftermath of the war, returning servicemen established BWIR veterans’ associations in the Caribbean and the United States, and thousands of civilian men and women insisted that Britain owed them material and social rewards for their contributions to the imperial war effort. In response to these demands, colonial officials established veterans’ assistance organizations, devised land settlement schemes for ex-soldiers and their families, promised them preferential access to public works and civil service jobs, and paid for veterans to

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56 Before the 1925 constitutional reforms, the governor nominated all of the members of the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago. The 1925 constitution created a twenty-six member Legislative Council, which consisted of seven elected members, twelve official members, six unofficial members, and the governor. In addition to high property qualifications, prospective voters in Trinidad and Tobago had to demonstrate that they could understand spoken English. Both men and women were enfranchised by the reforms, but with different voting age guidelines. Male voters had to be 21 years old while female voters had to be at least 30 years old. Approximately six percent of the total population was eligible to vote under the 1925 reforms. Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962* (Exeter, N.H.: Heinemann, 1981), 165-166

57 Discharged World War I soldiers in Jamaica established the British West Indies Regiment Association, Jamaica Old Comrades Association, and Ex-British West Indies Regiment Association. Former soldiers in Trinidad created The Returned Soldiers and Sailors Council and Organization. Veterans who settled the United States founded the British West Indian World War Veterans’ Association in Harlem.
migrate to the sugar plantations of eastern Cuba in an effort to reduce un- and under-employment. ⁵⁸

In the concluding chapter, I carefully trace how BWIR veterans and civilian reformers strategically invoked their wartime contributions to the empire in order to demand continued benefits in the postwar period. Examining varied forms of public claims-making by ex-soldiers and civilians between 1919 and 1920, I assess the degree to which the war shifted the balance between local and imperial conceptions of belonging, as shown through new strategies for popular mobilization and civic engagement.

**Shifting Loyalties and the Contemporary Post-Colonial Caribbean**

Debates about popular loyalty and national identity continue to haunt Jamaica and Trinidad, although both islands became independent nation-states in 1962. Since the early 1990s, the creole multiracial nationalism that ascended in the wake of the labor rebellions of the 1930s has faced sustained criticism from the urban lower class, local scholars, and political activists dissatisfied with the meager social and economic gains achieved after four decades of independence. In the face of high crime rates, widespread underemployment, extensive out-migration, and growing disillusionment with the established political parties, there is widespread agreement that the nationalist project in the two largest Anglophone

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⁵⁸ In 1919, the governor of Trinidad and Tobago established the Discharged Soldiers’ Central Authority to assist BWIR veterans find jobs, purchase land, or apply for disability assistance. That same year, the Jamaican government created the Central Supplemental Allowance Committee to help BWIR veterans in their transition back to civilian life.
Caribbean territories is “stalled,” or even more ominously, in a state of “terminal meltdown.”

The current social, economic, and political crisis in Jamaica and Trinidad has not only undermined the established political regimes but has also called into question the very symbols and rituals of national belonging. During the past decade, the prime ministers of both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have formed high-profile committees to reexamine their national symbols and observances. These committees—comprised of the region’s most prominent intellectuals, religious leaders, politicians, and business elites—were explicitly promoted as an effort to increase “cultural unity” and “strengthen national harmony” in the face of growing factionalism. In a speech before Parliament in June 2006, Trinidadian Prime Minister Patrick Manning acknowledged that the debate over national symbols revealed the difficult task of “managing diversity” in a multiethnic, postcolonial nation, while Jamaican Prime Minister P.J. Patterson conceded that Jamaicans were forced to reevaluate their national symbols in light of “cultural chaos, the absence of national identity,

59 Brian Meeks, Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Baker (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1996), 134; Brian Meeks, Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press)

60 In her ethnographic study of nationalism, race, and popular culture in contemporary Jamaica, anthropologist Deborah Thomas found that lower-class Jamaicans no longer identified with the symbols and values of creole nationalism, but instead, defined themselves in relation to a modern form of blackness rooted in urban Caribbean life and African-American youth culture. Deborah A. Thomas, Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004)

61 The Jamaican Committee on National Symbols and National Observances was appointed in February 1996 and the Trinidad and Tobago Committee on National Symbols and National Observances was formed in June 2006.

62 “Small country, big passions: PM pitches a civilised way forward for plural Trinidad and Tobago,” Trinidad and Tobago Express, June 4, 2006; Report on National Symbols and Observances (Kingston: Jamaica Information Service, 1996), 2
and the weakening of our values and attitudes.” Thus, I hope that this dissertation will contribute to the literature on the origins of patriotism in the British Caribbean, while providing a historical case study for contemporary debates about “hegemonic dissolution” and popular mobilization in the region.

63 The entire text of Prime Minister Manning’s address was reprinted in “Small country, big passions: PM pitches a civilised way forward for plural Trinidad and Tobago,” Trinidad and Tobago Express, June 4, 2006; Report on National Symbols and Observances (Kingston: Jamaica Information Service, 1996), 2

Figure 1: Historical Map of the Caribbean Basin (with the British Caribbean colonies in bold type). S. R. Ashton and David Killingray, eds., *British Documents on the End of Empire: The West Indies*, Series B, Volume 6 (London: Stationary Office, 1999), vi
Chapter One

The West Indian Fight to Serve:
“War Fever” and the Imperial Patriotic Cacaphony

On September 15, 1914, five weeks after the outbreak of the Great War in Europe, members of the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League (UNIA) assembled at Collegiate Hall in downtown Kingston, Jamaica. Marcus Garvey, the fledging association’s President and Traveling Commissioner, opened the weekly gathering with a speech on the brotherhood of man, and then trounced two fellow UNIA officers in a spirited debate on the influence of religion and politics in the modern world. After winning the debate with a “two to one majority,” the man destined to become the New World’s best-known black nationalist abruptly departed from the organization’s standard program of lectures, elocution contests, and musical performances to introduce two special resolutions.\(^2\)

One resolution was addressed to French President Raymond Poincaré and expressed support for the French people while celebrating France’s “peaceful and civilizing influence on the world.”\(^3\) The other, most likely penned by Garvey, affirmed the UNIA’s unstinting “loyalty and devotion to His Majesty the King and to the Empire” and celebrated the “great protecting and civilizing nature of the English nation and people…and their justice to all

\(^{1}\) “The Censorship,” Daily Gleaner, August 4, 1914, 6
\(^{2}\) For a description of the meeting, see “A New Society,” Daily Gleaner, September 17, 1914, 14
men, especially to their Negro Subjects scattered all over the world.” Conveying words of support for British soldiers fighting across Europe and Africa, the robustly patriotic declaration “rejoice[d] in British victories and the suppression of foes,” while the closing line proclaimed: “God Save the King! Long live the King and Empire.”

In Garvey’s letter of transmittal to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the little known activist asked Lewis Harcourt to “convey the feeling of [the] resolution” to no less than His Majesty King George V. “Our love for and devotion to, His Majesty and the Empire, stands unrivalled and from the depths of our hearts we pray for the crowning victory of the British soldiers now at war.”

The resolution proved a spectacular coup for an organization that was less than two months old. In the following weeks, the UNIA’s resolution was reprinted in the island’s two major newspapers—the Daily Gleaner and the Daily Chronicle—as well as in the venerable London Times. It was also seized upon with alacrity by senior statesmen, colonial officials, and prominent reformers in both Jamaica and Britain who dispatched personal notes of appreciation to Garvey while lavishly praising the UNIA’s patriotism. Travers Buxton, Secretary of the London-based Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society applauded the UNIA for taking a public stance on the war, while Jamaica’s governor William Manning thanked Garvey for his “offers of readiness to serve in any way.”

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4 For the text of the resolution to Lewis Harcourt, see Marcus Garvey, Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League to Rt. Hon. Lewis Harcourt, September 16, 1914, CO 137/705, file 41210, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew Gardens, England. A summary of the resolution was announced in the press a day before the meeting, see “A New Society,” Daily Gleaner, September 14, 1914, 4

5 Marcus Garvey, Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League to Rt. Hon. Lewis Harcourt, September 16, 1914, CO 137/705, file 41210, National Archives of the United Kingdom

6 Travers Buxton to Marcus Garvey, October 21, 1914, reprinted in Hill, ed., The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume I, p.81; William Manning to Marcus Garvey,
Arthur Balfour, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, warmly acknowledged the resolution, noting that he read the document with the “greatest gratification.” The success of Garvey’s declaration of loyalty was even felt at the Colonial Office in London, where a clerk in the West India Branch, in a handwritten endorsement on the official coversheet, wrote, “I blush to think that I once suggested to Mr. Marcus Garvey that he should go to the workhouse.”

One month later in the southern Caribbean island of Trinidad, another future West Indian of prominence, Arthur A. Cipriani, drafted his own declaration of loyalty from his home in Port of Spain. In contrast to the UNIA’s resolution, Cipriani’s written appeals to the metropole in October 1914 have escaped scholarly attention. On October 12, 1914, Cipriani spotted a notice in the London Times stating that Arthur du Cros, a Member of Parliament and honorary colonel in the Royal Warwickshire Fusiliers, was recruiting West Indian migrants in London for a new infantry battalion. Inspired by du Cros' overture to West Indians in the metropole, Cipriani immediately contacted George Le Hunte, the Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, and Lieutenant Colonel G. D. Swain, the Commandant of Local Forces, with a proposal to raise a contingent in Trinidad to fight alongside their fellow islanders in London. When Governor Le Hunte and Lieutenant Colonel Swain both curtly rejected his idea, Cipriani cabled du Cros directly and asked if he would accept men residing

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8 Handwritten File Note [signature illegible], October 28, 1914, CO 137/705, file 41210, National Archives of the United Kingdom

9 Captain A. A. Cipriani, Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War (Port of Spain: Trinidad Publishing Co., 1940), 7
in Trinidad for his nascent contingent. By the time his telegram reached du Cros, however, the London-based battalion was completely full. Undeterred, Cipriani appealed to du Cros once more, this time entreating him to use his influence to lobby on behalf of West Indians "bottled up" in the colonies who wanted to enlist. Men throughout the region, Cipriani explained, not only wanted to fight because of their loyalty to the Empire, but also because of their pride as men. "West Indians have realized that it is a fight to a finish, that not only is the existence of the Mother Country at stake, but the very Empire that we are proud to be a part. We should not only feel isolated, but slighted, if our services are declined when men are still wanted to keep the flag flying," he declared.10

Marcus Garvey and Arthur Cipriani inhabited radically different social spheres in colonial Caribbean society. Garvey, a peripatetic black Jamaican printer and journalist with rural artisan roots, eked out a living hawking “monumental tombstones” and greeting cards, while Cipriani was the scion of Trinidad’s two most prominent French Creole families and served as the secretary of the island’s exclusive Breeders’ and Trainers’ Association.11 Yet both Garvey and Cipriani, along with scores of other men and women in the British Caribbean colonies during the war years, employed the gendered language of imperial patriotism to assert publicly their full membership in the British Empire and to lay claim to a host of rights and privileges as British subjects. For Garvey, the members of the UNIA, and other black and coloured reformers, the outbreak of war in Europe provided a dramatic opportunity to prepare the ground for future demands for representative government,

10 Cipriani, Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War, 7-8

11 Tony Martin, Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (Dover, MA: Majority Press, 1976), 6; Gérard Besson, “A Tale of Two Families: The De Boissiers & the Ciprianis of Trinidad,” paper presented to the 22nd Annual Conference of Caribbean Historians, St. Augustine, Trinidad, April 1990
enhanced economic opportunity, and professional mobility that would be, they hoped, unhindered by the “color question.” For white Creoles like Cipriani, as well as English expatriates who lived in the West Indies, the war offered a myriad of opportunities to display conspicuously their elite social position, wealth, and ties to the “Mother Country.” Equally important, these men demanded the right to demonstrate their loyalty to Britain and their continued importance in her sprawling empire by bearing arms in the Great War.

Cipriani's unlikely transformation from a jovial thoroughbred trainer and horse-raising enthusiast to Trinidad's premier military booster offers a window into the politics of martial masculinity in the British Caribbean during the early months of the Great War. As volunteers from the metropole and the self-governing Dominions rushed to join Kitchener's New Army in the autumn of 1914, Cipriani and like-minded military-aged men in the West Indies argued vigorously that their honor as men and their status as British subjects hinged on military service.

Across the region, prominent white planters, businessmen, and professionals, along with a small number of coloured elites, clamored for a West Indian contingent and launched private subscription funds to pay transportation and training costs. Like Cipriani, most of these men neither held an official government position nor had any previous military ties. In Jamaica, for example, English expatriate William Wilson spearheaded the campaign for a local contingent by sending a series of letters to the editor of the Daily Gleaner, the island’s most widely-read newspaper. Although Wilson was too old

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13 Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, and New Zealand were dominions of the British Empire during this period.
to enlist, he volunteered to donate £30 to send two Jamaican men to the front. He challenged ninety-nine other men and women of means in the colony to contribute £30 as well, so that a respectable draft of 200 recruits could journey to England together to represent the island.¹⁴ Donations to support Wilson's idea poured into the offices of the *Gleaner*, with over £1216 amassed in the first month alone.¹⁵

As Kristin Hoganson convincingly demonstrates in her study of the cultural roots of the Spanish-Cuban-American and Philippine-American wars, celebrations of martial masculinity often functioned simultaneously as a “motivating ideology and a political posture in debates over war and empire.”¹⁶ In the United States, jingois employed gendered arguments for war to unite observers who supported US intervention in Cuba and the Philippines on economic, humanitarian, or political grounds. Wartime military service, jingois promised, would bolster American manhood while serving the nation’s strategic interests as well. Whereas pro-interventionist groups in the United States lobbied for more aggressive foreign policy in order to inaugurate an overseas empire, bellicose commentators in the British Caribbean hoped that military service would solidify—and perhaps even advance—their standing in the British Empire. Envisioning military service as a vehicle for masculine self-assertion and regional advancement, military boosters like Cipriani and Wilson argued that West Indians’ martial labor would benefit the colonies as well as the metropole.

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¹⁴ “Jamaicans for the Front,” *Daily Gleaner*, April 23, 1915, 9


Building on these insights, this chapter examines how the effort to raise a West Indian military contingent grew from a scattered, private campaign to sponsor a few hundred men to a publicly funded, regional movement that boasted over 15,600 volunteer soldiers by 1918. Although men from the British Caribbean had fought under the Union Jack since 1795 when enslaved men were impressed to defend British possessions during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, the enlistment of thousands of civilians during the Great War was one of the largest military mobilizations in the history of the English-speaking West Indies.\textsuperscript{17} The earliest and most vocal proponents of the movement that would produce the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) were well-connected, middle-aged white men like Cipriani and Wilson, but black and coloured men like Garvey also sought to make their voices heard.

As Garvey and Cipriani’s overtures demonstrate, the campaign to create a West Indian fighting force extended across the Atlantic to London, where officials at the Colonial and War Offices mulled over the possibility of mobilizing volunteers from the Caribbean, whether black, coloured, East Indian, or white. Whereas the cadre of elites who marshaled the campaign for a regional fighting force imagined military service as a masculine right that West Indians had earned through centuries of loyalty to Britain, officials in London drew upon racialized hierarchies of martial fitness to disparage West Indians’ soldiering abilities and to rebuff their initial offers of service. Hence, as authorities in the Colonial and War Offices publicly celebrated West Indians’ “patriotic spirit,” they also sought to maintain the established fiction of a colorblind Empire while conspiring privately to keep black, coloured,

\textsuperscript{17} For a discussion of the early West India Regiments, see Roger Norman Buckley, \textit{Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979)
and East Indian volunteers from the battlefields of Europe. And, on occasion, they even doubted the whiteness of European men in the colonies.  

In tracing the origins of West Indian participation in the Great War, I am revisiting well-trodden ground, as the most recent scholarship routinely cites West Indians’ overtures to Britain during this period as proof that even the region’s nonwhite majority readily embraced British rule and fully ascribed to the cult of monarchy and empire that buttressed it.  

Historian Glenford Howe, for example, argues that “the majority of the inhabitants of the British West Indies had been conditioned as faithful patriots” by August 1914. “Centuries of alienation, indoctrination, creolisation and suppression of the remnants of African cultural practices had by the outbreak of the war, created staunchly loyal black Britishers in the colonies.”

In a similar vein, Humphrey Metzgen and John Graham contend that the outbreak of the Great War elicited a “patriotic fervour” throughout the region that “gladdened the heart of jingoists.” Such sweeping assessments imply that expressions of imperial patriotism precluded the development of autonomous Creole politics and priorities. In contrast, I argue that the mobilization for war fuelled widespread debates about colonial status, racial equality, and proper manhood, leading British officials on both sides of the

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18 B. B. Cubitt (War Office) to the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies (Colonial Office), September 2, 1914, CO 318/333, file 33355, National Archives of the United Kingdom


20 Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 1

21 Humphrey Metzgen and John Graham, *Caribbean Wars Untold: A Salute to the British West Indies* (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2007), 87
Atlantic to question West Indians’ loyalty. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrates that although the tone and tenor of patriotic resolutions often sounded quite similar during the war years, the ubiquitous discourse of imperial patriotism could be used to articulate markedly different ideas, to voice quite distinct interests, and to suggest sharply different implications for the future of the British West Indies. Rather than overemphasizing shared rhetorical elements, we need to focus on the creative ways in which the discourse of imperial patriotism was mobilized—and would shift over the course of war—while generating a dynamic leading to profound, if often unanticipated, social and political changes after the war, including self-government and representative democracy.

“A raw West Indian negro troop”: Debating Race and Martial Fitness at the Colonial Office

Jamaicans awoke on the morning of August 5, 1914, to the news that Britain had officially declared war on Germany. Before dawn, at 2:15 a.m., Governor William Manning received an urgent telegram from the metropole “announcing the outbreak of hostilities with the German Empire.” Within hours, news of the war spread across the colony through telegrams, public notices, and informal networks of rumor and gossip. Describing the frenzied exchange of information on the island during the first day of the war, Herbert DeLisser mused: “The telegraph wires hummed with the momentous tiding; sleepy telegraph clerks were startled into alert wakefulness as the significant message was spelled out by the

22 Handwritten note by R.A. Wiseman, September 1, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom

23 For a chronological account of Governor Manning’s response to the outbreak of war, see William Manning to Lewis Harcourt, October 20, 1914, CO 137/705, file 43763, National Archives of the United Kingdom.
tapping electrical instruments; on every public building, in the early hours of that sultry summer morning, the statement was displayed."²⁴ The prominent newspaper editor further recounted that “[o]n the news being known, the streets of the city and the towns became filled with excited people who spoke and argued as if the next four-and-twenty hours would decide the fate of nations.”²⁵ After weeks of nervous anticipation, the empire was finally at war.

For many women and men from the laboring classes, the outbreak of war signaled a period of deepening hardship on the homefront. Isedora Buckley of Whitfield Town, Jamaica, recalls walking home from primary school one afternoon when she overheard adults talking about the outbreak of war. Unsure of “what they ment [meant] when they spoke about war,” the young Jamaican rushed home to query her parents. Their frank response was far from reassuring: “They told me that whenever war starts we are not going to get anything to eat and nothing to wear when those we had torn off,” she remembered years later. Shocked by her parents’ dire predictions and overcome with tears, Buckley asked her mother if their family would “die for hunger and walk around naked” because of the war. Although her mother ultimately insisted that the “Lord will provide,” her prediction that World War I would usher in a period of widespread deprivation and hardship underscored the profound fears of laboring peoples.²⁶

Among the region’s elite however, Britain's entry into World War I triggered a flood of patriotic fundraising activity on behalf of the “Mother Country.” In addition to

²⁴ Herbert G. DeLisser, *Jamaica and the Great War* (Kingston: Gleaner Co., 1917), 9
²⁵ DeLisser, *Jamaica and the Great War*, 10
²⁶ 7/12/154, "Jamaica Memories" Collection, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town
establishing official war relief funds and making donations of tens of thousands of British pounds, local legislatures throughout Britain’s “ancient and loyal” colonies in the Caribbean also offered gifts of tropical staples, cigarettes, and hand-sewn woolen wraps and uniforms to assist in the war effort. 27 In addition, from almost the very beginning of the war, men in the colonies lobbied local officials and authorities in Britain for the right to join "the splendid brotherhood [fighting] in the service of the Empire," sparking a trans-Atlantic debate about the role that black, coloured, East Indian, and white colonials would play in the war effort. 28

The discussion regarding West Indian wartime military service began in London on August 28, 1914, when officials at the Colonial Office dispatched an initial query to the War Office regarding Caribbean volunteers. 29 Before the War Office could reply, T.A.V. Best, Colonial Secretary of the Leeward Islands, telegraphed the Colonial Office on August 31 inquiring whether “coloured men” would be accepted as volunteers for military service. 30

27 “Barbados-The gift of 2,240,000 lbs. of sugar,” West Indian Committee Circular, September 22, 1914, 431; Officer Administering the Government of the Leeward Islands to Secretary of State for the Colonies, September 4, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33764, National Archives of the United Kingdom; T.A.V. Best to Secretary of State for the Colonies, September 18, 1914, CO 152/342, file 39480, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Governor of Jamaica to Secretary of State for the Colonies, September 19, 1914, CO 137/704, file 35916, National Archives of the United Kingdom. For the total financial contribution of the British Caribbean colonies to the war effort, see Table B.1 in Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 203-204


29 I have not been able to locate the letter. However, Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, mentions this initial correspondence in a letter to the War Office in April 1915. Lewis Harcourt to Kitchener, April 22, 1915, CO 318/333, file 50043, National Archives of the United Kingdom

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Best’s one-line missive prompted a lengthy exchange among the Colonial Office clerks, foreshadowing the debate regarding military service and imperial patriotism that would eventually beset government officials and private citizens on both sides of the Atlantic. According to the 1914 Manual of Military Law, “negroes and inhabitants of Protectorates” could serve in British regiments, but would be classified as “aliens” rather than British subjects. As “alien” servicemen, black and coloured volunteers who enlisted in British regiments could not hold a rank higher than a non-commissioned officer and were subject to restrictive enlistment quotas. Specifically, the Manual of Military Law mandated that the “number of aliens serving together at any one time in any corps in the regular forces” could “not exceed the proportion of one alien to every fifty British subjects.” However, despite these discriminatory provisions, the Manual of Military Law guaranteed that “any inhabitant of a British protectorate and any negro or person of colour” would be “entitled to all the privileges of a natural-born British subject” while on active duty.31

A careful reading of the Manual of Military Law reveals that black and coloured volunteers from the West Indians qualified for service in the British Army, even if under profoundly disadvantaged terms as “aliens”. For the staff at the Colonial Office, however, the key issue was West Indians’ martial fitness, not the official policy as outlined in the Manual of Military Law. In a handwritten minute, clerk R.A. Wiseman conceded that “some coloured W. Indians are men whom it would be a pity to discourage altogether,” yet he doubted that most “negroes” possessed sufficient soldiering abilities. When compared to

30 Officer Administering the Government of the Leeward Islands to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, August 31, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom

other non-white colonial soldiers, particularly those from the Indian subcontinent, Wiseman insisted that black West Indians simply did not measure up. “It is all very well to have Indian troops fighting in Europe, but to have negroes seems to me to be quite a different matter. Moreover the Indian troops are part of a trained and efficient military machine whereas the West Indian troops would not be,” he argued. Wiseman also claimed that local military corps in the Caribbean were woefully inefficient, and therefore could never be “sent like the Indian army from the W. Indies to the theatre of operations.”32 In a slightly less disparaging assessment, clerk Greg Grindle suggested that black and coloured West Indian soldiers might be utilized, but only to “set free better troops” for the frontlines.33

It is instructive that Wiseman justified the exclusion of black volunteers by referencing the fighting prowess of Indian soldiers. The same week that the Colonial Office took up the issue of black volunteers from the West Indies, the War Cabinet voted to deploy the Lahore and Meerut infantry divisions of the Indian Army in France, marking the first time that Britain mobilized non-white servicemen to fight in Europe.34 Like his superiors in the War Cabinet, Wiseman’s predictions about the combat performance of black and Indian soldiers drew upon theories about the inherent martial capacities of different races as much as systematic military evaluations. In the decades before the Great War, British military elites increasingly embraced the idea that certain groups possessed a natural predisposition for the

32 Handwritten note by R. A. Wiseman, September 1, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom
33 Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom
art of war. Drawing on late nineteenth century theories of race and human behavior, proponents of martial race theories posited that men from specific racial and ethnic groups were biologically and culturally inclined to be fierce and highly-disciplined warriors. Martial race theorists argued that cold and temperate regions with rugged terrain produced elite warriors, while tropical weather and urban living stifled physical development and masculine vigor. Martial race theories had a tremendous impact in India, where General Frederick Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army and one of the most popular military heroes in late Victorian Britain, reorganized the army to enlist more men from the martial races in the Punjab, North-West Frontier, and Nepal. By 1914, seventy-five percent of soldiers in the Indian Army were from a handful of martial racial groups, and military leaders in India and Britain were championing the idea that the Indian Army was capable of fighting, and defeating, a European enemy.

Whereas military officials and popular commentators in Britain valorized Indian soldiers as “high souled men of first-rate training,” they largely ignored the longstanding military contributions of West Indian soldiers. Indeed, during their extensive exchange regarding a potential West Indian contingent, the Colonial Office staff failed to acknowledge that black soldiers from the West India Regiment (WIR) had fought and died on Britain’s behest for nearly 120 years. Formed in 1795 to buttress Britain’s precarious military

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37 Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, 100
38 “British Reinforcements,” *Jamaica Times*, September 5, 1914, 6
campaigns in the Caribbean during the French Revolution, the WIR was originally staffed by thousands of enslaved Africans who served as soldiers and pioneers. Unlike previous slave militias, the regiment was a standing unit commanded by officers from the British Army, and was an official part of Britain’s armed forces. WIR soldiers fought in several major campaigns during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars and helped suppress local uprisings in Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823), and Jamaica (1865). Outside of the Caribbean, the WIR fought in West Africa in Gambia as well as in the Ashanti Wars from 1873-74.

Even though the WIR had an established record of military service, the Caribbean regiment never garnered the heroic reputation or popular esteem that other imperial regiments enjoyed in Britain. “The West India regiment is never seen in England,” WIR officer A.B. Ellis lamented. “[T]he British public knows nothing of such regiments, has no friends, relatives, or acquaintances in their ranks, and consequently takes no interest in them.” Moreover, Ellis argued Britons imagined black men as jovial, carefree dandies, not disciplined soldiers: “[T]he popular idea in Great Britain of the negro is that he is a person who commonly wears a dilapidated tall hat, cotton garments of brilliant hue, carries a banjo or concertina, and indulges in extraordinary cachinnations at the smallest pretext….”

The question of West Indians’ martial fitness, or lack thereof, was not the only problem for Colonial Office authorities, however. Domestic political and military

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41 Ellis, *The History of the First West India Regiment*, 24

42 Ellis, *The History of the First West India Regiment*, 19
considerations, particularly the problem of anti-black sentiment in the metropole, loomed large as well. Colonial Office functionaries anxiously pondered how a black contingent from the colonies would be greeted in Britain. Wiseman hinted that Britons in the metropole might not welcome black soldiers from the empire. “Is it likely that public opinion here would welcome a raw West Indian negro troop being sent over…to be trained alongside of the regiments in Lord Kitchener’s new army?” he cautioned.\textsuperscript{43} Although black West Indian soldiers had fought in the Caribbean and West Africa, serving on European soil shoulder to shoulder with white British servicemen was quite a different matter.

If imperial officials were unwilling to raise “raw negro troop[s]” from the West Indies, they were also unsure about the utility of forming an all-white Caribbean contingent.\textsuperscript{44} Clerk C.A. Darnley proposed that military officials in the West Indies form an elite “contingent of planters.”\textsuperscript{45} Unlike black civilians, Darnley argued, white West Indian planters had experience riding and shooting, and some had even served in the South African War.\textsuperscript{46} Darley’s proposal failed to garner any support in the Colonial Office, as his colleagues insisted that the complex color-class hierarchy in the West Indies would make it challenging—both practically and politically—to create an all-white regional contingent. Wiseman warned that it would be “difficult if not impossible to discriminate between the

\textsuperscript{43} Handwritten note by R. A. Wiseman, September 1, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{44} Handwritten note by R. A. Wiseman, September 1, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{45} Handwritten note by C. A. Darnley, September 1, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{46} Handwritten note by C. A. Darnley, September 1, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom
pure white and the near white” volunteers, while Grindle insisted that any regional unit “would of course include black and coloured men.”

If the Colonial Office rejected the idea of Caribbean military unit on racial grounds, imperial officials did not want to alienate black and coloured West Indians by publicly acknowledging a colour bar in the British Army. “On the whole,” wrote Wiseman, “I think it should be our policy if possible to prevent any public discussion of the colour question in the West Indies, and I think that the only effective way to do this is to nip in the bud any attempt to raise local corps for service in Europe.” Grindle concurred, adding that military authorities in the colonies should not discourage black and coloured men from volunteering for service, but rather should steer them towards local defense forces instead of the British Army. To ensure that the War Office rejected the proposal for a West Indian contingent without provoking racial unrest, Wiseman directed his colleagues to inform the War Office that the Secretary of State for the Colonies would “depreciate the raising of the coloured question in the West Indies and would therefore propose to reply that local volunteers corps for service in Europe cannot be accepted.” Thus, Colonial Office officials not only devised their own strategy to derail attempts to form a West Indian contingent, but also lobbied their colleagues in the War Office to adopt the same approach.

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47 Handwritten note by R. A. Wiseman, September 1, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom

48 Handwritten note by R. A. Wiseman, September 1, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom

49 Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom

50 Handwritten note by R. A. Wiseman, September 1, 1914, CO 152/342, file 33037, National Archives of the United Kingdom
On September 2, 1914, B.B. Cubitt, Assistant Under Secretary of State for the War Office, replied to the Colonial Office on behalf of the Army Council, the War Office’s policy-making body. In the carefully-worded letter, Cubitt diplomatically avoided any discussion of race, and instead, claimed that West Indian volunteers should focus on local defense efforts. Acknowledging West Indians’ desire to serve, Cubitt stressed that the members of the Army Council applauded the “patriotic spirit which prompts the offer of a West Indian Contingent” but could not support the proposal to create a new unit for service in Europe. Instead, the Army Council suggested that “residents in the West Indies will be most usefully employed at present in denying supplies...to the enemy’s commerce destroyers, and to maintain order, if necessary.”

Pleased with the War Office’s tactful rejection, the Colonial Office quickly dispatched a copy of the letter to the governors of all of Britain’s Caribbean colonies on September 8.

“Let them give us a chance”: The Local Campaign for a West Indian Contingent

It took nearly a month for the Colonial Office’s September 8th missive to reach the West Indies. As the confidential letter traveled westward across the Atlantic, Arthur

51 B. B. Cubitt to the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, September 2, 1914, CO 318/333, file 33355, National Archives of the United Kingdom

52 Lewis Harcourt to Governor William Manning, September 8, 1914, 1B/5/29/21, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town

53 Dr. A. A. Mvers to the Editors of the West India Committee Circular, November 7, 1914, reprinted “Letters to the Editor-The Proposed West Indies Contingent,” West India Committee Circular, December 15, 1914, 598.

54 Governor William Manning reviewed a copy of the Colonial Office’s letter on October 9, 1914. The first two members of his staff reviewed the letter on October 6, 1914. For date received notations on the cover
Cipriani and other military boosters in the colonies—completely unaware that officials in the metropole had already decided to exclude black and coloured West Indian volunteers—launched an aggressive campaign for a West Indian fighting force. During a seven-week time span from late August to mid October 1914, at least nine different plans for a military contingent emerged in Jamaica alone, while men from Trinidad to the tiny Leeward Island presidency of Dominica likewise campaigned to serve alongside their fellow colonials in the British Army. 55 While historians have suggested that black West Indians eagerly “demanded the right to serve in a spirit of proud imperial patriotism,” the earliest and most vocal proponents of the movement that would produce the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) were actually prominent whites. 56 In the metropole and in the Caribbean, white planters, businessmen, and professionals, occasionally joined by a small number of coloured elites, spearheaded the drive for a British Caribbean military contingent. To make their case, these military boosters summoned familiar notions of loyalty and justice while also suggesting that the ties between Britain and her Caribbean colonies were anchored in reciprocity and mutual obligation.

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56 Lara Putnam, “‘Nothing Matters but Color:’ Transnational Circuits, the Interwar Caribbean, and the Black International,” in From Toussaint to Tupac: the Black International Since the Age of Revolution, ed. Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 114
If imperial patriotism provided a common lexicon for military enthusiasts, then ideas about race exposed the fault lines in the pro-military camp. In Jamaica in particular, the proposals for a military contingent laid bare racialized conceptions of martial fitness, as military enthusiasts not only lobbied for a publicly-funded force, but also debated which men should fill its ranks. Military boosters and potential volunteers waged a spirited campaign for a Jamaican contingent through the island’s major newspapers, particularly the Kingston-based *Daily Gleaner* and *Jamaica Times*. The opening salvo was launched in late August 1914, when an anonymous writer sent a brief missive to the *Gleaner*, the island’s venerable establishment paper. The correspondent encouraged Governor William Manning to issue a public call for volunteers and predicted that the island would quickly raise a draft of "sturdy young fellows" for combat in Europe.\(^{57}\) Five days later, “Backwoodsman,” a correspondent from Cambridge in the northwestern parish of Trelawny, offered his call for a contingent manned by Jamaica’s rural majority. He urged the governor to form a regiment of 2,000 rural recruits instead of expending hundreds of pounds on local defense efforts. Noting that there were many young men in his village who were “physically fit and accustomed to hardships,” he suggested that 1,500 volunteers be deployed in Europe immediately, while the remaining 500 volunteers function as a reserve regiment.\(^{58}\)

\(^{57}\) “Backwoodsman” proposed that the Jamaican government cover for the contingent’s basic expenses, which he estimated at £350 per year, while private donations from patriotic residents could support the widows and orphans of fallen soldiers. Once Jamaica recruited its contingent, he confidently predicted that Trinidad, Barbados, British Guiana, and the smaller islands would promptly raise their own regiments as well. To demonstrate his commitment to the war effort, “Backwoodsman” pledged to contribute £1 1s. “every month as long as the war lasts” to a family of a disabled or slain soldier. To make good on his offer, he enclosed £2 2s. for the months of August and September along with his letter. “Another Suggestion,” *Daily Gleaner*, August 31, 1914, 4

\(^{58}\) “Contingent for Europe,” *Daily Gleaner*, September 5, 1914, 14
Military enthusiasts also put forward plans to deploy soldiers and recently discharged veterans from the West India Regiment (WIR) as combat troops in Europe. At its height in the nineteenth century, the WIR consisted of “twelve battalions of negro troops, raised exclusively for service in the West Indies.” By 1914, however, the once formidable regiment had been reduced to two understaffed battalions of black soldiers led by an all-white officer corps. Yet several schemes to mobilize the regiment for combat duty once again were inspired by heroic tales of the WIR’s distinguished past—including the fact that WIR soldiers Samuel Hodge (Tortola) and William James Gordon (Jamaica) were the first non-Europeans to win the Victoria Cross, Britain’s highest military honor.

On the same day that the *Gleaner* published the letter from “Backwoodsman,” the paper also included a note from Charles C. Moulton, a “Jamaican and loyal British subject” in Ancón, Panama, on the Pacific side of the Canal Zone. Moulton was one of tens of thousands of West Indians who journeyed to the Isthmus from 1904 to 1914 to labor as “silver roll” employees on the massive US-led canal project—or to work informally as artisans, cooks, launderers, grave-diggers, janitors, prostitutes, and street vendors in the bustling Canal Zone. The vibrant, highly transient community of Caribbean migrants in Panama included some 20,000 Barbadian contract workers, several thousand women and

59 Ellis, *The History of the First West India Regiment*, 3

60 Joseph, "The British West Indies Regiment," 94

61 Private Samuel Hodge, a member of the Fourth Battalion of the WIR, received the Victoria Cross in 1867 for “his bravery at the storming and capture of the stockaded town of Tubabecolong, in the kingdom of Barra, River Gambia” during a battle in the First Gambia Campaign in West Africa. For the complete citation, see *The London Gazette*, January 4, 1867, Issue 23205, Page 84

Lance-Corporal William James Gordon, a member of the First Battalion of the WIR, received the Victoria Cross in 1892 for his “bravery and self-devotion” during the Second Gambia Campaign in West Africa. For the complete citation, see *The London Gazette*, December 9, 1892, Issue 26532, Page 7217
men from Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean archipelago, and laborers from Martinique and Guadeloupe who had initially toiled on the ill-fated French canal-building project during the 1880s. Several hundred discharged soldiers from the WIR also made their way to Panama, looking to bolster their fortunes in the civilian world. Yet, with the opening of the canal in August 1914, Caribbean migrants scrambled desperately to find new sources of employment as the Isthmian Canal Commission laid off nearly 2,000 workers per month. Writing in a climate of profound uncertainty and growing economic deprivation, Moulton reported that there were many “military men” in Panama who were “qualified and …willing to go to the front.” Although far from home, he predicted that WIR veterans would eagerly “respond to the call and join the army” if the Jamaican government took the lead.

The most publicized proposal to use the WIR in combat came from Major Edward T. Dixon, a member of the Legislative Council who represented the parish of St. Andrew. Born in Birmingham, England, in 1862, Dixon served in the Royal Field and Royal Horse Artillery before retiring from military life in 1889. He later relocated to Jamaica, where he purchased the Billy Dunn estate in Half Way Tree, and then won a seat in the Legislative Council in

62 For an estimate of the total number of Barbadian contract workers who immigrated to Panama during the construction of the US-led canal project, see Bonham C. Richardson, Panama Money in Barbados, 1900-1920 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 125


64 William H. Gale, “Annual Report for Commerce and Industry for 1914 (First Section).” March 8, 1915, RG 84, Vol. 082, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Panama, Colon Consulate, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

65 “Military Men on the Canal Zone,” Daily Gleaner, September 5, 1914, 14; For a detailed discussion of West Indians’ role in the construction of the Panama Canal and West Indian life in the Canal Zone, see Julie Greene, The Canal Builders: Making America’s Empire at the Panama Canal (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), Chapter Three
July 1914. Dixon proposed that the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion of the WIR, currently garrisoned at Up Park Camp in Jamaica, should be deployed on the battlefields of Europe. The professional soldiers of the WIR, he reasoned, were infinitely more fit than the British civilians flooding recruitment centers to join Kitchener's New Army. Dixon volunteered to recruit a local militia comprised of WIR veterans to serve as a local defense force once the active duty WIR troops sailed for Europe. Using his platform as an elected member of the Legislative Council, Dixon presented his idea to the other elected members and garnered their unanimous support. However, Governor Manning refused to back Dixon's proposal on both military and financial grounds, insisting that the plan would be too costly and would not contribute significantly to the war effort. In June 1915, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} battalion of the WIR departed for Sierra Leone and in 1916, the unit engaged in limited combat operations against the Germans in East Africa.

Whereas Major Dixon, Charles Moulton, and “Backwoodsman” envisioned Jamaica’s black and coloured majority representing the colony on the field of battle, there were other military boosters who argued from the outset that soldiering should be restricted to the “best classes,” a euphemism for the island’s white (and lightly coloured) upper crust. These military enthusiasts championed an older, aristocratic model of military service that

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68 William Manning to Lewis Harcourt, October 20, 1914, CO 137/705, file 43763, National Archives of the United Kingdom

69 Joseph, "The British West Indies Regiment," 94
framed arms-bearing and other forms of martial labor as the preserve of cultured gentlemen.\textsuperscript{70}

In September 1914, S.C. Burke, the Assistant Resident Magistrate for Kingston, privately solicited Governor Manning’s support to raise a contingent of 300 men. Burke volunteered to organize a small mounted unit, representing the “pick of the colony,” which would train in Jamaica and then sail across the Atlantic with their personal horses and military supplies in tow. Confident that the unit would be a credit to the island, Burke insisted that the local government take on all of the group’s expenses, including pre-deployment training, arms, equipment, uniforms, transportation, and soldiers’ pay at the rate of 4s. per day, the maximum pay for non-commissioned officers in the British Army.\textsuperscript{71} In a similar vein, the \textit{Gleaner} reported that Kingston-based solicitor J.H. Cargill formed his own private volunteer corps, which counted “quite a number of influential gentlemen” among its ranks. The exclusive group drilled three times a week in the hope of eventually serving overseas with the British Army. Tellingly, Cargill vetted all queries from prospective members in person and expected each corpsman to purchase his own military supplies, uniform, and other equipment.\textsuperscript{72}

If Burke’s and Cargill’s proposals presented military service as a pastime for the island’s tiny elite, more circumspect commentators counseled colonial authorities to screen all prospective volunteers based on their personal qualifications and military backgrounds.

Cattle pen-keeper G.R.C. Heale, for instance, proposed that the local government only

\textsuperscript{70} As historian Richard Smith points out, the arms-bearing tradition in the British Caribbean was historically linked the white colonists’ anxieties about property rights and racial domination. Smith, \textit{Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War}, 48-51; James Burk, \textit{Handbook of the Sociology of the Military}, ed. Giuseppe Caforio, (New York: Springer, 2003), 111-130


\textsuperscript{72} “W.I. Regiment and the War,” \textit{Daily Gleaner}, October 27, 1914, 6
sponsor volunteers who could pass a thorough medical examination and shooting test as well as provide proof of previous military training. Given that the primary sources of military training for civilians in Jamaica were all-white private militias and rifle clubs, Heale’s scheme effectively barred black, coloured, and East Indian volunteers. Indeed, Heale flatly acknowledged that only “75 to 100 first class men” would be admitted to Jamaica’s military contingent based on his criteria.  

As military-aged men and pro-enlistment voices flooded the local press with proposals, news that the War Office had declined the offer to raise a West Indian contingent came to light in late October 1914. On October 20, the West Indian Committee Circular, the official organ of the powerful, London-based West India Committee, addressed the “bitter disappointment” in the West Indies as word spread that the War Office had refused to raise a regional contingent. Rationalizing the War Office’s unpopular decision in a front-page article, the editors posited that the number of volunteers from the West Indies “would not have been sufficiently strong numerically” to justify the formation of a new contingent. Furthermore, echoing the language of the War Office’s September 2 missive, they insisted that any general campaign to mobilize West Indian men for overseas service would deplete local defense forces and make the islands more vulnerable to raiding parties from enemy ships.  

Like their colleagues in the metropole, some colonial officials in the British Caribbean also questioned the utility of mobilizing West Indian men for military service abroad. In a letter to Lewis Harcourt in October 1914, Governor William Manning reported

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73 “Opinion of Gleaner Readers,” Daily Gleaner, October 13, 1914, 10

74 “The West Indian Offer of Service,” West Indian Committee Circular, October 20, 1914, 481
that there had been “some agitation” in Jamaica to raise a “Mounted Force for Imperial Service” as well as “proposals to raise a corps to replace the West India Regiment for service in Europe.” Yet Manning refused to sanction either plan, noting that the cost of raising troops for overseas service was prohibitive and could not be justified “from a Military point of view.” Likewise, Arthur Cipriani recalled that military and colonial officials in Trinidad, including the colony’s governor George Le Hunte, dismissed the idea that a West Indian contingent could contribute to the war effort. “[T]he idea that West Indian troops should be sent to help the Mother Country,” Cipriani noted angrily, “was looked upon as absurd, preposterous, and unthinkable.”

Following the War Office’s denial of their right to serve, military enthusiasts expressed a mounting sense of frustration with both imperial and colonial authorities, insisting that patriotic West Indians had been robbed of their opportunity to demonstrate their manhood and loyalty in the crucible of war. For these would-be volunteers, martial labor functioned simultaneously as a public marker of imperial belonging and as a defining rite of passage for male citizens and subjects. Describing the intense desire to serve in the island, a writer from Barbados expressed his sadness at the unanticipated rebuff in a letter to London. “We have put up sugar and money for the various subscriptions,” he explained, “but that won’t win our battles. It’s lives we desire to give as it’s for the Empire that the Motherland is fighting and it is only fair to give these colonies the opportunity of showing the true spirit of patriotism that they have always evinced in the past in a crisis of this kind.”

55 William Manning to Lewis Harcourt, October 20, 1914, CO 137/705, file 43763, National Archives of the United Kingdom

56 Cipriani, Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War, 7
correspondent accused Barbados Governor Leslie Probyn of not advocating forcefully for a contingent, he also maintained that imperial authorities did not understand the pain Barbadians felt after being “slighted” once more by the War Office. When word spread that the War Office had rejected the offer of a contingent, it struck like a “cold water douche from the Government,” dampening the spirits of young men through the island. “We are very much cut up about it,” he lamented, “and are by no means satisfied that it should rest there.” “I hope they will soon see their way to give our lads a chance of serving the Flag that they pride and honour, and so raise their spirits, which are at present very flat over the whole affair,” he wrote. “If they could only realise at home what it means to a colony like Barbados, and the other West Indian colonies…to be able to hand down to posterity that their sons have fought and bled with the sons of the Motherland in the most critical period of her existence.”

As the Barbadian letter writer makes clear, elite calls for a West Indian combat force stemmed in part from deeply-felt anxieties about the region’s declining status in the empire and repeated public “slights” to the manhood of West Indians of all colours. As Thomas Holt and other historians have richly documented, imperial interest in the Caribbean colonies declined significantly in the decades after emancipation, as the region’s financial and strategic importance waned. In fact, by the early twentieth century, recurring rumors that Britain might transfer her “ancient and loyal” West Indian colonies to the United States

77 “Notes of Interest,” West India Committee Circular, November 3, 1914, 520

circulated throughout the region during periods of economic or social crisis in the metropole, heightening local anxieties about imperial belonging.\textsuperscript{79}

Thus, the War Office’s refusal to authorize a West Indian contingent, despite the region’s past martial contributions, effectively relegated Britain’s Caribbean colonies to the sidelines of the Great War, both literally and symbolically. This slight not only stymied efforts to solidify the ties between colony and metropole through the martial sacrifice, but also denied West Indians the social and political capital associated with arms-bearing. The intersection of martial masculinity and imperial belonging during the opening months of the war was powerfully illustrated in a political cartoon entitled, “Shoulder to Shoulder,” which was initially published in \textit{The Grain Growers’ Guide} in western Canada (see figure 2).\textsuperscript{80}

Drawn by Canadian artist Arch Dale in August 1914, the stirring image represented the British Empire as a military unit comprised of six male soldiers standing “shoulder to shoulder” in front of a large, billowing Union Jack. Great Britain—rendered as a stocky, middle-aged soldier reminiscent of John Bull—stands at the center of the image, surrounded by armed soldiers representing New Zealand, Canada, Australia, India, and Africa.


These rumors resurfaced in the aftermath of World War I, see Jamaica Imperial Association to Colonial Secretary (Jamaica), October 23, 1919, in H. Bryan, Acting Governor to Viscount Milner, October 31, 1919, CO 137/733, file 65916, National Archives of the United Kingdom.

\textsuperscript{80} Arch Dale, “Shoulder to Shoulder,” \textit{The Grain Growers’ Guide}, August 1914, n.p. \textit{The Grain Growers’ Guide} was published in Winnipeg, Canada by farmers’ organizations in the “prairie” provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Professor John H. Thompson (Department of History, Duke University) kindly brought this image to my attention and provided background about the publication.
Conspicuously absent from the image is a figure representing the British Caribbean, thus excluding the West Indies from martial visions of the British Empire.

![Shoulder to Shoulder](image)

**Figure 2:** Imagining Martial Brotherhood in the British Empire (without the West Indies). Each soldier is identified by the sash across his uniform and his distinctive dress. Soldiers from left to right: New Zealand, Canada, Britain, Australia, India, and Africa. Arch Dale, “Shoulder to Shoulder,” *The Grain Growers’ Guide*, August 1914, n.p.

W.H. Steele Mitchell, a coloured cocoa planter in the eastern Caribbean island of Grenada, eloquently expressed the profound sense of dejection many eager volunteers felt, writing that many military-aged men in the West Indies were “simply burning with desire to serve their King and country.” These young men, particularly rural cocoa planters, were “accustomed to a hard, open-air life,” Mitchell explained in a letter to officials in London,
and would make fine soldiers if given the same opportunity as other colonials. Yet without a regional contingent, volunteers would have to pay the considerable sum of £25 to sail to England to enlist. Given that most cocoa planters earned less than £200 per year—and the majority of peasants and urban laborers garnered far less—the fare to England was simply too great a cost to bear. To solve this problem, Mitchell proposed that the colony allocate part of its £50,000 reserve fund to send 100 Grenadian volunteers to England. Tellingly, Mitchell framed military service as a way to show gratitude to the metropole, echoing earlier appeals by Arthur Cipriani and the correspondent from Barbados. “We think it very hard to remain here and not be able to do something in return for the protection given us by the [British] cruisers in these waters,” he wrote.  

For Mitchell, contributing to the war effort meant forsaking civilian life in the colonies to serve in the storied battlefields of Europe.

As disaffection mounted in the British Caribbean, a powerful new advocate for a West Indian contingent emerged in the metropole. Douglas Cochrane, the 12th Earl of Dundonald, was a retired Lieutenant-General in the British Army and the former General Officer Commanding the Militia of Canada. His grandfather, the 10th Earl of Dundonald Admiral Thomas Cochrane, had served as the Commander of the North American station of the British Navy and published an early pamphlet outlining the commercial potential of Trinidadian asphalt. Like his grandfather, Dundonald invested in land in Trinidad—this time hoping to find oil instead of asphalt—and had visited Trinidad and Barbados during a tour of the West Indies from 1904 to 1905.  

In November 1914, after hearing the plight of W.A.

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81 W. H. Steele Mitchell, Daily Express, reprinted in “Letters to the Editor,” West India Committee Circular, November 17, 1914, 550

82 Lieut.-General The Earl of Dundonald, My Army Life (London: Edward Arnold & Co, 1934), 1-19, 302-303
Moore, a dark-skinned black Trinidadian who was rejected when he tried to enlist in England, Dundonald wrote to Secretary of State Lewis Harcourt to lobby for the creation of a West Indian contingent. In his letter, Dundonald stressed that he was “strongly averse to the introduction of coloured people into British Regiments” on the grounds that racially integrated regiments would “be very detrimental to the Imperial connection.” Yet, he acknowledged, “harm would be done to the Empire if we offended the susceptibilities of the loyal black population, for it is the black population and their loyalty to Great Britain which stands like a rock between any proposal to exchange the Stars and Stripes for the Union Jack.” Therefore he suggested that the Colonial Office organize a separate West Indian contingent that could serve in a temperate climate, such as Egypt’s.  

Dundonald outlined his idea in a two-page memorandum entitled, “Proposed West Indian Contingent.” He argued that imperial patriotism as well as depressed economic conditions made the West Indies a fertile ground for military recruiting. “The coloured population of the West Indies is intensely loyal, and Britain’s war would be their war,” he expounded, “but irrespective of sentiment the present time ought to be favourable for recruiting, as many thousands of West Indian labourers who have been employed in the construction of the Panama canal are, owning to the completion of the work, free for another opening.” Moreover, he asserted, the “people of the West Indies are Christians,” which made them less susceptible to German propaganda that sought to exploit tensions between Christians and Muslims in the British Empire. He estimated that the West Indies would be able to form at least one division for service abroad and supply the necessary drafts to

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83 Lord Dundonald to the Colonial Office, November 23, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom
maintain the division in the field. In addition to mustering men with no previous military experience, Dundonald suggested that veterans from the West India Regiment and local police forces could help to “stiffen the ranks of the newly formed units.” Since the rank and file of the new contingent would be volunteers from the West Indies, he suggested that all of the senior non-commissioned officers and three-fourths of the commissioned officers should be from Britain. He also recommended that British officers and non-commissioned officers who had been injured at the front or were no longer fit to withstand the harsh winters in Europe could be used to train volunteers in the West Indies. 84

Dundonald’s modest proposal would have far-reaching consequences. Most notably, it reignited the debate about West Indian military service at Colonial Office and skillfully underscored the stakes of the military question. By rejecting West Indians’ aspirations to join the military, Dundonald warned, imperial officials were inadvertently provoking racial unrest and outright disloyalty in the colonies. Unconvinced by Dundonald’s argument, clerk R. A. Wiseman reiterated his deep-seated concerns about the soldiering abilities of West Indian volunteers. “From the political point of view,” Wiseman wrote in an internal minute, “I do not think the military value of the negro in the W. Indies is sufficient to make it necessary for us to press the W.O. [War Office] to modify their decision not to have anything to do with a W.I. [West Indian] contingent.” Then he added, caustically, “What colony in the W.I. could raise a contingent sufficiently large to make any appreciable difference to the war?” 85

84 “Proposed West Indian Contingent,” Lord Dundonald to the Colonial Office, November 23, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom

85 Handwritten note by R.A. Wiseman, November 26, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom
While Wiseman lampooned the idea of a West Indian contingent, mockingly characterizing Dundonald’s plan as an effort to send “half fit soldiers to the West Indies to train negroes,” other imperial officials increasingly emphasized the political value of permitting West Indians to serve in the military.\textsuperscript{86} Although only a handful of black and coloured West Indians had attempted to enlist, senior Colonial Office staffers reasoned that military service was a way to cement West Indian loyalty. “There is no doubt whatever that it is politically desirable to make some use of the black man, even if it only amounts to increasing the strength of the W.I.R. with a view to reinforcing the battalion in Sierra Leone,” clerk Greg Grindle maintained.\textsuperscript{87} Likewise, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies G.V. Fiddles concurred with the plan to send West Indian volunteers to Egypt on the grounds that it was “very desirable to encourage loyalty in the West Indies.”\textsuperscript{88} And, in a remarkable volte-face, both Grindle and Fiddles insisted that black soldiers from the West India Regiment had served “with distinction” in previous conflicts and should have the opportunity to do so once again.\textsuperscript{89}

On December 8, 1914, the Colonial Office endorsed a modified version of Dundonald’s plan, and forwarded his proposal to the War Office for the Army Council to

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\textsuperscript{86} Handwritten note by R.A. Wiseman, November 26, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{87} Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, November 26, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{88} Handwritten note by G.V. Fiddles, December 1, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{89} Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, November 26, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Handwritten note by G.V. Fiddles, December 1, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom
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review. Three factors likely motivated the Colonial Office’s new stance on the question of West Indian military service. First, Dundonald’s proposal skillfully sidestepped the volatile issue of black West Indians’ status as “alien” military volunteers by proposing that West Indian soldiers serve in their own contingent rather than with white troops in British regiments. Second, he recommended that the West Indian contingent should be stationed outside of Europe in Egypt or another temperate country. Although the War Cabinet deployed Indian troops to fight in France, Secretary of State for the Colonies Lewis Harcourt insisted that the colour question and other considerations made it utterly “impractical” to use West Indian troops on the European continent. Most importantly, high-ranking imperial officials agreed with Dundonald’s assertion that the military question could either weaken or strengthen West Indians’ loyalty to the empire. In a letter to the War Office, Secretary of State for the Colonies Lewis Harcourt urged the Army Council to consider “the political advantages to be gained by recognizing and encouraging the loyalty of the black and coloured population.” Thus, Harcourt drafted a memo detailing how “to duplicate the present battalion of the West India Regiment in Jamaica and to form a service battalion for Egypt or some other warm country.” If that was not possible, Harcourt proposed, “Contingents might be organized in the larger Colonies of Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and British Guiana” and deployed on the “lines of communication in Egypt.”

If policymakers at the War Office were moved by the Colonial Office’s political assessment of the military question, they continued to doubt West Indians’ martial abilities.

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90 H. J. Read (on behalf of Lewis Harcourt) to War Office, December 8, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom

91 H. J. Read (on behalf of Lewis Harcourt) to War Office, December 8, 1914, CO 318/333, file 46453, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Therefore, as a compromise, the Army Council agreed to raise a West Indian contingent, but insisted that the new contingent would not be “suitable” for combat duties in Egypt or East Africa. Instead, they offered to station the contingent in the former German colony of Cameroon and in other “Territories recently taken from the enemy in West Africa.” Far from the battlefield, the new contingent would form part of the garrison of troops that would secure and hold newly-acquired African territories. Harcourt swiftly rejected the plan to use West Indian volunteers for garrison duty, declaring that military-aged men were “so anxious to fight for the Empire” that they would “deeply resent” any proposal to serve as an occupying force in a West African backwater. Moreover, he argued, black West Indian troops would be susceptible to local illnesses, which would severely limit their effectiveness in West Africa. Given that the West African Frontier Force was already in the area, Harcourt went on, it made little sense to raise a regiment of soldiers from the Caribbean when local recruits were readily available.

Since the War Office was unwilling to alter its proposal, Harcourt wrote to Dundonald in late December 1914 to inform him that his proposal for a West Indian contingent had been rejected. “The difficulties and disadvantages presented by this proposal are found to be too considerable to allow of it being adopted in any satisfactory form,” Harcourt averred. “In the circumstances, therefore, it is feared that it will not be

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92 B. B. Cubitt to the Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, December 14, 1914, CO 318/333, file 50043, National Archives of the United Kingdom

93 Harcourt outlined in concerns with the War Office’s December 1914 proposal in a letter to Lord Stamforham in April 1915. See Lewis Harcourt to Lord Stamforham, April 20, 1915, CO 318/333, file 50043, National Archives of the United Kingdom

possible to employ West Indian troops for service outside the West Indian colonies.” For the second time since the outbreak of the war, officials at the War Office rebuffed the call to raise a West Indian fighting force.

**Confronting the Empire’s “Nasty Cowardly Skin Prejudice”: The Fight to Serve**

As the minimal threat of German invasion dissipated by early 1915, colonial officials scrambled to come up with explanations for the War Office's intransigent position without publicly acknowledging the existence of a colour bar in the British army vis-à-vis West Indians. Some local leaders suggested that men from tropical climates would never be able to withstand the harsh winters on the Western Front. The War Office's willingness to deploy thousands of Indian troops in France in September 1914 quickly belied that assertion, however. Others argued that the projected cost of raising and transporting publicly-funded contingents was simply too much for the chronically cash-strapped colonies to bear. The most patently ridiculous excuse came from Barbados Governor Leslie Probyn, who claimed that black and coloured volunteers' dark skin would make them dangerously “conspicuous” in a European conflict.

Despite the bevy of excuses circulated by colonial bureaucrats in London and the Caribbean, military boosters and potential volunteers increasingly challenged the War

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96 Grenada *Federalist*, June 19, 1915, 2, quoted in Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 34

97 Governor Leslie Probyn to Lewis Harcourt, October 27, 1914, CO 28/284, file 44093, National Archives of the United Kingdom.
Office’s rationale for excluding West Indian volunteers from the imperial armed forces. Evidence of the growing restiveness in the West Indies abounded in the press in late 1914 and early 1915. In a published letter to *West India Committee Circular*, Dr. A. A. Mvers of Dominica insisted that the islands of the West Indies could easily produce enough men to send a contingent abroad while also maintaining a local defense force in each island, contesting the notion that the Caribbean colonies could never mobilize enough volunteers to justify a separate military unit. “It may interest you to know that, speaking for Dominica, there are good active men who would willingly give their service abroad,” he wrote. Moreover, Mvers attacked the Colonial Office’s claim that West Indians should focus on local defense in order to prevent German ships from raiding coal and other vital supplies from the region’s port cities. “As for preventing the enemy from obtaining supplies, surely sir, you cannot be serious,” he wrote incredulously. “How can a handful of riflemen, however brave and well-trained stand up unsupported by artillery of any sort or kind, against quick-firing…guns of the modern cruiser?"\(^98\)

Describing the local response to the War Office’s rebuff, Myers reported that in Dominica there was “much dissatisfaction at the prompt and unconditional rejection of our offer of service.” The War Office, he reasoned, should have offered to review the proposal “later on” instead of curtly refusing to consider the possibility of a West Indian contingent. If accepted for service, West Indian soldiers could perform garrison duty in England or patrol communications lines in Belgium and on the Western front, he suggested. Whatever the task, Mvers stressed that West Indians had earned the right to serve the Empire because of their

\(^{98}\) Dr. A. A. Mvers to the Editors of the West India Committee Circular, November 7, 1914, reprinted “Letters to the Editor-The Proposed West Indies Contingent,” *West India Committee Circular*, December 15, 1914, 598
loyalty and longstanding ties with Britain: “We are among the most ancient colonies of the Crown, and in loyalty hold ourselves second to none; we wish to do something more than we are doing for the King,” he insisted. “Let them give us a chance, then.”

Whereas Myers did not suggest that the “colour question” fuelled the War Office’s decision, other observers rightly guessed that racial concerns contributed to the War Office's intransigence. The editors of the Grenada Federalist condemned “the nasty cowardly skin prejudice characteristic of the empire,” which prevented the War Office from recruiting West Indians in a time of dire conflict, while many Barbadians and Jamaicans believed that the imperial government was simply unwilling to arm black men to fight against a European enemy. Remarkably, the most strident public rebuke of the War Office came from the pages of the British Honduras Clarion, the mouthpiece of the conservative Creole establishment. Redeploying the hyperbolic language of British war propaganda, the paper blasted the hypocrisy of those who demanded West Indians' unflinching loyalty while preventing them from demonstrating it through military service:

Until the war is carried into Germany; until the Allied commanders sit in the imperial palace in Berlin, and dictate terms of peace; until the holocaust of blood, rapine and horror indescribable, offered in Belgium by Germany to her gods of demonical hate, arrogance and barbaric militarism has [been] avenged, the empire cannot dispense, unless she is obsessed with the spirit of self-destruction, with the services of her blackest and humblest citizen. Englishmen take long to learn their lessons. The killing of a German is an imperial duty of obligation, as the churchmen say; and god forbid that the complexion of the man who does the killing shall stand in the way of the victory, without which the England, which we all love, in spite of her many faults, shall stand humbled at the foot of an arrogant and despised conqueror.

99 Dr. A. A. Myers to the Editors of the West India Committee Circular, November 7, 1914, reprinted “Letters to the Editor-The Proposed West Indies Contingent,” West India Committee Circular, December 15, 1914, 598

As the editors ominously warned, England's racist military policies not only kept her faithful “blackest and humblest” subjects from taking their rightful place on the field of battle, but also made Englishmen more vulnerable to Germany's military might.

While the region's pro-military businessmen and newspaper editors pressured the War Office to reconsider its stance on a West Indian contingent, a trickle of British expatriates and white Creoles sailed to England to enlist in Britain's burgeoning armed forces. These enlistees included junior civil servants, sons of planters and rural estate managers, constables, middling-level clerks and businessmen, prominent ministers, and a fair number of recent secondary school graduates who were driven to volunteer by a sense of manly duty, a thirst for adventure and fame, or simply boredom at home. E.P. Sibthorpe, the organist for Kingston Parish Church, joined the Eleventh Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment. While training for the front at Worgret Camp in Dorset, Sibthorpe sent home a striking self-portrait showcasing his new military uniform.102 Twenty-one-year-old John Chandler of Claremont, Jamaica, resigned his position with the United Fruit Company in San Jose, Costa Rica, in May 1915 in order to enter the Inns of Court Officer Training Corps in England. Chandler was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the County of London Regiment and received a Military Cross for “conspicuous gallantry in action” in 1916.103 The departure of the first group of white volunteers from Trinidad, as the famous radical activist and intellectual C. L.  

101 *The Clarion*, August 12, 1915, 177, quoted in Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 34

102 "Now in Training for Service at the Front," *Daily Gleaner*, October 5, 1915, 6

103 Frank Cundall, *Jamaica's Part in the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: IOJ, by the West India Commission, 1925), 109
R. James later recalled, elicited the “most remarkable” celebrations “ever witnessed in the history of the colony.”

While taking in these white West Indian volunteers, Kitchener’s New Army roundly discouraged black and coloured West Indians from enlisting in its ranks. In a confidential memo circulated in November 1914, the Colonial Office secretly instructed the region’s governors to dissuade nonwhite would-be volunteers from sailing to England. Three months later, in a secret letter to Governor Manning in February 1915, Lewis Harcourt additionally insisted that “no candidate who is not of pure European descent should be recommended” for a commission in the “new Service Battalions of His Majesty’s Army.”

Yet this did not dissuade determined black and coloured professionals from journeying across the Atlantic at their own expense to volunteer and then being victimized by the War Office’s discriminatory policies. Dr. William Steele Mitchell, the acting resident surgeon of Grenada, applied for a position in the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1915 after reading about the desperate shortage of doctors in England. Despite the urgent need for trained physicians, the War Office decided that Mitchell—a “slightly coloured man” with “African wooly hair”—was “ineligible for such appointment” because he did not possess “pure European blood.”

Mitchell's rejection initially touched off a firestorm of criticism in Grenada, but it failed to

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106 Lewis Harcourt to William Manning, February 10, 1915, 1B/5/29/22, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town

107 Governor Hadden-Smith to Bonar Law, August 7, 1915, CO 321/282, file 40055, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Director General, Army Medical Services to W.S. Mitchell, July 8, 1915, CO 321/282, file 40055, National Archives of the United Kingdom
provoke any sustained anti-war protests. Jamaican government veterinarian G.O. Rushdie-Gray was also rebuffed when he applied for a position in the Army Veterinary Corps, despite having previously served as a veterinarian to the WIR. While continuing to insist that it did not maintain an “absolute bar against coloured men for commissions in the Vet. Corps,” the War Office suggested that Rushdie-Gray's particularly dark skin colour made his appointment impossible. This decision was seconded by officials in the Colonial Office who expressed their shock that Jamaica's governor would have recommended a black man for a commission without mentioning Rushdie-Gray's complexion in his dispatch. In an apologetic reply to the Colonial Office, Governor Manning promised to provide in future the “required report” detailing a candidate’s race if the “Officer applying for a Commission is not of pure European descent.”

The manifest illogic of the War Office’s position was made abundantly clear in the case of the small number of black and coloured West Indians who had settled in England before the outbreak of the war, since these men were allowed to enlist in British regiments. Jamaican leatherworker Egbert Watson was living in Camden Town in north London when the war began, and he enlisted in the Royal Garrison Artillery in January 1916. Watson fought as a gunner in France for two months before leaving the service because of myalgia.

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108 Governor Hadden-Smith to Bonar Law, August 7, 1915, CO 321/282, file 40055, National Archives of the United Kingdom

109 Governor Manning to Bonar Law, April 15, 1916, CO 137/715, National Archives of the United Kingdom. Rushie-Gray's service with the West India Regiment is discussed in Smith, Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity, and the Development of National Consciousness, 65

110 Minute, May 3, 1916, CO 137/715, file 20904, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Minute, May 15, 1916, CO 137/715, file 20904, National Archives of the United Kingdom

111 William Manning to Bonar Law, June 23, 1916, 1B/5/23/5, Jamaica Archives
and epilepsy. Grenadian James Ernest Ross joined the 19th London Regiment in 1914 and, like Watson, served as a machine gunner in combat. Captured by the Germans during the Battle of Cambrai, Ross was a prisoner of war for nearly six months before making a daring escape with 19 other prisoners in 1918. Alonzo Nathan, a Jamaican seaman in the bustling port city of Cardiff, initially served in the Army Service Corps, although he would eventually be transferred to the BWIR once it was created. The same thing occurred with dozens other West Indian soldiers in British regiments.

The most famous Jamaican volunteer was future Premier Norman Manley, who was in his first year at Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship when the war erupted. Postponing his studies, he enlisted in June 1915 along with his younger brother Roy, hoping initially to serve in the Royal Flying Corps; however, he ultimately settled on the Royal Field Artillery because of the prohibitively high cost of flight school. In his memoirs, Manley noted that even “after the start of the first World War it was impossible to be in England and not be aware of the problems of colour. You were immediately aware in a thousand ways that you belonged elsewhere but not there.” Indeed, when Roy Manley applied for admission to the Officer Training Corps in 1915, he was curtly rejected because of his racial heritage. Likewise, Norman Manley encountered such “violent colour prejudice” when he was

112 Pension Claims for Egbert Watson, WO 364/4505, National Archives of the United Kingdom

113 George I. Brizan, Brave Young Grenadians-Loyal British Subjects: Our People In The First and Second World War (San Juan, Trinidad: Paria Pub. Co., 2002), 33

114 Pension Claims for Alonzo Nathan, WO 364/2665, National Archives of the United Kingdom


promoted to corporal that he elected to revert to the rank of gunner and subsequently transferred to a new division.\textsuperscript{117} In 1917, he was there to bury his 21-year-old brother Roy after he was fatally struck in the heart by a shell-casing fragment while fighting in Ypres.\textsuperscript{118}

As the coloured planter Mitchell had noted, the steep cost of traveling to England to enlist, which ranged from £15 to £25 per person, effectively barred men of the laboring classes from joining the colors. Determined to do their bit for the Empire in her hour of need, some men sought out wealthy local patrons to sponsor their passage to England or joined the growing chorus of citizens lobbying for a publicly-funded contingent. Others simply avoided paying the substantial cost of a ticket to England by stowing away on U. K.-bound ships. In May 1915, nine men from Barbados were discovered on the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company steamer, the S.S. \textit{Danube}.\textsuperscript{119} When questioned, the stowaways proudly asserted that they intended to go to England to join the army. When the \textit{Danube} arrived in the metropole, the would-be soldiers were promptly arraigned at West Ham Police Court, where the magistrate informed them that they had little hope of being accepted in a British regiment. Undeterred, the men refused to return to Barbados, proclaiming that they had “come to fight and they were going to fight.” Algernon Aspinall, the Secretary of the West India Committee, took an interest in the men's case and requested that the magistrate allow them to enlist in a battalion for coloured men forming at Cardiff. The charges against the nine men

\textsuperscript{117} Manley, "The Autobiography of Norman Washington Manley," 7

\textsuperscript{118} Manley, "The Autobiography of Norman Washington Manley," 5-6

\textsuperscript{119} "Coloured Men as Recruits," \textit{The Port of Spain Gazette}, June 16, 1915, 5
were ultimately dismissed, and they were released into the care of the West India Committee.\textsuperscript{120}

The embarrassing log-jam at the War Office came to an end only after the personal intervention of King George V finally compelled the office to accept a West Indian contingent. In April 1915, the king received a heartfelt appeal from a woman engaged in charitable work in the West Indies, who made the case for the creation of a combat regiment staffed by the region’s men.\textsuperscript{121} Moved by her petition, George V, through his Private Secretary Lord Stamfordham, wrote a letter to Lewis Harcourt informing him that it would be “very politic to gratify the wish of the West Indies to send a Regiment to the Front.” Like Dundonald and other previous commentators, George V suggested that the regiment could be “usefully employed in Egypt.”\textsuperscript{122}

In a lengthy reply dispatched three days later, Harcourt blamed the War Office for declining previous opportunities to raise a West Indian contingent, while shrewdly minimizing the Colonial Office’s role in the two prior rejections. Harcourt explained that the “question of meeting the natural and legitimate aspirations of the West Indies to take some action in the war” had been raised on several occasions since the beginning of hostilities and informed Stamfordham that the Colonial Office had discussed proposals for a West Indian contingent with the War Office in late August 1914 and again in December 1914. However, he insisted, the War Office flatly declined to authorize a contingent for service in a combat

\textsuperscript{120} Coloured Men as Recruits," \textit{The Port of Spain Gazette}, June 16, 1915, 5

\textsuperscript{121} Joseph, "The British West Indies Regiment," 98

\textsuperscript{122} Lord Stamfordham to Lewis Harcourt, April 17, 1915, CO 318/333, file 50043, National Archives of the United Kingdom
theater on both occasions. Harcourt admitted that it had been difficult for him to deal with the offers of service from the West Indies “owing to the colour question,” since it was “not possible to enlist black or coloured men in British regiments.” He went on to suggest that the formation of a West Indian force on the European front was “impracticable for various reasons, of which colour is only one.” Yet, despite these difficulties, Harcourt acknowledged that he “had begun to feel some anxiety as to the possible effect of continued rejection of offers of service on the loyalty of the black population of the West Indies and on their existing attachment to the Empire.” Thus, in December 1915, he had asked the Army Council to find some way to mobilize the “black population of the West Indies for the purposes of the war.” However, the War Office failed to provide a mutually agreeable proposal, resulting in a four-month impasse.123

On April 22, 1915, Lord Stamforham notified Harcourt that George V had reviewed his letter and had spoken with Kitchener regarding the possibility of a West Indian contingent. Stamforham reported, “[T]here is no recollection of the War Office having refused the offer of a West Indian Contingent” and that Kitchener “would be very glad to accept” a contingent as long as it was a “complete unit” and did not come with “any conditions as to where it should serve.” Given the “political importance of not refusing the loyal offer of services from the West Indies,” George V encouraged Harcourt to “make a proposal which would be acceptable to the War Office.”124 After a terse exchange between

123 Lewis Harcourt to Lord Stamforham, April 20, 1915, CO 318/333, file 50043, National Archives of the United Kingdom

124 Lord Stamforham to Lewis Harcourt, April 22, 1915, CO 318/333, file 50043, National Archives of the United Kingdom; War Office to Secretary of State, Colonial Office, May 19, 1915, CO 137/712, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Harcourt and Kitchener, the War Office officially authorized the formation of a West Indian contingent, later officially deemed the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR), on May 19, 1915.\footnote{Lewis Harcourt to Kitchener, April 22, 1915, CO 318/333, file 50043, National Archives of the United Kingdom; War Office to Secretary of State, Colonial Office, May 19, 1915, CO 137/712, National Archives of the United Kingdom}

News that the British West Indies would have its own military contingent was greeted with enthusiasm throughout the region. In Jamaica, laborers and rural cultivators were said to have flooded the coffers of the War Contingent Fund, despite being squeezed to the breaking point by staggering wartime inflation. Workers at the Petersville Pen contributed £1 6s 3d, while the Rose of the Isthmus Lodge of the British Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria collected £1 6d from its working class members for the effort.\footnote{"The Jamaica War Contingent Fund," Daily Gleaner, May 14, 1915, 13; "The Jamaica War Contingent Fund," Daily Gleaner, May 26, 1915, 13} Sad that he was too young to enlist, seven-year-old John Elliot McCrea, Jr., of Port Antonio, Jamaica, decided to support the fledging contingent by collecting donations on Empire Day. His efforts netted an impressive 10 shillings.\footnote{"Men of Trinidad!," Port of Spain Gazette, June 5, 1915, 9} In Trinidad, inveterate military booster Arthur Cipriani partnered with the Port of Spain Gazette to compile a roster of local men willing to enlist. On June 5, 1915, the Gazette published a rousing appeal to the “Men of Trinidad!,” encouraging them to volunteer for service by sending their names to the paper's main office.\footnote{"For King and Empire," Port of Spain Gazette, June 29, 1915, 5} By month's end, 766 men had answered the call; Cipriani, not surprisingly, was listed as the very first volunteer.\footnote{"For King and Empire," Port of Spain Gazette, June 29, 1915, 5}
If the creation of the BWIR signaled that nonwhite colonials might also play a role in the imperial defense effort, then George V’s historic call for “men of all classes” to pick up arms in the service of the empire left little doubt that colonial subjects could also become British soldiers. George V’s personal appeal for volunteers, published in late October 1915, issued a sweeping invitation to men in the empire to fight alongside their “brothers” in Britain. Weaving together powerful ideas about British justice, imperial fraternity, volunteerism, and righteous war, the sovereign’s message invoked an egalitarian, colour-blind “free Empire” sustained by the martial labor and voluntary sacrifice of both citizens and subjects. “In freely responding to my appeal,” he wrote, “you will be giving your support to our brothers who, for long months, have nobly upheld Britain’s past traditions, and the glory of her Arms.” By soldiering on behalf of the empire, he suggested, colonial subjects could assume their “share of the fight” while honoring the sacrifices of their fellow Britishers.130

The symbolic importance of "The Appeal"—which was read aloud in pulpits from Kingston to Castries and reprinted in all of the region's major newspapers—was tremendous. Appropriating the language of “The Appeal,” military recruiters, journalists, black and coloured reformers, and prospective soldiers would begin to offer their own visions of empire and mutual obligation as the war progressed. And, in an act that highlighted his personal commitment to colonial soldiers, George V officially endorsed the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) through a royal proclamation in the London Gazette on October 26, 1915, one day after circulating his stirring appeal throughout the empire.131

130 The (London) Times, October 25, 1915, 7
131 London Gazette, October 26, 1915, quoted in Cundall, Jamaica's Part in the Great War, 1914-1918, 27
“Fighting for human liberty together with the immediate sons of the Motherland”: Black and Coloured West Indians and the Language of Imperial Patriotism

Although whites spearheaded the trans-Atlantic campaign that culminated in the creation of the BWIR, black and colored reformers in the British Caribbean celebrated the news of a regional contingent and recognized the opportunities that soldiering could enable. In Grenada, the editors of the *West Indian* rhapsodized about the historical significance of the BWIR for the region's black and coloured majority: “The grand spectacle has been left for us—West Indians, most of us whom are descendants of slaves, fighting for human liberty together with the immediate sons of the Motherland in Europe's classic field of war made famous from ancient Grecian days to the days of Marlborough on Wellington. The bones of Clarkson and Wilberforce rattle in their graves today.”

Similarly moved, Marcus Garvey invited military recruiters to UNIA meetings and gave a stirring address to the first contingent of soldiers to depart from Jamaica.

Instead of wading into the ten-month debate over military service, black and coloured activists elected to focus on how the dislocations of war could fundamentally reshape the social and political order in the British Caribbean. Indeed, none of the region’s leading black or coloured activists put forward their own proposals for a military contingent during the first ten months of the war. This is surprising given the racial overtones of the military question as well as the increasingly high stakes of the debate. Yet published reports of the UNIA’s

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132 “Britain’s Myriad Voices Call,” *The West Indian*, July 24, 1915, 4

133 “Britain’s Myriad Voices Call,” *The West Indian*, July 24, 1915, 4

meetings during this period do not include any references to the topic of military service, and Garvey’s personal correspondence from August 1914 to May 1915 is conspicuously silent on the issue. Tellingly, the UNIA’s celebrated loyalty resolution also neglected the larger question of West Indians serving “shoulder to shoulder” with British citizens. Likewise, coloured Jamaican dentist Louis Meilke, the region’s strongest proponent of a self-governing West Indian federation, did not chime in on the military question despite his previous support for universal military service. Grenadian editor and activist T.A. Marryshow also steered clear of the military question. Remarkably, none of Marryshow’s early editorials in the *West Indian*, the progressive newspaper he co-founded in January 1915, called for the formation of a regional fighting force.

Rather, capitalizing on a moment of profound dislocation, black and coloured activists launched vibrant grassroots movements for political reform and racial equality. As the debate about a West Indian contingent raged in the press, black and coloured middle-class reformers in British Honduras (Belize), Jamaica, Trinidad, Grenada, and elsewhere in the region challenged the legitimacy of Crown colony government, protested *de facto* racial discrimination, and advocated greater intra-regional and intra-racial cooperation. These educated men and women, based largely in the region's cosmopolitan capital cities, founded a host of new social and political groups during the first year of the war. In Kingston, Jamaica, for instance, two new organizations emerged in 1914 seeking to foster an appreciation of local history and culture while promoting a racially-tinged West Indian identity. The Jamaica Patriotic League, established by coloured musician Astley Clark, endeavored to advance the “spirit of patriotism, unity, mutual love, comradeship and citizenship” among the island's women, men, and youth. Guided by the nationalist motto, “Jamaica's Welfare First,” the
League operated through a network of local chapters named after Jamaican historical figures and British patriots. Clark also published a series of daily lessons for children in the *Gleaner* and *Jamaica Times*, which focused on moral uplift, social development, and local history. In July 1914, Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League (UNIA), which he officially registered two weeks later on Emancipation Day. His new organization combined the pecuniary benefits of a fraternal society with the highbrow curricular offerings of a debating club and an explicit program for racial progress. Under the banner of “One God, One Aim, One Destiny,” the association aspired to “establish a universal confraternity among the race, to promote the spirit of race pride and love, and to reclaim the fallen of the race.” Unlike Clark, Garvey advanced an international vision of the struggle for black advancement in Jamaica, which he viewed as part and parcel of a global black movement that transcended imperial boundaries. Indeed, he boldly embraced transnationalism, positioning the UNIA as an advocate for “all Negroes, irrespective of nationality.”

As Garvey formulated his ambitious strategy to unify blacks in the Caribbean, United States, Brazil, and the African continent, coloured doctor Louis Meikle led a regional crusade for a British West Indian federation from his home in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Born in the

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137 The annual commemoration of the end of slavery in the British West Indies, and the British Empire, is celebrated on August 1st.

verdant coffee-growing parish of Manchester, Jamaica, in 1874, Meikle had traveled to the United States to study medicine and dentistry at Howard University. After graduation, he landed a position as a medical inspector with the U.S. Public Health Service and the Isthmian Canal Commission, working alongside thousands of Caribbean migrants in the pulsating Canal Zone in Panama. By 1912, Meikle had relocated to Trinidad, where he published *Confederation of the British West Indies versus Annexation to the United States: A Political Discourse on the West Indies*, a book-length treatise that contrasted the promise of a West Indian federation to the perils of annexation to Canada or the United States. Lambasting British Crown colony rule as “autocratic in principle, and a gigantic farce,” Meikle nevertheless argued that annexation to the United States or Canada would subject nonwhite West Indians to a virulently racist regime of legalized segregation and racial terror.\(^\text{139}\) Unwilling to choose between the lynch law of the United States and the humiliations of Crown colony government, he instead proposed that the British colonies in the Caribbean form a political federation with Dominion status in the empire. Federation, he claimed, would “preserve the West Indies for the West Indians” and frustrate American aggression in the region.\(^\text{140}\)

Central to Meikle’s vision of a popularly-governed “United West Indies” was compulsory male military service. As early as 1912, a full two years before the eruption of armed conflict in Europe, Meikle forewarned that Britain’s defeat in an “approaching Anglo-

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\(^\text{139}\) Louis S. Meikle, *Confederation of the British West Indies versus Annexation to the United States: A Political Discourse on the West Indies* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969, 1912c), 38

German war” could force West Indians to become “subjects of the Kaiser.”

To protect the scattered territories of the British Caribbean from foreign encroachment, he argued that the constitution of any future West Indian federation should require male citizens to serve in a local defense corps or the standing army. Drawing on his experiences in the fin-de-siècle United States, where secondary schools offered rudimentary military training and teenaged boys swelled the ranks of militarized cadet corps, Meikle concluded that martial labor instilled manly character, self-discipline, and physical strength. “The young men of to-day should be taught to handle the rifle at as early an age as is consistent with physical development,” he wrote. “Judging from the signs of the time, education in these days must necessarily be extended farther than the use of the pen—it must also embody the use of the sword and rifle.” With proper military training, he predicted optimistically, “a humped, slouchy-moving lump of humanity” is “transformed into a new creature.” Meikle also included several references to soldiering in a public letter that his Trinidad-based West Indian Federation Committee circulated in August 1914.

While Meikle relied on the region’s elite-controlled press to publicize his federation proposals, other black and coloured reformers founded their own progressive organs during the war years, independent papers that served the tripartite function of articulating demands for democratic political reform, promoting racial self-esteem, and informing local communities of the global struggle for black advancement. In British Honduras, middle-class

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141 Meikle, *Confederation of the British West Indies versus Annexation to the United States*, 6

activist Hubert Hill Cain started the Garveyite *Belize Independent* in 1914. The following year, journalist Theophilus Albert Marryshow and lawyer C.F.P. Renwick launched *The West Indian* in St. George's, Grenada. The masthead of the new paper contained a hand-drawn map of the Caribbean that boldly proclaimed the founders’ regional vision by including the Spanish- and French-speaking isles as well as the Anglophone territories. And, it audaciously proclaimed the editors' nationalist mission: “The West Indies Must Be Westindian.”

So why did the same cadre of leaders who had seemed relatively uninterested in the fevered debate over West Indian military participation readily embrace the British West Indies Regiment in the summer of 1915? These men, I argue, realized that West Indians could leverage their overseas military service to call for social and political reforms on the homefront. During the early months of the war, the debate over West Indian military service had been bound by the idea that a regional force would be limited in size, and perhaps include only white elites. Yet, the news that the War Office had authorized a regional contingent that would accept any men who met the standard requirements for a British soldier meant that military service could be used as a tool for local black and coloured reformers to pursue enhanced social standing and a more democratic political culture. Thus, in June 1915, the Grenada *Federalist* posited that the dislocations of war and black soldiers' performance on the battlefield would undermine deeply-ingrained notions of white racial superiority that barred West Indians from the privilege of self-government. “[W]e think the

143 For more information about Hubert Hill Cain's involvement in the UNIA in British Honduras, see Peter Ashdown, "Marcus Garvey, the UNIA and the Black Cause in British Honduras, 1914-1949," *Journal of Caribbean History* 15 (May-November 1981), 41-55

144 The requirements for enlistment in the BWIR are discussed extensively in Chapter Two. For a brief overview of the requirements for enlistment, see “The Conditions of Enlistment,” *Jamaica Times*, October 9, 1915, 15

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day is dawning,” the editors predicted, “when the black man will be more fairly treated in the empire.” But, in an implicit rebuke of imperial patriotism, they boldly proclaimed: “When that day comes we must thank Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany for it.”145

145 Grenada Federalist, June 19, 1915, 2
Chapter Two

“Every Mother's Son?”: The Racialized Politics of Martial Masculinity and Mutual Obligation on the Homefront

Private John Mahamad, a BWIR volunteer from Trinidad, dispatched a cryptic warning to the governor of Jamaica in January 1916. In his brief letter to William Manning, Mahamad claimed a “Mahadan bishop” from India had travelled to Trinidad to foment disloyalty among the colony’s 110,000 East Indian residents. As proof of the Indian cleric’s seditious designs, Mahamad described how four male disciples of the “bishop” tried to discourage him from enlisting in the BWIR, insisting that he “must not fight for the English [but] fight for the German.” Although the Trinidadian government knew the name of the “Mahadan bishop,” the private maintained that colonial administrators were in the dark about his covert activities and network of local collaborators. “You must warn the Trinidad government about it,” Mahamad implored, “for it will be hard for the English” should the cleric and his men continue their anti-British agitation. Promising to reveal additional information about the seditious cleric’s Trinidadian followers, the East Indian soldier avowed: “When you received this letter you must send and tell me and I will tell you the name of the four persons who is in Trinidad.”

1 “Cycling Salvador at the Front,” Port of Spain Gazette, September 2, 1915, 9

2 According to the 1911 census, the total population of Trinidad and Tobago was 333,552, of which 110,911 individuals were East Indians. Within the East Indian population, 14,957 people were listed as “Mohametans” (Muslims). Census of the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago, 1911 (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Government Printing Office, 1913), 4, 20

3 John Mahamad to William Manning, January 20, 1916, File Folder 33/1916, Box 3-96 (1916), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain
Governor Manning responded swiftly to Mahamad’s ominous letter and asked General L.S. Blackden, Inspector of the West Indian Local Forces and Officer Commanding the Troops-Jamaica, to investigate his allegations. Under interrogation, Mahamad identified the Indian cleric’s four Trinidadian associates as Peck Mohamed, Oli Mohamed, Mohamet Meah, and Daimalli Meah. All four men were “Mohammedans,” and three of the men—Peck Mohamed, Oli Mohamed, and Mohamet Meah—had been born in India and completed contracts as indentured laborers in Trinidad. In contrast to the humble background of the other men, Daimalli Meah was a “rich cocoanut plantation owner and merchant” who had been born in Trinidad. According to Private Mahamad, Daimalli Meah had secretly urged him “not to join the British Army” because the British were “fighting other Mohammedans (the Turks).”

Even though Mahamad’s account remained consistent throughout the interrogation, the interpreter charged that Mahamad’s allegations were motivated by religious rivalry rather than loyalty to the empire. According to Sergeant Teymil, Mahamad was a member of an established Muslim sect in Trinidad, while the four men he accused of disloyalty belonged to an upstart Muslim group led by Nahmed Moulva, a cleric from India. The intense competition between the two sects of East Indian Muslims had recently turned violent, when

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4 Manning outlined the actions he took in response to Private John Mahamad’s letter in a missive to the Governor of Trinidad. Manning also forwarded a copy of Mahamad’s letter as well as the report from the military investigation. William Manning to Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, February 4, 1915, File Folder 33/1916, Box 3-96 (1916), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

5 Private John Mahamad was interrogated by Lieutenant Colonel Leslie G. Harrison, Commandant of the Jamaica War Contingent. For Harrison’s full report, see Leslie G. Harrison (Commandant, Jamaica War Contingent) to T.B. Nicholson (Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter Master General), January 25, 1915, File Folder 33/1916, Box 3-96 (1916), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

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followers of Nahmed Moulva severely beat John Mahamad’s spiritual leader. Although the assailants paid a fine in Trinidad’s Civil Court, the interpreter alleged that Private Mahamad denounced his four compatriots because of their personal ties to Nahmed Moulva.  

After reviewing Mahamad’s dispatch to Governor Manning, officials in Trinidad likewise discounted the private’s allegations against Peck Mohamed, Oli Mohamed, Mohamet Meah, and Daimalli Meah, concluding that Mahamad “made up” tales of sedition “with a view to getting the parties of the opposite faction of the Mohammedans…into the bad grace of the Trinidad Government.” Further still, Protector of Immigrants A. H. W. De Boissiere insisted it was actually members of Mahamad’s religious sect who circulated seditious newspapers in the colony and “preached against Mohammedans fighting against the subjects of the Sultan and his Allies.” Turning the tables on the Trinidadian private, De Boissiere smugly proclaimed: “John Mahamad has been hoisted with his own petar.”

Mahamad’s ill-fated plan to discredit rival Muslims by accusing them of sedition was unusual, yet his strategic invocation of the language of loyalty and disloyalty was not. Using the mobilization for war as an opportunity to curry favor with elites, pursue mobility through military service, or settle old scores with bitter enemies, individuals across the region participated in the war effort for a host of pragmatic as well as patriotic reasons. For Mahamad and other ambitious BWIR recruits, the act of enlisting could provide social capital

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6 Leslie G. Harrison (Commandant, Jamaica War Contingent) to William Manning, January 25, 1915, File Folder 33/1916, Box 3-96 (1916), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

7 Typed file note by the Protector of Immigrants, May 16, 1916, File Folder 33/1916, Box 3-96 (1916), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago.

The phrase “hoist with one's own petar” means to be “injured by the device that you intended to use to injure others” and originates from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1602). The Phrase Finder, [http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/hoist%20by%20your%20own%20petard.html, accessed July 31, 2011]
and unprecedented access to colonial administrators, even if that access did not always secure the desired outcome.

To date, scholarly accounts of military mobilization in the British Caribbean have paid insufficient attention to the role of individuals like John Mahamad, who were born in India, migrated to the region as indentured laborers, and spoke limited English. Likewise, the rich interdisciplinary literature on East Indian activism in the region has focused on the dramatic clashes between indentured workers and colonial agents in the nineteenth-century or the rise of social, religious, and political movements after the abolition of indentureship in 1917, leaving the World War I era relatively unexamined. As a result, scholars have prematurely concluded that East Indians remained “isolated and largely unaffected by the value system of the wider society” before 1917. By broadening the scope of inquiry during the war years to include East Indian immigrants and other marginalized groups, we can begin to construct a more comprehensive account of military mobilization, and we can challenge prevailing assumptions about how elite and subaltern actors responded to this unprecedented moment of civic activism.

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8 By the outbreak of the Great War, approximately forty-six percent of the East Indian population in Trinidad had been born in India. The remaining fifty-four percent of the Indian population was born in Trinidad. Census of the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago, 1911 (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Government Printing Office, 1913), 12

For examples of histories that omit the role of East Indian volunteers, and the East Indian community more broadly, in the war effort, see Herbert G. De Lisser, Jamaica and the Great War (Jamaica: Gleaner, 1917); Frank Cundall, Jamaica's Part in the Great War, 1915-1918 (London: IOJ, by the West India Commission, 1925); Captain A.A. Cipriani, Twenty-five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in the Great War 1914-1918 (Port of Spain: Trinidad Publishing Co., 1940), Sir Charles Lucas, ed., The Empire At War, Volume II (Humphrey Milford: Oxford University Press, 1923)

This chapter chronicles the regional recruitment campaign for the BWIR, with a particular focus on the political discourses, policies, and practices that defined military mobilization across the British West Indies. Given the limited financial and organizational resources of the colonial state in even the largest West Indian territories, the massive task of recruiting, training, and deploying thousands of men for overseas military service hinged on the unpaid labor of civilian women, men, and children. Throughout the region, fresh-faced Boy Scouts paraded at patriotic fundraising events, estate laborers and cattle pen workers donated money from their merger paychecks to buttress war relief funds, local Red Cross nurses captivated audiences at recruitment rallies, rural clergymen preached the gospel of military service, primary school teachers offered free evening literacy classes for military-aged men, and women from all classes sewed clothing and other "comforts" for the volunteers. By scrutinizing the regional dynamics of recruitment, rather than analyzing the recruitment process for each British Caribbean colony in isolation, this chapter demonstrates how the fevered campaign to recruit men for the BWIR between 1915 and 1918 added new importance to the core imperial ideals of loyalty, mutual obligation, interracial fraternity, and devotion to the monarch, while simultaneously prompting West Indians from diverse racial, colour, and class backgrounds to reassess their relationship to the metropole and their fellow colonial subjects.

Studying this moment of amplified civic engagement and popular mobilization, historians have documented how racialized notions of martial fitness and deeply-entrenched colour/class hierarchies “adversely influenced recruiting decisions and policies.”10 After the

War Office authorized the formation of a West Indian regiment in May 1915, Glenford Howe argues, “the contradictions inherent in the plan to have contingents composed of the multiplicity of classes and ethnic groups in the region surfaced.” The “social divisions between whites, coloureds, and blacks,” he writes, “immediately became a major issue.”

Yet narrating the story of military mobilization as a process defined by contestation between three racial groups—whites, coloureds, and blacks—distorts the social landscape, which included thousands of free and indentured East Indians as well as smaller communities of ethnic minorities from China and the Levant. Moreover, a myopic focus on interracial conflict between whites, coloureds, and blacks hinders us from understanding the intersectional nature of social categories in the region, where locally-defined racial and ethnic identities were profoundly shaped by colour, class, lineage, education, and religion.

Instead of viewing whites, coloureds, blacks, and East Indians as discrete, politically unified constituencies, this chapter reveals how military mobilization spurred intense intraracial debates, disagreements, and clashes as well as interracial rifts. As John Mahamad’s failed gambit illustrates, accusations of sedition and disloyalty were often exchanged between rivals who shared a common cultural background and social location, rather than lodged against members of other racial or ethnic groups. Tracing the countercurrents of inclusion and exclusion that marked this dynamic period, I begin by


11 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 48

12 For an overview of the role of indentured immigrants in the British Caribbean colonies, see Walter Look-Lai, Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993)
analyzing the protracted negotiations to develop a framework for military mobilization. Then, turning to the regional recruitment drive, I interrogate the martial discourses that permeated BWIR recruitment rallies and spurred tens of thousands of men to answer the call for volunteers. In the final sections of the chapter, I examine popular and elite resistance to the BWIR, including private efforts in British Honduras, Barbados, and Trinidad to create separate military contingents for volunteers from the “better classes” of whites and coloureds.

This chapter draws upon a rich vein of unpublished and published sources, including: memoirs, newspaper accounts, military recruitment posters, government correspondence, speeches, and statistical data on soldiers and rejected volunteers. It also incorporates rich personal accounts about the recruitment process from two previously untapped collections produced by or in conjunction with Jamaican women and men in the 1950s and 1970s.13 These remarkable collections—which include 89 oral histories and 312 written reflections from elderly Jamaicans, including at least nine BWIR veterans—allow us to understand better the personal motivations that led men to enlist as well as the bureaucratic contours of the recruitment process.

13 The “Jamaica Memories” collection, housed at the Jamaica Archives, contains original copies of 312 letters written to the Daily Gleaner as a part of an island-wide contest in November 1959. For the contest, the Gleaner asked readers to submit their memories about life in Jamaica fifty years earlier. The newspaper received 312 submissions in total. The second collection, “Life in Jamaica in the Early Twentieth Century: A Presentation of Ninety Oral Accounts,” contains eighty-nine transcribed interviews with elderly Jamaicans conducted between 1973-1975 under the direction of Jamaican historian and novelist, Erna Brodber. This collection is presently housed at the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies at the University of the West Indies-Mona. To date, scholarly accounts of the BWIR have not drawn upon either one of these extensive collections.
“We have to face the colour difficulty”: Setting the Terms for Military Mobilization

The War Office officially authorized the creation of a West Indian contingent in May 1915; however, the exact size, composition, and organization of His Majesty’s new military unit remained undefined and open for negotiation. As a result, despite the enthusiastic response to the War Office’s announcement, several vital questions about the nascent contingent had to be settled before recruitment could officially commence. Would the BWIR include volunteers from every colony in the British Caribbean or would the regiment solely welcome men from the region’s larger territories? Who would spearhead, finance, and administer the local recruitment process: colonial officials, private citizens, or military authorities? And most centrally, how many new soldiers did military boosters intend to recruit and what would be the criteria to serve?

Metropolitan officials and administrators in the West Indies confronted these questions during the summer of 1915 as they sought to define what role West Indian troops would play in the imperial war effort and the specific terms that would dictate their participation. Unlike the spirited ten-month campaign that culminated with the creation of the BWIR, the negotiations to construct an institutional framework for military mobilization took place among a small cadre of British officials in London and the colonies. Excluded from the official discussions—which unfolded through confidential letters and private telegrams—military boosters, would-be volunteers, and local reformers in the West Indies

14 Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, July 20, 1915, CO 318/336, file 33039, National Archives of the United Kingdom

15 War Office to Secretary of State, Colonial Office, May 19, 1915, CO 137/712, National Archives of the United Kingdom
were forced to wait for news from appointed officials rather than registering their own demands concerning the nascent contingent. Yet the incessant clamor for updates and action by the local press and interested observers provided a charged atmosphere for bureaucratic debates within the colonial administration.

The negotiations to fix the terms of the BWIR reignited the tug-of-war among the Colonial Office, Army Council, and War Office. On one side, the Army Council and War Office maneuvered to minimize their financial and logistical contributions to the BWIR. In a letter to the Colonial Office, the Army Council endorsed the idea to form a single West Indian contingent but stressed that the new regional unit would function as a “separate Contingent” rather than a regular British Army unit. By funneling West Indian volunteers into a colonial contingent instead of the British Army, explained clerk B.B. Cubbitt candidly, the Army Council sought to prevent BWIR soldiers from claiming “all of the emoluments of a British soldier.” Furthermore, the Army Council recommended that the local governments in the colonies should provide funding for non-effective charges such as separation allowances and soldiers’ pensions as well as pay for each soldier’s passage to England, including all meals during the voyage.16 Finally, the Council proposed that BWIR soldiers

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16 Separation allowances were designed to “provide for the maintenance of the family of the soldier when he is unavoidably separated from them by the exigencies of the public service, or to assist in maintaining the dependants of the soldier, other than wives and children, in the same degree of comfort as they enjoyed” prior to his enlistment. Until December 1917, soldiers who applied for separation allowances for their dependants were required to make a weekly allotment from their pay to contribute toward the separation allowance and the government would contribute the balance. Separation allowance payments were determined by the soldier’s rank, number of dependants, and place of residence. War Office, Regulations for the Issue of Separation Allowance and Allocations of Pay During the Present War (London: HMSO, 1915), 5
should not be eligible for bonus proficiency pay, although they consented to compensating West Indian soldiers at “British rates” while on active duty.17

On the other side, the Colonial Office pushed military authorities to use imperial funds to cover most expenses for the BWIR rather than raiding the coffers of the colonies. In a letter to the War Office in early July 1915, Secretary of State for the Colonies Bonar Law explained that he would feel "considerable difficulty" asking the colonies to assume full responsibility for separation allowances, pensions, and all other non-effective charges, given the limited financial resources in the West Indies and the open-ended "indefinite character" of such expenses. Moreover, he insisted West Indian volunteers receive the same pay as British troops, writing that the BWIR "must be paid at British rates." However, as a compromise, Law stated he would be willing to ask the colonies to contribute a mutually-agreed upon proportion of the non-effective charges on an annual basis. All separation allowances and pensions for soldiers who resided in the West Indies, he further conceded, could be paid at the rate set for the West India Regiment, instead of the higher scale for British soldiers. Law also made it clear that "all other expenses in connection with the contingent should fall on Imperial funds," including the "cost of eventual repatriation to the respective Colonies of recruitment."18

In response to the Colonial Office’s demands, the War Office consented to pay BWIR soldiers on the same scale as their British counterparts, with privates earning one shilling per day and non-commissioned officers receiving between 1s 8d and 4s daily.

17 B. B. Cubbitt, War Office to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, June 25, 1915, CO 318/336, file 29508, National Archives of the United Kingdom

18 H. J. Read (for Bonar Law) to Secretary of State for War, War Office, July 7, 1915, CO 318/336, file 29508, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Depending on their rank and years of service, commissioned officers in the BWIR could earn up to 16s per day. After two years of service, West Indian servicemen would also qualify for proficiency pay in addition to their standard daily wage. Furthermore, in a July 17th letter to the Colonial Office, the War Office stated that disability pension rates for BWIR soldiers would be on par with European regiments and that widows of BWIR soldiers could claim a one-time payment equal to the deceased soldier’s annual pay. Despite these significant concessions, BWIR soldiers would not receive all of the benefits provided to British Army troops. In keeping with Bonar Law’s suggestion, the War Office mandated that separation allowances for the dependents of BWIR soldiers would be calculated using the rates for the West India Regiment instead of those for the British Army. Accordingly, the wife of a BWIR private would receive a separation allowance of only 11s. 1d. per week rather than the 12s. 6d. allotted to the wife of a British Army private. Further still, only widows of BWIR soldiers of “pure European parentage” could apply for full British Army pension benefits. In a revised funding proposal for the BWIR, the War Office insisted that colonial governments in the West Indies pay the costs of travel to England for their respective contingents and also a portion of the non-effective charges. Once in England, however, imperial military

\[19\] For the various separation allowance scales for the British Army, see War Office, *Regulations for the Issue of Separation Allowance and Allotments of Pay During the Present War* (London: HMSO, 1915), p.46; For the various separation allowance scales for the West India Regiment, see B.B. Cubbitt, War Office to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, July 17, 1915, CO 318/336, file 29508, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\[20\] The final terms regarding the colonies’ contribution to separation allowances would not be fixed until September 1915. See E.R. Darnley (Colonial Office) to J.B. Crosland (War Office), September 14, 1915, CO 318/336, file 43957, National Archives of the United Kingdom; A. Pickard (War Office) to E.R. Darnley (Colonial Office), September 22, 1915, CO 318/336, file 43957, National Archives of the United Kingdom

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authorities would assume all costs for the soldiers and combine the individual island contingents to form battalions of the BWIR.  

Officials at the Colonial Office were generally pleased with the terms outlined in War Office's July 17th missive, which incorporated most of Bonar Law's recommendations. Yet at least one staff member worried that the terms for the BWIR did not provide enough compensation for white volunteers and their kin. Clerk Greg Grindle, in a last-ditch effort to win more favorable pensions for white BWIR soldiers and their families, urged his colleagues to revise the BWIR pension provisions to ensure that the "widows of Europeans" who lived in the colonies would receive British Army pension rates, rather than the agreed-upon lower pension rates for BWIR soldiers. Grindle acknowledged that any effort to create a two-tiered pension system based on race might fuel "a little colour excitement" in the colonies, but he reasoned that the "general enthusiasm about the contingent" would mitigate widespread unrest. "We have to face the colour difficulty in the end and we had better face it boldly to begin with," Grindle argued in an internal minute. "We have done so over the commissioned ranks and so far no harm has ensued from the rejection of coloured applicants for commissions."

If Grindle seemed remarkably cavalier about the potential fall-out from his pension proposal, he also acknowledged that prospective soldiers in the West Indies were losing patience with the pace of negotiations. "There is an idea" in the colonies, he reported, "that the delay is due to [a] reluctance to accept coloured men, and Jamaica is getting excited and

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21 B. B. Cubbitt, War Office to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, July 17, 1915, CO 318/336, file 29508, National Archives of the United Kingdom

22 Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, July 20, 1915, CO 318/336, file 33039, National Archives of the United Kingdom
the Barbados would-be recruits will soon be out of hand." In fact, as Grindle predicted, would-be volunteers and local observers in the colonies grew increasingly angry about the sluggish pace of military mobilization. In Jamaica, one local paper described how a mood of “impulsive suspicion” pervaded the island as local commentators stridently condemned the “alleged coldness of the Governor and the War Office towards the idea of our Contingent.”

In Trinidad, military boosters directed their ire at the local government rather than imperial officials in London, accusing the colonial officials of “bungling” the campaign to organize a West Indian contingent. “There is no haggling over the statement that there is utter disgust and unfortunate lack of confidence in our government in regards to the vexed question of a contingent from Trinidad,” one anonymous letter writer seethed. “If the authorities are jealous of the bravery and willingness of our men, why do they not don uniform and go out to the firing line?” Likewise, the editors of the *Port of Spain Gazette* reported that an unnamed “responsible citizen” in the colony predicted that the local officials “would do their utmost to prevent a contingent [from] being sent from Trinidad at all” in order to cover up their own mishandling of military recruitment. Seeking to quell popular disaffection over the contingent question, at least two governors in the region, George Basil Haddon-Smith of

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23 Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, July 20, 1915, CO 318/336, file 33039, National Archives of the United Kingdom

24 The *Jamaica Times*, August 7, 1915, 14

25 The Proposed Trinidad Contingent,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, June 25, 1915, 3

26 “The Government and the People,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, June 25, 1915, 2

27 “The Proposed Trinidad Contingent,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, June 25, 1915, 3
the Windward Islands and William Manning of Jamaica, wrote to the Colonial Office during the summer of 1915 to demand that recruitment for the BWIR commence immediately.\(^{28}\)

The Colonial Office officially circulated the terms for the BWIR to governors in the West Indies via telegram on July 21, 1915, and then turned its full attention to the question of recruitment.\(^{29}\) In comparison to the tense exchange regarding the financial provision of the BWIR, there was little disagreement in official circles about the projected size of the regiment. Imperial authorities and government officials in the colonies all initially imagined the BWIR as a modest unit comprised of 950 to 1,500 servicemen. In June 1915, Governor William Manning estimated Jamaica could recruit up to 500 volunteers for military service, while Barbados, Trinidad, and British Guiana would together supply another 1,000 recruits.\(^{30}\) That same month, the Combined Court of British Guiana, the colony’s main legislative body, voted to recruit at least 100 local men for military service, while Governor George Le Hunte affirmed during a special meeting of the Legislative Council that Trinidad could likely supply 300 to 400 soldiers.\(^{31}\) For its part, the Colonial Office projected that the total strength of the BWIR would be roughly 950 to 1,150 men—350 men shy of Manning’s estimate of 1,500

\(^{28}\) George Basil Haddon-Smith to Lewis Harcourt, June 7, 1915, CO 321/281, file 26449, National Archives of the United Kingdom; William Manning to Greg Grindle, August 5, 1915, CO 137/710, file 36649, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\(^{29}\) For a draft of the telegram, see Bonar Law to the West Indian Colonies, July 20, 1915, CO 318/336, file 33039, National Archives of the United Kingdom. The Governor of the Windward Islands stated that he received the official telegram on July 21, 1915. “The West Indian Contingent,” \textit{Daily Argosy}, August 1, 1915, 5

\(^{30}\) “West Indians Volunteer,” \textit{New York Times}, June 4, 1915, p.4; In a speech to the Legislative Council, Governor George Le Hunte of Trinidad stated that Governor Manning approached him about raising a battalion of 1,200 soldiers for the BWIR, which is lower than the figure quoted by the \textit{New York Times}. “The Legislature,” \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, June 26, 1915, 5

\(^{31}\) “The Legislature,” \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, June 26, 1915, 5; Lucas, ed, \textit{The Empire at War}, 417
volunteers—though it acknowledged that preliminary estimates “would probably be exceeded when recruiting started.” And whereas Manning proposed that the BWIR enlist only volunteers from the most populous Caribbean colonies—namely Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and British Guiana—the Colonial Office anticipated that at least 50 volunteers from the Windward Islands would sign on as well.  

The initial recruitment targets for the BWIR, as the press frequently pointed out, were remarkably conservative given that approximately 2.1 million inhabitants lived in Britain’s Caribbean colonies in 1915. Jamaica, the region’s most populous colony, boasted a population of over 830,000 people, of which roughly 433,000 were men; yet Governor Manning anticipated recruiting from the island only 500 volunteers for military service. Frustrated by the governor’s limited recruitment plans, the editors of the *Gleaner* reasoned that Jamaica should contribute at least 1,000 soldiers to the BWIR, reminding readers that the island’s population surpassed that of Trinidad, Barbados, and British Guiana combined. Moreover, the editors pointed out, citing enlistment figures from the French Caribbean colonies, Martinique had supplied “between four to five thousand soldiers” for the French Army during the first year of the war from a local population of 193,000 inhabitants. Even though the editors acknowledged that most Martiniquan soldiers were conscripts, they insisted that the low recruitment targets for the BWIR caused the British Caribbean colonies to “show up somewhat poorly” compared to “the little French West Indian Island.”

32 H. J. Read to Secretary of State for War, War Office, July 7, 1915, CO 318/336, file 33039, National Archives of the United Kingdom


34 These figures are taken from the 1911 official census, cited in Ford and Cundall, *The Handbook of Jamaica for 1916*, 37
rousing call for action, the editors declared, “It will thus be seen that Jamaica, from the point of view of population, ought to be able to contribute twice as many men as the other three colonies put together….We have had no reason yet given why a thousand men should not go from Jamaica, and until that reason is given we shall continue to advocate the sending of a thousand men.”  

In Trinidad, the editors of the *Port of Spain Gazette* similarly questioned why a colony of over 300,000 inhabitants, including an estimated 25,000 military-aged men, should be expected to muster only a paltry 450 recruits. The editors pushed its readers to reassess the colony’s contribution to the imperial war effort, declaring that “at least ten times the 450 men called for by the Government” should come forward. “[T]he question may well be asked now,” they wrote, “have we lived up to what we should have done?”  

For at least one well-connected commentator, the low recruitment targets for the BWIR reflected a lack of initiative by the colonial government rather than public indifference to the war. In his post-war history of the BWIR, Arthur Ciprani claimed that high-ranking members of the colonial administration—including the governor and the Inspector-General of the Constabulary—simply believed that local men “could not be got” for the contingent.  

While public commentators in the larger West Indian colonies lobbied for more ambitious recruitment targets during the summer of 1915, local leaders in the Bahamas, British Honduras, and eastern Caribbean labored to convince imperial officials that the

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35 “The Men and the War,” *Daily Gleaner*, June 5, 1915, 8

36 “Recruiting in Trinidad,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, September 1, 1915, 11

37 Captain A.A. Cipriani, *Twenty-five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in the Great War 1914-1918* (Port of Spain: Trinidad Publishing Co., 1940), 9
smaller territories could successfully recruit, train, and mobilize any men for the BWIR. Remarkably, neither Governor Manning nor the Colonial Office included recruitment projections for the Bahamas, British Honduras, or the Leeward Islands in their proposals for the War Office, and Manning further ignored the Windward Islands as well. Not content to sit on the sidelines of the regional recruitment movement—and in the shadow of the larger colonies of Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and British Guiana—colonial officials in the smaller colonies submitted their own proposals to the War Office between July and September 1915 and won approval to contribute troops to the BWIR. “We have clamoured for recognition. Our claims have been granted,” proclaimed the editors of the West Indian after the War Office accepted Grenada’s offer of men for the BWIR. “We stand today charged with a great responsibility in the full gaze of other West Indian colonies who have in the past and in the present ignored our claims—and the West Indies stand in the full gaze of the self-governing colonies. It is ours now to prove that a worthy sister, a Dominion to be, is knocking at the door of Imperial Councils; it is ours to prove the sterling British ring of our natures.”

The seemingly anodyne exchange about BWIR recruitment targets served as a proxy for more fractious debates regarding colonial standing and recognition. While the War Office was content to accept 1,500 soldiers from the West Indies—a symbolic yet militarily negligible contribution that could staff only one field battalion, military enthusiasts in the West Indies demanded to make a “fair contribution” to the war effort in “the shape of men to join the colours.” In doing so, they insisted that men in the West Indies, like fellow

38 “Britain’s Myriad Voices Call,” The West Indian, July 24, 1915, 4
39 “Recruiting in Trinidad,” Port of Spain Gazette, September 1, 1915, 11
colonials in India, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Canada, and elsewhere, should be full and equal participants in the imperial war effort, including shouldering the burden of military service. Yet, in the midst of their calls for full military mobilization, military boosters increasingly professed that only certain groups of men should enjoy the privilege of fighting for the Empire and specifically argued that the region’s substantial population of East Indian men should not be eligible for the BWIR.

Local discussions about East Indians’ military fitness provide new evidence that metropolitan theories about martial races circulated to the far reaches of the Empire, shaping the ways in which elites in the British Caribbean viewed local men of Indian descent. Although the region’s newspapers frequently celebrated the battlefield exploits of the Indian soldiers, they argued that Indian immigrants in the Caribbean lacked the martial abilities of other Indian “races.” ³⁴⁰ In one particularly revealing editorial, published in Jamaica in June 1915, the editors of the *Daily Gleaner* roundly discounted the soldering potential of East Indians and predicted that “very few [or] perhaps none” would be recruited for military service. East Indian “coolies” in Trinidad, the editors charged, did “not belong to the fighting races of India” and lacked basic physical strength. For similar reasons, they also concluded that none of Jamaica’s 20,000 East Indians would be recruited for the BWIR, even though several East Indian men had come forward to volunteer for the local defense force as early as August 1914. All 70,000 East Indians in British Guiana were also deemed unfit for the

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³⁴⁰ For coverage of Indian soldiers in the Great War, see “Our Fine Indian Troops,” *Jamaica Times*, September 5, 1914, 6
BWIR, along with the colony’s indigenous Arawak and Carib peoples, who, the editors claimed, lived in a “primitive condition.”  

Two months later, the War Office privately confirmed what the editors of the *Gleaner* had publicly speculated: Military officials would not recruit East Indian men to join the BWIR. In response to a query from the governor of British Guiana about enlisting East Indians, War Office staffer B.B. Cubbitt explained that Indian troops were “already so numerously represented in the fighting forces of the Empire” that the Army Council did not find it “desirable to make any special appeal or to encourage the enlistment of men of that race in a Contingent of West Indians.” The War Office’s odd claim—namely that men of Indian descent in the Caribbean colonies should not be encouraged to enlist because of the abundance of Indian men serving in other units of the British armed forces—confused officials at the Colonial Office, who questioned whether the War Office had completely banned East Indian volunteers or simply mandated that no further recruitment would be necessary. Hoping that the War Office would allow East Indians who had already volunteered to serve, clerk R.A. Wiseman shared a report from a visiting doctor who affirmed East Indians’ potential as soldiers. Dr. Mirett not only “spoke highly of their physique,” Wiseman reported, but also boasted that East Indians were “fairly easy for white men to manage” and were “excellent material for soldiers.”


42. B. B. Cubbitt to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies (Colonial Office), August 16, 1915, CO 318/336, file 37888, National Archives of the United Kingdom

43. Handwritten note by R. A. Wiseman, August 17, 1915, CO 318/336, file 37888, National Archives of the United Kingdom
A clear statement of policy towards East Indian volunteers would emerge only in October 1915, after East Indian recruits from Trinidad sailed to England with the BWIR. Unsure of how to interpret the War Office’s August 1915 statement on East Indian recruitment, the Colonial Office had only communicated the curious edict to the governor of British Guiana. Meanwhile, in Trinidad, military authorities remained completely unaware of the War Office’s directive and enlisted 38 men of Indian descent, including provocateur John Mahamad, in their first contingent of BWIR soldiers. When the 38 volunteers disembarked in England, military authorities in the metropole summarily discharged the soldiers and sent them home via Jamaica, where Mahamad wrote his infamous letter to Governor Manning in January 1916. After discharging John Mahamad and his comrades, the War Office clarified its position on East Indian recruitment in a second letter to the Colonial Office. Explaining their decision to discharge the East Indian soldiers, the War Office claimed the men were all born in India and, therefore, were viewed as “unsuitable and unlikely to become efficient soldiers, on account of their ignorance of the English language and of difficulties in connection with food.” Yet, in a slight departure from the August directive, the War Office conceded it had “no objection to the inclusion of Creoles of East Indian descent,” as long as they were “British subjects born in the Colonies, able to speak English, and prepared to accept the rations usually issued to British troops.”

There is no evidence, however, that any British Caribbean colony accepted East Indian volunteers after the 38 recruits from Trinidad were rejected and shipped home.

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44 B. B. Cubitt to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, October 25, 1915, CO 318/336, file 49130, National Archives of the United Kingdom

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If the War and Colonial Offices played a decisive role in defining the parameters of military mobilization in the British West Indies, then colonial governors ensured that the actual process of recruiting men for the BWIR remained firmly in local hands. During the summer of 1915, governors throughout the region established local recruitment committees to administer and supervise official recruitment drives. With remarkable consistency, governors appointed members of the local white (and coloured) upper classes to serve on these committees, solidifying elite control over the military mobilization effort. In Jamaica, for example, the inaugural nine-member War Contingent Committee included “well known gentlemen” such as businessman William Wilson, solicitor W. Baggett Gray, journalist Michael de Cordova as well as Brigadier General L.S. Blackden and Governor Manning.45 Likewise in Barbados, Governor Leslie Probyn handpicked wealthy Bridgetown merchants and high-ranking members of the colonial government to serve on the island’s official recruiting committee.46 While the recruitment committees in Trinidad, British Honduras, and Grenada were comprised primarily of prominent businessmen, military officials, and planters, they also included middle-class activists who had publicly called for political and social reforms. Governor Haddon-Smith appointed coloured lawyer C. F. P. Renwick, co-founder of the progressive West Indian newspaper, to Grenada’s eight-member recruitment committee, on which Renwick served as the group’s inaugural Honorable Secretary. H.H.

45 “The Jamaica Contingent,” Port of Spain Gazette, June 30, 1915, 11. The remaining members of the inaugural War Contingent Committee were Frank Jackson, John Barclay, S. Couper, and J. Tapley. John Barclay was the Secretary of the Jamaica Agricultural Society and S. Couper served as the Director of the Government Railway. Joseph C. Ford and Frank Cundall, The Handbook of Jamaica for 1919 (Kingston: Government Printing Office, 1919), 592

46 For a list of the members appointed to the inaugural Barbados Recruiting Committee in August 1915, see “Report of the Recruiting Committee,” August 11, 1917, CO 28/292, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Vernon, a Creole member of the Belize Town Board and former member of the reformist People’s Committee of 1907, served as the treasurer of the Contingent Committee in British Honduras. Most importantly, in a decision that would lay the groundwork for profound social and political changes on the homefront, the acting governor of Trinidad appointed Arthur A. Cipriani, the colony’s most prominent military booster, to the colony’s four-member recruiting committee in the summer of 1915.

“Missionaries of our Manhood”: Martial Discourse and Regional Recruiting Practices

In many respects, Arthur Cipriani’s appointment to Trinidad’s official recruiting committee was a risky decision for colonial authorities. Although the French Creole horse trainer and cocoa planter was a leading champion of the contingent movement and held positions in several elite social organizations, his incessant activity on behalf of the war effort frequently brought him into conflict with agents of the colonial state. In December 1914, after organizing a Christmas sweepstakes that netted $1,725 for the Trinidad War Fund, Cipriani became the first person in the colony’s history to be charged with organizing an illegal lottery. Forced to appear before the City Police Court, Cipriani pleaded guilty to the lesser offense of “publishing a proposal for a lottery” to avoid trial. The presiding magistrate, moved by the patriotic purposes that motivated Cipriani’s fundraising scheme, simply reprimanded the defendant and elected not to issue a fine. Buoyed by the judge’s sympathetic ruling, Cipriani publicly announced the results of the lottery to subscribers in

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47 “Just a Little Bunch of Islands in the Sea,” The West Indian, September 19, 1915, 4
Trinidad and Jamaica, submitting detailed reports of the winnings less than two weeks after leaving court.\textsuperscript{48}

Cipriani’s highly-publicized brush with the law was a harbinger for his public skirmishes with colonial administrators during the first half of 1915. Two months after his court appearance, Cipriani condemned colonial officials and members of the clergy for trying to ban public Carnival festivities because of the war effort. Tackling the matter in February 1915, Cipriani chastised the elite for holding elaborate private pre-Lenten celebrations, while trying to stop members of the working class from masquerading in the street on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. “Let the better classes show their sympathy with the nation” by forgoing their nightly revelry, he proposed in a letter to the editor, and then “the man in the street will easily be convinced that he can, this once, forgo carnival.”\textsuperscript{49} After temporarily silencing the anti-Carnival coterie, the emboldened reformer then focused his ire on the colonial government for its lethargic response to military mobilization. In one particularly scathing letter to the \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, published in June 1915, Cipriani fumed: “Trinidad has been again forced into the humiliating position of ‘follow my leader’ by the local government and those responsible for the furthering of her interests.”\textsuperscript{50} Following his outburst, Cipriani urged the \textit{Port of Spain Gazette} to compile a list of potential volunteers rather than waiting on the colonial government to spearhead the military mobilization effort. That same month, Cipriani launched an unauthorized, one-man campaign to recruit a

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\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, February 7, 1915, quoted in Errol G. Hill, “Calypso and War,” \textit{Black American Literature Forum}, Vol. 23, No.1 (Spring 1989), 70

\textsuperscript{50} “Help for the Motherland,” \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, June 2, 1915, 11
\end{flushleft}
contingent of Trinidadian Red Cross nurses for the front; however, he had to abandon the quixotic initiative when the War Office insisted it would accept only certified nurses with three years’ experience.51

Despite his previous conflicts with the colonial government, Cipriani initially embraced his position on the recruiting committee, describing the coveted appointment as an “honor.”52 In early August 1915, ten months after he first proposed the idea of a West Indian contingent in a letter to Colonel Ducros, Cipriani organized the inaugural recruitment rally for the Trinidad Contingent of the BWIR. Held at Marine Square in Port of Spain and chaired by the city’s mayor, the rally provided Cipriani with a grand stage to solidify his position as a populist champion. “I am one of the people,” he declared in a speech before the massive rally crowd. “I was born and bred in this colony, was reared in it from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. I have shared your sorrows and your joys, and I appeal to you today in the name of the King to enlist.” To underscore his egalitarian stance further, he invited all men—“irrespective of class, colour, or creed”—to step forward for military service.53 By any measure, Cipriani’s recruitment rally was a remarkable success. Less than 24 hours after the gathering, he later boasted, the first contingent of 450 men had come forward and enlisted to represent Trinidad and Tobago in His Majesty’s armed forces.54

51 “Mr A. A. Cipriani and Red Cross Nurses,” Port of Spain Gazette, September 5, 1915, 6
52 Captain A. A. Cipriani, Twenty-five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in the Great War 1914-1918, 9
54 Captain A. A. Cipriani, Twenty-five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in the Great War 1914-1918, 9
Throughout the West Indies, BWIR recruitment rallies functioned as festive community events that combined the slogans and speakers of elite patriotic fundraisers with the boisterous atmosphere and rowdy call-and-response banter of a Caribbean market. Military boosters officially announced the location and date of upcoming rallies through newspaper advertisements, professionally printed circulars, and posted placards. Sunday sermons and circuits of neighborhood gossip carried the news to unlettered men, women, and children throughout the community.\(^{55}\) Describing how up-to-date information about recruitment circulated through dense social networks and official public notices, one BWIR volunteer from rural Point Hill, Jamaica, insisted simply: “It was established man. The war cry was established.”\(^{56}\)

On the day of the rally, local women painstakingly decorated the selected venue with flowers, ribbons, bunting, and banners. When a rally was held on a weekday afternoon, school leaders dismissed excited students at lunchtime, and local business-owners shuttered their doors hours early in anticipation of the big event. At "monster recruiting rallies" with hundreds or thousands of attendees, the band of the local militia or police force paraded near the rally site to drum up additional enthusiasm. By the time the scheduled speakers assembled on the wooden platform to start the rally, the audience was brimming with men, women, and children from diverse class and colour backgrounds.

\(^{55}\) Commenting on the central role that ministers played in circulating information, one BWIR soldier from rural Jamaica recalled: “Ministers on Sunday tell them [the news]. Ministers on the pulpit Sunday tell them. And when the Minister tell them they believe what [the] Minister say. So if you even get a paper and read it and tell them, they say: ‘But the Minister never tell we so Sunday!’” “Life in Jamaica in the Early Twentieth Century: A Presentation of Ninety Oral Accounts” (unpublished transcripts housed at Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica), Volume: Parish of Trelawny, Respondent: 81TMa, “Mr. G.—Ex-Serviceman,” 21

Military service was restricted to men; however, military recruitment depended on the unpaid labor and moral authority of women. In his journalist account of Jamaica during the Great War, *Gleaner* editor Herbert DeLisser maintained that 1914 marked the first time in the history of the island that a large number of women "openly and gladly identified themselves with a public and patriotic movement."\(^{57}\) Indeed, while the initial campaign to garner the right to form a regional contingent was spearheaded by Cipriani and other elite men, much of the responsibility for recruiting and mobilizing men for each colony's BWIR contingent fell on the shoulders of women. Elite and middle-class women were pivotal in the planning, advertising, and staging of recruitment rallies. In fact two women, Anne Douglas and Mrs. Trefusis, organized one of the region's first recruitment meetings, held in Irish Town, Jamaica on October 14, 1914. Douglas and Trefusis later helped to establish an autonomous Women's Recruiting Committee.\(^{58}\)

Nicoletta Gullace has demonstrated how gendered notions of patriotism in wartime Britain "implicated women in defining the parameters of male citizenship, while endowing women's traditional domestic, maternal, and sexual roles with an openly expressed importance to the military state."\(^{59}\) As military recruiters sought to garner new recruits through appeals to manhood and moral suasion, women's intimate relationships with male partners, and the activities of the domestic sphere more broadly, became matters of national security. In the British West Indies, as in wartime Britain, military officials and their civilian

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\(^{57}\) DeLisser, *Jamaica and the Great War*, 70

\(^{58}\) DeLisser, *Jamaica and the Great War*, 69

\(^{59}\) Nicoletta F. Gullace, "White Feather and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War," *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2 (April, 1997), 183
partners targeted women as vital allies in the effort to procure suitable soldiers, insisting that women performed a patriotic duty by pressuring reluctant sons and boyfriends to enlist. One zealous female speaker in Antigua commanded women to “inspire the men with a zeal that would make them wish to give their life's blood for their country!”\(^{60}\) The *Gleaner* editorialized that women had the power to make men “do almost any thing they please,” and it was therefore their responsibility to “shame the men into greater patriotic activity.”\(^{61}\) The editors of the *Clarion* explicitly targeted working class women, using the recurring fictional character of Keziah Mimms. Writing in the working class Creole dialect of Belize Town, Keziah offered witty commentary on pressing issues of the day through a series of letters to her cousin Jane Biggs. In one letter, Keziah celebrates her son's new status as a soldier in the British Honduras Contingent of the BWIR, boasting “Ah…tenk de Lawd dat me son is a man an not ah slacka.”\(^{62}\)

Red Cross nurses Annie Douglas and A.E. Briscoe were tremendously popular—and highly effective—recruitment rally speakers because of their willingness to cajole and shame men who did not embrace their call for martial masculinity. Douglas in particular was (in)famous for ridiculing men who would not join the army by referring to them as “ladies” and taunting them with items of women's clothing. At a “monster recruiting meeting” attended by thousands in Montego Bay, Jamaica, Douglas called on men in the audience to form a Cavell platoon in honor of the martyred British nurse, Edith Cavell. She then announced, to great applause, that she brought a dress for any "slackers and shirkers" who did

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\(^{60}\) *The Antigua Sun*, August 25, 1915, 3, quoted in Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 53

\(^{61}\) “Women for the Cause!,” *Daily Gleaner*, May 17, 1917, p. 8

not step forward to volunteer. Speaking later on that day at another rally in St. James, Douglas announced that she brought a woman's skirt to put on any man who refused to volunteer for the BWIR. She reportedly held up the skirt during her speech and asked the men in the audience if they were prepared to don it, eliciting forceful shouts of “No!” and “Never!” At a meeting in Old Harbour, a port town west of Kingston, she declared that men could either proudly wave the Union Jack after enlisting or could don a handkerchief and "play the part of an old woman."

As the example of Annie Douglas makes clear, female military recruiters not only chastised reluctant volunteers, but also validated and affirmed the masculine virtue of men who did enlist. One particularly evocative image from the British Guiana Daily Argosy highlights how military recruiters invoked women’s moral authority to sanction military service and masculine self-sacrifice (see figure 3). In the 1915 drawing, the colony of British Guiana is rendered as a young indigenous woman who dutifully watches over her “sons” in the BWIR as they solemnly march off to war. In the foreground, a uniformed soldier kneels before the towering woman who, on behalf of the nation, imparts her blessing on the volunteer. Inverting familiar representations of stoic departing soldiers surrounded by crying wives and mothers, the image depicts an indigenous woman comforting a prostrate, tearful serviceman. As the soldier weeps, the serene indigenous woman gently touches his bowed head with her left hand, while firmly holding a stalk of sugarcane, the colony’s major export

63 "A Notable Day at Montego Bay," *Daily Gleaner*, November 17, 1915, 13

64 "The Great Recruiting Demonstration at Montego Bay," *Daily Gleaner*, November 18, 1915, 14

crop, with her right hand. Beneath the two figures, the artist included words of encouragement for BWIR troops, proclaiming: “Good Luck and God Bless You!”

Figure 3: “Guiana’s Sons,” *Daily Argosy*, September 19, 1915, p.5

Military recruiters also reminded women about the pecuniary benefits they could enjoy if their male relatives or partners enlisted. The wife of a BWIR private qualified for a separation allowance of 11s. 1d. per week, plus an additional 1s. 2d. per week for each dependent child. The spouse of a non-commissioned officer (NCO) above the rank of a
corporal was entitled to even more, garnering 13s. 5d. per week. Soldiers’ mothers and common-law domestic partners could also petition for separation allowances, as long as they proved that they had been financially dependent on the soldier for at least a year prior to his enlistment. Given that most women in the region eked out a living through domestic service or low wage agricultural work, the promise of a weekly separation allowance for the duration of the war provided a compelling material reason to support mobilization. A humorist in Trinidad brilliantly captured women’s pecuniary motives for supporting the recruitment campaign in a piece published in the *Port of Spain Gazette*. In a sketch entitled, “Inside the Recruiting Office,” a sergeant asks a woman if her husband wants to enlist. “Want to enlist! He’s got to enlist,” she quickly replies. Stating that she has four children to support, the woman asks the sergeant if she will receive a separation allowance. When the recruiter responds that she will garner 28s. 6d. per week, the woman exclaims: “Twenty-eight an’ six a week! ‘Nuff said. Rope him in.”

Appeals for military-aged men to volunteer to honor their sisters, wives, and mothers were only eclipsed by stirring calls to defend the “Mother Country” in her hour of need. Military recruitment posters and patriotic banners appealed to recruits' pride in the empire in general and respect for the King in particular by visually constructing military service as an imperial duty and a personal demonstration of loyalty. As Brian Moore and Michelle Johnson have convincingly shown, the cult of monarchy and empire reached its apex during the Great War and bridged elite and popular cultures in the British Caribbean. Therefore, it

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67 “Inside the Recruiting Office,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, September 30, 1915, 3
is not surprising that banners proclaiming “Fear God and Honour the King” or “Long Live the King” often greeted recruitment rally attendees in Jamaica. In the eastern Caribbean island of Dominica, one recruitment notice in the local newspaper boldly declared: “THE KING NEEDS YOU!” When asked why he joined the BWIR, one Barbadian veteran explained that the “island government told us that the king said all Englishmen must go to join the war.”

Similarly, all of the surviving recruitment posters for the Bahamas Contingent of the BWIR prominently displayed the image or name of George V, forging a symbolic link between military service and respect for the sovereign (see figure 4). These posters, which were printed by the Gleaner Company in Jamaica between 1915 and 1917, featured new slogans such as “Put yourself right with your King” as well as the more traditional invocation, “God Save the King.” Even in the sole poster without George V's portrait, the text of the poster recalled the King's Appeal of October 1915, declaring that "HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY KING GEORGE has called on men of his Empire, MEN OF EVERY CLASS, CREED AND COLOUR, to COME FORWARD TO FIGHT that the Empire may be saved and the foe may be well beaten" (see figure 5). The centrality of the monarch in military recruitment images in the West Indies stands in sharp contrast to the dominant use of military and familiar tropes in recruitment posters in Britain. Indeed, the

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68 Moore and Johnson, Neither Led Nor Driven, see Chapter 9


71 Simon Rogers, “There were no parades for us,” The Guardian, November 6, 2002 [http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2002/nov/06/britishidentity.military]
most iconic Great War recruiting poster in Britain featured Lord Kitchener's stern face and pointing finger hovering above the words "YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU," implying an obligation to the nation, not the sovereign.

Figure 4: Recruitment Poster for the Bahamas Contingent of the BWIR. The portrait at the top of the poster is of King George V. “Young man! Are you between 19 and 35? If you are your duty is clear. Enlist to-day. God save the King!,” 1915, POS-WWI –Gt. Brit, no. 266, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress
Figure 5: Recruitment Poster for the Bahamas Contingent of the BWIR. “Young men of the Bahamas. ... Enlist to-day,” POS-WWI –Gt. Brit, no. 263, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

If loyalty to King and Country did not inspire potential recruits to take up arms, then military recruiters and their civilian allies invoked the dreaded prospect of German rule in the Caribbean. At a recruiting meeting in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, T. L. Roxburgh bluntly informed
volunteers that they would not be fighting to save England, but rather, to "protect their own homes from German despotism." During a special UNIA meeting for departing soldiers, Marcus Garvey recounted stories of German atrocities in Togoland, West Africa, and warned the men that Germany was plotting a global “war against the races.” Garvey contended that German imperialists, unlike their British counterparts, willfully sought out every opportunity to oppress and degrade their Africans subjects.

The most sensationalist military boosters associated a German victory with the specter of slavery, crafting a particularly evocative (and cynical) image for men and women who were three generations removed from bondage. Speaking at a recruiting rally in Duan Vale, schoolmaster L. N. Welsh insisted that without the protection of the British navy, Jamaicans “would be more or less slaves” forced to live under a tyrannical German government. At the same meeting, Rev. A. G. Eccleston ominously predicted that Jamaicans would suffer like the “Israelites of old in bondage in Egypt” if Germany triumphed over Britain. In the poem, "The Motherland's Call," Sydney Moxsy portended that a German victory would result in complete devastation and slavery for the West Indies. Published in the Gleaner in late November 1915, the emotionally charged recruiting poem contended that England's ruthless foes threatened not only the Mother Country but her vulnerable subjects in the empire as well. If black men failed to demonstrate that "brave

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73 “Meeting Held," Daily Gleaner, October 25, 1915, 14
74 “The Call of the Empire for More Recruits," Daily Gleaner, December 17, 1915, 11
75 “The Call of the Empire for More Recruits," Daily Gleaner, December 17, 1915, 11
hearts may beat beneath a coloured skin," all Jamaicans would suffer because of their cowardice. The final stanza of the poem warned:

That land is doomed which breeds a coward race,
Who money seek, but never dare to face
Their Country's foes; who fain at home would hide,
When need arises they should stem the tide,
That threatens their land o'erwhelm, sweep all away,
Or make them slaves beneath a foreign sway.\textsuperscript{76}

Even the governor of Jamaica contended that a German victory would result in "slavery more serious, more degrading, than anything known to history."\textsuperscript{77}

Calypsonians, the region's quick-witted vernacular bards, also mocked men who refused to defend their homes from “German invasion,” retooling the language of martial masculinity for popular consumption.\textsuperscript{78} In Trinidad, one of the most popular calypsos during the war years humorously contrasted the bravery of Trinidadians who rallied to protect the island from German invaders with the cowardice of men who remained at home:

\begin{verbatim}
When de rumour went roun' de town
Dat de Germans were coming to blow de town
Some, like cowards, remained at home
All de brave run down with stones
Some run with bottles, some run with bricks
Some run with bamboo, some run with sticks
Old Lady Semper run down with she old big po' chambe [chamber pot]
Sans Humanité

Now listen to what I gotta say
Trinidadian boys gotta rule the day
Now listen to what I gotta say
Dey volunteered to fight fo' de King without anything
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{76} “The Motherland's Call," \textit{Daily Gleaner}, November 29, 1915, 14
\textsuperscript{77} “A Notable Day at Montego Bay," \textit{Daily Gleaner}, November 17, 1915, 13
But listen boys, we got all de rum we need in dis colony
Sans Humanité

Significantly, the calypsonian who penned this song not only celebrated the valor of
Trinidadian military volunteers, but also championed civilians who stood ready to repel an
enemy incursion with stray bottles, felled bamboo, sharpened sticks, and handfuls of stones.
If cowardly men refused to come forward, the calypsonian joked, then Old Lady Semper
would battle in their place with her po’ chambe.

Whereas calypsonians humorously implied that West Indian men “volunteered to
fight fo’ de King without anything,” black and coloured reformers envisioned soldiering as a
route to postwar political gains and enhanced social standing. Fred Warner, a volunteer from
Demerara, British Guiana, abandoned his plans to study music in the United States in order to
serve in the BWIR. Explaining his decision, Warner boldly asserted: “I mean to win
something in honour of my race.” For Barbadian recruit Douglas A. Haynes, battling the
Germans and Turks on the other side of the Atlantic offered a powerful vehicle for contesting
class and colour discrimination at home. Instead of "patiently waiting for bones" in
Barbados, he elected to join the colors to "prove himself as a man" in the bloody crucible of
war. After the Allies were victorious, Haynes insisted he would return home to "claim [his
rights] in the name of manhood." The Grenada Federalist also argued that black soldiers'
performance on the battlefield would undermine the deeply engrained notions of white racial

University Press, 1996), 207

80 “Demerarian Goes with the Barbados Contingent,” Daily Argosy, June 22, 1915, 6

81 Aviston D. Downes, “Boys of the Empire: Elite Education and the Construction of Hegemonic
Masculinity in Barbados, 1875-1920,” in Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and
Empirical Analyses, ed. Rhoda Reddock, (Kingston, Jamaica: University Press of the West Indies, 2004),
129
superiority that barred West Indians from the privilege of self-government. Yet, unlike
Haynes, the Federalist pressed for a fundamental change in the collective political status of
black and coloured West Indians, proclaiming:

As Coloured people we will be fighting for something more, something inestimable to
ourselves. We will be fighting to prove to Great Britain that we are not so vastly
inferior to the whites that we should not be put on a level, at least, of political equality
with them. We will be fighting to prove that the distinctions between God-made
creatures of one empire because of skin, colour or complexion differences, should no
longer exist, and that some opportunities should be afforded the Coloured subjects of
the empire as fall by right of race to its citizens. We will be fighting to prove that we
are no longer merely subjects, but citizens—citizens of a world empire whose watch-
word should be Liberty, Equality and Brotherhood.82

The BWIR’s valiant military service, the paper proposed, could transform all West Indians
from degraded subjects to empowered citizens.

For some men, the thrill of donning the King’s uniform was a powerful inducement
to join the colors. As historians and sociologists have noted, military uniforms function
simultaneously as a tangible symbol of state power, and as an embodied status marker,
transforming civilians into military men worthy of both fear and esteem.83 Once in uniform,
as Heather Streets notes, soldiers take on a corporate martial identity that they perform for
military and civilian audiences.84 For colonial subjects and disenfranchised racial and ethnic
minorities, wearing a military uniform often facilitated access to previously restricted social
spaces, emboldened soldiers to assert their newfound authority over local law enforcement

82 The (Grenada) Federalist, October 27, 1915, 2; quoted in Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 17

83 Henrietta Harrison, “Clothing and Power on the Periphery of Empire: The Costumes of the Indigenous
People of Taiwan,” positions: east asia cultures critique Vol.11, No. 2 (2003): 348-350; Heather Streets,
Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914 (Manchester:
Manchester University Press, 2004), 201-202, 207-210

84 Streets, Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914, 201
officials, and affirmed their claims to masculine virtue. U.S. African American soldiers during the Great War, for example, strove “to make their character fit their uniform” by crafting an assertive masculinity that combined civic responsibility, racial uplift, and self-sufficiency with physical prowess, sexual vigor, and a confident swagger.\textsuperscript{85} In his study of \textit{tirailleurs Senegalais}, Gregory Mann found that West African colonial soldiers sported their uniform, especially the distinctive pants and red \textit{chéchia}, for years after demobilization as a visual symbol of their ties to France and their superiority over the civilian population. These \textit{anciens tirailleurs}, Mann argued, “used uniforms to appropriate, and not merely to reflect, the state’s power” and insisted that their martial labor conferred lifelong social, economic, and political privileges.\textsuperscript{86}

In Jamaica, Ugent Augustus Clark recalled that “any man in a uniform was a Big Man” during the war years. Clark was twenty-two years old and working as a gardener in Kingston when he first encountered the soldiers of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Jamaica (BWIR) War Contingent. The sight of sharply-dressed recruits marching in tight formation outside the barracks at Up Park Camp greatly impressed him, and he secretly enlisted shortly thereafter. Clark’s yearning for adventure and an independent life beyond the confines of his aunt’s home also pulled him towards army life, in addition to his desire to assist the “Mother Country.” “Me was enthusiastic to know England,” he explained. “Them say them a fight to defend England. Everything was England. Every man was loyal to England.”\textsuperscript{87}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{85} Adriane Lentz-Smith, \textit{Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 81

\textsuperscript{86} Gregory Mann, \textit{Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 93-95

\textsuperscript{87}}
New arrivals, English-language newspapers, and private letters carried information about the nascent contingent to the large West Indian diaspora in Central America, where British subjects closely monitored the contingent movement and even offered their own proposals for a regional fighting force. In June 1915, when West Indian migrants in Panama learned that a regional contingent would be allowed to serve in the Great War, the Panama Star and Herald reported that the news "threw the local West Indian colony into a fever of excitement" as antillianos in Colón and Bocas del Toro clamored to serve alongside their fellow Britishers in the BWIR. While a small number of volunteers paid their own way from Panama to Jamaica to enlist in 1915, most potential recruits could not afford to pay the cost of a ticket home to “join the colours.” One frustrated Trinidadian letter writer in Panama declared that there were “thousands of able-bodied West Indians” residing on the Isthmus who were “burning with the desire to leave for the front and give their quota to help the cause.” Yet, he claimed, “a great many” would-be soldiers in Panama lacked the money to sail home to enlist. And even the handful of recruits who were “able to defray their own travelling expenses,” he noted, “do not think it advisable to go through the sacrifice of relinquishing their remunerative posts, or throw up their old established clientele” without clear assurances that they would be accepted as soldiers.

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88 For an thoughtful analysis of the communication networks that connected the British West Indies to Central America, see Lara Putnam, “‘Nothing Matters But Color’: Transnational Circuits, the Interwar Caribbean, and the Black International,” in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*, eds. Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 107-129

89 DeLisser, *Jamaica and the Great War*, 97
West Indian volunteers in Central America initially received little support in their efforts to enlist in the BWIR. In contrast to the fevered recruiting effort in the British Caribbean colonies, British officials in Panama did not launch an official campaign to mobilize military-aged West Indian men during the first three years of the war. Justifying their inaction, British officials stationed in the territory stressed that Panama was a neutral state, which prevented any belligerent nation from formally recruiting soldiers for their armed forces on Panamanian soil. Since the United States, also officially neutral until 1917, controlled the Panama Canal Zone, British authorities were prohibited from recruiting in the Isthmus’s major migrant zone. Would-be volunteers, however, accused the British Consuls in Panama of “frigid indifference” towards the imperial war effort and suggested that local British authorities intentionally stymied any recruitment efforts in order to appease US business interests. “It is whispered around that this evident lack of spirit for the cause on the part of His Majesty’s Consuls is due to a fear of giving offense to the United States Government,” the Trinidadian letter writer reported in November 1915, as it is “presumed in certain quarters that any attempt to recruit men on the Isthmus would result in a material reduction of the labour force of the Canal Zone.” Although the Trinidadian correspondent quickly dismissed the rumor as “all bosh,” he stressed that any volunteers who abandoned their jobs in the Canal Zone to join the BWIR could be easily replaced “from the ranks of the unemployed.”

In the absence of official recruiting drives, private individuals and groups in Panama organized to assist military-aged men who wanted to volunteer but could not afford to pay

90 “West Indians in Panama,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, November 17, 1915, 9

91 “West Indians in Panama,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, November 17, 1915, 9
the cost of a ticket to Jamaica, the closest major recruiting center. While some would-be
volunteers lobbied officials in the British Caribbean to appoint a BWIR recruiting agent in
Colon, others mobilized elected to bypass official channels and seek private funding. Black
and coloured West Indians in Bocas del Toro, for example, formed the Friendly Societies
Permanent Committee of the Jamaica War Contingent in October 1915. By tapping into a
preexisting network of friendly societies, religious groups, and civic associations, the
committee quickly raised enough money to send 51 men from Panama to Jamaica.92 The
recruits arrived on Christmas Day 1915 and sailed to England with the 2nd Jamaica War
Contingent the following month.93

After the United States officially entered the Great War in April 1917, Lieutenant L.
W. Hitchens—“His Majesty’s Recruiting Agent for the Republic of Panama”—sailed to the
Isthmus to launch an official recruitment campaign.94 The Central American Express, an
English-language newspaper in Bocas del Toro, greeted Hitchens with a rousing open letter
that recounted the private efforts to send volunteers in 1915 and affirmed West Indians’
steadfast support for a large-scale recruiting push. Positioning themselves as loyal subjects
of the Crown, the letter writers boldly affirmed their right to participate in the state-sponsored
recruitment effort. “As Britishers,” they declared, “we demand our share of the privilege of
having you here in your official capacity.”95 In a span of less than three months, between

92 On the privately-organized and funded recruitment effort in Panama in 1915, see “Bocas-Del-Toro
Volunteers,” Daily Gleaner, November 22, 1915, p.11; “Can We Send for Them?,” Daily Gleaner,
November 23, 1915, 8

93 “Jamaica’s Loyal Sons Coming Home to Enlist for the War,” Daily Gleaner, 6; “They Remembered
England,” Daily Gleaner, December 29, 1915, 8

May and August 1917, approximately 2,091 men stepped forward at community rallies in Colón, Bocas del Toro, and other Panamanian migrant hubs before traveling to Jamaica to enlist. 96

“Answering the call of the Motherland”: Military Enlistment and Rejection for the BWIR 97

From the outset, the number of volunteers greatly exceeded the recruitment targets developed during the summer of 1915. Between September and December 1915, nearly 2,500 recently-enlisted soldiers sailed to England from the British West Indies, surpassing the original target by roughly 1,000 men. Once they arrived, each serviceman was assigned to either the First or Second Battalion of BWIR along with fellow recruits from throughout the region. While the largest number of BWIR officers and men came from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the smaller islands and British mainland territories in Central and South America also contributed to the initial recruitment effort. One hundred thirty men from the Bahamas sailed to England along with the drafts from Jamaica, and Barbados’ inaugural contingent included 123 soldiers. Over 360 volunteers from the Windward Islands journeyed to England in late 1915, including 200 Grenadians, 112 recruits from St. Lucia, and 55 men from St. Vincent. The fevered recruiting effort in British Guiana netted 333


96 Hill, Who’s Who in Jamaica, 1919, 242

97 “Men in a World of Men,” Port of Spain Gazette, September 12, 1915, 11
men, while British Honduras proudly contributed 110 servicemen. Even the tiny Leeward Islands of Antigua, Dominica, Montserrat, and St. Kitts and Nevis contributed 106 recruits.  

During the next two and a half years, more than 13,000 additional soldiers would travel to Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, filling the ranks of twelve BWIR battalions in total (see table 11). In keeping with the first wave of volunteers, the vast

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majority of BWIR soldiers—over 65 percent of the regiment—enlisted in Jamaica. In total, Jamaica sent to the BWIR over 10,200 men, which included the nearly 2,000 volunteers who were recruited in Panama and sailed from Jamaica. Trinidad and Tobago, the second most populous British colony in the region, mobilized over 1,400 officers and men for the regiment. By comparison, British Guiana contributed only 700 servicemen for the regiment from a population only slightly smaller than Trinidad’s. Remarkably, British Honduras, the isolated Central American territory with a population of less than 42,000 inhabitants, enlisted the highest rate of BWIR soldiers per capita. As historian Nigel Bolland points out, British Honduras recruited 12.8 soldiers per 1,000 inhabitants, greatly exceeding the regional average of 4.9 men per 1,000. In fact, by 1917 officials in British Honduras, amid fears that further recruitment could deplete the local labor supply, suspended further military recruiting after supplying 533 men to the BWIR.99

For men who aspired to join the BWIR, the uncertain journey from civilian to soldier included at least two rounds of medical examinations as well as a literacy test. Most prospective soldiers volunteered for service at recruitment rallies or makeshift recruiting centers near their hometowns, where they completed an initial physical examination and literacy screening. Those men who received preliminary approval from military recruiters in their local community then travelled to the colony’s major military barracks and submitted to a second, more invasive medical screening. In order to enlist, prospective servicemen had to meet specific age, height, and weight guidelines, demonstrate “good character” and

“intelligence,” and possess a clean bill of health. Furthermore, men who volunteered before November 1916 had to be able to read and write in English. In addition to these standard requirements, several islands in the eastern Caribbean islands initially only accepted unmarried volunteers for military service.

Colonial officials and local military boosters took great pains to characterize the regiment as "representative" of the region, insisting that the BWIR included volunteers from "practically every trade and industry and every walk of life in the West Indies." Prominent newspaper editor Herbert DeLisser described the 1st Jamaica War Contingent as a "mixed lot" comprised of "clerks and artisans and labourers, boys who had served behind a counter and boys who had handled a hoe, young men who had sat on stools with the pen as their only instrument of labour, and young men who had wielded a pair of scissors or deftly manipulated an awl." Like other contemporary commentators, he also highlighted the interracial nature of the contingent, boasting that the new recruits ranged in skin tone from "white to black, including every shade of complexion known in the colour categories of a West Indian community."

100 In general, volunteers had to between the ages of 19-38 in order to enlist unless they had previously served in the military. Veterans who desired to enlist in the BWIR could sign-up until age 45. For the complete enlistment requirements, see “Notice: Barbadians for Service with the British Army,” Barbados Globe and Colonial Advocate, June 23, 1915, n.p; “Information Regarding Rates of Pay, Separation Allowances, and Pensions for Men Joining the Jamaica War Contingents,” 1B/5/77/108-1926, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town.


102 Lucas, ed, The Empire at War, 336

103 DeLisser, Jamaica and the Great War, 71
DeLisser’s oft-cited description of the BWIR as an example of interracial harmony and cross-class camaraderie masked the profound racial hierarchies that existed within the regiment. For example, in his groundbreaking 1917 history of the BWIR, DeLisser conveniently omits the fact that white men who enlisted in the regiment always served as officers, while black and coloured volunteers served as enlisted men or, at best, non-commissioned officers (see figure 7). Two coloured Jamaicans, Hubert Austin Cooper, Deputy Clerk of Courts for the parish of Westmoreland, and A.B. Rennie of were commissioned as second lieutenants in the BWIR. \textsuperscript{104} In keeping with the discriminatory policy of the British Army, the Army Council decreed in December 1915 that only recruits with “unmixed European blood” could be eligible for commissions in the BWIR. \textsuperscript{105} This ruling ensured that even highly-educated and accomplished black and coloured servicemen could never advance beyond the rank of sergeant. Compounding this racist slight, the War Office assured West Indian governors that it would supply “trained and partially trained officers” from Britain if military recruiters in the colonies failed to mobilize sufficient numbers of local whites to staff the officer corps. \textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{104} Minute by the General Officer Commanding the Troops, Up Park Camp, Jamaica, March 20, 1919, enclosed with Leslie Probyn to Viscount Milner, CO 137/731, file 27084, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{105} Bonar Law to the Governors of Jamaica, Leeward Islands, Barbados, Trinidad, and British Guiana, December 18, 1915, CO 318/336, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{106} B. B. Cubitt to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, December 14, 1915, CO 318/336, file 57697, National Archives of the United Kingdom
DeLisser, like other contemporary commentators, also did not acknowledge that the War Office barred most men from the region's sizeable East Indian community from joining their compatriots in the BWIR. This silence is likely due to the fact that the official policy to exclude Indian immigrants emerged over the course of several months and was never explicitly stated in recruitment materials or the local press. Thus, it is possible that only the small cadre of colonial and military authorities who directly supervised recruiting were aware of the War Office’s official position regarding East Indian volunteers.

So what do we know about the men who ultimately enlisted in the BWIR? In the absence of their official military enlistment applications, it is only possible to reconstruct a
tentative demographic sketch of the men who served in the regiment. Contemporary recruiting reports suggest that the initial wave of volunteers overwhelmingly resided in, or near, their local capital city. In Barbados, the chairman of the Recruiting Committee noted that the first recruits came from St. Michael's and adjoining parishes while, in Trinidad, men from Port of Spain and surrounding communities comprised the earliest enlisted men. In Jamaica, 13 percent of the first 4,000 volunteers listed Kingston as their hometown, although the capital city was home to only seven percent of the island’s total population (see table 6). Sixty-two percent of the initial soldiers from Grenada hailed from St. George’s, and a remarkable 76 percent of the men in the 1st Bahamas Contingent hailed from the island of Nassau. Unlike their rural compatriots, these urban denizens received frequent updates about the recruitment process and lived in close proximity to the official enlistments centers (which were first opened in each capital city). Equally as important, they had better access to the colony’s leading medical and educational institutions, which might have allowed them to pass the required physical and literacy screenings at higher rates than the rural majority. However, as military recruiters increasingly ventured outside of the cities to rural settlements, mountain villages, and seaside fishing communities, the proportion of BWIR soldiers from these areas duly increased. Indeed, by the end of recruiting in Jamaica, the total number of

107 The military enlistment applications for BWIR were destroyed in the bombing of London in 1940.

108 “Recruiting in Colony for BWI Regiment,” November 23, 1917, CO 28/292, National Archives of the United Kingdom


110 Frank Holmes, The Bahamas During the Great War (Nassau: The Tribune, 1924), 28-29; “Our Men for the Front,” The West Indian, September 5, 1915, 3
volunteers from the rural parishes of St. Mary and St. Elizabeth surpassed the number of recruits from Kingston (see table 8).

Whereas DeLisser maintained BWIR soldiers entered the military from a wide array of vocational backgrounds, other observers insisted the regiment was comprised of men from the “working classes.”111 Indeed, C. L. R. James went even further, claiming that many recruits only “for the first time wore shoes consistently” after they enlisted in the BWIR.112 In fact, many of the first men to join the ranks had previously worked as constables or volunteered in local paramilitary groups. One in three soldiers in the 1st British Guiana Contingent cut their teeth in the constabulary, while 18 of the first 79 men to enlist in the Barbados Contingent were veterans of the local Police or Defense Forces.113 Indeed, the chairman of Barbados Recruiting Committee acknowledged that many more policemen "were anxious to join" the BWIR, but it was "inexpedient" to remove any more men from police duty.114 In Jamaica, T. G. Beckford, a ten-year veteran of the Constabulary Force, enlisted in the BWIR and convinced twenty of his friends and colleagues to volunteer as well.115 Barbadian J. C. Hope never worked as a constable, but rather internalized the "soldierly spirit" after participating in a host of patriotic militia groups. During his days as a pupil at Barbados' Combermere School, Hope drilled with the school's Cadet Corps, joined the

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111 Lucas, *The Empire at War*, 364


113 "Items of News," *Port of Spain Gazette*, September 8, 1915, 4

114 "Recruiting in Colony for BWI Regiment," November 23, 1917, CO 28/292, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Lucas, ed, *The Empire at War*, 364

League of the Empire, and distinguished himself as the island's first King's Scout. After graduation, Hope enlisted in the Barbados Contingent of the BWIR.

Even though constables and local militia veterans led the initial rush to the colours, working class men between the ages of 18-30 comprised the majority of BWIR volunteers. According to self-reported data from the first 4,000 soldiers in Jamaica, 25 percent of men simply listed their previous occupation as “labourer” (see table 5). An additional 16 percent of soldiers, 657 men in total, stated that they worked as cultivators before enlisting. Over 30 percent of volunteers were skilled artisans who entered the military with valuable expertise in carpentry, mechanics, coach building, masonry, plumbing, and boot making. In contrast, less than ten percent of soldiers reported working in middle-income occupations such as clerks (6.2%), constables (1.1%), teachers (1%), chemists (.43%), and foreman and overseers (.43%) before enlisting. Remarkably, none of the first 4,000 Jamaican volunteers were clergymen and only three were professional musicians.

For the majority of men who eagerly stepped forward at BWIR recruitment meetings, the ambition to become a soldier would never be realized. Rejection rates throughout the British West Indies—as in England and the Dominions—were staggering, with tens of thousands of men being classed as physically unfit or "not likely to become efficient soldiers." In a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, G.B. Haddon-Smith, governor of the Windward Islands territories of St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Grenada, lamented

116 Downes, "Boys of the Empire," 128.
118 Lucas, ed, *The Empire at War*, 348
that local medical officers rejected over 25 percent of volunteers for the 1st Windward Islands Contingent. In addition, military officials sent home another 30 recruits because they did not have sufficient accommodations for them.\textsuperscript{119} Fifty-seven percent of men who applied to join the 1st Bahamas Contingent were turned away, while an astonishing 71 percent of men who volunteered in British Guiana between 1915 and 1917 were rejected.\textsuperscript{120} In Jamaica, the rejection rate climbed from 53 percent for the first contingent in 1915 to 66 percent for the fourth contingent, 16 months later.\textsuperscript{121}

Indefatigable military recruiter Arthur Cipriani experienced the bitter sting of rejection firsthand. After spearheading the campaign to mobilize West Indian volunteers for military service, Trinidad’s premier military booster learned that he was too old to enlist.\textsuperscript{122} Still determined to participate in the mobilization effort, the 40-year-old rejected recruit dutifully recruited other men for Trinidad’s first two BWIR contingents, before attempting to enlist once again. In a reversal of his previous ruling, the Commandant of the Local Forces officially endorsed Cipriani’s application for a commission in the BWIR in November 1915, noting that Cipriani had “taken a keen interest in recruiting” and was “most desirable as an officer” for the colony’s contingent.\textsuperscript{123} In January 1916, Cipriani entered the barracks to

\textsuperscript{119} G. B. Haddon-Smith to A. Bonar Law, September 15, 1915, CO 321/282, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{120} Holmes, \textit{The Bahamas During the Great War}, 25; Howe, \textit{Race, War and Nationalism}, 59

\textsuperscript{121} “Our Recruits,” \textit{Daily Gleaner}, March 8, 1917, 16

\textsuperscript{122} “Items of News,” \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, September 8, 1915, 4

\textsuperscript{123} “Mr. A. Cipriani’s Application for Commission in West India Contingent,” November 15, 1915, File Folder 29/1916, Box 3-96 (1916), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago
begin military training and ultimately departed with Trinidad’s third BWIR contingent as a newly-minted second lieutenant.124

Whereas Cipriani was eventually able to enlist, many rejected recruits wistfully remembered the disappointment of being turned away from the BWIR. In a letter to the Gleaner in 1959, Joseph Campbell proudly recalled that he was the first man in his district of St. Ann’s parish to volunteer for the war. Medical examiners declared him unfit, however, because he required heart medication for an unnamed aliment.125 Another elderly man from St. Ann’s parish, interviewed in the early 1970s, recalled that he tried to join the contingent since all of his close friends were “leaving out to the War.” Yet when he attempted to enlist, a military official briskly rejected him stating, “You too small, man, you too young.”126 Mr. Ferdinand, an elderly fisherman and shopkeeper in Port Henderson, Jamaica, also vividly recounted the medical examination where a doctor disqualified him for military service. After watching Ferdinand complete a series of squats and examining his testicles, a military physician informed the teenaged volunteer that he had a “gentleman complaint” and could not enlist. “Man, I was vex!” Ferdinand explained in an interview six decades later. “I didn’t vex right off but I keep on telling him that is not so.” When the rejected recruit eventually

124 “Items of News,” Port of Spain Gazette, January 4, 1916, 4; “The Trinidad Breeders Association and Mr. A.A. Cipriani,” Port of Spain Gazette, January 8, 1916, 3

125 7/12/129, “Jamaica Memories” Collection, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town


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stormed out of the military barracks, a woman selling fruit nearby teased him, shouting:
“Him vex, because him don’t pass!”

Like Joseph Campbell and Mr. Ferdinand, the majority of BWIR volunteers were rejected for medical reasons. In Jamaica alone, over 26,600 prospective soldiers were examined at Up-Park Camp military barracks between 1915-1918, of which 13,940 were rejected as “medically unfit” (see table 12). The single most common cause for medical rejection was failure to meet the strict weight and/or chest width requirements for a soldier. Of the 13,940 men rejected from the Jamaica War Contingent, 3,765 (27%) were classed as "underdeveloped/underweight." Military authorities rejected an additional 1,280 (9%) recruits because of poor physique and 514 (4%) men for not meeting the minimum height requirement. Even men who met the height, weight, and chest requirements were often dismissed because of other ailments caused by malnutrition and poor medical care, including: rotten teeth (5%), anemia (8%), skin diseases (9%), physical deformities (3%), and hernia (2%).

In British Guiana, Britain’s only colony on the South American mainland, mosquito-borne diseases stymied many volunteers’ quest to enlist. Over 1,708 men were rejected because of filariasis, a parasitic disease that infects the lymphatic vessels and potentially causes swollen limbs, fever, and blindness, as well as other related medical conditions. George O. H. Easton, a 30-year-old prospective soldier from Plantation Cane Grove in East Coast, Demerara, attempted to join the BWIR on two separate occasions but was rejected on

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129 Lucas, ed, *The Empire at War*, 418
medical grounds because of filarial glands. Challenging the diagnosis of the medical examiners, Easton boasted that he was “strong as a lion” and could not recall the last time that he had suffered from any major ailment. Rejected recruit Clarence C. Maynard likewise questioned the medical examiner’s pronouncement that he was unfit due to filarial glands by insisting that he was “in the pink of condition to do any fighting.” Maynard, in a letter to the editors of the *Daily Argosy*, explained, “The downfall of Britain would be a ruin to my race, and I feel I have as much right to serve my King and country to the end as a soldier.”

Military officials frequently encouraged rejected men to reapply for service after receiving treatment for their disqualifying ailment or completing an exercise regime to increase their chest measurements. After being rejected at the Contingent Camp in Jamaica, Caleb Barrant and Charles Moore vowed to "get well in the next two or three weeks" and reapply for enlistment. A. S. Bryden, an eager volunteer in Barbados, elected to undergo an operation to correct the “internal trouble” that prevented him from enlisting. Other men surreptitiously took advantage of the decentralized examination process, changed their names, and had a different physician complete the required examination. The Eighth Troop of Boy Scouts in Port of Spain, Trinidad dramatized the plight of men who were repeatedly rejected on medical grounds through a humorous skit about a snow cone seller and

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132 "Recruiting in Demerara," *Port of Spain Gazette*, September 5, 1915, 11
133 "Late Happenings in the Rural Districts," *Daily Gleaner*, November 19, 1915, 10
134 “Late Barbados News,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, September 11, 1915, 7
aspiring soldier named Luly. After visiting the military medical examiner, Luly discovered that he had a narrow chest and "too much belly" to enlist. Determined to don the King's uniform, he completed a strenuous exercise regiment, and then returned to the doctor for reexamination. Unfortunately, however, the examiner informed Luly that his stomach had increased in size and his puny chest had gotten even smaller. In a fit of desperation, Luly begged the doctor to "put him under some operation or to turn him upside down by means of which his chest would become belly and [his] belly chest."135

Illiteracy was also a major cause of rejection throughout the British Caribbean, frustrating eager volunteers and military boosters alike. In Trinidad, the 1911 census reported that over half of the population could not read and write. The literacy rates among the island’s sizeable East Indian community were even lower, as only 11% could read and write in English.136 Despite the tremendous expansion of primary education in Jamaica between 1867 and 1909, only one-quarter of school-age children attended classes regularly by the outbreak of the Great War.137 As a result, over a third of the adult population was unlettered. While over 50 men volunteered for the Jamaica BWIR Contingent after a series of rallies at Dry Harbour Mountains, the recruiting agent reluctantly "turn[ed] away a good many" because they could not read or write.138 Likewise, Dr. S. A. G. Johnson, Secretary of the Friendly Societies War Contingent Committee in Panama, reported that the majority of the 150 men who volunteered from Bocas del Toro were rejected because they could not

135 "Boy Scout Concert," Port of Spain Gazette, September 12, 1915, 9
136 Census of the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago, 1911, 22-23
137 Moore and Johnson, Neither Led Nor Driven, 212; Census of Jamaica and its Dependencies: Taken on the 3rd April, 1911 (Kingston, Jamaica: Government Printing Office, 1912), 10
meet the literary requirement. Frustrated that so many “able-bodied industrious men” could not enlist, Johnson confessed: “I was truly ashamed to have so many of my countrymen illiterate.”

Instead of seizing the opportunity to advocate for increased educational opportunities, some commentators depicted unlettered men as more physically fit and adventurous than their literate peers. For example, a correspondent for the *Gleaner* wrote: “[I]t is noticed that the illiterate are physically a stronger class of men. They, for the most part, grow up in the mountains and sleep and live out on the wilds. They grow a lusty set of men, and the life they are accustomed to fits them more for the trenches than the men who can read and write.”

Before the literacy requirement was officially withdrawn in November 1916, primary school teachers across the region held free educational courses at night for men who wanted to learn how to read and write in order to enlist.

Whereas commentators frequently bemoaned the large number of physically fit volunteers who were rejected because of illiteracy, the problem of venereal disease among recruits—particularly the "loathsome syphilis"—sparked widespread public debate. In Jamaica, 1,512 men were rejected at Up Park Camp because they were infected with a venereal disease. This figure does not include infected men who were treated and eventually allowed to enlist, or those men who were turned away by doctors at the island's

139 “Jamaica’s Loyal Sons Coming Home to Enlist for the War,” *Daily Gleaner*, 6


141 Lucas, ed., The *Empire at War*, 348

142 Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 66

other recruitment sites. Nearly 20 percent of recruits from Trelawny, a rural parish on Jamaica's northern coast, were declared unfit for service because of venereal disease. Likewise, volunteers from the rural parishes of Hanover, St. Mary, and St. Ann also had high rates of rejection because of venereal disease. In contrast, only eight percent of recruits from the urban parishes of Kingston and St. Andrew were rejected due to venereal disease. The chairman of Jamaica's Central Recruiting Committee speculated that the low venereal disease rates for urban recruits was due to their ability to access medical treatment facilities in the capital.

For J. Challenor Lynch, chairman of the Recruiting Committee in Barbados and a member of the Legislative Council, the “frequent occurrence of venereal disease” among enlisted soldiers was an urgent matter of “grave concern.” According to Lynch, at least 20 percent of BWIR recruits in Barbados developed a venereal disease after they began training, with 51 soldiers ultimately being discharged as medically unfit. Because the colony’s military barracks were unenclosed and located near a public highway, military officials could not sequester newly-enlisted soldiers from wives, girlfriends, and sex workers in Bridgetown or other nearby civilian populations. As a result, the regiment’s overburdened medical officers struggled to manage an “enormously increased” caseload because of venereal disease, while military officials worried that infected soldiers would not be able to join their comrades overseas. Indeed, after a raucous three-week stopover in Barbados, 20 percent of the soldiers in the Leeward Island Contingent were sent home due to venereal disease.

144 Howe, Race, War, and Nationalism, 64

145 “Report of the Recruiting Committee,” August 11, 1917, CO 28/292, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Lynch, echoing other commentators across the region, described the problem of venereal disease using a combination of moral and pragmatic language. “The existence of the evil has, no doubt, been long known, as it is also known that in the days when the ships of the Royal Navy cruised in these waters, this Port was regarded with ill favour by the Commanders, and shore leave was seldom accorded,” he explained. “The existence of a body of men near Bridgetown, with regular pay and a good many hours of leisure,” he went on, “has but served to bring it into the light.” With public attention now firmly fixed on the problem of venereal disease among the colony’s volunteers, Lynch called on the Legislative Council to give the issue “serious attention.”

Government officials in Barbados, Grenada, and Jamaica swiftly responded to public demands for action by unveiling new public health initiatives and enacting repressive legislation that targeted civilians. In August 1917, the Grenada Legislature passed an ordinance criminalizing the intentional transmission of a venereal disease. The new law required any adult suffering from a venereal disease to seek treatment immediately and to register with local public health officials. The government offered monetary rewards to residents who reported an infected neighbor, while those who refused treatment for a venereal disease were subject to prosecution and forced medical care. In Jamaica, the Kingston Public Hospital opened an evening clinic to diagnose and treat venereal disease,

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146 “Report of the Recruiting Committee,” August 11, 1917, CO 28/292, National Archives of the United Kingdom

and it served over 6,700 women and men between February 1917 and January 1918. The Jamaica Legislative Council also passed a bill criminalizing the spread of venereal disease and imposed fines on herbalists and other traditional healers who treated venereal disease sufferers. These fines, as Glenford Howe argues, "were intended to have the double effect of encouraging infected persons to come forward, and more crucially, of asserting the hegemony of Western biomedicine over indigenous healing practices, which were regarded by the authorities as largely ineffective and obstructive."149

A significant number of men were discharged from the BWIR after they had taken the official enlistment oath because they developed a serious illness at training camp or failed to adapt to the stringent rules and regulations of military life. Indeed, 2,082 men were discharged from the Jamaica War Contingent headquarters at Up Park Camp after serving in the BWIR for only a few weeks.150 These men, who had once been celebrated as heroic volunteers, were given a one-way train ticket home and summarily dismissed without pay. To make matters worse, their names were often printed in the local newspaper along with the reason for their dismissal. One rejected volunteer became a recruiter himself and published a poem entitled “To Those Who Have Not Enlisted” in the Port of Spain Gazette.151 Other would-be soldiers refused to relinquish their newfound status as contingent men. Felix Geroge Brown enlisted in the 1st Jamaica Contingent of the BWIR but was discharged in late

148 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 70
149 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 70
150 Hill, Who’s Who in Jamaica, 1919-1920, 247
151 “To Those Who Have Not Enlisted,” Port of Spain Gazette, September 9, 1915, 4

141
November 1915. Instead of leaving the Contingent Camp, he secretly stole a khaki uniform and two officer's stripes and pretended to be a newly commissioned corporal. For two weeks, Brown moved about the camp bossing around new recruits before he was detected and arrested by police. Brown, who had a previous criminal record, was ultimately charged with “habitually abstaining from labour” under the colony’s notoriously fluid Vagrancy Law and was sentenced to two months in prison.

“Why Should I Go to the Front? The War Is No Concern of Mine:” Popular Resistance to Recruitment

Colonial authorities and local military officers effusively praised West Indians for their unwavering support of the empire, yet undercurrents of discontent swirled throughout the recruitment process. On September 2, 1915, a group of soldiers from the Trinidad Contingent of the BWIR proudly paraded through the streets of Port of Spain on one of their frequent training marches. Instead of being greeted by cheering onlookers, His Majesty's newest recruits were besieged by a band of boys who jeered and shouted, “Look at the German targets!” Later on that evening, civilians Alexander Morris and Anthony Graves spotted the humiliated soldiers downtown on George Street and bombarded them with a hail of rocks and sticks. When a constable attempted to arrest Morris and Graves for their unprovoked attack, their female companion Louisa Moore defiantly urged the men to resist

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152 "Imposter in Khaki Uniform," *Daily Gleaner*, December 16, 1915, 6
155 "Cowardly Slackers," *Port of Spain Gazette*, September 4, 1915, 9
arrest and proclaimed that they had done nothing wrong.  

The *Port of Spain Gazette* swiftly demonized the hecklers as unpatriotic, unmanly, and unworthy of British citizenship, while also goading the “enraged public” to retaliate on behalf of the island's volunteers. Dismissing the hecklers as “people who are of no consequence whatever in the colony,” the paper insisted that such men lacked the patriotic feeling and moral decency of true Britishers. “They are men without country; men whose souls have died within them, and they are of no use to this or any other land.” Equally damning, the paper maintained that men who harassed BWIR volunteers were actually shirkers and cowards plagued by guilt because of their own fear of military service. Instead of becoming soldiers of the king, this band of resisters comprised a contemptible “Cold Feet Brigade.” The paper suggested that anyone found disparaging the recruits should be put in the dock or banished from the colony altogether.  

Recruits in Jamaica, like their beleaguered comrades in Trinidad, faced public taunts from onlookers who cast doubt on their masculinity and soldiering skills. “Miss B,” a Jamaican septuagenarian interviewed at her home in 1975, described how people in Kingston would assemble during the Great War to watch BWIR servicemen march through the city laden with “a load on dem back.” As the men of the “conteegent” marched “round the town,” the newly-minted soldiers would jubilantly sing:

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Them going to fight the Kaiser  
If we only get a chance  
We are going to fight the Kaiser  
If we only get a chance
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156 “Stoning Recruits,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, September 11, 1915, 9

It will be a hip hip hooray.\textsuperscript{158}

In response to the soldiers' robust celebration of martial masculinity, spectators would command the servicemen to “bow, boi, bow” and mock new recruits' ill-fitting uniforms and uncoordinated marching by singing:

\begin{verbatim}
Leff' conteegent lef'
Boot ah nuh fi you
Hat ah nuh fi you
Leff' conteegent lef'
\end{verbatim}\textsuperscript{159}

Public heckling of BWIR soldiers was one of many forms of resistance during the Great War, belying one historian’s claim that West Indians were either “highly supportive or indifferent to the war.”\textsuperscript{160} Some male resisters pretended to have a disqualifying medical condition or lied about their age to escape military service. During the mandatory military registration in Jamaica, for example, one man reportedly insisted that he was prone to spontaneous fits, and therefore, was unfit for duty. When the registrar insisted that she would record his name anyway, he exclaimed: "Ah me Missus! Ah me Missus, me n' want fe fight!"\textsuperscript{161} Similarly, Jane Thompson recalled that “some men drink soap sud, some hid their ages” in order to avoid joining the Jamaica Contingent. Unlike many of her neighbors, Thompson's husband elected to volunteer for the contingent and never returned home.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{158} Life in Jamaica in the Early Twentieth Century: A Presentation of Ninety Oral Accounts, Volume: St. Andrew Parish, Respondent: 39StaFc, “…the world let go now,” 49

\textsuperscript{159} Life in Jamaica in the Early Twentieth Century: A Presentation of Ninety Oral Accounts, Volume: St. Andrew Parish, Respondent: 39StaFc, “…the world let go now,” 50

\textsuperscript{160} James, Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia, 54

\textsuperscript{161} "The Man Who Is the Island's Backbone," Jamaica Times, July 13, 1918, 8

\textsuperscript{162} 7/12/43, "Jamaica Memories" collection, Jamaica Archives
At other times, groups of men resisted military service by fleeing en masse. In New Amsterdam, British Guiana, "bus loads" of military age men left town on the day that a recruiter for the BWIR was scheduled to visit after hearing a rumor that they would be drafted for service. A similar rumor nearly derailed a major recruiting meeting in Gayle, Jamaica, in October 1915, when "some mischievous persons" suggested that the governor was going to compel every eligible man in the town to join the colors. Even five decades after the war, rumors about the use of forced impressments to fill the ranks of the BWIR still lingered in Jamaica. During an interview, “Miss B” insisted that military recruiters used to “walk and pick up men, whether you willing or not, to carry dem to a foreign.” While “Miss B” claimed that soldiers in the older West India Regiment voluntarily enlisted, she declared that soldiers in Jamaica’s BWIR contingent were compelled to serve. “But when the war did hot, deh walk and take men, young strong men—fe go fight,” she maintained, “whether fe fight or watch or fe carr’ things me no know.”

Military recruiters also bemoaned the fact that some men who initially volunteered for the BWIR refused to take the oath of enlistment once they passed the final medical examination. While it is unclear why these recruits ultimately decided to forego military service, their unwillingness to accept the rigors of military life implicitly challenged romantic portrayals of soldiering. In Jamaica, at least 13 volunteers declined to sign the official

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163 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 223
enlistment agreement and were summarily dismissed from the barracks at Up Park Camp.\textsuperscript{167} 

In Grenada, Governor Hadden-Smith publicly ridiculed BWIR volunteers who “jibbed” military authorities by refusing to complete the enlistment process. In a speech before the Legislative Council in September 1915, he announced that any men who stepped forward for military service—but then refused to serve—would be transferred to the “Cold Feet Brigade,” where they would receive medals for “sitting down and looking at the women make guava jelly.”\textsuperscript{168} Like many other commentators, Hadden-Smith impugned the manhood of men who failed to perform martial labor by comparing them unfavorably to women.

Some resisters, unmoved by the rhetoric of mutual obligation and imperial patriotism, simply felt no connection to a conflict being fought thousands of miles away on the other side of the Atlantic. The \textit{Port of Spain Gazette} complained that many young men cared more about football than the bloody conflict in Europe: “‘They are too inclined to regard the matter in no serious light and take very little or no interest whatever in trying to understand the perilous times which the British empire is at present experiencing. You speak to them of the retreat from Warsaw and they alter the conversation to football! You ask whether they have read the telegrams and their reply is that ‘we don't bother to read the telegrams!’”\textsuperscript{169} The chairman of the Barbados Recruiting Committee admitted that many men and women who resided outside of St. Michael's parish initially had little interest in the war and felt no need to support the local patriotic effort.\textsuperscript{170} He gladly noted, however, that they gradually started to

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\textsuperscript{167} Hill, \textit{Who's Who in Jamaica, 1919-1920}, 247

\textsuperscript{168} “News and Topics in Brief,” \textit{The West Indian}, September 5, 1915, 4

\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, August 15, 1915, 3

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embrace the recruitment campaign after recruiters repeatedly visited their communities. In British Honduras, protestors ripped down a copy of George V’s “Appeal” and in its place brazenly wrote: “What the hell have we got to do with the war?”

The notion that there was no place for black soldiers in the British Army led some men to rebuff calls to join the BWIR. During the early months of recruiting, the Gleaner fiercely contested accusations that England would never deploy "a single black soldier" by reminding readers that African troops were fighting valiantly under the Union Jack in campaigns across the African continent. The editors of the Barbados Globe likewise trumpeted the supposedly “mixed” nature of the imperial armed forces, dismissing “talk of colour prejudice” as “pure unadulterated bunkum.” Despite these efforts, some military-aged men questioned why black and coloured subjects should fight on behalf of the empire when the British did not view them as equals. When asked why he ignored the call to enlist, one young Trinidadian retorted that England did not appreciate the support of her black colonial subjects. "The coloured man has no right to interfere in this war," he insisted, "because the English snubbed an African chief who offered a contingent by telling him that this was a white man's war and they did not want Africans to assist."

Likewise, some men questioned why they should risk their lives to save England and her empire when British rule in the Caribbean was racist and unjust. War recruiter A. E.

170 “Report of the Recruiting Committee,” August 11, 1917, CO 28/292, National Archives of the United Kingdom

171 “Letter to the Editor from A Creole,” Clarion, November 4, 1915, 520

172 “Native Troops,” Daily Gleaner, August 11, 1915, 8


174 “Mischievous Utterings,” September 12, 1915, Port of Spain Gazette, 6
Briscoe was horrified when a Jamaican peasant remarked that he saw no reason to fight to preserve British justice, when "he didn't see much liberty" in his own country. Scandalized by his " ingratitude," Briscoe suggested that the resister move to Germany in order to gain a proper appreciation for the "gifts of liberty, freedom, and justice" in the British Empire! Another critic of the war effort confronted BWIR soldiers training in Seaford, England, and chastised the men for fighting in a conflict between European elites. In a powerful rebuke of dominant narratives about the “German menace,” he declared: “Look at your King, he’s a German, and so are all the rest of the family, [so] why don’t you lay down your arms and do no fighting.” Unwilling to tolerate such public affronts to the King and his soldiers, English officials swiftly charged the outspoken critic with “making remarks likely to jeopardize recruiting” and sentenced him to six months in prison with hard labor.

By late 1916, military boosters in the colonies increasingly called for strong measures to combat resistance. Talk of conscription first emerged in Jamaica in October 1916, nine months after compulsory service was implemented in England. Governor Manning and his allies in the business community, however, roundly condemned any plans to introduce conscription on the grounds that it would disrupt the colony’s labor supply. Five months later, legislators H. A. L. Simpson and E. F. H. Cox once again proposed that Jamaica should implement conscription to fill the ranks of the BWIR. After receiving tacit support from

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175 The Man Who Is the Island's Backbone," *Jamaica Times*, July 13, 1918, 8

176 *Newhaven Chronicle*, November 18, 1915, quoted in Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, 70

177 Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, 70

178 DeLisser, *Jamaica and the Great War*, 117
Governor Manning and the Colonial Office, Simpson and Cox introduced the Military Service Bill in the Legislative Council on March 6, 1917.

The subsequent debate over the conscription law brought questions of martial fitness, mutual obligation, and imperial loyalty to the forefront of public discussion once more. While some conscriptionists maintained that compulsory military service would compel Jamaicans of all classes to serve in the war, anti-conscription forces worried the proposed law would disproportionately target poor and working-class men. The Gleaner tried to reassure the public that conscription would not result in mass impressments among the laboring class, but would instead guarantee that men from all social strata enlisted “on the basis of equality.”¹⁷⁹ “Compulsion does not mean that you are to seize any man and hustle him up to Camp,” the editors remaineded readers, “this is not Germany, it is part of the British Empire.”¹⁸⁰ Other commentators questioned how conscription would impact the colony’s Chinese and East Indian minorities. In a letter to the editor, W. Clarke MacCalla of Kingston wondered whether the conscription bill would be “strictly confined to the natives of Jamaica” or East Indian and Chinese men would also be allowed to “share some of the glory” of military service.¹⁸¹ While MacCalla celebrated “stalwart” men from the colony’s Asian immigrant community, James Sawers of Port Maria urged military authorities not to conscript British subjects from Jamaica because the island was “already quite overrun with Chinese, East Indians, and others.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ “Compulsion in Jamaica,” Daily Gleaner, March 12, 1917, 8
¹⁸⁰ “The Call for Men,” Daily Gleaner, March 12, 1917, 8
¹⁸¹ “Opinions on Compulsion Bill,” Daily Gleaner, March 24, 1917, 1
¹⁸² “The Question of Compulsion in this Colony,” Daily Gleaner, March 19, 1917, 4
Anti-conscriptionists, led by former Legislative Council member Alexander Dixon, held a public rally in Kingston on April 2, 1917, and dispatched a resolution protesting compulsory service to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.\textsuperscript{183} Despite their highly publicized demonstration, the Legislative Council passed the Military Service Bill on April 4, with 21 of the 25 legislators voting in favor of the law. The bill took effect on June 1, making Jamaica only the second colony in the British Empire to pass a conscription measure.\textsuperscript{184} The Military Service Law required every male on the island between the ages of 16-41 to register with local registration authorities in their home parish and made them liable for military service if sufficient numbers of volunteers did not come forward.\textsuperscript{185} Middle-class female volunteers, in addition to their numerous other contributions to the recruitment campaign, performed nearly all of the clerical labor required to process the 122,238 men who registered in accordance with the Military Service Law (see table 7).

Not all local men complied with the mandate to register for military service, however. In September 1917, George Chin, president of the Chee Kung Tong Society in Kingston, forwarded a petition to the Chinese Minister in London protesting the new Military Service Law. Writing on behalf of the colony’s 1,700 Chinese male residents, Chin argued that Chinese men residing in Jamaica should not be compelled to fight on behalf of the British

\textsuperscript{183} William Manning to Walter Long, June 15, 1917, CO 137/723, file 34825, National Archives of the United Kingdom; “Conscription,” \textit{Daily Gleaner}, April 3, 1917, 11

\textsuperscript{184} Despite enacting the Military Service Law in 1917, military authorities in Jamaica never actually resorted to conscription to acquire men for the BWIR. Cundall, \textit{Jamaica's Part in the Great War, 1915-1918}, 25

\textsuperscript{185} Military Service Law, Law 16 of 1917, \textit{Laws of Jamaica}
Empire. Remarkably, in a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the acting governor of Jamaica confirmed Chen’s questionable claim that all Chinese residents in the colony were foreign subjects. According to the governor, Chinese men would not be liable for military service due to their “alien nationality,” and were required only to complete the preliminary registration process along with all other male inhabitants. Furthermore, in an effort to reassure the anxious Chinese community, the governor dispatched a “prominent and respectable” Chinese merchant from Kingston to answer any further questions about the Military Service Law on behalf of the government. By strategically invoking their familial and political ties to China, Chinese immigrants and their descendants in Jamaica successfully rejected the politics of imperial patriotism and its attendant obligations.

The “Better Classes” of “(Practically) White Men”: Elite Perspectives on Military Service

If popular resistance to recruitment highlighted the limits of military mobilization, then the elite campaign to create private contingents in British Honduras, Barbados, and Trinidad reveals the movement’s colour and class fault lines. Throughout the war, military recruiters publicly celebrated the BWIR for welcoming volunteers "irrespective of class, colour, or creed." Yet in private, many of the very same white and coloured elites who led

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186 For population data on the Chinese community in Jamaica, see Census of Jamaica and its Dependencies: Taken on the 3rd April, 1911, 7, 28

187 Acting Governor of Jamaica to Walter Long, September 29, 1917, CO 137/722, file 52680, National Archives of the United Kingdom

188 A. S. Bowden to Captain Warner, December 6, 1915, CO 295/503, file 57711, National Archives of the United Kingdom

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the movement to staff the BWIR conspired to keep the “better class” of volunteers from serving alongside black artisans and laborers. The “better class”—those men “who prided themselves on superiority of lineage or education” as Arthur Cipriani explained—included British and locally-born men who hailed from esteemed families and studied at exclusive secondary schools. This class, forged through local understandings of race, class, and status, included individuals of colour who had attained prominence through education, wealth, or professional achievement as well as the white planter and merchant establishment. Narrowing the focus to this small but influential group, this final section analyzes the backroom campaign to create separate military units for the region’s most prominent sons.

Even before recruitment for the BWIR officially commenced, sugar estate owners in Trinidad and British Guiana warned Secretary of State for the Colonies Bonar Law that efforts to recruit large numbers of white plantation managers and overseers for military service “would be extremely prejudicial to the best interest” of the colonies. In a private letter sent by the West India Committee in June 1915, the estate proprietors stressed that colonial officials in Trinidad and British Guiana should avoid recruiting the “comparatively few white employees on the sugar estates” or risk a “serious state of affairs” on the colonies’ rural plantations. Specifically, they claimed white military-aged men were required to maintain production and order among the East Indian agricultural labor force, explaining that the “labour on the sugar estates is…almost exclusively East Indian” and that it was “essential


190 Captain A. A. Cipriani, *Twenty-five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in the Great War 1914-1918* (Port of Spain: Trinidad Publishing Co., 1940), 9
that such labour should be controlled by white managers and overseers who are indeed indispensable.” Though the proprietors maintained that they had not hindered any white employees from volunteering for military service, they urged Bonar Law to take up the matter of white military recruitment with the governors of Trinidad and British Guiana.191 The Secretary of State for the Colonies honored their request and reminded the governors of the two “coolie colonies” to be mindful of local estate proprietors’ labor needs.192

If some estate owners feared the loss of white employees, other men from the “better classes” baulked at the thought of serving alongside black rural and urban laborers in the BWIR. Instead, they desperately clung to older models of military mobilization in which propertied white and coloured men served in exclusive local militias (or as officers in the British Army), while men from the laboring classes endured the arduous life of a professional soldier in the West India Regiment. In British Honduras, the impulse to divide the colony’s military volunteers by class and colour came from the highest reaches of the colonial administration. After receiving authorization to recruit 100 British Hondurans for military service, Governor Wilfred Collet privately lobbied the Colonial Office for permission to create one contingent of 50 working-class woodcutters and a second contingent comprised of middle- and upper-class men drawn from the colony’s Volunteer Force. Justifying his proposal for two overseas contingents in a colony of less than 42,000 inhabitants, the governor explained that the colony’s woodcutters were “a very different class of men,” who

191 West India Committee to Bonar Law, June 29, 1915, CO 318/336, file 30143, National Archives of the United Kingdom

192 H. J. Read (for Bonar Law) to the Governors of Trinidad and British Guiana, July 6, 1915, CO 318/336, file 30143, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, July 2, 1915, file 30143, National Archives of the United Kingdom
“for the most part...are of a lower grade of life.” Such men, Collet reasoned, “would be exceedingly useful wherever a knowledge of bushwork is required,” but should not serve in the same unit as British Honduras’s Creole elite.\textsuperscript{193} When the Colonial Office rebuffed his idea, the governor implicitly challenged public celebrations of interracial military camaraderie by protesting that it was “not an easy matter to maintain discipline” in a contingent “consisting of men of different colours, ranging from pure white to almost pure black.”\textsuperscript{194}

Collet’s campaign to recruit separate contingents for working-class and elite volunteers in British Honduras faltered quickly. However, in Trinidad and Barbados, local elites did manage to create their own private military contingents, which solely accepted white and lightly-coloured volunteers who wanted to serve in British Army regiments. In the Trinidadian case, three members of the colony’s official BWIR Recruiting Committee—George F. Huggins, Enrique Prada, and Major A. S. Bowden—covertly conspired with merchant William Gordon Gordon to craft plans for a privately-funded unit, tellingly named the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent. Rather than focusing on their appointed duty to recruit soldiers for the BWIR, Huggins, Prada, Bowden, and Gordon began contacting members of the colony's financial elite in August 1915 to raise funds for their private contingent. Fearing a backlash from the governor and the Commander-in-Chief of the Local

\textsuperscript{193} Wilfred Collet to Secretary of State for the Colonies, July 15, 1915, quoted in Anne S. Macpherson, \textit{From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 57

\textsuperscript{194} Wilfred Collet to Secretary of State for the Colonies, August 27, 1915, quoted in Anne S. Macpherson, \textit{From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982}, 57
Forces, the four-member committee kept local colonial officials “discreetly in the dark” about their plans as they solicited donations to fund their nascent group.195

In addition to hiding their plans from the colonial administration, Huggins, Prada, and Bowden also concealed their unauthorized recruiting activities from fellow BWIR recruiting committee member, Arthur Cipriani. Narrating the history of the BWIR years later, Cipriani recalled that he initially noticed a “rift in the clouds of local recruiting” when men from the “better classes” refused to volunteer for Trinidad’s first BWIR contingent. After discovering that Huggins and “his brother merchants” had established a private contingent for men who wanted to serve in the British Army, Cipriani rebuked the colony’s elite for inserting “the question of class” into the recruitment effort and denounced their plans in letters to the Mirror and Port of Spain Gazette.196 “Our better class young men are shirking” their duty, Cipriani explained in his letter to the Mirror, “because of the lamentable question of colour which lies at the bottom of everything in these parts.”197

Instead of publishing his open letter, the editors of the Port of Spain Gazette retorted that Cipriani was trying to “fan smoldering embers into flames” by publicly invoking the “colour question.”198 Undeterred, the outspoken recruiter took on the organizers of the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent and the press at a public recruiting meeting in late August 1915. “The game has not been played in many quarters, it was not being played

195 Captain Dow, Record of Service of Members: The Trinidad Merchants' and Planters' Contingent 1915 to 1918 (Trinidad: Printed by the Government Printer, 1925), ix
196 Cipriani, Twenty-five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in the Great War 1914-1918, 9
198 Mr. A. A. Cipriani and His ‘Boycotting’ Charge,” Port of Spain Gazette, September 3, 1915, 9
now,” Cipriani fumed before a large crowd in Port of Spain’s Marine Square. “The raising of a rival contingent, the boycott of this meeting by the *Port of Spain Gazette*, the miserable and unfortunate attitude of those who were able to enlist from the public service in the defense forces of this colony—all gave evidence that the game was not being played.” Three days later, in a biting letter to the editors of the *Gazette*, Cipriani once again exposed the hypocrisy and thinly-veiled racism of the island’s white and coloured elite. “Have the Colonials declined to do their duty to King and Country,” he asked pointedly, “because of the presence of East Indians and Blacks?”

Cipriani’s unflinching rebuke of the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent highlighted an ideological chasm among members of Trinidad’s white upper echelon. While historians rightly cite the creation of the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent as evidence of white elites’ hollow commitment to the principle of interracial military service, the intraracial debate over the private contingent also signals that some local whites did reject the movement to divide the colony’s military volunteers by race, colour, and class. Reflecting on the controversy after the war, Cipriani would reiterate his strident condemnation of George Huggins and the other members of the Recruiting Committee who coordinated the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent, despite their official obligations to the BWIR. The members of the committee, Cipriani concluded (perhaps with a touch of hindsight), never possessed any “real sympathy” for the BWIR and “on every possible occasion…did all in their power to recruit the best available material for the Merchants’ Contingent.”

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199 “Mr. A. A. Cipriani and His ‘Boycotting’ Charge,” *Port of Spain Gazette*, September 3, 1915, 9

to stop the rival group or to compel men from the colony’s “better classes” to enlist in the BWIR, Cipriani admitted that the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent was an “unfortunate compromise” that accommodated Trinidad’s elite in order to avoid “friction between classes” or “any show of public indignation.” Such shortsighted concessions to conservative powerbrokers, Cipriani predicted ominously, would ultimately have a “baneful influence” on the cosmopolitan colony’s future.201

Officials at the Colonial Office were also forced to consider the political implications of the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent after two representatives from the private unit requested a meeting with Bonar Law.202 In early November 1915, Major A. S Bowden and George Huggins disembarked in London with the first cadre of volunteers for the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent—a group of 112 recruits whom Bowen candidly described as “(practically) white men.”203 The Colonial Office staff quickly determined that the Secretary of State for the Colonies could not meet with Huggins and Major Bowen “without exposing himself to the obligation of seeing representative of other contingents” as well; yet staff members were less clear on the level of support—if any—the Colonial Office should extend to the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent.204 “Since these men have considered themselves too good for the [BWIR] contingent,” clerk R. A. Wiseman argued, “I presume that we

201 Cipriani, Twenty-five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in the Great War 1914-1918, 9

202 George Huggins to A. Bonar Law, November 4, 1915, CO 295/503, file 51237, National Archives of the United Kingdom

203 A. S. Bowden to Captain Warner, December 6, 1915, CO 295/503, file 57711, National Archives of the United Kingdom

204 Handwritten note by F. G. A. Butler, November 5, 1915, CO 295/503, file 51237, National Archives of the United Kingdom
should not feel obliged to make any exceptional effort to help them.” Clerk C. A. Darley offered a more positive assessment of the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent, stating that the group was “likely to contain some very useful men” for the British Army. However, both Darley and clerk Greg Grindle questioned if it would be feasible to aid the volunteers since they would be “scattered over various Regiments” in the British Army.

In a pragmatic compromise, the Colonial Office sent Grindle to meet with the two representatives of the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent after the Secretary of State for the Colonies diplomatically declined their invitation due to prior “engagements.” The frank exchange among Bowden, Huggins, and Grindle sheds profound insight on the racial prerogatives of Trinidad’s conservative elite as well as the intraracial squabbles among whites in the colony over the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent. During the private summit, Bowen and Huggins assured Grindle that they had no intention of opposing the local government or the official recruitment effort for the BWIR by siphoning off qualified men for the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent. Rather, Bowen and Huggins insisted, they had established the private contingent because “white and the better class of coloured men will not serve with the blacks [and] want to join British regiments.” Instead of being acknowledged for their efforts to mobilize the colony’s elite sons, Bowen and Huggins complained, colonial officials in Trinidad had given the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent the “cold shoulder” and even refused to provide a police escort for the group during public

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205 Handwritten note by R. A. Wiseman, November 6, 1915, CO 295/503, file 51237, National Archives of the United Kingdom

206 Handwritten note by C. A. Darley, November 6, 1915, CO 295/503, file 51237, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, November 6, 1915, CO 295/503, file 51237, National Archives of the United Kingdom
events. As a result, one well-heeled subscriber to the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent Fund complained that his wife was “knocked about from pillar to post” by rowdy working-class spectators who assembled uninvited to view the group.\footnote{207} Furthermore, Bowen and Huggins asked for official assurance from the Colonial Office that local authorities in Trinidad would not blacklist volunteers who resigned from their jobs in the civil service to join the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent secretly.\footnote{208}

After Grindle’s meeting with Bowen and Huggins, Bonar Law dispatched a brief missive to Huggins offering his support for the recruiting effort. In a diplomatically-worded letter written on behalf of Bonar Law by F. G. A. Butler, Butler reported that the Secretary of State for the Colonies was “very sorry” that his schedule prevented him from meeting with representatives from the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent and thanked Huggins for his “work in getting recruits for the Army.” In addition, Law promised to ask Trinidad’s governor, George Le Hunte, to “give all proper facilities to the Committee in its work of helping young Trinidadians who wish to come to England to join a British regiment.”\footnote{209}

The Colonial Office’s official sanction of the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent cooled the local row over the group’s aims and purpose. The leaders of the private contingent ultimately recruited 276 volunteers for the British Army between 1915 and 1918 and raised over $61,000 to cover initial training and transportation costs (see table 10).\footnote{210}

\footnote{207} “Another Serious Complaint Against the Police,” Port of Spain Gazette, October 22, 1915, 9

\footnote{208} Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, November 15, 1915, CO 295/503, file 51237, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\footnote{209} F. G. A. Butler to George Huggins, November 16, 1915, CO 295/503, file 51237, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\footnote{210} Captain Dow, Record of Service of Members: The Trinidad Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent 1915 to 1918, xiii, 34
Though Arthur Cipriani remained adamantly opposed to the rival contingent, two young
Trinidadians who would rise to prominence as nationalist literary figures in the postwar years
sought to serve with the group. Alfred Hubert Mendes, the prolific Portuguese Creole writer
best known for his work with the *Beacon* Group literary cadre in the 1930s, was seventeen
years old and studying in England when the Great War erupted in 1914. Hoping to protect
his son from the dangers of war, Mendes’s father brought him back to Trinidad in the
summer of 1915.211 Yet, the budding writer soon grew restless at home in the West Indies
and volunteered for the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent in “quest of new experiences to
fuel his writing.”212 Hence, less than a year after returning to Trinidad, Mendes enlisted in
the Second Contingent of the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent and sailed across the
Atlantic along with 69 other volunteers in December 1915.

Once in Europe, Private Mendes served as a rifleman with the King's Royal Rifle
Corps alongside working-class colliers from northern England and two fellow Merchants’
and Planters’ Contingent volunteers from Trinidad.213 Deployed to Abbeville near the mouth
of the Somme, the 18-year-old private spent his first months as a soldier in a muddy, rat-
infested dugout 20 feet below ground. Mendes managed to endure the “hell of mud and
death” on the Western Front, but his two Trinidadian companions quickly broke under the
strain of constant shelling, homesickness, and fatigue. Recalling the breakdown of one of his
companions, Mendes wrote: “He wept without shame, choking with self-pity, his manhood

211 Michèle Levy, “Introduction,” in *The Man Who Ran Away and Other Stories of Trinidad in the 1920s
and 1930s*, by Alfred Mendes (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2006),

212 Michèle Levy, “Introduction,” in *The Man Who Ran Away and Other Stories of Trinidad in the 1920s
and 1930s*,

the West Indies Press, 2002), 43
lacerated and shredded. Intoning as one haunted by horrors, ‘Oh Holy Mary, Mother of God, have mercy on me and save me!’ he fell back upon the mud floor whimpering like a baby, until beyond endurance, he lapsed into a deep sleep.” Shortly thereafter, military officials declared both of Mendes’ Trinidadian comrades “unfit for service” and sent them home less than eight months after enlistment.\textsuperscript{214} Mendes, however, climbed his way through the ranks to become a sergeant and received the Military Medal for his “coolness” and “complete disregard for his personal safety” during the Battle of Poelcappelle in Flanders in 1917.\textsuperscript{215}

In the years following the Great War, Mendes chronicled his battlefield experiences in a host of semi-autobiographical poems and short stories, which were published in Trinidad’s major literary journals. Describing the horrors of trench warfare on the Western Front in a retrospective poem published in 1933, he wrote:

\begin{quote}
I remember the months I spent in the trenches with lice playing hide-and-seek about my body in the midst of mud and the stench of decomposed bodies.

and I remember the futility
and the wickedness
and the beastliness of it all\textsuperscript{216}
\end{quote}

Although C. L. R. James was four years younger than Alfred Mendes, both teenagers had a passion for literature and had been educated at Queen’s Royal College, Trinidad’s oldest and most prestigious boys’ secondary school. In 1918, at the age of 17, James volunteered for the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent during his final year at Queen’s

\textsuperscript{214} Mendes, \textit{The Autobiography of Alfred Mendes, 1871-1991}, 48

\textsuperscript{215} Mendes, \textit{The Autobiography of Alfred Mendes, 1871-1991}, 60-61

\textsuperscript{216} \textit{Beacon}, May 1933, 21, quoted in Michèle Levy, “Introduction,” in \textit{The Man Who Ran Away and Other Stories of Trinidad in the 1920s and 1930s}, xv
Royal College. Writing about the local military recruitment campaign four decades later, James vividly described how class and colour divided the colony’s volunteers into two distinct military units. The Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent, he explained, was a private group comprised of “young men of the upper middle class” who were “sent direct to England to join English regiments and financed by the local merchants.” He mused, “The rumour was, and the facts seemed to show that the merchants selected only white or brown people” for their contingent. In contrast, the colonial government recruited the BWIR “public contingent” from “among the masses of people.” When “white boys” from Queen’s Royal College elected to serve with the less-prestigious BWIR, James remembered, they immediately received commissions as officers and returned to school “with chests out and smart uniforms and shining buttons.”

James’ fleeting anecdote highlights one of the central ironies of the recruitment campaign: While white volunteers who joined the BWIR secured coveted appointments as commissioned officers or NCOs, only 26 percent of men who joined the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent received commissions in the British Army. Indeed, the vast majority of men from the “better classes” who enlisted with the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent — over 60 percent in total — soldiered as lowly privates throughout the war.

Eager to “see the world,” James decided the “best way would be to go to the war.” Although he was “dark” and underage, the athletic teenager was “widely known as a coming

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218 For the rank of men who joined the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent, see The West Indian Contingent Committee, *Report and Accounts for the Six Months ended 31st December, 1918* (London: The West India Committee Rooms, 1919), n.p.

219 James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 30
cricketer” and “tall and very fit.” Skipping school one morning in 1918, James travelled to an office where “one of the big merchants” in Port of Spain “examined the would-be warriors” for the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent. “Young man after young man went in, and I was not obviously inferior to any of them in anything,” James later recalled. “The merchant talked to each [volunteer], asked for references and arranged for further examination as the case may be.” Yet, when James approached the merchant’s desk to volunteer, he was rejected curtly before receiving a physical examination or an interview about his educational pedigree. “He took one look at me, saw my dark skin, and shaking his head vigorously, motioned me violently away,” James wrote.220

James never revealed why he elected to volunteer for the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent rather than Trinidad’s BWIR “public contingent.” However, he insisted he was “not unduly disturbed” after being rejected by the upper-crust military group. Rather, he contended that it was his white teachers at Queen’s Royal College who were deeply troubled by the overt racism of the Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent. “When the masters heard what had happened to me some of them were angry, one or two ashamed, all were on my side,” he wrote. “It didn’t hurt for long because for so many years these crude intrusions from the world which surrounded us had been excluded. I had not even been wounded, for no scar was left.”221

Following the example of their peers in Trinidad, members of Barbados’ upper crust, known locally as the “best class,” formed their own private contingent for volunteers who

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220James, Beyond a Boundary, 31

221James, Beyond a Boundary, 31
wanted to serve in the British Army.\(^{222}\) In November 1915, merchant D. G. Leacock founded the Barbados Citizens’ Contingent along with nine other white supporters and issued a public call for “all good Citizens in Town and Country to come forward and help.”\(^{223}\) The group amassed nearly £2,000 in private donations during its first month in existence, garnering words of praise from the Trinidadian press as well as the local establishment.\(^{224}\) Yet, one of the region’s black-owned newspapers blasted the leaders of the private contingent for appropriating the language of citizenship to recruit white and coloured gentlemen for their exclusive unit. “Citizen’s Contingent! What a name!,” the editors of the \textit{West Indian} fumed. “If there is a Citizen’s Contingent,” they asked, “what condition does the Barbados [BWIR] Public Contingent represent? Those who are not citizens?”\(^{225}\)

Even after the creation of private contingents in Barbados and Trinidad, many middle- and upper-class men still refused to step forward for military service. In fact, only 89 recruits enlisted in the Barbados Citizen’s Contingent, falling short of the goal of 100 to 200 men.\(^{226}\) In Jamaica, one frustrated observer disparagingly referred to the colony’s young elite as "gilded youth" and "carpet knights" and questioned their bravery by citing biblical verses on fear and cowardice from Psalms and Isaiah.\(^{227}\)

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\textsuperscript{222} Samaroo and Girvan, “The Trinidad Workingmen's Association and the Origins of Popular Protest in a Crown Colony,” 211
\textsuperscript{223} “Barbados Citizens Contingent,” \textit{Port of Spain Gazette}, November 7, 1915, 7
\textsuperscript{225} \textit{The West Indian}, November 25, 1915, 2
\textsuperscript{226} Henry W. Lofty, \textit{Report of the Census of Barbados, 1911-1921} (Bridgetown: Advocate Ltd. Co, 1921), 14
\textsuperscript{227} "Jamaica Slackers," \textit{Daily Gleaner}, October 25, 1915, 13
\end{flushleft}
effort in rural Retreat, Jamaica, stalled in November 1915, one resident blamed the local class of gentlemen who urged peasants and artisans to enlist while their own sons stayed at home. The *Gleaner* also openly castigated the island's privileged youth who idled at home "living a life of ease" while local peasants and laborers volunteered for the army in droves. "Has position no obligations?,” asked the editors. “Has it ceased to be the duty of Gentlemen to lead where danger lies?”

As the war progressed, frustrated commentators issued increasingly strident calls for the “better class” of men to join the colors. Speaking at a rally in Linstead, Jamaica, in 1917, W. F. Bailey contrasted the bravery and patriotism of Jamaica's unlettered black masses with the unwillingness of the island's wealthy scions to don the King's uniform. Chiding elite men who boasted about their English lineage, yet refused to serve in the military during a time of unprecedented crisis, Bailey challenged the elite to demonstrate their loyalty on the battlefield. "The barefoot peasant, the illiterate negro has come forward boldly," he protested. "But the educated class has provided the slackers in this country. 'Tis sad to say it, but nevertheless, 'tis true."

Like their white counterparts, some men from the region's educated coloured and black middle class chaffed at the idea of serving alongside the "mixed class of men" enlisted in the BWIR. In a speech before the Legislative Council, the Administrator of Dominica applauded the patriotic spirit of the island's laboring men, while lamenting the lack of

228 “Answering Homeland's Call,” *Daily Gleaner*, November 6, 1915, 14

229 “Topics of the Day: The Other Young Men,” *Daily Gleaner*, November 27, 1915, 8

volunteers from the "more educated classes of …[the] creole population." Likewise in Antigua, an observer noted that the island's white elites and black working men volunteered to serve in the BWIR while the "better class of coloured young men" rarely did so. Remarkably, in a desperate attempt to recruit more men for military service, Governor Leslie Probyn embraced a proposal from the Barbados Recruiting Committee to create a separate regiment for “the better class of coloured men.” Forwarding the proposal to Secretary of State for the Colonies Walter Long in late July 1918, Probyn acknowledged that middle-class coloured men had little interest in soldiering alongside black and coloured working peoples in the BWIR. At least for some potential soldiers, Probyn implicitly acknowledged, the prerogatives of class and status trumped any allegiance to “King and Country.”

The belated effort to establish a distinct contingent for coloured men never materialized due to the end of hostilities in Europe, yet Probyn’s overtures to the Colonial Office underscore the persistent salience of race, class, and colour in the recruitment campaign. Despite the soaring rhetoric of imperial fraternity and mutual obligation, military recruiters and volunteers in the British Caribbean confronted the difficult task of managing gendered anxieties and interracial and intraracial hierarchies throughout the war years. Across the Atlantic in the Middle East and Europe, BWIR soldiers would confront similar issues as they struggled to navigate racially-charged treatment in military barracks and under abusive commanding officers and faced unexpected challenges to their standing as soldiers from the War Office.

231 Lucas, *The Empire at War*, 377-378
232 Lucas, *The Empire at War*, 377
233 Leslie Probyn to Walter Long, July 31, 1918, CO 137/726, file 42533, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Chapter Three

“Just as any other British soldier”: Intra-Imperial Networks and the Battle Against Discrimination in the Armed Forces, 1918-19

In July 1918, a Tobagonian soldier stationed in Palestine clandestinely chronicled his experiences as a private in the First Battalion of the BWIR. In an unsigned letter to his cousin in Trinidad, the private offered a harrowing portrait of military life: “[W]e was simple cent away like a pack of cows to be sold to any purchaser…It is true that soldiering is a hard thing, but with our unit it is twice as hard as it is with other units.” Despite nearly three years of service in a combat zone, the private reported, his commanding officers insisted that BWIR servicemen had not “train[ed] enough for the firing line.” Thus, instead of battling Turkish forces, the Tobagonian serviceman endured years of backbreaking manual labor, unremitting verbal assaults from his superiors, and an epidemic of influenza that sent his comrades “pouring into hospital by scores.” After witnessing fellow soldiers “tied hands [and] feet” with rope for refusing to work, the Tobagonian private questioned how supposedly civilized Englishmen could treat West Indian troops with such vicious disregard. “[D]o you think it right for such a thing to happen among a set of people who think they are the most civilised people in the world” and “who generally say England is fighting for civilization?” he asked caustically. Predicting that there was “going to be a mutiny” in his battalion due to the rampant discrimination and abuse they endured, the soldier implored his cousin to submit his account to the Port of Spain Gazette, the colony’s most widely-

1 J. C. Hope, V. C. Thomas, E. F. Packer, et. al. to J. Challenor Lynch, August 2, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom, London

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circulated newspaper, so that civilians on the homefront could know what was really happening to “their boys” in the BWIR.²

The beleaguered private had been one of the earliest volunteers for the BWIR, joining Trinidad’s first contingent in 1915. Yet, in less than three years, his views of the war and West Indians’ role in it had undergone a dramatic shift. “I now see that we were really not required out here, otherwise we would have been put into better uses as soldiers,” he confessed. Angry that the “cold footed Englishmen” entrusted to lead his battalion refused to speak out on behalf of their men, the private mocked his superiors for “sheltering themself [themselves] from bullets…instead of going [to] fight for their mother country.” Unwilling to suffer further abuse, the soldier declared that he would have “preferred to die any sort of death rather than…undergoing what is happening at present” with his unit. Palestine, he concluded bitterly, was a “cursed country.”³

The Tobagonian soldier’s damning exposé never reached his cousin in Port of Spain or Trinidad’s local newspapers.⁴ Rather, military censors at the British Army General Headquarters in Bir Salem, Palestine, opened and confiscated the letter less than a week after it was posted.⁵ Citing the “nature of the letter” and the fact that it was “intended for publication in the press,” military officials launched a wide-ranging investigation to uncover

² Unsigned Letter to Mr. Prince Alfred, July 18, 1918, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain

³ Unsigned Letter to Mr. Prince Alfred, July 18, 1918, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

⁴ This letter, and the controversy it generated, has also escaped the attention of historians and other scholars of the World War I Caribbean.

⁵ Lt. Col. P. J. Fearen to Headquarters, XXI Corps, July 22, 1918, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

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its author. After postal officials used the Army postmark on the envelope to trace the letter to the First Battalion of the BWIR, Colonel C. Wood-Hill, the battalion’s commanding officer, conducted an internal probe to identify the letter writer. When the colonel’s investigation ended “without success,” General Edmund Allenby, Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and the highest-ranking British officer in the Middle Eastern theater, took the extraordinary step of enlisting the assistance of Trinidad’s governor, J. R. Chancellor, to help expose the anonymous correspondent. Working in conjunction with the colony’s Inspector General of the Constabulary, authorities in Trinidad ultimately identified the anonymous letter writer as Private Charles Roberts, an unmarried volunteer from Tobago.

If Private Roberts aimed to expose the indignities of military life to civilians on the homefront, many other BWIR servicemen, particularly the regiment’s black and coloured non-commissioned officers, elected to address their concerns through formal petitions to civil

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6 Lt. Col. P.J. Fearen to Headquarters, XXI Corps, July 22, 1918, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago; Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force to Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, November 5, 1918, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

7 Lt. Col. C. Wood-Hill to Headquarters, Anzac Mounted Division, September 14, 1918, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

8 Lt. Col. C. Wood-Hill to Headquarters, Anzac Mounted Division, September 14, 1918, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago; Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force to Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, November 5, 1918, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago; Governor J.R. Chancellor to the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, January 1919, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

9 Officials in Trinidad finally identified Private Roberts as the anonymous letter writer in late March 1919, eight months after his letter was confiscated and four months after the Armistice. I have not located any correspondence regarding what happened to Private Roberts after his identity was exposed. Governor J.R. Chancellor to the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, March 22, 1919, File Folder 4/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago
and military authorities rather than adjudicate their grievances in the court of public opinion. For example, W. E. Julien, a Grenadian sergeant who served alongside Roberts in the First Battalion, risked his privileged standing in the ranks by signing a petition that condemned the War Office’s decision to exclude BWIR soldiers from the substantial pay increase mandated in Army Order No. 1 of 1918 (see figure 8). The petition, dispatched to Governor Charles O’Brien of Barbados in autumn 1918, was signed by 41 other soldiers from the First and Second Battalions, 38 of whom were non-commissioned officers.¹⁰

Figure 8: Sergeant W. E. Julien with fellow BWIR soldiers in Grenada. Standing (left to right): Sergeant John Marcus Knight, unidentified soldier. Seated (left to right): Sergeant W. E. Julien, Sergeant John Byron Renwick. Sergeant Renwick also signed the petition to Governor Charles O’Brien in 1918.

¹⁰The forty-two signatories included: sixteen (16) soldiers from Jamaica, five (5) from Barbados, five (5) from Grenada, four (4) from British Guiana, three (3) from the Bahamas, three (3) from British Honduras, two (2) from Trinidad, two (2) from St. Vincent, one (1) from Montserrat, and one (1) from St. Lucia.
In their petition, Julien and his comrades chastised the War Office for excluding BWIR soldiers from Army Order No.1, yet they also took care to present themselves as respectable men, “taxpayers,” and “loyal subjects of His Majesty.” Writing to O’Brien as a potential patron and ally, the petitioners appealed for his “co-operation” and “respectfully beg[ged]” the governor to lobby the War Office on their behalf.\textsuperscript{11} In doing so, the petitioners strategically sidestepped the contentious allegations of verbal abuse, dismal working conditions, and exclusion from combat that animated Private Roberts’ graphic personal account. Rather, Sergeant Julien and his comrades articulated their grievances using the contractual language of mutual obligation, noting that BWIR soldiers were “treated as British soldiers in equipment, training, and discipline” and had been “led to believe” that they would be “treated as Imperial Troops and receive any and all benefits accruing to such troops.”

In a similar vein, the soldiers framed their protest as a principled stance against discrimination in the military, rather than a ploy for more money. “We would like it to be understood that the motive of this memorandum is not so much to get the pecuniary benefits from which we have been denied,” they explained, “as to bring before His Excellency that we are alive to the fact that as West Indians we have been unfairly discriminated against.” Thus, by accusing the War Office of violating the celebrated principles of imperial fraternity and mutual obligation, the petitioners presented their protest as an extension of their patriotism rather than an act of disloyalty.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} The petition was not dated, but several references in the text suggest that it was written during the second half of 1918. Petition from Charles Callender, W. E. Julien, A. Johnson, et. al to Governor Charles O’Brien (Barbados), n.d., CO 318/348, file 16801, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{12} Petition from Charles Callender, W. E. Julien, A. Johnson, et. al to Governor Charles O’Brien (Barbados), n.d., CO 318/348, file 16801, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Sharp differences in tone, language, and outlook separated Private Roberts’ emotionally-charged letter from Sergeant Julien’s carefully-worded petition; yet, by reading these two accounts in dialogue with one another, we can begin to uncover the range of political perspectives and protest strategies that fuelled BWIR soldiers’ campaign against discrimination in the British imperial armed forces. Roberts and Julien were part of a remarkable groundswell of activism that began during the last months of the war and crested after the Armistice. While individual West Indian soldiers had risen up to challenge discrimination, dire working conditions, and slights to their manhood from the very beginning of the war, soldiers’ activism reached its peak intensity between 1918 and 1919. During the second half of 1918 alone, more than 220 BWIR soldiers signed petitions to British civilian military authorities, while other servicemen echoed the call for equal treatment through individual (and often anonymous) letters of complaint. Most dramatically, BWIR soldiers stationed near the Mediterranean port city of Taranto, Italy, mutinied in December 1918, sparking the most violent protest in the regiment’s history. Four interrelated grievances animated BWIR soldiers’ battle against discrimination: the regiment’s exclusion from Army Order No. 1, the prohibition against granting commissions to non-white soldiers, abusive treatment by commanding officers, and the practice of assigning BWIR units to sanitation and fatigue duties. Over the course of their yearlong drive to redress these grievances, soldiers forged new intra-imperial alliances, experimented with various forms of collective protest, and mulled over the possibilities for equal treatment and opportunity inside the British Army and beyond.
This chapter chronicles BWIR soldiers’ multi-sited campaign against discrimination in Britain’s imperial forces during the final year of their military service. During this effort, BWIR servicemen mobilized in two distinct geographic spheres: the Middle Eastern theatre (which included Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia) and Italy. Extant scholarly accounts of this watershed period focus on the fiery mutiny in Taranto, Italy, while paying insufficient attention to the broader ferment that included petitioning, letter-writing, and various forms of collective organizing before and after Taranto. By analyzing the mutiny in isolation from other forms of protest, scholars have overlooked the ways in which BWIR soldiers like Sergeant Julien and Private Roberts set out strategically to cultivate and mobilize a network of allies across the British Empire to buttress their drive to be treated with dignity and compensated equitably. Through the exchange of letters and petitions, BWIR soldiers simultaneously invoked and substantiated their membership in Britain’s imperial forces, insisting that West Indians constituted a special class within the Empire.13

By 1918, petitioning was a well-established aspect of black and coloured West Indians’ protest politics. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, free people of colour, and less frequently enslaved men and women, regularly petitioned the Crown and local legislative bodies to protest against mistreatment and discrimination. After emancipation in 1834 and “full freedom” in 1838, black and coloured West Indians used petitions as a vehicle to solicit support from Queen Victoria and to register demands for improved material, social, and political standing with local colonial officials. Significantly, I have not found any examples of BWIR soldiers petitioning King George V, which perhaps reflects a more nuanced understanding of the division of authority and responsibility in the imperial bureaucracy. On the use of petitions by black and coloured West Indians before 1900, see Franklin Knight, ed., General History of the Caribbean—Volume III: The Slave Societies of the Caribbean (London: UNESCO, 1997), 159-160; Mimi Sheller, Democracy after Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 145-197; Swithin Wilmot, “Politics at the ’Grassroots’ in Free Jamaica: St James 1838-1865,” in Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora, ed. Verene A. Shepherd (New York : Palgrave, 2002), 449-446

scope and volume of soldiers’ correspondence highlights the importance of intra-imperial circuits during this period: non-commissioned officers in Egypt sent petitions to distant colonial administrators in Barbados, Dominica, and St. Lucia; soldiers in Mesopotamia wrote urgent pleas for assistance to military recruiters in British Honduras; servicemen in Europe reported fresh racial slights to sympathetic newspaper editors in Grenada and Trinidad; and soldiers in Italy relayed their grievances to retired civil servants in London. Their letters, in turn, were frequently forwarded along with enthusiastic endorsements to the Colonial Office or directly to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, validating soldiers’ claims that discrimination against the BWIR was an “insult to the whole of the West Indies.”

Soldiers’ protest strategies reflected their evolving understanding of military rules, regulations, and hierarchies as well as their precarious status as subjects in a highly bureaucratic, global empire. When confronted with the intransience of the War Office and their limited right of appeal in the military, BWIR soldiers redirected their efforts towards colonial officials in Britain and the West Indies, deftly entangling civil authorities in a military dispute over pay and status. Non-commissioned officers, the highest-ranking black and coloured soldiers in the BWIR, were the fulcrums around which the yearlong campaign pivoted. Drawing on their position of authority in the ranks and their social and political networks in the colonies, non-commissioned officers nourished the movement in their roles as organizers and strategists. The BWIR sergeants’ mess, a space where soldiers routinely


14 Petition from Charles Callender, W. E. Julien, A. Johnson, et. al to Governor Charles O’Brien (Barbados), n.d., CO 318/348, file 16801, National Archives of the United Kingdom
gathered for “weighty discussion and learned discourses” before 1918, functioned as an intellectual and organizational hub for dissident soldiers during the protests.\textsuperscript{15}

If the longstanding focus on the Taranto mutiny has obscured the dense networks that facilitated the transnational campaign for equality, it has also led scholars to overstate soldiers’ militancy, particularly the extent to which protesting soldiers articulated their grievances using anti-colonial or black nationalist rhetoric. In one of the earliest scholarly treatments of the BWIR, W. F. Elkins argued that the “racist constraints of the War Office” drove “black soldiers away from their connection to the British Empire.”\textsuperscript{16} The mutiny, he went on to assert, marked the “modern advent of mass resistance by West Indians to British rule.”\textsuperscript{17} Brimming with verve and righteous indignation—and published at the height of the Black Power movement—Elkins’ provocative analysis of soldiers’ activism captured the imagination of a generation of scholars in the Caribbean and continues to inform the scholarly consensus on the BWIR to this day.\textsuperscript{18} Yet, rather than viewing the mutiny as the defining act in this period of fevered mobilization, I argue that it was an exceptional moment

\textsuperscript{15} A. E. Horner, \textit{From the Islands of the Sea: Glimpses of a West Indian Battalion in France} (Nassau, Bahamas: Guardian, 1919), 50


\textsuperscript{17} Elkins, “A Source of Black Nationalism in the Caribbean: The Revolt of the British West Indies Regiment at Taranto, Italy,” 103

of violence in a campaign overwhelming characterized by petitioning, letter-writing, and other non-violent forms of dissent. A careful examination of BWIR soldiers’ public and private discourse reveals that most soldiers, unlike Private Charles Roberts, couched their claims for equitable treatment in the language of mutual obligation, presenting themselves as “loyal subjects” who sought racial equality in exchange for their voluntary service on behalf of the Empire. They doggedly pursued and won the support of white allies and conscripted colonial authorities to act on their behalf by insisting that their military service should garner equitable recompense. Instead of positioning themselves at the vanguard of the “national liberation struggle” in the Caribbean, as Elkins suggests, most BWIR servicemen vigorously pursued greater inclusion *in the empire* on the basis of genuine equality.¹⁹

**Rights, Respectability, and Army Order No. 1: The Opening Salvos**

Army Order No. 1 of 1918, the Royal Warrant that served as a rallying cry for outraged BWIR soldiers from Egypt to England, was initially viewed as an unmitigated victory for British servicemen. On November 26, 1917, after sustained agitation by British servicemen and a statement of support from the Joint Committee of the House of Lords, the House of Commons, and the General Federation of Trade Unions, Chancellor of the Exchequer Bonar Law announced before the House of Commons that the government had “decided to make certain further awards” to imperial soldiers and sailors.²⁰ Eight days later,

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¹⁹ Elkins, “A Source of Black Nationalism in the Caribbean: The Revolt of the British West Indies Regiment at Taranto, Italy,” 103

on December 4, 1917, the sweeping new wage and benefits regulations were officially published as Army Order No. 1 of 1918. Army Order No. 1 retroactively raised the minimum pay for privates from 1s. per day to 1s. 6d., a net increase of 50 percent. Commissioned officers and enlisted men likewise received a major pay hike, though it was less generous than the unprecedented allotment for privates. In addition to raising the minimum rate of pay, Army Order No. 1 also granted servicemen a bonus of 1d. per day for each full year of wartime military service. For soldiers who had served since the outbreak of war in 1914, the “War Pay” provision increased their wages by 3d per day or 1s. 9d per week. Furthermore, Army Order No. 1 drastically reduced the amount of time soldiers had to serve before they could qualify for additional proficiency pay and guaranteed that wounded soldiers would continue to draw their wages while hospitalized. The order also mandated that separation allowances for soldiers’ dependents would be paid from public funds, instead of being

21 The provisions of Army Order were applied retroactively as of September 29, 1917. War Office, “Army Order 1, Royal Warrant—Increase in Pay for Soldiers,” Army Orders, January, 1918 (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1918), 3-6, in CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom

22 The original rate of pay for imperial troops was established by Royal Warrant on December 1, 1914. Under Army Order 1 of 1918, the minimum daily wage for privates rose by 6d. while the basic pay for other ranks increased by 3d. War Office, “Army Order 1, Royal Warrant—Increase in Pay for Soldiers,” Army Orders, January, 1918 (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1918), 4-5 in CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom

23 War Office, “Army Order 1, Royal Warrant—Increase in Pay for Soldiers,” Army Orders, January, 1918 (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1918), 4 in CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom

24 The qualifying period for proficiency pay was reduced from two years to six months, see War Office, “Army Order 1, Royal Warrant—Increase in Pay for Soldiers,” Army Orders, January, 1918, 3. For the new regulations concerning hospitalized soldiers’ pay, see War Office, “Army Order 1, Royal Warrant—Increase in Pay for Soldiers,” Army Orders, January, 1918, 6
deducted from soldiers’ personal wages.²⁵ Taken together, Bonar Law predicted that the far-reaching financial provisions of Army Order No. 1 would cost the Treasury £65 million in the first year and at least £69 million in the following year.²⁶

Not all soldiers serving under the Union Jack, however, qualified for the pecuniary entitlements of Army Order No. 1. Indeed, nearly all of the provisions of the order—including those regarding soldiers’ minimum daily pay, the “War Pay” bonus, and separation allowances—applied solely to soldiers who served in imperial units that maintained a depot “situated in the United Kingdom, Isle of Man, or the Channel Islands.” Erecting a stark boundary between servicemen with roots in the metropole and those who enlisted in the Empire, the order explicitly excluded all men who “enlisted for service in Colonial units or contingents” and soldiers who were paid at a colonial rate. Therefore, the 1.76 million soldiers who served in contingents raised in the self-governing Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Newfoundland were not eligible for the benefits of Army Order No. 1, and continued to draw their standard wages from their home governments.²⁷ Likewise, servicemen in the Indian Army, King’s African Rifles, South African Native Labour Corps, East African Military Labour Corps, and similar regiments were also

²⁵ War Office, “Army Order 1, Royal Warrant—Increase in Pay for Soldiers,” Army Orders, January, 1918, 3-4

²⁶ HC Debates, 26 November 1917, vol. 99, cc1631-3

²⁷ Approximately 1,176,767 men served in units from the Dominions including: Australia (412,952 men), New Zealand (128,525 men), Newfoundland (6,326 men), and Canada (628,964). For enlistment figures for the Dominions, see War Office, Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War, 1914-1920, (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1922), pp. 756, 773. While soldiers from the Dominions were excluded from Army Order No. 1, soldiers in the all-white South African Overseas Expeditionary Force were awarded the benefits of the order through a special provision.
disqualified due to their service in colonial contingents. Finally, members of the Non-Combatant Corps, the labor unit comprised of British conscientious objectors, and all servicemen who labored in agricultural positions were excluded as well. As a result, at least 2.6 million of the 8.5 million men who served in Britain’s combined armed forces were legally excluded from the benefits of Army Order No. 1.

Although most non-European servicemen were prevented from enjoying the emoluments outlined in Army Order No. 1 because of their service in colonial units, the order did not make any explicit reference to race, color, or citizenship. As a result, Indian, black, and coloured soldiers serving in regular British Army regiments—or in imperial units that met the strict criteria outlined in Army Order No.1—qualified for the full benefits of the Army Order along with their counterparts in the metropole.

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29 According to historian Michael Francis Snape, the Non-Combatant Corps “was never very large and at no point mustered more than 3,000 conscientious observers during the First World War.” I have not been able to locate a figure for the number of British soldiers engaged in agricultural labor in 1917-18. Michael Francis Snape, God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars (New York: Routledge, 2005), 193

30 For the total number of British, Dominion, Indian, and Colonial Troops mobilized for the First World War, see War Office, Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War, 1914-1920, 756

By February 1918, two months after Army Order No.1 was published, BWIR soldiers in Egypt began to make official enquires about their standing under the new edict. In keeping with military protocol, soldiers from the First, Second, and Fifth Battalions successfully secured the backing of their commanding officers who, in turn, solicited the aid of General Edmund Allenby, Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. The veteran general and Sandhurst graduate was an ideal patron for the BWIR, having recently led a string of decisive victories that drew international acclaim and climaxed in the capture of Beersheba, Gaza, and Jerusalem in autumn 1917. A “physically large and confident” soldier who had served in the South African War (1899-1902) and on the Western Front (1914-1917) before taking the helm of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in June 1917, Allenby was known as a “bundle of contradictions.” On the one hand, his domineering presence, “brusque” manner, and frequent verbal tirades led his subordinates to nickname him the “Bloody Bull.” On the other hand, Allenby exhibited an unusual willingness to interface with front-line troops and “took more personal interest in the rank and file than

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32 General Edmund Allenby first wrote to the War Office on February 6, 1918 to inquire about Army Order No.1. The letter is referenced in, G.F. Watterson, War Office to General Edmund Allenby, March 27, 1918, File Folder 2/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

33 Under Allenby’s command, British forces captured Beersheba on October 31, 1917, Gaza on November 7, 1917, and Jerusalem on December 10, 1917. For an overview of these campaigns from official dispatches, see A Brief Record of the Advance of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force Under the Command of General Sir Edmund H. H. Allenby, July 1917 to October 1918, Second Edition (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1919), 1-9; For a scholarly treatment of Allenby’s role in these key victories, see Matthew Hughes, Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917-1919 (London: Frank Cass, 1999).

almost any modern British commander.” As one officer in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force later recalled, “There was scarcely a man in the force who did not feel that he was a matter of personal interest to the C in C [Commander in Chief] and the effect was miraculous.”

General Allenby wrote to the War Office on behalf of BWIR soldiers on February 6, 1918, to inquire about their standing relative to Army Order No. 1. In a succinct reply the following month, the War Office averred that the regiment was “not eligible for the benefits of Army Order No.1/1918”—except for the limited provisions regarding “Proficiency Pay and Hospital Stoppages”—because the BWIR did not meet the basic qualifications outlined in Articles 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the Army Order. According to those articles, Assistant Financial Secretary G.F. Watterson explained in a letter dated March 27, 1918, only units with depots in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, or Isle of Man qualified for the pay increase, subsidized separation allowance payments, and war service gratuity outlined in Army Order No. 1.

Convinced that the BWIR should receive the full benefits of Army Order No. 1, Allenby dispatched a second personal note to the War Office in early May 1918 asking the Army Council to reconsider its position. For the bulk of the letter, Allenby skillfully outlined the regiment’s history, emphasizing that the BWIR formerly maintained a depot in the United

35 Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land: World War I in the Middle East*, 82-83


37 G. F. Watterson, War Office to General Edmund Allenby, March 27, 1918, File Folder 2/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago
Kingdom and still operated a detail camp and pay office in England. He also took pains to stress the soldiers’ respectability and class backgrounds, noting that many of the men held “first class positions in their Colony.” Implicit in this seemingly quotidian claim was the idea that BWIR soldiers constituted a privileged class of colonial subjects: they were educated, responsible, and capable. By virtue of their educational and professional achievements, Allenby signaled they were worthy of the basic rewards and privileges bestowed on servicemen in the British Army as a matter of course. This line of argument would reappear, in one guise or another, in nearly every favorable description of the BWIR during this period. If loyalty and faithful service were not enough to secure the War Office’s esteem, then BWIR soldiers and their advocates hoped that their respectability would carry weight.

The ideology of respectability constituted a double-edged sword for black and coloured colonials in the British Empire. On the one hand, racialized and gendered notions of respectability exalted the anglophile culture of the ruling colonial oligarchy, positioning “cultured” white men as the rightful guardians of colonies with large black majorities. In the British West Indies and elsewhere in the Empire, respectability came to define the impermeable boundaries of Britishness and civilization, marking those who engaged in Afro-Creole religious, social, and cultural practices as backward, uncivilized, and utterly incapable of exercising the rights and privileges of citizenship. Yet if the ideology of respectability

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38 General Edmund Allenby to War Office, May 9, 1918, File Folder 2/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

39 For examples of this rhetorical strategy, see J. Challenor Lynch to T.E. Fell, Colonial Secretary (Barbados), October 9, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Colonel C. Wood-Hill to Sir John Chancellor, Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, November 26, 1918, File Folder 2/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago; West Indian Contingent Committee to Walter Long, December 30, 1918, CO 318/347, file 63228, National Archives of the United Kingdom; West Indian Contingent Committee to Alfred Milner, January 15, 1919, CO 318/347, file 3414, National Archives of the United Kingdom
buttressed white hegemony, it also provided a narrow opening for non-white colonials to achieve social mobility through educational attainment and Victorian social mores. In this patronizing logic, the “backward races” of the Empire could aspire to hold positions of responsibility in the military, colonial service, and business world after a period of tutelage by their social betters. Ambitious black and coloured West Indians took full advantage of the available educational and social opportunities to affirm their status as respectable men and women and to undermine notions of white superiority through individual achievement. For BWIR soldiers, rhetorical claims to respectability served as a means to transcend the racist strictures of the military and civilian worlds and as a declaration of racial equality.40

General Allenby’s eloquent ode to respectability fell on deaf ears at the War Office, however. In response to the general’s second appeal, the War Office now insisted that the BWIR was ineligible because it was a “Native Unit.”41 Writing in June 1918, G. F. Watterson explained that “Native Units were excluded from the benefits of Army Order 1/1918 only after very careful consideration,” and insisted that “no alternation in the decision” was possible.42 Two months later in response to a separate query, B. B. Cubitt,

40 On the development of the ideology of respectability in the British Caribbean during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920 (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004); Catherine Hall, Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 115-139; Brian L. Moore, Cultural Power, Resistance, and Pluralism: Colonial Guyana, 1838-1900, (Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 1995); and Bridget Brereton, Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870-1900, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), Chapters Four and Five

41 General Edmund Allenby to War Office, May 9, 1918, File Folder 2/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago; G.F. Watterson, War Office to General Edmund Allenby, June 18, 1918, File Folder 2/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

42 G. F. Watterson, War Office to General Edmund Allenby, June 18, 1918, File Folder 2/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago
Assistant Secretary to the War Office, echoed Watterson’s pronouncement, declaring that the BWIR was “definitely ineligible” for the benefits of the Army Order.  

The assertion that the BWIR was a “Native Unit” flew in the face of three years of precedent and policy and touched a raw nerve among West Indian servicemen. When word of the War Office’s ruling spread among the ranks, according to historian Winston James, who writes with only a touch of hyperbole, “[T]he Rubicon was crossed, and a collective cry of outrage rang out.” For many BWIR soldiers, the term “native” was little more than derogatory shorthand for the uncivilized peoples of the empire, those backward men and women who could not speak the King’s English, practiced non-Christian faiths, and were ignorant of British laws and customs. J. E. Lewis, a coloured sergeant from British Honduras, captured the sentiment of many BWIR servicemen when he declared that he was a “Soldier of the King,” and refused to be “bracketed with W. A. C. [West African Contingent], Chinese and Local Labourers, who are Arabs or Armenians, or Jews.” The prospect of being lumped together with men of the West African Contingent—whom Sergeant Lewis described as “full-blooded Africans” who could “hardly speak English”—was unthinkable.  

More perspicacious soldiers exposed the War Office’s slight of hand by rehearsing the institutional history of the BWIR instead of debating black and coloured West Indians’ status as “natives.” They noted that the regiment had been established by a Royal Warrant

43 B. B. Cubitt to Colonial Office, August 2, 1918, CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom

44 Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America*, 62

45 Sergeant J.E. Lewis to Lieutenant Colonel Cran, February 22, 1918, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
issued in Britain, funded by the British Treasury, and governed by the rules and regulations of the British Army Act. Further still, the War Office had consented to pay BWIR troops according to the ordinary rates of pay for the British Army and had faithfully done so since the BWIR was established in 1915, a clear signal that the regiment was a part of the imperial forces. Any belated attempt to label the BWIR as a “Native Unit,” and to exclude the regiment from Army Order No. 1 on those grounds, soldiers insisted indignantly, constituted a “manifold injustice.”

Even the most cursory examination of the language of Army Order No. 1 reveals that the War Office was on very shaky ground. The text of the order did not include a single reference to “Native Units,” much less a provision banning such units from the new regulations regarding pay and separation allowances. Moreover, the articles which specifically excluded “Colonial Units” clearly referred to regiments like the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), Royal Newfoundland Regiment, and the Canadian Expeditionary Force, which did not draw their pay from the imperial purse. Thus, when officials at the War Office blithely suggested that their ruling was simply meant to enforce existing policy, they were being disingenuous. Rather, the move to exclude BWIR soldiers from the full entitlements of Army Order No. 1 constituted a backdoor attempt to prevent the regiment from enjoying the full benefits allotted to imperial units in violation of existing policy. Just as the War Office had repeatedly undermined the BWIR’s official status as an

46 In regards to pay, the 1915 telegram which outlined the final terms for the creation of the BWIR stated: “Pay at British rates would commence from date of embarkation at Colony of concentration and would be borne by Imperial funds as well as all other expenses connected with the contingent from that date until date of return to respective colonies of recruitment.” See Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governors and Administrators of the West Indian Colonies, July 28, 1915, copy enclosed in CO 318/348, National Archives of the United Kingdom

47 Petition from Charles Callender, W.E. Julien, A. Johnson, et al to Governor Charles O’Brien (Barbados), n.d., CO 318/348, file 16801, National Archives of the United Kingdom
infantry unit—derisively referring to the regiment as a “Service Battalion” and assigning most soldiers to labor duties—the ruling on Army Order No. 1 was an attack on the status of West Indian soldiers in the armed forces.

Rebuffed by military authorities, BWIR soldiers increasingly registered their discontent with allies in the civilian world. Most frequently, they solicited support from the West Indian Contingent Committee, a London-based association dedicated to protecting the welfare of British Caribbean servicemen. Formed in 1915, the West Indian Contingent Committee initially directed most of its efforts towards providing entertainment, temporary lodging, and holiday gifts for Caribbean soldiers. By 1918, however, the Contingent Committee increasing mediated disputes between the BWIR troops and the Colonial and War Offices, and pressured officials in Britain to compensate aggrieved servicemen fairly. The members of the Contingent Committee were particularly valuable advocates for BWIR soldiers, since most of them had once held high-ranking posts in the colonial service. Several former West Indian governors—including George Le Hunte, the recently retired governor of Trinidad and Tobago, and Sydney Olivier, the former governor of Jamaica—served on the Contingent Committee. The group was chaired by veteran colonial administrator Everard im Thurn, who worked in British Guiana for over two decades before moving to the South Pacific to become the Governor of Fiji. Prolific historian Algernon Aspinall served as the Contingent Committee’s honorable secretary.

During the final months of the war, BWIR soldiers inundated the offices of the West Indian Contingent Committee with messages protesting their exclusion from Army Order No.
In response, the Contingent Committee quietly launched an informal investigation of the pay dispute in June 1918. During a meeting on June 25, 1918, Algernon Aspinall read aloud portions of letters from frustrated BWIR soldiers who complained about Army Order No. 1, unpaid separation allowances, and a host of other financial discrepancies. Hoping to get to the root of the problem, Thurn directed Aspinall to get a copy of Army Order No. 1 since there was “much discontent at the BWIR not being entitled to the extra pay…granted to Imperial troops.” He also instructed Aspinall to meet with the Command Paymaster to address soldiers’ grievances about separation allowances.

The West Indian Contingent Committee’s fact-finding mission regarding Army Order No. 1 would meander through the summer and fall of 1918. As the London-based committee slowly gathered information and reviewed soldiers’ pleas for assistance, twelve Barbadian servicemen from the First Battalion secretly contacted James Challenor Lynch, a member of the Barbados Legislative Council and chairman of the island’s BWIR Recruiting Committee, to express their simmering discontent. Writing from Egypt, the soldiers argued that the War Office’s discriminatory policies were undermining their official standing as imperial soldiers. They relayed the crushing news that the BWIR had been excluded from Army Order No. 1, even though BWIR soldiers were paid through imperial funds and had always functioned as “Imperial troops.” They also described how black and coloured soldiers—“in spite of worthy recommendation”—were excluded from the Cadet System and systematically barred from

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48 “Minutes a Meeting of the General Purposes Committee,” June 25, 1918, West Indian Contingent Committee Minute Book, ICS 97 1/6/1, Institute for Commonwealth Studies, London; “Minutes a Meeting of the General Purposes Committee,” November 1, 1918, West Indian Contingent Minute Book, ICS 97 1/6/1, Institute for Commonwealth Studies

49 Minutes a Meeting of the General Purposes Committee,” June 25, 1918, West Indian Contingent Committee Minute Book, ICS 97 1/6/1, Institute for Commonwealth Studies
gaining commissions. Frustrated at being denied the “privilege and advantage” afforded to “Tommies and White West Indians,” the petitioners warned that they could no longer “uphold the honour and name of the West Indies” under the existing “adverse conditions and conflicting regulations.” Unwilling to endure further discrimination, the exasperated soldiers wrote to Lynch seeking immediate redress.50

The twelve Barbadian soldiers who signed the petition were well-educated men with ties to the island’s most esteemed black and coloured families. Petitioner E. F. Packer, for example, was the scion of a planter and the grandson of a judge. V. O. Thomas was part of a “middle-class and well-connected” family, and petitioner V. L. Talma’s brother had studied at Oxford as the Barbados Scholar. Petitioner J. C. Hope was a celebrated King Scout and elementary school teacher before joining the BWIR, yet was forced to serve throughout the war as a lowly private.51 Hope, like Sergeant W. E. Julien, ultimately received the Distinguished Conduct Medal for “conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty” after he rescued a comrade and helped him to return safely to camp.52 For these middle-class soldiers, the British Army’s discriminatory pay and promotion policies were particularly humiliating because they relegated all non-white servicemen—irrespective of educational attainment, class, or lineage—to a subordinate status in the armed forces. “It must be

50 J.C. Hope, V.C. Thomas, E.F. Packer, et. al. to J. Challenor Lynch, August 2, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom

51 For a description of the educational background and socioeconomic status of the petitioners, see J. Challenor Lynch to T.E. Fell, Colonial Secretary (Barbados), October 9, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom

52 Private J.C. Hope was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal in October 1918. Hope, while “wounded in four places, including a broken arm,” assisted a fellow soldier to travel over a mile back to camp. For the complete citation, see Supplement to the London Gazette, October 21, 1918, Issue 30961, Page 12349
understood that the men of this regiment are like the men of all the new armies of the Empire, a different type to the old professional soldier,” the Barbadian petitioners explained, “and there could never have been the response to the appeal made by the recruiting committees in the various islands but for the fact that we were made to understand that we would have been on an entirely different footing to the regular West Indian regiment, and that we would have enjoyed every privilege just as any other British soldier.”

Frustrated by the disjuncture between the promise of imperial fraternity and the reality of endemic discrimination in the armed forces, the petitioners demanded that Lynch intervene on behalf of the men he had sent off to war. “We have been deceived,” they wrote. “We like to think that the deception was not intentional. The fact remains that conditions are not as expected and it is to you and other gentlemen of like positions to whom we look to retrieve our wrongs.” The petitioners did not specifically state which other gentlemen they expected to lobby on their behalf, but they did demand that Lynch formally present their petition to the colony’s legislative body, the House of Assembly.

At the same moment that the Barbadian soldiers prodded Lynch to take up their cause, soldiers from Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Montserrat dispatched petitions to their respective colonial administrators in the West Indies. Like their comrades from Barbados, the Leeward Island soldiers condemned the War Office’s decision to exclude the BWIR from Army Order No. 1 and protested the racist “Cadet System” which kept them from advancing into the commissioned ranks. The fact that these four groups of petitioners

53 J.C. Hope, V.C. Thomas, E.F. Packer, et. al. to J. Challenor Lynch, August 2, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom

54 I have not been able to locate the original petitions from the soldiers from Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Montserrat. However, T.A.V. Best, Acting Governor of the Leeward Islands, offers a summary of the
all elected to band together with other soldiers from their home island to petition the state—
instead of drawing on pan-West Indian networks based on rank, unit, or political
sensibility—complicates historian Glenford Howe’s finding that petitioners usually collected
signatures from “representatives from all of the colonies” and articulated their complaints in
a pan-West Indian context.\textsuperscript{55} In fact, BWIR servicemen employed a variety of organizational
strategies during the yearlong campaign for equal pay and status, at times forming networks
based on island of origin while at other moments invoking pan-West Indian solidarities.
Though we still know very little about how institutional constraints differed for soldiers
stationed in the Middle East and in Western Europe—and how those constraints, in turn,
impacted the ways in which dissident soldiers could articulate their grievances—it is clear
that soldiers on all fronts functioned in overlapping networks based on rank, unit, class, and
island of origin and experimented with various organizational tactics to challenge
discrimination in the armed forces.

J. Challenor Lynch never read the Barbadian soldiers’ petition aloud in the chambers
of the Legislative Council, but he did forward their petition to the governor along with a
personal missive in support of the soldiers. In the past, Lynch, like most of his upper-class
peers, had shown remarkably little concern for the travails of ordinary Barbadians.\textsuperscript{56}
However, as the chairman of the local recruiting committee and a coloured West Indian, he

\textsuperscript{55} Howe, \textit{Race, War and Nationalism}, 161

\textsuperscript{56} On Lynch’s tenure in the Legislative Council and his antipathy towards the laboring classes, see Bonham
C. Richardson, \textit{Panama Money in Barbados 1900-1920} (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 106, 131, 133
was appalled by the soldiers’ reports of rampant discrimination. In his letter to Governor O’Brien, Lynch stressed that the petitioners were among the very first volunteers from Barbados, and were of “a different class” from the agricultural laborers who enlisted in later BWIR contingents.57 “The first Contingents, the men who first responded to the call were, like their white brothers in England who first responded, some of the best,” he explained, “and the Recruiting Committee feel that the claim to be put on the same footing as other combatant units of the British Army, is a just one. They joined with that understanding, they qualified, and they asked to be recognised as such.”58

Further still, Lynch emphasized that the petitioners had selflessly come to the aid of the empire, even though racist military officials in Britain repeatedly rebuffed their attempts to enlist. Undeterred, the petitioners and scores of other West Indians valiantly lobbied for the right to serve alongside their “white brothers,” often at great personal and professional expense. “West Indians were not content to look on when England needed man-power and other parts of the British Empire were making splendid efforts,” Lynch reminded O’Brien. “Some paid their own expenses and joined in England, some had their expenses paid by subscription but for the great majority of the coloured men, entrance to the British Army was barred until the British West Indies Regiment was formed.” With the formation of the BWIR, black and coloured West Indians expected that they would serve in a combatant unit and “would be treated in the same way as other British Regiments.”


58 J. Challenor Lynch to T.E. Fell, Colonial Secretary (Barbados), October 9, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom
soldiers from the entitlements of Army Order No. 1 (1918) clearly violated the terms under which the soldiers enlisted.\textsuperscript{59}

Confident that O’Brien would see the merits of the soldiers’ grievances, Lynch entrusted the governor to submit the soldiers’ petition in a manner that would “win a favorable decision” for the troops.\textsuperscript{60} At Government House, Charles O’Brien quickly realized the serious implications of the soldiers’ complaints, but not for any of the reasons that Lynch had carefully laid out in his letter. If racial injustice and a sense of duty drove Lynch to support the petitioners, then Governor O’Brien was motivated by the basic desire to maintain law and order. O’Brien, a Sandhurst graduate and retired Lieutenant-Colonel in the British Army, worried that disgruntled soldiers would wreak havoc in Barbados after the war. Therefore, attempting to stave off future confrontations, he forwarded the soldiers’ petition and Lynch’s letter of endorsement to Walter Long, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in October 1918. Writing in an apologetic tone, O’Brien acknowledged that the soldiers’ petition was “irregular and contrary to Army Orders” because it had not been sent through the proper military channels. However, he stressed that the petitioners were men of “good character and standing” and that their appeal was “respectfully worded.” Confiding in Long, O’Brien admitted that pragmatism, rather than a commitment to equality, fuelled his concern about the aggrieved soldiers: “I am anxious that any representations of our men serving may be enquired into before their return” so that “the harmony of such a return may not be interfered with.” If O’Brien sympathized with the substance of the petitioners’ grievances—

\textsuperscript{59} J. Challenor Lynch to T.E. Fell, Colonial Secretary (Barbados), October 9, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{60} J. Challenor Lynch to T.E. Fell, Colonial Secretary (Barbados), October 9, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom
namely that BWIR soldiers faced systemic discrimination relative to pay and promotion—he failed to express to Long his explicit support.61

By the time the petition reached the Colonial Office in late November 1918, nearly four months had passed since the twelve Barbadian servicemen penned their appeal for assistance. The soldiers’ petition had traveled from a military outpost in the Egyptian desert to a British colony in the Caribbean Sea and back across the Atlantic to the heart of Britain’s imperial bureaucracy. In the intervening months, the sociopolitical landscape in Europe had changed dramatically. Two weeks before the soldiers’ petition arrived in England, the war had abruptly ended with the signing of the Armistice between the Allies and Germany on November 11, 1918. As the focused shifted from winning the war to forging a lasting peace, the Colonial Office evinced little interest in lobbying the War Office on behalf of soldiers who would soon be demobilized and discharged. Thus, despite Lynch’s robust endorsement of the petition and Governor O’Brien’s tacit request for the appeasement of disgruntled BWIR soldiers, the clerks at the Colonial Office refused to challenge BWIR soldiers’ exclusion from the benefits of Army Order No. 1. They also concluded that the War Office had agreed to grant commissions to “slightly colored persons” in the BWIR at the discretion of their local governor. With that ruling in place, they considered the matter resolved.62

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61 Charles O’Brien to Walter H. Long, October 14, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom

62 The War Office initially decided that “slightly coloured gentlemen” could be nominated for temporary commissions in October 1917. However, the War Office’s decision was not widely communicated until April 1918, leading most BWIR soldiers to believe that black and coloured men were still barred from holding commissions. See Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor of Barbados, October 20, 1917, CO 28/292/37, National Archives of the United Kingdom; B.B. Cubitt to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, April 26, 1918, CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Handwritten File Note by E. R. Darnley, December 18, 1918, CO 28/294, file 56561, National Archives of the United Kingdom.
Private Etienne Dupuch was travelling with his unit from France to Italy when he learned of the Armistice. During a stop at a railroad station in a small French village, Dupuch met a crowd so jubilant that he initially thought that the local townspeople had “gone crazy.” Pulling into the train station, Dupuch encountered an orgy of excitement: “Catholic nuns, priests, young girls and everybody were running up and down the platform hugging and kissing each other and shouting ‘Armistice! Armistice!’” Before Dupuch could figure out why the villagers were so elated, they rushed the train and pulled BWIR soldiers into their “mad demonstration of joy.” Afterward, they served the soldiers hot coffee and other treats. According to Dupuch, it took “quite a few moments” before the soldiers realized that the villagers shouts of “Armistice” meant that the Great War was over. However, once they processed the news, they immediately “went crazy” and celebrated alongside their new French comrades.64

The Armistice between the Allies and Germany on November 11, 1918, marked the end of 52 months of carnage stretching from northern Europe to southern Africa. The human toll of the war was staggering and utterly unprecedented. Nearly 16 million men, women, and children lost their lives in the conflict, including 6.8 million civilians. More than 9.5 million servicemen died, which according to historian Deborah Cohen’s grisly calculation,

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63 Secret Telegram, Base Commandant, Taranto to War Office, December 10, 1918 (B.C. 121), CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom

64 Etienne Dupuch, A Salute to Friend and Foe: My Battles, Sieges, and Fortunes, (Nassau, Bahamas, The Tribune, 1982), 81
means 5,600 soldiers perished on average each day of the war.\textsuperscript{65} The Great War claimed the lives of over 1,200 BWIR soldiers, and another 2,500 men were wounded while on active duty.\textsuperscript{66} Despite their largely noncombatant role, one in 13 BWIR soldiers met their end while serving overseas on foreign soil.\textsuperscript{67}

Whereas the Armistice signaled the end of military hostilities, it intensified BWIR soldiers’ struggle for equal pay and status. With the dangers of war now squarely in the past, long-suppressed anger over Army Order No. 1 percolated to the surface rapidly and with tremendous intensity. Two weeks after the Armistice, Colonel C. Wood-Hill, commander of the First Battalion of the BWIR, warned that a “very deep-seated feeling of dissatisfaction” existed among the troops stationed in Egypt. In an urgent letter to John Chancellor, Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, Wood-Hill confessed that the initial effort to secure the benefits of Army Order No. 1 for BWIR soldiers had faltered and that the War Office had flatly refused to reconsider its ruling. Wood-Hill wrote, “At first the increased rate of pay was refused on the grounds that the British West Indies Regiment having no Depot in the United Kingdom could not be granted the additional rate of pay;” he explained, “but when it was pointed out how absurd this ruling was, they dropped the question of a Depot and raised the question of being natives.” Even though General Allenby had “done his best” to persuade

\textsuperscript{65} Deborah Cohen, \textit{The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1


\textsuperscript{67} Only two of the twelve BWIR battalions served in combat during the Great War. Soldiers in the First and Second Battalions fought against Turkish forces in the Middle Eastern theater in Palestine from August to September 1918. For a description of their combat activities, see Commander-in-Chief, Egyptian Expeditionary Force to War Office, December 17, 1918, File Folder 2020/1919, Box 2020-2980 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

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the War Office to make an exception for the regiment, the soldiers were “classified as natives” and their claims to Army Order No.1 were rebuffed.68

Unable to sway the War Office through direct appeals, Wood-Hill endeavored to recruit a network of allies who could pressure policymakers in Britain. In many respects, his tactics mirrored the protest strategies that rank-and-file BWIR soldiers had developed and tested in the final months of the war. He dutifully prodded colonial officials in the West Indies to intervene on behalf of Caribbean soldiers, writing personal appeals to J. R. Chancellor as well as Governor George Haddon-Smith of the Windward Islands. And he reached out to Colonel L. S. Amery, a military insider who served as the Liaison Officer between the War Office and the War Cabinet, with the hope of influencing the Secretary of State for War. As Wood-Hill explained in his missive to Chancellor, the central hurdle in the BWIR’s campaign for equality was not the intransience of the War Office, but rather the dearth of well-connected patrons. “The difficulty is, the West Indies not being federated, it is very hard to get combined action on their behalf as a whole, or to get anyone in England with sufficient influence to take the matter up,” he explained. Thus, to overcome official indifference towards the regiment, Wood-Hill borrowed another aspect of BWIR soldiers’ protest strategy: he took pains to portray West Indian servicemen as members of the landowning and professional classes. Erasing the rural and working-class roots of most soldiers, he claimed that a “very large proportion” of men in the regiment had held “responsible Government positions in the West Indies” or were small landowners. Most others, he insisted with no further explanation, had “sacrificed a great deal to enlist.” Thus,

68 Colonel C. Wood-Hill to Sir John Chancellor, Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, November 26, 1918, File Folder 2/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago
for Wood-Hill, the “very delicate question” of drawing the boundary between British and native troops necessitated that officials consider a soldier’s class and comportment, not just his color.69

Wood-Hill’s vision of BWIR soldiers as respectable and self-sacrificing patriots was not uncontested, however. In the months that it took his letter to travel from Egypt to Trinidad, his idyllic portrayal of BWIR servicemen was shattered by a violent protest in Taranto, Italy, led by soldiers from the Ninth Battalion. The men of the Ninth, Private Charles P. Coote acknowledged candidly, were a unit of “rough fellows.”70 The hardscrabble battalion was comprised of peripatetic Jamaican and Barbadian migrants who, like Private Coote, had flocked to Panama before the war in search of work and then enlisted in the BWIR following a whirlwind recruitment drive on the Isthmus.71 Under the command of Colonel Reginald E. Willis, the battalion had spent over a year hauling ammunition, building trenches, and performing a host of other backbreaking tasks as laborers in France. Like most BWIR soldiers, the men of the Ninth Battalion never saw action on the front lines as combat troops; instead they battled brutally cold winters, miserable working conditions, chronic illness, and a notoriously difficult commanding officer. As one soldier later recalled, Colonel Willis “had the reputation of being a brute.”72 Once, when a frostbitten soldier failed to stand and salute, Willis angrily “dug his spurs” into the soldier’s bandaged leg to force him

69 Colonel C. Wood-Hill to Sir John Chancellor, Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, November 26, 1918, File Folder 2/1919, Box 1-193 (1919), Colonial Secretary’s Office Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

70 C.P. Coote to Lady Matilde Mallet, December 10, 1918, reprinted in Letters from the Trenches During the Great War (Shipston-on-Stour, King's Stone Press, n.d.), 28

71 Richardson, Panama Money in Barbados 1900-1920, 217

72 Dupuch, A Salute to Friend and Foe: My Battles, Sieges, and Fortunes, 78
to his feet. Afterward, the white Jamaican colonel snarled, “When you write your mathi [mother] mountain back in Jamaica, tell the folks I’m turning Jesus Christ out here. I’m making the lame walk.”

Despite the profound difficulties of the war years, however, the “rough fellows” of the Ninth Battalion showed little outward evidence of disaffection or rising resentment. Rather, in the weeks following the Armistice, the battalion peacefully relocated to Cimino Camp on the outskirts of Taranto, Italy, to await demobilization.

Figure 9: BWIR Officers from the Jamaica War Contingent, Egypt 1917. Col. Reginald E. Willis is seated in the front row (fifth from the left). Photographs of Jamaican Officers Who Served in World War I, 7/81/1, Jamaica Archives


74 C.P. Coote to Lady Matilde Mallet, December 10, 1918, reprinted in *Letters from the Trenches During the Great War*, 28
Located on the southern coast of Italy near strategic ports in the Mediterranean Sea, Cimino Camp served as a major transportation hub for British soldiers who were travelling between Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas. In addition to hosting transient units of servicemen as they readied for deployment or demobilization, the bustling base was home to corps of civilian contract laborers from Malta, Fiji, and Italy. After the Armistice, the eight BWIR battalions stationed in Western Europe congregated at Cimino Camp, marking the first time that all eight battalions had assembled together at the same base. Soldiers from the Eighth, Tenth, and Eleventh Battalions who had been stationed at Taranto before the Armistice were joined by the Third Battalion on November 10, 1918, and the Fourth Battalion two days later. The following day, on November 13, soldiers from the Ninth Battalion disembarked at Cimino Camp after travelling south from France. The Sixth and Seventh Battalions marched into the base on November 14, making Taranto home to over 7,500 BWIR soldiers.75

Less than a month after they arrived in Taranto, soldiers from the Ninth Battalion mutinied, sparking six days of unrest that marked the most serious breach of discipline in the regiment’s history. The mutiny erupted on Friday, December 6, 1918, after Colonel Willis ordered his men to clean the latrines of the Italian Labour Corps, a group of white civilian laborers.76 Instead of acceding to his demeaning request, soldiers from the Ninth Battalion

75By the end of November 1918, the Third, Fourth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Battalions of the BWIR were stationed in Taranto, Italy. The First, Second, and Fifth Battalions remained in the Middle East until 1919. For the numbers of BWIR officers and men at the base, see General Headquarters (GH), Italy to War Office, December 19, 1918, CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom; War Diary, Ordinance Depot, Taranto, Italy, November 1918, WO 95/4256, National Archives of the United Kingdom

76On November 19, 1918, Captain W. I. Hamlin noted that Base Headquarters had granted permission for military officials to use soldiers from the Third, Fourth, Sixth, Seventh, and Ninth Battalions “for the purposes of Labour.” However, it was unusual for soldiers to perform sanitation duties for other military
assaulted Willis and then “danced, shouted, and poked holes in his tent with their bayonets.” Over the weekend, the protest gained momentum as soldiers from the Ninth and Tenth Battalions refused to work, and “disaffection and acts of insubordination” rapidly spread to other BWIR regiments as well. By the third day of the mutiny, the protests escalated sharply and claimed its first and only casualty. On Sunday, December 8, Acting Sergeant Robert Richards of the Seventh Battalion shot and killed Samuel Pinnock, a Jamaican private in his battalion, claiming self-defense. After the shooting, BWIR soldiers beat Sergeant Richards in retaliation. 

Deeply rattled by the “increasingly truculent” behavior of BWIR troops, General J. H. V. Crowe, the base commandant at Taranto, dispatched a series of urgent telegrams to the War Office recommending that the Ninth and Tenth Battalions be “immediately embarked to Egypt, Malta, Salonika, or Marseilles.” If the War Office was unable or unwilling to

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77 While the general outline of the mutiny is well known, the exact chronology and causes of the uprising are less understood. Some scholars, for example, have argued that BWIR soldiers at Taranto rose up in protest against the racist policies of the base commandant, Brigadier-General C.D.V. Cary-Barnard. During his tenure at Taranto, Cary-Barnard, a white South African, enforced strict racial segregation on the base, relegating BWIR soldiers to segregated canteens and the Native Labour Hospital. However, he did not assume command at Taranto until February 4, 1919, nearly two months after the mutiny. Therefore his policies could not have played a role in sparking the protest. On Cary-Barnard’s supposed role in the mutiny, see Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America*, 63; Peter Ashdown, “The Growth of Black Consciousness in Belize, 1914-1919: The Background to the Ex-Servicemen’s Riot of 1919,” *Belcast Journal of Belizean Affairs*, Vol.2, No.2 (December 1985): 3. For the quotation, see Dupuch, *A Salute to Friend and Foe: My Battles, Sieges, and Fortunes*, 78

78 Base Commandant, Taranto to War Office, December 9, 1918 (B.C. 119), CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, 130

In addition to the events outlined above, the official history of British military operations in Italy during the Great War states that "stones were thrown at two officers and a bomb was thrown into the tent of a regimental quartermaster-sergeant" during the Taranto mutiny. Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds, *Military Operations, Italy, 1915-1919* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1949), 386-387
transfer the troublesome units, then Crowe insisted that a “battalion of white troops [was]
absolutely essential” to suppress the mutiny. Before the War Office could dispatch
reinforcements, the anxious general attempted to quell the protests on his own. On December
9, he made an example of the Ninth Battalion by temporarily disbanding the unit, and
scattering the officers and men among the seven remaining BWIR battalions at Taranto.
And to minimize any further protests, he punished the entire regiment by ordering all BWIR
soldiers to turn in their rifles. Yet, even after the entire regiment was disarmed, the situation
at Taranto remained tense and “unsettled.” Determined to squash the mutiny once and for
all, the British Army General Headquarters in Italy dispatched white soldiers from the
Seventh Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment and the 48th Machine Gun Corps to
Taranto. If the infantry battalion and machine gunners were unable to stop the mutiny, the
British military authorities in Italy assured the War Office that a second battalion was
“standing by,” ready to be deployed. The show of force worked. By December 12, six

79 Secret Telegram, Base Commandant, Taranto to War Office, December 9, 1918 (B.C. 119), CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom
80 Secret Telegram, Base Commandant, Taranto to War Office, December 10, 1918 (B.C. 121), CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom
81 The War Office confirmed the decision to disband the Ninth Battalion on January 4, 1919 and military authorities at Taranto permanently disbanded the unit on January 19, 1919. See Base Routine Orders, Taranto Base, January 20, 1919, WO 95/4255, National Archives of the United Kingdom; War Diary, Ordnance Depot, Taranto, Italy, January 1919, WO 95/4256, National Archives of the United Kingdom
82 Secret Telegram, Base Commandant, Taranto to War Office, December 10, 1918 (B.C. 120), CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom
83 Telegram, General Headquarters (GH), Italy to War Office, December 12, 1918 (0605), CO 318/347; War Diary, Ordnance Depot, Taranto, Italy, December 1918, WO 95/4256, National Archives of the United Kingdom
84 Telegram, Inspector-General of Communications (IGC), Italy to War Office, December 11, 1918 (IC/1609), CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom
days after the initial protest commenced, the base commandant reported that there was “no further disturbance” at Taranto.\textsuperscript{85} Lacking confidence in General Crowe’s leadership, British military leaders in Italy sent Major-General Henry Thullier, head of the Army Chemical Warfare Department, and two other staff members to Taranto to maintain the peace at the base.\textsuperscript{86}

The mutiny was one of two collective protests spearheaded by BWIR soldiers at Taranto in early December 1918. On the same day that the mutiny erupted, 180 BWIR sergeants at the base urgently petitioned Walter Long, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to lodge their grievances about discrimination in the British armed forces. While the mutiny highlighted BWIR soldiers’ growing willingness to buck authority and violently contest the terms of their labor, the sergeants’ petition revealed that more conservative notions of imperial patriotism and mutual obligation had not fully lost their sway. The sergeants explained the purpose of their petition with remarkable diplomacy, writing that there were “certain circumstances” in the BWIR which did “not tend to engender the most cordial feelings for the Empire in the West Indies.” Before revealing their specific grievances, they reminded Long that West Indians had patriotically supported the war effort and had come forward “out of the keen spirit of loyalty” to fight for the Empire. West Indians who successfully enlisted in the metropole during the early months of the war, they noted with

\textsuperscript{85} Telegram, Base Commandant, Taranto to War Office, December 12, 1918 (B.C. 123), CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{86} Telegram, General Officer Commanding (GOC), Italy to War Office, December 13, 1918 (0606), CO 318/347, National Archives of the United Kingdom
approval, “enjoyed all of the privileges and benefits” given to British soldiers. “This clearly proves that, although they are West Indians, they are ‘British’, and we admit, is only just.”

Yet if West Indian recruits in Britain enjoyed the fruits of British justice, their compatriots who enlisted in the Caribbean were not so fortunate. Despite assurances that BWIR servicemen would receive “all of the privileges and benefits derivable from service in the British Army,” the petitioners alleged that soldiers who served in Italy and France were systematically barred from earning commissions or advancing beyond the rank of sergeant. To add insult to injury, they were denied the increase in separation allowances granted to British soldiers in 1917 and the hefty 50-percent pay increase awarded to British regiments in Army Order No. 1. Determined to have their grievances “settled on the basis of Justice,” the sergeants urged the Secretary of State for the Colonies to “forcibly place” their petition before the War Office and His Majesty’s Government. They also issued a searing indictment: “We feel we have been serving as Soldiers in the British Army, assisting in a World War for Justice and Freedom, yet we, ourselves have not derived the same benefits as those along with whom we have been doing our bit,” the sergeants declared, “and that where any such benefits have been derived it has been on a one-sided basis.”

The 180 sergeants who accused the British Army of taking their labor without giving proper material and symbolic rewards in return were among the most senior black and coloured soldiers in the BWIR. Of the 15,600 soldiers who served in the regiment, less than 500 would ever don the three chevrons of a sergeant. As leaders in their respective

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87 Petition from M. Murphy and 179 signatures to Secretary of State for the Colonies, December 6, 1918, CO 28/294, National Archives of the United Kingdom

88 Petition from M. Murphy and 179 signatures to Secretary of State for the Colonies, December 6, 1918, CO 28/294, National Archives of the United Kingdom
battalions, the sergeants had successfully navigated the military hierarchy to become non-commissioned officers, a rank that imperialist poet Rudyard Kipling famously described as the “backbone of the Army.” Yet, they also chaffed under the same racist policies that excluded all BWIR soldiers—irrespective of rank, education, or achievement—from the social and financial benefits of soldiering. Having patiently endured the indignities of the war years, the sergeants exhorted colonial authorities to use all of their influence to reverse the series of measures that relegated BWIR soldiers to second-class status.

Given the timing of the petition and the logistics of collecting 180 supporting signatures from soldiers in seven different battalions, it seems likely that the sergeants drafted the petition before the mutiny and decided to send it on December 6 after the mutiny erupted. However, it remains unclear whether the petitioners approved of the mutineers’ confrontational tactics or directly participated in the mutiny. Indeed, it is important to note that the sergeants’ petition did not include any reference to the upheaval at Taranto or any explicit expression of solidarity with the striking soldiers. It also failed to mention the discriminatory labor assignments that fueled the initial confrontation between the Ninth Battalion and Colonel Willis. Thus, instead of assuming that the sergeants dispatched their petition on December 6 as a part of a coordinated campaign with the mutinous soldiers, we must also consider the possibility that the sergeants hoped to present their grievances as separate and distinct from their subordinates. The fact that the sole fatality of the mutiny occurred when a black sergeant took up arms against a mutinous private, suggests that non-

commissioned officers and privates might have divided into opposing camps during the upheaval.90

In the wake of the mutiny, military and colonial officials pondered how to punish the rebellious soldiers. Fearful of additional unrest, British military authorities in Italy requested that all eight BWIR battalions be repatriated immediately and replaced by Italian and British labor corps. At the Colonial Office, however, Greg Grindle, in his new role as Assistant Secretary of State for the Colonies, suggested the insurgent soldiers should have additional time added to their tour of duty instead of being rewarded with an early trip home where they could stir up trouble in the colonies. “Other things being equal, these men ought to serve a further term for their misbehavior,” Grindle argued. “If they are in a ‘truculent’ state, it would be better that they should be brought to their senses before they are let loose in the W. I. [West Indies].” Moreover, from a financial standpoint, it made little sense to replace black BWIR soldiers with white soldiers, given that BWIR soldiers were “cheap compared to white troops.”91 Ultimately, the plan to repatriate all eight BWIR battalions stalled when the War Office refused to provide replacement laborers at Taranto.

Unable to rid themselves of BWIR soldiers en masse, British military authorities in Italy hastily arrested and prosecuted at least 51 soldiers from the Fourth, Sixth, and Ninth Battalions for their role in the upheaval, charging them with offenses ranging from mutiny to

90 Acting Sergeant Robert Richards was initially charged with manslaughter for fatally wounding Private Pinnock. However, he was convicted on the lesser charge of “conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline” and sentenced to six months in prison with hard labor. His sentence was ultimately reduced to only two months imprisonment. War Diary of the Seventh Battalion, British West Indies Regiment, January 16, 1919, WO 95/4262, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Julian Putkowski and Julian Sykes, Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act, (London: Leo Cooper, 1999), 264

91 Handwritten File Note by G.E.A. Grindle, December 13, 1918, CO 318/347, file 60323, National Archives of the United Kingdom
disobedience. The accused servicemen, all privates, each faced field general courts-martial at Cimeno Camp in Taranto between December 1918 and January 1919. Judged by a panel of three commissioned officers, the 51 soldiers were convicted of disobeying a commanding officer and of mutiny, which was broadly defined as any act of “collective insubordination, or a combination of two or more persons to resist or induce others to resist lawful military authority.” Although mutiny was a capital offense, 46 of the convicted servicemen received sentences ranging from three to five years imprisonment. Two other convicted mutineers—Privates E. Edwards and A. Marshall of the Ninth Battalion—were sentenced to eight years of penal servitude. The harshest sentences were meted out to three servicemen in the Ninth Battalion: Private D. Myers was sentenced to 10 years in prison, Private J. Munroe received a 20-year sentence for mutiny and for striking a commanding officer, and Private Arthur Sanches was initially sentenced to death but had his sentence commuted by the base commandant to 20 years in prison. Instead of sailing home as war heroes, the 51 Taranto

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92 The following number of soldiers was convicted from each battalion: Fourth Battalion (13 soldiers), Sixth Battalion (24 soldiers), and Ninth Battalion (14 soldiers). Register of Field General Courts Martial, WO 213/27, National Archives of the United Kingdom


94 All thirteen convicted soldiers from the Fourth Battalion were sentenced to three years penal servitude, which was reduced to two years imprisonment with hard labor. The twenty-four convicted mutineers from the Sixth Battalion received sentences ranging from three years to three years and six months penal servitude. Nine soldiers from the Ninth Battalion were sentenced to five years penal servitude. Register of Field General Courts Martial, WO 213/27, National Archives of the United Kingdom

95 After the Armistice, all outstanding death sentences for military offences were commuted to penal servitude and no further death sentences for military infractions were carried out. Soldiers found guilty of murder and other serious civil crimes, however, still faced the death penalty. Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson, Blindfold and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War (London: Cassell, 2001), 401
mutineers would travel back to the West Indies in leg irons, guarded by white British soldiers and BWIR military police.\textsuperscript{96}

The fact that all of the BWIR mutineers escaped with their lives, despite the seriousness of the charges they faced, reflects the British Army’s anomalous stance towards mutiny. For reasons that are still poorly understood, British Army brass charged soldiers with mutiny much less frequently than their European peers and almost never executed convicted mutineers. Only 1,800 British servicemen were charged with mutiny between 1914 and 1920, compared to 25,000 to 40,000 soldiers in the French Army.\textsuperscript{97} And of all of the British soldiers charged with mutiny during the war, only three were executed.\textsuperscript{98} Soldiers were much more likely to face the firing squad for desertion, cowardice, murder, or even quitting their post than they were for mutiny.\textsuperscript{99} Indeed, the four BWIR soldiers who were executed during the war lost their lives not because they had led collective protests against military authorities, but because of individual transgressions that included violence against their comrades.\textsuperscript{100}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{96} Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 189-190
\item \textsuperscript{97} Corns and Hughes-Wilson, Blindfold and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War, 401
\item \textsuperscript{98} Gunner William E. Lewis (Royal Field Artillery), Private Jack Braithwaite (Otago New Zealand), and Acting Corporal Jesse Robert Short (Northumberland Fusiliers, Tyneside Irish) were executed for mutiny during the Great War. Mahmoud Mohamed Ahmed, a laborer in the Egypt Labour Corps, was also executed for mutiny. For a complete listing of all British and colonial soldiers and laborers executed during the war, see Corns and Hughes-Wilson, Blindfold and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War, Appendix 2
\item \textsuperscript{99} The British Army executed three hundred six (306) soldiers and laborers during the Great War. The vast majority of executed men were convicted of desertion (266 out of 306). Corns and Hughes-Wilson, Blindfold and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War, 51, 447
\item \textsuperscript{100} Privates James A. Mitchell (First Battalion) and Albert Denny (Eighth Battalion) were executed for murder, while Private Hubert A. Clarke (Second Battalion) was executed for striking a superior officer. Private Herbert Morris (Sixth Battalion) was executed for desertion. For a detailed account of the
\end{itemize}
The Taranto mutiny rendered visible the depth of soldiers’ discontent and heightened the stakes for subsequent confrontations. For Caribbeanist scholars, the mutiny serves as an example of the radicalization of BWIR soldiers and highlights their willingness to contest the “racist fetters imposed upon them by the War Office.” Yet, a panoramic view of this period reveals that the mutiny was part of a wave of collective protests launched by frustrated metropolitan and imperial soldiers in the wake of the Armistice, climaxing with the massive riot of Canadian servicemen at Kinmel Camp in March 1919. These upheavals, as Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson rightly assert, “were much more in the nature of ‘strikes’ than ‘mutinies’ and were…more concerned with demobilization grievances than with refusing to fight.” While the Taranto mutiny would cast a long shadow over the BWIR, it was not nearly as violent or threatening as uprisings by white servicemen following the Armistice. Indeed, as Colonel Wood-Hill noted in an account written after the war, BWIR soldiers behaved with tremendous “restraint” compared with mutinous British and Dominion troops.

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101 Elkins, “A Source of Black Nationalism in the Caribbean: The Revolt of the British West Indies Regiment at Taranto, Italy,” 101

102 Wood-Hill, A Few Notes on the History of the British West Indies Regiment, 10

103 Corns and Hughes-Wilson, Blindfold and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War, 380

104 Wood-Hill, A Few Notes on the History of the British West Indies Regiment, 10
From Repression to Representation: Imperial Officials’ Shifting Views of Dissident Soldiers

On the surface, an uneasy calm returned to Taranto in mid-December 1918. BWIR soldiers returned to their daily routine of fatigue duty and regimental parades while the Worcestershire Regiment soldiers who had been dispatched to the base “with ammunition in their pouches,” prepared for demobilization after the mutiny abruptly petered out. However, under the cover of darkness, a group of BWIR soldiers had begun gathering to share their common grievances and to discuss the future of the West Indies. At the inaugural meeting held on the evening of December 17, 1918, a group of sergeants formalized their ties by establishing a secret association called the Caribbean League. The leaders of the new association, Sergeants H. L. Brown, C. Herbert Collman, and A. P. Jones, were all Jamaicans from the Third Battalion. While it is unclear if Brown, Collman, and Jones were also involved in organizing the petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Caribbean League emerged from the same set of disappointments regarding pay, promotion, and regimental status that fueled the earlier effort. The three co-founders of the League, like the previous petitioners, explicitly connected the plight of BWIR soldiers to the question of colonial governance in the West Indies. For these soldiers, the struggle for justice and equality in the British Army was inextricably linked to the fight for freedom on the homefront.


106 General Henry Thullier to War Office, Secret Dispatch, December 29, 1918, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Between December 1918 and January 1919, the Caribbean League met four times and grew to include non-commissioned officers from every BWIR battalion at Taranto. In scholarly accounts, historians often portray the League as a militant anti-colonial group, arguing that it represented a “landmark in Anglophone Caribbean nationalism.” Yet organizationally, the League most closely resembled a West Indian friendly society or fraternal order. The central purpose of the League was the “Promotion of all matters conducive to the General Welfare of the islands constituting the British West Indies and the British Territories adjacent thereto.” To fund the association’s initiatives, prospective members were required to pay an “admission fee” of one shilling as well as a one-shilling annual “subscription.” Despite its military origins, membership in the Caribbean League was open to “individuals of both sexes” who resided in the British Caribbean colonies or were children of West Indians. In keeping with the pan-West Indian ethos articulated in the League’s purpose, the founders proposed that a “Commitment of Management” govern the association with representatives from throughout the British Caribbean. Yet, they also proposed that the association’s headquarters should be in Kingston, Jamaica, leaving the other islands to make do with smaller sub-offices to handle local affairs.

It is significant that the founders of the Caribbean League elected to model their organization after the civilian voluntary associations that peppered West Indian communities instead of forming a veterans’ association or military brotherhood. As Lara Putnam has shown, black West Indians created a vibrant network of voluntary associations in the early in

107 Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, 133

108 Major Maxwell Smith to General Henry Thullier, December 27, 1918, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom
the 20th century that combined racial uplift, mutual aid, and political advocacy.\textsuperscript{109} These trans-local associations connected West Indian men and women across the Caribbean while also providing a training ground for a generation of new leaders. Not content to advocate on behalf of servicemen alone, the founders of the League structured the association to foster broad civic engagement and a trans-local West Indian identity. At least one of the three co-founders, C. Herbert Collman, had garnered valuable organizational experience as a member of two fraternal orders in Jamaica prior to the war. Before joining the BWIR, Collman had led the drive to establish in Port Antonio, Jamaica, a court of the Ancient Order of Forresters, a popular fraternal order with lodges throughout the British West Indies and Panama.

Because of Collman’s “untiring zeal and energy,” the new court was established in June 1915 under the patronage of Governor William Manning.\textsuperscript{110} Collman was an active Freemason as well.\textsuperscript{111}

The sole surviving accounts of the League’s meetings are from Sergeant Leon Pouchet, a Trinidadian soldier-turned-informant from the Eighth Battalion.\textsuperscript{112} According to


\textsuperscript{110} “The Order of the Forresters Here,” \textit{Daily Gleaner}, June 8, 1915, 4

\textsuperscript{111} “Brilliant Masonic Function Held on Wednesday Night,” \textit{Daily Gleaner}, December 12, 1919, 10

\textsuperscript{112} Sergeant Pouchet’s first name and home colony are not included in any of the reports on the Caribbean League. However, there is a soldier named Sergeant Leon Charles Pouchet, Regimental Number 11533, listed among the rolls of BWIR volunteers from Trinidad. Leon Charles Pouchet enlisted in the Fourth Trinidad Contingent and departed for the war on July 7, 1917. Before joining the BWIR, he resided in Port of Spain and listed his wife as his next of kin. See “Nominal Roll of all the Contingents that have left
Pouchet, 50 to 60 soldiers attended the second meeting of the Caribbean League, which was held at the Tenth Battalion’s sergeants’ mess on December 20, 1918. While soldiers at the first meeting discussed the purpose of the League in largely apolitical terms, by the second gathering, some soldiers openly assailed British racism and imperialism and articulated a militant agenda for black self-determination. In a fiery speech during the meeting, a soldier from the Third Battalion declared that “the black man should have freedom and govern himself in the West Indies and that force must be used, and if necessary bloodshed to attain that object.” Pouchet reported that the majority of the audience “loudly applauded” the soldier’s call for black social and political power in the British Caribbean. The meeting then evolved into a heated discussion of the “grievances of the black man against the white,” as soldiers discussed the litany of racial slights they endured while serving under the Union Jack. Since the League was composed entirely of non-commissioned officers, the soldiers’ most urgent complaint was that military authorities routinely undermined their leadership role in the BWIR by replacing black non-commissioned officers with white NCOs. As a result, the small cadre of black non-commissioned officers faced the constant threat of losing their hard-earned status if a white NCO transferred to their unit. Angered by the army’s disregard for their rank, members of the League responded by making “veiled threats” against any white NCOs who traveled to Jamaica during demobilization. In addition, the

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Trinidad and Joined the B. W. I. Regiment,” File Folder 1792/1918, Box 1009-1936 (1918), Colonial Secretary’s Papers, National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago; C.B. Franklin, Trinidad and Tobago Year Book (Port-of-Spain: Franklin’s Electric Printery, 1919), xlvii
disaffected soldiers agreed to launch a general strike to secure better wages once they returned to the West Indies.\textsuperscript{113}

Sergeant Pouchet’s account of the first two clandestine meetings of the Caribbean League offers a rare glimpse into the ways in which BWIR soldiers expressed their frustrations among their comrades, away from of the intense gaze of powerful colonial and military authorities. In their letters to British officials, BWIR soldiers buttressed their appeals for equal treatment by celebrating British justice and Britain’s interracial empire. In private, however, soldiers framed their misfortunes in stark racial terms, articulating their grievances as restive black men, not as loyal British subjects. They fumed that educated and experienced black soldiers had limited opportunities for advancement, even in an overwhelmingly black regiment like the BWIR. They condemned white minority rule in the West Indies and issued demands for freedom in the postwar period. They discussed the chasm between the rhetoric of imperial fraternity and the reality of racial discrimination in the British military. Instead of waiting on the assistance of sympathetic white allies, the men challenged each other to carry the fight for self-determination back home to the colonies and to employ violence if necessary to obtain redress. Meetings of the Caribbean League, at least for a short time, provided a space where BWIR soldiers could collectively articulate an alternative language of protest and struggle.

Just as the members of the Caribbean League were beginning to formulate strategies to challenge their dual subjugation as soldiers and colonial subjects, increased surveillance and internecine conflict irrevocably splintered the group, and the underground movement to

\textsuperscript{113} Major Maxwell Smith to General Henry Thullier, December 27, 1918, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom
mobilize BWIR soldiers at Taranto faltered. Two soldiers who attended the meeting on December 20 reported the League’s covert activities to military authorities in late December 1918. Immediately after the League’s second meeting, a sergeant from the Tenth Battalion notified his commanding officer about the association, and Sergeant Pouchet from the Eighth Battalion provided a detailed report about the League to his commanding officer, Major Maxwell Smith.\textsuperscript{114} As news of the League spread throughout the military chain of command, commanding officers from several BWIR battalions confronted their men about their role in the association. Colonel A. E. Barchard, commanding officer of the Third Battalion, ordered the sergeants in his unit to submit an account of the inaugural meeting of the League and to reveal the association’s purpose. While Barchard ultimately approved of the League after reading the soldiers’ report, the commanding officer of the Tenth Battalion cautioned his men to be “very careful over the League business and [to] leave political matters alone.” In a thinly veiled threat to his men, Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Long menacingly warned BWIR soldiers that West Indian troops could never “stand up against the British Tommy” as it was “the British Tommy who beat the Germans.”\textsuperscript{115} Most notably, three days after the Caribbean League’s meeting on December 20, General Henry Thullier ordered that Italian civilian labors replace BWIR soldiers for all “sanitary work” on the base, eliminating one of the soldiers’ major grievances.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{114} Major Maxwell Smith to General Henry Thullier, December 27, 1918, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{115} Major Maxwell Smith to General Henry Thullier, January 3, 1919, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{116} War Diary, Ordinance Depot, Taranto, Italy, December 23, 1918, WO 95/4256, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Once the Caribbean League was exposed, attendance at the meetings declined significantly. Given the high stakes of participating in unsanctioned activities while on active duty, many soldiers elected to abandon the League instead of waiting for the likely backlash from military officials. As a result, only 30 soldiers attended the meeting on January 3, 1919, whereas 50 to 60 men had turned out before the group was reported. Most of the soldiers who remained involved with the League came from the Third Battalion—home to the three co-founders of the League—or from the rebellious Ninth and Tenth Battalions, which had led the mutiny at Taranto. Their comrades from the Fourth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eleventh battalions voted with their feet, fleeing the League en masse.

While it is possible that the Caribbean League could have continued to exist in the face of growing external pressure and declining membership, internecine feuds over tactics and organizational structure sent the association into a precipitous decline. During the meeting on January 3, Sergeant Pouchet protested the plan to locate the League’s headquarters in Jamaica, predicting that Jamaicans would perpetually monopolize the leadership positions. Not surprisingly, Pouchet garnered strong support from the non-Jamaican members of the League, while the Jamaican members rebuffed his claim. Latent inter-island rivalries were just the tip of the iceberg, however. During the same meeting, some soldiers proposed that the League should move beyond its base of non-commissioned officers and recruit rank and file BWIR soldiers. However, other members—perhaps thinking of the recent mutiny—warned that it was “rather risky” to recruit privates to join the League, since they might “misunderstand” its purpose and “get excited.” Moreover, members debated whether the League should take a strident anti-government stance or work with the colonial authorities to promote gradual reform. In a marked departure from the
militant tone of the second meeting, several soldiers advocated cooperating with the colonial government and stressed the “peaceful purpose” of the League. Even those soldiers who embraced a more confrontational strategy cautioned that the League should wait for a more opportune moment. Sergeant Monte, a Jamaican soldier from the mutinous Ninth Battalion, counseled that the “best thing to do was not to pull against the government but to work in harmony with them for the present and then strike at the right moment.” At least one soldier, a Vincentian sergeant from the Tenth Battalion, rejected any form of collective action at all. After listening to the debate over tactics, he ruefully remarked, “I do not intend to associate myself anymore with the league as I see it has taken a serious turn.”

The leaders of the Caribbean League scheduled an additional meeting for the following night, but there is no record that any subsequent gatherings took place after January 3, 1919. Despite the League’s rapid collapse, General Thullier remained alert for any signs of insurgency in the BWIR and personally interviewed Sergeant Pouchet to garner additional information about the League’s covert activities. In a secret letter to the War Office, Thullier alleged that the Caribbean League was “formed ostensibly for industrial and reform purposes,” but was actually “covering seditious designs for execution on return to the West Indies after demobilization.” Intent on punishing the leaders of the League, Thullier initially considered charging the three co-founders with “conspiracy to cause sedition.” However, he quickly concluded that it would be “useless and inadvisable” to court-martial the men because of the lack of corroborating witnesses. Moreover, he acknowledged that the defendants would likely produce their own witnesses who would deny the seditious aims of the League. In the absence of a court-martial, Thullier urged the Colonial Office to inform

117 The third meeting of the Caribbean League was held on January 3, 1918 at the sergeants’ mess of the Eighth Battalion of the BWIR.
all West Indian governors about the League and suggested that the Jamaican police monitor
the activities of Sergeants Brown, Collman, and Jones when they returned home.\textsuperscript{118}

Still reeling from the mutiny and faced now with reports of seditious activities among
the BWIR’s black and coloured elite, the Colonial Office embraced General Thullier’s
alarmist assessment of the Caribbean League. The clerks at the Colonial Office viewed the
Caribbean League as an ominous bellwether for postwar mobilization in the colonies and
feared that the League could stimulate anti-colonial sentiment, and perhaps even violent
unrest, on the homefront. “The League may confine itself to legitimate objects, or it may
disappear; but there is undoubtedly great risk that it may give rise to some seditious
movement which would be made much more dangerous by the knowledge of arms and
discipline which has been acquired by the men of the Regiment,” warned senior clerk E. R.
Darnley. Since all three co-founders of the Caribbean League hailed from Jamaica, Darnley
was particularly anxious that the League might “foment sedition and violence” in Britain’s
most populous and important Caribbean colony.\textsuperscript{119} Gilbert Grindle, Assistant Under-
Secretary at the Colonial Office, offered a similarly dire assessment of the role that returning
soldiers would play in Jamaica. Expressing his “considerable apprehensions” about
demobilizing 7,500 BWIR servicemen in Jamaica, Grindle cautioned that the “mutinous
state” of the soldiers would only worsen when they encountered poor economic conditions at
home. The men, he lamented, would be “turned adrift” in an island plagued by chronic

\textsuperscript{118} General Henry Thullier to War Office, Secret Dispatch, December 29, 1918, CO 318/350, National
Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{119} Handwritten File Note by E. R. Darnley, January 16, 1919, CO 318/350, file 2590, National Archives of
the United Kingdom
under-employment and few job prospects for returning veterans. “Some rioting seems inevitable,” he concluded gravely.  

Ironically, the Colonial Office turned to Colonel R. E. Willis, the infamous officer whose abusive actions sparked the mutiny in the Ninth Battalion, to devise a strategy to combat the Caribbean League and limit unrest during demobilization. In early January 1919, E. R. Darnley met with Colonel Willis in England to discuss the Caribbean League and craft a “scheme of demobilization” for the regiment. Instead of suppressing the remnants of the Caribbean League outright, the men proposed that the governor of Jamaica should closely monitor the group’s leaders and activities and “be prepared to take prompt action” at the earliest sign of unrest. In addition, Grindle urged Governor Probyn to “get on with his plan for providing employment” for returning servicemen, as the “problem of keeping order” was now his primary responsibility. After meeting with Willis, the Colonial Office staff relayed their instructions to Governor Probyn in a confidential letter and enclosed copies of the reports about the Caribbean League written by military officials in Italy and at the War Office. On the same day, they also warned the governors of British Honduras, Trinidad, British Guiana, and the Bahamas about the Taranto mutiny and the formation of the Caribbean League.

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120 Handwritten File Note by G.E.A. Grindle, January 17, 1919, CO 318/350, file 2590, National Archives of the United Kingdom

121 Colonial Office to Leslie Probyn, January 24, 1919, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom

122 Colonial Office to The Officer Administering the Government of British Honduras, January 24, 1919, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Colonial Office to Wilfred Collet (British Guiana), January 24, 1919, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Colonial Office to W.L. Allardyce (Bahamas), January 24, 1919, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Colonial Office to J.R. Chancellor (Trinidad and Tobago), January 24, 1919, CO 318/350, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Colonial Office to G.B. Haddon-Smith (Windward Islands), January 24, 1919, CO
As Colonial Office staffers secretly instructed governors in the West Indies to prepare for the worst, they also belatedly started to evaluate soldiers’ complaints of pay discrimination. Throughout 1918, Walter Long, Secretary of State for the Colonies, had adamantly refused to review BWIR soldiers’ appeals for equal compensation. Instead, when pressed, Long simply repeated the War Office’s paper-thin excuse that BWIR soldiers were ineligible for the imperial pay increase because they did not have a regimental depot in Britain. However, on January 10, 1919, Alfred Milner, a conservative statesman and veteran colonial administrator, replaced Long as Secretary of State for the Colonies. Unlike his predecessor, Milner had significant experience in both colonial governance and military affairs, and he had a particular interest in civil-military relations. Before assuming the helm of the Colonial Office, Milner had served as the Secretary of State for War from April 1918 to January 1919. He had also held a series of important positions in British Southern Africa during the Second South African War (1899-1902) and likely co-authored the Balfour Declaration of 1917.\(^{123}\) Having successfully presided over the War Office during the final months of the war, Milner understood the politics of soldiers’ compensation and immediately set out to tackle BWIR soldiers’ grievances over Army Order No. 1.

By reviewing the pay dispute, Milner sought to appease disgruntled BWIR soldiers before a second round of disturbances erupted. He also aimed to mollify the growing chorus of colonial elites who portended that the failure to compensate BWIR soldiers on par with their British counterparts could foment unrest in the colonies. The most insistent call for action came from the West India Committee, an influential association of planters, colonial administrators, and business magnates headquartered in central London. Founded in the late eighteenth century to advance the interests of absentee planters and merchants, the West India Committee continued to champion the prerogatives of the region’s moneyed elite well after the decline of the plantation complex. At first glance, it is shocking that the West India Committee, a conservative bastion for British and West Indian elites, supported BWIR soldiers’ demand for the full benefits of Army Order No. 1. Yet several members of the West India Committee, including its chairman Everard im Thurn, were early supporters of the regiment and gradually forged personal relationships with black and coloured servicemen through their work with the West Indian Contingent Committee. Having read “numerous complaints” from dispirited West Indian soldiers and conducted their own informal investigation of Army Order No. 1 during the summer of 1918, the West India Committee formally petitioned the Colonial Office during the final weeks of 1918 to lobby colonial administrators to intervene on behalf of the BWIR. When Alfred Milner took over at the

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124 On the history of the West India Committee, see Douglas Hall, *A Brief History of the West India Committee* (St. Lawrence, Barbados: Caribbean Universities Press, 1971)

125 West Indian Contingent Committee to Walter Long, December 30, 1918, CO 318/347, file 63228, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Colonial Office in early January 1919, the West India Committee welcomed him with a second call for action.\textsuperscript{126}

The West Indian Contingent Committee’s petitions to the Colonial Office in late 1918 and early 1919 highlight the mix of pragmatic and principled reasons that led white elites increasingly to support the BWIR. On one hand, the dispute over Army Order No. 1, with its strong racial overtones, was a budding public relations nightmare for colonial administrators and white business elites. If official celebrations of interracial fraternity in the empire proved to be little more than a myth, elites feared that there would be a virulent anti-white backlash in the West Indies. Noting that the pay issue was “giving rise to very great dissatisfaction in all ranks of the British West Indies Regiment,” the Contingent Committee portended that discrimination against the regiment would have a “serious effect on public opinion” in the colonies.\textsuperscript{127} In a later letter, the Contingent Committee ominously reported that soldiers’ anger about Army Order No. 1 had become “intense.”\textsuperscript{128}

On the other hand, the Contingent Committee reluctantly acknowledged that BWIR soldiers possessed a “legitimate grievance” against the War Office.\textsuperscript{129} The all-white South African Overseas Contingent, which lacked the required depot in England, received the full benefits of Army Order No. 1, as did coloured West Indians who served in British

\textsuperscript{126} West Indian Contingent Committee to Alfred Milner, January 15, 1919, CO 318/347, file 3414, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{127} West Indian Contingent Committee to Walter Long, December 30, 1918, CO 318/347, file 63228, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{128} West Indian Contingent Committee to Alfred Milner, January 15, 1919, CO 318/347, file 3414, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{129} West Indian Contingent Committee to Alfred Milner, January 15, 1919, CO 318/347, file 3414, National Archives of the United Kingdom
regiments.\textsuperscript{130} BWIR soldiers, the Contingent Committee stressed, had willingly volunteered to fight in the Great War “in spite of the fact that their services were at first refused.” If British soldiers who were drafted into service received the full entitlements of the Army Order, then it was a “manifest injustice” to deny the same rewards to the BWIR.\textsuperscript{131}

The 18 men who signed the petition wielded considerable political clout. Most were veterans of the colonial service and boasted extensive personal and professional ties to the Caribbean. The seven most prominent signatories—Francis Fleming, James Hayes-Saddler, Frederic M. Hodgeon, George Le Hunte, R. B. Llewelyn, Sydney Olivier, and William Grey Wilson—had recently served as colonial governors in the region. The chairman of the West Indian Committee, Everard im Thurn, and the group’s well-regarded secretary, Algernon Aspinall, were also well-known in elite West Indian circles. Thurn, a globetrotting explorer, botanist, and colonial administrator, served in British Guiana for over two decades before being appointed as Governor of Ceylon and Fiji. Aspinall, a prolific historian, authored numerous books and articles on the history of the West Indies and frequently advised West Indian governors on matters of policy. Further still, Thurn, Aspinall, Olivier, Hodgeon, and Le Hunte, along with fellow signatories H. F. Previté and Robert Rutherford, all maintained close contact with soldiers through their work with the West Indian Contingent Committee and, to a much greater extent than the Colonial Office, had consistently championed their

\textsuperscript{130} West Indian Contingent Committee to Walter Long, December 30, 1918, CO 318/347, file 63228, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{131} West Indian Contingent Committee to Alfred Milner, January 15, 1919, CO 318/347, file 3414, National Archives of the United Kingdom
welfare. With ties to the upper echelons of the colonial service, and to rank-and-file BWIR soldiers, the petitioners rightly assumed that their appeals would be reviewed with the utmost consideration.

Before Milner could placate the Contingent Committee, news arrived that colonial authorities in Barbados were preparing to settle the pay dispute with or without the endorsement of officials in Britain. In response to the flood of appeals by BWIR soldiers and their allies, F. J. Clarke, Speaker of the House of Assembly and chairman of the local committee for returning soldiers, recommended that the local government use public funds to grant soldiers the raise mandated in Army Order No. 1. If the “Imperial Government” was not “disposed to grant equal pay,” Governor O’Brien relayed in a brief telegram, then legislators in Barbados were poised to intervene in “accordance with [the] promise on enlistment that the men would receive equal treatment to British troops.” O’Brien assured Milner that he would keep the proposal in abeyance until he received instructions from the Colonial Office, yet the fact that the legislative body in Britain’s most conservative Caribbean colony was prepared to affirm BWIR soldiers’ right to the benefits of Army Order No.1 jolted the Colonial Office staff. If Barbadian soldiers received the pay increase from local coffers, then soldiers from other West Indian colonies would likely press for similar

132 “Minutes a Meeting of the General Purposes Committee,” June 25, 1918, West Indian Contingent Committee Minute Book, ICS 97 1/6/1, Institute for Commonwealth Studies; “Minutes a Meeting of the General Purposes Committee,” November 1, 1918, West Indian Contingent Minute Book, ICS 97 1/6/1, Institute for Commonwealth Studies; “Minutes a Meeting of the General Purposes Committee,” January 14, 1919, West Indian Contingent Committee Minute Book, ICS 97 1/6/1, Institute for Commonwealth Studies

133 Governor Charles O’Brien to Secretary of State for the Colonies, January 28, 1919, CO 318/347, file 3414, National Archives of the United Kingdom
concessions, setting off a new round of agitation and protest. “The political effect” of the House of Assembly’s plan, George Grindle concluded, “would be deplorable.”

Under pressure from several quarters, Milner ordered his subordinates to prepare a memo assessing the row over Army Order No. 1. The resulting document, written in lucid, uncomplicated prose by Confidential Clerk H. T. Allen, found that there was an “irresistible case” for awarding BWIR soldiers the disputed pay increase. Guided by a basic commitment to fairness and a keen awareness of the larger political stakes, Allen argued the War Office’s ruling was neither politically savvy nor just. “Discrimination in the matter of pay on colour grounds seems unfair,” he concluded after scrutinizing the telegrams that established the original rate of pay for BWIR soldiers. The War Office had promised volunteers “pay at British rates” and never suggested that their wages would be frozen if British soldiers received a raise. “Supposing it had been necessary to reduce the pay of British privates to 9d. a day, would the War Office or Treasury have interpreted the correspondence to mean that the privates of the British West Indies Regiment remained entitled to 1s. a day?” Allen asked incredulously. The War Office’s backroom machinations, coupled with the racial overtones of the pay dispute, he warned, could fatally undermine West Indians’ loyalty to the empire. “The West Indian negro is in general proud of his British nationality (even to the point of being obnoxious about it when abroad),” but “discrimination in the matter of pay based on colour grounds…is calculated to arouse, and has in fact already aroused, great resentment.”

There was already “reason to fear trouble” in Jamaica during demobilization, and the risk of

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134 Handwritten File Note by G.E.A. Grindle, January 31, 1919, CO 318/347, file 7242, National Archives of the United Kingdom
unrest would be heightened if “any legitimate grievance in regard to pay remains unremedied,” he predicted.  

The staff at the Colonial Office had less than a day to digest Allen’s thoughtful memo before meeting with officials from the War Office. Having exchanged terse letters for months, representatives from the Colonial and War Offices finally met to review BWIR soldiers’ standing relative to Army Order No. 1 on January 31, 1919. If there had been any lingering debate, the meeting convinced officials at the Colonial Office that the extant ruling was completely untenable. When pressed to justify their decision, the representatives from the War Office jettisoned the claim that the BWIR was a native regiment, maintaining instead that financial considerations spurred their ruling against West Indian troops. If the BWIR received the full benefits of the Army Order, then “coloured units” from Fiji, Bermuda, and South Africa would demand similar financial concessions as well. Unimpressed by this latest excuse, officials from the Colonial Office retorted that a “clear line could be drawn” between the BWIR and the other units. And, as H. T. Allen had pointed out earlier, the estimated cost of granting the pay increase to all coloured units was merely £500,000, equal to what the British Treasury spent on “two hours…of the war.” More to the point, they stressed that the fallout from further inaction could be dire. In a handwritten internal note

135 H.T. Allen, “Pay of the British West Indies Regiment,” January 30, 1919, CO 318/348, file 5991, National Archives of the United Kingdom

136 These other “coloured units” were the Fiji Labour Company, Bermuda Royal Garrison Artillery, Cape Coloured Labour Battalion, Cape Corps Infantry, Cape Auxiliary Horse Transport Corps, and Cape Coloured Labour Section. E.R. Darnley estimated the total enlistment for these six units to be approximately 8,000 men in total. Colonial Office, “Draft Memorandum for the War Cabinet: Question of extending to various coloured Colonial Contingents the full benefits of Army Order No.1 of 1918, February 1919, CO 318/347, file 7242, National Archives of the United Kingdom

137 H.T. Allen, “Pay of the British West Indies Regiment,” January 30, 1919, CO 318/348, file 5991, National Archives of the United Kingdom
written after the meeting, Grindle warned that the War Office remained blithely unaware of the “grave political issues” of their ruling. Grindle, however, possessed no such naiveté: “[I]f these men are discharged in the W. I. [West Indies] with a rankling sense of injustice due to their colour, I fear the British connection will be weakened just when we want the loyalty of the black man to hold out against American aggressiveness.” Further still, predicted Grindle, if returning soldiers rioted during demobilization, the Colonial Office would reap the blame for the War Office’s bungled ruling.138

Authorities at the Colonial Office, especially Alfred Milner, were determined not to take the fall for the War Office. In the wake of the meeting, Milner directed E. R. Darnley to draft a Cabinet memo outlining the Colonial Office’s stance on the BWIR and Army Order No. 1, and stressed that the memo should be written “in the first person,” and sent to the War Office over his signature, to add heft.139 The final document, collectively revised by several staff members with substantial input from Milner, emphatically argued that BWIR soldiers should receive the full benefits of Army Order No. 1. Milner pressed the War Office to reconsider its decision on two grounds—“that of immediate necessity and that of future political effect.” Recapitulating H. T. Allen’s earlier reading of the enlistment terms for the BWIR, he concluded the War Office had promised to pay West Indian volunteers at the same rate as their British counterparts. While it remained unclear if BWIR soldiers had also been guaranteed any future increases in pay, Milner insisted the exact wording of the original documents was irrelevant given the larger political stakes. “The fact is that, however the

138 Handwritten File Note by G.E.A. Grindle, January 31, 1919, CO 318/347, file 7242, National Archives of the United Kingdom

139 Handwritten File Note by Alfred Milner, February 4, 1919, CO 318/347, file 7242, National Archives of the United Kingdom
question may be argued here, nothing will ever convince either the men themselves or their friends at home that they have not been put off with a lower rate of pay purely on account of their colour,” he explained. If the soldiers returned to the colonies “labouring under a grievance based on racial distinctions,” the consequence would be “racial riots” and major political unrest. Any money saved by excluding BWIR soldiers from Army Order No. 1, Milner warned urgently, “will be most dearly bought.”

If the immediate political considerations were not sufficiently compelling, Milner entreated, the War Office should consider the long-term consequences of its ruling. Any hint of racial prejudice on the part of the imperial government, he maintained, would alienate black and coloured West Indians and “prejudice the British connection for generations.”

Given that black and coloured West Indians were pivotal allies in the fight against U. S. expansion in the Caribbean, the War Office’s decision could have major geo-political repercussions. “The coloured population of the West Indies has hitherto been more attached to the British connection than the white, and properly handled is our chief bulwark against American designs,” Milner confessed. “If this question of pay is handled as to leave behind a sense of injustice and a colour grievance the attachment of the negro population to the Empire will be seriously affected.” With the first BWIR battalion scheduled to sail home in a matter of weeks and the threat of disturbances looming, Milner called on the War Office to act immediately to settle the dispute.

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140 Colonial Office, “Draft Memorandum for the War Cabinet: Question of extending to various coloured Colonial Contingents the full benefits of Army Order No.1 of 1918, February 1919, CO 318/347, file 7242, National Archives of the United Kingdom

141 Colonial Office, “Draft Memorandum for the War Cabinet: Question of extending to various coloured Colonial Contingents the full benefits of Army Order No.1 of 1918, February 1919, CO 318/347, file 7242, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Besieged on all sides, the War Office finally relented. In February 1919, B. B. Cubitt, Assistant Secretary to the War Office, announced that the Army Council would grant all BWIR soldiers the “full terms” of Army Order No. 1, including over seventeen months of back pay at the increased rate.\textsuperscript{142} Further still, the Council agreed to award BWIR servicemen the War Gratuity outlined in Army Order No. 17 of 1919, which would be paid as a lump sum upon demobilization.\textsuperscript{143} Officials at the Colonial Office gushed over the hard fought victory. “The War Office have now given us all we asked in regard to pay, and more than we asked in regard to gratuity,” a clerk boasted.\textsuperscript{144} Alfred Milner quickly telegraphed the good news to the governors of the West Indian colonies, and clerk E. R. Darnley personally informed West Indian Contingent Committee chairman, Everard im Thurn.\textsuperscript{145} After a year of vigorous petitioning, organizing, and protesting, BWIR soldiers scored a significant victory in the fight for equality in the British imperial armed forces. Their transnational campaign not only forced the War Office to honor its original promises to the regiment, but also led the Army Council to consider granting other “coloured units” the benefits of Army Order No. 1.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{142} B.B. Cubitt to the Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, February 18, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10950, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{143} Under Army Order No. 17 of 1919, soldiers received a gratuity of £5 for the first year of military service and an additional 10s. per month for every month of service after the first year for a maximum of 48 months. See HC Deb 13 February 1919 vol. 112 cc 294-5W

\textsuperscript{144} Handwritten File Note by E. R. Darnley, February 20, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10950, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{145} Telegram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to February 21, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10950, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Handwritten File Note by E. R. Darnley, February 20, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10950, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{146} In his letter, Cubitt did not specify what other “coloured units” might also retroactively receive the benefits of Army Order No.1, but the likely units included the Fiji Labour Company, Bermuda Royal
Conclusion

Colonial Office functionaries belatedly attempted to claim credit for the War Office’s revised ruling; however, BWIR soldiers were unquestionably the driving force behind the victorious campaign for the full benefits of Army Order No. 1. Their unlikely victory, which garnered significant material concessions and official recognition of the regiment as a unit in the imperial armed forces, highlights the political acumen and sheer determination of West Indian troops. When confronted with the intransience of the War Office, BWIR soldiers strategically deployed the political language of mutual obligation to add moral heft to their demands for equal treatment, castigating the War Office for both reneging on its promise and violating a central tenet of the Empire. Soldiers’ written overtures to far-flung colonial administrators, military officials, and West Indian political elites map the multiple, overlapping networks that nourished the protest movement and demonstrate how soldiers deftly moved between the civilian and military worlds. Soldiers’ petitions and letters to colonial administrators, as Gregory Mann noted in his study of West African veterans, also illuminate the complex “process of creating and treating clients.” As this chapter has demonstrated, the military and political elites who supported the BWIR’s campaign did so for a host of principled and pragmatic reasons and nearly always imagined BWIR soldiers as

Garrison Artillery, Cape Coloured Labour Battalion, Cape Corps Infantry, Cape Auxiliary Horse Transport Corps, and Cape Coloured Labour Section. B.B. Cubitt to the Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, February 18, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10950, National Archives of the United Kingdom

147 The West Indian Contingent Committee also boasted about its role in securing the benefits of Army Order No. 1 for BWIR soldiers in its closing report for 1918. The West Indian Contingent Committee, Report and Accounts for the Six Months ended 31st December, 1918 (London: The West India Committee Rooms, 1919), n.p.

loyal and respectable clients worthy of their benevolent patronage. For the soldiers who rebelled at Taranto—and the non-commissioned officers who flirted with militant strategies during meetings of the Caribbean League—collective action offered an appealing alternative to protracted lobbying.

Unfortunately for BWIR soldiers, the battle for equal status and treatment in Britain’s imperial forces did not end with their decisive victory in February 1919. As soldiers anxiously waited to sail home in early 1919, the base at Taranto, Italy, would once again provide the backdrop for a major confrontation. This time, instead of battling the War Office, soldiers would face both vicious treatment at the hands of a senior military official and new concerns about readjusting to civilian life.
Chapter Four

“Democracy shall be no empty romance”: Postwar Protest in the Shadow of Taranto

_We are a new people, born out of a new day. We are born out of the bloody war of 1914-18._
-Marcus Garvey

In January 1919, Lieutenant Colonel J. R. H. Homfray dispatched an ominous report to Lord Maurice Hankey, secretary of the War Council. As an officer in the Royal Marine Artillery, Homfray had visited every West Indian colony during the Great War as part of Britain’s imperial defense effort. Now that hostilities had concluded, he sensed a “great deal of uneasiness” among colonial elites regarding the demobilization of the BWIR. West Indian veterans, predicted Homfray, would return to the colonies “imbued with revolutionary ideas” and demand unreasonable compensation for their military service. “All the blacks” who have returned from the war, the lieutenant colonel claimed, “seem to imagine they are not going to work anymore” and will be “supported by a grateful country.” If disaffected ex-soldiers revolted, as they had in Taranto, the small number of white volunteers in the West Indies would not be able to contain the unrest. Since colonial authorities could not depend on coloured volunteers to quell an insurrection—presumably because of their sympathies with black and coloured soldiers—Homfray recommended that the War Office dispatch Royal

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1 “Welcome to the Men of our Contingents,” _The Belize Independent_, July 16, 1919, Vol. VI, No.279, 3


3 On Lord Hankey’s work with the War Council, see Lord Hankey, _The Supreme Command, 1914-1918, Volume I_ (London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1961), 3-10, 237-332
Marines armed with machine guns to Barbados, Trinidad, and Jamaica during demobilization. “At St. Kitts, Antigua, Dominica, and [St.] Lucia, I think there will not be very much trouble,” he predicted, “but Demerara, Barbados, Trinidad, and Jamaica are decidedly pessimistic.”

Lord Hankey forwarded Homfray’s dire assessment to Secretary of State for the Colonies Viscount Milner, instructing Milner that Homfray’s opinion on the West Indies was “not one to be neglected.” Military officials in the metropole likewise advised the Colonial Office to expect trouble from returning West Indian servicemen. Colonel Piers W. North, commander of the 3rd Royal Berkshire Regiment, reported that West Indian volunteers who served in British regiments had gotten “hold of white women” and soldiered alongside white men. Having asserted their equality with whites on the battlefield and in the bedroom, West Indian veterans, North cautioned, would be “quite spoilt” when they returned to the colonies.

Civilian observers on the homefront confirmed military officials’ worst fears about West Indian soldiers. In May 1919, Governor Leslie Probyn fretted that Jamaican veterans, inspired by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, would bring home “a form of Russianised unrest.” The following month, Governor Charles O’Brien detected “considerable disaffection” among Barbadian veterans due to their “treatment at Taranto and during the

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4 J. R. H. Homfray to Lord Hankley, January 14, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10550, National Archives of the United Kingdom

5 Typewritten note by Lord Hankey, February 12, 1919, on J. R. H. Homfray to Lord Hankey, January 14, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10550, National Archives of the United Kingdom

6 Piers W. North to Colonial Office, January 6, 1919, CO 318/352, file 7723, National Archives of the United Kingdom

7 Leslie Probyn to Viscount Milner, May 22, 1919, CO 137/731, file 34400, National Archives of the United Kingdom
war.”8 In his 1926 memoir, white Jamaican constable Herbert Thomas recalled that there was tremendous anxiety about the loyalty of BWIR servicemen, since the men had mutinied while “quartered in idleness at Taranto in Italy.”9 Fellow white lawman Percy L. Fraser, Superintendent of Prisons in Trinidad, likewise described how veterans harbored a “high pitch of resentment” because of the racism in Taranto. Angered by the “bad and unfair treatment” they received overseas, he explained, veterans had returned to Trinidad with a militant agenda to stamp out class and colour inequalities.10 “I have no hesitation in stating that this awful class feeling cropped up in full force,” wrote Fraser, “on the return of the soldiers of the British West Indies Regiment from the First World War.”11

In scholarly accounts of the postwar British Caribbean, BWIR veterans typically emerge as protagonists in the nascent nationalist movement, occupying a central role alongside charismatic trade union leaders and populist politicians. Beginning with C. L. R. James’ landmark 1932 biography of Arthur Cipriani, historians have credited veterans with catalyzing the movement for self-government and have richly detailed ex-soldiers’ contributions to postwar anti-imperialist and workers’ struggles.12 Scholars writing in the 1960s and 1970s, in keeping with the strong nationalist ethos of the era, typically


9 Herbert T. Thomas, The Story of a West Indian Policeman or Forty-seven Years in the Jamaica Constabulary (Kingston, Jamaica: Gleaner Co., 1927), 214

10 Captain Percy L. Fraser, Looking over my Shoulder: Forty-Seven Years a Public Servant, 1885-1932 (San Juan, Trinidad: Lexicon Trinidad, Ltd., 2007), 8

11 Fraser, Looking Over My Shoulder, 8

12 C. L. R. James, The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of the British Government in the West Indies (Nelson, Lancashire: Coulton, 1932)
foregrounded the radicalism and disaffection of former servicemen. W. F. Elkins, for example, argued that the “experiences of black soldiers” during World War I “contributed to the rise of nationalist sentiments in 1919.” Returning veterans, he contended, sparked “the national liberation struggle that eventually led to the demise of open colonial rule” in the region.13 Similarly, in his magisterial study of decolonization in Trinidad and Tobago, political scientist Sewlyn Ryan wrote that it was “difficult to overemphasize the war’s effect on generating revolutionary ideas” among working-class civilians and ex-servicemen.14 Within the past decade, historians have begun to offer more tempered assessments of veterans’ postwar political consciousness, suggesting that ex-soldiers “returned home radicalized by the ill-treatment and discrimination” they encountered abroad but “retained an attachment to the ideals of heroic sacrifice.”15 Yet in the absence of in-depth treatments of veterans’ engagements with the state and with civilians in the immediate postwar era, it is difficult to assess ex-servicemen’s evolving loyalties, alliances, and priorities.

Intervening in these debates, this chapter examines the range of strategies veterans and their civilian allies employed in their attempts to wrest material, political, and symbolic rewards from the colonial state. It offers a detailed chronological narrative of the tumultuous period between 1919 and 1920, when nearly 14,000 BWIR veterans returned to the colonies after serving in World War I and revolutionary upheavals in Europe and North America contributed to a mood of popular militancy in the West Indies. This chapter begins by

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14 Selwyn D. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 28

situating elite anxieties about returning servicemen in the context of heightened claims-making by activists on the homefront and the explosive growth of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Then, narrowing the geographic frame, the chapter explores the politics of demobilization in British Honduras, the Central American outpost where a massive uprising led by returning veterans erupted in the capital city in July 1919. In the final section, the chapter compares veterans’ divergent organizing strategies in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the two most populous British Caribbean colonies.

BWIR veterans and their civilian allies, this chapter suggests, strategically highlighted their wartime sacrifices to contend that Britain owed a debt to loyal West Indians. In contrast to veterans in the metropole, who increasingly turned to private charities and voluntary organizations to meet their needs after November 1918, West Indian veterans directed their demands for recompense squarely at the colonial state. In a similar move, returning veterans strategically publicized their experiences of racism and discrimination in the British Army, citing each slight as proof that the “Mother Country” had violated its own core principles. Yet, during the dramatic 1919 upheavals in British Honduras and Trinidad, which pitted veterans who favored negotiation with the colonial state against those who sought change through popular rebellion, reformist ex-soldiers like Arthur Cipriani and Samuel Haynes ultimately prevailed. Their strategic use of the language of imperial patriotism and disdain for violent forms of protest would have lasting consequences for the tone and trajectory of veterans’ politics in the region.

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A “great deal of uneasiness”: Elite Anxieties on the Eve of Demobilization

As 1919 dawned, metropolitan officials looked ahead with trepidation at the impending demobilization of the BWIR. Even before receiving Lieutenant Colonel Homfray’s urgent warning in February 1919, the Colonial Office had begun to request additional military support in anticipation of the return of West Indian troops. Deeply rattled by the Taranto mutiny and the formation of the Caribbean League, Colonial Office staffers secretly asked the War Office to deploy a battalion of British infantry to Jamaica to maintain order during demobilization. Yet, in response to Homfray’s call for heavily armed marines and military cruisers in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad, the Colonial Office questioned the utility of such an overwhelming show of force. Dispatching three cruisers to the West Indies during demobilization, clerk C. R. Darnley maintained, “would look like panic.” Instead, Darnley proposed that the War Office should station a single warship at Jamaica since over 7,200 BWIR veterans, including the founders of the infamous Caribbean League, would be demobilized there. In the other colonies, where much smaller numbers of veterans would disembark, local authorities could recruit loyal BWIR ex-servicemen to serve alongside the standing police force if trouble arose.

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17 J. R. H. Homfray to Lord Hankley, January 14, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10550, National Archives of the United Kingdom

18 Homfray’s January 1919 letter reached the Colonial Office on February 17, 1919.

19 B. B. Cubitt to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, February 7, 1919, CO 318/350, file 8424, National Archives of the United Kingdom

20 Handwritten note by C. R. Darnley, February 18, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10550, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Unlike his subordinate, Viscount Milner was unwilling to disregard Homfray’s proposal without first consulting authorities in the Caribbean. In a telegram to West Indian governors on February 20, Milner instructed colonial officials to “take every precaution for the maintenance of order during demobilization,” warning that there was still “serious discontent” in the BWIR despite the recent victory regarding Army Order No. 1. Following up on Homfray’s suggestion, Milner also asked the governors of Trinidad, Barbados, British Guiana, and the Windward and Leeward Islands if they would require a warship to render assistance when veterans returned. Since the British Navy was stretched thin, he stressed, governors should only solicit additional assistance if it was absolutely necessary.

At least two governors in the region, Charles O’Brien of Barbados and William Allardyce of the Bahamas, responded to Milner’s telegram by requesting a strong naval presence during demobilization, demonstrating that anxieties about returning veterans permeated the region’s smaller territories as well as Jamaica. O’Brien, having previously served as the acting commissioner of the Transvaal Town Police during the violent 1907 miners’ strike in Witwatersrand, South Africa, had no qualms about using deadly force to

The Colonial Office had initiated plans to station a warship near Jamaica during demobilization before receiving Homfray’s letter. Secretary of the Admiralty to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, February 7, 1919; Viscount Milner to Governor of Jamaica, February 15, 1919; and G. V. Fiddes to Secretary of the Admiralty, February 20, 1919 all in CO 318/350, file 8424, National Archives of the United Kingdom

21 Secretary of State for the Colonies to Officer Administering the Government (British Honduras) and to Governor of the Bahamas, February 20, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10550, National Archives of the United Kingdom

22 Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governors of Trinidad, Barbados, British Guiana, and the Windward and Leeward Islands, February 20, 1919, CO 318/350, file 10550, National Archives of the United Kingdom

suppress popular uprisings. Despite the relatively small number of veterans projected to return to Barbados, he requested that a warship dock at the colony during the entire period of demobilization. Additionally, he called for armed marines and bluejackets to be stationed in pickets throughout the capital in case of any unrest and ordered the Commandant of the Local Defense Force to post guards at the colony’s armory. Justifying the need for such an overwhelming show of force, O’Brien alleged that BWIR soldiers had sent threatening letters to various individuals on the island. More ominously, he noted, returning servicemen were “trained to the use of arms” and knew the location of the colony’s major stores of guns and ammunition.24

The specter of the Caribbean League spurred William Allardyce to request a gunboat to help maintain order in the Bahamas. Although the League disbanded in early January 1919, Allardyce remained deeply troubled by the “seditious movement.” In a secret dispatch to Admiral Morgan Singer in late February 1919, the governor predicted that his island’s small Defense Force would not be able to keep the peace when Bahamian veterans returned from overseas. Stressing that the Defense Force was “composed mainly of coloured persons,” Allardyce echoed Homfray’s earlier assertion that colonial authorities could not rely on black and coloured militiamen to suppress an uprising by the BWIR.25 Like many other white elites, Allardyce insisted that only white British troops could be trusted to

24 Charles O’Brien to Viscount Milner, March 5, 1919, “Scheme of Organization Against Civil Disturbances,” GH 3/4/4, Barbados Department of Archives

suppress the nonwhite majority during a crisis. The loyalty of black and coloured lawmen, like that of BWIR veterans, was always suspect.

Rather than fearing returning veterans, many colonial subjects in the British Caribbean hoped to leverage their wartime sacrifices to demand enhanced political privileges in the postwar era. Prominent black activist and solicitor Emanuel M’Zumbo Lazare expressed the hopes of many West Indian reformers in a public letter published in the *Argos*, Trinidad’s laborite newspaper, in January 1919. A fierce opponent of Crown Colony rule, Lazare had served as a Lieutenant in the West India Regiment in the 1890s and met Queen Victoria during the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1897. During a review of black colonial troops, Queen Victoria, admired and beloved by West Indians all of classes, reportedly had leaned out of her carriage and asked the Trinidadian officer if he spoke English. After returning to Trinidad, Lazare fought for constitutional reform through his work with the Ratepayers Association as well as the short-lived Pan African Association. A decade later, in his letter to the *Argos*, Lazare strategically invoked West Indians’ role in the imperial war effort to reignite the regional struggle for representative government. Moved by “filial obligation,” he wrote, military-aged men throughout the West Indies dutifully put aside their political grievances and answered the wartime call for volunteers. Likewise, civilians

26 After the withdrawal of the last garrison of white British troops from the British Caribbean in 1905, colonial authorities and local white elites repeatedly insisted that black and coloured volunteers and constables could not be trusted to suppress popular uprisings. Bonham C. Richardson, *Igniting the Caribbean’s Past: Fire in British West Indian History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 189-191


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willingly donated money and agricultural produce to aid the metropole. On the battlefields of Europe, white, black, and coloured Trinidadians gave their lives in the “greatest of all causes”—the fight for democracy. Now that the war was over, Lazare asked pointedly, would West Indians “be included in that great democratic circle, which is now encompassing the world? Shall we (the West Indian colonies) not be given a voice in the Congress of Nations?”

According to Lazare, BWIR volunteers had “earned” the privilege of representative government for all West Indians through their martial labor. Now, in anticipation of BWIR soldiers’ impending return, the noted activist urged the Mayor of Port of Spain to gather the colony’s “leading citizens” to petition the metropole for political reforms. “Preparations are now being made for the reception of our noble boys who have covered themselves with glory and won our political emancipation,” he wrote. “Shall we be so inconsistent to ring out joy bells in honour of their home-coming after we shall have failed to reap the benefits of their glorious achievement?” If the Mayor and the Legislative Council refused to advocate for democracy, maintained Lazare, then the “people must rise to the occasion and be up and doing.”

Esteemed schoolmaster U. Theo McKay, elder brother and mentor of Jamaican poet Claude McKay, likewise used the language of mutual obligation to articulate the state’s debt to BWIR veterans. Yet, in contrast to Lazare’s call for political concessions, McKay

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31 For a biographical portrait of U. Theo McKay, see Winston James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice: Claude McKay’s Jamaica and His Poetry of Rebellion* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2001), 26-33

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lobbied the colonial government to reward veterans materially with land grants and pensions. In recognition of their sacrifices on behalf of the empire, McKay recommended that returning soldiers should receive well-paying employment along with “a sum of money or a bit of land.” Having seen the world and served in the British armed forces, he argued, veterans should not be expected to “go back to use the pick and shovel” at home. Decrying the low pre-war wages on the island, the noted socialist and freethinker added that ex-soldiers, civil servants, and laborers must receive fair compensation if Jamaica hoped to advance in the postwar era. “The old order has passed, and passed forever,” McKay maintained. “The cry is ‘forward!’ and any man who puts himself in the path of progress will find himself crushed to atoms.”

Lazare and McKay were part of a rising chorus of black and coloured activists whose demands for reform sparked the explosive postwar growth of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). In the five years since the Kingston UNIA division dispatched a loyalty petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Marcus Garvey’s organization had grown from a fledging club in Jamaica to a vibrant transnational movement headquartered in Harlem. No longer content to curry favor with colonial authorities, Garvey spoke with an increasingly militant tone after his move to the United States in 1916. In response to the Armistice, the Jamaican black nationalist warned European statesmen to “be very just to all the people who may happen to come under their legislative control” in the postwar period. “The masses of the whole world have risen as one man to demand true equity and justice,” Garvey declared in the pages of the Negro World, advising that black

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men and women would no longer tolerate the pre-war status quo. “There will be no peace in the world until the white man confines himself politically to Europe, the yellow man to Asia and the black man to Africa,” he insisted. And, in a clear warning to the world’s colonial powers, the UNIA’s President-General added that “any one who dares to interfere with this division” of land would reap “trouble for himself.”

The *Negro World*, the UNIA’s militant official organ, carried Garvey’s message of African redemption and black empowerment throughout the Caribbean. The motto emblazoned on the paper’s masthead—“NEGROES GET READY”—rallied readers to prepare for a new socio-political era. Copies of the *Negro World* initially reached readers in the Caribbean via traveling sailors and international mail in late 1918. Shortly before the Armistice, Garvey mailed fifty copies of the newspaper to D. B. Lewis in Corozal, British Honduras, and promised to forward the same number of copies each week to raise awareness about the UNIA’s program. At the same time, members of the West Indian diaspora in Panama first encountered the *Negro World* in the Canal Zone, where Japanese sailors reportedly distributed the periodical. By February 1919, official representatives from the UNIA were selling copies of the *Negro World* in Trinidad and enrolling new members as

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well. In the months that followed, colonial officials from British Guiana to Barbados also discovered that Garvey’s provocative newspaper circulated in their islands. And according to the leading historian of the UNIA, BWIR servicemen read the *Negro World* while stationed overseas and secretly brought copies home with them during demobilization.

For West Indian readers of the *Negro World*, the paper offered an uncompromising call for “universal democracy.” Four months after Garvey’s controversial essay, W. A. Domingo published a trenchant editorial on the future of the British West Indies. Domingo, a Jamaican journalist who migrated to New York in 1910, cut his teeth as an officer in the National Club in Jamaica before reuniting with Garvey as the literary editor of the *Negro World*. Like Garvey, Domingo hoped the end of World War I would inaugurate a political “renaissance” for black men and women. Constructing a provocative counter-history of the war, the socialist writer argued that Britain conscripted the Caribbean colonies into the war effort, denying the region’s residents any voice in international affairs. “Too small and too weak to cherish any notion of aggression,” the British Caribbean colonies reluctantly stumbled into the European conflict because of bellicose politicians in the “Mother Country.” Despite this, Domingo claimed, colonial governments in the British Caribbean “went the

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36 W. M. Gordon (Acting Governor) to Viscount Milner, June 18, 1919, CO 295/521, file 41273, National Archives of the United Kingdom


39 For an analysis of Wilfred A. Domingo’s political trajectory, see Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998), 41, 50-51, 94, 269-270
limit” to demonstrate their loyalty, assuming financial burdens that would “impoverish them for generations.” And West Indian men, like other subjects in the empire, voluntarily served in the war for democracy even though most lived under autocratic Crown Colony governments at home.  

Yet “beneath the surface of their self-sacrificing patriotism,” Domingo assured readers, lay “an ineradicable belief that their suffering and their participation in the war” would garner significant social and political rewards in the postwar period. Having soldiered in a war for democracy, BWIR veterans would no longer accept “economic serfdom or political slavery,” he insisted. “The British Empire cannot be half de[s]potic and half democratic. If oligarchical rule is not to be tolerated by Englishmen in England, it should not be tolerated by them in sections of their own empire. If political freedom is good enough to be forced upon Germans, then it is certainly good enough for Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, St. Kitts and other islands of the Antilles.”

Already anxious about the impending return of BWIR veterans, colonial authorities moved rapidly to suppress the Negro World. In British Honduras, acting governor Robert Walter banned the importation and sale of the UNIA organ, writing that the paper would “incite racial hatred” and was probably funded by “German or Bolshiviki money.” Walter’s ban failed to stem the circulation of the Negro World, however, as copies were smuggled into

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British Honduras via Mexico and Guatemala.\textsuperscript{42} Officials in Trinidad began covertly intercepting copies of the \textit{Negro World} in late February 1919, later justifying their illegal actions by insisting that the newspaper was “seditious and contrary to public policy.”\textsuperscript{43} The wartime postal censor in British Guiana started confiscating parcels of the \textit{Negro World} in May 1919, after senior administrators in the colony declared that the paper “observe[d] a policy of antagonism to the white race.” Casting a suspicious eye on all incoming African American periodicals, they likewise sought to restrict the circulation of \textit{The Crusader}, the socialist magazine of Harlem’s African Blood Brotherhood, and \textit{The Christian Recorder}, the organ of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church.\textsuperscript{44}

After months of nervous anticipation and military buildup, BWIR veterans finally began to arrive in the colonies en masse in the spring of 1919. Colonial officials publicly celebrated returning veterans as paragons of imperial loyalty while privately bracing for violent upheavals, public demonstrations, and the resurgence of the Caribbean League. In Jamaica, constable Herbert Thomas remembered, colonial officials were especially tense. Shortly before the first group of veterans arrived in the colony, a local “scaremonger” had


\textsuperscript{43} W. M. Gordon to Viscount Milner, June 18, 1919, CO 295/521, file 41273, National Archives of the United Kingdom; W. M. Gordon to Wilfred Collet, June 10, 1919, CO 295/521, file 41273, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{44} For the exchange between colonial administrators in British Guiana and U.S. consular officials regarding the circulation of the \textit{Negro World} and other black publications from the United States, see George Chamberlin to Robert Lansing, May 9, 1919, RG 59, 811.918/129, National Archives and Records Administration; Cecil Clementi to Viscount Milner, May 10, 1919, CO 111/623/7345, National Archives of the United Kingdom; B. H. Bayley to George E. Chamberlin, May 31, 1919, RG 59, 811.918/130, National Archives and Records Administration; George E. Chamberlin to Robert Lansing, June 2, 1919, RG 59, 811.918/130, National Archives and Records Administration, all reprinted in Hill, ed., \textit{The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers}, Volume XI, 199-204, 205-206, 209-210
warned the governor that ex-servicemen would launch a “deliberately planned and organised rebellion” upon their return. In response, Governor Leslie Probyn ordered all police officers to take special precautionary measures and assigned constables to guard the major demobilization hubs. In addition, when the first 1,200 Jamaican veterans disembarked on May 2, 1919, Probyn ensured that a warship was stationed near Kingston Harbor and sent a detachment of West India Regiment troops to stand guard near the ship (see figure 10). When residents condemned the brazen show of force, Jamaica Military Headquarters issued a public statement claiming that authorities only ordered the security measures to protect veterans from throngs of eager spectators. Unconvinced by this diplomatic explanation, a group of ex-sergeants drafted a letter to the governor protesting “the reception accorded to them on their return” and the “untrue statements” government officials circulated about their loyalty and behavior during the war.

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45 Thomas, *The Story of a West Indian Policeman*, 216

46 *Jamaica Times*, May 17, 1919, 10

47 Minutes of the Meeting of the Privy Council, July 18, 1919, 1B/5/3/32, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town
To minimize the threat of a large-scale veterans’ protest in the capital, authorities arranged for ex-servicemen to return to their home parishes within 24 hours of mustering out. After brief words of welcome by the governor and other leading officials, military authorities quickly shepherded veterans away from crowds of well-wishers and onto

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48 Secretary of State for the Colonies Viscount Milner recommended this strategy in a telegram to all West Indian governors in February 1919. For a copy of Milner’s telegram, see Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor of Trinidad, February 8, 1919, File Folder 926/1919, Box 231-1266 (1919), National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain
departing trains. In lieu of a central homecoming celebration in Kingston, villages and towns across the island greeted “their sons” with home-cooked meals, cigarettes, and free entertainment in local community gatherings.49

Once in their home communities, the men also collected a £2 advance on their final wages as soldiers. Like other British troops, BWIR veterans garnered a one-time war gratuity based on their length of military service as well as a demobilization allowance. Thus, within 30 days of demobilization, most former soldiers received a total of £20 to £25, a sum equal to approximately seven months wages for a private.50 Disabled veterans also registered for a pension based on their military rank and degree of injury. Privates who were “partially capable of earning of living” garnered 6d. to 1s. 6d. per day while those unable to work at all received up to 2s. 6d.51

War widows could apply for a one-time payment equal to a year of their spouses’ military salary, only if they proved that they had been financially dependent on the deceased soldiers’ earnings and were legally married at the time of his death.52 Given that less than 40 percent of black and coloured laboring peoples in the British Caribbean were formally

49 On the plan to send veterans to their home parishes for welcome home festivities, see “Return of the Contingents,” Northern News, April 19, 1919, 1; “Montego Bay Will Give Contingent Men Warm Welcome,” Northern News, April 26, 1919, 1; Thomas, The Story of a West Indian Policeman, 214-220

50 BWIR veterans were officially demobilized after a 28-day transitional furlough period at home. During this period, they still received daily wages and had the right to wear their uniform. “Army Demobilization Regulations, Part III, Chapter XXXIII: British West Indies Regiment,” CO 318/355, file 7060, National Archives of the United Kingdom. For the average final payment allotted to BWIR veterans, see Secretary of State of the Colonies to Governor of Trinidad, March 18, 1919, File Folder 926/1919, Box 231-1266 (1919), National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago


52 “Information Regarding Rates of Pay, Separation Allowances, and Pensions for the Men Joining the Jamaica War Contingents,” 1B/5/77/108-1926, Jamaica Archives
married in the World War I era, many women who had lived in common-law partnerships with BWIR soldiers were automatically excluded from the benefits for war widows.\footnote{On rates of legal marriage in the British Caribbean, see Rhoda E. Reddock, \textit{Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago} (London: Zed Books, 1994), 60; Anne S. Macpherson, \textit{From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 128-129; Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, \textit{Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920} (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), 329-330} Further still, many war widows who did meet the requirement of legal marriage would have had difficulty proving that they were dependent on their deceased husband’s wages. The “ideal of the dependent, non-wage earning housewife,” as Rhoda Reddock and others have demonstrated, departed sharply from the reality of high rates of female wage labor in the West Indies.\footnote{Reddock, \textit{Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago}, 61; Janet Henshall Momsen, ed., “Introduction,” \textit{Women and Change in the Caribbean: A Pan-Caribbean Perspective} (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 1} In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, over 64 percent of women were classified as “gainfully employed” in 1911 and 62 percent of women held paying jobs in 1921, despite mounting unemployment in the postwar period.\footnote{Reddock, \textit{Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago}, 70} In Barbados, over 82 percent of women performed remunerative labor outside of the home by 1921, highlighting the disjuncture between elite gender ideals and working-class families’ dependence on female wage earners.\footnote{Henry W. Lofty, \textit{Report on the Census of Barbados, 1911-1921} (Bridgetown: Advocate Co Ltd., 1921), Appendix B}

BWIR veterans in Trinidad, like their comrades in Jamaica, initially evinced few signs of disaffection. Returning home on a Saturday morning, the first contingent of 450 officers and enlisted men docked in Port of Spain on May 24, 1919. Greeted by a “motley
crowd” of well-wishers, the men disembarked at St. Vincent’s Wharf as the Constabulary band played “Home Sweet Home” as well as the popular calypso, “Run Your Run Kaiser William.” After marching under the massive triumphal arch erected for their homecoming, returning soldiers stood in formation as Mayor Frederick Scott welcomed them on behalf of the city. Then they paraded through the streets of Port of Spain, where cheering crowds repeatedly broke through their ranks to join the festivities. By the time the veterans reached the Prince’s Building to hear a speech by Governor John Chancellor, according to one local newspaper, the once-orderly soldiers looked “like stragglers” and were “accompanied by some of the women of the streets.” Disheveled or not, the men stayed after the governor’s address to attend a special breakfast hosted by the island’s elite before mustering out to reunite with family and friends.

Across the region, colonial authorities breathed a sigh of relief as the first days after demobilization passed without incident. After talking with recently returned veterans in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, constable Herbert Thomas concluded that colonial officials’ fears about ex-servicemen were unfounded. BWIR veterans, he reckoned, had “nothing in their hearts but joy and pleasure at being once more at home.” Commenting in July 1919 on the behavior of former soldiers, Governor Charles O’Brien noted with pleasure that veterans’ conduct had been “quite correct” since their arrival in Barbados. Indeed, the governor even

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58 Anthony, The Making of Port of Spain, 156

59 Cowley, Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso, 220

60 Thomas, The Story of a West Indian Policeman, 217
surmised that the “majority” of ex-soldiers had “benefitted by the years under [military] discipline.”61 Within days however, an unanticipated uprising in British Honduras would shatter colonial officials’ newfound optimism.

“We are going to give them hell tonight”: The Battle for Rights and Recognition in British Honduras62

Veterans from the British Honduras Contingent of the BWIR returned home on July 8, 1919. Sailing to Belize Town on HMS Veronej, the 339 officers and men were greeted aboard the ship by commander of the local Territorial Force Lieutenant-Colonel James Cran, nominated member of the Legislative Council and chairman of the Returned Soldiers Welfare Committee Archibald R. Usher, and a throng of eager reporters. The veterans disembarked near Court House Wharf and paraded through the streets of the capital to Government House, the governor’s stately residence on the shore of the Belize River. On the parade route, people from “all classes” showered returning servicemen with “spontaneous outburst of welcome” and outpourings of joy.63 “The royal reception accorded to us on our return here…filled us with pride and admiration,” Lance Corporal Samuel Haynes recalled. “We know for a fact and we are exceedingly proud,” he boasted, that the welcome home celebration in British Honduras was “the grandest and best yet given to returned soldiers throughout the West

61 Charles O’Brien to Viscount Milner, July 14, 1919, “Unrest in the West Indies,” GH 3/5/1, LT/S/1, Barbados Department of Archives


63 Testimony of James Cran, September 26, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom; “Welcome to the Men of our Contingents,” The Belize Independent, July 16, 1919, Vol. VI, No. 279, 3
Indies.” At Government House, Governor Eyre Hutson praised BWIR soldiers for their role in the Empire’s “fight for freedom and justice” and congratulated them on defeating “the King’s enemies.” In recognition of their wartime sacrifices, the governor promised that all veterans would receive a “substantial” gratuity from the military, demobilization pay, and assistance finding civilian employment. Furthermore, during “a few days of holiday and rest,” the men could enjoy free sporting events and entertainment along with their families and friends.

While Governor Hutson celebrated the wartime exploits of BWIR soldiers, he also sought to limit veterans’ financial demands on the colonial state. Inverting the language of mutual obligation, the governor insisted that the Empire had fulfilled its debt to World War I veterans and that returning servicemen had a responsibility to reintegrate promptly into colonial society. Reminding ex-soldiers that the West India Committee in London and the Contingent Society in British Honduras had looked after their welfare and raised thousands of dollars for their families, he urged veterans to demonstrate their gratitude by returning to work quickly rather than waiting until their “money is exhausted.” Advising ex-servicemen to embrace thrift and “honourable labour,” the governor invited former soldiers to deposit their military gratuity, back pay, and any subsequent earnings in newly-created savings accounts. By securing gainful employment and avoiding the “temptation to spend,” he suggested, BWIR soldiers could contribute to British Honduras’ postwar prosperity and

64 Testimony of Samuel Alfred Haynes, September 17, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

65 “Address by His Excellency the Governor to the British Honduras Contingents,” July 8, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
honor their commanding officers. “I am confident that the good reputation which you have won while on active service will be jealously guarded by each one of you on your return to your native land,” Hutson proclaimed, and that you will “resist any temptation to excesses” and “bear in mind the reputation you have earned” as a member of the British Army.66

Following his address, Governor Hutson shook hands with each returning veteran and presented each man with a printed copy of his speech. Then, the men marched to Drill Hall where they received a $10 advance on their final pay and celebrated over “cold refreshments.” Two days later, ex-soldiers reassembled to receive their final disbursement of £20. Heeding Governor Hutson’s advice, “a considerable number” of former servicemen deposited part of their gratuity in the state-run Savings Bank, while others met with members of the newly established Employment Committee to begin searching for work.67

Unlike other West Indian volunteers, the men of the British Honduras Contingent of the BWIR had spent most of the war soldiering together as a special sub-unit in Mesopotamia. Attached to the Inland Water Transport (IWT) Section of the Royal Engineers, the men performed guard duty at major British military camps along the Tigris-Euphrates river system and worked in skilled labor positions as motor-boat drivers, carpenters, clerks, and blacksmiths.68 Recalling their time in Mesopotamia months after the war, British Honduran soldiers painted a bleak picture of life in the “cradle of civilization.” Non-commissioned officers who garnered prized jobs as craftsmen or clerks watched angrily

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66 “Address by His Excellency the Governor to the British Honduras Contingents,” July 8, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

67 Testimony of James Cran, September 26, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

68 Lieutenant Colonel L. J. Hall, The Inland Water Transport in Mesopotamia (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1921), 185
as their British counterparts received additional proficiency pay for performing skilled labor while they did not. As a result, senior black and coloured BWIR clerks in the IWT earned substantially less than their white subordinates while shouldering greater workloads. Unlucky soldiers assigned to guard duty or transportation work endured “bitterly cold” winters and sun as hot as a “fiery furnace” in the summer. Men who toiled on the rivers fared even worse, performing backbreaking labor with substandard equipment or no equipment at all. Despite his official role as the contingent’s drummer, David McKoy was assigned to transport rations to boats on the Tigris River along with three other BWIR servicemen. McKoy and his comrades carried bags of rations on their heads or shoulders for two miles in each direction, while white soldiers used bullock trucks to haul their goods. When McKoy asked a commanding officer for a cart to lighten his load, the officer replied that the bullock trucks were “only for the use of British soldiers.” Offended by this slight, McKoy asked in response: “What was I?” When the officer stated once more that the carts were for British servicemen only, McKoy snapped that he “was a British soldier and also a

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69 After two years of service, soldiers working in skilled labor positions garnered proficiency pay of 6d. to 10d. per day in addition to their standard wage. After the passage of Army Order No.1 of 1918, the qualifying period for proficiency pay was reduced from two years to six months. War Office, “Army Order 1, Royal Warrant—Increase in Pay for Soldiers,” Army Orders, January, 1918 (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1918), 3.


71 Hall, The Inland Water Transport in Mesopotamia, viii
member of the B.W.I.”

Figure 11: British Honduran BWIR soldiers in Mesopotamia.
http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/britishhonduras/britishhondurasmesopotamia.htm

Englishmen, however, constantly reminded McKoy and other British Honduran soldiers that they did not view them as comrades. On their first day in the Middle East, the British Honduras Contingent marched into a YMCA hut in Egypt singing the imperialist anthem, “Rule Britannia!” In response to their display of imperial patriotism, a group of white British servicemen shot back, “Who gave you niggers authority to sing that, clear out

72 Testimony of David Nowellington McKoy, September 30, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

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of this building—only British troops admitted here.” Months later, a lieutenant colonel removed four BWIR clerks from a kraal for British soldiers in Kurna, Mesopotamia, declaring that “no niggers were allowed to bathe in there.” White British clergymen, too, barred black and coloured Honduran soldiers from church services for British troops. As a final humiliation, the men had to bunk in leaky “mud huts without any flooring,” kitchens, or proper latrines during their tour in Mesopotamia. “It was strongly noticeable that in the huts in which British soldiers were quartered, electric lights, flooring, and winter stoves were introduced,” Corporal Samuel Haynes recalled, “but not in our camp.”

Following the Armistice in November 1918, the British Honduras Contingent had endured deteriorating conditions as they shuttled from base to base. During a brief stay in Deolali, India, in March 1919, the camp commandant ordered the men to perform fatigue duties for European troops. When some soldiers refused, pointing out that European troops never carried out menial labor for the BWIR, military authorities swiftly court-martialed and imprisoned them. Two months later, the contingent arrived in Taranto, Italy, where military officials at the infamous base also assigned them to menial labor and fatigue duties. That June, the war weary contingent traveled from Taranto to Le Havre, France, to board a

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73 Testimony of Samuel Alfred Haynes, September 17, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

74 Testimony of James Devon Essex Tennyson, September 17, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

75 Testimony of Grenville William Charles Hulse, September 8, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

76 Testimony of Samuel Alfred Haynes, September 17, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

77 Testimony of Frederick Hubert Erskine McDonald, September 9, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
westward bound ship to travel home. During the 7-day journey from Italy to France, Corporal Haynes later testified, the men were “packed in some old trucks like sardines.”

Once aboard HMS Veronej, black and coloured BWIR warrant officers were ordered below deck to bunk with the enlisted men. In addition, Regimental Sergeant Major Frederick McDonald was initially denied the privilege of dining in the officer’s saloon and was passed over for a key leadership position on the ship despite having recently received the Meritorious Service Medal. When BWIR soldiers complained about the insufficient rations, a white quartermaster sergeant delivered one final insult shortly before the men disembarked in British Honduras. Claiming that West Indian soldiers were “never so well fed as since joining the army,” the quartermaster sergeant snarled that the men had survived on “plantains and yams” at home and should be thankful to have anything to eat at all.

Colonial authorities in British Honduras, largely unaware of veterans’ demoralizing experiences during the war, assumed that there was “no serious dissatisfaction” among ex-soldiers. In fact, Superintendent of Police Robert Wyatt initially concluded that veterans

78 Testimony of Samuel Alfred Haynes, September 17, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom. For additional accounts of the substandard accommodations given to BWIR troops in Mesopotamia, see Testimony of David Nowellington McKoy, September 30, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Testimony of Isaac Emmanuel Lewis, September 17, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

79 Testimony of Frederick Hubert Erskine McDonald, September 9, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Hall, The Inland Water Transport in Mesopotamia, 200

80 Testimony of Grenville William Charles Hulse, September 8, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

81 Testimony of Eyre Hutson, August 27, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
had returned “considerably improved” after their stint in the army. Yet, there was mounting evidence in Belize Town that neither veterans nor civilians were willing to accept the pre-war status quo. During a variety show and film screening for former servicemen on July 11, 1919, veterans and townspeople loudly applauded the French flag but sat defiantly in silence when pictures of King George V and Queen Mary appeared. According to one witness, the audience greeted an image of the Union Jack with even more hostility. When the tri-colored flag of the British Empire flashed across the screen, Cyril Fuller later recalled, the audience at the C.US Theatre groaned and made other “sounds of disapprobation.” And, in an explicit rebuke of imperial patriotism, some BWIR veterans in the theatre openly declared “the French flag was the only one that they would fight for” in the future.

One day after the incident at the C.US Theatre, a deputation of four demobilized soldiers met with Governor Hutson after hearing rumors that “a shipload” of white veterans from England had arrived in the colony to take well-paying jobs at local businesses. Led by Sergeant H. H. H. Vernon, the group of non-commissioned officers complained that two

82 Testimony of Robert Wyatt, September 8, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
83 Testimony of Samuel Alfred Haynes, September 17, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
84 Testimony of James Cran, September 26, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
85 Testimony of Cyril Fuller, September 22, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
86 Testimony of James Cran, September 26, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
prominent Belize Town firms had recently hired European immigrants for clerk positions while many qualified Creole men remained unemployed. Arguing that “men of the Colony,” particularly returning BWIR veterans, should have preference over European jobseekers, Vernon called on the governor to intervene. Despite his recent appeal for BWIR veterans to find employment as quickly as possible, Governor Hutson refused to condemn local merchants’ discriminatory hiring practices, claiming he “could not possibly interfere in such a matter.” Further still, the governor admonished ex-servicemen not to expect preferential treatment for the colony’s black and coloured Creole majority.\textsuperscript{88}

Veterans’ demand for preferential access to local jobs highlighted the increasingly precarious financial position of Creole men and women. Between 1914 and 1919, the cost of living increased 300-400 percent in British Honduras, leading laboring and middle class residents to accuse merchants of wartime profiteering.\textsuperscript{89} The price of vital foodstuffs particularly soared, as the colony had little domestic agriculture and depended overwhelmingly on imported food. Residents faced stiff hikes in the price of clothing as well leading to “exceptionally bad” conditions in Belize Town.\textsuperscript{90} Commenting on the extent of wartime inflation barrister Frans Dragten declared, “I do not think there is anything that has not gone up in price” during the war.\textsuperscript{91} To make matters worse, wages in the colony’s vital

\textsuperscript{88} Testimony of Eyre Hutson, August 27, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{89} Anne S. Macpherson, \textit{From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 39

\textsuperscript{90} Testimony of Frans Robert Dragten, n.d., Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{91} Testimony of Frans Robert Dragten, n.d., Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
forestry sector declined almost 50 percent and hiring for forestry jobs in the Belize District fell nearly 60 percent.\(^9^2\) As economic conditions worsened, the *Clarion* noted, many parents in the colony could no longer afford to send their children to school.\(^9^3\)

Elsewhere in the West Indies, laboring peoples also confronted staggering price inflation, though conditions were rarely as difficult as in British Honduras. In Trinidad, the price of consumer goods increased 126 percent in Port of Spain and 171 percent in Tobago.\(^9^4\) Officials in Jamaica reported that the cost of foodstuffs increased 145 percent while clothing prices jumped 350 percent.\(^9^5\) Residents in Grenada grappled with a comparable rise in food costs, while watching clothing prices increase as much as 500 percent.\(^9^6\) Cost of living reports from authorities in St. Lucia and British Guiana likewise noted significant material privation due to skyrocketing housing, food, and clothing costs.\(^9^7\)

Hence, as Governor Hutson dismissed returning soldiers’ requests as unreasonable, other local voices pressed veterans to demand more significant reforms as repayment for their wartime service. Black and coloured Creole activists, for example, urged returned soldiers to use the leadership skills and vocational experience they acquired overseas to spur political

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\(^{92}\) Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982*, 39

\(^{93}\) *Clarion*, July 18, 1918, quoted in Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 176


\(^{95}\) Leslie Probyn to Viscount Milner, July 8, 1920, CO 318/355, file 37284, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\(^{96}\) G. B. Haddon-Smith to Viscount Milner, August 13, 1920, CO 318/355, file 45125, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\(^{97}\) G. B. Haddon-Smith to Viscount Milner, July 31, 1920, CO 318/355, file 43390, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Wilfred Collet to Viscount Milner, August 21, 1920, CO 318/355, file 46334, National Archives of the United Kingdom
and economic development at home. The *Belize Independent*, a progressive newspaper edited by black journalist Hubert Hill Cain, dedicated nearly all of its July 16th edition to examining the role that veterans would play in the future of British Honduras. In an editorial welcoming home ex-servicemen, the *Independent* proclaimed that the return of BWIR veterans inaugurated a “new era” in the colony’s history. While the colonial government had been marred by “deadlock and stalemate” during the war, the dislocations of the global conflict had produced heightened demands for reform in the postwar period. “The masses throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world,” the paper declared, “are determined that Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity shall no longer be mere catchwords; Democracy shall be no empty romance.” Those who “went to fight and we who remained to pay,” it warned, “are taking serious thoughts about it ourselves instead of…leaving it to others.” As “true patriots” who had traveled abroad and served alongside soldiers from throughout the Empire, BWIR veterans had a special obligation to challenge political oppression and exclusion on the homefront. Claiming that “no one is more qualified to determine the future of his own land than the soldier who risked his life blood,” the *Independent* pressed veterans to “make their voices heard” in the fight against Crown Colony rule. Reminding ex-servicemen of their obligation to their compatriots, the paper asked: “Will men who travelled thousands of miles to protect the name of the Empire, refuse or neglect to perform a more sacred duty that lies right at hand?”

A second article in the *Independent* linked wartime sacrifice and political privilege more explicitly, conscripting ex-soldiers into the battle for representative government. Writing under the moniker “Patriot,” a correspondent argued that British Hondurans had

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98 “Welcome to the Men of our Contingents,” The Belize Independent, July 16, 1919, Vol. VI, No.279, 3
earned the right to representative government and improved living conditions because of their contributions to the imperial war effort. In doing so, he insisted that British Hondurans’ displays of loyalty to the empire should be repaid with substantive political and economic reforms. Describing how local women and men had voluntarily donated money and materials to the war effort despite their distance from the metropole, “Patriot” claimed that the colony’s 41,000 British subjects now expected “better recognition” from local and metropolitan officials. “British Honduras has done her share in the great struggle and we are looking out for our reward,” he insisted. “We want a voice in our affairs. We are entitled to it, and we must have it.” Imagining veterans as the natural leaders of the reform movement, “Patriot” posited that ex-soldiers had “become used to modernism” abroad and could therefore spearhead development projects at home. After seeing “good roads and many other useful and necessary things” overseas, he declared, they would accept nothing less in their own communities. 99

Local reformers urged veterans to join the movement for political reform, but ex-soldiers largely focused their efforts on securing material concessions from the state. Between July 8 and 21, at least 60 former soldiers met with members of the state-sponsored Employment Committee to discuss their work history and prospects for future employment. The committee, chaired by Legislative Council member Sally Wolfssohn, wrote letters of recommendation for ex-servicemen and identified suitable job openings. Although veterans initially established a good rapport with the committee, relations soured when the group only

secured jobs for 1 or 2 men. During a tense meeting on July 21, veterans’ frustration with the lack of employment reached a tipping point. “The demeanor of the ex-soldiers at the meeting,” committee member and Clarion editor Phillip Woods later testified, was “aggressive and ugly.” Unwilling to work for the rock-bottom wages generally paid to local laborers, ex-soldiers demanded compensation 2 to 3 times higher than the prevailing rates. Several veterans, for example, requested jobs as storemen, demanding $15 per week instead of the standard pay of $5 or $6. When the committee announced that there were 30 road-building jobs available for veterans, ex-servicemen lobbied for a daily wage of $2 instead of $1.25. According to committee member Percy George, one veteran requested 100 acres of land and a $1000 advance in recognition of his military service. After hearing the veteran’s request, George later testified, he concluded it would be “impossible” for the committee to meet ex-soldiers’ expectations. By the end of the meeting on July 21, veterans likewise questioned the utility of working with the Employment Committee. Voicing the frustrations of many veterans, one ex-soldier ominously warned the committee, “What I want, you cannot give me.”

One day after the strained Employment Committee meeting, one of the largest uprisings in the history of British Honduras erupted on the streets of Belize Town. Constable David Rowland was walking along East Canal Street on the south side of the capital when he

100 Testimony of Phillip Woods, September 22, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom


102 Testimony of Percy George, September 20, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

103 Testimony of Percy George, September 20, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
encountered BWIR veteran Tom Granham at 7:30 p.m. As Sergeant Granham and a group of men passed the constable, Granham allegedly shouted: “We are going to give them hell tonight.” Unsure of how to interpret the ex-servicemen’s outburst, Rowland simply walked past Granham and continued his patrol without confronting the sergeant or his companions.104 An hour later, Colonel James Cran was resting on his veranda when he heard the sound of breaking glass. Running to the street, Cran watched in shock as 8-10 BWIR veterans, dressed in their military uniforms and marching in formation, smashed the glass window of Brodie’s department store using large walking sticks. Hoping to end the disturbance before it escalated, Cran pleaded with the men to leave the street immediately and to discuss their grievances with him. While numerous soldiers had trusted Cran to address their grievances during the war, the group of veterans quickly dismissed the colonel’s offer to mediate on their behalf. Taking matters into their own hands, the men ordered Cran to “go away” and warned him to keep his distance from the contingent for the rest of the night. As Cran tried to reason with the veterans, they pushed him aside and marched to Holfus & Hildebrand department store, where they also broke every glass window.105

104 Testimony of David Samuel Rowland, September 24, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

105 Testimony of James Cran, September 26, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Following in pursuit of the veterans, Cran observed as the former soldiers, now surrounded by a crowd of approximately 70 civilian onlookers, smashed the windows of six
additional stores in rapid succession. “Working on the sound of a whistle,” the men marched in front of each business, waited for the leader to give the signal to break the windows, and then methodically struck the glass until the lead soldier blew the whistle a second time. Significantly, the veterans made no attempt to enter the vandalized stores or to remove any goods. “They were acting under discipline during the whole of this time and absolutely no attempt was made at looting at all,” Cran later testified. “Even the articles which were exposed in the windows, which they had broken and which could be easily reached, were not touched by the Contingent.” Struck by the ex-soldiers coordinated movements, the colonel surmised that the demonstration was “part of a carefully prepared programme.”

Regimental Sergeant Major Frederick McDonald was sitting at the Territorial Club with Percy George when a visitor rushed in and announced that veterans were “raising hell” on the other side of town. Hoping to quell the upheaval, McDonald ran to Albert Street where he encountered Colonel Cran and at least 10 rebellious ex-soldiers. After advising Cran to go home immediately, McDonald approached one of the ringleaders, Sergeant H. H. H. Vernon, and entreated him to stop his men from vandalizing any further property. When Vernon refused, McDonald approached the protestors directly but was rebuffed once more. As McDonald continued to negotiate with his former comrades, 2 or 3 ex-soldiers suddenly ran toward him, raising their sticks in a menacing posture. Calling their bluff, McDonald asked the men “what the hell” they meant to do and reminded them that he still “their Sergeant Major.”

106 Testimony of James Cran, September 26, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

107 Testimony of Frederick Hubert Erskine McDonald, September 9, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
By invoking his military rank, McDonald summoned his wartime status and authority in an attempt to reign in his former subordinates. During the war, the decorated warrant officer had been the highest-ranking nonwhite soldier in the British Honduras Contingent, commanding the respect and obedience of black and coloured enlisted men. In streets of Belize Town, however, the sergeant major’s authority carried much less weight. Rebellious ex-soldiers still respected their former commander enough not to physically assault him—putting down their sticks and fleeing when challenged by McDonald—but they disregarded his pleas to resolve their grievances though negotiation rather than mass action. When McDonald approached Sergeant Ogaldez and urged him to share any grievances he had with Colonel Cran, the former non-commissioned officer replied, “Not for hell.” When McDonald ordered Private Rufus Hall to leave the streets at once, the ex-soldier reminded McDonald that he was no longer in charge. “Oh, this is not Mesopotamia, this is not Egypt,” Hall growled, “this is Belize.”

Other alignments had changed since the war as well. During the Taranto mutiny in December 1918, non-commissioned officers failed to join the six-day protest, electing instead to articulate their grievances through a petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. In British Honduras, however, former non-commissioned officers and ex-privates joined forces as protestors in the streets of Belize Town. Sergeants Tom Granham and H. H. H. Vernon led the initial demonstration, marching at the head of the formation and giving signals with their whistles. Sergeant Ogaldez brazenly rebuffed Frederick McDonald’s pleas for restraint and Lance Corporal G. Hulse threatened to assault the former sergeant major. Witnesses

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108 Testimony of Frederick Hubert Erskine McDonald, September 9, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

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later testified that at least one other non-commissioned officer, Quartermaster Sergeant J. H. Grant, also participated in the protest. Most significantly, ex-soldiers met clandestinely in the home of Corporal Charles Sutherland to formulate plans for the uprising.

The coordinated protest by ex-servicemen erupted into a full-blown riot around 8:50 p.m., when the capital’s electric generator failed. As Belize Town plunged into darkness, civilian women, men, and children flooded the streets and began looting the major dry goods and grocery stores. Within minutes of the power failure, merchant Henry Melhado witnessed rioters hauling “sewing machines, gramaphones, bundles of clothing, and various other things” across the Swing Bridge. On guard at the Power Station, Captain Herbert B. Stoyle watched helplessly as “hundreds of women, men, and contingent men” passed by with “tremendous loads” of goods. The women, he noted with dismay, were “passing with their dresses full of loot and coming back again for more.”

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109 “Appendix P: List of Persons Alleged to Have Committed Offenses,” Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

110 Macpherson, From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982, 68-69

111 Historian Peter Ashdown maintains that riotous veterans sabotaged the generator, but witnesses at the Power Station testified that the generator failed due to “a shortage of steam.” The official Riot Commission likewise concluded that the power failure was not intentional. Testimony of Herbert Blin Stoyle, September 22, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom; Summary Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

112 Testimony of Henry Melhado, September 22, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Armed with walking sticks, axes, hatchets, and fence pailings, the mixed crowd of veterans and civilians attacked several white homes as well.\textsuperscript{114} To many white Creoles, the upheaval looked like a race riot. “Every white man in the streets,” Governor Hutson recalled, “carried his life in his hands.”\textsuperscript{115} Expressing a similar sentiment, one white resident insisted that “anybody with a white face” incurred the wrath of the crowd.\textsuperscript{116} William Hoar, keeper of the Belize Prison, later testified that the rioters hurled racialized threats as they made their way across the capital. Standing on North Front Street, Hoar watched as 70-80 veterans and civilians crossed the Swing Bridge reportedly shouting, “We are going to kill the white sons of bitches tonight” and “This is the black man’s night.” When the rioters spotted Hoar, they chased him and threatened to “smash his skull.”\textsuperscript{117} He ultimately escaped unscathed, but several other white residents were not so fortunate.

Duncan Fraser, managing director of Broadie’s dry goods and hardware business, left home to check on the store and inadvertently crossed paths with a group of 300 to 400 rioters. After someone in the crowd spotted Fraser, several veterans beat him with fence pailings, leaving him bloody and “senseless.”\textsuperscript{118} Percy George, secretary of the Returned Soldiers

\textsuperscript{113} Testimony of Herbert Blin Stoyle, September 22, 1919, \textit{Report of the Riot Commission}, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{114} Testimony of Henry Melhado, September 22, 1919, \textit{Report of the Riot Commission}, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{115} Testimony of Eyre Hutson, August 27, 1919, \textit{Report of the Riot Commission}, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{116} Testimony of Percy George, September 20, 1919, \textit{Report of the Riot Commission}, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{117} Testimony of William Hoar, September 22, 1919, \textit{Report of the Riot Commission}, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{118} Testimony of Duncan Fraser, September 15, 1919, \textit{Report of the Riot Commission}, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Welfare Committee, endured a 15-minute assault at the hands of 4 or 5 ex-servicemen. As a crowd of civilians looked on, veterans repeatedly struck George on his back, shoulders, and legs and then kicked him at the base of his spine. In response, returned soldiers beat him “black and blue” while a crowd of civilians “jeered and laughed and danced.” Several minutes into the thrashing, an ex-private rescued Wyatt from the clutches of his former comrades and escorted the dazed policeman to the South Street Police Station. Phillip Matthews sustained severe head wounds after Privates Stephen Panting and Patrick Hamilton chased him through his house, pounding him with sticks. Unlike most victims, Matthews, an officer in the British Honduras Territorial Force, managed to fight off his attackers. Trading blows with the two ex-servicemen, Matthews knocked Hamilton to the ground and kicked Panting three times in the stomach before the men finally fled.

Despite “some forebodings and intimations of trouble,” the violent upheaval on the night of July 22 “came as a shock” to local authorities and totally overwhelmed the capital’s understaffed police force. Beating victim Duncan Fraser, echoing the sentiments of many

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123 *Summary Report of the Riot Commission*, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
white Creoles, later testified, the riot “was the biggest surprise of my life.” Superintend
dent of Police Robert Wyatt likewise confessed that he “had not anticipated any outbreak” among
returned soldiers. The violent upheaval also caught Governor Eyre Hutson by surprise.
Unlike other governors in the region, Hutson had elected not to request additional military or
naval support during demobilization and did not increase the colony’s standing security
forces once BWIR veterans returned. Even after he was warned on July 18 that there was a
“strong undercurrent of ill-feeling” among ex-soldiers, Hutson “still placed trust in the
loyalty of the majority of the Contingent.”

Therefore, on the night of the riot, the Belize Town police force included only 39
men, 6 of whom were new recruits. At the height of the riot around 11:00 p.m., the meager
police force faced a crowd of 3000 to 4000 people, approximately one-third or one-fourth of
the capital’s total population. When only 35 members of the British Honduras Territorial
Force, the colony’s local militia, reported for emergency duty, Governor Hutson feared that
the rioters would seize power and compel him to “haul down the [British] flag.”

124 Testimony of Duncan Fraser, September 15, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
125 Testimony of Robert Wyatt, September 8, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
126 Testimony of Eyre Hutson, August 27, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
127 Summary Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
129 Eyre Hutson to Greg Grindle, July 31, 1919, CO 123/295, National Archives of the United Kingdom
As colonial authorities retreated to Drill Hall anticipating immanent defeat, a small contingent of BWIR veterans tried once again to quell the riot. Sometime between 11:30 p.m. and midnight, Sergeant Major McDonald and fellow non-commissioned officer Corporal R. J. McKoy stood on the north side of the Swing Bridge and issued a call for volunteers to help restore order. Blowing his whistle to attract attention, McDonald shouted: “Any loyal men of the contingent fall in under me.” Five or six men, including Corporal Samuel Haynes, immediately stepped forward and began detaining suspected looters. McDonald continued to solicit volunteers among the crowd until he had assembled a unit of 10 to 15 ex-soldiers. Under McDonald’s direction, the veterans marched through town clearing looters from pillaged stores and businesses. “[S]eeing men in uniform,” McDonald later testified, “the people took fright and came out in quick time offering…no resistance.” After clearing each store, the sergeant major posted a pair of veterans to keep guard in case the looters returned. Once his unit had successfully cleared and secured four pillaged stores, McDonald reported his progress to Colonel Cran, who was holed up at Drill Hall along with other white Creoles. Informing Cran that his men were unarmed and facing a hostile crowd, McDonald requested that members of the Territorial Force relieve the veterans as soon as possible. Shortly after 1:00 a.m., a group of colonial officials guarded by members of the Territorial Force read the Riot Act and began clearing the remaining rioters from the street.

The riot finally subsided at daybreak on July 23 as the remaining civilians and ex-servicemen gradually dispersed and wandered home. In the light of day, the scope of the

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130 Testimony of Frederick Hubert Erskine McDonald, September 9, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
damage became clear. Insurance claims for the 9-hour uprising exceeded $138,000.\textsuperscript{131} Ten of the city’s largest stores had been wrecked, leaving a trail of broken glass and ruined merchandise throughout downtown. Every pane of glass in Miss Staine’s boarding house was smashed and several private homes of white businessmen had extensive damage as well. Significantly, no public buildings or government properties were damaged, calling into question historian Peter Ashdown’s widely accepted claim that the riot was a “clumsy attempt at a coup d’état.”\textsuperscript{132} Likewise, the rioters made no attempt to storm Government House although, as Governor Hutson openly acknowledged, it remained completely unguarded all night.\textsuperscript{133} In light of these findings and veterans’ pre-riot focus on economic grievances, it is likely that the upheaval on July 22 was a concerted attack on the colony’s white merchant elite rather than an effort to seize control of the state.

In the days following the riot, tensions ran high in Belize Town as rumors swirled that civilians would return to the streets.\textsuperscript{134} To ensure that no further unrest took place, colonial officials relied on Frederick McDonald, Samuel Haynes, and other “loyal” veterans to maintain law and order. Embarrassed by his deepening dependence on black and coloured veterans, Governor Hutson confessed privately that it was “humiliating to realise their


\textsuperscript{133} Testimony of Eyre Hutson, August 27, 1919, \textit{Report of the Riot Commission}, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{134} Testimony of James Cran, September 26, 1919, \textit{Report of the Riot Commission}, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
influence and power.” Yet, on July 23, the beleaguered governor authorized McDonald and Captain Grenville Hulse to assemble a group of 60 to 70 veterans to patrol the streets of Belize Town and to guard white-owned businesses. The following morning, the men watched as the British naval warship HMS *Constance* arrived in English Caye, near Belize Town. Under the command of a British officer Captain E. C. Kennedy, 100 white British marines and a machine gun crew disembarked in the colony and established a command center at Drill Hall. While the heavily-armed naval party assumed command of local security operations, Governor Hutson continued to utilize BWIR veterans to perform police duties. Following the governor’s declaration of martial law on July 26, Colonel Cran swore in 45 ex-servicemen as special constables and authorized them to begin arresting suspected rioters and looters. According to Sergeant Major McDonald, the first men they arrested were six former comrades: Privates Blackwood, Willocks, Hall, Gaboret, Hamilton, and Domingo.

Forty men were ultimately arrested for their role in the riot, including at least fourteen BWIR veterans. Tried before a special session of the Supreme Court, 31 individuals were convicted of criminal offenses related to the upheaval on July 22. The court handed down

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135 Eyre Hutson to Viscount Milner, July 30, 1919, CO 123/295, file 108634, quoted in Peter Ashdown, “Race Riot, Class Warfare and ‘Coup d’état: The Ex-Servicemen’s Riot of July 1919,” 10

136 Testimony of Frederick Hubert Erskine McDonald, September 9, 1919, *Report of the Riot Commission*, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

the longest sentences to three ex-servicemen convicted of violent assaults. Private Rufus Hall, the veteran who boldly reminded Sergeant Major McDonald that he was no longer in Mesopotamia, was convicted of attacking fellow veteran P. C. Francis with a brick and received a sentence of 6 years imprisonment with hard labor. The two veterans who beat and kicked Percy George—Privates W. Grant and A. Willocks—were each sentenced to 5 years imprisonment with hard labor. Rioters convicted of non-violent offenses received sentences of 6 months in prison.  

The three-member commission appointed to investigate the origins of the riot concluded that the disturbance was caused by economic distress, racial animosity towards the capital’s white residents, and the “presence of a considerable number of returned soldiers with extravagant claims and pretensions.”

Colonial authorities rewarded “loyal” contingent men materially and symbolically for their role in suppressing the popular uprising. Shortly after the riot, Frederick McDonald became the new Assistant Superintendent of Police for Belize Town and temporarily served as the Superintendent of Police after Governor Hutson removed Robert Wyatt from the post due to his poor leadership during the crisis. McDonald, Hutson later testified, had performed “loyal and yeoman service” on behalf of the colonial government. Corporal 


139 Summary Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

140 Justifying his decision to place Robert Wyatt on a mandatory leave of absence and to relieve him of his post, Hutson wrote: “Mr. Wyatt is slovenly in appearance, is on too intimate terms with the men of the force and he has, in my opinion, neither the education nor standing to command that respect, which is in my opinion, essential, from members of the force and from the general public in Belize. He is slow to act, in fact, he has become ‘stale at his job.’” Eyre Hutson to Secretary of State for the Colonies, October 22, 1919, CO 123/296, file 65768 National Archives of the United Kingdom

141 Testimony of Eyre Hutson, August 27, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Samuel Haynes, in recognition of his loyalty, received a special commendation from Secretary of State for the Colonies Viscount Milner. Haynes also served on the Returned Soldiers’ Contingent Committee, a group formed by the “loyal section” of BWIR veterans in the wake of the riot. The leaders of the new veterans’ organization pledged to resolve ex-soldiers’ grievances through negotiation with colonial authorities.\(^{142}\) To appease other veterans, Governor Hutson established a new Labour Bureau Office in August 1919 to assist ex-servicemen find employment. For men who could not secure jobs in the private sector, the state-run Labour Bureau provided temporarily relief work, employing 40 veterans by October 1919.\(^{143}\) Hutson also petitioned imperial authorities for a £10,000 loan so that the local government could hire up to 150 unemployed veterans to work on road construction and land reclamation projects across the colony.\(^{144}\)

Whereas colonial authorities celebrated Frederick McDonald and Samuel Haynes for their loyalty during the riot, some Belize Town residents openly condemned the veterans’ reformist politics. Four days after the riot, William Hoar, keeper of the Belize Prison, was standing on the steps of the North Side Police station when Annie Flowers, a cook for a leading merchant family, approached a group of women standing nearby. Flowers, speaking in “as loud a voice as possible,” reportedly declared: “The black man have no pluck. The women have to be behind them all the time or else they do nothing; but if they were all like


\(^{143}\) Eyre Hutson to Secretary of State for the Colonies, October 22, 1919, CO 123/296, file 65768, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\(^{144}\) Eyre Hutson to Secretary of State for the Colonies, October 30, 1919, CO 123/296, file 66222, National Archives of the United Kingdom
me, I would take their [white men’s] wives and daughters and bloody well live with them: that would teach them that this country belongs to the blacks.” Threatening to “shove hat pins in the eyes of the bloody white men” the next time there was an uprising, Flowers reportedly vowed that she would work to clear all whites out of Belize Town. When the warship of British marines leaves, she allegedly added, “we will know what to do with the white bastards.”

“The problems of peace were as difficult as those of war”: Veterans and the Politics of Gratitude in Jamaica and Trinidad

BWIR veterans in Jamaica and Trinidad also took to the streets in July 1919, although their protests lacked the planning, scope, and intensity of the uprising in British Honduras. On the night of July 18, a crowd of black sailors and ex-soldiers attacked white seamen from HMS Constance in downtown Kingston. During the attack, the assailants reportedly shouted, “kill the whites,” as they stabbed 5 to 6 visiting sailors with razors. One or two white civilians were also assaulted during the fracas, which the veterans later claimed was in retaliation for the recent anti-black riots in Liverpool and Cardiff. In response to the attack and the “open threats of the mob,” the captain of the Constance landed a piquet of 50 armed Marines who patrolled Kingston for the remainder of the evening. The following day, acting governor Robert Johnstone stationed guards from the West India Regiment and HMS Constance throughout the capital to maintain order during the official Peace Day celebrations. Yet, despite rumors of an impending rebellion, ex-soldiers did not mount any

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145 Testimony of William Hoar, September 22, 1919, Report of the Riot Commission, CO 123/296, file 65699, National Archives of the United Kingdom

146 George Small, 7/12/35, "Jamaica Memories," Jamaica National Archives
additional violent protests in Kingston during the summer of 1919.\footnote{147}

When Jamaican veterans and their allies participated in the official peace festivities in July 1919, they did so as imperial patriots rather than dissidents. Demobilized soldiers marched along with members of the Jamaica Federation of Labour (JFL) in the Kingston Peace Day parade, symbolically linking their plight to the cause of organized labor.\footnote{148} Led by A. Bain-Alves, a member of the island’s coloured middle-class, the JFL functioned as an umbrella organization of skilled and unskilled workers, including longshoremen, hotel workers, coal heavers, banana carriers, and cigar makers.\footnote{149} Like many ex-soldiers, the leadership of the JFL articulated its calls on behalf of laboring peoples using the language of imperial patriotism rather than the discourse of revolutionary class struggle. In a commemorative Peace Day address to Secretary of State for the Colonies Viscount Milner and King George V, the JFL declared its “unswerving Loyalty and Allegiance” to the sovereign and the empire on behalf of the “workingmen of Jamaica.” Citing their countrymen’s military service, the JFL boasted that the “sons” of the island had upheld their vow to defend “the sacred person of His Majesty” and “His Imperial Interests.” As a “reward” for their wartime loyalty, the members of Jamaica’s largest workers’ organization requested that the Prince of Wales “pay a visit” to “His Majesty’s most ancient and loyal”

\begin{footnotes}
\item[147] Robert Johnstone to Viscount Milner, August 14, 1919, CO 137/733, file 50990, National Archives of the United Kingdom; “Disorder in the Metropolis,” Daily Gleaner, July 21, 1919, 13
\item[148] “Peace Day Observed with Enthusiasm in Jamaica,” Daily Gleaner, July 21, 1919, 1, 13
\end{footnotes}
Caribbean colony.\textsuperscript{150} In response, George V’s emissary reported that the King was “pleased” to receive the JFL’s address and remained “well assured” of Jamaicans’ loyalty.\textsuperscript{151}

Colonial officials in Jamaica managed to secure veterans’ quiescence through a combination of rewards and repression. Within weeks of demobilization, local authorities launched several economic initiatives for BWIR veterans. To help ex-servicemen reenter the civilian workforce, every parish established an employment committee that provided information about job openings, pay and pension benefits, and special training programs for disabled veterans. To compliment the efforts of parish-level employment committees, the Central Supplementary Allowance Committee, the island-wide agency in charge of veterans’ affairs, created a job registry in Kingston where over 1000 men applied for employment. The colonial government also offered a small number of educated former soldiers the opportunity to work as assistants and clerks in the civil service. Forty veterans took the required examination and twenty-one men ultimately passed and received jobs in the Government Service.\textsuperscript{152} For veterans who sought to work as rural cultivators, the Central Supplementary Allowance Committee provided loans of up to £25 to purchase land, tools, or supplies to build a house. Between 1919 and 1920, 1,227 veterans applied for loans and 213 were approved.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{150} Jamaica Federation of Labour to Viscount Milner, CO 137/732, file 463878, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{151} Draft reply, September 3, 1919, CO 137/732, file 463878, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{152} Frank Cundall, \textit{The Handbook of Jamaica for 1921} (Kingston, Jamaica: Government Printing Office, 1921), 600

\textsuperscript{153} Cundall, \textit{The Handbook of Jamaica for 1921}, 600-601
The most popular state-sponsored initiative required veterans to seek their fortunes abroad once more. Acknowledging that the depressed local economy could not support 7,232 returning servicemen, the colonial government provided free work permits and transportation assistance for veterans to migrate to Cuba. Remarkably, 4,036 ex-soldiers, approximately 56 percent of BWIR veterans in the colony, participated in migration initiative between June 1919 and March 1920. Following Jamaica’s lead, colonial officials in Barbados and St. Lucia enacted similar programs, sending a total of 482 more BWIR veterans to Cuba by the end of 1920. In addition to encouraging migration to Cuba, Governor Probyn of Jamaica suggested that veterans might be willing to migrate as far as the South Pacific to work as laborers. In a telegram to the Colonial Office, Probyn averred that ex-servicemen might pursue employment opportunities in Samoa if they received at least $1 per day in wages and free passage for their families. In addition, he stressed that a land grant on the South Pacific island would offer a strong inducement for ex-servicemen to migrate. Similarly, the Jamaican government also considered sending veterans to work for the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, until West Indian banana workers in the Bocas Division launched a series of crippling strikes in 1919.

The colonial government also offered one significant political concession to Jamaican veterans. In May 1919, the Legislative Council voted to grant all returning servicemen the

154 Cundall, *The Handbook of Jamaica for 1921*, 600

155 The government of Barbados sponsored 422 BWIR veterans to migrate to Cuba, while St. Lucia sent 60 former soldiers. Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 191, 199

156 Leslie Probyn to Secretary of State for the Colonies, June 22, 1919, CO 137/732, file 37053, National Archives of the United Kingdom

157 Claude Mallet to Earl Curzon of Kedleston, Foreign Office, February 24, 1919, CO 318/350, file 19715, National Archives of the United Kingdom
right to vote in the 1920 island-wide election, temporarily exempting ex-servicemen from the steep property and income qualifications for voters.\textsuperscript{158} During the same session, the Council also enfranchised approximately 3,000 propertied women, becoming the second British Caribbean colony to grant women the right to vote.\textsuperscript{159} Taken together, these two measures expanded the Jamaican electorate by 25 percent, which offered an unprecedented opportunity for women and black and coloured laborers to register their concerns through formal politics. Yet, for reasons that remain unclear, ex-soldiers showed little interest in exercising their newly acquired voting rights. Only 164 men, approximately 2 percent of the island’s veterans, registered to vote in the 1920 election.\textsuperscript{160} Similarly, propertied women in Jamaica, like their female counterparts in British Honduras, evinced minimal interest in electoral politics. Of the 3,000 eligible women, only 173 chose to register for the 1920 election.\textsuperscript{161}

In contrast to the array of state-sponsored veterans’ programs in Jamaica, colonial authorities in Trinidad initially made little effort to assist BWIR veterans find civilian employment or to incorporate them in the political system. As a deputation of ex-servicemen complained in early July 1919, the government offered no land settlement scheme, unemployment benefits, or skills training programs for local veterans.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{158} Law No. 17 of 1919, “Temporary Registration of Voters Law,” in Robert Johnston to Viscount Milner, July 9, 1919, CO 137/732, file 44170, National Archives of the United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{159} Propertied women in British Honduras gained the right to vote in 1912. Linnette Vassell, “The Movement for the Vote for Women 1918-1919,” Jamaican Historical Review, Vol. 15, No. 11 (1993): 40-54; Macpherson, From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 37, 47

\textsuperscript{160} Joseph C. Ford and Frank Cundall, The Handbook of Jamaica for 1920 (Kingston: Government Printing Office, 1920), 658

\textsuperscript{161} Ford and Cundall, The Handbook of Jamaica for 1920, 658

\textsuperscript{162} B. W. I. Deputation to Colonial Secretary of Trinidad and Tobago, July 3, 1919, File Folder 4278/1919, Box 4026-4967 (1919), National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago
government’s inaction, veterans expressed their mounting disappointment with postwar social and economic conditions during a series of public protests in July 1919, demonstrating a militancy that departed sharply from Jamaican veterans’ organizations. On July 19, BWIR veterans were invited to march at the front of a military review as a part of the colony’s official Peace Day celebrations. Only 132 veterans elected to participate, however. Instead, large crowds of former soldiers, many of whom were in uniform, assembled at the parade site in Port of Spain and booed and heckled their former comrades as they marched past. According to G. H. May, the Inspector General of the Constabulary, many veterans allegedly refused to participate in the parade “because they were disappointed at not being armed.” While rumors swirled that veterans were planning to “shoot down all the officers,” they likely refused to participate in the parade in protest of the government’s indifference to their plight.163

Two days later, on the evening of July 21, veterans “wantonly and severely attacked” British sailors and civilians in Port of Spain. During the brawl with British sailors, veterans taunted their victims by recounting their sexual dalliances with white women during the war. After making “very lewd and disparaging remarks” about the white race, veterans publicly attacked the respectability of white women, boasting they had “freely” engaged in sexual relations with European women while stationed abroad. According to Inspector May, ex-soldiers allegedly threatened to “ravish” white women in Trinidad, suggesting that their transgressions of the colour line would continue on the homefront.164

163 G. H. May, “Report by the Inspector General of the Constabulary,” in W. M. Gordon (Acting Governor) to Viscount Milner, July 29, 1919, CO 295/521, file 50053, National Archives of the United Kingdom

164 G. H. May, “Report by the Inspector General of the Constabulary,” in W. M. Gordon (Acting Governor) to Viscount Milner, July 29, 1919, CO 295/521, file 50053, National Archives of the United Kingdom
Although anxieties about interracial sex were more acute in the United States, where Senator James K. Vardaman had infamously warned of “French-women-ruined Negroes,” colonial authorities in the West Indies also feared that veterans would demand access to white female bodies as a result of their wartime interracial experiences. Writing in the aftermath of the riot in British Honduras, Governor Eyre Hutson concluded that veterans’ interracial sexual liaisons had made a “dangerous and regrettable impression on them.” Jamaican constable Herbert Thomas likewise suggested that some ex-soldiers returned to the island possessing a newfound familiarity with white women. Having discovered a “totally different” class of white women while abroad, he wrote, demobilized servicemen no longer respected “buckra ladies” at home. In his memoir, Percy Fraser, Superintendent of Prisons in Trinidad, claimed that returned soldiers made good on their threats and committed “unlawful acts” against local white women. In the months following veterans’ return, he alleged, it was “unsafe for any white woman to go out in the night unescorted.”

Members of the white elite in Trinidad responded to the string of racially tinged disturbances by calling for “prompt and stringent measures” to protect their lives and property. In a “confidential and urgent” letter to the acting governor, six of the colony’s most prominent whites, including military boosters George F. Huggins and Major A. S. Bowen, outlined a military-style battle plan to “stem the tide of popular inclination.” The rising tide


166 Eyre Hutson to Secretary of State for the Colonies, October 22, 1919, CO 123/296, file 65768 National Archives of the United Kingdom

167 Thomas, *The Story of a West Indian Policeman*, 26

168 Fraser, *Looking Over My Shoulder*, 8

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of popular inclination, as they termed it, was dangerously anti-white. A “substantial minority of the black population openly proclaims that it has no further use for the white man, and means to eliminate him,” they charged. Since whites could not rely on the “black constabulary” to defend their lives in a crisis, they urged the governor to mobilize the colony’s resources so that “the services of every white man available may be utilized to the best advantage.” Betraying the depth of their anxiety, the letter writers recommended that the governor seize all available firearms and explosives from local gun dealers and arm the colony’s white men. Furthermore, they requested a standing body of white troops to help maintain order and, if all else failed, pressured the government to establish fortified safety zones where white women and children could hide during an emergency.169

Panicked by displays of black self-assertion, the letter writers insisted that colonial rule in Trinidad was being subverted by the “mischievous and systematic exploiting of the race question.” Identifying three sources of anti-white sentiment, the men blamed the global “wave of labour unrest” in 1919, returning veterans, and the Argos newspaper. While condemning ex-soldiers for introducing “revolutionary ideas” from abroad, the letter writers leveled their harshest criticisms at the local anti-establishment paper. “The impunity with which this irresponsible publication has for a long time past been permitted to circulate all kind of revolutionary, seditious and mischievous literature is regarded as a scandal by all the serious members of this community,” they huffed. “[U]nless some speedy method can be

169 G. F. Huggins, C. de Verteuil, J. A. Bell Smythe, A. S. Bowen, A. H. McClean, and H. H. Pasea to the Colony Secretary, July 30, 1919, in W. M. Gordon (Acting Governor) to Viscount Milner, July 29, 1919, CO 295/322, file 50053, National Archives of the United Kingdom
evolved of either suppressing or muzzling this poisonous organ, a catastrophe is inevitable.”

Huggins and his co-petitioners closed their frantic missive by acknowledging that the war had also transformed a second aspect of race relations in Trinidad—the status of East Indians. In a remarkably candid description of colonial divide-and-rule strategies, the men stated that white plantation owners had once relied on indentured Indians to act as a buffer against black uprisings. With the end of indentureship in 1917, however, the white minority could no longer depend on East Indians to serve as a “safe-guard against trouble with the negroes.” The “‘creole coolie’ will either remain an interested spectator,” they speculated, “or join the mob.”

Colonial authorities acknowledged the presence of racial friction in Trinidad, but denied reports that a racial conflagration was imminent. “If the white people in the Colony would only cease cackling and spreading and enlarging on the wild rumors going around,” the Inspector General of the Constabulary fumed, “the situation would soon be clear.”

After consulting with the Legislative Council, acting governor W. M. Gordon resolved that a garrison of white troops was not needed to maintain order. Further still, he declined to suppress the Argos, noting that the content of the paper had “recently undergone a change for the better.” Assuring the Colonial Office that the “feeling of class hatred” was quickly

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170 G. F. Huggins, C. de Vertueil, J. A. Bell Smythe, A. S. Bowen, A. H. McClean, and H. H. Pasea to the Colony Secretary, July 30, 1919, in W.M. Gordon (Acting Governor) to Viscount Milner, July 29, 1919, CO 295/522, file 50053, National Archives of the United Kingdom

171 G. F. Huggins, C. de Vertueil, J. A. Bell Smythe, A. S. Bowen, A. H. McClean, and H. H. Pasea to the Colony Secretary, July 30, 1919, in W. M. Gordon (Acting Governor) to Viscount Milner, July 29, 1919, CO 295/522, file 50053, National Archives of the United Kingdom

172 G. H. May to Colonial Secretary, August 5, 1919, in W. M. Gordon to Viscount Milner, August 7, 1919, CO 295/522, file 50042, National Archives of the United Kingdom
subsiding, Gordon stressed that the “majority of the more responsible black and coloured people” did not harbor any racial animosity against whites. As long as the respectable black and coloured residents of Port of Spain remained loyal, he surmised, the popular classes were not likely to rebel. 173

Gordon’s faith in the “responsible” black and coloured population was put to the test in early August when Algernon Burkett founded the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Council (RSSC), an association for BWIR veterans and West Indian sailors who served in World War I. Speaking at the RSSC’s first public meeting, held in Port of Spain on August 15, Burkett declared that he was determined to “get the Government to do a little more” for returned veterans. Specifically, he criticized the government’s recently announced land settlement scheme for veterans, which provided ex-soldiers with 5 acres of land and required them to cultivate their plot for 5 years before they received the deed to the property. Denouncing the initiative as “illogical, unholy, and inequitable,” Burkett countered that colonial officials should award each veteran with no less than 20 acres of land as well as a cash grant of £50. He further questioned why the Discharged Soldiers Central Authority, the council the governor appointed to supervise demobilization, did not include any black or coloured representatives. If veterans wanted to “get sympathy” for their cause, alleged Burkett, they needed someone of their race to champion their interests. Encouraging veterans to place their trust in him, Burkett urged ex-soldiers and sailors to “shout their grievances until their

173 W. M. Gordon to Viscount Milner, August 7, 1919, CO 295/522, file 50042, National Archives of the United Kingdom
sacrifices of life-blood and their duty had been adequately compensated by the
Government.”174

Algernon Burkett departed sharply from the respectable, middle-class sergeants who
led veterans’ organizations in Jamaica, British Honduras, and elsewhere in the West Indies.
A civilian with no military background, Burkett’s only tie to the BWIR was that he had
recruited volunteers for the regiment. Tellingly however, Burkett had never stepped forward
himself to enlist. Instead, he spent the war years writing “letters and petitions galore” on
behalf of BWIR soldiers’ unlettered dependents. Burkett plied his letter-writing services at a
fixed rate, allegedly garnering “a good sum” for his efforts.175

Given his past criminal record, Burkett likely took an interest in the war effort for
pecuniary rather than patriotic reasons. According to local police, Burkett lived “on his wits”
and was “always ready to champion the cause of anyone able or willing to pay him for his
service.” Since he was a “clever cunning fellow,” Burkett made his “line of business pay
well indeed.” Before championing the cause of BWIR veterans, Burkett had run afoul of the
law for receiving goods as a “commission agent” but refusing to pay the bill. During the war,
he posed as a solicitor and bilked unsuspecting clients out of attorney’s fees. In addition, he
founded an association for cane-farmers, which collapsed after the members discovered he
was having “the time of his life at their expense.” The cane-farmers physically attacked him
at one of their meetings and Burkett quickly moved on to champion other causes. All told,
Burkett was convicted on five criminal charges between 1911 and 1918, including two counts

174 “Returned Soldiers and Sailors,” Trinidad Guardian, August 16, 1919, 11
175 “Algernon A. Burkett As Known by the Police,” File Folder 14/1921, Box 3-988 (1921), National
Archives of Trinidad and Tobago
of assault and battery. Yet the “clever and cunning trickster,” as one detective labeled Burkett, had managed to emerge as the new spokesman for BWIR veterans.176

One week after the inaugural meeting of the RSSC, Captain Arthur Cipriani returned to Trinidad along with the last contingent of the colony’s BWIR veterans. Disembarking in Port of Spain on August 22, Cipriani rode on horseback at the head of the homecoming parade and was heralded as the “King of Egypt” for his work on behalf of BWIR servicemen during their tour in the Middle East. Speaking to fellow soldiers at the official homecoming celebration, Cipriani countered Burkett’s militant demands for veterans’ programs with a populist appeal for law-and-order and respectful negotiation with government officials. In an address that would define his subsequent political style, Cipriani offered to champion the cause of veterans as long as they “played the game” with colonial authorities and deferred to his leadership. Reminding returning servicemen that they remained liable to military law during their first 28 days at home, Cipriani warned his comrades to avoid confrontations with local police and to steer clear of unscrupulous friends. Moreover, he counseled veterans to report their grievances about outstanding gratuities to him or other former officers rather than “abusing the Paymaster” in heated confrontations. Seeking to avoid further clashes between ex-servicemen and the local government, Cipriani cautioned veterans not to take matters into their own hands. “[D]o not go about making fools of yourselves,” he declared to rousing applause. “Nobody is out to do you, everybody is out to help.”177

Having introduced an alternative model of veterans’ politics in Trinidad, Cipriani openly attacked Burkett’s competence and authority at a public meeting on September 6.

176 “Algernon A. Burkett As Known by the Police,” File Folder 14/1921, Box 3-988 (1921), National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago

177 “Captain Cipriani’s Stirring Reply,” Trinidad Guardian, August 23, 1919, 7
After crediting the leaders of the RSSC for establishing the colony’s first veterans’ organization, Cipriani argued that veterans could most effectively address their grievances in an association comprised entirely of former soldiers rather than a “mixed council” with civilian leadership. Reminding ex-servicemen that he had “stood by them when the days were dark,” Cipriani invoked his work with the local recruitment campaign and his spirited defense of court-martialed soldiers in Egypt as proof of his leadership acumen. In order to settle their latest grievances, he declared, veterans had to address the “proper authorities” and petition through the “proper channels.” Instead of attacking the local government’s parsimony, Cipriani maintained that local leaders were obligated to spend the colony’s limited resources in a responsible and sustainable manner. “It would be almost criminal for the Government to give large sums of money to each returned soldier to lick out,” he insisted. Rather, veterans should solely ask the government to make a limited “concession” that would support unemployed men for a fixed period of time.178

Echoing the sentiments of veterans in the metropole, Cipriani argued that the “moral obligation” between veterans and the state extended to the “whole community” as well. Civilians on the homefront, he declared, had lived in “comfort, peace, and plenty” during the war years because of the sacrifices of BWIR soldiers. Therefore, veterans should seek assistance from civilians rather than solely seeking recompense from the government. Closing his rousing address, Cipriani assured veterans that he could “get the most out of the Government” if they allowed him to negotiate on their behalf and did not “hinder his work by

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178 “Meeting of Returned Soldiers,” *Trinidad Guardian*, September 7, 1919, 9
abusing people” in the colonial administration. In response, ex-soldiers unanimously elected “the Captain” to serve as the president of the newly formed Soldiers and Sailors Union.179

As Cipriani set about to resolve ex-soldiers’ grievances through mediation, the specter of popular upheaval continued to haunt authorities. In October, Colonel Isaac Unsworth of the Salvation Army warned clerks at the Colonial Office to expect “fresh trouble in British Honduras” as well as “riots in Jamaica and elsewhere.” The primary cause of discontent in region was economic, not political, he maintained: “The labourers are simply not paid enough to live on.” In Jamaica, agricultural laborers toiled for 50 to 75 cents per day while 90 miles away in Cuba, they could earn over 2 dollars for the same work. If planters across the West Indies paid competitive wages, they could stem the tide of rising discontent and spur increased domestic spending. If they failed to address laboring peoples’ economic grievances, Unsworth predicted, workers would wrest concessions through rioting, strikes, and violence.180

The Colonial Office dismissed Unsworth’s claim that low wages fueled discontent, intimating that the Salvation Army official possessed “wide, but not very deep knowledge of the West Indies.”181 Despite mounting evidence of economic distress, Assistant Secretary of State for the Colonies Greg Grindle insisted that labor conditions had improved in the colonies and that “progressive planters” were willing “to pay liberally” for diligent workers. The actual cause of the recent unrest, he posited, was deepening anti-white feeling among the

179 “Meeting of Returned Soldiers,” Trinidad Guardian, September 7, 1919, 9
180 Type-written report of meeting with Colonel Unsworth, CO 318/352, file 64434, National Archives of the United Kingdom
181 C. R. Darnley to Leslie Probyn, November 10, 1919, CO 318/352, file 64434, National Archives of the United Kingdom
popular classes. Published reports about race riots in England and the United States, stories from returning BWIR veterans, and revolutionary workers’ uprisings all contributed to a "feeling of Blacks against the Whites." Declaring that there was “no special remedy” to alleviate the race problem, Grindle concluded that the state’s conventional response to popular disaffection would no longer be sufficient: “We can provide against disorder, improve conditions, and be careful over questions of race,” he wrote, “but nothing we can do will alter the fact that the black man has begun to think and feel himself as good as the white.”

In late November 1919, nearly three months after Cipriani outmaneuvered Algernon Burkett to become the voice of the veterans’ movement, Governor John Chancellor announced the results of their closed-door negotiations. Holding fast to its previous position, the local government refused to grant BWIR veterans the same demobilization allowances and unemployment benefits issued to British soldiers in the metropole. Justifying the state’s parsimony, Chancellor deftly reworked the language of wartime sacrifice and mutual obligation. In England, he argued, one-third of military aged men had served in the armed forces during the Great War and all available material resources had been diverted to the war effort. In Trinidad, however, only 1 in 30 eligible men served in the BWIR and the economic dislocations of the war were minimal compared to the metropole. In light of these differences, declared Chancellor, the colonial state could not justify compensating BWIR

182 Handwritten note by Greg Grindle, October 22, 1919, CO 318/352, file 64434, National Archives of the United Kingdom
veterans on par with English soldiers. Simply put, Trinidadians had not sacrificed enough to reap the same postwar rewards as Englishmen.

BWIR veterans in Trinidad did wrest one unanticipated concession from colonial authorities, however. As an act of “gratitude,” the government agreed to pay each ex-soldier a $72 (£15) final settlement. Veterans could elect to receive the payment in cash as a lump sum or in six monthly installments of $12. Alternatively, they could request tools or other items of an equivalent value in order to start a small business. As a third option, ex-soldiers could receive 5 acres of land and $24 in cash to be paid in monthly installments. Men who requested a land grant had to cultivate at least 1 acre of the property within the first year in order to retain their grant.

While there are no surviving records of Cipriani’s closed-door negotiations with Governor Chancellor, the results of his mediation on behalf of Trinidadian veterans were significant. Given that the average unskilled worker in Port of Spain earned $24-$30 per month, the government’s $72 gratuity provided soldiers with the equivalent of three months salary. After receiving the gratuity, as historian Kelvin Singh rightly notes, veterans who had already secured civilian employment would have been better off than most laboring people. For an unemployed veteran, the $12 per month payment would have kept him from destitution for six months, but fell short of what was needed to support a family. For veterans who hoped to establish themselves as small farmers, the substantial $48 deduction to

183 “The Government and Returned Soldiers,” Argos, November 26, 1919, 7; “Trinidad and Tobago Discharged Soldier Central Authority,” Council Paper 59 of 1920, CO 298/115, National Archives of the United Kingdom

184 “The Government and Returned Soldiers,” Argos, November 26, 1919, 7; “Trinidad and Tobago Discharged Soldier Central Authority,” Council Paper 59 of 1920, CO 298/115, National Archives of the United Kingdom
cover the cost of land left them with little money to buy tools, seed, or other essential supplies. Also, given that much of the Crown land granted to ex-servicemen was located in remote areas, the cost of relocating, clearing the land, and cultivating it in one year would prove too much for many would-be smallholders.185 Yet, for BWIR veterans in urban areas and small towns, the lump sum payment offered a temporary buffer from the worst effects of the postwar economic downturn.

Cipriani’s advocacy on behalf of BWIR veterans did not end with his victory in November 1919. After securing the £15 gratuity for Trinidadian ex-servicemen, Cipriani worked to settle old scores with military brass in Taranto, Italy. In a series of letters to colonial officials, Cipriani graphically described the indignities BWIR soldiers endured while stationed in Italy in the spring of 1919, provocatively denouncing their suffering as a “reign of terror.”186 By cataloging the racist slights and daily humiliations BWIR troops had experienced while awaiting demobilization, he hoped that the War Office would formally sanction military officers at Taranto, including the infamous base commandant Brigadier-General C. D. V. Cary-Barnard.

During their wartime tour in Egypt, Cipriani explained in a November 1919 letter, military officials had “punctiliously observed” the rights and privileges of BWIR soldiers.187 Military officers at Taranto, however, refused to treat black and coloured West Indian soldiers as equal to white British troops. At the Italian base, Brigadier-General C. D. V. 

185 Singh, Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad 1917-1945, 20

186 Arthur A. Cipriani to Horatio Bottomly, May 2, 1920, reprinted in Captain A. A. Cipriani, Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War (Port of Spain: Trinidad Publishing Co., 1940), 61

187 Arthur A. Cipriani to the Colonial Secretary (Trinidad and Tobago), November 29, 1919, reprinted in Cipriani, Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War, 60
Cary-Barnard had seized every opportunity to enact punitive measures against the regiment. In his role as base commandant, Cipriani wrote, the South African general confined all BWIR soldiers to the base for the duration of their stay and further isolated them by instituting a system of strict racial segregation. In a departure from past practices, Cary-Barnard had barred black and coloured soldiers from military canteens, YWCA huts, and other recreational spaces for British units. On one occasion when the general did permit BWIR soldiers to use the base's sole cinema, he allegedly insisted that the regiment had to fill every seat because he “would not allow British troops to sit down alongside niggers.”

To make matters worse, Cary-Barnard relegated BWIR servicemen to inferior “native hospitals” where, Cipriani contended, sick servicemen “were starved and were not given sufficient blankets to keep warm.”

Worse yet, Cary-Barnard had ordered BWIR servicemen from the First, Second, and Fifth Battalions to perform the same menial labor duties that sparked the December 1918 mutiny. These soldiers, having fought in the frontlines in Palestine and Jordan and earned decorations for bravery, baulked at the general’s efforts to treat their units as labour battalions. When Major J. B. Thursfield, Cipriani’s commanding officer in the Fifth Battalion, confronted Cary-Barnard for assigning BWIR soldiers demeaning fatigue duties in

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188 Major J. B. Thursfield to Arthur Cipriani, September 30, 1919, reprinted in Cipriani, Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War, 65

189 Arthur A. Cipriani to the Colonial Secretary (Trinidad and Tobago), November 29, 1919, reprinted in Cipriani, Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War, 60

190 On the role of the First and Second Battalions in combat operations in Palestine from August to September 1918, see Commander-in-Chief, Egyptian Expeditionary Force to Secretary of State for War, War Office, December 17, 1918, CO 318/350, file 7466, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew Gardens
violation of their status as an infantry regiment, the base commandant refused to rescind his order. Unleashing a verbal tirade on the white Jamaican major, Cary-Barnard barked that he was “perfectly aware of the promise” made to BWIR soldiers but refused to honor it since the men were “only niggers and…no such treatment should ever have been promised to them.” Claiming that BWIR servicemen were “better fed and treated better than any nigger had the right to expect,” the irate commandant insisted he would assign BWIR troops whatever jobs he saw fit. If any soldiers refused, Cary-Barnard threatened, he would “force them to do it.”

In an appeal to the governor of Trinidad, Cipriani stressed that the rampant discrimination at Taranto had “affected the loyalty and patriotism” of BWIR soldiers. “It must be remembered that all our men are volunteers—the majority being black but educated and enlightened—and had come over 3,000 miles to do their bit,” he wrote. General Cary-Barnard’s “reign of terror,” as Cipriani evocatively described it, threatened not only to erode soldiers’ willingness to fight for the “Mother Country” but also damaged their esteem for the empire. “The impression is gaining ground throughout the West Indies,” Cipriani warned ominously, “that the West Indian, more particularly the Black [West Indian], will not volunteer his services again” if called upon by the Crown.

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191 Report by Major J. B. Thursfield, September 30, 1919, reprinted in Cipriani, Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War, 62

192 Arthur A. Cipriani to the Colonial Secretary (Trinidad and Tobago), November 29, 1919, reprinted in Cipriani, Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War, 60
Conclusion

Despite his impassioned pleas, Cipriani’s campaign to have Brigadier-General Cary-Barnard formally sanctioned for his treatment of BWIR troops ultimately failed. The South African general deftly refuted Cipriani’s claims and the War Office evinced little desire to punish a high-ranking military officer based on the allegations of a few West Indian veterans. Yet Cipriani’s warning that black and coloured West Indians would withdraw their loyalty to the empire if Cary-Barnard escaped punishment is instructive. In his groundbreaking treatise, *Exit, Loyalty, and Voice*, economist Albert O. Hirchman offers a broad theoretical framework for understanding how individuals respond to disappointing performance by organizations, firms, and states. According to Hirchman, aggrieved individuals can give voice to their concerns in hopes of receiving redress or can exit by withdrawing their support and allegiance. Centrally, he claims that the “activation of voice is a function of loyalty.” Those most likely to choose voice over exit are individuals with a high degree of loyalty and a strong belief that they can influence powerbrokers to secure a favorable result. These same individuals will also deploy the threat of exit as a tool for achieving reform. “The threat of exit will typically be made by the loyalist—that is, by the member who cares, who leaves no stone unturned before he resigns himself to the painful decision to withdraw or switch,” Hirchman concludes. In the case of the state, where

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193 Cipriani, *Twenty-Five Years After: The British West Indies Regiment in The Great War*, 65


195 Hirschman, *Exit, Loyalty, and Voice*, 83
absolute exit through popular insurgency, exile, or the renunciation of citizenship carries extremely high costs, the impetus toward voice will be particularly strong.196

In his quarrels with colonial authorities, Cipriani mastered the “art of voice,” using loyalty as a form of social capital and as a powerful bargaining chip that could be withdrawn in the face of repeated slights. Yet, by privileging voice over exit, he worked actively to marginalize more radical forms of veterans’ protests and limited the range of strategies open to disaffected ex-soldiers. During the 1920s, Cipriani’s status as Trinidad’s premier spokesman for veterans would hinge on his ability to contain and discredit former comrades who articulated their grievances outside the framework of mutual obligation and imperial patriotism.

Likewise in British Honduras, returning veterans Frederick McDonald and Samuel Haynes rejected the militant anti-colonial and anti-white sentiment that Annie Flowers boldly articulated in the days following the riot. Even after he moved to the United States in 1921 to work for the UNIA, Samuel Haynes continued to boast about his role in quelling the popular uprising of ex-servicemen and civilians in Belize Town. In a 1927 article published in the *Negro World*, Haynes recounted how he “saved a number of white men—British, Scot, Irish, German, and American—from probably wholesale massacre at the hands of an infuriated contingent of returned soldiers” in the summer of 1919. In recognition of his loyal service and “restraining influence,” Haynes reported, he garnered “the commendation of the Secretary of State for the Colonies in a special dispatch to the Governor of the Colony.”197 Three years later, he once again highlighted his part in suppressing the July 1919 rebellion,

196 Hirschman, *Exit, Loyalty, and Voice*, 83

197 *Negro World*, August 13, 1927
depicting his former comrades as hotheaded drunkards. “If the truth were told, it was I whose appeal to sobriety and reason saved the handful of Europeans in Belize from a savage massacre when the returned soldiers rioted in an orgy of rum in the summer of 1919,” he wrote. “I rose to the occasion and silenced the radicals.”

198 Belize Independent, June 18, 1930, quoted in Macpherson, From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982, 33
Epilogue

On the morning of November 11, 1922, ten thousand people gathered in downtown Kingston, Jamaica, to witness the unveiling and dedication of the island’s official World War I memorial. Unveiled on the fourth anniversary of the Armistice, the towering 29-foot monument commemorated the lives of over 1,130 Jamaican servicemen who perished during the war. Designed by two Jamaican architects and constructed using locally quarried stone and marble, the monument consisted of a massive white cross placed atop an octagonal base (see figure 13). The gleaming white structure, surrounded by beds of tropical plumbago and hibiscus flowers and draped in Union Jacks, stood as the centerpiece in the newly commissioned Memorial Square, constructed at the cost of £3000. The two inscriptions on the monument, rendered in simple block lettering, highlighted the memorial’s dual function as a commemoration of local loss and as a symbol of imperial belonging. The first inscription, chiseled on a marble slab on the stone base, dedicated the monument “In Memory of the Men of Jamaica who fell in the Great War.” The second inscription, borrowing the consolatory words etched on cenotaphs across Britain, proclaimed: “Their name liveth for evermore.”¹

Shortly before 11:00 a.m., as relatives of the deceased assembled in a specially-designated seating area and thousands of “uninvited” spectators crowded together on the street and on nearby rooftops, acting governor Herbert Bryan ascended the dais to officially dedicate the new memorial.² In a brief address, Bryan lauded the “sons of Jamaica” who

¹ “Unveiling and Dedication of Jamaica's War Memorial, 11th November 1922,” Manuscripts and Special Collections, National Library of Jamaica, Kingston

²
sacrificed their lives to guarantee the security of the empire. Along with other fallen “sons of the Empire,” Jamaica’s war dead joined an immortal fraternity of men who fell in the service of the King. Declaring that their sacrifices were not in vain, the governor charged the people of Jamaica to retain the “indomitable spirit” that led thousands of their countrymen to face the threat of death so that the “Empire might stand.” “O People of Jamaica,” he proclaimed, “Let us remember, and charge our children to remember, that these who saved our mortal heritage cast away their own.”

According to the Daily Gleaner, “thousands of people who had no invitations” to the unveiling ceremony had “seized every available vantage point” near the memorial by the time the ceremony commenced. Police and military guards were dispatched to keep “the uninvited” at a “prescribed distance” from monument. “Island’s War Memorial Unveiled & Dedicated: Imposing Ceremony,” Daily Gleaner, November 13, 1922, 3

“Unveiling and Dedication of Jamaica's War Memorial, 11th November 1922,” Manuscripts and Special Collections, National Library of Jamaica, Kingston
The political significance of the new memorial, and the ritualized acts of mourning that accompanied its unveiling, did not escape the editors of the *Daily Gleaner*. In an editorial published two days after the ceremony, the paper argued that the cenotaph was more than a “local manifestation of feeling” for the island’s deceased soldiers. It was also a
“symbolic representation” of Jamaicans’ “feeling for the Empire” and “continued solidarity” with Britain. Despite moments of imperial “backslidings” in the postwar years, the *Gleaner* maintained, the British people remained committed to advancing the “personal liberty” of colonial subjects throughout the realm. And Jamaicans of classes, recognizing the sovereign’s commitment to “justice and freedom,” remained loyal to the King and to the “spirit” of his empire. “Let no one be mistaken: in spite of all that may be said in moments of peace, when men are prone to be critical and discontented: if the Empire were threatened again...[w]hat Jamaica did in 1915 and after, she would do again and more, much more.”

The language of imperial patriotism and mutual obligation pervaded popular commemorations of the Armistice as well. On the same day that Kingstonians dedicated the cenotaph in memory of their deceased “sons,” *The Labour Leader*, the organ of the Trinidad Workingmen’s Association (TWA), reflected on the meaning of the war for black and coloured colonials. Armistice Day, the editors surmised, held “far greater” significance for West Indians than it did for “any of the Caucasian races” that fought in World War I. For the descendants of enslaved Africans, the war had provided the first opportunity to repay Britons for the “ransom of twenty million sterling” that “Victoria the Good paid to set their forefathers free.” By offering their lives as soldiers, West Indian men had repaid “in blood” their ancestors’ “long outstanding debt to the British Empire.” Thus on Armistice Day, black and coloured subjects in the British Caribbean not only celebrated the empire’s wartime victory, but the “paying off” of a deeply-felt obligation for the abolition of slavery. “The love, the devotion, and the loyalty of the West Indian for the Throne” led black and coloured servicemen to lay down their lives for the preservation of His Majesty’s empire, the editors

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4 “Lest We Forget,” *Daily Gleaner*, November 13, 1922, 8
proclaimed. Having saved the empire and repaid the debt for emancipation, West Indians now solely possessed a “debt of gratitude” for the Mother Country’s beneficence.⁵

How can we make sense of these public odes to loyalty, martial sacrifice, and mutual obligation, articulated by a colonial governor, an establishment newspaper, and the organ of the region’s largest and most assertive labor organization, four years after the Armistice? What do these appeals tell us about claims-making, public discourse, and political obligation in the colonial British Caribbean? Taken together, these three appeals highlight the degree to which celebrations of martial labor eventually spread far beyond the small cadre of military boosters that pressed for the creation of the BWIR in 1914 and 1915. Both during and after the war, public officials, activists, members of the local elite, and veterans themselves invoked West Indians’ military service as the most compelling evidence of the region’s loyalty to the empire. BWIR soldiers’ hardships overseas, rather than discrediting volunteers’ decision to fight for “King and Country,” enhanced their moral authority and ability to make demands on the state. Even after the dramatic upheavals in British Honduras and Trinidad in 1919, and the expansion of the UNIA throughout the region in the early 1920s, individuals with a wide range of agendas continued to deploy the political language of imperial patriotism to garner concessions from authorities in Britain and the small class of powerbrokers in the colonies. Rather than severing their ties to the empire, BWIR veterans embraced multiple allegiances in the 1920s, including loyalties based on heightened local, regional, and diasporic consciousnesses as well as connections to the monarch and the metropole. Like subaltern actors in other undemocratic societies marked by patron-client

⁵ “Lest We Forget,” The Labour Leader, November 11, 1922, n.p.
relationships, veterans possessed a “medley of loyalties” that spurred both cooperation and conflict with the state.\(^6\)

The local politics of imperial patriotism had profound consequences for the development and trajectory of veterans’ organizations in the West Indies. In the months following demobilization, BWIR veterans seemed poised to emerge as a powerful new interest group. Between 1919 and 1920, ex-servicemen across the region formed autonomous veterans’ associations and successfully pressured local authorities to provide cash gratuities, social welfare programs, and temporary employment. Between 1920 and 1921, ex-servicemen garnered a further concession from colonial authorities: pardons for the Taranto mutineers. Shortly after Arthur Cipriani launched his campaign to expose Brigadier General Cary-Bernard’s abuses at Taranto, Jamaican legislator H. A. L. Simpson began pressuring imperial authorities to pardon the 49 former BWIR soldiers held in Jamaica for military offences. Simpson’s effort garnered the support of the *Gleaner*, which called on Governor Probyn to intercede on behalf of the imprisoned veterans. Challenging official narratives about the mutineers, the *Gleaner* suggested that the former soldiers were “young men of intelligence” who bore “the stamp of respectability.” Moreover, the paper questioned why veterans who volunteered “as freemen to assist in wiping out autocracy” were “brought back to the West Indies as prisoners.”\(^7\) Bowing to mounting pressure from veterans and their civilian allies, Secretary of State for the Colonies Viscount Milner pardoned 47 of the 49 ex-soldiers imprisoned in Jamaica in October 1920 and ordered that the men should be permitted


\(^7\) “The Quality of Mercy,” *Daily Gleaner*, August 28, 1920, 8
to return to their home colonies. That same month, Governor Charles O’Brien pardoned two Taranto mutineers in Barbados and Governor J. R. Chancellor of Trinidad followed suit in 1921.

Yet, in the wake of these significant victories, the nascent veterans’ movement sputtered. As ex-servicemen dedicated to negotiation and constitutional forms of agitation took the helm of veterans’ organizations in Trinidad, British Honduras, Jamaica and elsewhere in the region, these nascent groups offered few opportunities for rank-and-file members to participate in the process of lobbying the state. Arthur Cipriani’s injunction that ex-servicemen should report their grievances to their former officers, instead of “making fools” of themselves by confronting authorities directly, underscored the top-down model of leadership that stymied mass mobilization among veterans. Despite veterans’ strong sense of collective identity and public venerations of martial sacrifice, veterans’ organizations suffered from low membership and ill-defined agendas. Significantly, only 1 of the 3 veterans’ organizations founded in Jamaica in the 1920s survived more than 1 year. The most enduring organization, the Jamaica Old Comrades’ Association, declared that it was “strictly non-political” and listed the governor as its honorable president. In Trinidad, the colonial government refused to recognize Cipriani’s nascent veterans’ organization or

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8 “All But Two of the British West Indies Regiment Men Who Were In The Penitentiary Have Been Pardoned,” *Daily Gleaner*, October 23, 1920, 1

9 “All But Two of the British West Indies Regiment Men Who Were In The Penitentiary Have Been Pardoned,” *Daily Gleaner*, October 23, 1920, 1

10 Captain Cipriani’s Stirring Reply,” *Trinidad Guardian*, August 23, 1919, 7

Algernon Burkett’s Returned Soldiers and Sailors Council (RSSC), and there is no evidence that either group remained active after 1924.

Thus, when women and men in the British Caribbean spoke of the Great War in the 1920s, they increasingly invoked heroic narratives about the dead instead of acknowledging the needs of surviving BWIR veterans in the own communities. Tellingly, during the war memorial dedication ceremony in Kingston in November 1922, ex-servicemen were relegated to a viewing-area across the street from the memorial and were not invited to take part in the military review (see figure 14). While colonial governments continued to provide economic programs for veterans, especially in Jamaica where the government launched an ambitious land-settlement scheme and allotted £20,000 for public works jobs, public officials increasingly concentrated their efforts on commemorating the war through memorials and annual celebrations rather than tending to the material needs of the living.12

12 On the local effort to provide economic support for veterans in Jamaica in the 1920s, see Richard Smith, “‘Heaven grant you strength to fight the battle for your race:’ Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Jamaican Memory,” in Race, Empire and First World War Writing, ed. Santanu Das (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 272
By examining imperial policy and popular claims-making in the wartime British Caribbean, this dissertation has shed light on the racialized and gendered nature of obligation in colonial societies; the multiple uses of the language of imperial patriotism; and impact of
military service on BWIR veterans’ political consciousness and claims-making. This study also helps to explain why Arthur Cipriani, Samuel Haynes, and other well-known ex-soldiers rose to prominence as leaders of civilian organizations rather than veterans’ groups. After winning the support of black and coloured laborers due to his work on behalf of the BWIR, Cipriani won the presidency of the Trinidad Workingmen’s Association (TWA) in 1924 and led the group until his death in 1945. In addition, he enjoyed an unprecedented string of electoral victories, serving in the reformed Legislative Council from 1925-1945 and as mayor of Port of Spain from 1929-1940.13 Championing the rights of “unwashed and unsoaped barefooted men,” Cipriani lobbied for an eight-hour working day, minimum wage, compulsory education, workmen’s compensation, and universal suffrage.14 He also pushed for more West Indian men to be appointed to high-ranking civil service positions and campaigned tirelessly against all forms of racial discrimination.15 Yet, as Gordon K. Lewis rightly observes, Cipriani never questioned the “ultimate moral rightness of the British Empire” or demanded an end to colonial rule.16 Thus, his valiant efforts on behalf of laboring peoples throughout the region were ultimately undermined by the “fatal ambiguity involved in trying to be Empire loyalist and West Indian patriot at one and the same time.”17

13 Beginning in 1925, the Legislative Council in Trinidad included a minority of elected members. Before 1925, all members of the Legislative Council were appointed rather than elected.

14 Sewlyn D. Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 34

15 On Cipriani’s activism during the interwar years, see Gordon K. Lewis, The Growth of the Modern West Indies (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 203-207; Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, 35-43

16 Lewis, The Growth of the Modern West Indies, 206

17Lewis, The Growth of the Modern West Indies, 207
As we approach the centennial of the outbreak of World War I, a new generation of Caribbeanist scholars has taken up C. L. R. James’ call for “a detailed history of the B.W.I. Regiment.” Yet, the recent burst of scholarly interest in the BWIR stands in sharp contrast to the dearth of popular knowledge about West Indians’ role in the war effort. While conducting research in Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados from 2008 to 2009, I discovered this firsthand as community members, archivists, and fellow graduate students expressed surprised when I explained the focus of my research. Many respondents immediately insisted that no West Indian men had served in World War I or simply assumed that I was actually interested in researching World War II. Even the current military personnel charged with preserving the history of West Indian military service stated that they had been taught very little about the 15,600 men who soldiered in the BWIR. During an informal tour of the Jamaican Military Museum at Up Park Camp, my guide stated that the museum focused on the history of the WIR and the current Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) and contained few artifacts from the BWIR. During a visit to the World War I memorial in Kingston, now dedicated to fallen soldiers from both world wars, I spoke with one of the JDF soldiers assigned to guard the monument. After explaining my interest in the historic cenotaph, the servicemen insisted that only a few Englishmen from the island had served in World War I and that no black men had volunteered. Like many other people I encountered, he believed that black and coloured West Indians had first served en masse in Europe during World War II.

Interviewed in the early years of the twenty-first century, the last surviving BWIR

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18 C.L.R. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (Nelson, Lancashire: Coulton, 1932), 27
veterans offered a mixed assessment of their military experience. George Blackman, a coloured volunteer from Barbados, enlisted as a teenager and served with the Fourth Battalion in France and Italy. Interviewed in 2002, the 105-year-old former soldier recounted several examples of racist slights from German prisoners of war as well as British comrades. Yet, he leveled his harshest criticism at colonial officials for not providing sufficient support for returning veterans. “When the war finish, there was nothing,” Blackman maintained. “The only thing that we had is the clothes and the uniform that we got on. The pants, the jacket and the shirt and the boots. You can’t come home naked.” Calling attention to the ambiguous position of former colonial soldiers in postcolonial societies, Blackman complained that he was not eligible for a military pension from Britain or Barbados. “England don’t have anything to do with me now. England turned me over,” he reported. “Barbadians rule Barbados now.” 19 Ugent Clark, a 103-year old veteran from Jamaica, echoed George Blackman’s distaste for war, vividly recalling the difficult working and living conditions in wartime France. While Clark was able to collect a small pension from the Jamaica Legion, he shared Blackman’s critique of postwar social and economic conditions in the Caribbean. Advising the next generation of activists on the unfinished struggle for rights and recognition, Clark declared: “You must demand justice. It’s the hardest thing to get in Jamaica. There’s no love can come in without justice. Give every man equal rights—pay him a good day’s pay for a good day’s work—that’s justice.” 20

19 Simon Rogers, “There were no parades for us,” Special Report: The Military: Soldiers of the Empire, Guardian, November 6, 2002, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/military/story/0,,834475,00.html]

Figure 15: Sentinels at the Jamaica War Memorial in National Heroes’ Park in Kingston. Photo by the Author, June 2008
## Appendix

### Table 1: Population of Jamaica (1911)

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<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>Coloured</td>
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<tr>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>397,439</td>
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Source: *Census of Jamaica and its Dependencies: Taken on the 3rd April, 1911* (Kingston: Government Printing Office, 1912), 7, 28

### Table 2: Population of Barbados (1911)

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### Table 3: Population of Trinidad (1911)

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<td>Trinidad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other British West Indies colonies (including Tobago)</td>
<td>72,623</td>
<td>21.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK and British colonies (excluding West Indies)</td>
<td>1,428</td>
<td>0.43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>3,710</td>
<td>1.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1,113</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,850</td>
<td>1.15%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total non-Indian population</strong></td>
<td><strong>223,432</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad (of Indian descent)</td>
<td>59,535</td>
<td>17.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>50,585</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Indian Population</strong></td>
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<td><strong>33.02%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Census of the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago, 1911* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Government Printing Office, 1913), 12
Table 4: Age of the First 4000 Men to Enlist in the BWIR in Jamaica

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of Soldiers</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Soldiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17-29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.075%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>1314</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-23</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-25</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-27</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-29</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>3767</td>
<td>94.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-31</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-33</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34-35</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38-39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.075%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.050%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.125%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Not Given</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.175%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Civilian Occupation of the First 4000 Men to Enlist in the BWIR in Jamaica

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former Occupation</th>
<th>Number of Soldiers</th>
<th>Percentage of Soldiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laborers</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenters and Cabinet Makers</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakers</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers, smithers, and mechanics</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boot and Shoemakers</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailors</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masons and Builders</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printers and Binders</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishermen</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine, motor drivers and trackmen</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chauffeurs</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constables</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop keepers</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servants</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butchers</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coachbuilders and wheelwrights</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddlers</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coopers and Sawyers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigar makers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbers and Tinsmiths</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemists and Hospital Assistants</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman and Overseers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamen</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsmiths and Jewelers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat and Basket makers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipwrights</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.175%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanners</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.125%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musicians</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.075%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.025%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar boiler</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.025%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Occupation Not Stated</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>4000</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Home Parish of the First 4000 Men to Enlist in the BWIR in Jamaica

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Population (1911 Census)</th>
<th>Percentage of the Total Population</th>
<th>Number of Soldiers</th>
<th>Percentage of Soldiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kingston</td>
<td>59,674</td>
<td>7.18%</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrew</td>
<td>52,773</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Thomas</td>
<td>39,330</td>
<td>4.73%</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>49,360</td>
<td>5.94%</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary</td>
<td>72,956</td>
<td>8.76%</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Ann</td>
<td>70,651</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trelawny</td>
<td>35,463</td>
<td>4.27%</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James</td>
<td>41,376</td>
<td>4.98%</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover</td>
<td>37,432</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>66,456</td>
<td>7.99%</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Elizabeth</td>
<td>78,700</td>
<td>9.47%</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>65,194</td>
<td>7.84%</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarendon</td>
<td>73,914</td>
<td>8.89%</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Catherine</td>
<td>88,104</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroad</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td><strong>831,383</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>4000</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Compulsory Military Service Registration Data for Jamaica By Parish (1917)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Population (1911 Census)</th>
<th>Percentage of the Population</th>
<th>Population of Men (1911 Census)</th>
<th>Number of Men Who Registered for Military Service</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Registrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kingston</td>
<td>59,674</td>
<td>7.18%</td>
<td>25,037</td>
<td>11,495</td>
<td>9.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrew</td>
<td>52,773</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
<td>24,861</td>
<td>6,781</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Thomas</td>
<td>39,330</td>
<td>4.73%</td>
<td>18,873</td>
<td>6,262</td>
<td>5.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>49,360</td>
<td>5.94%</td>
<td>24,843</td>
<td>7,571</td>
<td>6.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary</td>
<td>72,956</td>
<td>8.76%</td>
<td>37,523</td>
<td>12,734</td>
<td>10.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Ann</td>
<td>70,651</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>34,024</td>
<td>8,422</td>
<td>6.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trelawny</td>
<td>35,463</td>
<td>4.27%</td>
<td>16,432</td>
<td>5,203</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James</td>
<td>41,376</td>
<td>4.98%</td>
<td>18,767</td>
<td>5,306</td>
<td>4.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover</td>
<td>37,432</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
<td>17,615</td>
<td>5,068</td>
<td>4.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>66,456</td>
<td>7.99%</td>
<td>31,795</td>
<td>8,290</td>
<td>6.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Elizabeth</td>
<td>78,700</td>
<td>9.47%</td>
<td>36,967</td>
<td>10,152</td>
<td>8.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>65,194</td>
<td>7.84%</td>
<td>30,931</td>
<td>8,243</td>
<td>6.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarendon</td>
<td>73,914</td>
<td>8.89%</td>
<td>36,412</td>
<td>11,521</td>
<td>9.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Catherine</td>
<td>88,104</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>43,359</td>
<td>15,190</td>
<td>12.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>831,383</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>397,439</strong></td>
<td><strong>122,238</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Total BWIR Enlistment in Jamaica By Parish (1915-18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Population (1911 Census)</th>
<th>Percentage of the Population</th>
<th>Population of Men (1911 Census)</th>
<th>Number of Men Who Registered for Military Service</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Registrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kingston</td>
<td>59,674</td>
<td>7.18%</td>
<td>25,037</td>
<td>11,495</td>
<td>9.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrew</td>
<td>52,773</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
<td>24,861</td>
<td>6,781</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Thomas</td>
<td>39,330</td>
<td>4.73%</td>
<td>18,873</td>
<td>6,262</td>
<td>5.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>49,360</td>
<td>5.94%</td>
<td>24,843</td>
<td>7,571</td>
<td>6.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary</td>
<td>72,956</td>
<td>8.76%</td>
<td>37,523</td>
<td>12,734</td>
<td>10.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Ann</td>
<td>70,651</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>34,024</td>
<td>8,422</td>
<td>6.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trelawny</td>
<td>35,463</td>
<td>4.27%</td>
<td>16,432</td>
<td>5,203</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James</td>
<td>41,376</td>
<td>4.98%</td>
<td>18,767</td>
<td>5,306</td>
<td>4.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover</td>
<td>37,432</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
<td>17,615</td>
<td>5,068</td>
<td>4.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>66,456</td>
<td>7.99%</td>
<td>31,795</td>
<td>8,290</td>
<td>6.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Elizabeth</td>
<td>78,700</td>
<td>9.47%</td>
<td>36,967</td>
<td>10,152</td>
<td>8.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>65,194</td>
<td>7.84%</td>
<td>30,931</td>
<td>8,243</td>
<td>6.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarendon</td>
<td>73,914</td>
<td>8.89%</td>
<td>36,412</td>
<td>11,521</td>
<td>9.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Catherine</td>
<td>88,104</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>43,359</td>
<td>15,190</td>
<td>12.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>831,383</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>397,439</strong></td>
<td><strong>122,238</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 9: Trinidad and Tobago Contingent of the BWIR By Draft (1915-17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contingent</th>
<th>Date of Departure</th>
<th>Name of Ship</th>
<th>Number of Officers</th>
<th>Number of Enlisted Men</th>
<th>Total Number of Soldiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>September 18, 1915</td>
<td>H.M.T. Verdalla</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>November 17, 1915</td>
<td>H.M.T. Magdalena</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>March 28, 1917</td>
<td>H.M.T. Magdalena</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>July 7, 1917</td>
<td>H.M.T. Magdalena</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>December 8, 1917</td>
<td>H.M.T. Magdalena</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1438</td>
<td>1479</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: C.B. Franklin, *Trinidad and Tobago Year Book* (Port-of-Spain: Franklin's Electric Printery, 1919)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contingent</th>
<th>Date of Departure</th>
<th>Name of Ship</th>
<th>Number of Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>October 18, 1915</td>
<td>R.M.S. Danube</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>December 29, 1915</td>
<td>R.M.S. Balantia</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>January 27, 1916</td>
<td>S.S. Sphörid</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>April 12, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Serrana</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>April 23, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Matina</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>June 5, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Sargasso</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>June 27, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Benlawers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>July 3, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Sphörid</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>July 13, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Serrana</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>October 3, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Sargasso</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>October 17, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Sphörid</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>November 7, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Santille</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th</td>
<td>December, 1917</td>
<td>S.S. Savon</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th</td>
<td>January 31, 1918</td>
<td>S.S. Sphörid</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th</td>
<td>March 20, 1918</td>
<td>S.S. Santille</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th</td>
<td>May 27, 1918</td>
<td>S.S. Sphörid</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th</td>
<td>September 14, 1918</td>
<td>S.S. Santille</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL**  276

Source: Captain H. Dow, *Record Service of Members of the Trinidad Merchants’ and Planters’ Contingent, 1915-1918* (Trinidad: Government Printery, 1925), 23
Table 11: Total BWIR Enlistment Figures By Colony (1915-18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colony</th>
<th>Area in Square Miles</th>
<th>Population (1911 Census)</th>
<th>Number of Officers</th>
<th>Number of Enlisted Men</th>
<th>Total Number of Soldiers</th>
<th>Percentage of BWIR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>171,983</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>831</td>
<td>5.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>4,403.5</td>
<td>55,944</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>2.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Guiana</td>
<td>90,277</td>
<td>304,149</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>4.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Honduras</td>
<td>8,598</td>
<td>41,543</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>3.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>4,207.25</td>
<td>831,383</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>9,977</td>
<td>10,280</td>
<td>65.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>1,974</td>
<td>333,552</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1,438</td>
<td>1,478</td>
<td>9.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>69,307</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>2.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeward Islands</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>127,189</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>1.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Anguilla, Antigua, Barbuda, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Montserrat, Redonda, and St. Kitts-Nevis)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>233.25</td>
<td>48,637</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Vincent</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>44,434</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>2.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>110,846</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,028,121</strong></td>
<td><strong>397</strong></td>
<td><strong>15,204</strong></td>
<td><strong>15,601</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 12: Causes of Rejection for Jamaican BWIR Volunteers (1915-18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause of Rejection</th>
<th>Number of Men Rejected</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Rejections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underdeveloped, Underweight</td>
<td>3,765</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venereal Diseases</td>
<td>1,512</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin diseases, sears, sores, ulcers</td>
<td>1,297</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor physique</td>
<td>1,280</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anemia, heart, lungs, pulse</td>
<td>1,151</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teeth</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undersize</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat feet, knock knees</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varicocele, varicose veins</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deformity, including phimosis</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hernia, Rupture</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected by Medical Officer as not likely to become an efficient soldier</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sight</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundry causes</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periostitis, stiff joints</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under age</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over age</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlarged glands</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat chest</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defective speech</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused to sign on</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause of rejection unknown</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>13,940</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
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**DISSERTATIONS**

Biography

Reena Nicole Goldthree was born in St. Louis, MO and graduated from University City High School. In 2003, she received a B.A. in History-Sociology (magna cum laude) from Columbia University and was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. She also completed the New York State Teacher Education Program, earning a certificate in Secondary Social Studies Education. While at Columbia, she received the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, John Kluge Fellowship, Astor Presidential Scholarship, and Ethel Hedgeman Lyle Undergraduate Service Award from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. She received an M.A. in History at Duke University in 2005 as well as a Graduate Certificate in Latin American and Caribbean Studies.

During her graduate studies, she received the Andrew W. Mellon Graduate Fellowship in Humanistic Studies, Ford Foundation Diversity Dissertation Fellowship, Thurgood Marshall Dissertation Fellowship (Dartmouth College), Albert J. Beveridge Grant for Research in the Western Hemisphere (American Historical Association), J. William Fulbright Fellowship, Harvey Fellowship (Mustard Seed Foundation), Mellon Travel and Research Grant (Woodrow Wilson Foundation), Graduate Merit Scholarship (Educational Advancement Foundation), and Ida B. Wells Graduate Student Award (Coordinating Council for Women in History). She was also awarded several fellowships from Duke, including the Duke Endowment Fellowship, International Advanced Fellowship (Graduate School), and Summer Research Fellowship (Graduate School). She has published “Amy Jacques Garvey, Theodore Bilbo, and the Paradoxes of Black Nationalism,” in Global Circuits of Blackness: Interrogating the African Diasporas (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010) as well as an encyclopedia entry on women’s activism in the Anglophone Caribbean. She currently holds a faculty appointment in the African and African American Studies Program at Dartmouth College.