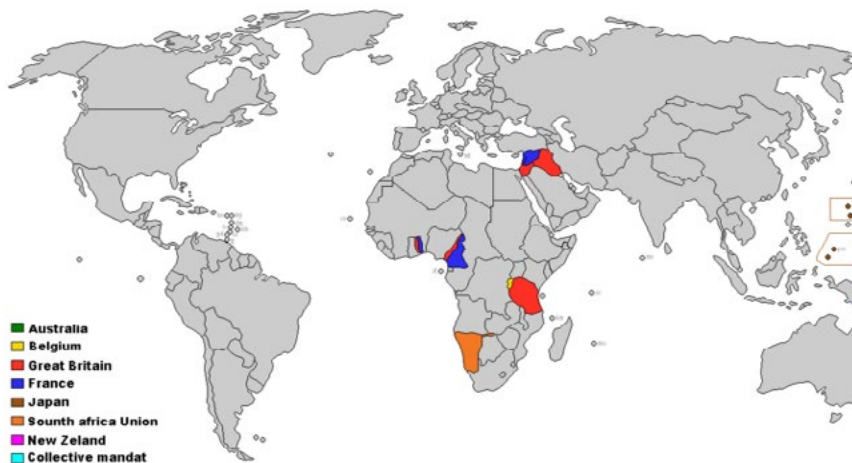


Conclusion



The Costs of the Great War

As we've learned throughout this module, World War I wasn't just about events in Europe. While our examination has focused on French West Africa and Senegalese Soldiers, German *Schutztruppe*, the British Kings African Rifles, and porters in the East African Campaign, even this is just a small snapshot of the impact of the war on the African continent. By the time the war ended, every colony in Africa, with the exception of neutral Spanish territories, had been drawn into the conflict. Although numbers are hard to determine with certainty, over 2 million Africans served in World War I, both in Africa and in Europe, with approximately 250,000 killed. Many thousands more were wounded or disabled.

Alongside soldiers and carriers, European powers had also drawn on colonies for material resources during the war. In the British Gold Coast for example (discussed in Lesson 1), imperial officials raised funds for planes and other military equipment. More broadly throughout the war, demands for African products and raw materials persisted, though this did not necessarily mean increased prices for those items.

Conclusion

The Costs of the Great War

The Paris Peace Conference and the Pan-African Congress

The End of the Great War and Legacies

Conclusion: Remembering the Great War

In many cases, crops were requisitioned or paid for at prices below market, with particularly heavy impacts for subsistence farmers. In others, price controls, compulsory cultivation of crops, and labor recruitment for essential projects were a part of state-imposed mobilization mandates.

For civilians, the war was particularly devastating. Both sides dislocated communities and seized or destroyed civilian property. Villages and farms were destroyed in battle. In addition to the disruptions caused by mass recruitment, famines compounded by plunder destabilized local life. In East Africa alone, nearly 1,350,000 Africans were mobilized for war. The death toll of soldiers and carriers on that front alone exceeded 150,000, though the true figure may be higher. In German East Africa, the harsh conditions of combat and plundering of farms resulted in the deaths of an estimated one in seven people. Across the continent, upwards of 750,000 civilians perished as a result of famines, war, disease, and rebellion.

The heavy costs of the war—the loss of life, forced recruitment and labor, economic hardships, food requisitions, and other abuses—exacerbated existing tensions between imperial authorities and subject populations, spurring wartime protests and revolts. As discussed in Reading 3, the Chilwembe Rising of 1915 reflected both long-standing frustrations with the colonial regime in British Nyasaland and the loss of African life in the war. This was far from the only act of



South Africans cooking in a British labor camp on the Western Front, 1918

Key Terms:

The Paris Peace Conference

The Pan-African Congress

Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations

Mandate System

Commemorations and Monuments

Centenary of the Great War

resistance. In ports around the continent, periodic strikes arose, while policies of forced recruitment spurred Africans to cross borders, hide from recruiters, or simply desert.

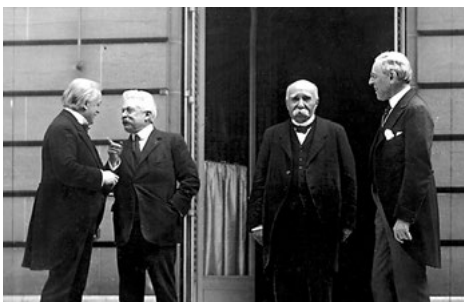
Protests occurred in the British Gold Coast, and from late 1915 to 1917 French officials also faced an anti-colonial revolt waged by an armed coalition of 15,000–20,000 men in the Volta-Bani region (now Burkina Faso and Mali). The Volta-Bani War was suppressed by bombarding and sacking entire villages, and the leaders were jailed or executed. In East Africa, the Adubi War of June and July 1918 in British Nigeria was an uprising against forced labor and taxation introduced by the colonial government. While repressive measures usually brought these movements to an end, they also tended to deepen the anti-colonial sentiments that had spurred them in the first place.



1922 map of Africa, showing the distribution of German colonies to Allied nations

The Paris Peace Conference and the Pan-African Congress

When World War I ended with the Armistice of November 11, 1918, Allied leaders immediately set about drawing up agreements among themselves. In January, US President Woodrow Wilson had issued a general statement of principles called the Fourteen Points, which he had proposed should guide these post-war settlements. Among these was a call for adjustments to colonial claims, which he suggested should be approached in a manner that gave the interests of both



The “Big Four” : Lloyd George (Great Britain), Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (Italy), Georges Clemenceau (France), and Woodrow Wilson (USA)

native peoples and colonists equal weight. Throughout the war, Wilson and Allied leaders had emphasized that the war was being waged to preserve democracy and “self-determination” – the right of people around the world to determine their own fates and independence. For observers around the world, this language had raised hopes for reform, citizenship, and even the potential for post-war independence.

However, when the Paris Peace Conference began in 1919, no African leaders were invited to represent the interests of their people. The major figures

at the talks were the “Big Four” Allied leaders: U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, and Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando. They, together with representatives from 26 other, mostly European countries hashed out the terms of the treaty. While conditions of surrender were drawn up for Germany, the Russian Empire had become the Soviet Union, but the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires had collapsed – their European territories were carved up into new, independent states... might the same be the case for Africa?

In December of 1919, while peace talks were underway, W. E. B. Du Bois was also in Paris. In addition to interviewing veterans, he hoped the war's end would provide an opportunity to make a case for Black people in the Americas and colonized Africa, and that the peace treaties would grant self-determination to colonized peoples. Roused by the gathering of world leaders and discussions of Africa's future without African participation, Du Bois, with Blaise Diagne and others, organized the landmark Pan-African Congress.



The first plenary session of the Paris Peace Conference, held in Paris, France on January 18, 1919

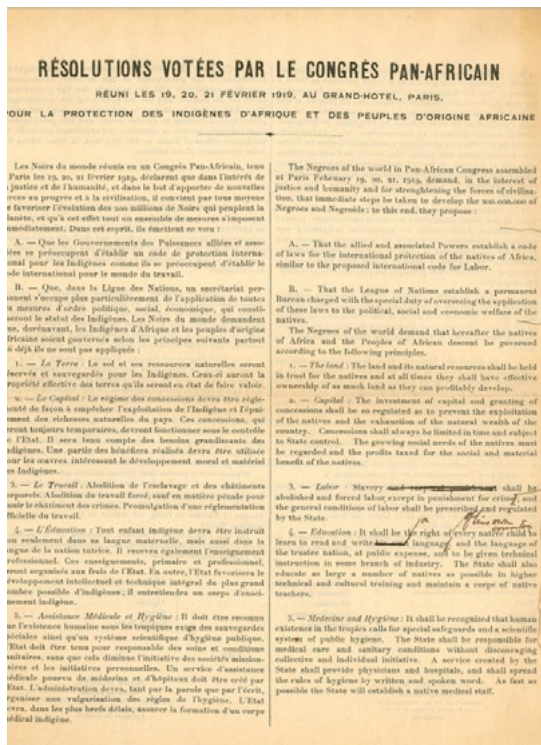
The Pan-African Congress of 1919 was not the first meeting of its kind. In 1900, the First Pan-African Conference had been held in London and Du Bois was a keynote attendee. During the war, new connections between African leaders and soldiers helped to strengthen Pan-African politics, which Du Bois hoped would serve as a basis for effecting change. The conference of 1919 aimed to seize on the moment by bringing together fifty-seven delegates from Africa, the West Indies, and the United States in Paris to discuss their vision for Black people in the post-war order. Though many of the delegates had little if any first-hand knowledge of Africa, the proceedings were covered in depth and with great interest in the African-run newspapers of British West Africa. *The Gold Coast Leader*, for example, published an editorial in July of 1919 titled “The Pan-African Conference,” discussing the proceedings and indicating that the next Pan-African Congress, planned for 1921, “ought to be far more representative than the last one.”



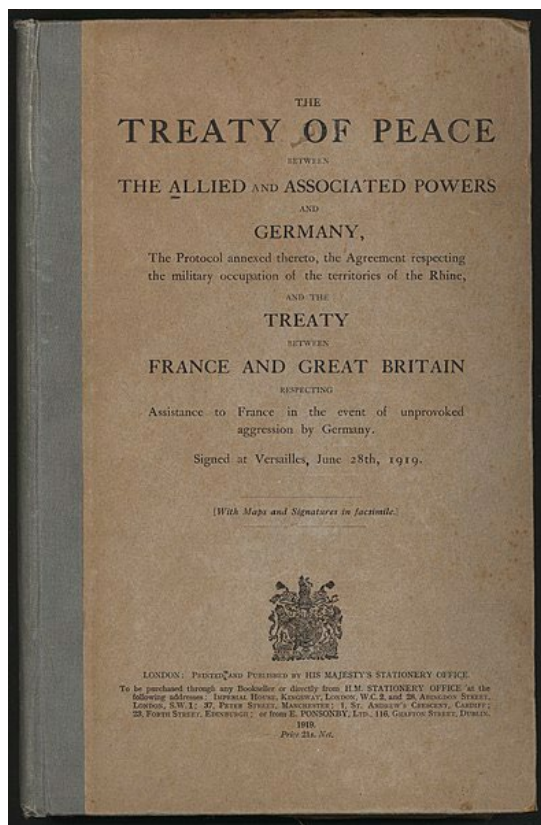
A session of the Pan-African Congress of 1919; W. E. B. Du Bois seated at center.

The Pan-African Congress lasted from February 19 to 21, and included speeches on African development, promoting shared African heritage, the importance of women in the congress, and the use of troops in Europe. At its end, the participants adopted a resolution that called for the drafting of a code of law “for the international protection of the natives of Africa” to be overseen by the League of Nations; an end to economic

exploitation; the abolishment of slavery and capital punishment; education and healthcare; and more participation in government. While congress attendees insisted that African natives should be allowed to participate in their own government, they did not demand African self-determination at the time. But Blaise Diagne and other French African representatives typically focused on the goal of improving conditions in colonies, rather than independence – a point of frustration for Du Bois. Other attendees, including John Archer (the leader of the newly created African Political Union and the first person of African descent elected to the English parliament) had also expressed sharp demands for African self-governance and an end to imperialism.



First page of the Resolutions of the Pan-African Congress, February 21, 1919



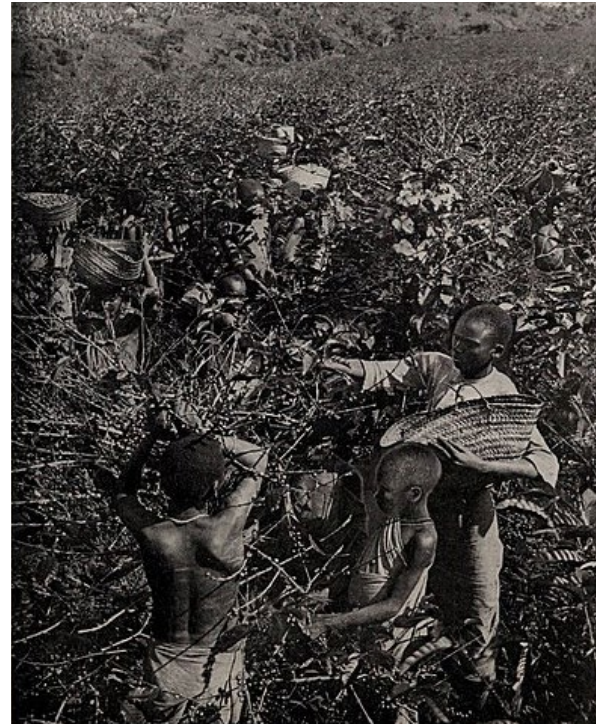
Cover of the Treaty of Versailles, which included the Covenant of the League of Nations

For most participants in the Pan-African Congress, as well as observers in Africa, it was a bitter disappointment when the Paris Peace Conference concluded, and the Treaty of Versailles was issued and signed in June 1919. For African colonies and colonies around the world, the outcome of the talks was far different than it was for the former imperial lands in Europe. As discussed in Reading 3, Germany was required to give up its overseas colonies, which, according to Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, were distributed among Allied leaders according to the “Mandate System.” The transfer of these territories expanded French and British imperial claims dramatically.

The majority of African colonies were placed under the direct administration of Allied leaders—Tanganyika to Britain; the Cameroons and Togoland to France; and Ruanda-Urundi to Belgium—while South West Africa became an integral part of South Africa. Allied leaders claimed that these places were not “ready” for independence and required further development and guidance. The system assumed European political, economic, and cultural superiority. Though Allied leaders were expected to develop the territories for the benefit of its native people and the League of Nations would monitor their activities, no meaningful enforcement mechanism was put in place. Despite now calling these territories “Mandates,” the treaty effectively sanctioned the perpetuation of a system of imperialism that favored white hegemony.

The End of the Great War and Legacies

As the war drew to a close and conferences unfolded in Paris, soldiers and carriers were demobilized and sent home, and imperial authorities reoriented colonial administration back towards “normal” activities. There were ceremonies and parades in Paris that expressed appreciation to the colonial soldiers from all over France’s Empire. French war veterans also received pensions. In Nyasaland (Malawi), although veterans of the carrier corps of the war received some pay, and combat veterans received a small pension, veterans of the East Africa campaign overall noted that white soldiers were paid considerably more and observed that they continued to face poverty, migrant labor, and taxes as they had before the war.



Harvesting coffee in 1920s Nyasaland, East Africa

Many had hoped the war might bring about shifts in colonial dynamics—that service and loyalty would be rewarded, citizenship granted, or perhaps some degree of autonomy achieved. But despite occasional celebrations of colonial troops as defenders in a time of crisis, most subjects did not gain appreciable relief from the racist hierarchical social order that regulated colonial life.

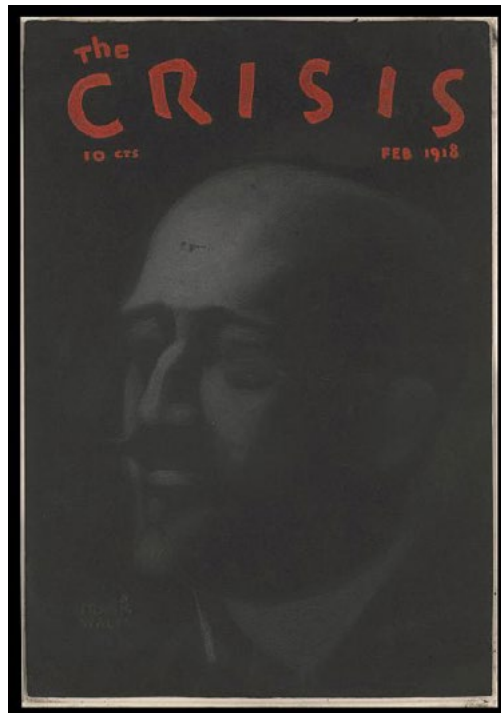
In the case of African Americans as well, it had been deeply frustrating to see racist patterns persist in the American Expeditionary Force, where Black enlisted men were chiefly used in labor battalions, with only a small minority (around 10%) actually seeing combat. Upon their return home, the soldiers that did were celebrated as heroes in parades around the country. In February 1919, the all-Black 369th Infantry Regiment was welcome back by tens of thousands of New Yorkers in a parade from Fifth Avenue into Harlem. To Du Bois and others, they represented the aspirations of African Americans for democracy and full citizenship. However, his hope that participation in the war would lead to an appreciation for Black service and perhaps greater rights back home, and maybe even an end to global empire, proved maddeningly elusive. The Red Summer of 1919 saw a sweep of white racist terrorist acts against African Americans, especially returning Black servicemen.



Black U.S. soldiers at rifle practice behind the front lines in France

Nevertheless, both during the war and after, Du Bois continuously used his position as editor of *The Crisis* to report on and celebrate the military accomplishments of Black soldiers. Despite his disappointment, he pursued the realization of civil rights in the U.S. and the cultivation of a Pan-African community. The draft introduction to his book, *The Black Man and the Wounded World*, was published in *The Crisis* in January 1924.

Though the introduction characterized the war as tragedy and the book was never finished, the work returned to the themes explored in his 1915 article, “The African Roots of War.” The text framed the conflict in light of the history of American and European imperialism and economic exploitation of peoples of African descent. It expressed his effort to capture and preserve their roles and experiences in the Great War and illustrated his commitment to assert African voices as a central part of its history. More broadly, the war marked a pivotal moment in the 20th-century civil rights movement and shaped the political consciousness of African American soldiers and civilians, who continued activism into the postwar period.



Cover illustration of the February 1918 issue of *The Crisis*, with a portrait of W. E. B. Du Bois



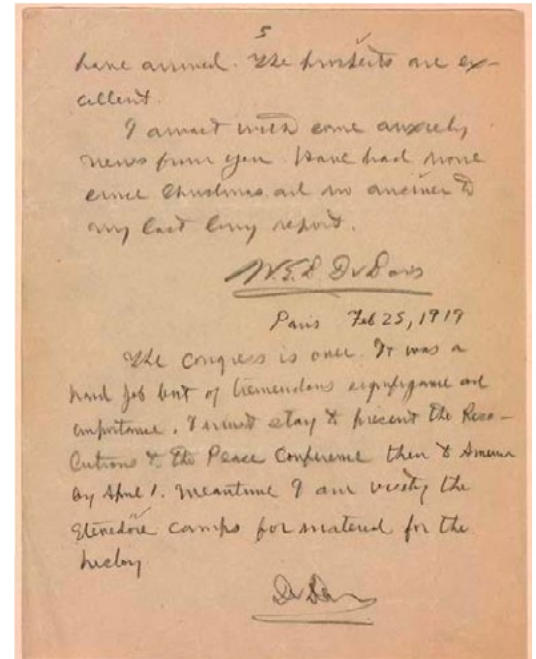
Sol Plaatje, c. 1900 with a portrait of W. E. B. Du Bois

For people in Africa, another critical consequence of the war was that it fostered growing demands for colonial reform and participation in the processes of government. In the interwar era, political and nationalist activism was most prevalent among African members of the middle-class and elites. But even for others, the initial hopes for the war—that it might increase people’s rights or autonomy, or that service would be rewarded with pay or land, or that citizenship might be granted—didn’t disappear. For Africans around the continent, the juxtaposition of the war experience with the rhetoric of democracy and self-determination provoked a new skepticism about European rule, giving way to a readiness to forthrightly

challenge colonial policies, even if full-blown independence campaigns did not come to fruition until after the Second World War.

South African activists such as Sol Plaatje—whom you met at the beginning of this module—renewed their campaigns for attention to the scandal of land alienation that had occurred in 1913 with the Native Lands Act. The National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) insisted on being heard regarding Britain’s exploitative controls of the lucrative cocoa and palm oil trades. In Kenya, returning African war combatants and carriers saw their homelands being handed over to white war veterans, energizing a new generation to organize for African rights.

The Pan-African Congresses continued too—meetings held in London, Brussels, and Paris in 1921; London and Lisbon in 1923; and New York City in 1927 promoted the preservation of Black cultural identity and rights and drew attention to global racism and its impacts. African elites in particular increasingly framed their experiences as part of a continental and global story, which strengthened their broader critiques of colonialism. By the fifth Pan-African Congress in 1945 (attended by Du Bois and many future leaders of post-colonial African states), the forum served as basis of solidarity that helped to mobilize liberation movements in the wake of World War II. Thus, while the immediate conditions of colonial subjects did not seem to change much in the years following the Great War, the immorality and violence of colonialism had been laid bare.



W. E. B. Du Bois to the NAACP, January 12, 1919, reporting that, “The Congress is over. It was a hard job but of tremendous significance and importance.”

Conclusion: Remembering the Great War

As discussed at the outset of this module, while gaps remain, the scholarship on Africa and colonial subjects’ contributions to the Great War has expanded dramatically in recent decades. From the 1980s on, interest in African soldiers and carriers and their roles in both the African and European theaters, works on everyday people using interviews, and the number of studies on topics including gender and civilians have grown. But beyond scholarly literature, much of what the public in North America and Europe know about the war still largely centers on Europe.

World War I monument in Mombasa, Kenya to Askari and carriers



In the war's aftermath, commemorations including parades, wreath laying's, and monuments provided some acknowledgement of the contributions of African and African American forces. In addition to the parades mentioned above, several monuments were constructed in French West Africa in the years shortly after the war—one in Dakar (which has been moved twice since its construction) another in Saint Louis in Senegal, and one in Bamako in French Sudan (today Mali). In regions of British East Africa, a similar story of commemoration unfolded. The Askari monument in Mombasa (along with similar monuments in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam) was also built in the 1920s to acknowledge the role of African soldiers in the First World War. However, in colonial settings, these post-war commemorations to fallen soldiers typically served as a form of imperial propaganda. The construction of imposing statues on pedestals tended to glorify the idea of empire more than the soldiers and carriers themselves. Monuments of this era also often reflected the inequality between white and black soldiers through their placement in colonial squares, as well as their design and portrayals of troops.

While remembrances and monuments have emerged in the years since, the centenary commemorations of the Great War, from 2014 to 2018, provoked new attention to colonial subjects' contributions. Though overshadowed by events celebrating European and white American sacrifices, the anniversary of the war's end in Europe on November 11, 1918 (known as Armistice Day) was commemorated in Africa by Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Somaliland, South Africa, and Nigeria (whose day of remembrance was January 15, the end of the Biafran War).

Meanwhile in Britain, commemorations included calls to honor the service of Africans, Indians, and Caribbeans who fought in the war, and in 2017, the African and Caribbean War Memorial in Brixton, London, was unveiled—the first monument in the country to the more than two million servicemen and women in both World Wars.

In France, the need to acknowledge the role of the men who served in World War I from Indochina, Madagascar, Algeria, Morocco, and French West Africa also



African and Caribbean Memorial in London, England

came to national attention 2018. As part of its events, the presidents of France and Mali laid a wreath at the “Black Army” monument to West African soldiers in the city of Reims, north-east of Paris. The original monument from 1924 (identical to the monument in Bamako) was removed by the Nazis during World War II and its replacement completed in 2013.

Monuments commemorating the sacrifices of African American soldiers were also built throughout the 20th century, particularly in the U.S. and in France. In fact, before they had even left for home at the war's end, the 372nd Infantry raised funds for the creation of a monument to remember members of their unit killed in action near Monthois, France. Others include a monument to the 371st at Bussy Farm, and a monument placed in 1997 to the 369th at Sechault in northern France. In 2006, a replica of the memorial at Sechault was unveiled in New York City. During the centennial celebrations, exhibits and commemorations were held around the United States, including an exhibit titled "We Return Fighting" at the National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington, D.C.



Ceremony at the "Black Army" Monument in Reims, 2013 (above); Monument to the 369th Infantry in New York (below)



Alongside monuments and commemorations, attempts to reckon with delayed honors, denied citizenship, and pay have also come to attention in recent years. In 1998, Abdoulaye N'Diaye, the last surviving Senegalese Tirailleur from World War I passed away the day before he was to belatedly receive the French Legion of Honour. With no World War I veterans left, in 2010 France granted full military pensions to 30,000 surviving colonial World War II veterans from Africa alongside their European counterparts and in 2017, French officials held ceremonies to begin granting 28 veterans citizenship, of which 23 were Senegalese. In 2015 in the United States, Sgt. Henry Johnson of the 369th Infantry Regiment was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, along with the Medal for Valor, New York's highest military honor.

Yet, while these remembrances illustrate a degree of growing acknowledgement and attention to the experiences of Africa and the African diaspora in the First World War, they remain far outweighed by attention to European and white American experiences. In fact, in 2021, British authorities were forced to apologize after an investigation into the centenary commemorations found that African and Indian soldiers were either unequally or not commemorated at all, due to "pervasive racism." Public attention, in both commemorations and education on the war remains focused on European narratives. Over 100 years on, no living veterans of World War I remain. And while

communities, families, and others may continue to carry their stories, we should consider why these places, people, and experiences are often excluded from the broader picture of the Great War. Moreover, we should consider how popular contemporary understandings and narratives of the war change and are enriched when we make greater efforts to learn about, share, and reflect on the war from these perspectives.

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Cooking in a labour camp, Western Front, during World War I (likely the South African Native Labour Contingent, a part of the British Labour Corps), January 1, 1919, Public Domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cooking_in_a_labour_camp_Western_Front_during_World_War_I._This_photograph_shows_four_men_cooking_and_drinking_soup_from_one_of_the_army_outside_catering_boilers._They_are_all_probably_members_of_\(4687898545\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cooking_in_a_labour_camp_Western_Front_during_World_War_I._This_photograph_shows_four_men_cooking_and_drinking_soup_from_one_of_the_army_outside_catering_boilers._They_are_all_probably_members_of_(4687898545).jpg)

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Council of Four at the World War I Paris Peace Conference, May 27, 1919, U. S. Signal Corps, Public Domain, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Big_four.jpg

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Harvesting Coffee, Nyasaland, Africa, photo from *The Encyclopedia of Food*, by Artemas Ward, 1923, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harvesting_coffee,_Nyasaland,_Africa,_photo_from_The_Encyclopedia_of_Food_by_Artemas_Ward.jpg
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Sol Plaatje, c. 1900, photograph from his 1915 book *Native Life in South Africa*, P.S. King and Son Ltd, London, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sol_Plaatje_002.jpg

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