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The Luther Skald is published twice annually, spring and fall, and is intended to provide a venue for outstanding student history writing, which may also serve as a model for students working on history essays during their undergraduate careers. Although Luther’s History faculty recommend student work for publication, The Luther Skald accepts submissions, in the forms of book reviews and essays, from Luther alumni and current students. Manuscript submissions should follow the style guidelines established in the American Historical Review and should be sent to the editor. Manuscripts received by January 1 will be considered for the spring issue, and those received by August 1 will be considered for the fall issue. The Luther Skald will also print, from time to time, news of the honors and achievements of History students, faculty, and alumni.
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“THEIR OLD PROPENSITY FOR RAIDING CATTLE WAS, HOWEVER, THEIR UNDOING”: MAASAI PARTICIPATION IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN EAST AFRICA

Race L. Fisher, ‘19

Introduction

The First World War (1914-1918) earned its designation as a worldwide conflict as European powers drew on their African and Asian colonies for soldiers and laborers. British and German colonialism in the late nineteenth century set the stage for an East African theater of war, where the British recruited native Africans to fight under the command of white officers for sole control of the region. British recruitment of Africans was informed by the theory of martial races, which purported that certain cultures or ethnic groups were better suited for warfare. Among the East African ‘tribes’ regarded as unfavorable for military service were the Maasai.¹ Despite the fearful reputation of the Maasai warriors, William Lloyd-Jones, an officer in the British King’s African Rifles, observed that “their old propensity for raiding cattle was, however, their undoing.”² From the British perspective, the Maasai’s foremost desire to increase their cattle stocks barred them from ever becoming good soldiers. Although the Maasai aided British war efforts in East Africa to a small extent, they were generally absent from both labor and combat roles. This paper argues that pre-colonial circumstances and colonial interactions explain the minimal participation of the Maasai in the First World War as stemming from the development of cultural conservatism. Pre-colonial disasters as well as British exploitation and suppression of Maasai culture spurred cultural conservatism that reinforced and intensified the

¹ An alternative spelling of Maasai, Masai, was common among the British in the colonial period and will be used in primary source quotations throughout this paper.
value of cattle in accordance with the Maasai’s traditional, pastoral way of life. British perceptions of the Maasai as poor soldiers were informed by the Maasai’s previous employment in early colonial punitive expeditions and wartime experiences that reinforced both perceptions and realities of the Maasai’s preoccupation with pastoralism.

**Historiography**

This paper engages in scholarly discussion on British-Maasai colonial relations and Maasai participation in the First World War. Scholarly works on East African colonialism provide context for understanding the Maasai’s relationship to the British colonial system. *The Maasai and the British 1895-1905; the Origins of an Alliance* by Richard Waller (1976) is a valuable study of British-Maasai relations in the early colonial period. Waller argues that this relationship resulted in the Maasai’s alienation from the British colonial administration and spurred the development of cultural conservatism. Dorothy L. Hodgson’s *Once Intrepid Warriors* discusses the changes in Maasai gender relations and ethnic identities due to British colonial development projects. Although this study overlooks British-Maasai relations in the First World War, it reinforces the idea that British colonialism rooted the Maasai more so into their patriarchal, pastoral culture. This paper will fill a historiographical gap by drawing a connection between Maasai cultural conservatism preceding and following World War I to the war itself.

Information on the Maasai’s participation in the war is derived from short and scattered references made across numerous scholarly works on the First World War in East Africa. From Brian Gardner’s *German East* in 1963 to Edward Paice’s *World War I: The African Front* in 2008, historians have noted the Maasai’s services to the British as intelligence scouts. Additionally, Byron Farwell’s *The Great War in Africa* (1989) mentions Maasai participation in
Major J. J. Drought’s Skin Corps, which conducted guerilla-style raids. These references are scarce and lacking in analysis, however they do provide valuable insight into Maasai contribution to the war effort which is often overshadowed by their aversion to recruitment and poor reputation. Maasai participation in scouting and raiding capacities complemented traditional Maasai styles of warfare, and therefore reinforces this paper’s argument that the Maasai’s lack of interest in modern soldiering stemmed from cultural conservatism within their society.

Scholars of Africa and the World Wars such as Michelle Moyd and Anthony Kirk-Greene have noted that despite the Maasai’s warrior society based around cattle-rustling, the group was regarded by both the Germans and the British as making poor soldiers, averse to any discipline. These scholars argue that due to these perceptions by European recruiters, alongside the Maasai’s general refusal to enlist, Maasai participation in the *Schutztruppe* and King’s African Rifles (KAR) was minimal. The brief mentions of the Maasai being undesirable for recruitment provides insight into European perceptions of the Maasai, however questions regarding how these ideas were formed remain unanswered. This paper will argue that British perceptions of the Maasai during the war stem of Maasai cultural conservatism that developed before and during the colonial period. Modern warfare did not appeal to Maasai motivations to acquire cattle, therefore they avoided attempts at recruitment.

**Sources**

This paper is based off of research on Maasai participation in the First World War in both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources engaged by this paper include numerous books and diaries written by British administrators and military officers from the beginning of the colonial period through the First World War. Among these men are Frederick John Jackson, William Lloyd-Jones, and Richard Meinertzhagen. In their writings, these men display a clear
sense of racial and cultural superiority. It is important to understand this bias as it is essential to fully understand the British perspective of the Maasai and the colonial developments that took place in East Africa. While perceptions of these experiences are to a degree informed by their inherent biases, this fact does not totally invalidate their personal experiences, those of their colleagues, nor the insight into the period and events that they bring. One unfortunate drawback of this research is the general absence of published primary sources providing the Maasai’s perspective on their wartime participation. Secondary sources on East Africa and the Maasai read alongside firsthand British accounts provide adequate insight into the Maasai’s positions, feelings, and reactions in these contexts.

**The Maasai and Cattle**

The Maasai are an East African ethnic group who inhabit the areas of modern-day central and southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. From the pre-colonial period through the World Wars, the group lived a semi-nomadic, pastoralist lifestyle, primarily based around cattle herding, husbandry, and rustling. The Maasai’s economy was rooted in its cattle-based pastoralism. Cattle meat, milk, and blood provided sustenance and nutrition; hides were used for clothing, bedding, and weaponry; and dung was used as a building material. The importance of cattle for the Maasai is not only material, but also spiritual. In traditional Maasai religious belief, the god Ngai or Enkai gave them all the cattle on earth. Being a gift from the divine, consuming cow milk and meat became a spiritual act. All of the Maasai’s basic needs, both physical and spiritual, were met by their cattle.

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Given the importance of cattle in all areas of Maasai life, cattle herding, trading, and raiding constituted essential livelihoods for the men of Maasai society. Maasai society was strongly patriarchal, with male elders holding all decision-making positions. Younger males were placed into age-set groups that determined their role in society. Young Maasai men between the ages of 12-25 fell into the ‘warrior,’ or ilmurran, age-set. These warriors wielded spears, clubs, and shields to raid cattle from neighboring groups. Raiding was a means to not only acquire cattle and increase one’s social standing, but also to display political and military strength gained through one’s great cattle-wealth. Thus neighboring groups such as the Kamba and Nandi often fell victim to the cattle rustling of young Maasai warriors.\(^5\) This practice of raiding was also supported by the Maasai’s religious traditions, in that because the divine had given all cattle on earth to the Maasai, they were justified in rustling them from other groups.\(^6\) Maasai social and political organization was therefore built on its relationship to cattle.

**Maasai in the Pre-Colonial Period**

The base of the Maasai’s society and economy was shattered in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, in a period known to the Maasai as “When the Cattle Died.”\(^7\) The Rift Valley, the historic homeland of the Maasai, was struck by famine, disease, and war. In 1883 the Maasai’s herds were plagued with bovine pleuropneumonia (BPP), and again in 1891 with rinderpest, causing the deaths of a large number of cattle, shaking the foundations of the Maasai’s economy. In 1892 smallpox struck the Maasai themselves, wiping out a significant

portion of their population. The famine, disease, and loss of lives caused a breakdown in the
Maasai social and economic structure that resulted in civil war among different Maasai groups,
not only to gain political control in the face of the social breakdown, but also to replenish cattle
stocks that were lost to disease. Roland Anthony Oliver wrote in his *History of East Africa*,
“[m]uch of [the civil war’s] substance lay in conflict for cattle. … Cattle, more than any other
possession, were both the livelihood and the ambition of the Masai. … The instinctive reaction
of the Masai was to seek to make good their losses at the expense either of their neighbors or of
their fellows.”

Although some Maasai did choose to adopt other lifestyles, becoming hunter-gathers or joining their agricultural neighbors, the great shock of this period against the
traditional Maasai social and economic structure caused them to cling more desperately to their
pastoral way of life.

By the advent of European colonialism in East Africa in the early 1890s, the disease and
conflict had subsided and the Maasai had once again stabilized their society and economy.
Dorothy Louise Hodgson, a renowned historian of the Maasai, suggests that Maasai experiences
of the pre-colonial period contributed to their cultural conservatism. She writes in her
authoritative volume *Once Intrepid Warriors* how “one might argue that the survivors of the
disasters who returned to pastoralism as a livelihood more fiercely embraced their identity as
pastoralists.”

Hodgson therefore posits that the disasters of the pre-colonial period stimulated
cultural conservatism among the Maasai. This motion toward conservatism was further
developed in the colonial period and provides insight into Maasai participation in the First World
War.

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**British Colonization—An Informal Alliance**

Before the British established the East African Protectorate in what is now Kenya in 1895, they needed to subdue hostile ‘native’ groups to assert their colonial control. The Maasai maintained a strong reputation “savagery and violence” in Africa due to the warriors’ cattle-rustling activities. When this reputation came to British attention, an informal alliance with the Maasai was sought. Richard Waller writes in his study of early British-Maasai relations the British view that “antagonizing the Maasai might lead to a collapse of British control but a little manipulation might turn the ‘greatest menace of East Africa’ into an important British asset.”

The British therefore decided to make the Maasai warrior an ally rather than an enemy, the path to which laid in the Maasai’s desire to acquire more cattle following the period of disasters. Primary sources do not indicate the British possessing a clear understanding of the Maasai’s preoccupation with cattle beyond that of cattle being the base of their economy and society. This ignorance of the Maasai’s complex relationship with cattle did not, however, prevent the British from seizing the opportunity to exploit this phenomenon for their own colonial ends.

Preying on the Maasai’s desire for cattle and their culture of cattle-rustling, the British hired the Maasai as caravan guards and as auxiliaries for punitive expeditions against other African groups. Waller writes how Maasai warriors were recruited for punitive expeditions on the basis that they would be given a share of the spoils, namely cattle; “[the Maasai] were allowed to keep a substantial portion of the captured stock, which was shared out after the expedition.” Between 1893-5 ten punitive raids were conducted with the Maasai against

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11 Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya*, 56.
13 The punitive expeditions were military actions taken by the British to pacify or subdue African groups in order to place them under their colonial administration and create space for white British settlers.
various African groups “in which some 500 head of cattle and 18,000 goats were taken.”

Maasai participation in the British punitive expeditions was intimately tied to the disasters of the pre-colonial period. The Maasai saw employment by the British as a means to recover lost cattle stocks. The British, on the other hand, viewed employing the Maasai as the pacification of a potential security threat for the developing colony. The British exploited as well as encouraged the Maasai’s traditional practice of cattle-raiding for the purpose of colonial development.

**British Perceptions of the Maasai in the Punitive Expeditions**

Maasai participation in the early British punitive expeditions not only reinforced their traditional way of life, but it also provided the opportunity for close contact between the British and Maasai, from which perceptions about the Maasai as ill-disciplined warriors were first formed and held over to the First World War. Sir Frederick John Jackson (1859-1929), a British administrator in East Africa wrote how:

> [o]pinion was divided on [the Maasai’s] merits, even by military officers, not only as soldiers, but as spearmen and allies. As soldiers they were not of the right temperament. Up to a certain point they were good, but they had no ambition except to acquire wealth, sufficient to enable them to retire, and revert to savagery and an idle life as soon as possible.¹⁶

Jackson believed that the Maasai’s deep cultural ties to pastoralism, which he viewed with contempt, caused their personal motivations to lie only in the acquisition of wealth—which for the Maasai was cattle—rendering them unfit for modern armies where fighting for payment in the form of currency, employment, and patriotism were standard. Jackson explained further how:

> [t]o any military officers the employment of the Masai as levies was a source of irritation and annoyance, and it was regarded by some as a reflection on their own men as scouts and in mobility generally; and it is they who have lost no opportunity of calling attention

¹⁵ Ibid., 537.
to any hesitation or refusal of the Masai to enter patches of forest, in which enemy bow-and-arrow men were concealed, without the support of a few rifles.\textsuperscript{17}

In this instance the Maasai’s unwillingness to blindly follow orders, and perhaps having a unique awareness of their enemies’ tactics, was met with much frustration by British officers. Although Jackson himself was sympathetic to the Maasai in this particular example, it shows the frustrations and lack of discipline British officers perceived.

William Lloyd-Jones and Richard Meinertzhagen, both British officers in the King’s African Rifles (KAR), offer their views of the Maasai in their personal experience with them on punitive expeditions, where examples of the Maasai’s incapacity for discipline was more pronounced. Lloyd-Jones wrote in his history of the KAR:

The Masai company certainly made an excellent appearance on parade, but they did not take kindly to discipline, though they would do anything for officers whom they liked and who understood them. On one occasion only were they used on active service, and then against their hereditary enemies the Nandi. Their old propensity for raiding cattle was, however, their undoing, and a whole section of the company was ambushed after they had abandoned their rifles in the heat of the chase. Hampered by their unaccustomed uniform and equipment, they were no match for the naked Nandi warriors, who speared them to a man.\textsuperscript{18}

In this example, Lloyd-Jones highlights the Maasai’s ‘propensity for raiding cattle’ as the root of their indiscipline. This instance of insubordination led to the death of Maasai soldiers, however an experience by Meinertzhagen shows a more violent side of Maasai indiscipline. Before embarking on a raid, Meinertzhagen wrote, “I issued an order to my company and to the Masai Levies that if any man was guilty of killing women or children he would be shot. My men are mere savages in the laws and customs of war, and the Masai are bloodthirsty villains to whom the killing of women and children means nothing.”\textsuperscript{19} Despite this clear order, Meinertzhagen

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 200-1. A levy (pl. levies) is synonymous with a military conscript, recruit, soldier, etc.
\textsuperscript{18}Lloyd-Jones, \textit{K.A.R.}, 76.
detailed how “I saw two of my men and three Masai in the act of dragging a woman from a hut, and the body of a small boy on the ground, one of the Levies being in the act of withdrawing his spear from the little boy. Another levy was leading a small girl by the hand … he paid no attention to me and killed the child.”  

Meinertzhagen proceeded to make true of his earlier warning and shot the Maasai who participated in the murders. Although this example is given from the perspective of a British officer, it sheds light on a concerning degree of the Maasai’s indiscipline documented during their military operations that continued to shape British perspectives and influence British recruitment of the Maasai.

The relationship between the British and the Maasai in the early colonial period was mutually beneficial. With the help of the Maasai, the British were able to ‘pacify’ African groups who resisted colonial rule through punitive expeditions and the Maasai were able to replenish their cattle stocks that were depleted by the pre-colonial disasters with the spoils. This relationship reinforced and encouraged the Maasai’s traditional cattle-rustling way of life, and therefore further developed the cultural conservatism within Maasai society. This close relationship between British officers and Maasai auxiliaries in the punitive expeditions caused the British to develop negative opinions about the Maasai’s capabilities as soldiers. The British saw the Maasai as being hopelessly caught in their ‘savage’ and ‘primitive’ way of life where their only motivation was acquiring more cattle, which often led to them disobeying officers’ orders. Both the development of Maasai cultural conservatism and negative British perceptions of the Maasai’s soldiering capabilities set the precedent for the Maasai’s limited recruitment for military service in the First World War.

20 Ibid.
The Maasai Moves (1904-1913)

With the assistance of the Maasai, the British ‘subdued’ the native population of East Africa and established the East African Protectorate in 1895. The formal establishment of the Protectorate opened the door for white British settlers. The most desireable land for the white settlers was that of the Rift Valley, the historical homeland of the Maasai. From the British perspective, a relatively small number of Maasai were monopolizing premium farmland due to their pastoral lifestyle. Lloyd-Jones explains how:

[i]t appears that in order to graze large herds properly it is often necessary to abandon a pasture for a considerable period. For this reason a cattle owning tribe probably requires more land than officials, however impartial and sympathetic but unskilled in cattle lore, would imagine. The troubles between the authorities and the tribe were always due to this question of grazing. … It is a complicated question of which, I fancy, the solution has not yet been found.21

Perceptions of the Maasai as a violent and savage people remained among the British and contributed to the conversation on what the British colonial administration was going to do about this troublesome group. Lord Hindlip, a British traveler and hunter in East Africa, provided the solution to Lloyd-Jones’s ‘complicated question’ in his history of the region, British East Africa. Past, Present, and Future: “The solution of the Masai problem is not hard. All parties concerned seem to agree that they must be placed on a reserve.”22 In 1904 Sir Donald Stewart, the High Commissioner of the British East African Protectorate negotiated the Masai Agreement. The agreement ceded possession of the Rift Valley to the British government in return for the creation of two exclusive reserves, the southern Kajiado and the northern Laikipia.23 With this agreement, the Rift Valley became open to white settlement and the perceived Maasai threat

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23 Oliver, History of East Africa, 35-6.
could be restricted. When white settlers came to demand Laikipia for settlement as well, a
Second Masai Agreement was negotiated in 1911.\textsuperscript{24} As a result, in 1912 the Maasai who
inhabited Laikipia were moved onto the Kajiado reserve.\textsuperscript{25}

While the agreement benefited the British colonial system by providing more land for
white settlers, Oliver writes “the Masai regarded themselves as badly treated, and they turned
away from European contact and reverted to a narrow tribalism. Their reserves became
overcrowded and overgrazed, and attempts by European veterinary and administrative officers to
better their lot met with steady opposition and distrust.”\textsuperscript{26} The agreements made few attempts to
integrate the Maasai into the British colonial system, rather opting to isolate them from British
settlers to avoid conflict. British attempts to promote agriculturalism among the Maasai failed.
Lloyd-Jones wrote how “[the Maasai] were organised on military lines and could not, or would
not, turn their spears into ploughshares or shepherds’ crooks.”\textsuperscript{27} The Maasai’s experience with
the British colonial administration and white settler occupation of their historical homeland
resulted in “large-scale alienation.”\textsuperscript{28} British attempts to discourage pastoralism—which was
intimately tied to cattle-raiding and an internal security threat—were met with contempt and
resentment and fed into the Maasai’s conservative impulses.

\textbf{Eve of the First World War}

On the eve of the First World War, Maasai cultural conservatism had developed both by
pre-colonial disasters and interactions with the British colonial administration. The historian
John Iliffe wrote in his \textit{A Modern History of Tanganyika} that by 1914, nearly one percent of

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 218.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 343-4.
\textsuperscript{27} W. Lloyd-Jones, \textit{Havash!}, 157.
\textsuperscript{28} Oliver, \textit{History of East Africa}, 50.
modern-day Tanzania’s land was occupied by Europeans. He continues to explain how “the chief losers had been the pastoralists, especially the Masai confined to their ‘ludicrously inadequate’ reserve.”\(^29\) Although limited spatially to their reserves, the Maasai’s cattle-based economy was prosperous in the pre-war period. The Maasai’s participation in British punitive expeditions and their knowledge of cattle husbandry allowed their stocks to replenish to a more than comfortable level. Lloyd-Jones admits, although not without crediting the British for their prosperity, that “[the Maasai’s] herds have been greatly increased during the *Pax Britannica*, firstly by additional herds received from the Government in payment for services rendered as levies during various punitive expeditions, and secondly by the skillful management of their breeding stock.”\(^30\)

Although the Maasai had “profited handsomely from punitive expeditions,” their use as auxiliaries was banned in 1908,\(^31\) and thus the Maasai’s mutually beneficial relationship with the British had come to an end.

With the stabilization of their society and economy, the Maasai no longer had much interest in cooperating with the British, especially given their treatment in the Maasai moves, which they regarded as wholly unfair. Waller explains this new development in Maasai-British relations, stating how:

> [t]he Maasai were left with a much reduced interest in British rule. They themselves were less in need of British support. The civil war was over. They had survived the lean years of the 1890s and the herds had recovered… Although the Maasai were willing to acknowledge the help given to them in times of need, they saw that the British had less to offer in times of prosperity.\(^32\)


\(^32\) Ibid., 550.
Although the informal alliance between the Maasai and British had ended, the attitudes and perceptions the two groups developed toward one another persisted into the First World War.

**Maasai Participation in the First World War**

The historiography of Maasai participation in World War I tends to emphasize their general absence from the primary colonial armies: the British King’s African Rifles and the German *Schutztruppe*. Although these assessments are not invalid, they do tend to overlook the ways in which the Maasai did participate in and contribute to the colonial war effort in East Africa. Although the Maasai actively avoided recruitment into the KAR and Carrier Corps, they provided the regiments with “large quantities of livestock” for rations instead.\(^3\) The Maasai also constituted the sole units of Lord Delamere’s Maasai Scouts. Lord Delamere, “mightiest lion hunter in Africa,” was one of the first British volunteers to gather forces for the war in East Africa.\(^4\) He is said to have “possessed exceptional knowledge and influence with the warlike tribe of the Masai,” and had his scouts perform various intelligence and scouting operations, tasks which the Maasai were regarded as being exceptionally good at. Lloyd-Jones recounts in his *K.A.R.* how “[i]n the early days of hostilities the young Masai warriors had performed valuable service as scouts and brought in remarkably accurate information. Parties of them had penetrated far behind the German lines, and even suffered severe casualties from the German machine-guns on several occasions.”\(^5\) The service of the Maasai as scouts was therefore much valued and highly regarded among British officers in East Africa.

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Another notable Maasai unit was Major J. J. Drought’s Skin Corps. The Skin Corps was named due to their notable uniforms, or rather the lack thereof, and were “mostly wild Masai, who wanted no pay but expected to be able to rustle their enemies’ cattle.”36 Drought’s Skin Corps was “particularly adept” at guerilla, raid-style attacks against the Germans,37 as this style of warfare related more closely to their traditional styles of combat rather than the modern, rifle-bearing operations of the British. Drought and his Skin Corps worked with Meinertzhagen, who wrote of a particular battle on Christmas Day, 1915, where the regiment ambushed a German camp, killed all the enemy, and ate their Christmas dinner.38

Mentioning the examples of Maasai contributions to the British war effort in East Africa does justice to the Maasai by acknowledging their often overlooked participation in the war, however it also shows the ways in which the British continued to exploit the Maasai’s particular traditional skill set for their own advantage. The Maasai’s unrivaled propensity for navigation made them highly respected guards and messengers in the early colonial period. Jackson wrote how:

[The Maasai] had a very good, not to say remarkable eye, for country, and a retentive memory for landmarks, and were in consequence unequalled as guides. They had no superiors as ‘runners’ between stations, and were almost uncanny in their capacity for finding anyone on safari, if given a letter in a cleft stick and a few days’ rations, and told to go off and find him, with perhaps only the direction as an indication of his whereabouts to guide them.39

36 Ibid., 199-200.
38 Ibid., 200.
39 Jackson, Early Days in East Africa, 200.
With this knowledge, it makes sense as to why the Maasai were sought after for scouting units. The Maasai accepted this work as it did not conflict with their traditional pastoral values and roles in society.

As demonstrated through their participation and success in the Skin Corps, the Maasai’s capacity for cattle-raiders—the very thing the British wished to mitigate—made them incredibly useful in defeating German forces in the East African bush. This use of the Maasai by the British, not at all unlike that of the early punitive expeditions, reinforced their traditional way of life. Any resentment or alienation felt by the Maasai toward the British was outweighed by the opportunity to raid cattle. Such an opportunity was very appealing to young Maasai warriors who wished to prove themselves in battle and acquire wealth. Despite their attempts to suppress Maasai culture, the British again capitalized on it for their own ends and further validated the Maasai’s motion toward cultural conservatism.

Maasai Non-Participation in the First World War

Although the Maasai were present in British units during the First World War, their participation was still very limited. The qualities that made the Maasai well-suited for work as scouts and raiders—those that tied them closely to their tradition of pastoralism—were also the root cause of their poor discipline and aversion to recruitment in the formal colonial armies.

The Maasai show a limited participation in the KAR during the First World War. In an interview by Dorothy Louise Hodgson, Wanga, a Maasai woman, “was six years old during the outbreak of World War I and remembered seeing German and then British soldiers pass through on horseback. Men of the Iltareto age-set (warriors from 1911-1929) were forcibly conscripted into the war as fighters and porters.” Wanga stated in the interview how “they were forced to
go, it was a very difficult thing.”**40** This first-hand account of a Maasai in the war shows how the group was not free from the forceful conscription of the British and therefore were present in the KAR and Carrier Corps to a small degree. The Maasai were regarded as a ‘warrior tribe’ by the British and therefore were expected to enthusiastically join the British military. It is for this reason that the Maasai’s aversion to recruitment was met with much frustration by the British. Lloyd-Jones explains how in the British recruitment of native Africans, “difficulty was encountered only in the case of the Masai. … They voluntarily presented gifts of cattle for rations for the troops, but when pressure was further exerted, certain sections of the warriors betook themselves to their fastness and defied the orders of the Government.”**41** Like many other African groups, the Maasai fled from their own villages to avoid British conscription.

In addition to refusing recruitment into the KAR, the Maasai also refused to participate in the British Carrier Corps. Lloyd-Jones first mentions this phenomenon in his history of the KAR, explaining how “The nomadic warrior races, such as the Nandi, the Masai and kindred tribes, will not carry loads, thereby rendering themselves exceedingly unpopular with the settler element of Kenya Colony.”**42** The Maasai’s refusal to join the KAR as well as the Carrier Corps seemingly caused much frustration among British recruiters, as they needed volunteers and in their eyes the Maasai were not contributing in any capacity. Lloyd-Jones later explains the reasoning for the Maasai’s refusal to join the Carrier Corps: “the young men of the tribe considered it beneath their dignity to perform work which, according to their traditions, was fit only for women or coolies.”**43** This quotation provides insight into gender roles in Maasai society. The traditional male occupations of men were those of the cattle herder and raider. The

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**40** Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors*, 94-5.


**42** Ibid., 147.

**43** Ibid., 175-6.
Maasai men regarded labor tasks such as those of the porters in the Carrier Corps as emasculating for them to partake in. The strengthening of conservative sentiments within Maasai society since the 1890s meant the reinforcement of traditional conceptions of masculinity, and therefore the prospect of a Maasai warrior aiding the British war effort in a capacity his culture regarded as feminine was highly unlikely.\(^{44}\)

The Maasai were scarce among the KAR as the prospect of modern soldiering was not appealing to them for several reasons. Historian of Africa Timothy Parsons explains how \(\text{“} [\text{the Maasai retained enough land to preserve their precolonial pastoral economy;} \text{”} \) \(\text{“} [\text{they] had the luxury of rejecting military service because their precolonial pastoral economy remained largely intact.} \text{”} \)\(^{45}\) Rather than being integrated into the colonial economy, the Maasai’s cultural conservatism and isolation on the reserves allowed them to retain their traditional cattle-based system, which was flourishing by the beginning of the First World War. Whereas some African groups sought recruitment in return for a steady wage, education, and a job in the colonial administration, the Maasai were in no need of assistance from the colonial system.

In addition to economic factors, the Maasai aversion to the KAR is likely due to cultural factors as well. As discussed, the Maasai participation in the Masai Scouts and Skin Corps was due to those regiment’s particular styles of work and warfare being closer to traditional forms of Maasai combat. They complimented Maasai occupations and conceptions of masculinity, they offered wealth in the form of cattle, and they provided young warriors with battle glory. Maasai participation in these capacities demonstrates the fact of this appeal. The KAR and Carrier Corps, however, did not offer these same incentives, which explains their absence from these

\(^{44}\) It is also important to note that despite work in the Carrier Corps being regarded as ‘women’s work,’ throughout my research I did not come across any references to the recruitment of Maasai women.  
\(^{45}\) Timothy Parsons, “Wakamba warriors are soldiers of the queen’: The Evolution of the Kamba as a Martial Race, 1890–1970,” *Ethnohistory* 46, no. 4 (1999), 574.
forces. Unlike in the Skin Corps where the Maasai could wear their traditional dress and wield spears, the KAR uniformed them in British coats, trousers, and boots and equipped them with modern rifles. Lloyd-Jones observed how these modern arms hindered the Maasai’s effectiveness in battle: “In the opinion of most officers the Masai warrior is more formidable armed with his traditional spear than with the most up-to-date of modern rifles.”46 This point brings to light the Maasai’s inability to effectively operate modern rifles, preferring to enter battle with a spear which they were more accustomed to.

Participation in the KAR and Carrier Corps was therefore undesirable for the Maasai for two primary reasons that both stemmed from their cultural conservatism. Unlike the Skin Corps, neither regiment offered the Maasai cattle in return for service, which would increase an individual’s wealth and social standing in Maasai society. Additionally, neither conformed to the traditional occupations and conceptions of masculinity, as rifles were a foreign weapon and being a porter was regarded as women’s work. For these reasons, both informed by the conservative impulses of the Maasai, their participation in the KAR and Carrier Corps was minimal.

British perceptions of the Maasai as poorly disciplined and useless soldiers held over from the early colonial punitive expeditions also factored into the low levels of Maasai recruitment as well. The Maasai had set the precedent in the punitive expeditions as being averse to discipline, insubordinate, and overall unfit for soldiering. In that period, some officials outright discouraged their recruitment. Lord Hindlip wrote in regards to their recruitment into the KAR, “I fail to see the force trying to enlist so many more of them.”47 The Maasai soldiers who were recruited also did not seem to live up to British high expectations of them as warriors.

46 Lloyd-Jones, K.A.R., 76.
47 Hindlip, British East Africa, 46.
Lloyd-Jones wrote how “[c]ompanies of Masai and Nandi had been found unsuitable and had had to be disbanded.”\textsuperscript{48} Meinertzhagen wrote how: “my few Masai are not standing the climate at all well, and I shall have to send them back to Nairobi. When a Masai gets ill he gets sulky, and they soon become useless as soldiers.”\textsuperscript{49} For these reasons British officers were not eager to recruit the Maasai, as they were often regarded as being more trouble than they were worth.

Post-War British-Maasai Relations

At the end of the First World War, the relationship between the British and the Maasai continued to deteriorate until violence broke out. The historian Brian Gardner explained a particular event that occurred at a KAR training post in Nairobi in his book \textit{German East}:

Training was interrupted now and again, as when a battalion of K.A.R. threatened mutiny and had to be disbanded, and during an expedition against the Masai. This latter was an affair the officers from Europe did not enjoy. A ‘punitive expedition’, it consisted of firing machine guns on half-naked warriors in ostrich feather head-dresses, who attempted to protect themselves behind buffalo-hide shields. None got near enough to the machine-gunners and riflemen to use their spears.\textsuperscript{50}

Lloyd-Jones briefly recounts the aftermath of this encounter, writing “[a]fter the War the [Maasai] tribe was disarmed and their military system prohibited. They are picturesque survivals and, like the lion and the leopard, of no use to civilization.”\textsuperscript{51} The British viewed the Maasai as being predisposed to violence and raiding, hence their initial employment in the punitive expedition, their isolation on reserves, and recruitment for regiments like the Skin Corps. This attack on the Nairobi training camp, however, was the final straw for the British, who then

\textsuperscript{48} Lloyd-Jones, \textit{Havashl}, 23.
\textsuperscript{49} Meinertzhagen, \textit{Kenya Diary}, 106.
prevented them from organizing along military lines, reducing their pastoral lifestyle to merely cattle husbandry.

With the coming of World War II, the Maasai participated in the war to an even lesser extent. Germany had lost its colonies in East Africa following the First World War, and therefore there was no need for local defense forces, scouts, or raiding parties—all duties that the Maasai partook in. Native East Africans were recruited to fight on European and Asian fronts, however the negative perceptions of the Maasai as soldiers persisted and continued to influence European recruitment patterns. David Killingray wrote in his book *Fighting for Britain* how “[wartime recruiters] rarely enlisted Maasai who were thought to be ill-disciplined and incapable of being trained.”52 The perceptions of the Maasai as poorly disciplined soldiers that were first developed by the British in the early punitive expeditions are thus clearly traced through the First World War to the Second.

### Conclusion

The British exploited the Maasai’s traditional skill set against their enemies during times of conflict, yet tried to suppress and criticize these same aspects of Maasai culture in times of peace. The Maasai’s response to both exploitation and suppression was cultural conservatism. British suppression of the Maasai by moving them onto reserves from 1903-1913 caused resentment, alienation, and isolation from the colonial administration that spurred conservative sentiments within Maasai society. The Maasai were not integrated into the colonial economy and maintained their prosperous, cattle-based economy. British exploitation of Maasai raiding during the punitive expeditions and World War I encouraged and reinforced the familiar forms of

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warfare, offered the young warriors battle glory, and provided them payment in the form of cattle, all which fell within the bound of traditional Maasai cultural and economic values. The Maasai’s general absence from the KAR and Carrier Corps is explained by the lack of the incentives provided by the regiments; they did not compliment traditional Maasai values nor their personal ambitions.

Throughout their interactions with the Maasai, the British developed their own perceptions of the group that were carried throughout the colonial period. The British understanding of the Maasai as being poor, ill-disciplined soldiers stemmed from their personal experiences working with them in the punitive expeditions and in World War I. British officers and administrators identified the root cause of the Maasai’s incapacity for discipline as being, in the words of Lloyd-Jones, “their old propensity for raiding cattle,”53 the development of which the British themselves played a key role.

53 Lloyd-Jones, _K.A.R._, 76.
Bibliography

Primary Sources:


This book is by Charles Allsopp, better known as Lord Hindlip, an African traveler, hunter, and author. It offers a British nobleman’s perspective on the Maasai in the period of the Maasai moves.


This text consists of memoirs by Sir Frederick John Jackson (1859-1929), a British administrator in East Africa from 1907-1917, first published by his wife in 1930. This source provides the perspective of a government official on his travels throughout the region and his interactions with various African groups. The source discusses different perceptions of the Maasai in this time period and experiences employing them as soldiers.


This book, published in 1925, is William Lloyd-Jones’s personal account of his time in Africa serving as an officer in the King’s African Rifles in the British colony of Kenya from his arrival in 1908 until his wounding in battle near Lake Turkana in 1913. It provides a British military officer's perspective on various aspects of the K.A.R.’s work in Africa in the time leading up to the First World War. Portions discuss the his perceptions of the Maasai as a people and their capabilities as soldiers.


This volume, originally published in 1926 by William Lloyd-Jones, is a history of the King’s African Rifles in East Africa, from its very conception by Frederick Lugard in 1890 through the First World War. This source provides a first-hand account on the military operations and inner workings of the K.A.R. It also discusses developments in British-Maasai relations, his perceptions of the Maasai, and their capabilities as soldiers.

This text is a collection of diaries by Richard Meinertzhagen (1878-1967) during his time in the British East African Protectorate as an officer in the King’s African Rifles. The text provides insight into the attitudes and thoughts of a British officer on various aspects of life in Africa before World War I. The author briefly gives his opinions on the Maasai as soldiers and tells a few stories involving them in training and combat.


This volume, originally published in German by Colonel Ernst Nigmann in 1911, is a history of the German Protectorate Force, or *Schutztruppe*, of German East Africa. This text provides the history of the *Schutztruppe* from its beginning in 1889 until 1911 and details its relationships—interactions with and recruitment of—native Africans.

**Secondary Sources:**

*Books:*


This book is a general history of the First World War in Africa. It offers value insight into Maasai participation in the First World War, including discussions of the Maasai’s role in Lord Delamere’s Masai Scouts and Major J. J. Drought’s Skin Corps.


This book is a history of the First World War in German East Africa. It provides insight into the Maasai’s participation in Lord Delamere’s Masai Scouts as well as the punitive expedition against the Maasai at the end of the war.

This is a valuable analysis of the African participation in the British and German Carrier Corps in East African during the First World War. This text is helpful in noting the Maasai’s particular absence from this regiment.


This text is a study of how British colonial “development” affected perceptions of gender and ethnic identity among with Maasai of East Africa. The work combines cultural, historical, political, and economic perspectives into account when understanding how certain myths and stereotypes are perpetuated in Maasai culture through colonial policies.


This book is a modern history of Tanzania from the pre-colonial 1800s until 1961. Although a bit dated, it provides a helpful overview of the nation’s history colonial history and context for the events of the First World War in East Africa. It provides several mentions of the Maasai in this historical context.


This text analyses the African recruitment into the British army and their subsequent deployment on the European and Asian fronts during World War II. It is helpful to show how perceptions of the Maasai as poor soldiers continues to be a common perception held by the British.


This book is on the German *Schutztruppe*, or Protectorate Force, of German East Africa. It seeks to explain the role the African askari played in the development of the German colonial state through their personal ambitions of obtaining increased social status. This text also helps to understand the theory of martial races as it was implemented by the Germans.


This book is a broad history of East Africa, although it is rather dated. The second volume in the series provides useful context for the colonial and war periods. There are frequent
mentions of the Maasai before the war which will help to understand the nature of German-British-Maasai relationships during the First World War.


This book provides a case study of the Kamba people of Africa and their development of their martial identity in the twentieth century. It discusses the dramatic shift that occurred in the Kamba’s cultural and political identity as a result of British colonial rule. The Kamba were close neighbors and rivals of the Maasai and therefore this study proves useful for understanding the impacts of colonial policies on individual African ethnic groups.


This book offers a historical overview of Africa and the First World War. It provides information on the Maasai’s participation in Major J. J. Drought’s Skin Corps, their contributions to the intelligence service, and their general aversion to military discipline.

Scholarly Articles:


This article compares the effects of martial race theory on colonial recruitment policies, using the British policy outlined by F. D. Lugard and comparing it to those of the French and Dutch. He argues that colonial recruitment policies resulted in intentionally pluralized armies of various non-dominant martial African ‘tribes.’


This article is a case study on the Kamba people of East Africa and the effects the British colonial policy of the recruitment of martial races resulted in the Kamba coming to regard themselves as as such. This study demonstrates the ways in which colonial policies can influence the attitudes, mentalities, and culture of certain African groups.

This article offers a study of British-Maasai relations in the early colonial period. Waller argues that this relationship resulted in the Maasai’s alienation from the British colonial administration and spurred the development of cultural conservatism.
In the final months of 1944, many important world events were taking shape. While victory in Europe would not be attained until May 1945 and victory in Japan did not follow until September, the final pushes of the Second World War were apparent in these months. December 1944 might be best known for the start of the Battle of the Bulge, but there were other major historical events happening during this month. One, in particular, is central to understanding the war as it concerns the relationship between European colonial powers and their African colonies. This relationship was fraught with tension and did not only reflect experiences during this war, but also wider questions about how African colonies should or should not be integrated into European affairs. In this case, the colonial power was France, but most of the European powers were struggling in these months on two fronts: they wanted to win the war, and they wanted to know what to do with their African soldiers.

This crisis came to a head in France on November 30, 1944 at Camp Thiaroye, a holding camp near Dakar, Senegal. Somewhere near 1300 French-Senegalese soldiers rose up against the French officials at the camp. These soldiers were in the process of going home, but that did not fix the issues they were having with the French authorities; their return home was painfully slow, they were mistreated, and they were not paid. They rose up against the French soldiers, took a general hostage, and demanded that they receive the benefits to which they believed themselves to be entitled. The French were quick to respond, suppressing the actions of the
soldiers. By the end of December 1, the so-called mutiny had been fully suppressed. No French soldiers had died, but at least 35 Senegalese were dead.⁵⁴

While this event has a specific date attached to it, most of its historical influence has been found not in the events of those two days in the final weeks of 1944, but in the way it has been presented and represented in the seventy-five years since. Many of these representations are artistic in nature, but historians have also struggled to create a narrative that can accurately and persuasively make sense of what happened at Thiaroye, why it happened, and why it mattered. Whether they be historical or literary, cultural products related to history come of the ways in which people understand and respond to real events. These representations allow us not only to read how people understand what happened, but also make sense of the ways in which these interpretations are constructed to connect with larger visions about the relationship between these events and larger national or global historical narratives. Some of the most prominent representations⁵⁵ of the events at Thiaroye include Leopold Senghor’s poem Tyaroye and Ousmane Sembene’s film Camp de Thiaroye. Major historians including Myron Echenberg, Ruth Ginio, and Armelle Mabon⁵⁶ have been responsible for the historical representations.

While the history of the events at Camp Thiaroye and the artistic representations it inspired could be read as completely separate entities, that choice limits the scope and influence

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⁵⁴ There is much debate regarding the total death toll of the event. Many early estimates say that somewhere between 35 and 70 Senegalese lost their lives, but other historians believe that the death toll is somewhere near 500. This question is particularly difficult to answer because the burial of the bodies is an open question. As Sabrina Parent asked in her book Cultural Representations of Massacre, “To this day, not only is the number of victims uncertain but the place where they are buried is also unconfirmed: in the military cemetery or in a mass grave within the camp?” Sabrina Parent, Cultural Representations of Massacre (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 25.

⁵⁵ Due to space limitations in this paper, only two of the major artistic representations will be focused on. There are, of course, more interpretations than just these two. Sabrina Parent, in her book Cultural Representations of Massacre: Reinterpretations of the Mutiny of Senegal explores many others.

⁵⁶ Mabon’s excellent analyses of Thiaroye are entirely in French. Luckily, Sabrina Parent had access to a translated copy when creating her book, so some access to the work can be obtained through that source instead. Parent, Cultural Representations of Massacre.
of Thiaroye. By reading them together, it is much easier to make sense not only of what the representations themselves are referring to, but also how the construction of the representations sheds important light on the context of Thiaroye and how its meaning has been shaped. Not only this, but every time a historian comes to make sense of an event, they are constructing a particular narrative with larger implications, much like an artist would. With this in mind, when considering the dual issues of historical and artistic representations of Thiaroye, a question becomes important. It is this question which drove the research this study seeks to present.

What purpose do the representations of the events at Camp Thiaroye in 1944 serve in terms of making sense of the relationship between France and its Senegalese troops during the Second World War? In other words, this paper will consider how the interpretations of the events at Camp Thiaroye, including artistic and historical interpretations, make clearer the larger concerns about the state of the French-Senegalese relationship during and after the Second World War.

By considering representations of Thiaroye, particularly those by Ousmane Sembene and Leopold Senghor, as well as the ways historians have discussed the events at the camp, the relationship between Thiaroye and larger questions about the perceptions and realities about the relationship between France and Senegal become clear. While the particular details of what happened at Thiaroye on November 30 and December 1, 1944, are shrouded in secrecy, both historians and artists have been using the massacre, regardless of their detailed knowledge of the specific events, since December 1944 to make sense of the relationship between Senegal and France, especially as it was figured during the Second World War. In this way, we can read representations of Thiaroye less as a commentary on the massacre in its own right and more as a center for conversation about how people, particularly the Senegalese, understand the relationship between themselves and the French during the Second World War.
One of the challenges of negotiating issues with Thiaroye is the fact that the historical record of the event is very hard to access. There are few primary sources available to be examined, and those that do exist are very contradictory. It is quite possible that no completely accurate accounting of the events at Thiaroye will ever be possible.\textsuperscript{57} This makes considering Thiaroye from a perfectly historical perspective difficult. As such, this paper relies on creative ways to reconstruct Thiaroye. In fact, part of the argument of this paper is that we need not reconstruct all the particular events of those two days to understand the meaning of Thiaroye. While the events at the camp only occurred over two days, there are seventy-five years of interpretation which helped create what Thiaroye was. The way history is created can be more important than the precise details of how that history originally happened.

Despite these challenges, there is much material available on the conditions of French-Senegalese soldiers in the time before and after December 1944. The Senegalese Tirailleurs were used as soldiers for the French during the Second World War. Using colonized subjects as additional manpower during major conflicts was not new for European powers; France, however, was more accustomed to sending these troops to fight on European soil, having done so during the First World War.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, the idea that Senegalese soldiers would be sent to fight in Europe was not a new one. These soldiers had generally been used as shock troops, and many historians argued that their rate of casualty was much higher than their French counterparts.\textsuperscript{59}

While being a French-Senegalese soldier was certainly dangerous, public Senegalese sentiment as well as French propaganda promulgated ideas about the positive benefits that could

\textsuperscript{57} This is not to say that historians have not tried to make detailed analyses of the events or that continued research into the precise nature of the events would not be an excellent site for further study.


\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
be found from serving in the war. These benefits were usually tied to questions about obtaining French citizenship. Many Senegalese soldiers believed that if they served France and fought well, they would be granted equal footing with other French citizens; there were additional points of tension between those Senegalese who had French citizenship and those that did not. At the very least, there was a strong belief that they would receive similar pay and benefits from their service. Questions about their potential for citizenship and equality have been central to scholarship about French-Senegalese relationships during the Second World War.  

Realistically, though, regardless of the hopes of the Senegalese or the perceived intentions of the French, the realities of serving as a French-Senegalese soldier was much more brutal than merely a process of obtaining equality. Behind questions of citizenship lurk the more alarming issues about the mistreatment of and discrimination against the Senegalese soldiers.

The soldiers who were living at Thiaroye on November 30, 1944 were no exception to the fact that the Senegalese experienced significant hardship as a result of their service to the French. These particular soldiers had faced capture and were held as German prisoners of war before being sent to Thiaroye on their slow journey home. They were stationed in this crowded camp without enough room for all of them and did not receive the pay to which they were entitled. Many historians contend that these specific grievances were the immediate prerequisites to their actions.

First, these soldiers were returning prisoners of war. They had spent significant time in German internment camps, suffering malnourishment and racist attacks. They expected to receive better treatment from the French, and they perceived that they were not being given the

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60 For perhaps the most complete assessment of questions of Senegalese citizenship as it affected military service, consider Jacqueline Woodfork, “‘It is a Crime To Be a Tirailleur in the Army’: The Impact of Senegalese Civilian Status in the French Colonial Army during the Second World War,” *Journal of Military History*, 77 no. 1 (January 2013).
treatment which they deserved. Some sources indicate that they called out their treatment at
Thiaroye and compared it to their treatment in an internment camp. As Raffael Sheck noted in
his study about the experience of French colonial soldiers in German captivity,

The reports of French officers after the rebellion depict a defiant atmosphere in the camp.

One pointed out that the rebels demanding their pay repeatedly compared their treatment
at the hands of the French army to their captivity under the Germans: “The Boche paid
us more than you!”61

Regardless of whether these French sources were accurate or whether the Senegalese soldiers
were that aggressive, these sources remind us that the soldiers at Thiaroye were not only
struggling with their return from combat, but were also struggling to make sense of the
differences between their time as French soldiers and their time as German prisoners. In the
situation they were facing, neither scenario was particularly desirable.

Second, their trip home was taking excessively long. In general, during the last months
of the Second World War, the French government faced significant criticism about the way they
sent their troops home. The central concern with this repatriation process was that their African
soldiers were not their primary priority and thus their return trip was longer than it ever should
have been. As Echenberg noted, “Unlike French soldiers, who were quickly issued back pay and
were discharged, the Africans languished in camps because shipping space proved difficult to
obtain.”62 Lastly, and as Echenberg mentioned, these soldiers were not receiving the pay to
which they were entitled. “The immediate cause of the soldiers’ protest was the failure of the

61 Raffael Sheck, French Colonial Soldiers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 254. A Boche is a
German, particularly a German soldier.
62 Myron Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France”; The African Soldier in France During the Second World War,” The
Journal of Africa History, 26 no. 4, 373.
French authorities to provide them with back-pay and demobilization premiums." The combination of all these grievances created a space in which confrontation was almost impossible to avoid.

Amid the confusion of December 1944 and the poor record-keeping and sharing of the French, many of the details of the precise events of November 30 and December 1 have been lost. It may not be possible to ever construct a full picture of all the details. But to make full sense of the impact of the representations of Thiaroye, it is important to consider, as much as it is possible, the events of those two days and their aftermath. It is particularly challenging to approach this question, since there is little primary source material that references it and the French were long unwilling to release the material to which they did have access.

Displeased with their treatment at the hands of the French, hundreds of the more than 1300 Senegalese soldiers currently living at Camp Thiaroye overtook the camp. There is some historical debate about the nature of their take-over. Some believe the soldiers were armed and that they violently took over the camp. The violent nature of this “mutiny” is particularly

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63 Ibid., 376. Myron Echenberg, in “Tragedy at Thiaroye: The Senegalese Soldiers' Uprising of 1944,” discusses the question of these payments at length. He says that “Their French comrades-in-arms had received combat pay for the entire period from the beginning of the war through to liberation. Also, a special hardship bonus of 5,000 francs was applied to these ex-POWs. On October 31, 1944, the minister of colonies had written Dakar authorizing a series of benefits to the ex-POWs soon to be demobilized. They were to receive their back pay, only one quarter of which would be distributed in France; they would receive a demobilization pay of 500 francs upon their arrival in West Africa; and they would be issued a complete outfit of civilian clothes. While these provisions fell short of the treatment afforded French ex-POWs, they were in any case simply not implemented.” Echenberg goes on to explain the ways in which the French government avoided even paying the small amounts of back-pay they had decided the soldiers were entitled to. In any case, there was clearly an extreme imbalance between what French ex-POWs were paid and what the soldiers at Camp Thiaroye had been told they might have access to. Myron Echenberg, “Tragedy at Thiaroye: The Senegalese Soldiers’ Uprising of 1944,” in African Labor History, ed. Peter C.W. Gutkind (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications 1978), 115.

64 In a 2015 article for The Conversation, Postcolonial Studies and French professor David Murphy noted that in 2012 Francois Hollande, the French President, agreed to release archives relating to the massacre, a sentiment which he reiterated in 2014. Murphy argues that “the archives transferred to the Senegalese authorities are in fact just a fraction of the material held by the French on Thiaroye.” David Murphy, “The Time has Come for France to Own Up to the Massacre of its Own Troops in Senegal,” The Conversation, last modified March 18, 2015, http://theconversation.com/the-time-has-come-for-france-to-own-up-to-the-massacre-of-its-own-troops-in-senegal-35131.
questionable, considering that no French victims have been recorded. Most, however, agree that
the soldiers were likely not armed, at least not to the extent that the French response anticipated.
Mabon contends that the West African soldiers were shot at by “three indigenous companies, an
American tank, two half-tracks, three armored, two infantry battalions, a platoon made up of
non-commissioned officers and troops of Frenchman.”65 This reaction was more than was
necessary to subdue the soldiers, particularly if they were not armed. But the French were
reacting to the fact that the mutineers took a French general hostage. This man was the General
Commanding the Colonial Forces of FWA.66 Before the situation got any more out of control,
the French decided to act. In the early hours of December 1, 1944, the French brutally
suppressed the actions of the Senegalese, leaving many of the Senegalese soldiers dead.

When the French government discovered what had happened, they rushed to prevent
further issues developing with other Senegalese soldiers. They began to give out back pay and
tried to come up with a solution that would prevent further uprisings. “Thus, the soldiers’
uprisings, especially the one at Thiaroye, because its shock waves travelled throughout West
Africa and knowledge of it could not be kept from the African people, served effectively to
delegitimize naked force as a political instrument.”67 The goals of the French seemed to be to
prevent this from happening again even as they did not necessarily admit to their own fault in the
situation that developed.

But even though the French may have acted to prevent further issues, they also sought to
publicly punish the soldiers who had risen up at Thiaroye. Thirty-four of the surviving mutineers
were brought to court in March 1945. They were all convicted of mutiny and were ordered to

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67 Ibid., 378.
spend between one and ten years in prison combined with fines of 10,000 francs.\textsuperscript{68} Myron Echenberg, in his book detailing the experiences of Tirailleurs between 1957 and 1960 notes that “They [the French] made a public example of the Thiaroye prisoners by parading the alleged ringleaders through the streets of Dakar and then conducting a court-martial that became something of a show trial.”\textsuperscript{69} In 1947, French president Vincent Auriol granted amnesty without comment and the event passed into memory.\textsuperscript{70} The amnesty did not come soon enough for some. Between their conviction and the date of amnesty, at least five of the so-called mutineers died in prison.\textsuperscript{71}

But France was not the only government involved in this issue. The Senegalese government, as well, had to react to the tragedy, especially in the years following its independence from France.\textsuperscript{72} In popular discussion, the events at Thiaroye were usually hidden in Senegal. As Parent argued, “The metropolitan press hushed up the massacre.”\textsuperscript{73} In recent years, there has been renewed interest in memorializing and remembering what happened at Camp Thiaroye. But this interest does not solve the damage caused by years of ignoring the events. As an example, the cemetery at Thiaroye is overgrown and nearly forgotten.\textsuperscript{74} Even if it

\textsuperscript{68} Echenberg, “Tragedy at Thiaroye,” 116.
\textsuperscript{70} Parent, Cultural Representations, 26.
\textsuperscript{71} Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 376.
\textsuperscript{72} In general, when this paper refers to the Senegalese government, it is looking at the government that was formed after independence. Before independence was gained, the Senegalese government mainly consisted of local chiefs through which the French could assert their authority, especially in the more rural areas. There were striking differences between the influence of the French in the urban and rural areas, but the Senegalese governmental structure during the colonial period was not necessarily strong enough outside the French to consider its reactions as separate from the French. For more information on the structure of the Senegalese government during colonial rule, consider Lunn, Memoirs of the Maelstrom.
\textsuperscript{73} Parent, Cultural Representations, 27.
\textsuperscript{74} As Ruth Ginio noted, “Following independence, the Senegalese government chose to ignore the ‘embarrassing’ event and did nothing to turn Thiaroye into a site of memory. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch described the cemetery at Thiaroye as a hidden sight of memory. When she visited there in the 1970s, no sign led to it and the story of the dead soldiers remained untold. This was still the situation when I visited the site in 2001. The only words found anywhere in this graveyard were on a sign at the entrance saying: Cimetiere Franco-Senegalais. Inside, there are
were to be repaired and recognized, there is no proof that the bodies of the victims are buried there as opposed to in a mass grave somewhere in the camp. The effects of this forgetfulness might never be fully repaired. And because the event was not remembered, it is hard to make sense of exactly who did what and why.

The actions taken by the soldiers, and the French and Senegalese governments were not necessarily the central factors in understanding Thiaroye. A struggle for both historians and those trying to artistically make sense of the events at Thiaroye is the naming of what happened. Was it a mutiny of African soldiers against the French? Was it a protest, uprising, or revolt? Was it a massacre? Historians have used all these phrases at one point or another to describe the context of what happened. By reading these sources, looking particularly at the way in which they privilege certain namings of the event, we can read their interpretations about the way the event figures into larger questions of French-Senegalese relationships.75

Some historians have read Thiaroye as a mutiny. A major example is Richard Osborne’s *World War II in Colonial Africa*. Of the events, he said, “On December 1, the lid blew off at one of the crowded camps at Thiaroye, a few miles from Dakar. Some 1200 colonial soldiers, most of them former POWs, mutinied and took over the camp. Police and troops had to be sent to quell the riot, and in the process 35 people were killed and scores injured.”76 He did not say that around 200 graves with unmarked tombstones.” Ruth Ginio, “African Colonial Soldiers between Memory and Forgetfulness: The Case of Post-Colonial Senegal,” *Outre-Mers. Revue d'histoire* 93 no 350 (2006), 152.

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75 One of the challenges in writing this paper was deciding what term to use to refer to what happened. This paper tends toward saying “the events at Thiaroye” or “massacre,” following recent trends in naming, but this decision, too, has implications in terms of how this paper conceives of the relationship between its understanding of Thiaroye and French-Senegalese relationships. Even writing about how words have power creates a world in which these words have power. There are, of course, other versions of this paper which could have featured different word choices. Changing the way the paper refers to the events at Thiaroye would likely change the way the paper makes sense of Thiaroye. Perhaps there is no clearer solution than to be aware of the ways in which this affects the making of certain arguments.

only the Senegalese died. He very clearly labeled this event as a mutiny and reinforced those negative connotations with the word “riot.” The reasoning behind this word choice was made clear in his treatment of the French response. He praised the French for their ability to recognize the problems and “Immediately, they sped up the payment of back pay and other compensations and gave the returning soldiers as much priority as they could on transportation home.”77 He even discussed, though did not name, both Senghor’s and Sembene’s representations of the “mutiny,” saying that they really only served the purpose of “condemning the French”78 and that “The end result [of the reactions to Thiaroye] was that many of the returning colonial soldiers came home angry at the French and became easy recruits for the nationalist movements springing up all over West Africa.”79 Osborne clearly construed the relationship between the French and the Senegalese as one in which the French were doing the best they could and the Senegalese were unfairly reactionary against their accidental mistakes. He did not heavily criticize the French at all. In fact, of the two groups, the Senegalese were portrayed in a much worse light.

Other studies have taken a less aggressive route of naming and have considered Thiaroye as a revolt, protest, or uprising. An example of this can be found in Ruth Ginio’s monograph *The French Army and Its African Soldiers: The Years of Decolonization*. This book focuses on how the French army influenced the post-war political processes as well as how African soldiers participated in the fighting surrounding decolonization. In taking this view of history, Ginio draws a middle ground between blaming and praising the French. While the French did suppress

77 Ibid.  
78 Ibid.  
79 Ibid.
The protest, they had help from other African soldiers.\(^80\) The French, in her interpretation, were not entirely to blame. Myron Echenberg, the leading historian on Thiaroye, used similar language to describe what happened. He called the events both an “uprising”\(^81\) and a “protest.”\(^82\) He, too, attempted to draw a middle ground between the French and the Senegalese. He especially noted the competing beliefs of the French and the Senegalese. According to him, part of the reason for the soldiers not obtaining their pay was that “Many officials saw no urgency to compensate soldiers already possessing substantial sums,”\(^83\) especially when there were concerns, albeit unfounded, that these sums were obtained illegally.\(^84\) On the other hand, Echenberg does acknowledge that the grievances of the soldiers were “well founded.”\(^85\)

Newer interpretations have read Thiaroye as a massacre. In France 24’s news coverage in 2014 about the events at Thiaroye, the news anchor contrasted the official story of the mutineers firing first with newer interpretations of the event as a massacre. This news source privileges the interpretation of prominent French historian Armelle Mabon. Mabon was completely against the label of mutiny, arguing that the French repression of the actions of the soldiers was not due to violence or the fear of violence, but rather that “this [response] had been planned in advance.”\(^86\) Mabon did not absolve the French of guilt or allow their response to be

\(^{81}\) Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 376.
\(^{82}\) Ibid.
\(^{83}\) Ibid.
\(^{84}\) There was significant fear among the French that Senegalese soldiers who returned home with some money had either stolen it or received it from the Germans in an underhanded capacity. As Echenberg notes, “To paternalistic officials, the existence of such substantial sums not only minimized the urgency to pay the soldiers what was due them in back pay and demobilization bonuses, but it also caused French officials to assume that the money had been gained by unlawful means, despite the evidence indicating that the men had received wages from their German captors.” Echenberg, “Tragedy at Thiaroye,” 114.
\(^{85}\) Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 376.
reactionary. Instead, she conceived of this entire series of events as one that was necessary for the French to accomplish in order to convince their returning colonial subjects to stay in line and respect the colonial order even though they had just spent years defending France and were hoping for more freedom. Their response to the event, later, within Mabon’s interpretation, could never make up for the fact that they planned these deaths in order to inspire fear and obedience. Mabon’s interpretation is perhaps the most radical, but she is also, alongside Echenberg, the most respected historian of Thiaroye. Again, as with any of these interpretations, Mabon carefully crafted how she chose to label the events at Thiaroye.

Labeling of the events can certainly be debated. But what is fascinating about each of these arguments is the ways in which their understandings of the events of November 30 and December 1 pale in comparison to their judgments about the relationship between the French and the Senegalese and the question of who was to blame and what rationales are acceptable for judging either of their behavior. Osborne could not make sense of the behavior of the Senegalese, instead choosing to privilege the “recognition” by the French of their mistakes. Ginio and Echenberg acknowledged both sides of the argument by explaining some of the French reasoning, while privileging the decisions of the Senegalese. Mabon refused to acknowledge the French position and instead uncategorically declared this as a premeditated massacre. These conversations of French absolution and Senegalese blame are not limited to the historical space. In recent years, questions of how this event should be remembered have been especially pointed for Senegal.

Senegalese celebrations have honored those who died at Thiaroye. Sabrina Parent noted in her book about the representations of the massacre that while “there is no monument to the
memory of the dead soldiers in Senegal,“87 the former Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade created Tirailleurs’ Day in 2004 to remember the plight of the Tirailleurs and that a commemoration of the victims of Thiaroye was a prominent part. But Parent did not acknowledge that this commemoration was relatively recent and that, in the years before this, there was relatively little remembrance. In many ways, it seems like too little, too late, to begin remembering the tragedy 60 years after the fact. Still, having national days of remembrance is a productive step toward dealing with the pain inflicted on Senegal by the Second World War. In general, the question of how the Senegalese have remembered their participation in the second world war is a problematic one.

Ruth Ginio, in her article “African Colonial Soldiers between Memory and Forgetfulness: The Case of Post-Colonial Senegal,” noted aspects of the remembrance that Parent described. As she says,

A national memorial day for the soldiers was established, in fact, only following the ceremony in Provence [in which French officials paid homage to the African soldiers that served them during the Second World War]. Suddenly the Senegalese government issued a new law that set 23 August (the day of the liberation of Toulon) as a national memorial day for all the tirailleurs (not only Senegalese among them) who fought in the two world wars. It also initiated an enormous commemoration project in which Place de la Gare in central Dakar was to be renamed Place de Tirailleur and was designated to become a huge memorial for the soldiers who perished in the two world wars.88

These sites of remembrance were impressive, but Ginio also pointed to a specific example of the remembrance of Thiaroye. As she noted, “Alongside the reconstruction of the Place du Tirailleur another project is invisiged in the military cemetery of Thiaroye. The new law established that a monument for the dead soldiers be constructed there and that the president of

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87 Parent, Cultural Representations of Massacre, 5.
Senegal will lay a wreath in the cemetery at least once a year.”\textsuperscript{89} In a few years, the cemetery might be restored and serve as a formal site of memory of the events at Thiaroye. Still, this feels a bit like it’s too little, too late. Fixing the cemetery now will not change how it has been ignored, nor will it necessarily answer the question of where the victims’ bodies were buried. It does, though, have to possibility to create more meaningful interactions with the events at Thiaroye in the future.

Two of the major reinterpretations of the events at Thiaroye involve representations of the event that similarly reflect questions about the true implications of Thiaroye. Both are not primarily works of nonfiction or history. The first is the poem “Tyaroye” by Leopold Senghor. According to his notes, it was written from Paris in December 1944;\textsuperscript{90} it details his reactions to the events at Thiaroye, even though he never mentions what he is commenting upon, other than in his title. The other reinterpretation was created by Ousmane Sembene in 1982. Nearly 40 years after the events, it seeks to cinematically approximate what happened on those two days. It is obviously about the event in question, as we see a physical representation of the events, but there are questions about exactly what version of the events it might be narrating.

Leopold Senghor was born in Senegal in 1906. He served for the French during the Second World War and was captured by the Germans, serving time in a German internment camp, much like those soldiers at Thiaroye. In Mortimer’s study of the connections between Senghor’s life and his poetry, she noted that Senghor had to confront the short nature of human life and the complex issues with racism, especially since a French officer saved his life when he

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, 153.
was about to die by firing squad in the internment camp.\textsuperscript{91} She took this line of thought a step further by noting that “This episode is one that confirms duality, Senghor’s sense of belonging to both France and Africa.”\textsuperscript{92} This duality is one that was found in Senghor’s representation of the events at Thiaroye. He recognizes the tragedy of the event at the same time as he refuses to completely condemn the French for their part in it.

In 1944, when Senghor was in Paris, he wrote the poem \textit{Tyaroye}.\textsuperscript{93} As Sabrina Parent notes, “the poem does not represent the massacre.”\textsuperscript{94} Instead, it functions as a representative for rebellion in general. In the first lines of Tyaroye, Senghor posed the question of whether “France was no longer France?”\textsuperscript{95} After the poem considered issues including what the price of the soldiers’ blood was, Senghor created these final lines:

\begin{quote}
No, you have not died in vain, O Dead! You blood
Is not tepid water. It generously feeds our hope,
Which will bloom at twilight.
It is our thirst, our hunger for honor,
Our absolute authority.
No, you have not died in vain.
You are the witnesses of immortal Africa
You are the witnesses of the new world to come.\textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} This is Senghor’s title and his preferred spelling of Thiaroye. Most printed versions of the poem use the more common spelling, but this paper will use Senghor’s when directly referring to this poem.
\textsuperscript{94} Parent, \textit{Cultural Representations}, 37.
\textsuperscript{95} Senghor, “Thiaroye,” 68.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
These final lines created a feeling that this tragedy will be turned into hope, that something productive can come from the loss of life. This hope could have coincided with Senghor’s idea that “universal civilization was the dream of a society based on fraternal relationships between various peoples, who would have overcome racial bias and taken the best from each other.”

France is a central part of this universal civilization, and while Senghor’s poem clearly noted his disappointment in France with his rhetorical question about its status, the poem ultimately did not exclude France from the hopeful future he was constructing.

In this poem, Senghor constructed a version of the history between France and Senegal that privileged the notion of brotherhood and togetherness that included the French. It would have been easy for this poem, especially since it was written mere days or weeks after the tragedy, to condemn the French, to argue for independence, to encourage others to rise up in the face of oppression. But it clearly did not do any of these things. Instead, it took a moderate approach, one similar to a choice to name the events as a protest or a revolt. Instead of condemning the French for massacre or blaming the soldiers for mutiny, Senghor created an interpretation where he was simultaneously outraged at the death but also hopeful that a good future could be obtained, that France would perhaps do the right thing, that the dead would become a worthy sacrifice. As Parent noted, part of the reason for this moderation could be that “His desire to stay on good diplomatic terms with the French was too strong; he could not afford to publicly and officially humiliate France.”

In any case, Senghor clearly marked the relationship between the French and the Senegalese as one that was not positive but that could be salvaged.

97 Parent, *Cultural Representation*, 43.
98 Ibid, 45.
Ousmane Sembene engaged similar concerns about the relationship between the French and the Senegalese with his 1982 film *Camp de Thiaroye*. Sembene was a Senegalese writer and director. He became a Tirailleur in 1944 and served with the Free French Forces during the last year of the Second World War. During the Second World War, he served with the Free French Forces. He became a legend in African cinema, creating many popular films. While he was also an author, he is primarily remembered for his contributions to film. In 1982, he released the film *Camp de Thiaroye*, which tells the story of the events of November 30 and December 1. In a collection of his interviews, Annett Busch describes the film as follows:

After the end of the Second World War demobilized African soldiers that fought within the French army in Europe against Germany are being re-barracked. The soldiers are awaiting the promised pay and resist half-heartedly after it fails to come. Nevertheless, the French commanders are not satisfied with such an unresolved situation and order tanks to kill all the Africans.99

When this film was released, it generated significant controversy. It was banned in Senegal. A report in a 1990 printing of the *New York Times* says that “That film is still banned in Senegal, officially because of a dispute about the correct spelling of the title in the Wolof language.”100 It is more likely that the film is challenging for Senegal because of its difficult history of remembering Thiaroye at all. Less surprisingly, the film was also banned in France for more than a decade.101

Much like Mabon’s interpretation of Thiaroye, Sembene is highly concerned with presenting the French as the villains who had no justification for their actions. These decisions came under some criticism, as people were concerned with the ways in which Sembene might

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have been massaging history to arrive at this conclusion. For instance, Sabrina Parent noted that it is possible to accuse Sembene “of hiding, in the scene representing the massacre, the historical fact that the repression of the (repatriated) *tirailleurs senegalais* was partly perpetrated by other (stationed) *tirailleurs*.”\(^{102}\) Similarly, in Ngugi’s reading of *Camp de Thiaroye* and *Cry Freedom*, it was posited that Sembene’s choice to make a “political point”\(^{103}\) came at the cost of historical accuracy and open-mindedness. While both comments were meant as critiques, they actually illustrate the fact that the primary motivation of the movie was not to recreate history as much as it was to craft a narrative that presents Sembene’s view of the relationship between Senegal and France. Perhaps this intention, and the challenges of historical representation that resulted from it, was not on purpose, but, regardless, Sembene’s work allows us to read his understanding of the relationship between French and Senegal more than it does the historical events of Thiaroye.

The first thing that these sources, both historical, historiographical, and artistic do is remind their readers that questions about Thiaroye are still prominent. Even though the 75\(^{\text{th}}\) anniversary of the tragedy is approaching, questions about what happened and what it meant have not been resolved. Because the history of the actual events is so hard to access, these representations were central to how people could understand Thiaroye. But these representations also revealed the preoccupations their authors had and the ways they conceived of the larger questions of which Thiaroye formed only a piece. Instead of Thiaroye being an example of French-Senegalese relationships, it has become a place to discuss those relationships. The form each of these discussions took was highly influenced by these artists’ personal beliefs and time periods. It is not hard to imagine a world where these interpretations were written at different


\(^{103}\) Ngugi, “Presenting and (Mis)representing History in Fiction Film: Sembène's "Camp de Thiaroye" and Attenborough's "Cry Freedom”,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 16 no. 1 (2003), 58.
times; they would probably look much different. The point isn’t to praise or blame a given representation for its understanding of French-Senegalese relationships, but to be aware of the way in which they are shaping an understanding of those relationships based on their own political contexts.

Reading these sources considering these concerns makes it clear that they were concerned not with the events at Thiaroye, but with how they could use these events to stake larger claims about the world during the Second World War. Each of these interpretations is most concerned with how to make sense of the relationship between the French and the Senegalese. Who was to blame? Who reacted well? Did this event contain the potential to change the relationship? In many of these interpretations, there is also a focus on the distinct waste of life that occurred because of the massacre, mutiny, revolt, or protest.104 No matter which version someone ascribes to, people died and that cannot be taken back.

While this conclusion helps us better understand the purpose Thiaroye has served in the last 75 years, there are many places where further research is necessary. It would be important to situate Thiaroye not as a singular event reflective of larger concerns, but as part of a series of similar uprisings that can inform understandings of each other. As Echenberg notes, Thiaroye was neither the first nor the last clash between the Senegalese and the French.105 Further examination of these incidents might serve to clarify the position of Thiaroye as well as to consider on a broader scale how the French response to such events was or was not helpful. Additionally, it would be interesting to consider why Thiaroye has been so memorialized and other similar events have been forgotten. Regardless of these concerns for future historians and

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104 As Parent noted, “Let us not forget that Thiaroye was a failure: it was severely repressed by the French army and the African soldiers who carried out their orders. As such, Thiaroye can also be seen as an even revealing Africans’ involvement in the misery of (neo)colonization.” Parent, Cultural Representations, 5.

105 Echenberg, “Morts Pour la France,” 375.
artists, the material we have on Thiaroye still provides an excellent body of work to consider how we remember history and how we construct its meaning as we do so.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


This newspaper article describes the film “The Camp at Thiaroye,” especially in terms of how its characters reflect an African identity. It also talks briefly about the controversy about the film being banned in Senegal due to an apparent issue with translation.


This short television segment provides an account of the massacre of Thiaroye and includes various historical perspectives. It also includes photographs, letters, and interviews of select participants as well as discussions with their surviving families.


This newspaper article discusses the emergence of African films and filmmakers, particularly focusing on the ways in which American audiences can engage with their films. It focuses on the filmmaking choices of Ousmane Sembene and his complicated political views.


This is Ousmane Sembene’s film interpretation of the events at Thiaroye. Released in 1988, it won a prize at the Venice International Film Festival. It is written in French.


This selection of 25 interviews with filmmaker Sembene includes his discussions of his films and his history. Sembene was the filmmaker behind the influential Camp de Thiaroye, which dramatized the events at Thiaroye; Sembene himself fought for the French during the Second World War.


This is Leopold Senghor’s poem about the events at Thiaroye. He wrote it in December 1944 in Paris, short weeks after the tragedy. This is one of the most popular artistic representations of Thiaroye.
Secondary Sources

Books:


While this source doesn’t directly discuss Thiaroye, it works through the challenges faced during the French decolonization of West Africa and challenges the French faced. The process of decolonization, particularly in the 1940s can be used to explain some of the context of the events at Thiaroye.


This book traces the history of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* through both World Wars. The victims of Thiaroye were *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* for the most part and Echenberg has done significant research on Thiaroye in other sources. Thiaroye can be connected to a series of social and military conflicts that trace back far before the Second World War.


This biography of Ousmane Sembene focuses on both his life and art with special attention on the political and social influences found in his work. It considers his interactions with both Senegal and France and the way his films and writings reflect his personal viewpoints.


This book considers the relationship between the French Army and the African soldiers from West Africa that fought with them. Ginio focuses on the period between the end of the Second World War and 1964, when the African troops were demobilized. Thiaroye is used as a case study to explain and explore some of the tensions present during this time period.


In this book, Parent considers various representations of the events at Thiaroye, including films, prose works, and poetry. She uses analysis of these to consider their role in history and memory, using an interdisciplinary approach combining history, literature, and politics.


Here, Scheck considers the experiences of French colonial soldiers who were German Prisoners of War, particularly focusing on the long-term implications of their captivity as they were repatriated back home after the war. The soldiers at Thiaroye were returning home from such prison camps, so this book provides an excellent analysis of how this experience affected their actions and the way their actions were perceived by French authorities.
Websites, Journal Articles and Book Chapters:


This article considers how images of *Tirailleurs* were constructed by the French, particularly focusing on the mythology of the Senegalese Sharpshooter. Bloom considers how Thiaroye and its representations, including Sembene’s film, become part of this mythology, particularly in how the French understand the actions of their Senegalese counterparts.


This study explores the experiences in France of African soldiers during the Second World War. Echenberg considers the experiences of recruitment, mobilization, combat, prison and repatriation camps, and protests of African soldiers. In this last category, he undertakes a significant exploration of the massacre at Thiaroye and places it in context not only within a history of the French treatment of African soldiers but also within other contemporary protests.


Echenberg places Thiaroye within the context of both soldiers and workers. He conceives of the massacre not only as intersecting with military concerns of lack of pay and poor treatment, but also within broader concerns about the treatment of workers. This is perhaps one of the most respected historical studies about the events at the camp.


This article considers how the memory of African soldiers who fought for France has been forgotten, not only by the French, but also by Senegalese authorities. She explores why this lack of remembrance occurred and why it has taken until recently to erect memorials. As an example, she considers the cemetery at Thiaroye and the ways in which it does and does not serve as a place of remembrance.


This article considers the history of the remembrance of Thiaroye, particularly the ways the French government tried to hide what happened. It also talks about the times the French have been asked to tell the truth about what happened and how they have refused to adequately acknowledge their wrongdoings.

This article considers points of conflict and reconciliation in Senghor’s experiences as a French soldier as well as in his poetry. After serving as a prisoner of war, he related to the events at Thiaroye and wrote a poem entitled “Tyaroye” which is one of the most famous literary representations of the massacre.


This article discusses the history of forgetfulness as it relates to the massacre at Thiaroye. It notes the cemetery at Thiaroye as a site of forgetfulness, as well as the ways in which Thiaroye has been erased from both education and history.


This article discusses both what happened at Thiaroye as well as the ways in which French officials have or have not tried to account for their actions. This article also identifies the possibility that as many as 300-40 soldiers perished on December 1, as opposed to the officially recognized 35.


This study considers the issues inherent in using film as a medium to explore history, particularly in the ways it promotes a single authoritative narrative of historical events. It focuses in part on the historical complications present in Sembene’s Camp de Thiaroye, and how this film illustrates both history and Sembene’s biased interpretation of history.


This book chapter considers how the events at Thiaroye have been absorbed into African literary traditions to come to terms with the trauma of the event and its complicated legacy. She argues that the continual reinterpretations of the massacre of Thiaroye point to its importance to Senegal as a historical moment; she also notes that each of these representations points not only to the historical moment of Thiaroye but also to the historical moment each of the texts was created.


This article considers Sembene’s filmmaking techniques, particularly as they intersect with African oral traditions and Western narrative tendencies. Pfaff argues that Sembene uses the Western medium so that he can adapt it to “the needs, pace, and rhythm of African culture.” Including an analysis of Camp de Thiaroye, the article moves through each of Sembene’s major film works to examine how he is interacting with African narrative traditions.

This article explores tensions between the French and their African soldiers, both in terms of issues of French superiority as well as the challenges faced during conscription and combat for the African soldiers. Thiaroye is explored as a point of conflict and shame after the Second World War; this event is explored dually through both its historical details and the way it is portrayed in Sembene’s film.


This article considers how the film *Camp de Thiaroye* represents real historical concerns over questions of if French colonial atrocities could be traced directly to the Vichy regime. This article argues that the film points out that de Gaulle is the one who is truly responsible for the massacre. Through this argument, Shaka uses the film to question traditional narratives of how benevolent French colonial stewardship was.


This article considers how the status of certain Senegalese soldiers as French citizens influenced their interactions with the French state during the Second World War. She also discusses the legacy of such interactions, focusing on how this service was or was not remembered. In this context, she discusses the importance of various interpretations of the events at Thiaroye.
FRENCH WEST AFRICAN SOLDIERS AND ANTI-COLONIALISM DURING THE WORLD WARS

Anna DeWitt, ‘19

African involvement in the World Wars is given minimal coverage by historians, however the wars played a significant role in changing the context of African life. During the First and Second World Wars, France, Britain, and other colonial powers drew substantial numbers of troops from their colonies to support European troops in African and European campaigns. According to Myron Echenberg, hundreds of thousands of West African soldiers were conscripted to fight during this period.\textsuperscript{106} As much West Africa was colonized by France, many of these soldiers fought in the French military. For example, during the First World War approximately 161,250 West African soldiers were recruited from all French colonies.\textsuperscript{107} Similarly, 197,000 West Africans were recruited during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{108} French Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire were among the colonies that contributed their men to these numbers. Of the 161,250 soldiers conscripted during the First World War, 13,339 of those soldiers were from Senegal. During the Second World War, 24,523 men from Côte d’Ivoire were conscripted in 1940 alone.\textsuperscript{109} These numbers speak to the significant contributions of West African soldiers to French causes. Furthermore, they suggest that the war would have had a widespread impact on the West Africans involved as well as their communities and families.

In Europe, one of the effects of the World Wars is often said to be the downfall of colonialism. Two factors are usually attributed to decolonization after the Second World War. As a rising hegemon, the United States was critical of European imperialism. American leaders pressured European powers to allow colonies self-determination.\textsuperscript{110} Aside from American pressure, European military and economic weakness after the war is often cited as another major contributing factor in the decline in colonialism.\textsuperscript{111} While a majority of historians would agree that these two pressures were instrumental in the beginning of decolonization, another factor was arguably just as influential. Often called anti-colonialism or nationalism, these trends became more apparent after the wars. While such pressures from the colonies themselves also played a role in the end of empires, they did not simply appear overnight. A link between West Africans involved in the war and nationalism is not readily apparent in oral history nor in secondary source analysis, however many veterans recall taking part in both subtle and openly dissident actions that undermined French racial and colonial supremacy in a variety of ways. Although not explicitly motivated by nationalism, West African challenges to French colonial authority should not necessarily be disregarded as insignificant. This begs the question: were such dissident actions and challenges isolated events, or were they charged by another political sentiment, anti-colonialism? If so, what was their significance in the broader context of the period of decolonization after the world wars? This paper will explore the effects of dissident actions and events involving West African soldiers using oral histories. Furthermore, it will demonstrate that soldiers from Senegal and the Ivory Coast played significant yet understated roles in the early development of anti-colonialism in French West Africa during the World Wars.

\textsuperscript{110} Raymond Betts, \textit{Decolonization} (London: Routledge, 2004), 24-25.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 26-28.
Unlike African participation in the World Wars, African nationalism has received considerable attention by historians and political scientists. Scholars of African nationalism tend to be divided on the relationship of African soldiers and veterans to early anti-colonialist and nationalist sentiments. Within these debates, a handful of scholarly critiques have been made against those who suggest that veterans were influential in post-war anti-colonialism and nationalism. David Killingray is prominent among those who have critiqued colleagues for over stating the role of Africans involved in the war effort.112 Killingray and Fogarty’s work has also challenged Mosse’s ‘brutalization theory’, that Africans, like European soldiers returned from the war traumatized and ready to wreak havoc.113 Despite the critiques of over exaggeration, the prevalent consensus among historians, is that African soldiers and veterans made a notable contribution to anti-colonialism.

Work about the role of veterans in anti-colonialism and nationalism after the World Wars attributes their activity to at least one of three causes. First, some authors argue that exposure to Western values and powerful non-European groups during the wars caused Africans to adopt nationalist and anti-colonist sentiments. Basil David’s work “Let Freedom Come” provides an example of this type of argument. Davidson quotes a Nigerian soldier as saying “We all overseas soldiers are coming back home with new ideas”.114 This idea was that African soldiers had fought for freedom and that they were not racially inferior as the colonial system suggested.115 Davidson notes the power of the Japanese, anti-racist ideologies used to combat Nazism, and the Atlantic Charter as major influences on African soldiers and societies new

115 Ibid.
conceptions of and desire for freedom. Similarly, according to Carter and O’Meara, in British colonies, Africans used the concept of the right to self-determination as justification for nationalism. Michael Crowder, claims that the products of African nationalism, their constitutions, are “inspired by the metropolitan model” and “committed to variations of freedom, justice and equality”. The development of political awareness (particularly awareness of anti-colonialism), as a result of contact with other groups such as African-Americans, was also feared by French colonial leaders during the wars. These arguments however portray Africans as stripped of agency and original thought, while portraying Europeans as the besowers of enlightened political thought. Nor, on the other hand, do they account for instances of African resistance to colonization before and during the World Wars.

A second theme, greater awareness of inequalities between Europeans and Africans gained through the wars has also been cited by numerous scholars as a motivation for anti-colonialist and nationalist action. Scholars like Nancy Lawler, Joe Lunn, Michael Goebel, and David Killingray discuss the effect of discrepancies between treatment of Africans in service and after demobilization. In French colonies in particular, tensions clearly existed between French ideology and the oppressive colonial system. Cooper’s work on citizenship in the French Empire, provides a discussion of the conceptual basis for these tensions. He argues that French ideas about rights and citizenship, summarized by the famous ‘Liberté, égalité, fraternité’ and African

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116 Ibid., 202.
culture, were incompatible with the colonial system. Increased contact between Europeans and Africans during the wars would have provided more opportunities for African soldiers to witness discrepancies and racially based treatment. Goebel, Killingray, and other historians supply examples of these discrepancies in the way in which French ideology was applied to Europeans and Africans. Furthermore, they link the inconsistencies of the French colonial system in Africa to dissident action by African soldiers and veterans.

Sources concerned with the link between increased awareness of inequality and dissent action also point to the post-war mistreatment of demobilized veterans as a motivation. Broken promises about the payment of pensions or lesser sums compared to European soldiers, for example, are often linked to discontent and dissident actions among veterans from French African colonies. According to these historians, veterans’ post-war mistreatment by the French stoked discontent with inequality, subsequently fueling anti-colonialism and nationalism. Many of these concepts may be mixed or emphasized to varying extents within the literature.

A majority of historians provide evidence of soldiers’ involvement and plausible motives for participation in anti-colonialist and nationalist activity. However, given that newer literature, such as Killingray’s work on British Africa, critiques the consensus about French African soldiers and veterans’ impact, it is worth examining the extent to which these groups were

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actually involved and whether they explicitly acknowledge anti-colonial or nationalist motivations.

Historians on both sides of the debate about the impact of French African soldiers and veterans tend to conflate nationalism and anti-colonialism. Although they can be and historically are often related terms, they are not synonymous. In treating them as one in the same or else neglecting to make a clear distinction between the two terms, historians have limited their own analyses. Conflating nationalism and anti-colonialism, for example may lead to interpreting less dramatic events as insignificant to wider nationalist movements in Africa, therefore downplaying or dismissing them entirely. In reality, the same events may be significant from an anti-colonial perspective.

The distinction between the nationalism and anti-colonialism (or anti-imperialism) can be difficult to make. Both have various definitions and applications depending on their context.123 Lawrence defines nationalism “as a political doctrine” as, “the belief not only that homogenous, identifiable nations exist, but that they should govern themselves.” 124 Nationalism, as a concept linked to national identity, “can be used more broadly to signify the sentiment felt by many people of belonging to a particular nation on a daily basis.”125 Many scholars have correctly argued that dissident action by veterans and soldiers during and immediately after the World Wars were not typically connected to a sense of belonging to different nation.

Definitions of anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism are more difficult to isolate because of their common use with ‘nationalism’. From a historical perspective, anti-colonialism is “the struggle against imperial rule in colonized countries, mostly during the first half of the twentieth

124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
Additionally, the goal of anti-colonialism has is to “to question, interrogate, and challenge the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations”\textsuperscript{127} Although ‘anti-colonialism’ can refer to the political movements during the 20th century which, in many cases lead to post-colonialism and then nationalism, the historical definition is more appropriate for the purpose of this paper. This paper will use the term ‘anti-colonialism’ to refer to “a concept, practice, and philosophy” that J. Daniel Elam notes, “existed well in advance of 1900”.\textsuperscript{128} By making a clear distinction between nationalism and anti-colonialist action, this paper will provide a different and more nuanced perspective on the dissident and resistant actions of Africans from French ruled colonies involved in the World Wars. An anti-colonial perspective will both build upon and challenge previous historical work on the subject, particularly those works that have downplayed actions or events using the nationalist perspective.

Victor LeVine’s \textit{Politics In Francophone Africa} references the extensive history of African resistance to colonialism before nationalist movements of the latter half of the twentieth century. Le Vine’s analysis of different types of African resistance to colonialism are categorized into seven groups.\textsuperscript{129} These types of resistance range from creating informal political organizations, to “muted resistance”, and “outwitting the state”.\textsuperscript{130} Many of these types of efforts proved to be successful yet subtle ways to undermine French control in political and economic matters.\textsuperscript{131} Convincingly, Le Vine argues that the effect of these smaller scale

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 53-55.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
challenges to French domination was not slight. Rather, it was precisely “the intimate, informal, and usually non-violent context of French-African interaction that shaped... resistance and that ultimately led to the rise of modern African politics and the end of formal colonialism.”\textsuperscript{132} The events and actions that soldiers and veterans participated in as well as the groups they formed during and immediately the World Wars often fall within these categories.

Arguably, the best example of French African participation in any type of resistance during the World Wars, is Senegal. Unlike other Africans in French colonies, residents of the four Senegalese communes of Darkar, St. Louis, Rufisque, and Goree, were permitted local voting rights, freedom of speech and assembly, access to French courts, and were exempt from forced labor.\textsuperscript{133} Residents of the communes made up a very small percent of all Africans in Senegal and their rural counterparts were not permitted any of these “privileges.”\textsuperscript{134} However, given that some Senegalese had more agency than other Africans in French colonies, Senegal is a natural place to look for evidence of resistance to colonial power.

Based on the unique legal status of Senegalese from the communes, or \textit{originaires}, it may be tempting to assume that this group had less of a reason to resist French colonial power. However, despite their unique status the Senegalese recalled that inequality between themselves and the French persisted. Originaires were still restricted to traditional occupations or working menial jobs for French colonists.\textsuperscript{135} Racial hierarchies also continued to disadvantage them within French courts, where rulings tended to be in favor of ‘white’ men.\textsuperscript{136} Nevertheless,

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{133} Joe, Lunn, \textit{Memoirs of the Maelstrom} (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), 60
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
*originaires* avidly sought to defend their rights, when the French began to limit them from 1910 to 1914.¹³⁷

One of the many grievances held by *originaires* during this period was their dismissal from the French Army. Until the period of limitations and leading up to the first World War, originaire status had allowed Senegalese to serve in the French army with the same positions and status as French citizens.¹³⁸ After forming a political party to address the grievances of *originaires*, they elected Senegal’s well known political leader Blaise Diagne.¹³⁹ Diagne specifically capitalized on the issues of military service after the First World War began, demanding, “’If we can come here to legislate, we are French citizens; and if we are, we demand the right to serve in as all French citizens do.’”¹⁴⁰ Diagne’s position alone challenged precedents in the French Empire. As the first African elected as a Deputy to parliament he upended unanimous French control over the entire Empire.¹⁴¹ Diagne’s politics would serve as one of the first major and most pronounced challenges to French control in Senegal during the World Wars.

Diagne’s politics were clearly based on the grievances of *originaires*, one of which was their expulsion from the military, but Diagne did not simply use soldiers and their grievances as rhetorical material. Instead, would be soldiers were drawn into his politics when he called for “noncompliance with French efforts to enroll *originaires* as *tirailleurs*.”¹⁴² Resistance through noncompliance would have complicated French war efforts and undermined French authority in Senegal. After winning back *originaires*’ rights to serve in the military and be “incorporated in

¹³⁷ Ibid., 61.
¹³⁸ Ibid., 65.
¹³⁹ Ibid., 61.
¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 66.
French units and subject to the same obligations and advantages,” Diagne quickly connected military service to citizenship, eventually writing into law that *originaires* and their children were citizens.\(^{143}\) Eventually, as the need for soldiers grew, the promise of citizenship was extended beyond the communes.\(^{144}\) Furthermore, it framed the First World War as a “war to obtain rights”, spurring soldiers’ new attitudes about equality and the subsequent shake up of the colonial order in Senegal after the war.\(^{145}\)

The connection between the war, military service, and interests of *originaires* demonstrated through the Parti Jeunes Senegalais and Blaise Diagne is evident. Senegalese *originaires* withheld their service and once they regained their previous legal status began to push for more under the leadership of Diagne. Equally apparent in these actions is the challenge these events present to the French colonial system. In advocating for *originaires*’ rights as citizens, Diagne, and the *originaires* and *tirailleurs* who participated in the war were actively asserting themselves against traditional colonial hierarchies in their bid to obtain citizenship. Citizenship, of course, implied more rights and more influence over the politics of the French Empire.

Non-compliance with colonial demands and politicization of Senegalese *originaires*’ (and subsequently *tirailleurs*) interests demonstrates a more obvious and significant form of resistance. Other notable instances of resistance such as uprisings in response to conscription are mentioned by Lunn as well.\(^{146}\) However, these were not the only examples of soldier’s resistance to colonialism. Less organized resistance to colonial war time demands were common as well. Many Senegalese from rural areas fled or faked a medical condition to avoid being removed

\(^{143}\) Ibid., 61-66.  
^{144}\) Ibid., 73.  
^{145}\) Ibid., 73, 189.  
^{146}\) Ibid., 34.  

The Luther Skald  
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from their homes and forced to fight for the French.\textsuperscript{147} Although these actions were not necessarily motivated by a desire to undermine French colonial power, pressure the French for more rights, gain independence, resistance to the demands of French colonial authorities certainly challenged their power in a time of need. In fact, the effect of these actions was not slight; it is estimated that for every soldier recruited, another fled.\textsuperscript{148}

Evading military service is an example of one of Le Vine’s categories of resistances, “muted resistance.”\textsuperscript{149} Muted resistance or every day forms of resistance, are demonstrated by an anecdotes involving large numbers of African workers simply not showing up or “foot-dragging in meeting government quotas.”\textsuperscript{150} Le Vine also quotes John Lonsdale, “Many Africans resisted conquest, but more Africans evaded the forms of work which were then devised for them.”\textsuperscript{151} In several West African countries, noncompliance with and evasion of colonial demands collapsed entire forced labor systems.\textsuperscript{152} While avoiding conscription during the First World War did not immediately lead to the end of conscription, it certainly presented serious challenges to French efforts, leading to the use of increasingly severe tactics to ensure compliance.\textsuperscript{153}

Another of Le Vine’s categories of resistance is “Within the politics of exclusion”, referring to informal political organizations. After the First world war originaires formed veterans’ associations. Through these and similar organizations, Lunn describes veterans taking an active role in politics, interest groups, and founding labor unions.\textsuperscript{154} Despite the fact that veterans’ associations were not officially recognized political organizations in colonial Senegal,
they were significant in shaping post-war politics. Lunn’s oral histories clearly link the
Senegalese veterans’ transformed perspectives and the idea that they fought for their rights to
their newfound, outspoken roles in Senegalese politics. Later developments in Senegalese
political power, such as increasingly politically active veterans and winning equal representation
for rural and communal areas in the Colonial Council stemmed from the organizations created
after the war and attitudes developed during the war. Specifically, the ideas developed by
Diagne during the war influenced veteran’s awareness “of their wartime sacrifices on behalf of
France” and supported their interest in greater political participation. Lunn’s examples of
post-war political change clearly show the role of veterans and the war in expanding African
political movements and agency. Increasing African involvement in politics again represented a
threat to French colonial domination. As Lunn writes, “Senegalese political
supremacy...horrified the colonial establishment,” demonstrating the anti-colonial power of these
events. Furthermore, Lunn draws a line between the independence movements which gained
popularity after the Second World War and the continuing fight during the Interwar years which
sought to expand and equalize Senegalese rights to match those held by Europeans. Even
seemingly subtle forms of resistance to French absolutist rule over Senegal by soldiers and
politicians during the war, created “far-ranging political implications” for colonialism later in the
century.

Resistance to colonial injustices and hierarchies in addition to the struggle for greater
equality can be seen, not only in Senegalese originaires during the First World War, but also

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155 Ibid.
156 Ibid., 196.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid., 204.
160 Ibid.
during the Interwar years and the Second World War. As they had in the First World War, Senegalese *originaires* and politicians used military service as a vehicle to push the French for their rights. While it was ultimately unsuccessful, the Senegalese Deputy Diouf “proposed that French citizenship be granted to all those veterans in French West and Central Africa who had received the Légion d’Honneur, the médaille militaire, or the croix de guerre, were pensioners from the military, or who had received their carte de combattant.”¹⁶¹ This was also reflected in the insistence of Senegalese *originaires* that their rights and privileges be honored. They felt that their citizenship gave them both “rights and obligations,” so they expected to be treated as French soldiers were not as other Senegalese soldiers, who served as *tirailleurs*, were treated.¹⁶² Woodfork’s work highlights the continuation of Senegalese attitudes linking military service and citizenship from the First World War. Additionally, Woodfork’s analysis of the ways in which the *originaires* used this connection to pressure the French colonial system to honor their rights and gain more, shows a continuing pattern of resistance to one of the forms of oppression that supported the colonial system.

The use of Senegalese ideology about military service and citizenship manifested within the military during the Second World War in more subtle ways too. For example, Dieng, a veteran remembered *originaires* and *tirailleurs* “were issued metal helmets for combat, but that only the citizens *originaires* received wool caps to make wearing them more comfortable.”¹⁶³ In response, “the *tirailleurs* demurred and insisted that if they did not also get caps, they were ‘not going anywhere.’”¹⁶⁴ According to Dieng, the army “relented.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Ibid., 137.
¹⁶³ Ibid., 130.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid.
and Woodfork, originaire and tirailleurs veterans of both wars recalled being aware of discrepancies in the way they were treated. Although not all protested or demanded equal treatment, resistance to subpar treatment and outright abuses were not uncommon. These recollections from veterans can fit into the categories of muted resistance as described above or resistance “with French toleration.” 166 According to Le Vine the latter form of resistance was tolerated when it was not perceived as a serious threat to public order.167 In this case, the French may have simply seen accommodating the tirailleurs as an easier response rather than a response which might escalate the situation. Regardless of which category of resistance is most appropriate, the story demonstrates Senegalese soldiers testing the boundaries of the colonial hierarchy and by extension the colonial system itself.

Like Senegalese soldiers and veterans, Ivorian soldiers also posed challenges to the French colonial system. However, resistance to French absolutist authority and the injustices of the colonial system typically took as less direct form than they did in Senegal. Unlike the notably sized originaire population in Senegal, the majority of people of the Ivory Coast (Ivorians) were not permitted French citizenship, nor rights.168 A few exceptions existed where elite Ivorians who had been Westernized and completely assimilated to French culture were granted citizenship.169 However, these individuals did not represent a significant portion of the population and are not comparable to Senegalese originaires. Without the same access to politics and privilege, there were fewer Ivorian political leaders and organized political groups, particularly during the First World War. During the latter half of the Second World War Ivorians

167 Ibid.,53.
169 Ibid.
began to organize, resulting in more frequent and direct action that more closely resembled Senegalese politics during both wars. Ultimately throughout this period, the French colonial system in the Ivory Coast prevented the level of political involvement seen in Senegal. Despite these systematic limitations, Ivorian soldiers still participated in indirect forms of anti-colonialism.

Just as the Senegalese *originaires* fought back against the demotion of their rights, many Ivorian challenges stemmed from frustration with discrepancies in treatment between European and African soldiers during the wars. Some veterans recounted questioning French officers about the differences in their food compared to French soldiers.\(^{170}\) Even questioning something so simple implied questioning the racial hierarchy on which colonialism depended. Another subtle instance of resistance was described by Phillip Yace, a soldier from the Ivory Coast who fought in Europe during Second World War. He recalled that French officers wanted to evacuate African soldiers to warmer areas during the winter, but he refused wanting to stay. The assumption that African soldiers could not perform adequately in the winter and the differentiation between African and European soldiers was seen by Yace as “a question of our status.”\(^{171}\) Such an assertion of status, questioning of, and resisting the precedent of African obedience to European established in the colonial system follows the definition of anti-colonialism. Like many of the Senegalese examples, these also demonstrate muted resistance or resistance with French toleration described by Le Vine. Particularly in the second example, soldiers refused to follow the orders of the French, undermining the authority of the colonial hierarchy even if it was to a small extent.


Other differences between treatment of African and European soldiers during the Wars were noticed and often resisted by Ivorians. However, the majority of Lawler’s oral interviews, Ivorian veterans emphasized the differences between their own treatment during the war and after they were repatriated. One Ivorian veteran Sekongo described feeling “equal” to French soldiers during his service despite segregation and slight differences in treatment. After repatriation, Sekongo did not express the same feeling of equality, instead he said, “When I came back the first time, there was no more equality.” The intensity of Ivorian veterans’ discontent with returning to a more obviously unequal setting is exemplified in a situation described by Nanzegue Tuo. Tuo and other soldiers were not permitted into a movie theater by French cinema-goers. Angered, he and his fellow soldiers attacked the theatre and those inside. The attack was justified by the soldiers themselves, Americans, and Russians, because of the French mistreatment of the African soldiers who had fought for them in the war.

Such instances of violence between demobilized colonial soldiers and soldiers from the metropole were not uncommon. The most famous, the massacre of African soldiers at Thiaroye, was the result of discontent over unreceived financial compensation that boiled over into a mutiny. The grievances of the soldiers at Thiaroye were shared by many of the Ivorian veterans in Lawler’s interviews. Especially after repatriation, veterans remembered feeling as if no one cared. This was for a variety of reasons, including the fact that veterans’ pensions and

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173 Ibid., 193.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
former prisoners’ compensation were not paid, no one welcomed them back to their country, and their uniforms were taken away.179 Another veteran Sekongo Yenibiyo, summarized his feelings after repatriation, saying “they said nothing to us and took everything.”180

After the war many Ivorian veterans’ concerns about their unpaid pensions and French maltreatment led them to politics. Veterans such as Yeo Nabetegue expressed feeling disempowered and taken advantage by their service to France. Nabetegue, referring to the land he lost when during the war, “When I was in politics, I had the power to get it back.”181 The feelings of frustration expressed by Nabetegue were shared by many from the Ivory Coast and lead to their support of African politicians and parties who were eventually able to directly challenge French colonial power after the Second World war. Felix Houphouet-Boigny, a co-founder of a highly politicized agricultural interest group in the Ivory Coast and later an elected representative to the French National Assembly, was one such politician.182 Boigny appealed to former soldiers and forced laborers alike by promising to end forced labor and acknowledging France’s broken promises to veterans. In a speech, Nabetegue recalled Boigny saying, “When you were soldiers, you worked for France...After the first war, they promised to liberate us - to change power. They did not do this.”183 Such an appeal to the grievances held by veterans won Houphouet-Boigny their support.184 Ivorian veterans were also crucial to Biogny’s success as they often helped to spread his message throughout the Ivory Coast.185 Lawler describes Houphouet’s efforts to end labor as a “first real step toward independence”, showing that in the

179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
182 Ibid., 208-210.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid.,213.
185 Ibid.,210.
Ivory Coast, veterans were influential in major early anti-colonialism in addition to more subtle acts of resistance.

As we have seen, West African soldiers during and immediately after the First and Second World War were often involved in events and groups that can be viewed as challenging colonialism. These actions, events, and groups were often involved in questioning, interrogating, and challenging “the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations”, lending themselves to the definition of anti-colonialism. However, given the often subtle nature of African resistance to colonialism before the 1950’s, as discussed by Victor Le Vine, the fact that many historians have overlooked the significance of the types of events described in this paper is not surprising. Aside from the disguise of subtly, frequent minimization by historians of minor acts of resistance to colonial systems is the result of the conflation of ‘nationalism and ‘anti-colonialism’. Using clear definitions of each term facilitates a more nuanced examination of Senegalese and Ivorian activity during the Wars.

The anti-colonial perspective sheds new light on the influence of a variety of events in French West African colonial history. The character of the events, groups, and people, discussed in this paper range from pronounced, politically organized challenges of the empirical status quo, to seemingly inconsequential questions about the differences in treatment between African and European servicemen. Although the former type of anti-colonial action was not uncommon, the smaller ‘acts of defiance’ were much more common. Based on this, it appears that early anti-colonialism such as that during the World Wars did not typically manifest in organized political parties or movements. Furthermore, there is little evidence that these everyday forms of

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resistance were motivated by nationalism or a sense of collective national identity. This same lack of grand movements or wide spread nationalist ideology is what has often led historians to disregard or downplay actions taken by African soldiers and veterans. Despite this, authors like Lunn and Lawler have pointed to the significance of these smaller acts in the development of African nationalism in the latter half of the twentieth century. Even the minor actions taken by Africans involved in the war effort pushed the established boundaries of colonial administrations, values, and hierarchies. When these actions were organized by veterans’ groups and wartime leaders like Diagne and Houphouet-Boigny, they paved the way for increasing political agency among Africans within the colonial system. The subtleties of anti-colonialism in twentieth century French West Africa prove that the World Wars are more significant in the development of anti-colonialism than many historians recognize. Most importantly, the anti-colonial perspective acknowledges the contributions of these soldiers to the independence of their countries in addition to the sacrifices they made during the World Wars.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


A great source that relied heavily on primary sources to create. The article contains lots of long, direct quotes from veterans that are great to analyze. Lawler’s article also talks explicitly about Ivorian resistance to French colonial power whereas many other sources do not. The only downside to this is that there is some repeat information from Lawler’s other works.


Lawler focuses on the experiences and involvement of African veterans in anti-colonial protests as well as the effect of the Second World War on the Ivory Coast. The later half of Soldier of Misfortune outlines several reasons for veteran political participation and examples of other war related rhetoric that supported Ivorian political interests. Examples include rhetoric about sacrifices of African veterans during the war and hard feelings about forced labor endured during and after the war.


Focused on the First rather than Second World War, Lunn’s book outlines the unique history of Senegal supplement with oral histories. During the First War, the French colony allowed a segment of the African population citizenship rights. The book’s analysis of the war includes the relationship of the draft to political rights, movements, and the first African Senegalese politicians. While technically outside of the time period examined in my research it is still a relevant source as it discusses the war, veterans, and early African politics.


Woodfork’s work focuses on both of the World Wars and the involvement of Senegalese soldiers in them. The work is very similar to Lunn’s because it relies heavily on primary source material, often providing long quotes. It talks explicitly about what serving meant to these veterans and often touches on how it was linked to citizenship in both wars.
Secondary Sources

*Decolonization* provides an older interpretation of the post-Second World War period. It helps to explain some of the other influences during this time including foreign pressure on European colonial super powers which led to decolonization. On the other hand it does not appear to address African involvement in the wars directly. So, it will be an interesting perspective to compare my findings about the war and internal colonial pressure to decolonize.


This book is a series of works by various authors all talking about early African independence. These authors all give different contexts and explanations for why decolonization and independence occurred. The source will provide some balance to my other works which are very military heavy. It also connects African politics to ideas picked up from Europeans, which places in the same category as a lot of the other older literature.


Although it provides a very French perspective on African politics and citizenship, it also helps to contextualize the time period and the French colonial system. Most importantly it outlines French political ideologies and discusses how they are incompatible with the French Empire and its treatment of Africans. Furthermore it discusses how African military service and citizenship rights became linked, supported, and used by the French to support their Empire after the war when it was beginning to weaken.


Crowder’s book was helpful for providing a slightly older but not terribly aged interpretation of African anti-colonialism, nationalism, and involvement in the wars. The source presents somewhat of a middle ground in the literature by linking the wars and African participation to later politics and the European political values, while still acknowledging Africans recognition of the discrepancies between the French’s treatment of African colonies and those same ideals.


Davidson’s work is particularly useful for understanding the themes of older literature on African politics and involvement in the war. The source was very broad, talking about different regions of Africa and different colonial powers. It helped me to see the more antiquated ways of writing and thinking about African politics and nationalism that are very Euro-centric.

Similar to Elam’s article, this article defined anti-colonialism. The definitions were slightly different but I thought they added depth to each other and allowed me to better explain and support my framework. It also applied the concept to several different countries/colonies/regions. While I mostly used it for the definition, it was interesting to compare Elam’s applications with those provided by Sefa and Asgharzadeh.


Another source that helped me to understand how African military service was viewed by both Europeans and Africans involved. More specifically, it reiterated the motivations of the French for creating conscription in Africa and provided an overview of the reactions of the French West Africans. I used the source to help provide context for the region and for African involvement in the war in general.


Elam’s work gave a nice overview of anti-colonialism which allowed me to better grasp the concept itself. The article supported my framework for analysis by supplying a easy to follow definition of anti-colonialism. It also applied this definition and discussed the different manifestations of anti-colonialism in different parts of the world.


One of the few comparative works on French and British colonial Africa and African experiences immediately following the First World War. Like Killingray’s other work, this does not support the idea that the war lead to mass discontent nor nationalist political movements. Although it is outside the time period of focus, it will still help to contextualize the state of the colonies leading up to the Second World War. It will also serve as a good example of a comparative work on the topic.


Goebel’s work helped to fill in some of the blanks between the two wars. It also gave me a broad overview of the ways in which Africans who had migrated to France felt about these issues. There were several nice quotations from veterans and expatriates. It also helped me to understand French political ideals and how people saw the discrepancies between those ideals and the colonial system.

Johnson’s article discusses Diagne, his political stances, and path to power. It discusses his importance in African political history in general but also his connection to the war and veterans interests. It also provides a good overview of the issues in early Senegalese politics many of which are issues relevant to the war and the interests of originaires, tirailleurs and veterans.


This was an encyclopedia like book that talked about the Ivory Coast. It filled in some of the blanks in Lawler’s works because it more explicitly explained the political and colonial systems of the colony. This source will help to contextualize the Ivory Coast and the political events I am discussing. It also helped me to understand the differences between Senegal and the Ivory Coast, especially in light of Senegal’s unique relationship to citizenship among French colonies.


Killingray’s book on British African experiences during the war provides a broad overview of all of Britain’s African colonies during the Second World War. One of the last chapters, “Ex-servicemen & Politics” discusses the emerging politics of demobilized soldiers and the societies they left behind. Like many other recent sources on British colonial Africa, Killingray critiques the idea that veterans played an instrumental role in nationalist politics. The chapter will provide a good comparison to other sources on individual British colonies as well as Le Vine’s overview of French colonial Africa during this time period.


This book discusses theories, history, and the application of natiationlism. Lawrence spends a fair amount of the book discussing and defining exactly what nationalism as a concept is and how it can be used. The book will be helpful to help me set of the framework of my argument by comparing the definition to that of anti-colonialism.


Victor Le Vine’s *Politics in Francophone Africa* provides a general overview of French-African politics during and after the World Wars. Le Vine’s overview of French African political history echoes the idea of many scholars that most major political movements occurred after the second world although he acknowledges the prevalence of earlier and more subtle forms of anti-colonialism. Importantly however, the book emphasises the importance that the war played in encouraging African veterans’ to participate in politics.

This source more generally discusses the experience of African soldiers during the second world war from both French and British colonies. It helped to provided an overview of the experiences, numbers, and themes of these mens’ service. It was particularly helpful for the introduction of my paper because it helped me to provide simplified context.