**Chapter 12**

**Conclusion**

What do we learn from examining the struggles of different groups of men of color to achieve rights, recognition, and civic membership through service in the US armed forces from the Civil War through World War I? To answer this question, we must examine the particular space that such soldiers occupied in these conflicts, how they defined and situated their own roles, and how institutional changes relating to the military defined boundaries around these members of the military. Throughout these three wars, military engagements held particular places in the United States’ developing understanding of itself as a nation, and each successive war prompted recollection and reinterpretation of previous conflicts to define nationhood. At the same time, communities of color remembered and invoked their own involvement in these conflicts to consider and debate about their participation.

If considered through a conventional political development lens, the advances secured were unstable. African Americans achieved emancipation and both constitutional amendments and legislation securing rights through the Civil War, but the rights proved ephemeral. The Spanish American and Philippine Wars saw Black enlistees identified as crucial to victory and opportunities for Black officers to lead Filipino units, but neither Black nor Filipino soldiers were able to leverage their service successfully to place themselves firmly on the ground of masculinized American reunion around the national agenda of advancing the nation as an internationally recognized imperial power. During the mobilization for World War I, Black soldiers and their advocates pressed unsuccessfully for integration but successfully secured officer training. Black leaders came together around supporting the war effort and encouraged enlistment. Black troops served in Europe, some under French command, and had visible successes. Yet they faced discrimination both while they served and when they returned.

Asian immigrants also served in the American armed forces, albeit in small numbers during this era. Nonetheless, their participation was visible enough by the 1880s to raise concerns in the Navy’s leadership, which sought to limit them. The Spanish American War, however, opened up opportunities, and during World War I, Asians not only volunteered but also served through participation in the expanded selective service program imposed by Congress. Some tried to claim citizenship on the basis of their service, generating a debate over whether their status as veterans should entitle them to nationalize, even though generally Asians were forbidden to do so.

Filipinos began serving in the US armed forces in significant numbers at the turn of the 19th century. The Navy initially welcomed them in support roles. When resistance to American hegemony in the Philippines erupted in the wake of the Spanish American War, the United States recruited Filipinos to serve in special units. Filipinos, particularly those who had served in the Navy, also sought access to expedited naturalization processes, requiring administrative officials and judges to grapple with how to apply statutory language entitling veterans to citizenship in the case of veterans who fell into racially questionable categories.

These cases, spanning three wars and three different struggles for status and recognition, illustrate how race-making intertwined with statebuilding prior to the rise of the modern American state. Observing this process by focusing on military mobilization through these wars highlights how the need for state capacity incentivized racial incorporation that then generated conflict over how to maintain a racialized state. Policymakers at the national level inside and outside the military navigated incorporation by establishing limits, relying on both existing practices and congressional language to build and justify the system.

*Masculinity and its trials*

One thread running through these engagements is the role of masculinity in structuring the expectations and attributions of citizenship and civic membership. As the book has argued, members of the armed forces sought to leverage their service to claim rights. Service in the armed forces intertwined with masculinity in shifting ways throughout the period.

During the Civil War, African American men fought for the right to enlist as members of the armed services. Free Black men were permitted to enlist through the state militia system, but individuals escaping from slavery or gaining emancipation through the process of the war first had to gain recognition of their own masculine agency and capacity to serve. While the impetus first came from military commanders in the field and from state militias seeking to meet enlistment targets, Congress ultimately came on board with legislation extending that recognition – but devaluing Black service by offering less compensation. While Black enlistees objected, they had little success until increased recognition of their service and sacrifice, particularly in the aftermath of the Fort Pillow massacre, provided the necessary leverage. After this point, the plea both that the men were nobly sacrificing for the nation and the invocation of their need for more resources to serve as heads of household, providing for wives and families, gained traction with policymakers, leading to fairer payment scales.

A related dynamic played out with respect to voting rights. During the Civil War, a national conversation began about voting and the need to extend voting rights to soldiers and veterans. Pre-war presumptions about soldiers as itinerants with little connection to their communities fell in the face of new narratives about responsibility, sacrifice, and masculine patriotic service for the union. These shifts contributed to the expansion of voting rights for soldiers, and laid the groundwork for Black veterans to claim the franchise as well at the war’s end. Framing the vote as both a reward for loyal service to the union and as a source of collective mature civic responsibility and engagement in self governance, veterans contributed strongly to the fight for suffrage as a key plank of Black civic incorporation.

During the Spanish American and Philippine Wars, masculinity’s relationship to American national identity had shifted in conjunction with the rise of jingoism. The mobilization for and entrance into the Spanish American War rode a strong tide of masculinized rhetoric emphasizing strength, power, and forcefulness. The military conflicts themselves offered opportunities for a new generation of soldiers to participate in their own manly forging in the crucible of war. This crucible functioned as a patriotic and unifying echo of the Civil War, drawing from the increasingly dominant narrative of that war as a tragic fratricidal conflict with heroes on both sides. Military engagement and glory in this new round of conflict promised to knit up the wounds of disunion by drawing together successful and manly service from the entire nation as one.

Black servicemembers occupied a complicated position with respect to masculinity. Some were recruited in specifically racialized terms to serve in the “immune units,” segregated units that were recruited specifically for service in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines because individuals with African ancestry were believed to be more resistant to tropical diseases like malaria and yellow fever. While recruited to provide more strength and capacity to support vulnerable white troops, this facet of their service did not enhance their claims to masculine dominance. Rather, they took up the white man’s burden of promulgating advancement and civilization as uncertain possessors themselves of this national ethos.

This tension manifested in Black soldiers’ relations with Filipinos, both those who served with and under them, and those who navigated the politics of colonialism. Masculinity was tightly intertwined with whiteness for American military and colonial leaders, with whiteness standing in for the democracy, civilization, advancement, and enlightenment that colonialism was to bring. Black military representatives had to grapple with Filipinos’ observations of their own disparagement and racialized status, quietly and carefully acknowledging critique while publicly continuing to support and defend American values. Filipino revolutionaries actively sought to exploit this tension, going so far as to encourage American desertion and even defection to the revolutionary cause as an appropriate and independent masculine response to lynchings of African Americans in the south.

The Black press sought to incorporate Black men who served into this masculine framework, reporting on notable Black servicemembers as contributors to the expansion of American empire. Their battle exploits made news in the Black press, as did their experiences in positions of leadership. Some newspapers emphasized the value of Black service and leadership in illustrating for the Filipinos the maturity and incorporation of men of color. Ironically, the Black servicemember who received the most attention and masculinized respect in the white press was deserter David Fagen, who rose to officer status in the insurrectionist force.

The small number of Asians who served during the Spanish American and Philippine Wars also had complex relationships to masculinity. They only served in appreciable numbers in the Navy, and men of Chinese ancestry in the Navy often served in noncombat support positions. Nevertheless, Japanese enlisted man Buntaro Kumagai caught the attention of the American press as a fierce fighter dedicated to serving his adopted nation. Press coverage of Kumagai just after the turn of the century contrasted sharply with coverage of Civil War veteran Ny Look, a Chinese immigrant who challenged the order deporting him under the Geary Act in 1893. Ny Look, described as a fragile, barely ambulatory former cook, was not a model of powerful masculinized military service despite his having been wounded in service. Kumagai, alternatively, illustrated the common stereotype of the hypermasculine Japanese warrior.

Filipinos also bore a complex relationship to masculinity during the Spanish American and Philippine Wars. In their first encounters with Filipinos as imperial leaders, American observers were bewildered by the racial complexity they encountered. The Macabebes, who aligned themselves with the Americans, quickly gained the reputation for being fiercely martial. At the same time, as American colonial officials consolidated the concept of Filipinos as a racialized group, they saw the people with whom they were collaborating as decidedly subordinate, inferior, and in need of democratic tutelage. Policymakers in the United States were divided over whether Filipinos would ultimately be suited for independent self-governance but largely agreed that they were not fit for immediate citizenship, even if they had served in the military.

Back in the United States, the tension between the highly subordinated and subservient posture that segregation demanded and the manly authority inherent in military service contributed to the 1906 Brownsville Affray. The members of the 25th Infantry, when stationed in Brownsville, Texas, almost immediately experienced difficulty in comporting with the townspeople’s expectations of highly muted and subservient masculinity. Accused of shooting up the town, the soldiers stood firm in their assertions that they had committed no wrongs, ultimately provoking Theodore Roosevelt to confirm a group punishment of mass dishonorable discharges. As discussed, Black advocates adopted a variety of strategies to try to resolve the situation, some of which involved publicly rearticulating the manly honor of the regiment. Organization around this injustice was a significant factor in the rise of the Niagara Movement and its challenge to Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist approach.

During the World War I era, Black servicemembers and their advocates invoked masculinity as they objected to segregation and demanded opportunities for officer training. With the NAACP and its publication, *The Crisis*,now a leading voice for a politics of resistance to Jim Crow, the maturity and capability of Black troops were a leading theme. While their articulation of masculinity could not secure an end to segregation, the Army ultimately agreed to permit officer training.

The Black press covered the troops’ exploits abroad, celebrating their successes. In particular, New York’s 369th Infantry Regiment, colloquially known as the Harlem Hellfighters, and its most famous member, Private Henry Johnson, garnered extensive coverage for their exploits. The coverage emphasized the manly heroism of these champions, celebrating their combat victories. The hope, rendered fairly explicitly, was that these proven men would come home to a better and more accepting world.

Likewise, Asian and Filipino men who served sought to leverage their service into citizenship in part by emphasizing their comportment with masculine performance and values. In cases challenging denials of their bids to naturalize, they presented themselves as fully Americanized assimilated individuals who had performed honorable and at times even heroic service. Some courts even made a point of acknowledging these sketches of successful masculine civic performance. Nevertheless, bids on this basis had little success.

When Black troops returned to the United States, many were initially met with celebratory parades, as were the unsegregated forces. The 369th notably participated in a parade in which they marched from lower Manhattan to Harlem, with throngs of observers cheering them on. The celebrations and appreciation for their accomplishments proved short lived, however. Even before they returned from Europe, white men, most notably rabble-rouser Ben Tillman, but others as well, whipped up fears of the returning Black soldiers’ hypermasculinity and militance. Playing up scattered reports of Black troops’ interactions with white French women, alarmists warned that returned soldiers would expect respect, equality, and access to white women as a consequence of their service.

The effect of these warnings was disastrous for many veterans. While disrespect and agitated doubling down on Jim Crow norms was commonplace, veterans also suffered violent and deadly attacks. Many seemed linked to the men’s status as veterans, with white men attacking them either with clear knowledge of their status as veterans or even while they were still in uniform. The US Army undertook tepid investigations and tightened rules about the length of time that veterans were permitted to wear their uniforms after being mustered out of their units. Expressing full masculinity for Black veterans, particularly those who returned to the south, was often more dangerous than empowering.

*Service and sacrifice*

Each period featured discussions about the meaning of service and sacrifice on behalf of the United States during a time of war. While national officials broadly solicited service during each military engagement, questions arose about whether these calls should include men of color and on what terms. Their service was qualified in complex ways that shaped how it was recognized and rewarded.

The longstanding and consistent claims on the part of all the subordinated groups discussed in this book is that military service and sacrifice accomplished two things. First, it demonstrated a man’s (or his group’s) fitness for civic membership. Honorable service was both a training ground and a marker of civic engagement, investment in American values, and preparation of mature self governance through participation in representative democracy. Second, service and sacrifice, when recognized by the state, deserved a reward from the state. As this study has shown, both of these dynamics were complicated by race, as racial identity posed limits to the nation’s willingness to acknowledge and reward service.

African Americans had to struggle to be permitted to serve during the Civil War. Free Black men sought to enlist, and had some success in convincing governors in some states to allow them to join state militias. Other states were uninterested. Individuals who had fled slavery also wanted to take up arms against the confederacy, but despite their capabilities and knowledge of the terrain and resources of the Confederates, Union officials were at first uncertain about enlisting them. Congress and Lincoln finally agreed to organize formal regiments of Black troops after strong advocacy by Union generals who saw the potential. Resistance to Black enlistment became lower as the war progressed and recruits grew increasingly difficult to find. As noted above, achieving equal compensation for service was initially a challenge, and only after significant and visible military achievement did arguments to parlay service begin to achieve results.

During the Civil War and afterward, Black servicemembers and veterans articulated their service as fitting them to be members of the American democratic polity. As the Civil War progressed and Black service members provided critical capacity to the Union, policy discussions moved first toward emancipation, and then toward citizenship. Military service played an important role for several key national Republicans, including Presidents Lincoln and Grant, who understood veterans to have earned the franchise through their defense of American values. The connection between service and incorporation in democratic participation generated strong opposition from policymakers in the north and the south, who objected both to continued Black military service and its acknowledgment with greater civic rights.

Black service during the Spanish American and Philippine War, while recognized and publicized in the Black press, was often erased from white narratives of the conflicts. Teddy Roosevelt briefly acknowledged the role of the Black regular army troops that facilitated and supported his Rough Riders, but he did not maintain his early public recognitions, and by the 1910s, the storied charge had become an epic tale of white heroism. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the Army specifically solicited Black men under the belief that they would be more resistant to tropical diseases.

Black men served in the Philippine War both in enlisted units and as officers for the Philippine Scouts. They hoped that this service would translate into appreciation and recognition of their role in advancing American interests and supporting American ideals overseas. The narrative of service that increasingly dominated public space, however, rested upon idealized memories of the Civil War and emphasized the theme of reconciliation between north and south. Service was a means of performing reunion and particularly in the Spanish American War, was celebrated in this regard. These narratives of reconciliation left little space to acknowledge Black men’s service in the Civil war and afterward.

Asian service in this period was tenuous and limited, though members of the military sought to translate their service into citizenship. They rested their claims on the statutory promise that honorable service would render them eligible for citizenship. The turn of the century saw the culmination of a different legislative development – that of Chinese exclusion from the mainland United States. While the Supreme Court ruled that the descendants of Chinese immigrants born in the United States were entitled to citizenship, Congress granted significant latitude to administrative agencies to implement and manage exclusion. This process overshadowed the claims that military service entitled a member of the military or veteran to naturalize, with most of the courts that grappled with the issue finding that Congress had not intended to open this recognition of service to Chinese service members or veterans.

Military service by Filipinos was likewise an awkward fit with a transactional frame allowing citizenship or civic membership in exchange for military service. The Scouts’ service was lauded as heroic and recognized as providing evidence that at least some Filipinos were accepting American hegemony and values. Nonetheless, the Scouts were considered even in official reports as distinct from the other regular units in the American military, whether national army or militia. While this distinction was in some regards just a reporting device, it inadvertently revealed the contingent nature of this service and underlined its lack of full equivalence to regular service. And even Filipinos who enlisted in the Navy under regular terms had difficulty in extracting naturalization on the usual terms for veterans. With their status as Filipinos taking precedence over their service, some courts ran aground against the observation that they could not, as US nationals, naturalize as citizens, since they already owed allegiance to the United States.

The World War I era intensified the demand for service, most significantly through the implementation of the first truly national military draft. Rather than service as a voluntary proffer subject to acceptance and subsequent recognition, service became an obligation. So broad was this obligation that registration swept in almost all men of draft-eligible age, regardless of race or nationality. Local draft boards were left to sort out which men were exempt or could otherwise be passed over.

The Black press engaged a conscious and at times bitter debate over service and whether to offer it freely. This debate overlapped at the edges with socialist resistance to the draft and insistence that military service at the national level could not be compelled. The courts made swift work of this argument, but within the Black press, some voices continued to counsel less than enthusiastic cooperation with the national attempt to muster manpower swiftly. DuBois’s “Close Ranks” editorial advocated explicitly for bargaining for civil rights advances on the basis of enthusiastic and loyal service, advising Black men to enter the military and fellow Black editors to drop their opposition despite the military’s failure to eliminate segregation and its foot-dragging on officer training.

During the World War I era, service itself shifted as it intertwined with the Wilson Administration’s feverish efforts to gin up patriotism and suppress dissent. Military service was both expected and lauded, but wartime propaganda encouraged service through a variety of ways to support the war effort, including bond and stamp campaigns to provide financial support. At the same time, propagandists promoted military service as a path to greater education and opportunity and as a reinforcement of servicemembers’ patriotic commitment to American values.

Congress passed new legislation extending citizenship for service on the most generous terms ever adopted. Waiting periods and residency requirements fell by the wayside, as military service was publicly promoted not just as a legal obligation but as a path to citizenship. A huge swell of military enlistees took advantage of this opportunity, shedding their foreign allegiances to don an American uniform and quickly gain citizenship as a reward. Service was consciously promoted not just as a legal path to citizenship but also as a path to Americanization and assimilation. Despite this public campaign, both Asians and Filipinos ran into substantial difficulties in trying to extract their reward for their service. Even when they could demonstrate full assimiliation prior to enlistment, courts wrestled with the pre-existing legal frameworks that denied naturalization to them. When one Hawaii judge began naturalizing Asians who had served, he provoked a crisis in the State Department, which briefly considered stripping all of these men of their citizenship. Ultimately, the Supreme Court settled the question, ruling in 1925 that Hidemitsu Toyota, who served in the Coast Guard between 1913 and 1923, receiving at least eight honorable discharges, some during World War I, was not eligible to naturalize. The ruling closed the door on eligibility for all Asian veterans until Congress took specific action to remediate in the 1930s.

*Making Race*

The involvement of the state in making racial categories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has attracted extensive scholarly attention. While much of this process drove what was happening in the military, some aspects of military service contributed to race-making and the development of ideologies of race. In considering Amrican institutions and their impact on state-building, scholars sometimes tend to shunt the military to the side, viewing it as sui generis and separate. While this has been true to some extent – for instance, rules about equal pensions regardless of race were unthinkable in most other policy areas until much later in the 20th century – the American warrior state and its warriors had a significant impact on how policy developed and evolved in other spheres.

Over the course of the Civil War, the federal government had to confront direct questions about African Americans and their legal status. States had primarily driven this process, assigning statuses ranging from limited forms of citizenship with protected rights to slavery, and as Martha Jones has argued, Black state and city residents actively mobilized the state legal system to secure rights and recognition. Enlisting in the US armed forces, however, conferred status as a member of the military and, if service was completed successfully, as a veteran entitled to benefits. Emancipation, especially that secured by African Americans who fled from slavery, coupled with enlistment and service blurred lines between “free Blacks” and former slaves. Mobility during and after the war further complicated matters, as some northerners who enlisted decided to build their postwar lives in the south and some southerners who enlisted opted not to return to their previous homes. Status and access to rights remained bound to place, as northern African Americans did not experience the same tumultuous and ultimately unsuccessful struggle to realize civil and political rights. Nonetheless, with the status of slavery and its unique link to African Americans eliminated, the national government extended a minimal form of citizenship to all African Americans and recognized Black enlistees, regardless of their origins, on the same terms.

By the turn of the century, racial categories were consolidating. Black service members were being recruited in explicitly racial terms. These terms, however, limited their ability to partake of full civic membership. Black men who served did so as agents of an imperial state that was consciously advancing racialized conceptions of enlightened government in its new territorial possessions. Further, the status they earned through service proved ephemeral. Those who became officers had to struggle to maintain their commissions, with several losing them. Enlisted men who returned to the south after their service ended returned to their subordinated roles. The unrest in Brownsville dramatically underlined the privileging of Jim Crow over military status, also underlining that the military, as a national institution, was willing to bow to southern conceptions about the proper conduct of encounters between white civilians and Black soldiers.

At the same time, American law was beginning to consolidate restrictions on various national identities simultaneously as Asian, identifying all Asians as unassimilable and non-white, barring them from access to naturalization. While state and congressional restrictions on Chinese immigrants established the initial pathway, policymakers on the state and federal level sought to extend these restrictions to Japanese and Koreans. Anxieties about Chinese naval service in the 1880s contributed to new rules seeking to limit not just Chinese, but rather all Asian, enlistment, and despite the different negative stereotypes that dogged Chinese, Japanese, and Korean men, all were grouped together under the banner of undesirability. While a few Japanese plaintiffs attempted to claim whiteness, courts hearing these claims both denied whiteness and doubled down on the category of Asian.

Upon claiming sovereignty over the Philippine Islands, US authorities at first made breathtakingly complicated attempts to map out race in the existing multicultural and multilingual society. Filipinos’ involvement on both sides of the Philippine War initially contributed to complicated differentiations among indigenous groups, with the American-aligned Macabebes holding particular status. Within a short time, the attempt to identify and define such categories was abandoned, and the taxonomies never made any headway in American law. Instead, island residents were collected under the single category of Filipino. The Army’s Scout program reinforced this identity by unifying the enlistees as Filipinos while keeping the program administratively separated from the rest of the Army.

During the World War I era, the draft provided an interesting example of racial construction that deviated from the emerging categories. Draft registration cards identified race, but only by instructing individuals “of African descent” to tear off the bottom left corner. This practice enabled easy identification of these men for their placement in segregated units. Segregation prevailed in military training and service for all units throughout the country.

The Black press debated the draft and the wisdom of volunteering to serve. As this debate was taking place, the Wilson Administration worked to whip up patriotism and enforce loyalty. The potential for Black radicalization was a major concern for the administration, which identified former Tuskegee Institute insider and confidante of Booker T. Washington, Emmett Scott, to serve as the Special Advisor of Black Affairs, making him the highest ranked African American in the administration. The concerns about radicalization often took the form of worries that ignorant Black enlistees would be seduced into socialism. After the armistice, the administration became further concerned that Black men, when they returned to the United States and were mustered out of the Army, would (as explained above) embrace manhood and social equality, refusing to retreat back to the structural and individual subordination that prevailed prior to the war.

With regard to Asians and Filipinos, the paths set into motion at the turn of the century continued to develop. Congressional legislation confirmed the unity and lack of desirability of Asians as a group. Individuals who sought naturalization on the basis of military service faced courts that acknowledged their service but refused to allow them to become citizens because all Asians were identified as non-white. The draft law as written required registration of almost all men between the ages of 18 and 45 but allowed individuals with no path to citizenship to be exempt from mandatory service. Nevertheless, a number of Asian men did serve, and some of them may have been compelled to serve. Their experience diverged sharply from other immigrants, who found service to be a clear path toward governmental acknowledgment of assimilation and whiteness.

Likewise, Filipinos who had served continued to press for naturalization under the more generous criteria established for members of the military. The courts, however, kept this door shut despite Congress’s having created a path to citizenship for Filipinos, who held the status of US nationals. As with Asians, Filipinos’ racial status took legal precedence over their status as military veterans.

*The Narrative of Service and Memory*

The Civil War was understood as a monumental and transformational moment in American history, casting a long shadow over future discussions of war, the nation, and the meaning of union. For the Lincoln Administration, it began as a war over the permissibility of secession and the unresolvable debate about expanding the territory where slavery would be legal. As the war progressed, however, its meaning changed for Republicans and the abolition of slavery as an institution and a status and the emancipation of the slaves became more central. This book has explained how Black military service contributed to this transformation.

Several historians, most notably David Blight and Grace Elizabeth Hale, have documented how memory of the war and its meaning shifted in the period from Appomattox and the 1890s. Leading southerners who were seeking to limit postwar change and reimplement some form of slavery actively worked from the beginning to redefine the war’s meaning and control its memory. In this frame, the war was a tragic and fratricidal conflict, the south the north’s noble and heroic adversary, and Reconstruction a corrupt, excessive, and brutal program of northern domination.

Bitter partisan politics initially enabled the Republican Party to maintain a different set of interpretations of the war. Their views ranged from the Radicals’ full embrace of abolition and the uplifting of the emancipated race to civil and political equality to moderates’ less ambitious aims. The moderates nonetheless maintained that the south’s intransigence over the spread of slavery and attempts to reinstitute it warranted significant oversight and foreclosed a simple reconstitutive process that welcomed the seceded states and their leaders back into the fold. Republicans were also initially unified around the agenda of remaking the national government to rebalance institutions to favor their party, and to cement this advantage with Black votes. As southern resistance hardened and the northern Republican will weakened, the narrative became more difficult to sustain broadly.

As the nation approached the turn of the century, the rise of imperialism and jingoism hastened the shift. Reconciliation and unity narratives resonated strongly with the new military adventures, and the Spanish American War both offered the opportunity for a new generation to gain military glory and for this adventure to provide closure on the wounds of the Civil War.

Black service and sacrifice, both in memory and in framing new set of military engagements, challenged this understanding. The counter-memory embraced in the Black press was one that emphasized the critical role that Black troops played in saving the union. This narrative saw Black service as transformative for the individuals who served, for the race, and for the nation, fulfilling the promises of the founding of a nation conceived in liberty.

Some Black media outlets promoted this narrative to encourage enlistment, presenting it as both a patriotic duty and as a means of advancing equality. The memory of Black service also provided leverage to encourage the organization of units to accommodate Black volunteers. The national call for Black volunteers to serve as Immunes provided another opportunity to frame Black service as critical to national interests by linking it back to the Civil War era.

These narratives also challenged the reconciliation narrative, calling out the erasure of Black troops and of the focus on slavery and emancipation as central factors in the Civil War. While the Spanish American and Philippine Wars could serve as manly proving grounds for Black as well as white troops, the unified nation imagined in these narratives drawing from memory were quite different. Rather than a nation coming together to bring closure to a tragic fratricidal conflict, the nation would come together to reach toward a still unachieved vision of justice and equality that recognized and rewarded vital Black contributions.

By the time World War I began, the reconciliation narrative had become dominant. President Wilson both embraced and advanced it in public addresses and through his participation in 50th anniversary commemoration events. He resisted efforts to bring Black veterans into the center of memorial events. With the reconciliation narrative established, World War I could proceed as a unified patriotic national enterprise free of the bonds of memory.

Neither the Black press nor Black servicemembers accepted these understandings and memories. Black advocates struggled, usually unsuccessfully, to secure recognition of Black veterans and their participation in Civil War remembrance events. Calls encouraging enlistment invoked the history of Black service and reminded young Black adults of the heroism of Black troops in previous conflicts. Arguments challenging segregation and demanding Black officers relied on these memories. Stories of Black exploits in Europe sometimes placed them in this historical context as well. Overall, the demands that Black service be rewarded with greater civic membership relied not only on the prospective promise of service but on its memory as well.

DuBois and other leaders favoring a more confrontational stance invoked memory in other ways. Treatment of Black troops and veterans were to be remembered. The ill considered group punishment of troops suspected of involvement in the Brownsville Affray was a major factor in mobilizing new voices in the Black community that questioned unshakeable support for the Republican Party. Confrontational editors demanded both that Black service and mobilization in World War I be remembered, and that Black veterans and the Black community remember the extent to which their service was recognized and rewarded, making their political choices contingent upon this memory.

Memory took on a new cast in the postwar era as a wave of racist violence swept through the United States. As commentators were quick to observe, many incidents involved Black veterans, and many of the incidents involving these veterans seemed to have featured perpetrators who targeted veterans particularly. In a semi-coordinated effort to put the returned soldiers in their place, whites across the country lashed out on a variety of pretexts or no pretext at all. The NAACP led the way in collecting and reporting on these episodes, but other journalists for Black media outlets likewise ran stories to ensure that the violence would be recorded and remembered, that it would be recognized as racialized, and the link to military service would be made. This conscious effort to create and preserve memory would fuel the anti-lynching movement for several years to come.

Memory influenced the arguments that Asians and Filipinos made for recognition and citizenship as well, but in the early years, without a group narrative of collective service and sacrifice, the memories tended to be individual. Nonetheless, they adopted and adapted the frame of honorable service, emphasizing the servicemembers’ contributions as evidence of their attachment, loyalty, and worthiness as citizens.

*Comparison*

While this book has discussed three groups – African Americans, Asians, and Filipinos – the experiences of these groups were not parallel or fully comparable. Each was sui generis, but the influence of the developmental process concerning African Americans on American racial history cannot be gainsaid. Within this study, Black veterans and their advocates established the overarching rhetorical dynamic, emphasizing the contributions of servicemembers of color, their investment in promoting and defending American values, and their desert of the rights and privileges of citizenship in recognition of their having assumed its responsibilities. This dynamic flexibly and powerfully encompassed service in each of the wars discussed, generating arguments for specific measures improving and equalizing the treatment of members of the military and veterans, and for advancing particular rights and challenging the rise of segregation policies and logics.

The Black press and related forms of public advocacy were important factors in this process. The struggle for rights was a struggle for policy change and state development, but it was also a struggle for cultural change, and over the course of this study, we observe disagreements about tactics, strategies, and ultimate goals. Legal and policy change nonetheless remained an important focus, whether arguments pressed for rights advances or sought to stave off regression.

The story of Asian and Filipino military service in this period is less well known. While scholars have discussed the Scouts program and investigated Asian military service during World War I, the broader trajectories of these groups’ struggles beginning in the nineteenth century has garnered less attention due to the small numbers of individuals who served. Nevertheless, the historical record clearly illustrates that servicemembers and veterans from both groups attempted to leverage their military service to achieve advancement in the face of racial discrimination and hostility.

The framework of these struggles was different in many regards. African Americans secured citizenship in the aftermath of the Civil War, with legislation and then constitutional change fixing it as a legal principle. At first, national legislation appeared to favor their advancement, with Congress acting to counter public and private resistance to change on the state level. Supreme Court retrenchment and retreat from enforcement left African Americans vulnerable to rights predation on the state level. Ultimately, the policy environment on the national level accommodated and reinforced white supremacy, illustrated vividly by the treatment of Black soldiers, recruited and trained nation-wide, but subjected to segregationist policies and practices.

The national statutory and legal environment for both Filipinos and Asians was different. While Chinese initially had the protection of the Burlingame Treaty and the Supreme Court reined in state attempts to control Chinese immigrants and immigration, anti-Chinese, and later anti-Asian, sentiment soon came to drive legal developments in Congress. National laws restricted Asian immigration and regulated Chinese immigrants living in the United States. The counterweight for men serving in the military was a separate line of statutory developments that recognized the need for military recruitment among non-citizens and allowed these individuals to naturalize on different and easier terms than other immigrants. As time passed, the trajectories of these laws traveled in largely opposite directions: while national military leaders were uneasy with immigrants’ service, they authorized it during times of war and Congress’s legislative developments moved largely in the direction of rendering naturalization easier.

Filipinos initially had uncertain status under US law, an issue resolved with the creation of the US national category. The congressional bargain struck to permit the acquisition of new territories in the aftermath of the Spanish American War incorporated deep uneasiness with the racialized denizens of these territories, and the treaty reflected this sentiment. The debate over veterans’ capacity to claim US citizenship highlighted the problem with naturalization for US nationals: naturalization implies shifting one’s allegiance from one nation to another, but US nationals already owed allegiance to the United States. Filipinos pressing for naturalization via military service hoped to avoid this conundrum by activating congressional legislation allowing naturalization on the basis of military service, but ran into difficulty when making these arguments.

Asians faced less ambiguity and more hostility. While the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Wong Kim Ark v. United States*, issued at the threshold of the Spanish American War, ensured that the descendants of Chinese immigrants born in the United States were constitutionally entitled to citizenship, congressional law barred Asians from the naturalization process. Initially the bar was implicit, resting upon Congress’s early choice to authorize naturalization only for white people, but Congress clarified the restriction explicitly in the late nineteenth century. With the bar established regarding the Chinese, the courts extended it to include Japanese and Korean immigrants. Veterans seeking to leverage the military path to citizenship faced an uncertain legal environment, with the Supreme Court ultimately closing the door completely in the 1920s.

The path of each group illustrates how the master narrative of service and civic belonging operated, ultimately failing for all three to secure the bargains they sought to strike with the national state. Over the period studied, each group argued for and ultimately secured the capacity to serve, but not on fully equal terms with white members of the military. Still, by World War I, the demand for manpower contributed to unambiguous encouragement to all groups to enlist and serve in combat roles. This demand, however, did not translate successfully into full recognition of these individuals’ civic performances, their commitment to the nation and to national values, or their entitlement to fuller rights and benefits.

*Learning from Failure*

When we step back and evaluate where things stood in the years following World War I, it may appear that all three groups’ efforts paid off poorly. Placing these individuals and this issue in the center of a developmental story may seem perverse, since the kinds of changes that we can observe were limited in scope, and some changes wound up not lasting.

Nevertheless, this study illustrates how the figure of the servicemember of color enables us to understand better how law, policy, and culture functioned in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to define the shape of the national state. This analysis illustrates that civic membership and citizenship are not just as statuses that individuals do or do not gain, but also as performances that the policymakers who have the power to extend rights may endorse or not endorse. Ultimately, this developmental analysis raises two serious questions: first, can “full civic membership” ever be detached from this idea of a successful or unsuccessful gendered and racialized performance? And second, if we are convinced that it cannot be detached, then should reformers abandon it as an ideal and aspiration?

In Margaret Somers’ formulation of citizenship as the right to have rights, she rejects the concept of rights as a natural entitlement that can exist independently of political and social attachments. Rather, she argues, inclusion and membership are “ontological preconditions for recognition,” and membership in a polity is an ontological precondition for recognition.160 The situation of these three groups highlights this conundrum, as all sought to leverage membership and recognition as means of achieving human and citizenship rights. Asians used service to try to leverage membership, but failed to achieve recognition, as their status under the regime of Chinese exclusion proved an unbreachable barrier to membership. Filipinos had more mixed success, but recognition of their membership was hesitant and incomplete; their service was accepted in modified forms that rendered recognition conditional. Filipinos in the Navy particularly were confined to roles that did not compel masculine performance that would resonate strongly with the masculinized conception of American empire. And black soldiers and sailors, while citizens and formal members of the polity, struggled for recognition against a cultural tide that increasingly rendered them invisible.

The failures on the policy level nevertheless left legacies in all of the communities. Black, Filipino, and Asian soldiers who served in these wars generally remained invisible as deserving members of the polity or were rendered as highly individual exceptions. Nevertheless, the narrative of service, sacrifice, and entitlement to recognition increasingly gained adherents within these communities. The narrative both encouraged service and encouraged those who had served to think of themselves as deserving, and as representatives and exemplars who should be permitted to lead their groups into a new relationship with the national state. These experiences therefore laid the groundwork for the developments that would come, producing both individuals immersed in these narratives and a collective memory that could empower.