Preface

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The genesis of this volume was a simple Sunday morning conversation with Carolyn Brown. I had attended a preview of the first episode of Ken Burns's documentary, *The War*, at Dartmouth College, and I shared my observations with her. We both planned to include chapters on World War II in our respective monographs, and as we discussed our mutual concern with the largely superficial treatment of Africa in European and American accounts of World War II, and our conversion to the idea that World War II deserved much greater attention in African studies, the idea for a conference took root.

We convinced Gregg Mann and Ahmad Sikainga to join us as co-organizers in the project, and we brought together twenty-six participants from around the globe for a workshop at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, March 27–30, 2008. Following that workshop we organized a conference at Cornell University, September 18–20, 2009, as well as three panels at the 2010 meeting of the American Historical Association. This has been a long process, and along the way the composition of organizers changed as well; Gregg Mann left and Timothy Parsons joined us. In the multiple steps that brought us to this point, the numerous meetings and rewrites, our conviction in this project has been reinforced, for each of us learned something new at the end of the day.

Why Revisit World War II?

In the documentary *The War*, Ken Burns did an admirable job in illustrating the complexity and grand scale of World War II as well as the personal experiences of individuals who witnessed its horrors and victories. While fully deserving of the praise it garnered, the series also illustrates the concerns that drive this collaborative project – the inadequate attention to Africa's role in World War II. This early version of episode one importantly included discussion of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 but then replicated the

standard discussion of the North Africa campaigns, largely focusing on the actions of Generals Montgomery and Rommel. The same is true in texts on the war. The continent and especially sub-Saharan Africa are absent from the major works such as *The Second World War: A Complete History* by Martin Gilbert and *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II* by Gerhard Weinberg.[1] Unfortunately, this dominant narrative betrays a superficial understanding of the critical role that Africa and its peoples played in this war. This project seeks to intervene in this narrative by making available new scholarship that will facilitate a richer understanding of Africa's role and impact on this global conflict. In addition, this volume will bring the historiography of World War II and African historiography into greater dialogue as it illuminates the distinctive ways in which the drive to secure Africa's resources for the war shaped African lives and livelihoods.

A small but critical number of historians have focused on Africa's role in World War II;[2] however, most Africanist historians gloss over the period by giving a cursory discussion of the numbers of African troops in South Asia and Western Europe or treating it as just a prelude to nationalist movements in the postwar era. The contributors to this project argue that Africa's contribution to the war was signal to the Allied victory and that the war years require more systematic analysis for a number of reasons. The demands of the war brought unprecedented interventions into the daily lives of Africans by colonial powers and transformed social and economic relations within households and communities. Additionally, the new importance of the colonies for the war effort was not lost on the men and women who were put in the position of sacrificing their lives and economies to give others in Europe the freedoms that they did not enjoy. For men and women across the continent, the war was not just a distant event; rather, it transformed their lives, made them agents in a global struggle for democracy, and left an indelible imprint on their history. The contributors to the volume also utilize insights from a variety of fields of inquiry such as spatial analysis, gender

[1] Martin Gilbert, *The Second World War: A Complete History* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004); Gerhard Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[2] For example, see Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Senegalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991); Ashley Jackson, *Botswana 1939–45: An African Country at War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); David Killingray and Richard Rathbone (editors), *Africa and the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Nancy Ellen Lawler, *Soldiers, Airmen, Spies and Whisperers: The Gold Coast in World War II* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002); Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); G. O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1939–1953* (London: Evans Bros. for University of Lagos Press, 1979); Timothy Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the Kings Rifles, 1902–1964* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999).

studies, cultural studies, and environmental history. Consequently, this volume will help chart new ways of thinking about and capturing Africa's role in World War II.

Africa and World War II

The contributions to this volume highlight three critical issues – periodization, colonial policies, and the impact of the war on African individuals and communities. Periodization is critical in understanding the consequences the war imposed on African communities as well as Africa's impact on critical moments during the war. Contributors identify signal events that had the most sustained impact on African communities, such as the fall of France and Japan's conquest of South East Asia. They illustrate Africa's vital role in sustaining the Allied cause, especially after the fall of South East Asia. This attention to periodization allows for more comparative analyses both within and across regions and refines our analyses of changes in colonial policy. For example, Britain did not make the recruitment of African soldiers a priority until Japan's victories in the Far East, and then quickly moved to put 80,000 British West African troops in Burma.[3] France, on the other hand, relied heavily on West African soldiers in Europe and other parts of the empire, recruiting more than 100,000 men. These men on the frontlines were the most visible expression of Africa's role in the war; however, combat was just one dimension of Africa's contribution, for as the war expanded demands on African communities increased significantly. Nancy Lawler notes that Britain and France in particular "looked to their overseas territories to continue to fulfill their well-established role in the imperial systems . . . the colonies were expected not only to support themselves, but to provide resources, both natural and human, for the good of the respective metropoles."[4]

In many ways African resources sustained the Allied effort especially after 1942 but came at a high cost. What were the consequences for African communities as they supported their war-ravaged metropoles, the war effort, and themselves? Several contributors to this volume explore this question in depth by examining the social, cultural, political, and economic changes on the continent. One of the most critical areas of concern for colonial officials was labor. Not only did colonial powers use African soldiers to augment their forces in Europe and Asia, they needed African labor to maintain those economic sectors in Africa deemed essential to the war effort, such as coal mining and rubber production. In addition, entire communities had to be mobilized to provide rice and other foodstuffs for the troops, starch for

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[3] For more on African troops in Burma, see John A. L. Hamilton, *War Bush: 81 (West African) Division in Burma* (Wilby, Norwich, UK: Michael Russell, 2001).

[4] Lawler, *Soldiers, Airmen, Spies and Whisperers*, 1.

uniforms, and palm products necessary for the manufacturing of soaps and margarine in Europe.

The mobilization of communities to provide labor, food, and other resources for the war exacerbated some of the contradictions of colonialism, thus making World War II an equally significant watershed in African history. Colonial regimes faced rising tensions as some communities experienced food shortages in the wake of the redeployment of agricultural labor or the redirection of food to troops. Price controls on food, as well as restrictions on shipping and the movement of imported goods such as kerosene, helped fuel hyperinflation, especially in urban centers. In a period when control was paramount, colonial officials had to devise new strategies and policies to secure the resources necessary for the war while keeping the lid on social and economic unrest.

Despite the hardships, many African men and women took to heart the stated aims of the Allied forces and volunteered to support the war in numerous ways in order to demonstrate their commitment to the shared ideals of the cause. They raised money for local and international charities, prayed for Allied victories, and financed airplanes. Nigerians, for example, contributed £210,999 to the war effort through the Nigeria War Relief Fund.[5] Regardless of where or how individuals and communities contributed, the war changed their lives. Many women shouldered new responsibilities and exercised new freedoms as men and a few women went off to fight. The pace of urbanization increased, leading to greater pressure on housing and other urban resources as well as an expanded social base for critiques of colonial rule. In addition, in Liberia, Senegal, and Nigeria the war brought many people into contact with black Americans and helped foster new ways of thinking and new cultural expressions.

In many areas the war exacerbated existing social tensions. Urbanization, for example, made it increasingly difficult for households and communities to maintain control over young people, especially young women. In the cities, which were exciting cauldrons of new cultures, political activism, and temptations, women and girls could evade the attempts of fathers and husbands to restrict their movement. Similarly, young men could evade the control that older men had over their ability to marry. New sexual mores, the anonymity of urban life, and the opportunities for wage earning challenged generational privileges, deprived communities of the labor of their youths, and deepened a range of health issues.

The war also intensified political consciousness and awareness of the contradictions of imperialism. The contradictions became more glaring as

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[5] Gloria Chuku, "'Crack Kernels, Crack Hitler': Export Production Drive and Igbo Women during the Second World War," in Judith A. Byfield, LaRay Denzer, and Anthea Morrison (eds.), *Gendering the African Diaspora: Women, Culture and Historical Change in the Caribbean and Nigerian Hinterland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

the war unfolded for not only did colonial subjects champion the self-determination and democracy of the people who ruled them, but Africa, specifically Brazzaville, became the capital of De Gaulle's Free France. These contradictions resonated especially strongly with African soldiers for whom the mystique of white superiority fell victim to the brutality they saw Europeans inflict upon each other. Moreover, they cringed under the racial discrimination within their own army command as well as that of prisoner of war camps. Racism also played out on the continent in different ways, and several contributors examine racism in policies and practice. These contributions on racism will be significant to the historiography of World War II for as John Dowers argues, "apart from the genocide of the Jews, racism remains one of the great neglected subjects of World War Two."[6]

People on the home front who saw their sacrifices during the war as a down payment for their own self-determination also came to realize the contradictions between the ideals of the war and the effort to relegitimize colonialism. The continuation of wartime economic policies deepened the conditions for social discontent among workers, farmers, traders, and elites. World War II, in many instances, helped galvanize the militant nationalism of the postwar period as African men and women increasingly demanded their place in deciding their futures, their rights as workers, and an end to the indignities of racism. The war also contributed to the pace of decolonization, for the years of conflict left Britain and France economically weak. At its conclusion both colonial powers were initially committed to reforming imperialism through development and greater African political participation. However, their weakened economies and the cost of reforms ultimately contributed to their willingness to relinquish political control of their African colonies.[7]

Africa supplied troops, funds, and materials, as well as a location from which to plan for a Free France; thus it played a critical role in the Allied victory. The themes discussed here – mobilizing troops and resources, the experience of combat, changing gender roles, racial discrimination, democracy – all resonate with other world regions as well. Thus this volume will give scholars of North America, Europe, and Asia the tools to integrate Africa into their discussion of the war. They will have the resources to incorporate African voices and experiences from different parts of the continent, and to make comparative analyses within Africa and between Africa and other regions.

The insights and resources in this volume will enable us to teach World War II in its global complexity. For example, a global vantage point

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[6] John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 4.

[7] Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

complicates the seemingly simple issue of dating the start of the war. At the conclusion of the war in Europe, Italy and the United Nations signed a treaty in which all parties agreed that World War II in Ethiopia began with Italy's invasion of the country on October 3, 1935.[8] This detail forces us to problematize the dominant narrative of the war that begins and ends in Europe. In addition, this volume enables us to refine our understanding of the similarities and resonances of racial policies and practices among Allied and Axis forces. Britain, France, the United States, Germany, and Italy shared racial ideologies that demonized and infantilized people of African descent, and practiced racial discrimination at home and abroad. Therefore, both Allied and Axis states had to balance their need of black bodies for the war effort against their desire to maintain racial hierarchies and social separation. Finally, a global perspective reminds us that the discussions of what would come in the wake of the war had many contributing voices before competing power blocs reduced those voices to a bipolar Cold War. Ultimately, this volume will help to restore the "world" to the study of the Second World War.

A Note on Structure

This volume is organized into six sections. The first section offers three introductory essays that attempt to give a continent-wide overview of the centrality of Africa's human and material resources to the war effort. The remaining sections offer individual case studies from different parts of the continent. Section Two, *Colonial Subjects and Imperial Armies*, examines the experience of African men recruited for the military from French West Africa, South Africa, Morocco, and Kenya. Section Three, *Mobilizing Communities and Resources for the War Effort*, examines the largely coercive strategies imperial governments used to obtain resources such as rubber, lumber, minerals, or agricultural products from their African colonies and African resistance to them. Section Four, *Race, Gender, and Social Change in a Time of War*, draws on material from Eritrea, Gold Coast, Nigeria, South Africa, and France to illustrate how the war built on certain ideas about race and gender and changed gender relations as it created new opportunities, especially for young men and women. Section Five, *Experiencing War in Africa and Europe*, examines the wartime experiences of female combatants in Ethiopia, African American and African soldiers, French women, and missionaries. Finally, in Section Six, *World War II and Anticolonialism*, case studies from Guinea, Uganda, and Sudan consider the varied ways in which

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[8] Richard Pankhurst, "Italian Fascist War Crimes in Ethiopia: A History of Their Discussion from the League of Nations to the United Nations (1936–1949)," *Northeast African Studies*, new series, 6 (1999), 109–11.

the war shaped the anticolonial and nationalist movements that intensified after the war. Together they offer a macro and micro view of the multiple levels on which African contributions shaped the war as well as the ways in which the war affected individuals and communities and transformed Africa's political, economic, and social landscape.