



Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era (The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture)

Chad L. Williams

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On April 2, 1917, Woodrow Wilson thrust the United States into World War I by declaring, "The world must be made safe for democracy." For the 380,000 African American soldiers who fought and labored in the global conflict, these words carried life or death meaning. Relating stories bridging the war and postwar years, spanning the streets of Chicago and the streets of Harlem, from the battlefields of the American South to the battlefields of the Western Front, Chad L. Williams reveals the central role of African American soldiers in World War I and how they, along with race activists and ordinary citizens alike, committed to fighting for democracy at home and beyond.

Using a diverse range of sources, Williams connects the history of African American soldiers and veterans to issues such as the obligations of citizenship, combat and labor, diaspora and internationalism, homecoming and racial violence, "New Negro" militancy, and African American historical memories of the war. Democracy may have been distant from the everyday lives of African Americans at the dawn of the war, but it nevertheless remained a powerful ideal that sparked the hopes of black people throughout the country for societal change. *Torchbearers of Democracy* reclaims the legacy of black soldiers and establishes the World War I era as a defining moment in the history of African Americans and peoples of African descent more broadly.

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