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Double V on the Homefront:
African American Women Volunteers
in Knoxville, Tennessee
During World War II

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Megan N. Taylor

May 1995

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To my sisters:

Kate, Becky, and Emily

"Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult."

Charlotte Whitton (Mayor of Ottawa, Canada), 1993.

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ABSTRACT

Many historians have studied World War II and its effect on women, but few look at the efforts of black women in homefront defense. This study addresses the questions in what ways did African American women participate on the homefront? Who volunteered, and how did national African American women's groups motivate members to work for segregationist organizations? Evidence from local and national sources, including Red Cross national memoranda, Red Cross minute books from Knox County, local newspapers, and national African American women's clubs magazines suggest that African American women volunteered on many different levels in Knoxville. They joined groups directed by national sororities, the U.S.O., the Red Cross, and local church groups. During World War II, African American organizations promoted a non-violent protest against inequality through participation in the war. This thesis focuses on the African American recruiting guidelines of the Red Cross and Joint Army and Navy Boards and Committees (U.S.O.) and the volunteerism policies of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses, and the National Association of Colored Women. In addition, it will highlight club women's participation in Knoxville's nursing and first-aid classes, production units, U.S.O.s, and local grass-roots victory efforts.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In January 1942, the Knox County Red Cross Chapter announced the beginning of classes to prepare one thousand nurses' aides to relieve an acute local shortage caused by the enlistment of professional nurses in the area. A Negro course would be offered, the article stated, if enough interest existed. By February, African American women were training as civilian nurses in first-aid classes at the Carnegie Library on Vine Street.¹ Later, recruiters from Washington, D.C. arrived at Knoxville College to enlist African American nurses into the armed forces.² Although local chapters of national organizations such as the Red Cross and U.S.O. focused attention on white women of Knoxville, African American women also participated in many volunteer activities on the homefront in World War II.

Many historians have studied the war era, attempting to understand its effect on women. Most historians ask whether women's status changed permanently as a result of increased reliance upon women workers in the early to mid 1940s. To some degree, historians have considered the issue of African American women on the homefront in World War II. Most believe, however, that the status of African Americans

¹"Nurses Needed to Relieve Shortage," Knoxville News Sentinel 22 January 1942, C-11; "Negro First Aid Classes Enroll," News Sentinel 3 March 1942, A-3.

²Knoxville College Aurora (Knoxville TN), 11 November 1943, np.

changed little as a result of the war. In 1974, Chester Gregory had argued that African American women gained wealth and status during the war. He contended that the black non-domestic work force rose fifty-one percent and that African Americans enjoyed high wages in munitions and aircraft plants and factories.³

Karen Anderson refuted Gregory's conclusions in the Journal of American History article "Last Hired, First Fired." She claimed that although African American women gained ground in the fields of machine operatives, apparel manufacturing, and laundry and drycleaning, they could not break into many defense industries. When they worked in war factories, she maintained, they took the lowest-paying, dirtiest, janitorial-type jobs. According to Anderson, prejudice constrained economic experience and inhibited change; the greatest benefit of the war for African American women was the chance to move out of the South into a freer environment.⁴

In Riveting and Rationing in Dixie, a study of the homefront in Alabama, Mary Martha Thomas agreed that African Americans faced discrimination in factories and found employment in service jobs but not in high-paying

³Chester Gregory, Women in Defense Work During World War II (New York: Exposition Press, 1974), 76-9.

⁴Karen Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers During World War II," Journal of American History, 69 (June 1982): 86, 89, 97.

industries. The Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) failed to combat discrimination adequately at the factories, and African American women remained segregated, generally in janitorial positions, and lived in run-down, makeshift housing units surrounding the factories. On the other hand, white women gained employment in lucrative welding, riveting, and inspection positions, and white women obtained better housing. According to Thomas, African American women desired to keep their jobs after the war, but racism forced them back into domestic work.⁵

Although volunteers contributed to the war effort through national and local organizations, historians have chosen to focus on the wage-earning women of America because the movement of large numbers of women into the work force represented a break from the past. Perhaps because women have always involved themselves in volunteer organizations, volunteerism on the homefront has never been fully addressed as a topic. Thomas briefly mentioned volunteerism in Riveting and Rationing in Dixie, but she wrote only that both black and white women took part in Alabama United Service Organizations (U.S.O.s), the Red Cross, and other organizations, even though segregated chapters discriminated against African American women.

In American Women and World War II, reporter Doris

⁵Mary Martha Thomas, Riveting and Rationing in Dixie: Alabama Women in the Second World War (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 53-4, 104-5, 113-5, 119-20.

Weatherford examined different volunteer opportunities for women in World War II, including the armed services, the lives of housewives who were forced to ration, and participation in national service organizations such as the Red Cross and the U.S.O. After looking through national newspapers, magazines, and War Manpower Commission records, Weatherford concluded that white women volunteered in many capacities, but as a whole, African American women failed to work on the homefront because the opportunities for participation did not exist. She admitted that African Americans organized themselves in segregated U.S.O.s and Red Cross units as well as in the Office of Civilian Defense (O.C.D.), but she emphasized that the armed forces refused to admit African American women until the end of the war and that the national service organizations were suspicious of African American help at the local level. Alpha Kappa Alpha was the only national African American organization to promote patriotism and victory actively, according to Weatherford.⁶

This study challenges the conclusion that African American women failed to contribute fully to the war effort. It examines the ways in which African American women participated on the homefront in Knoxville, Tennessee, how national organizations fostered racism, and how black

⁶Doris Weatherford, American Women in World War II (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 232-247.

women's clubs encouraged their members to counter that racism. Local and national evidence from the years 1940 to 1945 suggests that African American women volunteered on many different levels in Knoxville. They joined groups directed by national sororities, the YWCA, the Red Cross, local church groups, and other informal organizations and clubs. These women's groups acted as more than mere auxiliaries to the white chapters of organizations, even though many organizations segregated and discriminated against African American women. Many of Knoxville's African American women volunteers followed the suggestions of their national women's organizations who supported the Double V effort of the war.

During World War II, national organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and women's organizations like the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN), and the historically black sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha promoted a nonviolent protest against racial inequalities in the U.S. through patriotic participation in the war. Leaders of these organizations argued that by supporting a war for democracy, African Americans could pressure white Americans for democracy at home, thus promoting the "Double V" message--victory abroad and at home. Leaders capitalized on the "V for Victory" image used by the Office of War Information, the War

Manpower Commission and other government war agencies.

These groups advocated volunteerism as a way to eradicate racist stereotypes.⁷ As Harvard Sitkoff explained in The Struggle for Black Equality, because the government needed the "loyalty and manpower" of all citizens, African Americans could "demand a better deal" in return for their unqualified support.⁸ African American citizens attempted to force integration in the armed forces and equality in war jobs, housing, and schools through highlighting discrepancies between black and white soldier and civilian life. Knoxville's African American women accepted the challenge from national leaders to volunteer for democracy, and their work helped create a base for the future civil rights movement in the city.

Knoxville provides an excellent example for a case study in World War II volunteerism in the African American community. Although only about ten percent of the population was black in the 1940s, the African American community had quadrupled between 1870 and 1920 to over 17,000 citizens. Although the African American population declined by 1,000 members during the Depression in 1930, Knoxville's black community remained centered around a

⁷AKA Ivy Leaf, 18:3 (August 1940), 3; NACW National Notes, October 1943, 4.

⁸Harvard Sitkoff, The Struggle for Black Equality 1954-1980, American Century Series (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), 11.

strong and influential middle class. Of 3,340 female black workers in Knoxville, 34.5% engaged in middle-class professions; male African American middle-class workers constituted 38.6% of their 3,689-member work force.⁹

Knoxville was a New South city committed to racial harmony, and the white community attempted to work with the black community to satisfy their basic needs and to smooth over problems before they arose. Black policemen joined the force in the late nineteenth century, and the African American community enjoyed voting rights and their own business organizations as well as representation in the city Chamber of Commerce.¹⁰ The segregated Knoxville school system employed qualified African American teachers and attempted to maintain or refurbish black school buildings. However, Knoxville instituted a poll tax to hinder black voters, failed to keep African American schools up to standard with white schools, and used the Chamber of Commerce as a safety valve to prevent black protest of conditions in the community and problems with segregation

⁹W. Bruce Wheeler and Michael J. McDonald, Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in an Appalachian City (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 36, 65; U.S. Department of Commerce, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population. The Labor Force: Occupation, Industry, Employment, Income, Vol. 3 Part 5 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 368-9, 372-3.

¹⁰Robert J. Booker, A History of Blacks in Knoxville, Tennessee: The First One Hundred Years 1791-1891 (Knoxville: Beck Cultural Center, 1991), 44.

from turning violent.¹¹

The historically black Knoxville College and many African American churches, including Mount Zion, Mount Olive, and Mount Cavalry Baptist, involved themselves in community outreach programs and sought to educate African American women in homemaking as well as reading and writing.¹² The Phyllis Wheatley chapter of the YWCA, founded in 1927, attempted to uplift the black community through domestic classes for young women. The local NACW and Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority chapters flourished in Knoxville and gave middle-class women the chance to organize reforms and volunteer activities.¹³

Originally, federal government organizations provided guidelines for volunteer efforts. The Joint Army and Navy Boards and Committees created the U.S.O., which operated from 1941-1946, within the subcommittee of Welfare and Recreation. Although the Joint Committees provided U.S.O. units for African American troops, the units remained segregated throughout the war. During the war, two segregated U.S.O. chapters existed in Knoxville. In

¹¹Jo Parker, "Not Nearly Enough: Educational Reforms for African American Students in Knoxville City Schools 1914-1930," unpublished seminar paper, University of Tennessee, 1993; Wheeler & McDonald, 65-8.

¹²Cecil Egerton, History of the First Baptist Church of Knoxville (Knoxville: Mount Zion Church, 1962), 35-47.

¹³Booker, 48; Knoxunion (Knoxville: Knoxville College, 1943, 1944).

addition, the National Red Cross set standards for African American women's participation in the war effort. Although many chapters across the country refused to include African American women in nursing classes and production units, the Knoxville chapter provided opportunities for involvement in segregated units. The NACW, NACGN, and Alpha Kappa Alpha encouraged their members to volunteer for U.S.O. and Red Cross activities.

In spite of segregation and fewer opportunities, African American women participated actively on the Knoxville homefront. Although the Red Cross and YWCA volunteers worked under the influence of white parent organizations, they participated to promote equality. Knoxville's African American women followed the suggestions of the NACGN, the NACW, and Alpha Kappa Alpha and volunteered, hoping to win the rights they deserved as citizens of the United States. Activities in Knoxville remained available to both races throughout the war, and the African American women of the Knoxville community found no limit to resources or ideas in their own volunteer victory efforts.

Chapter 2:

Image and Reality: Discrimination by National Organizations

In 1940, when the Red Cross began its blood campaigns in community drives, it followed the army's instructions to separate black and white blood. The NAACP soon discovered the organization's policy and denounced the Red Cross. In 1950, Jesse Thomas, assistant to the Red Cross director, noted that the Red Cross had found difficulty in recruiting members of the African American community during the war because of "antisocial" attitudes developed by blacks in the wake of the blood segregation controversy.¹⁴

In reality, many African Americans were willing to work for the Red Cross and other homefront organizations. At the local level, however, several volunteer groups turned away hopeful black participants. National policies of the Red Cross and U.S.O. maintained that African Americans should be included in all activities, but their organizational councils failed to enforce anti-discrimination policies locally. This allowed many chapters to refuse the help of African Americans in volunteer activities. The lack of concern for African American women shown by national groups in many cases limited the efforts of black women to

¹⁴Dorothy Sterling, Tear Down the Walls: A History of the Civil Rights Movement (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1968), 152; Jesse O. Thomas and Kathryn Richardson, "A History of the American Red Cross, Volume XXXII: American Red Cross Negro Personnel in World War II 1942-1946," Washington: American National Red Cross, 1950.

participate in many regional defense activities.

The American Red Cross oversaw almost all "official" voluntary war activities, and as the largest civilian group participating in homefront efforts, it set the tone for relations with the African American community. The Red Cross regulated production of surgical dressings and clothing, taught first aid and nutrition classes, and issued calls for blood plasma. In conjunction with the Office of Civilian Defense (O.C.D.) and the U.S.O., the Red Cross created the Volunteer Community Corps which provided canteens, recreation corps, home nursing classes, motor corps, and Volunteer Nurses' Aides Corps (VNAC) training.¹⁵

In theory, the Red Cross encouraged African American women to participate in all volunteer activities throughout the war. As early as 1940, the Red Cross invited the NACGN to join their National Council on Nursing. The Red Cross and U.S.O. provided supposedly "separate but equal" canteen facilities that served food to black troops. Segregated canteens operated together at railroad stations, bus stops, and hospitals. Both African American and white volunteers took courses on nutrition and recreation to qualify as hostesses. In addition, the Red Cross maintained segregated

¹⁵Southeast Programming Report, Records of the National Red Cross, RG 200, Box 321, File 148.08, National Archives. Hereafter Red Cross.

first aid classes and production units.¹⁶

The U.S.O. provided additional opportunities for volunteers to boost the morale of troops. Sponsored by the Joint Army and Navy Boards and Committees, the U.S.O. enlisted the help of citizens to create entertainment units for black and white troops throughout the country. These units showed movies, scheduled recreational activities like games and social dances, and brought in theater troupes. The army hired hostesses to schedule socials and dances, contract for bands, and organize local volunteers to attend activities.¹⁷

Like the Red Cross, the U.S.O. purported to be color blind. U.S.O. officials concerned themselves mainly with the morale of soldiers, but their policies affected the recruitment of volunteers who filled the U.S.O. entertainment centers. U.S.O. leaders decided that African American hostesses should serve black troops, but in reality, the recruitment of African Americans failed to live up to the Joint Committee's guidelines. The U.S.O. used far fewer African American women in their units than it needed.

¹⁶NACGN National News Bulletin, Vol. 14:29 (October 1940), 2; Mrs. Dougherty to Miss Boardman, 1940, Box 927, File 603.21, Red Cross; Norman H. Davis to Archibald MacLeish, 25 May 1942, Box 927, File 605, Red Cross.

¹⁷Memorandum for Col. W.H. Draper, "Notes in Conjunction with Chart Prepared by Morale Branch," 31 May 1941, Records of the Joint Army and Navy Committee, Subcommittee on Health and Welfare, RG 225, Box 7, Morale Folder, National Archives. Hereafter Joint Committee.

In 1941, the Army hired only fifty African American hostesses to work throughout the country, and housed them only where adequate facilities for African American troops existed.¹⁸

Women considered the Red Cross VNAC a stepping stone to a profession in nursing, because VNAs assisted nurses with non-medical tasks, experienced working in different hospital wards, and took extensive nursing courses. Many African American women tried to join the VNAC but found themselves turned away. Because women needed some college education, "good grooming" habits, and physical fitness, guidelines to join the VNAC allowed white leaders to keep many black hopefuls out of the group. Since small local committees admitted women for training, often African American women discovered that despite their qualifications, the committees deemed them unfit to join the corps, usually citing a lack of education as reason for their refusals. This excuse was a flimsy disguise for open racism. Although the Red Cross claimed to support recruitment of African American nurses, their official policy encouraged the consideration of African American VNAs for training only where "there is great need" for black aides and hospitals willing to train

¹⁸Conference of Morale Officers, 25-28 February 1941, Box 8, Joint Committee.

the women.¹⁹

As in the VNAC, African American women experienced discrimination in Red Cross/U.S.O. canteens. Although the Red Cross provided separate facilities for Red Cross canteens and put "colored people in charge of colored feeding units," white directors controlled African American canteens. African American canteens existed only as auxiliaries to white units, and often the black canteens were substandard. Many complaints lodged by African American troops against canteens listed sites rarely open, bad food, sites which had only white canteens, and several European canteens that claimed to be interracial but barred entry to black officers.²⁰

African American women tried to volunteer for U.S.O. entertainment centers, too, but the Joint Committees proved ambivalent towards black volunteerism. When the Joint Committees called upon national volunteer organizations to support the creation of the U.S.O., they failed to include any African American organizations at the planning stage. This foreshadowed the attitude of the U.S.O. towards African American women; throughout the war, concern for African

¹⁹Instructional Letter 25 to Regional Directors from Larrington Gill, 2 February 1942, Box 924, File 600.02, Red Cross; Program Guidelines, 26 November 1942, Box 924, File 600.02, Red Cross.

²⁰Mrs. Dougherty to Miss Boardman, 1940, Box 927, File 603.21, Red Cross; "Complaints and Commendations," April 1944, September 1944, Box 106, File 109, Red Cross.

American troops and recruitment of African American U.S.O. hostesses remained an afterthought in government planning.²¹

In 1941 as greater numbers of nurses enlisted in the armed forces, African Americans pushed to become a part of the VNAC, but the Red Cross retaliated and made its requirements for African American women even more restrictive. Responding to complaints in California, the National Urban League pressured the regional Red Cross to enlist more African American women in the VNAC. In response, the Pacific Red Cross chairwoman announced that if African American women wanted to join the VNAC, they needed to find their own instructors and training hospitals. In addition, she claimed that the Red Cross had no control over the local chapter's volunteer requirements.²²

This decision exonerated the local chapter by placing the responsibility on the volunteers themselves to organize into classes, even though the chapter actively recruited white women. Other regions adopted this policy, even when challenged by a qualified African American who reported discrimination within her chapter. An African American woman from Colorado Springs, Mrs. Goffman, filed a complaint with the FEPC. After she failed to recruit enough African

²¹Conference of Morale Officers, 25-28 February 1941, February 1941, Box 8, Joint Committee.

²²Gladys L. Badger to Mary Beard, 26 November 1941, Box 928, File 605, Red Cross.

American women to hold a segregated class, she attempted to enter a white VNAC classroom. The teacher called the police, who arrested Mrs. Goffman for trespassing and physically carried her to the police department.²³ When the FEPC and Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) chastised the organization for "contributing to current provocations which tend to increase the discontent of our colored people," the Red Cross national chairman defended the local chapter. He argued that local enlistment lay beyond the control of headquarters and that private hospitals could choose VNAs on any qualifications, including color.²⁴

The Red Cross refused to recruit African American women aggressively until returning veterans triggered a nationwide nursing shortage in 1944. At that point, the Red Cross decided that black nurses were better than no nurses at all. The recruitment of African American nurses came too late; the war was almost over, and many African American women had missed the chance to volunteer as nurses during the most crucial war years.²⁵

In 1941, the U.S.O. needed African American hostesses for entertainment units, but the Joint Committee hired only

²³George M. Johnson to Archibald MacLeish, 1 May 1942, Box 927, File 605, Red Cross.

²⁴Ibid.; Norman H. Davis to Archibald MacLeish, 25 May 1942, Box 927, File 605, Red Cross.

²⁵Minutes of the Temporary Advisory Committee on the Red Cross Nursing Services, 28 June 1944, Box 113, File 118.42, Red Cross.

fifty women who were then "scattered in various places throughout the country," and only where the local U.S.O. built structures to house Negro recreational facilities. In the same year, an editor for the African American newspaper, the Pittsburgh Courier, returned from a fact-finding trip in the South and concluded that most cities provided no weekday activities and built substandard facilities for black troops.²⁶ The trip should have become an important subject for the Joint Committees to discuss in their Morale Officers meetings, but the Morale Officers failed to investigate the reports detailed in the editor's trip.

The U.S.O. also recruited Gray Ladies to act as recreational directors, hostesses, and counselors in hospitals. Gray Ladies planned social activities for and visited with injured soldiers. Although leaders claimed to enlist Gray Ladies of both races, their policy mirrored the VNAC program. The U.S.O. and the Red Cross discussed bringing an equal number of white and African American women into the Gray Lady program, but the organizations decided that integrated programs would upset white women. They restricted the number of African American Gray Ladies, arguing that many hospitals failed to use enough black hostesses to warrant a wide-scale recruitment effort. African American women trained in auxiliary groups and could

²⁶Conference of Morale Officers, 25-28 February 1941, Box 8, Joint Committee; Mr. P.L. Prattis, Memorandum Report, 14 September 1941, Box 10, Joint Committee.

entertain black soldiers in segregated wards, which would alleviate any "social conflict" that might have arisen from integrated classes, meetings, and luncheons.²⁷

One year later, leaders of the African American community argued that creating better facilities for black troops would greatly increase morale and strengthen the entire defense program by reducing the amount of "bad press" circulating about the armed forces in African American newspapers. The military, however, proved unwilling to change. Although the Morale Unit of the Joint Committees discussed the problem with the Red Cross and suggested that "some effort should be made to improve conditions of the Negro in relation to the semi-official and private enterprises in connection with the war," the statement never left the planning table.²⁸

The Joint Committees failed to implement the policy and instead continued to blame the limited availability of black volunteer recreation corps on small African American communities in southern towns that refused to meet the demand for volunteers set forth by the U.S.O. The committee also charged that black civilians were apathetic towards the war. U.S.O. officials maintained that they provided more opportunities for recreation to African American troops than

²⁷Florence Black to Mary Swiggart, 23 February 1942, Box 930, File 607.1, Red Cross.

²⁸Ibid.

to white troops but that the lack of volunteers rendered the facilities inoperable.²⁹ This excuse for allowing poor conditions to hurt the morale of black troops fails to explain evidence of civilian activity in Knoxville, where the African American community actually raised money to open their own U.S.O. units.

In 1945, Jesse O. Thomas believed that he had worked hard to include African American women in the Red Cross, but that the black community had failed to take advantage of opportunities provided by the organization. During the war, African American women lodged at least two discrimination complaints in the Pacific Northwest, one in Texas, one in Colorado, one in the Northeast, and two in the South. These numbers fail to reflect the magnitude of discrimination by local chapters, but the evidence reveals that African American women in every region of the country felt left out of Red Cross activities.³⁰ Like other leaders of the Red Cross and U.S.O., Thomas refused to acknowledge that segregating African American women demoralized volunteers. Also, national Red Cross and U.S.O. leadership failed to

²⁹Ibid.; Memorandum by Francis Keppel, 11 November 1942, Box 37, Negro Troops and Problems, Joint Committee.

³⁰Jesse O. Thomas to Mrs. Lippman, 12 May 1945, File 928, Box 605, Red Cross; Gladyce L. Badger to Miss Mary Beard, 26 November 1941, File 928, Box 605, Red Cross; Mrs. Marcie Helen Talley to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 20 January 1942, File 928, Box 605, Red Cross, Virginia Dunbar to Mrs. Seymour, 15 November 1944, File 113.2, Box 113, Red Cross; "Complaints and Commendations," File 109, Box 106, Red Cross.

grasp the magnitude of local discrimination in volunteer activities.

Although Red Cross and U.S.O. national personnel believed that their policies towards African American volunteers were progressive, their reliance on local chapters to determine the need for black participation hurt the potential for African American volunteerism. Local chapters of civilian and military volunteer organizations acted almost autonomously, and the national leaders defended their actions. In this climate, African American women faced discrimination within their own communities.

Even though Red Cross and U.S.O. leaders failed to encourage the participation of African American women, black women's groups recruited women for the volunteer effort. The NACGN, NACW, and Alpha Kappa Alpha encouraged their members to fight for the opportunity to help the U.S. win the war. African American women leaders refused to react pessimistic about discrimination; instead, they urged club members to be positive about whatever achievements they could accomplish. According to these groups, volunteerism by black women showed white Americans that blacks deserved the economic, social, and political rights withheld in many regions. If black women helped to win a war for democracy, the government would appear hypocritical establishing equality abroad while ignoring the plight of African Americans at home. The Double V became a rallying message

for African Americans throughout the country.

Chapter 3:

The Double V Ideology

During World War II, the Double V message permeated both African American civilian and soldier life. African Americans argued that as patriotic citizens, they deserved equal rights under the law. Throughout the country, black soldiers and officers integrated officers' clubs nonviolently and petitioned the Secretary of War to equalize recreational facilities. The NAACP's magazine Crisis reported incidents of discrimination against soldiers in buses, movies, and restaurants.³¹

African American women broadcast the Double V message to the world as they fought for democracy on two fronts. The National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN), the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority promoted the Double V ideology most actively. Each of the groups had concerned themselves with the image of African American women before the war, and they believed that volunteerism fostered a positive image of "Negro Womanhood."³²

At the turn of the century, African American women

³¹Bernard C. Nalty, Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 157; Mary White Ovington, The Walls Come Tumbling Down (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1947), 273-4.

³²1941 Biennial Meeting Keynote Speech, Program Notes, 1-4, Records of the National Association of Colored Women (Bethesda, MD: UPI, 1992), Reel 2. Hereafter NACW.

formed groups to promote personal development among educated, Protestant women. Club women identified themselves as social and political activists and reformers. During the 1920s and 1930s, club members sought better working and living conditions for lower class African Americans, supported education as a means to "uplift" less fortunate people, fought for anti-lynching laws and woman suffrage, and established nurseries to instill "American" values in children. Community uplift turned to war production in the 1940s.³³

The NACGN worked with the Red Cross; leaders encouraged African American volunteerism in the VNAC and Home Nursing programs, but in addition, they promoted awareness of the desperate need for professional nurses in the armed forces. The army recruited the first African American nurse early in the war, after submitting to pressure from the NACGN, and leaders of the organization petitioned the military to accept larger numbers of women throughout the war years. In 1940, the NACGN announced that it wanted all of its members enrolled in the Red Cross for reserve military duty, because volunteerism helped the profession and the race. The NACGN also joined the Nursing Council on National Defense to ensure high standards in black nursing schools and attract

³³Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 94-6, 100-2.

high-quality women into the profession.³⁴

Throughout the war, the NACGN challenged African American nurses to fulfill their roles as participants in the war. In 1941, its national magazine featured an article about volunteerism written by the chairwoman of the NACGN National Defense Committee. In the article, she argued that the goal of the Red Cross to enlist five hundred nurses in the army could not succeed unless African American nurses were "integrated into every possible activity represented in the Defense program."

The chairwoman chided NACGN members' reluctance to volunteer in the war effort; only 199 African American nurses participated in the reserve corps. If the women expected to fight for a larger quota in the army, she insisted, they had to fill the positions already available. The article offered information about how to sign up with the Red Cross, work in the local Civilian Defense programs, and take nursing instructor courses.³⁵ At this point, leaders may have failed to assess local discrimination, which probably deterred many women from joining the reserve corps.

Although the NACGN cooperated with the Red Cross and the government in volunteer activities, the war intensified

³⁴"Headquarters Notes," NACGN National News Bulletin, Vol 14:29 (October 1940), 2.

³⁵Marion Seymour, "A Challenge to Service," NACGN National Bulletin, Vol. 15:32 (December 1941), 3.

the NACGN's struggle for equality within the nursing profession. The leaders of the NACGN maintained that volunteerism challenged racism and segregation, and the group urged white organizations to accept black nurses into their membership. NACGN members applied for positions in the Red Cross, despite negative reactions from local chapters. In 1941, the NACGN petitioned Red Cross National Headquarters to resolve the unsatisfactory situation for African American nurses in states throughout the country. The Red Cross accepted applications for the volunteer reserve at the national level because the NACGN forced national Red Cross leaders to maintain their official non-discrimination policy. African American nurses could override local discrimination by sending volunteer forms directly to the Washington Red Cross offices.³⁶

In addition to petitioning national organizations for equality, the NACGN promoted change through numerous small victories at the grass-roots level, citing the Pittsburgh Courier's ideas for the Double V campaign. Members won positions in white-dominated nurses' groups and in the Red Cross. As the National Bulletin announced to its members, "Beside working for Democracy abroad, we must work for Democracy at home. Nurses too well know what it means to be

³⁶"Headquarters Notes," NACGN National Bulletin, Vol. 15:31 (August 1941), 2.

denied Democracy."³⁷ By working in the war effort and pressuring the armed forces and civilian groups for membership, African American nurses made discrimination visible to society.

Like the NACGN, the National Association of Colored Women considered wartime volunteerism a top priority in order to highlight the achievements of African American women and to work for a more egalitarian society. The NACW continued promoting its goals of black community uplift through social work during World War II, but it also adopted the Double V message and struggled for democracy on the homefront. NACW members believed in the importance of community grass-roots projects, but they converted many of their education and youth projects into war production efforts. "First and Foremost in our club work, they maintained," "must be a united effort to win the war."³⁸

By 1941, the NACW boasted a membership of over 250,000 with fourteen states having 500 or more local chapters. Primarily middle- or upper-class and college-educated, these women worked feverishly to change the image of "Negro womanhood" through their uplift efforts. As members of the African American elite, NACW women believed themselves especially qualified as leaders of victory efforts; they

³⁷"Headquarters Notes," NACGN National Bulletin, Vol. 16:33 (August 1942), 2.

³⁸"Winning the War," NACW National Notes, October 1942 No. 1, 1-2.

decided early in the war that "as women who are privileged beyond the average of our race, we have responsibilities" to help defense efforts through Red Cross knitting and sewing work, church group volunteer activities, and U.S.O. participation.³⁹ National president Mrs. A.B. DeMent urged members to "join this host of women who have rededicated themselves to Help Win the War and Gain the Peace through our uplift services."⁴⁰

The NACW showed particular interest in working with the government's local homefront defense projects. At the 1941 biennial meeting, the NACW executive board created a National Defense Committee that co-operated with the government Defense Committee and coordinated local efforts within the African American community.⁴¹ The NACW magazine encouraged readers to follow the Civilian Defense rationing guidelines with meatless and coffee-free days. Local chapters in many states participated in war bond drives that originated from the national headquarters. The NACW also helped young women and girls participate on the homefront by promoting non-alcoholic black canteens and "pasting

³⁹1941 Program Notes, 42-3, Reel 2, NACW; "The Task Before Us," NACW National Notes, October 1941 No. 1, 1, 4.

⁴⁰Circular from Mrs. A.B. DeMent, 22 November 1943, Reel 11, NACW.

⁴¹1941 Meeting Program Notes, 54, Reel 2, NACW.

scrapbook" activities at the U.S.O.⁴²

Members of the NACW worked in U.S.O. units, helping in the victory effort, but also highlighting the poor conditions of the segregated canteens and chapter houses. In 1941 president Jennie Moton sent a circular letter to chapters urging them to contact their local U.S.O. commanding officer or hostess to volunteer and to petition the government for better Negro U.S.O. units. Volunteerism, Moton argued, pressured government "to provide adequate facilities for our enlisted men."⁴³

Like the NACGN, the NACW promoted cooperation with white groups like the U.S.O.; but through volunteerism, the NACW gained recognition for the civil rights struggle and worked for the Double V with other black women's groups. In 1941, the president of the Arkansas chapter, Mrs. Beatrice Kahn, summed up the views of the NACW. She emphasized that in defending the country, African American women would force society to look at them differently, on the same level as any other patriotic citizen. Kahn maintained that the African American woman had to be strong and willing to work for the good of America but also "to defend her race." In spite of "handicaps and discrimination" that faced African American women in national defense programs, she insisted

⁴²"Winning the War," NACW National Notes, October 1942 No. 1, 1-2; Edna Perdue, "Discusses Youth Problems," NACW National Notes, October 1943 No. 1, 4.

⁴³Jennie Moton to Co-Workers, 9 June 1941, Reel 10, NACW.

that "we must not fail America and as Americans we must insist that America shall not fail us."⁴⁴

Operating mainly on college campuses, Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority also supported volunteerism in order to demonstrate that African American women were upstanding and patriotic citizens and to pressure for equality. Founded at Howard University in 1908, Alpha Kappa Alpha modeled itself after the NACW and white sororities. AKA was selective; educational level, personal qualities, and commitment to philanthropic efforts determined membership. Sisters represented middle- and upper-class African American families, and all achieved at least partial college education. Many sisters joined the NACW and other black clubs after college. Like other club women, Alpha Kappa Alpha members believed themselves qualified to lead victory efforts because of their position and influence in society and their determination to uplift the black community.

Alpha Kappa Alpha argued explicitly that defense efforts could provide an entrance into white mainstream society and that a World War II victory could fulfill the promise of equality at home. In 1943, the national president understood how World War II could move white Americans toward giving African Americans long-deserved rights. "We, who are Negroes," she wrote, "know that we

⁴⁴Correspondence of Arkansas chapter, Mrs. Beatrice Kahn, President, 1941 Program Notes, 76-7, Reel 2, NACW.

have two victories to win--victory over the common enemy abroad and victory over destructive forces at home."⁴⁵ The National AKA Council maintained that the "Democratic Way of Life" transcended race and class. Leaders asserted that the struggle for democracy would come from those excluded from equal rights who participated in the war effort. Volunteers could change America into "something worthy of the price we would pay to defend it."⁴⁶

Alpha Kappa Alpha national president Dorothy Boulding Ferebree urged women to convince white organizations of the right to volunteer, regardless of discrimination encountered at local chapters of the Red Cross or U.S.O. She argued that African American participation forced white society to renounce their stereotypes about black women. "War contributions must not be thrust aside," Boulding maintained, "because we are women or because we are Negroes."⁴⁷ Cooperation with national relief and defense organizations suggested a solution for breaking racial barriers, according to Ferebree. In addition, she contended that AKA sisters needed to "make America know that we, as American citizens, want to taste democracy for ourselves

⁴⁵AKA Ivy Leaf, 21:1 (March 1943), 3.

⁴⁶Minutes of the Twenty-Third Annual Boule, 1940, Alpha Kappa Alpha Archives, Moorland/Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, 36. Hereafter AKA.

⁴⁷AKA Ivy Leaf, 18:3 (August 1940), 3.

while we are making it safer for all."⁴⁸

Like the often overlapping membership of the NACW, the sorority women believed that as members of an academic elite they had a duty to lead lesser-educated African Americans toward a more egalitarian society. At the Twenty-third Annual Meeting in 1941, members discussed local chapters' activities as a part of the community, educating and uplifting less fortunate African Americans while struggling towards a democratic ideal. The National Council encouraged members to maintain a "social consciousness" linking them to the African American community as a whole, in order to find strength in numbers.⁴⁹ The 1942 national president, Beulah T. Whitley, wanted Alpha Kappa Alpha to transform itself into "a fighting tool" for democracy on behalf of the entire African American community.⁵⁰

At the national level, Alpha Kappa Alpha involved itself in wartime activities and encouraged its members to participate in local victory efforts. AKA joined the Negro Panhellenic and donated money towards the creation of a special anti-discrimination committee. This committee, based in Washington, lobbied for the integration of national defense activities and war industries. AKA supported the Double V integration effort of the Pittsburgh Courier and

⁴⁸AKA Ivy Leaf, 19:3 (June 1941), 3.

⁴⁹Minutes of the Twenty-third Annual Boule, 37, AKA.

⁵⁰AKA Ivy Leaf, 20:1 (March 1942), 4.

asked members to participate in the Courier's local defense committees.⁵¹ In addition, Alpha Kappa Alpha sponsored "Listen America Week," a public awareness campaign for civil rights. Chapters throughout the country reiterated their desire for equality and desegregation in newspapers, letters, and telegrams to Congress.⁵²

Alpha Kappa Alpha leaders publicized the ways in which sisters could involve themselves in local defense efforts. They sponsored a Conference on Defense Planning, urging all African American women to join the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), host dances at the U.S.O., and follow all rationing rules. National leaders also sponsored a 1943 National Recruiting Drive of Negro Women for the War. Local chapters spent one week recruiting women in their communities for war industries, the Red Cross, the O.C.D., and other volunteer organizations. Throughout the war, the Ivy Leaf discussed different volunteer activities that needed African American women's involvement. Articles urged participation in War Bond programs, all Red Cross activities, canteen and Motor Corps Services, and First Aid

⁵¹Minutes of the Twenty-third Annual Boule, 40, 54, AKA.

⁵²1943 Annual Report, Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs, 1-3, 5, AKA; Marjorie Parker, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority: Sixty Years of Service (Washington: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., 1966), 33.

classes.⁵³

Messages from the leaders of African American women's groups spread to local chapters in newsletters, magazines, and national conferences. From inviting nursing recruiters as speakers to taking First Aid classes, club women led victory efforts in their own communities. The level of education, prosperity, and community respect achieved by club women enabled them to pursue victory efforts in white organizations. In Knoxville, African American club women worked within the Red Cross and U.S.O. as volunteers for defense. Women also led grass-roots community victory activities such as bond-selling, scrap collecting, and fundraising. Knoxville's club women gained a reputation for hard work and patriotism in both black and white society, and their efforts helped to publicize the willingness of African Americans to fight for democracy.

⁵³Findings: Defense Planning for the Future (National Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, 1942); 1943 Annual Report, Non-Partisan Council, 5, AKA; AKA Ivy Leaf: 19:3 (September 1941), 3; 20:4 (December 1942), 3-4.

Chapter 4:

Prepared for Emergencies: First Aid and Volunteer Nurses

In 1941, Knoxville's stagnant economy received a boost from defense contracts totalling over two million dollars. During 1943, over 16,000 women in Knoxville worked at ALCOA, Fulton Sylphon, Rohm and Haas, and numerous textile and ready-made clothing mills as a result of wartime mobilization. Thousands of workers poured in from the surrounding area to fill a critical need for workers, flooding the city and creating a severe housing shortage. The YWCA held socials for swing-shift women, and the Works Projects Administration (WPA) built daycare centers for children of defense workers. Although many Knoxvilleans benefitted from the wartime boom, the African American community found little opportunity to participate in the new prosperity. Most African American women worked in only the lowest-paying, menial jobs. The Red Cross provided many opportunities for participation, however, and African American women volunteered for the Double V in nursing and production units.⁵⁴

Knoxville's Red Cross promoted most organized homefront activities from 1940-1945. Many black and white participants in Red Cross volunteer work chose to study

⁵⁴Patricia Brake Howard, "Knoxville's Rosies: The Impact of World War II on Women Production Workers in Knoxville, Tennessee," (Ph.D diss., University of Tennessee, 1988), 26, 73, 120, 187-8, 218.

medicine and practical nursing. By early 1942, over two thousand Knoxville citizens had enrolled in Volunteer Nurses Aides, First Aid, and Home Nursing classes.⁵⁵ The YWCA and churches offered their buildings for classes, and their members participated in and instructed the Red Cross offerings.

Although Red Cross classes remained segregated throughout the war, the Knoxville chapter provided many opportunities for the African American community to volunteer on the homefront. The Red Cross encouraged the participation of men in the classes, but black and white female instructors taught the courses mainly to women students. Like the Red Cross, the NACGN promoted activities in nursing and volunteering for the armed forces. The organization saw its publicity goals fulfilled as occasional visitors to Knoxville spoke to African American women about the benefits of becoming a wartime nurse.⁵⁶ By taking advantage of opportunities provided by the Red Cross and attending recruiting sessions of government nurses, African American women answered the challenge for preparedness. Despite their segregation, African American women worked for

⁵⁵"Knoxville to Start Red Cross Defense Training," Knoxville News Sentinel 1 March 1942, A-3.

⁵⁶"Negro First Aid Class at Shiloh Presbyterian," Knoxville News Sentinel 21 April 1941, 5; "Negro Red Cross Enrollment Starts," Knoxville News Sentinel 15 March 1942, A-3; "Negro Nurse Speaks at Knoxville College," Knoxville Journal 11 April 1941, 1:10.

victory with as much enthusiasm as white Knoxvilleians.

Before the U.S. entered World War II, the Knoxville Red Cross chapter set up Home Service classes and attempted to secure First Aid Classes for African American volunteers. The Phyllis Wheatley YWCA sponsored Red Cross Home Service classes for girls and young women. These classes, a combination of introductory first aid and elementary nursing, continued through the year and throughout the war because enrollment remained very high. The YWCA enrolled its members and provided classroom space, and the Red Cross secured instructors and necessary materials for the classes.⁵⁷ The classes not only helped the war effort, but they introduced African American girls into a lucrative profession and encouraged self-esteem.

In April of 1940, the Red Cross Chairman of First Aid/Water Safety attempted to find a pool for the "instruction of Colored class." By May, no pools for whites had agreed to open their doors to African American participants, so the chairman dropped the class. He managed to convince Knoxville College to build a pool for the general health of the African American community and for a planned First Aid/Water Safety class the following summer. He recognized the need for participants in both white and

⁵⁷1941 Fortieth Anniversary YWCA Program, Report of the Phyllis Wheatley Chapter, YWCA Clinch Avenue Branch, Knoxville. Hereafter YWCA.

black water safety classes in Knoxville.⁵⁸

By 1941, when America's indirect involvement in World War II escalated and war with Japan loomed, the government capitulated to the NACGN's demand to recruit African American nurses. In Knoxville, the first of several nurse recruiting officers visited the black community. The Red Cross also expanded their First Aid Classes for African American women. In April 1941, a Lieutenant in the Army Nurses' Corps travelled to Knoxville to publicize war opportunities for African Americans. She explained to Knoxville College and Austin High students that African American women had a duty to fulfill the Negro nursing quotas set by the army and navy, and emphasized that the country needed the services of black citizens.

That same year, the Red Cross started a class for African American adults at Shiloh Presbyterian church. WPA Adult Education teachers instructed the class. At this point, no African Americans had achieved the level of instructor, so white instructors taught First Aid to the African American community.⁵⁹

The next year witnessed a major expansion of Red Cross activities throughout the country. As the United States

⁵⁸Knox County Minutes Book, 1938-1945, 3 April 1940 and 8 May 1940 Meetings, in possession of Knox County Red Cross Headquarters. Hereafter Knox County Red Cross.

⁵⁹"Negro Nurse Speaks at Knoxville College," Knoxville Journal 11 April 1941, 1:10; "Negro First Aid Class at Shiloh Presbyterian," Knoxville News Sentinel 21 April 1941, 5.

sent troops into battle, homefront defense became a top priority of the Red Cross domestic division. In Knoxville, the Red Cross added classes for white Volunteer Nurses' Aides and expanded the First Aid program for both black and white women. The Red Cross started new First Aid classes for African Americans almost every month in various locations, and several African American women became certified instructors.⁶⁰

Young African American women involved themselves in first aid and nursing classes when the Red Cross offered them the opportunity to participate. The Phyllis Wheatley branch of the YWCA reported that they held four standard First Aid Classes for their members. In February, Austin High School remained open after hours for a First Aid class. Fourteen Austin High graduates and twelve students enrolled in the first class.⁶¹

By the next month, several African American women had become instructors and had secured new First Aid classes for the African American community. Annie Jones, the first black Knoxville woman to receive certification for instruction, led a Negro Defense Training Class, which included basic health and first aid coursework. Anne

⁶⁰"Phyllis Wheatley Holds First Aid Classes," Knoxville News Sentinel 15 March 1942, A-3.

⁶¹YWCA 1943 Annual Report Program, Phyllis Wheatley Report, YWCA; "First Aid Class at Austin," Knoxville Journal 15 February 1942, 4:8.

Stewart taught at the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, instructing both morning and evening First Aid classes so that defense workers and students could attend the sessions.⁶²

Two African American instructors, Lula Fagg and Gladys Kyle, devoted much of their time to teaching First Aid classes in their community. Fagg began her volunteer efforts at Austin Homes, a low-income housing community, and McMillan Negro Elementary School. By April, eighteen African American students had taken the First Aid exam. Gladys Kyle assisted Fagg in the classroom and, in addition, taught her own class at the African American YMCA. In July, the Knoxville Journal dedicated a long article to the two tireless volunteers, a rare honor for any African American in the city. At the time of the article, Lula Fagg and Gladys Kyle had graduated 254 First Aid students from their classes. They had instructed First Aid courses in Fremont Methodist Church, Austin Homes Social Center, College Homes low-income housing, Dale Avenue Cafeteria, and even in Fagg's own home. The efforts of these women publicized the patriotism of Knoxville's African Americans and helped the Red Cross to reach its goal of preparedness.⁶³

⁶²"Knoxville Red Cross to start Negro Defense Training," Knoxville News Sentinel 1 March 1942, A-3; "Phyllis Wheatley Holds First Aid Classes," Knoxville Journal 15 March 1942, 11; "Negro Red Cross Enrollment Starts," Knoxville News Sentinel 15 March 1942, A-3.

⁶³"Negroes to take First Aid Exam," Knoxville Journal 17 April 1942, 14; "Cansler Y to Begin First Aid Class," Knoxville News Sentinel 8 May 1942, 8; "Negro Instructors

The Red Cross understood the benefit of using African American instructors in the black community. The well-known and well-respected African American teachers dedicated their time willingly to teach in black churches, schools, clubs, and low-income districts, leaving white instructors free to teach only white students in segregated classrooms. Although several African American women held instructor's certificates in First Aid, no women reached the instructor level in Home Nursing. The Chairwoman of Home Nursing appealed to "all groups of women" for instructors, but it took two years to fulfill that goal. Finally, in 1944, the Red Cross certified two African American women in Home Nursing instruction.⁶⁴

In Knoxville, only one wing of one hospital admitted African American patients. General Hospital needed Volunteer Nurses' Aides in their Colored Ward, but because it was the only available medical unit for African Americans, the demand for African American VNAs was lower than for white volunteers. Nevertheless, the Red Cross organized a VNA class in October 1942 for African American women, led by Mary V. Hays, a registered nurse. The local Red Cross screened the applicants, and each class, black and

Graduate 254," Knoxville Journal 5 July 1942, 1:2.

⁶⁴Knox County Red Cross Meeting Minute Book 1938-1945, 7 October 1942 Meeting, Knox County Red Cross; Alta F. Thomas and Peg Le Van, American Red Cross Knoxville Area Chapter: A Commemorative History (unpublished, 1972), 26, Knox County Red Cross.

white, received 150 dollars for materials and trained in hospitals.⁶⁵

In 1943, African American nurses travelled to Knoxville again to reiterate the need for black volunteers in the armed services' nurse corps. Although the recruiters were not tied directly to the NACGN, it is likely that their visit was a direct result of NACGN pressure on the government to publicize the efforts of African American nurses and to recruit new volunteers. Mrs. Pauline Butler spoke to Knoxville College students about the shortage of nurses in the Nurse Cadet Corps. She explained that the government needed over 65,000 trained nurses for civilian and service action. Mrs. Butler applauded the efforts of the Red Cross, maintaining that every family needed at least one member schooled in practical nursing care. She told the college women that federal government service provided wonderful opportunities to become involved in the war effort and to advance in good jobs. The following month, a United States Nurse Cadet Corps member spoke at Knoxville College in an effort to recruit student nurses. Several of Knoxville's African American nurses provided her with places to stay while she visited the area.⁶⁶

⁶⁵"Negro Aides Class to Accept Applications," Knoxville News Sentinel 30 October 1942, 17; "Cavalcade Magazine," Knoxville Journal 27 December 1942, 1.

⁶⁶Knoxville College Aurora (Knoxville, TN), 19 October 1943, 3; "Negro Nurse Recruits in Knoxville," Knoxville Journal 3 November 1943, 3.

By 1944-45, the expansion of Red Cross services had ended, but the Knoxville chapter maintained many of its original classes, switching focus from homefront defense to veteran's assistance. Black women remained active participants in First Aid and Nursing classes. In Knoxville, the NACGN attempted to bring attention to the activities of African American nurses one last time.

Although many women volunteered fewer hours as Germany surrendered and husbands returned home, the African American community in Knoxville refused to end their homefront efforts. In the Red Cross Southeast Regional Report, the Knoxville chapter reported that one African American woman had completed over 1100 hours of service in less than fourteen months as a Volunteer Nurses' Aide. The unnamed woman worked full-time as a maid in the Knox County Health Department and spent all of her free time in the General Hospital Colored Ward, according to the report. At the end of the school year, the Red Cross awarded seventeen Home Nursing Certificates to Austin High School women.⁶⁷

Once again, nurses tried to introduce women into their career in Knoxville. The NACGN led the effort in 1944. Mrs. Mabel K. Slayers, Executive Secretary of the NACGN, spoke to the Knoxville chapter, Knoxville College students, and the African American community in a meeting at the black

⁶⁷Southeast Regional Report, Box 322, File 148.08, Red Cross; Alta Thomas and Peg Le Van, American Red Cross Knoxville Area Chapter, 25.

YMCA. Her presentation, "War Problems and Problems of the Negro Nurse," highlighted wartime activities of nurses and urged women to join the profession.⁶⁸

In 1944, the Johnson City Red Cross chapter merged with the Knox County Red Cross chapter in an effort to cut spending on materials and instructors. Knox County took over the training requirements and course offerings in Johnson City because it had more experience and many more volunteers under its direction. Under the auspices of the Knox County Red Cross chapter, five African American women participated in Gray Lady training for the Johnson City Veteran's Administration Negro Hospital Ward.⁶⁹

Although the Tennessee NACW reported that all of its members supported Red Cross activities "one hundred per cent,"⁷⁰ few club women learned nursing skills in Knoxville. Evidence suggests that many club women of Knoxville belonged to both the NACW and Alpha Kappa Alpha. Almost all Alpha Kappa Alphas found employment as schoolteachers or stayed at home with their children, and held degrees from Knoxville College or Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College.

⁶⁸"NACGN Executive speaks at Cansler," Knoxville News Sentinel 2 July 1944, A-3.

⁶⁹Southeast Regional Report, Box 322, File 148.08, Red Cross.

⁷⁰1946 Annual Meeting, Southeast Regional Report, 34, Reel 2, NACW.

Red Cross First Aid and Nursing Classes offered a first step for women who desired a career in nursing, especially if the women had failed to complete college. The women received training in the VNA classes that fulfilled elementary nursing requirements. Alpha Kappa Alpha schoolteachers already worked in the profession that they considered to be the most desirable for middle- and upper-class African American women. Alpha Kappa Alpha and NACW women found little time to participate in nursing classes because they worked during school hours.⁷¹

Several Alpha Kappa Alpha members taught First Aid classes in Knoxville, and some members took the classes from their sisters. The Ivy Leaf Reported that Ethel Downer and Dorothy Nance instructed First Aid Classes in African American schools. Later, Augusta Hyatte, Mabel Williams, and Olive Wallace achieved instructor certification.⁷² A ninety-year resident of Knoxville and charter member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha chapter, Margaret Carson recalled taking a First Aid class from Olive Wallace after school. In her Knoxville College First Aid class, one-fourth of the participants were Alpha Kappa Alphas.⁷³

Although local leaders refused to integrate nursing and

⁷¹Interview with Margaret Carson, 10 October 1994, notes in possession of author.

⁷²"Chapter News," AKA Ivy Leaf, 21:1 (March 1943), 24.

⁷³Interview with Margaret Carson, 10 October 1994.

basic medical classes, the Knox County Red Cross provided opportunities to the African American community to participate in the war effort. Many African American women responded to the call for nurses, and First Aid classes expanded rapidly as high enrollment continued throughout 1942-1944. The enthusiastic response of Knoxville's African American community prompted the Red Cross to recruit African American women as instructors for the courses, thereby expanding the availability of classes for black students.

The large numbers of African American volunteers in homefront medical activities won the respect of the white community. White newspapers publicized African American classes and named instructors, citing their patriotic efforts and recounting personal stories about extraordinary instructors like Fagg; this treatment of African American women fulfilled a goal of both the NACW and Alpha Kappa Alpha.

Although club women took First Aid classes, they concentrated their efforts in production units and canteen service. These activities provided more opportunities for socializing because they involved leisure-time activities rather than classroom learning. In Knoxville, club women organized their own units for Red Cross knitting and sewing and ran the U.S.O. and Negro Lounge at the Southern Railroad Station canteen.

Chapter 5:

For the Boys: Production Units and U.S.O.s

In addition to promoting medical auxiliary activities during World War II, the Knoxville Red Cross sponsored production units and helped the government plan U.S.O. units throughout the city. Knoxville's yearly quota of clothing, blankets, and surgical bandages called for by the national Red Cross headquarters remained high throughout the war because Knoxville normally exceeded the quotas set for the chapter. Production Chairwoman Mrs. Dan Briscoe, Jr. noted that the Red Cross's attempt to make clothes was "greatly aided by work done at UT, the churches, and various groups."⁷⁴

In order to distribute materials and involve diverse community members for production projects, the Red Cross created production units. These units operated within churches, schools, sororities, and other women's clubs throughout the community. By 1941, Knoxville's Red Cross had created its ninety-ninth unit of production, and both white and black units rolled bandages, knitted, and sewed diligently for the war effort. Hundreds of people volunteered their time in churches, social clubs, and the YWCA and YMCA; at least eight African American units provided volunteer opportunities. In July 1942, over six

⁷⁴Red Cross Minute Book, 4 December 1940 Meeting, Knox County Red Cross.

hundred workers per day prepared surgical dressings to fulfill Knoxville's quota of two million before the end of the summer.⁷⁵ Production units remained the largest volunteer activity in Knoxville throughout the war, because sewing and preparing dressings required no special training or time commitments.

While some people sewed for the troops, others participated in relief and entertainment for the soldiers as they travelled through Knoxville on their way to camps or on return trips home. Knoxville had several white and black U.S.O. units; the number fluctuated during the war as several opened and closed simultaneously, and the white and black canteens at the Southern Railroad Station had served over 66,000 troops by August 1944. NACW and Phyllis Wheatley YWCA members sponsored the U.S.O. clubs, and Alpha Kappa Alpha collegiate and alumnae members served as hostesses at the Canteen and the U.S.O.⁷⁶ African American women who made clothing and supplied food to keep up troop morale gained recognition from white newspapers, just as the first aid and VNA participants had.

Knoxville's African American community opened its first U.S.O. in 1941. The Negro Division of the Knoxville U.S.O.

⁷⁵Red Cross Minute Book, 2 July 1941 Meeting; 1 July 1942 Meeting, Knox County Red Cross.

⁷⁶Red Cross Minute Book, 1 August 1944 Meeting, Knox County Red Cross; "Report of the Tennessee State President," Fifty Year Jubilee Annual Meeting Program, 1946, 126, Reel 2, NACW.

board spearheaded a campaign drive to raise eight hundred dollars for the unit; the white community already had a U.S.O. from its successful fundraising campaign. The Negro Division's goal was more ambitious, because the black community had fewer businesses and fewer potential donors.

Nonetheless, the Division succeeded and the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA opened the U.S.O. in an abandoned water treatment plant. Margaret Carson served on the Recreation Room Committee; she helped to furnish and decorate the main hall. NACW member Miss Bryce headed the entire operation. Soldiers on leave attended the unit.⁷⁷ In addition, the U.S.O. served Oak Ridge defense workers; the YWCA sponsored a bus that travelled from the town into Knoxville because the government refused African Americans entry into movie theaters and the organized recreation units there. In fact, the only recreation for African Americans provided by Oak Ridge consisted of an empty "Colored Recreation Hall" with a few chairs and tables.⁷⁸

The success of the U.S.O. rested on the energy of young women who served food and danced with soldiers. African American women served as hostesses at the unit and made the U.S.O. a popular recreation spot. A resident of Knoxville

⁷⁷"Negro Division to Raise U.S.O. Funds," Knoxville Journal 18 July 1941, 12; Interview with Margaret Carson.

⁷⁸Charles W. Johnson and Charles O. Jackson, City Behind a Fence: Oak Ridge, TN 1942-1946 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 116-7.

for over sixty years, Sarah Moore Greene, worked as a hostess in the unit. She took nutrition seminars to qualify and volunteered on the weekends. Greene remembers that most soldiers came to eat good food, but she also counseled soldiers with problems and referred them to other programs for additional help. Young women attended socials with the soldiers; Greene remembers seeing "a lot of pretty women-- they had a good time."⁷⁹ Although social considerations probably accounted for young women's motivation to volunteer, the U.S.O. provided an opportunity for the black community to help their own African American troops and workers.

Like the First Aid Classes, production units surfaced throughout Knoxville's African American community during the first full year of U.S. involvement in the war. In 1942, the city's Red Cross received help from the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, black churches, and Alpha Kappa Alpha members. Women in the units knitted, sewed, and rolled dressings in their spare time. Often, women volunteered in several groups simultaneously; they simply arrived on-site at a unit when they had any time to volunteer.

The Phyllis Wheatley YWCA formed the largest Red Cross Negro Production Unit; it began in January 1942 and remained open throughout the war. Volunteers kept the sewing and

⁷⁹Author's interview with Sarah Moore Greene, 24 October 1994, Center for the Study of War and Society, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.

knitting room open for twelve hours a day, Monday through Friday. Alpha Kappa Alpha member Mabel Williams held beginning sewing classes on Saturday, assisted by sorority sister, Maud Williams. Another woman instructed sewing classes. In addition, the unit served as an inspection center for work completed by individuals in their own homes.⁸⁰ Greene worked at the YWCA Production Unit. Every Thursday after she taught kindergarten, she volunteered to roll bandages. The unit accepted any willing volunteers who could stop in and help for any amount of time. As Greene remembers, "we could help--we could do whatever we could do. . . [Phyllis Wheatley] was just a little house."⁸¹

Several other community production units opened in 1942. An African American woman, Mrs. P. W. Dawkins, chaired a unit at Murphy Library, where two women taught knitting. Another woman held advanced knitting classes in her home when she was not teaching beginning skills at the library. Even the College Homes WPA Recreation Group assisted the Red Cross. Young girls learned to knit for defense while they discussed various aspects of basic first

⁸⁰"Phyllis Wheatley Y to Open Negro Production Unit," Knoxville News Sentinel 12 January 1942, 8-9.

⁸¹Interview with Sarah Moore Greene, 24 October 1994.

aid skills with their afterschool leaders.⁸²

African American churches volunteered to create their own production units. Although most workers were members of the congregation, each church unit encouraged everyone in the community to participate. Greater Mount Cavalry Baptist Church organized a Red Cross sewing unit and advertised for volunteers in Knoxville's African American newspaper, the Flashlight-Herald. Mount Zion Baptist Church opened a production unit, too. Women unable to volunteer at the Phyllis Wheatley unit during the week could work at Mount Zion on Sundays.⁸³

Mrs. Carl Davis chaired the Mount Olive Baptist Church Production Unit. The volunteers met on Wednesdays for seven hours to sew and knit for soldiers. The Mount Olive women executed a coup for the African American community; somehow, they managed to get their production unit listed several times in the Red Cross schedule next to exclusive white clubs, sororities, and Junior League groups. The Knoxville Journal listed the schedule in each Sunday's Society section, and Mount Olive appears to be the only black unit

⁸²"Wheatley Branch Busy for Red Cross," Knoxville News Sentinel 12 January 1942, 9; "College Homes Rec Group Knits for Defense," Knoxville Journal 15 February 1942, 4:8.

⁸³Knoxville Flashlight-Herald (Knoxville, TN) 7 February 1942, 4 (African American paper: single extant copy located at the Beck Cultural Center, Knoxville, TN); Interview with Sarah Moore Greene, 24 October 1994.

ever announced in the article.⁸⁴

In March 1942, Knoxville's Alpha Kappa Alpha chapter contacted the Red Cross in order to start a production unit. They created a schedule quickly and became some of the Red Cross's most productive volunteers. Each Friday between five and nine o'clock, all sisters sewed for at least one hour at the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA. AKA members Mabel Williams, Mildred Seals, and Edythe Nowlin supervised the work and kept a record of each sister's hours. Through the war, the local leader of Alpha Kappa Alpha held a production unit at her home. Many AKA teachers, including Margaret Carson, met after school at her house to make dresses and sweaters for former prisoners of war and citizens of liberated countries. She recalls that many of her garments found their way to former Nazi concentration camps. In June, the Ivy Leaf reported that several Alpha Kappa Alphas received pins for one hundred hours of Red Cross sewing; Carson attained two pins for her service.⁸⁵

By the close of the year, African American women had produced so many surgical dressings and garments that they attracted the attention of the white community; actually, the Phyllis Wheatley Unit produced more garments per

⁸⁴"Red Cross Announces Production Schedule," Knoxville Journal 1 March 1942, 8:7.

⁸⁵"Chapter News," AKA Ivy Leaf, 20:1 (March 1942), 37; Interview with Margaret Carson, 10 October 1994; "Chapter News," AKA Ivy Leaf, 20:2 (June 1942), 20.

volunteer in 1942 than any white unit. The Red Cross Production chairwoman called a meeting at the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA to honor the volunteers. Women working at the unit completed fifty sweaters, two pairs of gloves, seventy-five rompers, two army/navy all-purpose helmets, twenty shirts, and fifty sheets in less than one year. The Red Cross gave out one hundred hour service pins to five African American women, including the production unit chairwoman and the knitting chairwoman.⁸⁶

Local Alpha Kappa Alpha sisters remained busy throughout the fall, despite the fact that most of them held jobs as full-time teachers. The Ivy Leaf praised the chapter; by December, members had knitted or sewed at least one hundred Red Cross garments for troops and civilians. Since Knoxville's chapter had only twenty-four members, the large number of donations showed a tremendous accomplishment.⁸⁷

In addition to filling Production Units, Knoxville's African American community maintained the Negro Division of the U.S.O. Board. Although the original African American U.S.O. closed down because of its location and inconvenient distance from Oak Ridge workers, women and men planned to open another in the following year. In November 1942, the

⁸⁶"Production Unit Honored for Work," Knoxville News Sentinel 6 September 1942, D-4.

⁸⁷"Chapter News," AKA Ivy Leaf, 20:4 (December 1942), 15.

Negro Division met at the African American YMCA to launch another U.S.O. fundraising drive.⁸⁸

In 1943, the Red Cross opened a Negro Canteen at the Southern Railroad Station in the Colored Waiting Room to serve troops on their way to southern camps like Camps Forrest, Peay, and Claiborne. The African American canteen began a full year after the establishment of the white canteen. It is likely that the Red Cross needed African American women to serve black troops because white canteen hostesses exhibited a reluctance to entertain those soldiers. Furthermore, black troops could not enter the white waiting room that served as the original Red Cross canteen.⁸⁹

The Red Cross reported that in September service at the segregated Southern Station canteens had reached an all-time high. Margaret Carson worked at the canteen three days a week after school. She served food to black troops who were unable to leave their cars; often, she served two or three cars at a time. Carson also nursed both black and white sick men since all of the cots were upstairs in the African American waiting room. Other Alpha Kappa Alpha sisters volunteered at the Southern Station; several, including

⁸⁸Interview with Margaret Carson, 10 October 1994; "U.S.O. Board to Discuss Fundraising for 1943," Knoxville News Sentinel 14 November 1942, 3.

⁸⁹Red Cross Minutes Book, 3 February 1943 meeting, Knox County Red Cross.

Carson, received service pins for completing one hundred hours of work.⁹⁰

Knoxville African Americans activated the U.S.O. unit once again in 1943. Alpha Kappa Alphas sat on the Knoxville U.S.O. board, and sisters participated in the unit. The Phyllis Wheatley YWCA set up another U.S.O. that hosted men's service dances every Sunday afternoon. Many high-school and college women acted as hostesses for the unit. In October, Clinton industrial defense workers also attended the Phyllis Wheatley U.S.O., participating in many social activities and enjoying the dances.⁹¹

Although 1944-45 marked a slowdown in production and entertainment units, African American women continued to participate in Red Cross-sponsored activities. The Southern Service Station canteen remained open through the remainder of the war and into the period of troop demobilization. In October 1944, the Red Cross reported that African American women had repainted and redecorated their waiting room at the railroad station themselves.⁹²

Knoxville's two Negro U.S.O. units remained open until

⁹⁰Red Cross Minute Book, 1 September 1943 Meeting, Knox County Red Cross; Interview with Margaret Carson, 10 October 1994; "Chapter News," AKA Ivy Leaf, 21:3 (September, 1943), 37.

⁹¹"Chapter News," AKA Ivy Leaf, 21:1 (March 1943), 24; October 1943 Minutes of the YWCA Board of Directors, YWCA.

⁹²Red Cross Minute Book, October 1944 Meeting, Knox County Red Cross.

after 1945. They served both as clubs for active troops and returning veterans. The Negro Division must have been successful in its 1943 fundraising drives, because the Directory of U.S.O. Operations listed two black units in the 1945 directory. The African American YMCA headed the unit on Vine Street and Phyllis Wheatley YWCA serviced the Vine Street unit in 1945.⁹³

African American women enjoyed several benefits from volunteering in production units and serving as hostesses in the U.S.O. Not only did they help both black and white troops and prisoners of war, but they also used the time to socialize with friends and colleagues. Upper- and middle-class African American women participated in production units and canteen service because they had leisure time and resources. Often they joined with fellow club members or sorority sisters and thoroughly enjoyed their work.⁹⁴

As African American women gave their time willingly to keep up the morale of black and white troops, they gained more recognition and respect from the white community. Newspapers praised the women, naming extraordinary volunteers in the papers alongside white women, listing the times of the Negro Production Units, and enthusiastically

⁹³1945 National Agency Operations, Directory of U.S.O. Operations (New York: United Service Organizations, Inc., 1945), listed under "Tennessee units."

⁹⁴Interview with Margaret Carson, 10 October 1994; Interview with Sarah Moore Greene, 24 October 1994.

recounting their patriotic efforts. While the women enjoyed each other's company in segregated units, they moved closer to reaching the goals set by the NACW and Alpha Kappa Alpha. White citizens acknowledged African American accomplishments as a victory for all.

African American women found recognition working in segregated units of white Knoxville organizations, but they also participated in homefront volunteer efforts outside of the Red Cross and U.S.O. activities. The African American community created its own grass-roots victory campaigns that equalled those of the white community. Led by schools, churches, and the NAACP, the Knoxville community attended lectures, participated in scrap and war bond drives, and planted victory gardens. Only imagination and resources limited African American volunteer efforts.

Chapter 6:

Double V in Practice: Grass-Roots Volunteerism

In addition to helping the Red Cross and U.S.O. on the homefront, the African American community created its own outlets for promoting wartime volunteerism. In grass-roots defense efforts, club women, sorority sisters, teachers, and NAACP members joined together to help to win the war and to win equality for black citizens. Because African Americans directed community efforts without the assistance of white organizations, leaders could speak out against inequities in defense efforts and urge citizens to join the NAACP to fight for civil rights. As Knoxville African American women participated in NAACP membership drives, bought war bonds, and organized speeches and rallies around "The Negro and the War Effort," newspapers highlighted their activities once again. The community found strength in numbers during their struggle for recognition as first-class citizens.

Even before the United States entered World War II, Knoxville's African American citizens saw the potential for positive publicity in raising money for and volunteering in war relief projects. The Knoxville NAACP chapter involved itself in the promotion of equality in national relief organizations. Daisy Lampkin, a national field director of the NAACP, spoke to citizens at Mount Zion Baptist Church about working for national defense. She argued that African American volunteers provided manpower that was vitally

important to the defeat of totalitarian forces.⁹⁵ Later, Lampkin endorsed a measure proposed by the Knoxville NAACP that resolved to stop national discrimination in defense industry and in volunteer organizations. She sent the measure to all local, state, and national officials.⁹⁶

In March 1941, several club and sorority women, most of them alumnae of Knoxville College, chaired a project to raise money for British relief. They organized a "Negro Jitterbug" contest that was open to the community. Black businesses sponsored couples by paying their entrance fees, and the winners received cash prizes. Knoxville College sorority women publicized the effort, and black sorority members entered the contest early to lend prestige to the effort.⁹⁷

The next year, African American women participated in war bond drives as the government requested loans to supply, entertain, and transport troops in the first full year of war. NACW women worked in drives throughout Tennessee. Immediately after the war, the state chapter president reminded members that "during the war, Tennessee played an important part in the sale of War Bonds, especially the

⁹⁵"NAACP Holds Rally at Mount Zion," Knoxville News Sentinel 26 January 1941, A-3.

⁹⁶"NAACP Publishes Anti-Discrimination Resolution," Knoxville Journal 28 January 1941, 12.

⁹⁷"Negro Jitterbug Contest to be Held," Knoxville News Sentinel 14 March 1941, 12.

women. They led the drives and canvassed the neighborhoods, making the drives a success."⁹⁸

In February and again in September of 1942, several women volunteers led the first official defense bond drives in Knoxville's African American community. Mrs. Cora Burks and Mrs. Henry Green asked black businesses for money in February. In September, Emma T. Charles, a teacher at Austin High School, organized a rally to start the second drive. She and several NAACP leaders spoke at Mount Cavalry Baptist Church about "The Negro and the War Effort," encouraging African American participation in volunteer efforts directed by the government."⁹⁹

Other women's organizations supported war bond drives and Red Cross fundraisers. Alpha Kappa Alphas cooperated with the government by buying stamps and bonds; the Knoxville chapter became the first Greek-letter organization in the city to buy a bond as a group. All sororities helped in fundraising at Knoxville College. The Panhellenic Council held a Presidential Birthday Ball for the African American community to raise money for the war effort. The African American YWCA and YMCA helped to organize the ball,

⁹⁸NACW Annual Meeting Program, 1946, Southeast Regional Report, Report of the Tennessee Chapter, 34, Reel 2, NACW.

⁹⁹"Negroes to Hold War Bond Drive," Knoxville News Sentinel 22 February 1942, A-5; "NAACP Rally at Mount Cavalry Starts War Bond Drive," Knoxville Journal 13 September 1942, 2:6; "NAACP Speaks at Mount Cavalry," Knoxville News Sentinel 13 September 1942, 7.

and two Alpha Kappa Alphas, Edythe Nowlin and Margaret Carson, sat on the planning board.¹⁰⁰

Teachers led students in fundraising activities at their schools. African American and white Brownies and Girl Scouts purchased war bonds at the direction of their troop leaders, who were teachers. Girls solicited donations from the community and brought the money to troop meetings. In 1942, Beardsley Junior High Girl Scouts, a black troop, joined the city-wide Penny Drive for the Red Cross. All nine of the girls brought in money; some had collected as much as five dollars each. Beardsley Junior High teachers organized drives in their school; students achieved one hundred percent participation in the 1942 Red Cross fund drive.¹⁰¹

In 1942, African American teachers and club members began their first efforts at publicizing the importance of conservation of food and scarce items, community health, and disease prevention. In addition, Alpha Kappa Alpha and Iota Phi Lambda sororities collected used and unwanted books for a Victory Book Drive. They sent the books to the U.S.O. for

¹⁰⁰"Chapter News," AKA Ivy Leaf, 20:1 (March 1942), 39; "Negro Presidential Birthday Ball Planned," Knoxville News Sentinel 26 January 1942, B-8.

¹⁰¹Interview with Margaret Carson 10 October 1994; "Troops Give to Red Cross in Penny Drive," Knoxville News Sentinel 18 January 1942, 24; "Beardsley Students Give 100 Percent to the Red Cross," Knoxville News Sentinel 14 January 1942, C-11.

distribution to troops in the states and overseas.¹⁰²

During the same year, teachers at Austin High held a "Negro Health Week." Although "health and hygiene weeks" had instituted by black progressive reformers, teachers in 1942 focused attention on staying healthy as a way to aid community preparedness for homefront defense. At Knoxville College, women of the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA worked with the YMCA to plan a farm project that would provide food to Knoxville College commissary. The farm project gave jobs to students and saved the college money, but it also followed the national defense directive of using every inch of empty land for victory gardens. Consumer awareness and rationing became a concern for housewives during the war. The local Alpha Kappa Alpha chapter wrote a pamphlet explaining rationing and conservation of goods for the community at large.¹⁰³

Activities of the Knoxville Office of Civilian Defense intensified in 1942. African American men and women volunteered as air raid wardens, motor corps members, and

¹⁰²"Negro Sorority Collects Books for Soldiers," Knoxville News Sentinel 22 February 1942, A-7; "Chapter News," AKA Ivy Leaf, 20:1 (March 1942), 38.

¹⁰³"Negro Health Week Ends," Knoxville News Sentinel 5 April 1942, A-6; "'Y' Organizations Plan Extensive Farm Project," Knoxville College Aurora (Knoxville TN) 9 April 1942, 1; "Chapter News," AKA Ivy Leaf, 20:4 (December 1942), 15.

block conservation leaders in Knoxville.¹⁰⁴ Although the O.C.D. was a national organization, each community branch enjoyed full autonomy and ran the program with suggestions, not directives, from national headquarters.

In March, Austin High School teachers and black elementary school teachers registered people for Civilian Defense activities in a community-wide drive for volunteers. In the following month, Knoxville College hosted a three-day Civilian Defense school. Forty-five African American men and women attended air-raid, gas and bomb handling, and home defense sessions. By the end of the year, one African American woman, Mrs. A. E. Lampkin, had qualified as an O.C.D. Air Raid Warden for her neighborhood.¹⁰⁵

In 1942, the Red Cross blood controversy caused racial tension in Knoxville. The NAACP held awareness campaigns in the city, and other groups continued to press for civil rights through volunteerism and legal channels. According to NAACP officials in Knoxville, volunteerism legitimated the cry for equality. As a result of the blood segregation controversy, the NAACP held a recruitment drive for members. Over one thousand Knoxville citizens signed up publicly;

¹⁰⁴"Registration for O.C.D. Begins," Knoxville Journal 25 March 1942, 4.

¹⁰⁵"Registration for OCD Begins," Knoxville Journal 25 March 1942, 4; "OCD School Held At Knoxville College," Knoxville News Sentinel 23 April 1942, 7; Interview with Mrs. Carson, 10 October 1994; "Air Raid Wardens Named," Knoxville News Sentinel 13 September 1942, 7.

this expansion signified the greatest success the NAACP had witnessed up to that point. The Flashlight-Herald supported the NAACP recruitment and urged black citizens to join the organization in an article entitled, "Red Cross Calls Prejudice 'A Symbol of Democracy.'" They denounced the Red Cross policy as hypocritical and racist and urged African American Knoxvilleans to fight for equality at home while black troops tried to protect democracy overseas.¹⁰⁶

As an executive member of the NAACP, Sarah Moore Greene recruited black teachers during the war. Because a white school board controlled the African American school system, teachers feared that participation in the NAACP would cost them their jobs. Greene sent application forms to the principals of the schools, who then enclosed the forms in their paychecks. Teachers filled out the forms and sent checks for membership dues to Greene through the mail. The teachers received newsletters directly from the organization and the school board never knew about their affiliation. Greene remembers that all African American teachers joined the NAACP during the war because they knew that the NAACP would protect their anonymity.¹⁰⁷

In March 1942, a Knoxville College alumna and

¹⁰⁶"NAACP Drive Gets 1000 Members," Knoxville Flashlight-Herald 7 February 1942, 4; "Red Cross Calls Prejudice 'A Symbol of Democracy,'" Knoxville Flashlight-Herald 7 February 1942, 4.

¹⁰⁷Interview with Sarah Moore Greene, 24 October 1994.

successful businesswoman, unnamed in the Knoxville College Aurora, spoke to female students about the war effort. She admitted that inequalities existed in war industry and volunteer organizations, but she urged the students to fight against the oppression. "They must plan for the situation of war and segregation," the college newspaper reported, "by first getting prepared." The speaker claimed that all African American women had a duty to open doors in industry and all other areas of life to help all African American citizens achieve equality.¹⁰⁸

From 1943-1945, Knoxville's African American community continued to promote conservation of resources, fundraising for the war effort, and fighting for equality in defense organizations. In 1943, the Negro PTA, O.C.D., and "leaders of all other Negro women's groups" met at the central YWCA to discuss point rationing and cooking without important rationed ingredients. The leaders presented the information to their own groups after the seminar.¹⁰⁹

African American schools remained active in the war effort throughout the final years of the war. Emma T. Charles created a Victory Garden program at Austin High School in 1944 that taught conservation to students and supplied families with vegetables. Margaret Carson

¹⁰⁸"Alumna Brings Message to Knoxville Women," Knoxville College Aurora (Knoxville, TN) 26 March 1942, 1.

¹⁰⁹"Negro Leaders to Discuss Rationing," Knoxville News Sentinel 16 February 1943, 10.

remembers planting the gardens with her class at Vine Middle School. Schoolteachers also led scrap metal drives in the African American community. The women entered their pupils in contests and distributed prizes to the classes that had collected the most metal.¹¹⁰

Despite problems with segregation and racism within national organizations, the African American community in Knoxville continued to support the government through war bond drives and fundraising. Austin High school teachers led war efforts once again and conducted their third drive in the school. They expected their students to collect over three thousand dollars for war bond purchases. In 1944, the African American community conducted the last large War Bond Rally in connection with the government's Fifth War Loan Drive.¹¹¹

Although they remained faithful participants in the war efforts until the close of the war, African Americans also concerned themselves with issues of inequality and civil rights. NAACP members spoke in churches and to community groups about the Pittsburgh Courier's Double V program and urged citizens to fight for their own rights as Americans as they fought for Europeans' freedom. In 1945, Alpha Kappa

¹¹⁰"Victory Garden Program Begins at Austin High," Knoxville News Sentinel 22 March 1944, 6; Interview with Margaret Carson, 10 October 1994.

¹¹¹"Austin High Participates in Bond Drive," Knoxville Journal 29 September 1943, 14; "Negro Bond Drive to Start," Knoxville Journal 30 June 1944, 26.

Alphas circulated petitions to college groups and civic clubs opposing the Senate filibuster on the bill to continue the FEPC after the war. Sisters also worked in booths throughout the city to promote voter registration and payment of poll taxes.¹¹²

Many African Americans participated in community victory efforts because black organizations encouraged help from all citizens, not just middle- or upper-class ladies. Working women could buy bonds, if they could not find time to take nursing classes or knit for the Red Cross. Teachers helped their students take part in war bond drives, while businesses and churches highlighted their patriotism in fundraisers and in sponsoring NAACP panel discussions.

Because these kinds of African American groups answered only to their leaders and not to white organizations, the struggle for equality became an explicit goal within the struggle for an American victory. The important role played by the NAACP suggests that the community was aware of problems with segregation and prejudice within national volunteer organizations and defense industries. For the first time in Knoxville, the NAACP held successful public membership drives that elicited support from all citizens, not just college students or intellectuals. Perhaps African American volunteer efforts emboldened citizens to speak out

¹¹²Interview with Sarah Moore Greene, 24 October 1994; 1946 Program, Annual Boule, Report of the Southeast Region, Knoxville Chapter, AKA.

against injustice; it would be difficult for whites to retaliate against a Double V rally that operated in conjunction with a war bond drive.

Since leaders of black organizations tied messages of equality to volunteer efforts, the white community felt no threat from African American Knoxvillians. In fact, newspapers recounted NAACP civil rights discussions alongside African American efforts to win the war, thereby publicizing the Double-V message. Perhaps if white citizens had attended an African American victory drive or rally, they would have become alarmed at the black communities' growing outspokenness against inequalities. Their ignorance about black activities benefitted African Americans. Through volunteer activities, the African American community promoted awareness of civil rights issues and encouraged participation in the NAACP's Double V activities.

Conclusion:

Laying the Foundation for Civil Rights

World War II signalled a new era in the civil rights struggle. As they obtained new and better industrial jobs in the North and the South, African Americans began clamoring for permanent changes in their lives. By 1943, over one million African Americans worked in war industries. Many moved off of farms in the South and demanded equality in the workplace. African Americans exhibited a growing willingness to demonstrate openly and in mass numbers against discrimination in their struggle for civil rights during the war. In 1941, a threatened march on Washington convinced Roosevelt to create the FEPC. Returning soldiers demanded better service and refused segregation after being hailed as heroes in Europe and Asia. Many African Americans challenged the hypocrisy of Americans' democratization of Europe while they held a race subordinate within their own borders.¹¹³

World War II also marked a turning point for the NAACP. In 1940, the NAACP lost 168,000 members, a 40 percent decrease in membership from 1939. The NAACP had lost focus after crushing defeats of anti-lynching laws, infighting

¹¹³George Tindall, The Emergence of the New South 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 716; Richard Polenberg, War and Society: The United States 1941-1945, Critical Periods of History Series (New York: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1972), 116; Sitkoff, 11, 17.

among executive leaders, and charges of elitism and capitulation to white leaders' policies of segregation. Protesting against wartime blood segregation and treatment of black soldiers brought the NAACP back to life. Membership drives transformed the NAACP from an elite, middle-class movement into a grass-roots organization involving a cross-section of African American society. The U.S. NAACP had 530,000 members by the end of the war, and its publicity about discrimination against soldiers won international acclaim. Overseas members gave the NAACP \$400,000 during the war.¹¹⁴

The boost in membership and donations allowed the NAACP to experiment with challenging segregation. The group helped soldiers organize non-violent protests against the armed forces. As a result, the army refurbished many recreational facilities and integrated several officers' clubs. The NAACP also had the money to conduct successful lawsuits. As a result of NAACP litigation, the Supreme court overturned the legality of white primaries in the 1944 Smith v. Allwright case. The decision opened the vote to middle-class urban African Americans. After the war, NAACP lawsuits opened almost all university graduate schools to

¹¹⁴Giddings, 249; Robert H. Brisbane, The Black Vanguard: Origins of the Negro Social Revolution 1900-1960 (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1970), 185; Ovington, 280-1.

African Americans.¹¹⁵

African American women's volunteer work contributed to the burgeoning civil rights movement because they fought against discrimination within national organizations to promote homefront defense. Despite the Red Cross's and U.S.O.'s failure to provide equal volunteer opportunities for African Americans at the local level, Knoxville's African American community managed to secure places within these organizations. Urged on by their clubs, especially the NACGN, the NACW, and Alpha Kappa Alpha, black women sought to highlight the inequalities of American society by showing their willingness to work for the victory of democracy in Europe and Asia. They took advantage of opportunities provided by the Red Cross and attended First Aid and Volunteer Nurses' Aides classes, canteens, and production units. They raised money for, provided food for, and staffed the African American U.S.O.s. And when the Red Cross and U.S.O. failed to provide enough outlets for war work, the African American community held its own victory activities, including scrap collections, war bond drives, NAACP presentations, fundraising balls, and Civilian Defense work.

Knoxville's Red Cross and U.S.O. Committees may have provided more opportunities for African Americans to

¹¹⁵Minnie Finch, The NAACP: Its Fight for Justice (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1981), 110, 116; Brisbane, 195.

participate in volunteerism than other cities' chapters. Because Knoxville had a small black population, town leaders believed that they could afford to make concessions to the African American community to promote a New South spirit. African Americans in Knoxville could vote, provided that they could pay a poll tax, and had representation in town affairs through a black town committee board. In addition, the presence of Knoxville College created a strong middle-class African American community dedicated to uplift. Established organizations such as the NACW, the NAACP, and Alpha Kappa Alpha enabled the Red Cross and U.S.O. to work within pre-existing structures in the community.

Although women of all socioeconomic levels probably participated in war work, upper- and middle-class, college-educated women led the efforts and fulfilled the mission of the NACGN, NACW, and Alpha Kappa Alpha. These women believed that their education, wealth, and status made them uniquely qualified to lead any reform or other charitable community work, including wartime production, conservation, and hostess work. Most likely, white organizations appealed to certain "acceptable" groups of women when forming segregated production units, medical classes, and canteens. One African American woman of a lower economic status claimed that the Red Cross "never did anything" for the black community, most likely because she was unaware of

wartime opportunities.¹¹⁶ Probably well-to-do, educated African American women seemed much less threatening to the wealthy, educated white women who worked at their own U.S.O.s and Red Cross units.

Also, since many wealthier African American women held professional teaching jobs or were homemakers, they had more leisure time to devote to homefront activities. Production units seemed more popular with the middle- and upper-class women, because they involved no extra coursework or time to complete, and most women could knit, sew, or roll bandages reasonably well enough to contribute to the success of the unit. Church and sorority production units offered places to gather with friends and socialize while working together.

Although it is impossible to determine the motives of these volunteers, evidence suggests that women expected two results from their homefront efforts. All women wanted to contribute to the war effort to help their sons, brothers, husbands, sweethearts, and countless other overseas soldiers, but African American women harbored deeper reasons for volunteering. The presence of the NAACP at many community war rallies and the messages from national African American women's organizations reveals a desire for change; women worked for recognition as citizens deserving of equal rights.

¹¹⁶Interview with Gladys Gallman, 21 November 1994, notes in possession of author.

Many historians recognize that the return of soldiers after World War II precipitated the militant civil rights struggles of the latter half of the century, but this understanding overlooks the role of women in the war. Before the war, African American women tried to promote themselves as upstanding citizens to negate stereotypes of black women as promiscuous and uneducated. After the war, African American women demanded their rights as upstanding, patriotic citizens. While winning the praise and respect of the white Knoxville community and overtly working contentedly in segregated activities, African American women were registering with the NAACP and attending rallies that publicized African American war contributions.

After the war, women remained active in the promotion of civil rights. Theotis Robinson, Jr., the first African American undergraduate at the University of Tennessee, remembers that the teachers at Green Elementary school tried to instill pride in their students. He recalled:

Black teachers did not put limits on dreams that the students had. And I think that was very important in bringing up the generation that later took on the civil rights movement, because we had these attitudes instilled in us. I remember one of the things that used to occur in school. The NAACP at that time was very important in the struggle... and they conducted membership drives at the schools and everybody, every teacher, wanted her class to be one hundred percent [which guaranteed membership in a special junior club called the One Hundred Percent club].¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷Jo M. Parker, Interview with Theotis Robinson, Jr., 11 September 1994, tape in possession of interviewer.

Sarah Moore Greene continued her association with the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA and the NAACP. In 1950, she began challenging the white school board to add kindergartens to all schools, including the black elementary schools. She also continued membership drives, marched in parades in the 1950s to promote desegregation, and today is an executive member of the NAACP National Board.¹¹⁸

Knoxville's African American women gained status in the white community with their volunteer efforts but at the same time they supported NAACP and black women's organization's awareness campaigns to highlight inequality and push for democracy. African American women helped to transform the civil rights struggle from a passive, lawsuit-dominated middle-class movement to an activist, public-protest oriented mass movement with homefront defense. They promoted democracy for those abroad as they built a case for equality at home.

¹¹⁸Interview with Sarah Moore Greene, 24 October 1994.

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APPENDIX

FORM B

CRP # _____

Date Received in ORC _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects
(In accordance with institutional assurance of
compliance to DHHS)

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

Date _____

Principal Investigator and Co-PI:

Megan Taylor
Dr. Susan Becker

Address and Phone Number of PI and Co-PI:

History Department, University of Tennessee, 1101
McClung Tower 37796-5421, 615-974-5421
M.A. Thesis.

Title of Project: "Double Victory on the Homefront:
African American Women Volunteers in Knoxville during
World War II"

Department: History

Starting Date: Upon CRP approval

II. OBJECTIVES OF PROJECT

To explore the ways in which African American women participated in Knoxville during World War II, who volunteered, and motivations behind African American homefront participation during the war.

III. DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECTS

My subjects will range in age from early to mid-sixties up to ninety-three, in short, any African American woman or soldier who experienced World War II on a first-hand basis. I hope to interview at least twenty men and women from the Knoxville community, drawing from sorority alumnae, former teachers, Knoxville college alumnae, and veterans and their wives. If possible, I will interview veterans who experienced the Knoxville canteens and other segregated entertainment/relief projects.

IV. METHODS OR PROCEDURES

Potential interviewees will be contacted by mail with a letter that explains the project and its goals. A list of potential subjects has been generated from the Knoxville College alumnae directory, contacts at the Beck Cultural Center, and the Center for the Study of War and Society as well as local churches. After receiving a letter, potential subjects will be called by Investigator and asked to set up a time and a place which is convenient to the subject in order to meet one on one and discuss my questions. Contacting the subjects by mail will allow them to gather their thoughts and decide whether or not they choose to participate in the study. The subjects will be able to review the questions, if they so choose, before they sign the consent form. The interview should take about one hour. The interviewees will have the opportunity to review the tape before signing the gift form and will at that time have the opportunity to re-tape or re-word any of the material gathered in the session. I will ask the women several questions:

1. Where did you live as a child? When did you come to Knoxville?
2. Were you able to attend school? Through what grade?
3. How old were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Do you remember what you were doing at the time?
4. Were you employed/married/in school at the time?
5. Where did you work? What was it Like?
6. What kinds of jobs were available to women at the time?
7. What were your impressions of Knoxville in the forties?
8. Did you have any family or friends in the service?
9. Did you participate in any volunteer services during the war?
10. With what organizations did you volunteer and what did you do?
11. What kinds of women were in that organization?
12. What motivated you to volunteer?
13. Did you know about any other volunteer groups for African American women? What did Knoxville College graduate nurses do? Were they accepted by the Red Cross as First Aid trainers?
14. How did you feel about working in segregated groups?
15. What organizations, in your opinion, did the most for African American troops in general? Which organizations were the most open-minded about participation by African American women?
16. Were there adequate recreation facilities for children in the black community, like daycare? Did the situation improve during the war?

17. Do you think that World War II improved your life or the African American community in any way?

I will ask men questions 1-8 and in addition:

9. When did you join the service? How old were you?
10. What was your impression of facilities for African American troops during the war, especially in the South?
11. Did you visit a canteen or any other organized volunteer activity in Knoxville?
12. Who sponsored the activities? Who was in charge of the program? What kinds of women volunteered there?
13. Did you believe that your canteens were equal to the canteens for the white soldiers?
14. How did you feel about the Red Cross and the U.S.O. during the war? Did you believe that they considered the needs of African American troops when they planned activities? Did you experience any discrimination by these groups?

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

Because the participants will not be pressed to answer any questions against their will and will not be forced to give up the right to anonymity, minimal psychological risk is involved in the project. In most cases of the recording and preservation of World War II data, according to the guidelines set by the Center for the Study of War and Society, the anonymity of subjects is generally not maintained, but my subjects will be given pseudonyms if they desire to keep their identities secret.

The right to waive anonymity will be clearly stated on the permission form. I will hold the tapes until I have finished my research and then the tapes will be donated to the Center for the Study of War and Society, if consent is obtained from the interviewee by his/her signature on the gift form, to be preserved for future use. If the subject has requested that his/her identity remain anonymous, the Center will label subjects by alphabet, starting with Mr. or Mrs. A for the first interviewee, and the tapes will be stored in the UT Special Collections Archives.

If the subject wishes to keep tapes confidential, the Investigator will return the tapes to the subject after the use of those tapes. If at any time the subject wishes to end his/her participation in the study, tapes will be remitted to the subject immediately. Subjects will also have an opportunity to listen to the tapes before they are used.

VI. BENEFITS VS. RISKS

The risks of this project are minimal, as previously stated. The subject will benefit by having a record of his/her accomplishments that will be presented for the use of other historians. Often, veterans of the war wish to have a copy of the interview to share with their families. If any of my interviewees wish to have a copy of their interview, I will gladly provide them with a duplicate tape.

VII. METHOD OF OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM SUBJECTS

I will advise my subjects of their rights in this project and secure their permission to tape the interviews before the meetings are scheduled. In addition, I will offer a gift form that will allow the subjects to understand that the tape will become the property of the Center for the Study of War and Society if they agree to donate the tape(s). The informed consent will be signed before the interview is conducted, and the Investigator will explain any parts of the form if requested by the interviewee. After the interview, the subject will have the option to donate the tape to the Center for the Study of War and Society after revising any portion of the interview. The consent form will read: "I understand that my interview will be taped and will be used for evidence in the study of African American women involved in volunteer work on the Knoxville World War II homefront. I understand that my anonymity will be kept if I wish, and that my name shall be labeled Mr. or Mrs. with a letter of the alphabet following with only the Investigator knowing my identity. I understand that my interview will be given to the Center for the Study of War and Society for the future use of historians, and that I can contact Edith Szathmary at 974-3466 with any questions about research subjects' rights. I understand that I will be able to review materials before their use, if I choose to do so, and that if I do not donate the tapes to the Center, they will be remitted to me. I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary, and that refusal to participate at any point during the interview will involve no penalty."

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR

I am a second year graduate student and M.A. candidate in the Department of History. In addition, I have worked at the Center for the Study of War and Society for one year and am familiar with the means in which interviews with veterans are conducted and transcribed. I am aware of the risks and benefits of using memories as evidence in research, and I understand the professional ethics of maintaining

confidentiality or anonymity of the subject, keeping impartiality throughout the interviews, and abstaining from leading the subject into answers that are contrived to conform to my hypothesis.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF PROJECT DIRECTOR

By the Compliance with the policies established by The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Committee on Research Participation the Principal Investigator subscribes to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

- a. Approval will be obtained from the University Committee prior to the instituting of any change in research project.
- b. Development of any unexpected risks will be reported to the University Committee.
- c. A status report (Form D) will be submitted at 12-month intervals or as requested attesting to the current status of the project.
- d. Signed consent statements will be kept for the duration of project and for at least three years thereafter.

Principal
Investigator _____
Name

Signature Date

Advisor _____
Name

Signature Date

XI. DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW

Department
Head _____
Name

Signature Date

The application described above has been reviewed by the departmental committee and has been approved.

Chair,
Departmental
Review
Committee

Name

Signature

Date

APPROVED: Edith M. Szathmary
Coordinator of Compliances
Research Administration

Signature

Date

GIFT FORM

I hereby consent to the release of my tape to the Center for the Study of War and Society. I understand that by signing this form, I waive the right to confidentiality as this tape may be used by future researchers. My anonymity will be maintained, if I do not sign the waiver listed below, and I will simply be named with a letter of the alphabet if I so choose. I understand that I may place restrictions on the use of the tape by listing those restrictions beneath the anonymity waiver, and that I may call the Center for the Study of War and Society with any questions or comments regarding the use of my tape at any time.

Name

Date

Signature

By signing below, I hereby waive my right to anonymity and authorize the Center for the Study of War and Society to catalog this tape using my name:

Signature

I restrict the use of this tape in the following manner:

_____.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I hereby authorize my interview to be used as evidence in the research project of Megan N. Taylor, "Double Victory on the Homefront: African American Women Volunteers in Knoxville during World War II." I understand that my anonymity will be kept if I wish, and that my name shall be labeled Mr. or Mrs. followed by a letter of the alphabet corresponding to my place in the interview schedule. If I do not sign the waiver of anonymity at the bottom of the form, only the interviewer will know my identity. I understand that if I sign the gift form my interview will become the property of the Center for the Study of War and Society for the future use of historians.

I understand that I will be able to review the tapes before their use, if I choose to do so. If I sign the confidentiality clause at the bottom of this form, these materials will be used only in the study and will be remitted to myself upon completion of the study. I understand that if I do not sign the gift form, the materials will not be donated to the Center for the Study of War and Society and will be returned to me upon completion of the study.

I also understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and that refusal to participate at any point during the interview will involve no penalty. If I have any questions, I can contact Megan Taylor through the history department at 974-5421.

Name

Date

Signature

By signing below, I hereby waive the right to anonymity and authorize the researcher to use my name in her study:

Signature

I wish to maintain confidentiality of this tape. In signing below, I restrict the use of the tape to the researcher only and request that the tape be returned to me upon completion of the study.

VITA

Megan Newbury Taylor, born 11 January 1972, attended Kent Place School in New Jersey until heading South for undergraduate and graduate study. After completing her B.A. in Music and History at the University of Richmond and interning at the Museum of the Confederacy in Virginia, Taylor received her M.A. at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Taylor will attend the University of Arizona in Tucson to pursue Ph.D. studies in twentieth-century women's history.