



Race, War, and Surveillance: African Americans and the United States Government during World War I

Mark Ellis

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In April 1917, black Americans reacted in various ways to the entry of the United States into World War I in the name of "Democracy." Some expressed loud support, many were indifferent, and others voiced outright opposition. All were agreed, however, that the best place to start guaranteeing freedom was at home.

Almost immediately, rumors spread across the nation that German agents were engaged in "Negro Subversion" and that African Americans were potentially disloyal. Despite mounting a constant watch on black civilians, their newspapers, and their organizations, the domestic intelligence agents of the federal government failed to detect any black traitors or saboteurs. They did, however, find vigorous demands for equal rights to be granted and for the 30-year epidemic of lynching in the South to be eradicated. In *Race, War, and Surveillance*, Mark Ellis examines the interaction between the deep-seated fears of many white Americans about a possible race war and their profound ignorance about the black population. The result was a "black scare" that lasted well beyond the war years.

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