

“Of arms and the man I sing”: Citizenship, migration, and the promise of military service.

Rachel Gillett, NEHA paper 2011 in response to the question “Can the Historical Past Provide Clues to Sound Public Policy on Immigration & Migration in Today’s World?” (developed from a paper for the WHA 2010)

“Of arms and the man I sing,” begins the epic text that charts Aeneas’ journey from devastated Troy into the kernel of what became Rome. Arms and the man are a potent and productive avenue of investigation for the troubling question of migration, immigration, and whether the past can offer any clues as to sound policy on those issues. Men and women from many regions, in many times, have claimed that through taking up arms for a polity (of whatever type) they are entitled to full citizenship of that polity. This has been a particularly complex and contested field when it comes to migrants and colonial subjects serving in a metropole. In the following paper I am inevitably going to raise more questions than I answer, and I hope to suggest complexities to be explored further in our discussion.

Richard Fogarty's examination of race and war in France outlined how the French State believed military service to be "the school of the nation bringing together its sons and smoothing over geographic, linguistic and ideological diversity."¹ His insight regarding France offers a good departure point for a consideration of military service as a viable route to citizenship for immigrants. But it also raises, and leaves me with, some troubling questions about this route. Is it also as available for potential immigrant women of the nation? More particularly just how far does military service smooth over the differences between subjects differentiated by race and religion? Studying how a citizenship claim based on military service has played out in particular instances can thus illuminate a much larger historical set of claims and exclusions. It certainly offers clues, but arguably no solutions, to how to shape immigration policy. The DREAM Act has tried to grapple with the question of service and citizenship, and I will return to that act in my conclusion. In the meantime a case study from World War One, and several broader observations based on the available historiography of this issue will help us explore some of the dimensions of this question.

One of the first points worthy of discussion is that military service involves migration. Soldiers are

¹ Richard Standish Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918*, War/society/culture; Variation: War, society, culture. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 11; Alan R. H. Baker, “Military Service and Migration in Nineteenth-Century France: Some Evidence from Loir-et-Cher,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 23, no. 2, New Series (January 1, 1998): Baker's work discusses this notion and places it in the context of Eugen Weber's famous claim that military service turned "peasants into Frenchmen." Both Fogarty and Baker (amid others) complicate this claim.

migrants and when a country's military is in action, it usually involves in some form of travel and extended stay.² This experience of migration, I suggest, has a powerful influence on the sending nation. It can expose a minority population from a certain nation to a society organized upon different lines, and help them build a critique of exclusions in their home nation. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the experience of military service, and even more strongly, social interactions, in France opened this vein of critique for black American soldiers who fought in Europe during World War One. W. E. B Du Bois, and the NAACP along with him, suggested to African Americans that if they fought "first for Country," then they would "gain their Rights!"^{3 4}

When this didn't happen, following World War One, and again didn't happen in World War Two, that failure, combined with the contrasting experience of welcome and acceptance in Europe contributed to the critique that fuelled the Civil Rights movement. Martin Klimke's work on the transnational connections between German and American movements for Civil Rights demonstrates this process in relation to the presence of African-American soldiers on American military bases in Germany.⁵ These soldiers, and the segregation of the U.S. Army, inspired German youth into civil rights activism and solidarity movements, while the experience of relative freedom from Jim Crow in Germany galvanized many African American soldiers to participate in the struggle for civil rights. Truman's executive order 9981 ordering the integration of the military was a direct response to the civil rights activism that was spurred by the double victory campaign and the migration of US soldiers during, and after, the world wars.⁶ So policy can be affected by military migration in terms of a transnational process of a nation's own citizens, that brings new knowledge, demands, and experiences to bear upon policy-makers in the home nation.

My second observation is that the migration of soldiers into a nation can create fear, or confirm racial stereotypes within both sending and receiving nations. It can also create admiration and undermine perjorative racial stereotypes. In either of those cases there can be a flow-on reaction for

² Leo Lucassen offered a compelling analysis of this phenomenon in his presentation for the University Of Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh), "Mobility Transition Revisited, 1500-1900. What the Case of Europe Can Offer to Global History," 17/11/2010, <http://mediasite.cidde.pitt.edu/mediasite/Viewer/?peid=454dc4f5bdfd457f957ef3494508724e>, viewed live online, and accessed 2/21/2011

³ Shane A. Smith, "The Crisis in the Great War: W. E. B. Du Bois and His Perception of African-American Participation in World War I," *The Historian* 70, no. 2 (6, 2008): 239-262.

⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Editorial," *The Crisis* 16 (September 1918): 217. His editorial partly addressed cynics who accused him of promoting the war effort because he himself had been offered a commission as an officer.

⁵ My article in JWH explored this phenomenon in relation to migration in the interwar era. Martin Klimke's work looks at how the wartime interactions between African Americans and Germans fuelled the Civil Rights struggle in both places. Charissa Threat explores some of these aspects in her discussion of integration in the arena of nursing during World War Two. Maria Höhn, *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany / Klimke, Martin.*, Culture, politics, and the Cold War; Variation: Culture, politics, and the cold war. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

later migrants, and for international relations that affect the ability of men and women from either nation to migrate into the other. There is a lot of good work on the perception of foreign troops in European nations during both World Wars that illustrates this.⁷

And in the main section of this paper I'll stick with World War One. Military service served as a potent site for making new demands during World War One. This is particularly evident in the case of colonial soldiers and laborers recruited to work for the war effort who migrated into the colonizer's nations, and confronted the metropolitan population with their literal physical existence, and with demands for official recognition based upon their military service. Prior to the war many Francophone subjects of color shared with African Americans the hope that military service in the war would win vital ground in the fight for equality. They felt confident that colonial men (and the few women) who gave of their service and their blood in battle would thereby gain better treatment for all members of their countrymen and women. The term "double victory" had yet to be coined in America and the French instead used the phrase the "dette du sang" or "blood debt" but the concept of linking military service to claims for full citizenship was circulating widely throughout the black Atlantic in 1914.

In 1918, for example, a popular black American newspaper published a "Tribute to black troops of France."⁸ It commended the way that "Men of Western Africa" had responded enthusiastically to the "Call of arms in France," and proved to be "Real Heroes." The paper portrayed the Senegalese politician Blaise Diagne as a great leader for having inspired his compatriots to fight for the French army:

Paris, Aug 2.- The black troops of France have lately attracted public attention on account of the recruiting mission which, under the direction of M. Blaise Diagne, black deputy of Senegal, is actually travelling through French West Africa with a view to intensifying voluntary enlistment among the different races that people those vast territories...⁹

Once recruited the "heroism, intrepidity and abnegation" of the black troops had "revealed them to be worthy brethren-in-arms of the French *poilus*." The black French African soldiers or tirailleurs had "unhesitatingly proved their allegiance to France by sharing with all the other armies of Europe

⁷ Christian Koller, "Enemy Images: Race and Gender Stereotypes in the Discussion on Colonial Troops. A franco-German Comparison," in Karen Hagemann, *Home/Front: The Military, War, and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany / Schüler-Springorum, Stefanie*. (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2002), see also Andrew Jarboe's dissertation in progress, Northeastern University. Heather Streets-Salter addresses some of these issues in her work on Empire and Masculinity.

⁸ "Tribute to Black troops of France," *Chicago Defender* (New York, August 3, 1918).

⁹ Ibid.

the vicissitudes, dangers and glory of fighting for a good cause."¹⁰ The black American journalist thus implied that Blaise Diagne had furthered the cause of racial equality by this recruiting mission. He acknowledges that French West Africans had suffered from prejudice and that it took a war to convince the native born French poilus (or infantrymen) of their worth. The implication was that West Africans had advanced their claim to full inclusion in the french polity – and freedom of migration – through their service.

When black Francophone activists began to debate the colonial relationship after the war those debates were much more heated because the implied promise of easy migration, and full citizenship attached to military service was never honored. Blaise Diagne promised the sub Saharan Africans who enlisted decent food, military medals, new clothes, and above all a guarantee of French citizenship after the war.¹¹ However, French colonial troops, and laborers, had been mistreated horribly, and excluded, by both the French military institution, and by civilians.¹² Rick Fogarty points out that "as naturalization policy during the war demonstrated, racial and cultural prejudices prevented real reform in French policy in this area, despite the close linkage of military service and citizenship in traditional republican ideology."¹³

Senegalese tirailleurs were neither paid nor fed and housed as well as native French troops.¹⁴ One ex-tirailleur noted that "no African conscript who served in France can have failed to confront the stark contrast between the liberty, equality and fraternity which the republic claimed for its citizens, and the disabilities which it imposed upon its [colonial] subjects."¹⁵ Police spies recorded the complaints of "Daniel" who served as a spokesperson for black soldiers at a meeting of a black political association.¹⁶ Daniel complained that black troops had been poorly fed, and maltreated by *gradés europeens* or "top brass," (officers) during the war and that this situation had continued for

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ {Citation}

Chantal Antier-Renaud, *Les Soldats Des Colonies Dans La Première Guerre Mondiale*, Collection Histoire; Variation: Histoire (Editions Ouest-France) (Rennes: Ouest-France, 2008), 38.

¹² Tyler Stovall, "National Identity and Shifting Imperial Frontiers: Whiteness and the Exclusion of Colonial Labor after World War I," *Representations*, no. 84 (October 1, 2003): 52-72; Tyler Stovall, "The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War," *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 3 (June 1, 1998): 737-769.

¹³ Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 284.

¹⁴ Philippe Dewitte, *Les Mouvements Nègres En France, 1919-1939*, Racines du présent; Variation: Racines du présent. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985); Dana Hale, "Brothers in Arms? African Soldiers in Interwar France, in Ruth Simms Hamilton, *Routes of Passage: Rethinking the African Diaspora*, ADRP series; Variation: ADRP series. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 339.

¹⁵ Hamilton, *Routes of Passage*, chap. Ruth Simms Hamilton, "Increasing Resistance to Colonialism in Africa after the "Great War,".

¹⁶ APP Ass. 672, letter from 'Le préfet de la Police à Monsieur le ministre de l'intérieur,' dated 9 May 1927. The request for info was sent by the interior minister on 4 January 1927. The police were unable to determine who the man was.

the troops still in active service after the war.¹⁷ Despite this negotiation, and despite Diagne's advocacy, however, naturalization requirements for French Senegalese who wished to live in France, remained stringent, requiring them to pass educational and linguistic tests and show that they were of upright character.¹⁸ *Tirailleurs* who had finished their terms of service were decommissioned and effectively deported back to Africa. Efforts to make sure they left France were particularly forceful in the case of those former soldiers, like Lamine Senghor, who was moved by his poor treatment to begin an anti-colonial association in Paris.¹⁹ And the ultimate result was to create a core of disaffected and disenfranchized colonial subjects who had experienced life in France, and had experienced profound inequity, despite the republican promise of the French State. Many of these individuals began to clamor more actively for either full citizenship, or an end to the French empire. These experiences and the failed promise of french republicanism have fed into the significant tensions around the migration of colonial subjects into the metropole to this day, and french policy-makers grapple with how to honor, or avoid honoring, these claims.²⁰

Conversely the desire to have access to manpower and in particular military manpower, opened up the possibility of naturalization, and the ability to negotiate for civic recognition for many immigrant families.²¹ Nimisha Barton, of Princeton University recently presented some interesting findings from her doctoral research (in progress) at the Society for French Historical Studies annual meeting. She shows that between 1919 and 1929 a family's naturalization claim was far more likely to be successful if they explicitly mentioned, and even offered, healthy sons of eligible age, or the father of the family for military service.²² That policy, of course, favored families with sons and was inherently gendered. The red ink underlining certain passages in these naturalization forms provides compelling evidence that French State policy, in this interwar era, was formed by the desire to build

¹⁷ Sarah Zimmerman, "Living Beyond Boundaries: West African Servicemen in Twentieth-Century French Colonial Conflicts," Thesis in progress, UC Berkeley.

¹⁸ *La Dépêche Africaine* (Paris: Maurice Satineau, 1928), This Francophone pan-African paper tried to counteract this prejudice by publishing guides to naturalization for its readers seeking French citizenship, notably "La Naturalisation des Indigènes," April, 1929, p. 1. As numerous authors point out repatriation of colonial soldiers was common and the tests required for naturalization remained stringent even for soldiers. ; Dewitte, *Les Mouvements Nègres En France, 1919-1939*; Fogarty, *Race and War in France*; Alice Conklin, "Redefining "Frenchness" : citizenship, race regeneration, and imperial motherhood in France and West Africa, 1914-40," in Julia Ann Clancy-Smith, *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism / Gouda, Frances,; 1950-* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998),

¹⁹ R. Gillett, "Crossing the pond: Jazz, race and gender in interwar Paris" (United States -- Massachusetts: Northeastern University, 2010), 1; Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic: Migrant Rights and the Limits of Universalism in France, 1918-1940* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

²⁰ Note the proposal to genetically test individuals entering on a "family" visa. Note also a powerful video

²¹ "Immigrant DNA tests plan raises storm for Sarkozy | World news | The Guardian," September 13, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/sep/14/france.international>. Accessed February 27 2011

²² Nimisha Barton, "A Quantity of Men: Gender Politics and the Immigration Regime of Interwar France," Presented February, 11, SFHS Annual Meeting, Charleston, South Carolina, 2011.

a strong military, although their first preference was for white male immigrants (from Belgium, or even Eastern Europe). It thus became an inherently unequal migration qualification process. These types of policy were also characteristic of immigration and naturalization policy in Argentina, Spain, and Italy:

Especially before the Great War, laws and official practices reflected a dynamic of competition over the affiliation of migrants and their children, showing a disproportionate interest in men as soldiers and workers, and in women as mothers and morally suspect subjects.²³

Lest we think this process a relic of the past, and not informative I'll remind everyone of the recent US Army policy of facilitating and speeding up immigration for foreigners on legal visas prepared to serve in the Army. This would mean that after six months of service one's application for citizenship would begin to be processed in full. The policy began small but was intended to be extended to thousands of immigrants a year:²⁴

If the pilot program succeeds as Pentagon officials anticipate, it will expand for all branches of the military. For the Army, it could eventually provide as many as 14,000 volunteers a year, or about one in six recruits.²⁵

In the American case questions of national belonging and the issue of expanding immigration immediately made this case controversial. It drew opposition from Americans fearing this would constitute an easy route to citizenship and be open to those who lacked the appropriate sense of patriotism:

Marty Justis, executive director of the national headquarters of the American Legion, the veterans' organization, said that while the group opposes "any great influx of immigrants" to the United States, it would not object to recruiting temporary immigrants as long as they passed tough background checks. But he said the immigrants' allegiance to the United States "must take precedence over and above any ties they may have with their native country."²⁶

The underlying discourse is quite fascinating here, as it betrays a shift from seeing the army as the crucible of the nation, a rite of passage which, once undertaken, will guarantee national identification and patriotism (as per Weber) to a site of fear and possible unbridled opportunities for opportunistic immigrants. That fear and tension is also evident in the case of the french, dealing

²³ David Cook Martin, "Soldiers and Wayward Women: Gendered Citizenship, and Migration Policy in Argentina, Italy and Spain since 1850," *Citizenship Studies* 10, no. 5 (11, 2006): 572.

²⁴ <http://www.usadiversitylottery.com/news/us-citizenship/green-card-immigration-news-july282009.php>

²⁵ <http://www.usadiversitylottery.com/news/us-citizenship/green-card-immigration-news-july282009.php>

²⁶ <http://www.usadiversitylottery.com/news/us-citizenship/green-card-immigration-news-july282009.php> accessed February 27 2011. See also <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/15/world/americas/15iht-military.4.20199128.html> accessed February 27 2011.

with colonial soldiers, and, I would suggest, in the current issues surrounding the DREAM Act.

Hector Amaya points out that, in recent years, the American State has found it much easier to deal with the issue of citizenship when the soldiers in question were no longer alive. One of the first soldiers to die in the Iraq war was a latino immigrant to America, named Jose Gutierrez. His death, and those of many like him, prompted the introduction of a bill facilitating the process of granting citizenship to immigrant soldiers who died in the service of America:

Following the introduction of these bills, news media reported positively on this legislative move and praised its quick passage through both the Senate and House (by the evening of April 10). These American heroes soon became American.²⁷

As Amaya points out, in the context of the Iraq war, this was an easy policy decision and served many purposes, not all of which had to do with honoring the real lived service and sacrifice of immigrant soldiers in a way that would effect meaningful changes or improvements in policy surrounding immigration, or the socio-economic struggles experienced by immigrants.

Remembered in this way the narrative of heroic soldiers aspiring to citizenship and achieving that aspiration through patriotic sacrifice on (a different) foreign soil fit easily into a nationalist rhetoric of service and sacrifice. These policies could honor immigrants who served without engaging too deeply in an offer of citizenship rights to Latinos and other immigrant soldiers who still constituted a living presence – and possible widespread citizenship demands and questions – to the States.²⁸ I hope here that the resonance between my examples from the French past, and the American present should be becoming clearer.

A final example that bridges past and present is the case of the many Gurkhas who have fought for Britain since 1815.²⁹ In a landmark recent case their military service has been recognized and those who wish to migrate to the United Kingdom have been awarded that right.³⁰ This was not without strenuous protest and advocacy, however, and the decision in that case was limited to those who had served for four years and discharged after 1997. It provided a rich forum for the discussion of

²⁷ Hector Amaya, "LATINO IMMIGRANTS IN THE AMERICAN DISCOURSES OF CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALISM DURING THE IRAQI WAR," *Critical Discourse Studies* 4, no. 3 (12, 2007): 237.

²⁸ {Citation}
Amaya, "LATINO IMMIGRANTS IN THE AMERICAN DISCOURSES OF CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALISM DURING THE IRAQI WAR."

²⁹ {Citation}
Tony Gould, *Imperial Warriors: Britain and the Gurkhas* (London: Granta Books, 1999).

³⁰ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article3583493.ece> accessed 2/21/2011, see also <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3702436.stm>, accessed 2/21/2011. Note the use of facebook to petition the British Government, by way of the group "Give Gurkhas British Citizenship," this suggests how social media may influence former policy questions and become a forum for advocacy on issues such as immigration.

sacrifice, citizenship, and the rights attached to military service for non-citizens of the nation they are serving.

Conclusion

This reflection has offered a variety of examples and observations on the historic linkage between military service and citizenship and particularly tried to expose the complex intersection between that historic discourse and the enduring process of migration and its relationship to national identity. I think the examples I've offered suggest that military service is a deeply flawed premise for the legalization and opening up of migration, as it has historically excluded both men and women on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, and religious or cultural identity that "threatens" national unity and identification with the State. If, as Weber suggested, it was designed to turn "peasants into Frenchmen" it also attempted to obscure and erase diversity. Simultaneously the attempt to erase difference led to unequal treatment upon the basis of difference, as the experience of colonial soldiers and African-Americans showed. And, as a side note or sub-field of exclusion, the American military has become religiously exclusionary and increasingly so, in recent years. So the idea that military service is an equalizer and an honorable route to legal migration has a number of problems.

HOWEVER, if a nation is going to offer citizenship for immigrants who serve in the military, then it should be offered genuinely, with no caveats or hidden exclusions, or hopes that those who take advantage of it might conveniently be silenced – forever – in the agony of conflict, and the horror of battle. History shows that when the premise of citizenship through military service has not been honored it has produced discontent and political activism, and arguably brought down empires. Moreover if the racial and ethnic basis for inequitable treatment within a nation's armed services are not confronted and changed they undermine the effectiveness of the military and exacerbate internal national tensions.

Most recently the powerful construction that links military service to citizenship has been seen in the promise (or peril for some) of the DREAM act. The DREAM act proposes a set of conditions which would allow the undocumented children of immigrant workers to work toward residency by successfully finishing a college or trade school degree OR by serving in the military for at least two years. It has been the subject of much discussion and debate in a variety of communities who would be affected.³¹ I was intrigued by the newspaper coverage of this on Boston.com. An article,

³¹ See, for example, Galindo, René, Christina Medina, and Xóchitl Chávez. 2005. "DUAL SOURCES OF INFLUENCE ON LATINO POLITICAL IDENTITY: MEXICO'S DUAL NATIONALITY POLICY AND THE

published on May 18th, of this year, noted that a group of students had sent their representative Kyle de Beausset to meet with Senator Brown who “showed interest in the military idea.”³² On May 25th a much larger group presented hundreds of letters to the Senator. They “stressed the military provision of the proposal and highlighted students who vowed to join the military if allowed. Carlos Savio Oliveira, 22, of Falmouth, Mass., an undocumented immigrant from Brazil, said he wanted Brown to know he would join the U.S. Navy when the bill passed.”³³ I wrote a letter to Senator Brown advocating the passage of the DREAM Act. He reiterated his interest in those who might serve in the military, and his general sympathy to the objectives of the act, but cited his concern for the taxpayers who might have to pay out of “their” pockets for benefits granted to students and soldiers who were eligible for the program.

The assumption that military service should guarantee you citizenship has been iterated numerous times in history and is often invoked when the question of who is, and is not, included in the polity, the nation, in a meaningful way. The intersection between policies on immigration, citizenship and military service has a long history and it continues to inform contemporary politics. The progress of the DREAM act will be interesting to watch. It may be that the “military emphasis” is one aspect that strengthens it given the historical process I have described above. But will that leave it fragmented, partial, subject to the actual rolling back in practice of the “don’t ask don’t tell” policy? Or subject to possible gender expectations in migrant communities that precludes women's involvement in military service? I encourage participants at this conference to explore other historical instances that can expand our understanding of such issues, especially as the current administration seems to be dodging the bullet of immigration policy and has refused to pass the DREAM Act for now.

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³² http://www.myfoxboston.com/dpp/news/politics/local_politics/students-proposing-dream-act-for-illegal-immigrants-in-military-25-apx-20100518, accessed May 10th 2010. For student threatened with deportation under the act see http://www.boston.com/news/local/breaking_news/2010/06/harvard_student_5.html

³³ Sarah Zimmerman's doctoral thesis, above, begins to show how colonial soldiers and their wives manipulated this and negotiated the many migrations they made while in the service of France. http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2010/05/25/students_rally_to_ask_brown_to_back_dream_act/ accessed May 10th 2010.

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