

TRAGEDY OF NEGRO DOCTORS

Alvah Bessie tells the heartbreaking story of Negro surgeons, distinguished in their field, whom the Army won't take despite the desperate shortage of medical men.

THE United States Army is desperately in need of medical personnel. In accordance with that fact, it recently asked doctors and dentists under forty-five to enlist and accept commissions; and it indicated that those who did not enlist might expect to be drafted. The men facing the guns of the Axis need the services of trained physicians, surgeons, oral surgeons. And certainly it would be a strange soldier who would insist on having his desperate wounds treated by a man whose skin was the identical color of his own.

In New York's Harlem there are about 200 Negro physicians and surgeons. Many of them, patriotic Americans, answered the Army's call for medical personnel and filled out enlistment papers. Up to last week not a single Harlem Negro physician or dentist had been called into the Army Medical Corps unless he previously held a reserve commission; and the number of reservists who have been called is no more than six.

IN Harlem I talked to two of the most distinguished men in their field; one an oral surgeon of twenty years' standing, Dr. Arnold Donawa, who served with the International Brigade in Spain. The loyalist government thought enough of this man to entrust him with two hospitals devoted entirely to the treatment of face wounds. The other man I talked to was Dr. George D. Cannon, physician and surgeon, president of the Manhattan Central Medical Society—an organization of Negro doctors in Harlem. The stories these two men told me were extremely disheartening. Neither man was bitter. Both agreed that their people—who constitute over ten percent of our total population—ardently desire the defeat of Hitlerism. Both agreed that, despite this fact, the enthusiasm of the Negro people for the war is not at fever pitch.

"We try to forget the fact of Jim Crow," said Doctor Cannon. "We would like to forget it. But every day it stares us in the face; every day we read it in the newspapers. Jim Crow is everywhere; in the Army, the Navy, in industry, in the unions. We can't forget it."

Here are some of the facts Dr. Cannon and his colleague, the distinguished oral surgeon, Dr. Donawa, told me:

Dr. Donawa applied for a commission and was called down to talk to an officer in the Procurement and Assignment Division of the Medical Corps. There was some desultory conversation about Spain. "On the basis of your age and experience," said the officer, "I'd have to rank you as a major." The oral surgeon nodded. "Now, what's the lowest commission you'd accept?" the officer said. The oral surgeon said he would accept any

commission the US Army offered him. "Well, to be frank with you," said the officer, "you stand a slim chance. We like to get youngsters right out of school." The officer did *not* state that (1) it is impossible to get accomplished oral surgeons "right out of school," and (2) practically no Negro doctors are graduating from school—no more than 100 a year, since the schools that accept Negroes are stringently limited. Dr. Donawa has yet to hear from the Army about the disposition of his application.

Dr. —, who studied at Flower Hospital and long held a reserve commission in the Army, was called up with most of the men of his class. He was recommissioned, assigned to Fort —, was told when to report, what train to take. He closed his office, arranged for the disposition of his practice—when the Army "found out" he was a Negro. (Dr. —'s skin is very light.) He was told to wait "until he heard" from the Army. He has been waiting over a year now.

A PROMINENT Negro physician was assigned to Fort —, where he was the only Negro officer in camp. As an officer he could not associate with enlisted men. As an officer he was supposed to live in barracks with other officers. "Naturally," it was impossible to quarter him with other (white) officers. He was given a tent to himself, with no toilet facilities; the weather was bad. He complained and was told it would all "be taken care of." A few days later he was moved into the officers' barracks—*after all the other officers had been removed!* There, from six PM to six AM he lives in splendid isolation; no recreational or social facilities exist for a single Negro officer; there is no one to talk to.

At Fort — there is a base hospital staffed by both Negro and white doctors. On a particular day not so long ago, a line of soldiers was waiting for syphilis treatments. There were only a few Negro soldiers; there were many white soldiers. There were only a few white doctors; there were many Negro doctors in proportion to the Negro soldier patients. Rather than permit the Negro physicians to administer intramuscular treatments to the white patients, white orderlies were used to "stick" the men. The impatient white soldiers protested, saying they would rather be treated by a doctor than by an orderly. But Negro doctors are not permitted to treat whites.

Many of the Negro reserve officers have yet to be called into service in the Army; many Negro outfits are served by white doctors. The Navy still accepts *no* Negro doctors or dentists. A delegation from the War Defense Committee of the National Medical

Association (Negro) waited on the surgeon general of the Army. They offered the services of their member-physicians and surgeons. The Army thanked them. They asked how many doctors might be expected to be called. They were told there was no way of knowing "until the 1943 report of the Army is in." They were told all they had to do was send for enlistment papers to the office of the surgeon general, fill them out, return them. When they are received, they are then sent to Procurement and Assignment for a statement of availability and qualifications. Then "if there is an opening or need," the doctor will be assigned. If not, his commission will be "deferred." This is, of course, a run-around.

Dr. Cannon and Dr. Donawa agree that although the Army has stated it would take Negro personnel up to ten percent of the total personnel required, it has not done so. They agree that every attempt was made actually to *discourage* the enlistment of Negro medical and dental personnel. (One man was rejected, for instance, for being four pounds overweight—even when it was acknowledged by the examining doctor that the extra four pounds were muscle tissue, not adiposity.) Both surgeons feel that the bottleneck exists chiefly in the office of the surgeon general.

THE New York County Medical Society (which accepts Negroes in membership where many county medical societies, especially in the South, will not), has passed a resolution denouncing discrimination. In a recent issue of the *Bulletin* of the Physicians Forum, whose members are also members of the New York County Society, is an editorial on "Jim Crow, 1942." It says, in part:

"What is this color bar idea? It is surely high time it was quashed. Is not the magnificent part which the Filipinos played in defense of their country sufficient evidence of what a free people will do? And does not the apathy of the subject peoples of Burma and Malaya and India point the contrast? Why is America so loath to enlist the whole-hearted services of its loyal Negro population? . . ."

"Why, specifically, may well trained Negro physicians, some of them very specially qualified, care for Negro troops only?"

"Why should a Negro captain have to take orders from a white lieutenant? . . ."

Here is the case, as stated to me by Dr. Cannon and Dr. Donawa, the oral surgeon. Dr. Cannon feels that one of the keys to the situation is the persisting power, in the administration, of the bloc of Southern "Democrats," who, through seniority, command posts of influence and are "the greatest Negro-baiters of them all." He may have something there.

ALVAH BESSIE.

STATEMENTS TO "NEW MASSES" FROM PROMINENT AMERICANS

WHAT THE WAR MEANS TO THE NEGRO

Earl B. Dickerson

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THE staid halls of Congress echo these days with hysterical cries of a "labor shortage." There is talk of a labor draft and a "work or fight" decree. To the average black American—whether jobless in Harlem or sharecropping in Dixie—this strange cry is somewhat maddening. For idle on the sidelines—shunned and discarded—stand millions of Negroes still barred from American industry solely because of their color. Certainly talk of a labor draft seems a sham to the Negro. He doesn't have to be drafted to work. He is begging and pleading for a chance, but for the most part his demands for decent work at decent pay have gone unanswered. Through the President's Executive Order 8802 we have made some progress toward breaking down discrimination in employment. But we have a long way to go as yet before the cry about a labor shortage carries any weight with the Negro. Black America cannot recognize legitimacy in all the hue and holler as long as Negro workingmen still are not given an equal opportunity to train for skilled work and an equal opportunity to do skilled work.

All America should realize that it will take an all-American team—a unity of all colors and races—to beat the Axis.

Negro America stands for a 100 percent war effort that will achieve the immediate opening of a second front.

Paul Robeson



they have an even greater stake in this war than white Americans. A greater stake not only in the sense that an Axis victory would mean a thousandfold intensification of their present submerged status, but also in the sense that a war which has as its aim the destruction of the most reactionary forces in the world, German, Japanese, and Italian fascism, with their vicious doctrine of race hatred, is creating unparalleled opportunities for the Negro people, together with the oppressed millions in

AMERICAN Negroes want to win this war and want to give everything they've got toward winning it—if certain white Americans will let them. The fact is that *because* the Negro people are Jim Crowed, persecuted, denied their full rights,

Asia, Africa, and Latin America, to move forward toward freedom and equality. That is why every Negro who is loyal to his own people cannot but be 100 percent loyal to America and the United Nations.

But the fact remains that discriminatory practices in industry, in political life, and in the armed forces are weakening the fight against the Axis, just as is the continuation of imperialist policy toward India, China, and Africa. To be fully loyal to America and the United Nations we must scrap these harmful relics of the past. And as I have gone about the country I have been heartened to find that not only Negroes, but increasing numbers of whites, are beginning to speak up on these questions and demanding action now. I feel that no more patriotic speech has been made in this war than Wendell Willkie's statement in Chungking that "this war must mean an end to the empire of nations over other nations" and that immediate steps must be taken to "organize to our side not simply the sympathies, but also the active, aggressive, offensive spirit of nearly three-fourths of the people of the world who live in South America, Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia." And for American Negroes, what helps give this war such enormous importance is that one of the biggest factors on the side of the United Nations is the one country in the world where racial discrimination has been torn up by the roots, the Soviet Union.

John H. Sengstacke

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AT THIS time of crisis when the safety of the nation is in peril, it seems propitious that we examine the role that each section of our population must play in its preservation. The Negro people as an integral segment of our national life are intensely interested in preserving this great nation and the democratic way of life for which it stands. They are willing now as they have been in the past to sacrifice their money, the intimacy of their home life, and their blood if necessary, to preserve the concept which they have played such an important part in developing. The tradition of their adherence to this ideal is strong. As slaves they fought and gave their lives in the revolutionary war when democracy was so narrowly construed that it did not apply to these colored Americans who were fighting for a chance to see a nation born under its banner. During the Civil War they fought in the great struggle which extended the democratic concept so that the yoke of human bondage could be torn from

their necks. Now during this world conflagration they stand on the side of those people who feel that this war is a revolution against those forces which persist in hampering the extension to all peoples of the world the privileges and rights which flow from the democratic ideal.

J. Finley Wilson

*Grand Exalted Ruler, Improved Benevolent
and Protective Order of Elks*

I AM very happy to join with you in helping to obtain the Four Freedoms in this great world crisis. I believe that if we stand together we can win the Four Freedoms, not only for the Negro in New York, but for the Negro in Georgia and Alabama. It is as good a joke as Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo would want, to read the statements of Governors Talmadge of Georgia and Dixon of Alabama. Unless we are able to stop the Alabama and Georgia Hitlers over here, I am afraid we will lose the support of the dark races over there.

Ben Davis, Jr.

Communist Candidate for Congressman-at-Large, New York



AMONG the win-the-war necessities on the home front are the breaking down of age-old injustices against the Negro people and the speedy integration of Negroes into industry, into the armed forces, and into the governing councils of the nation, on the basis of full, untrammelled equality.

Both Farley's John Bennett and Hoover's Thomas Dewey are stooges of the appeasement and defeatist forces primarily responsible for the Jim Crowism and anti-Semitism that seriously endanger victory. As attorney general of New York State, Mr. Bennett has never prosecuted a single unpatriotic employer who refused to give jobs to Negroes, Jews, Catholics, foreign-born, or other loyal minorities. Mr. Dewey never prosecuted, when he was district attorney of New York County, a single discriminating employer denying equal job rights to Negro citizens.

A vote by a Negro citizen for either Bennett or Dewey is worse than wasted. It is a vote for the poll tax and Talmadgeism in the South and for Christian Frontism and racial discrimination in the North. The only way for the Negro people to register their win-the-war, anti-Jim Crow sentiment is by voting outside