



## LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Sandra Gioia Treadway  
Librarian of Virginia

### **They Served the Nation That Often Refused to Serve Them. Finally See Them the Way They Saw Themselves.**

***True Sons of Freedom*, a photographic exhibition at the Library of Virginia, explores the stories of Virginia's African American soldiers who served during World War I.**

**RUNS JANUARY 16–NOVEMBER 9, 2018**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*Richmond, Virginia* – **True Sons of Freedom**, a new exhibition at the Library of Virginia running January 16–November 9, 2018, uses photographs from the World War I History Commission Collection to highlight 20 African American soldiers from Virginia who fought overseas to defend freedoms they were denied at home.

The original photographs, reproduced in the gallery at nearly life-size dimensions, place visitors at eye level in front of the soldiers. The monumental scale allows viewers the opportunity to examine rich details not seen in the original photo postcards.

World War I recruitment efforts aimed at African Americans brought new soldiers into the armed services, providing them with opportunities to travel, to work, and, in many cases for the first time, to face cameras—all outside the restrictions of the Jim Crow South. These pocket-size portraits, made outdoors or in makeshift studios, became mementos for families and sweethearts. More importantly, these photographs challenge the crude and demoralizing cultural products of an era that often reduced African Americans to stereotypes and denied them full participation as citizens of the United States. They pose in uniform, some in casual stances, others with a rifle to show their combat readiness. Here were African Americans presented as they wanted themselves seen.

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Reflecting the pride and determination of African American World War I servicemen, the images were submitted by these veterans with their responses to military service questionnaires created by the Virginia War History Commission as part of an effort to capture the scope of Virginians' participation in the Great War. The series of questions about the veterans' experiences provides invaluable genealogical information about the soldiers, their families, and their service records.

African Americans from all parts of the commonwealth served in the army and navy during World War I. The soldiers highlighted in *True Sons of Freedom* came from locations across Virginia—with concentrations in the Eastern Shore/Hampton Roads, Central Virginia, and Southside regions of the state—and most worked as farmers or laborers before the conflict.

An online component will allow viewers to see all 140 of the photographs of African American soldiers submitted to the Virginia War History Commission and to add comments and information they might have about the soldiers. A future addition to the website will allow users to transcribe text from the questionnaires to help the Library make these records more easily searchable for researchers. Those interested can visit [www.virginiamemory.com/truesons](http://www.virginiamemory.com/truesons).

Information about related events at the Library will be sent to the media soon.

**If your readers/viewers are descendants of—or have any information about—these soldiers (see images at the link below), the Library would like to hear from them directly. Members of the public can contact Barbara Batson, exhibitions coordinator (804.692.3518 or [barbara.batson@lva.virginia.gov](mailto:barbara.batson@lva.virginia.gov)) or Dale Neighbors, Visual Studies Collection coordinator and exhibition curator (804.692.3711 or [dale.neighbors@lva.virginia.gov](mailto:dale.neighbors@lva.virginia.gov)).**

**IMAGES AVAILABLE AT**

[www.dropbox.com/sh/1atjlo2c55ciike/AAAHgAajyDxJ4Uc5c7pIP88wa?dl=0](http://www.dropbox.com/sh/1atjlo2c55ciike/AAAHgAajyDxJ4Uc5c7pIP88wa?dl=0)

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**January 15, 2018**