

## **EBONY AND JET: BRIDGING THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEDIA GAP DURING THE KOREAN WAR**

### **EBONY AND JET: COLMANDO LA BRECHA DE LOS MEDIOS NORTEAMERICANOS DURANTE LA GUERRA DE COREA**

Tenesha Talley<sup>1</sup>  
Morgan State University Baltimore, Maryland (USA)

Recibido: marzo 30 de 2023 – Aceptado: octubre 23 de 2023

**Abstract:** This article explores the role of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines during the Korean War in shaping African-American perspectives amid the societal shifts of the post-World War II era. While these publications were instrumental in portraying African-American success and entertainment, they fell short in adequately covering the intellectual and political aspects of the time, particularly concerning the Korean War. *Ebony*, despite its emphasis on achievements and notable figures, neglected significant wartime updates and conditions. *Jet*, though more reliable, also exhibited shortcomings in representing the broader spectrum of African-American soldiers' experiences in Korea. The article delves into the magazines' influence on beauty standards, advertisements, and their response to the changing African-American media landscape. *Ebony*, often criticized for its omission of African-American intellectuals, struggled to present a balanced view of the Korean War, while *Jet*, positioned as a weekly periodical, offered a more diverse range of stories but still lacked comprehensive coverage of African-American soldiers' contributions to the civil rights movement.

**Keywords:** Ebony, Jet, African-American media, civil rights movement, media representation.

**Resumen:** Este artículo explora el papel de las revistas *Ebony* y *Jet* durante la Guerra de Corea en la formación de las perspectivas afronorteamericanas en medio de los cambios sociales de la posguerra mundial. Aunque estas publicaciones fueron fundamentales para retratar el éxito y el entretenimiento afronorteamericano, quedaron cortas al cubrir adecuadamente los aspectos intelectuales y políticos de la época, especialmente en lo que respecta a la Guerra de Corea. *Ebony*, a pesar de hacer hincapié en los logros y figuras destacadas, descuidó importantes actualizaciones y condiciones de guerra. *Jet*, aunque más confiable, también mostró deficiencias al representar el espectro más amplio de las experiencias de los soldados afronorteamericanos en Corea.

El artículo ahonda en la influencia de las revistas en los estándares de belleza, la publicidad y su respuesta al cambiante panorama mediático afronorteamericano. *Ebony*, criticada a menudo por omitir intelectuales afronorteamericanos, luchó por presentar una visión equilibrada de la Guerra de Corea, mientras que *Jet*, posicionada como una revista semanal, ofrecía una gama más diversa de historias pero aún carecía de una cobertura integral de las contribuciones de los soldados afronorteamericanos al movimiento por los derechos civiles.

**Palabras clave:** Ebony, Jet, medios de comunicación afronorteamericanos, movimiento por los derechos civiles, representación mediática.

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<sup>1</sup>Tenesha Talley Department of History and Geography Morgan State University Baltimore, Maryland (USA)

The short gap in time between the closing of World War II and the Korean War saw a significant shift in African-American ideals, with the polarizing prospect of integration on the horizon. The recently passed Executive Order 9981, which desegregated the American military, offered an early but limited perspective on what may come. This period of African-American success on the battlefield and prosperity in entertainment and civil rights was reflected in popular weekly and monthly periodicals. *Ebony* magazine and *Jet* magazine, two of the most popular and highly influential African-American periodicals of the time, kept the African-American public updated on the latest trends and news of African Americans nationally and worldwide, including news following the soldiers overseas in Korea. Shifting the narrative of beauty and success as primarily White, these periodicals showcased the glitz and glamour of Black Hollywood, with rising and established stars gracing the covers weekly. It comes as a surprise, however, that while these popular magazines were easily accessible to the African-American public for news, they focused on beauty standards rather than the intellectual and political actions of the time. In particular, *Ebony* magazine needed to address the conditions and updates of the Korean War readily. Instead, it became a periodical of oddities and further projected mainstream stereotypes of African-American men and women. Although *Jet* magazine was guilty of upholding many of the same stereotypes as *Ebony*, it was a more reliable source in breaking free from the novelties that entertained the public and raised awareness of the national and international fight for civil rights, including the ongoing conflict between African American soldiers and the racist policies of the American Army. However, the ongoing work by African American activists, such as Thurgood Marshall, was heavily excluded from the weekly news articles presented within *Jet*. Both magazines' content proves their unreliability compared to African-American newspapers in engaging the public with the Korean War.

### **Who Do We Stand For? Beauty Standards, Advertisements, War and White Mainstream Magazines, 1945–1955**

Clarke and Hazell examined the “hierarchy of skin color” dominant during the early twentieth century after World War II. This phenomenon created the dichotomy that plagued mainstream media: White images were shown in a positive light, and “people who are not White or male tend to be portrayed in a stereotypical and unfavorable light.”<sup>2</sup> Hazell and Clarke were well aware that this pattern aided in furthering a racist and sexist American society. They argued that these magazines promoted images that “greatly influenced people’s views and attitudes concerning gender or race.”<sup>3</sup> This racial hierarchy was not limited to only White faces. The magazines featured the dominant, lighter-complexioned African-American images often included in mainstream media. The White standard of beauty, described by Hazell and Clarke as “light skin, long, straight hair, thin lips, thin figure,” dominated mainstream advertisements and acted as the line between what was acceptable and unacceptable in the African-American image.<sup>4</sup> This transitional period from war to peacetime saw the inherent need for an African-American equivalent to mainstream White magazines. As stated in an op-ed by Marguerite Cartwright, establishing a successful magazine required “an understanding of the potential reader[and] how he feels and thinks.”<sup>5</sup> She noted that “the existence of the vast majority of average hardworking, middle-class Negroes is ignored as opposed to whites in mainstream magazines.”<sup>6</sup> It is evident that Cartwright was well aware of the lack of coverage of African Americans in American media and recognized the need for African-American-based magazines. She noted the inclusion of African Americans was limited to “violence and sensationalism” in these mainstream magazines, a general nod at the negative stereotypes of aggressive and violent African

<sup>2</sup> Clarke and Hazell, “Race and Gender in the Media,” 5.

<sup>3</sup> Clarke and Hazell, “Race and Gender in the Media,” 6.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke and Hazell, “Race and Gender in the Media,” 6.

<sup>5</sup> Marguerite Cartwright, “Magazines in Sepia,” *Negro History Bulletin* 17, no. 4 (1954):75.

<sup>6</sup> Cartwright, “Magazines in Sepia,” 75.

American men as well as having overwhelming athletic prowess.<sup>6</sup> As such, *Ebony* was quickly able to fill this role to act as a balance for African-American media. Openly regarded as a magazine “for Black people by Black people,” *Ebony* took a page from White mainstream magazines but showcased the accomplishments of African Americans from “Harlem to Hollywood” that largely remained ignored by mainstream media.<sup>2</sup> The magazine was thoroughly engaged with the mainstream trend of transitioning independent, working women back to homemakers with the imminent return of veterans from overseas. In response, *Ebony* was littered with editorials and advertisements that not only reinforced traditional gender roles but continued to center White beauty standards as the ideal. African American women of fairer complexions, typically those who could “pass” as White women, dominated the front page and the ads, reflecting the White media and what was “more culturally and socially acceptable” than the average, darker-skinned African American. In an article titled “The Most Beautiful Negro Women in America,” *Ebony* presented six women, five lighter-complexioned women and only one darker-complexioned woman who fit the bill. When asked how they determined beauty, the article author, John Powers, explained, “My idea of beauty is a natural beauty,” distinguishing the importance between an “outer glow,” the image that focuses on outer appearance and features, and an “inner glow,” the image had to do with one’s character and individuality.<sup>3</sup> Powers’ attempt at dispelling the belief that *Ebony* followed the mainstream African-American women with European features fell short, as the lack of diversity propelled the thought that only lighter-complexioned women held uniqueness. While *Ebony* did not subscribe to the popular standard of portraying African Americans in stereotypical and menial roles like personal servants, maids, and Aunt Jemima in ads like that of their White magazine peers, African Americans of darker complexions who were included were those considered exceptional in their field, including that of entertainment, sports, military heroism, and civil rights advancement. This focus proved detrimental throughout the Korean War, as the magazine needed more wartime updates, which were substituted for stories on the glamorous life of these celebrities.

The media was filled with updates on the Korean War regarding White soldiers’ “suffering and sacrifice” throughout mainstream media. Cartwright examines over two years of war, of the dozens of photos depicting soldiers and their wartime experiences, “in only three were Negroes shown.” The expectation that *Ebony* would make up for this shortcoming was not met. John H. Johnson, *Ebony*’s editor, chose only to showcase “the happier side of African American life,” which consisted mainly of the accomplishments of African Americans rather than the tumultuous image of war.<sup>4</sup> This stance is apparent in the lack of war content during the four years of war. From 1950 to 1951, *Ebony* published only four editorials about African-American soldiers stationed in Korea, with a total of 63 photos. Even though this improved the limited pictures of these soldiers in mainstream magazines, it was a meager number and little wartime engagement for a magazine of *Ebony*’s caliber. Notably, the soldiers included in these images were those with tragic or heroic feats, if not both. One editorial spotlighted Lieutenant James F. Harvey, Jr., an African-American jet pilot who had completed fifteen combat missions within the first four months of the war’s onset. *Ebony* includes commentary from Harvey’s southern White commanding officer who complimented him as “one of the best officers I’ve ever had.”<sup>5</sup> The images taken of Harvey included only White pilots, in a sense removing him from the confines of color rather than displaying the struggles that came with being a lone African-American pilot. The editorial glamorized Harvey’s life in Japan as

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<sup>6</sup> Cartwright, “Magazines in Sepia,” 94.

<sup>7</sup> Marlo Barnett and Joseph Flynn, “A Century of Celebration: Disrupting Stereotypes and Portrayals of African Americans in the Media,” *Black History Bulletin* 77, no. 2 (2014): 30.

<sup>8</sup> John Powers, “The Most Beautiful Negro Women in America,” *Ebony*, November 1949.

<sup>9</sup> Cartwright, *Magazines in Sepia*, 94.

<sup>10</sup> Megan E Williams, “Meet the Real Lena Horne”: Representations of Lena Horne in “*Ebony*” Magazine, 1945–1949,” *Journal of American Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 117.

<sup>11</sup> “Jet Pilot Over Korea: 99th Vet Chalks Up 15 Combat Missions in the First Days of War,” *Ebony*, October 1950, 21.

one that “is almost completely untouched by prejudice of any kind,” a life not often shared by those who were in the Army and not the Air Force.<sup>12</sup>

Like many other *Ebony* editorials, Harvey’s experience represented a small glimmer of privilege that failed to see the perspective of most African-American soldiers overseas. In another instance, *Ebony* gives an expose on the “heroic death” of Ensign Jesse Brown, a pilot whose plane went down during a combat mission. In highlighting the reaction to his death in his home community, Hattiesburg, *Ebony* adds that “nine Negroes have been lynched since 1890,” but “both Negro and white” were quickly able to gather in mourning for the soldier.<sup>13</sup> By including this, Brown’s death became more of a miracle than a tragedy by breaking through racial animosity. Similarly, *Ebony* highlighted nine African American Distinguished Service Cross winners, four of whom were mortally wounded in Korea. In the editorial, the images of each soldier were included. Still, the commentary only referenced the soldiers who had passed, specifically Private Edward O. Cleaborn, a young soldier who was described as an “18-year-old martyr.”<sup>14</sup> Again, there was an emphasis on deepening racial relations as “more than 2500 white and Negroes turned out” in the southern city of Memphis to see Cleaborn posthumously awarded. Among the limited editorials released, three focus entirely on pilots, a highly coveted and respected professional role within the African-American community, and two on stories of tragedy. Except for an editorial on Navy “Frogmen,” an obscure position that would provide an intriguing read for the magazine’s audience, there was no inclusion of soldiers in Army Infantry in any capacity. This display of exceptionalism correlates to the lack of inclusion of darker African Americans unless they meet the proper success criteria or ended in heroic martyrdom. *Ebony*’s exclusion of the average African American in any role, including soldiers in the Army, strips away the relatability of the magazine as well as distorts the happenings of the Korean War through omission.

Although *Ebony* was a wholly-trusted African American news source during the Korean War, its exclusion of the war and soldiers was noticeable. Thurgood Marshall’s investigative tour of Japan and Korea was not mentioned. This major story touched on a popular topic within *Ebony*: integration and African-American and White relations within America. Why was this not a story worth placing in the magazine? *Ebony* has long been criticized for its omission of African-American intellectuals as opposed to entertainers and athletes. Theodore Cross examines the phenomenon of “anti-intellectualism” that has plagued the magazine since its founding, referencing American Jim Crow and “its determination to keep intellectually gifted Blacks out of the great educational institutions of this country.”<sup>15</sup> *Ebony*’s following of standard White American ideals again shaped the magazine’s content rather than appropriately assessing the needs of the African American readers. While Thurgood Marshall is not considered an academic leader within the African-American community, his position as legal counsel for the N.A.A.C.P. and subsequent appointment to the Supreme Court argue his case as a highly esteemed activist and intellectual. Treating him as such, the exclusion of his investigative trip within *Ebony* is a plausible yet inexcusable explanation. *Ebony* solidified its position as a counterpart of White mainstream magazines. Still, the available war content lacked equally as much as its counterparts in the inclusion of African-American soldier stories and the fight for civil rights.

Alongside the angle of anti-intellectualism, *Ebony*’s lack of coverage of the Korean War was heavily influenced by the anti-Communist wave that plagued America throughout the Cold War. *Ebony* released

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<sup>12</sup> “Jet Pilot Over Korea,” *Ebony*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> “Shock at Death Hits Hard at Family of Flier,” *Ebony*, April 1951, 17.

<sup>14</sup> “War Heroes: More Negroes Win D.S.C. in Korea than Received Coveted Award in Four Years of World War II,” *Ebony*, May 1951, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Theodore Cross, “*Ebony* Magazine: Sometimes the Bell Curve’s Best Friend,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* No. 10 (1995–1996): 75.

a photo editorial in October 1950 titled “Is it a War of Color?” that accused the influence of Communists of adopting a “race angle” that worsened the racial division in American society.<sup>16</sup> Instead of addressing the existing racial discrimination that plagued Koreans and African American soldiers fighting in Korea, *Ebony* diminished the experience as political propaganda to sway African Americans, as had been the case in World War II. In their criticism, *Ebony* referred to the Associated Negro Press as “Negro dupes” who considered the war “a clash of white versus colored, of imperialism versus nationalism, of colonialism versus anti-colonialism.”<sup>17</sup> Although *Ebony* correctly identified the obvious ploy to shift African-American loyalty, it looked at the war as a black-and-white picture of democracy and Communism rather than the gray area of racism that affected the African-American experience in the Army. As such, war content that was included in the magazine needed to realize the African-American perspective of the Korean War.

By contrast, letters sent from soldiers provided more authenticity than what was included in *Ebony*’s editorials. While the number of letters included was limited, the soldiers were allowed to convey their feelings regarding being in the armed forces and their experiences to *Ebony*’s audience. Some expressed disappointment in the lack of coverage of soldiers in other branches of the military outside of the Air Force, stating, “Not once have we read an article about the Marines. We are few and far between, but we have been here in Inchon since last September.”<sup>18</sup> Others shared stories of fellow soldiers’ valiant efforts in Korea as examples that dispelled the stereotype of African-American soldiers’ inefficiency in combat. Still, the majority of the letters that *Ebony* chose to share discussed racial relations between African American and White soldiers, emphasizing the Air Force. One Sergeant Paul L. Shaw remarked that “a remarkable and unbelievable change has occurred in race relations during the short period that the Armed Forces’ policy of non-segregation has been in effect.”<sup>19</sup> It was also a common statement among the letters that *Ebony* was a popular magazine with both White and African-American soldiers. Again, these soldiers’ experience was one privilege, as African American soldiers within the Army bore the brunt of racial discrimination. It is evident that *Ebony* was meticulous in presenting the armed forces and the Korean War as a conflict devoid of racial tension through its disregard of a variety of responses from enlisted soldiers.

The 1950s ushered in a new trend of magazines publishing content more geared toward the African-American ideal rather than the traditional White standard. The new push for civil rights had a significant effect on what captured the attention of the community. *Jet* magazine, first published in late 1951, reflected these ideals, as not only lighter-skinned celebrities graced the cover of their magazine, but African Americans of darker complexions that looked like many of the viewers of the magazine. Not only did *Jet* stray from the standard complexion, but it allowed models of different body types to grace the cover as well, a feat that many mainstream magazines had not yet attempted. While there were still ads that continued to highlight the White beauty standard of fair complexion and long, straight hair, the editorials were filled with images of a diverse African-American community engaging in daily activities, marketing a relatable image to the public. *Jet* marked a shift in the African-American beauty standard and promoted the concept of embracing Blackness rather than seeking validation from mainstream society. *Jet* touched on the declining popularity of passing and the “strong race pride” growing in the African-American community.<sup>20</sup> The magazine gathered responses from African Americans who refused to pass,

<sup>16</sup> “Is it a War of Color?” *Ebony*, October 1951, 94.

<sup>17</sup> “Is It a War of Color?” *Ebony*, October 1951, 94.

<sup>18</sup> “Servicemen Write,” *Ebony*, July 1951, 6.

<sup>19</sup> “Servicemen Write,” *Ebony*, July 1951, 7.

<sup>20</sup> “Why Passing is Out,” *Jet*, July 17, 1952, from Google Books, [https://books.google.com/books?id=QEMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=QEMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed February 19, 2023), 12.

some saying, “I could never forsake my family to live as a white person” and dispelled the common belief among White people that “Negroes are ashamed of their race and wish to be white” as a stereotype.<sup>21</sup> This article and others promoted a strong image of the African American without equating light complexion as the standard.

Marketed as a weekly periodical rather than a monthly periodical like *Ebony*, *Jet* had a greater opportunity to indulge in a more detailed view of the daily engagements of African Americans. Founded by the same publishing company as *Ebony*, Johnson Publishing Company, it is clear that this was a direct response to the lack of familiar images of the African-American middle and lower middle class, a significant portion of its audience. It was pocket-sized to carry around, making it a convenient option for African Americans rather than a full-size periodical. Similar to *Ebony*, the periodical consisted of updates on a plethora of categories, including medicine, religion, and farming, topics typically excluded or hastily summarized in monthly periodicals. While stories in *Ebony* occasionally touched on updates in local communities, *Jet*'s content captured local and obscure stories, making a national community of African Americans feel close-knit. This was not limited to the national level as *Jet* also included a foreign news category, updating the public on international relationships among the African Diaspora. In the weekly segment “This Week in Photos,” the magazine shared photos ranging from celebrity vacations to a grandmother lacing their grandchildren’s ice skates. *Jet* filled in the blind spots that *Ebony* missed, making for a more well-balanced magazine experience.<sup>22</sup>

While *Jet* had significant advertisement content, its diligence in following the tides of the ongoing civil rights movement is notable. In studying the periodical from its conception until the end of the war, *Jet* included an update in some form, whether local or national, on the numerous fights and injustices across the country in each publication. This included lynchings, integration successes, and failed integration attempts. However, as *Ebony* and *Jet* belonged to the same company, the lack of African-American soldier stories was apparent within the weekly periodical as well. From its conception until the end of the Korean War, the magazine failed to acknowledge army integration as an important factor in the civil rights movement, a stark contrast to the constant detailing of educational integration. There was a small number of articles published on soldiers overseas, with interracial relationships and interracial children typically featured. Only four such articles strayed from the topic of White and African-American relations. The first, in a similar fashion to *Ebony*, *Jet* honored Cornelius H. Charlton for receiving a Medal of Honor posthumously. In receiving the award, the soldier’s father stated, “My son has proved that the Negro is worthy of the country’s highest honor...and even those persons in America who have felt the Negroes are second-class citizens must in their hearts know that that isn’t so.”<sup>23</sup> *Jet*'s inclusion of such a weighted statement acknowledged the ongoing racial discrimination within American society and the necessity to validate the presence of African Americans on the battlefield. The commentary, however, distinguishes the soldier as an exception rather than the standard due to his death. It comes as no surprise to include this soldier in the magazine. His story served as another act of martyrdom within the African-American community. Even with its first publication arriving in the middle of the war and well after Thurgood Marshall’s initial visit to the battlefield, it is a surprise that the magazine heavily focused on civil rights had no coverage of his ongoing press tour through 1952. What was mentioned regarding any justice disputes amongst the soldiers stationed in Korea was the case of Corporal John A. Bigger, who was “a

<sup>21</sup> *Jet*, “Why ‘Passing’ is Out,” July 17, 1952, 16.

<sup>22</sup> “This Week in Photos,” *Jet*, April 3, 1952, from Google Books, [https://books.google.com/books?id=J0MDAAAAMBAJ&source=gbs\\_all\\_issues\\_r&cad=1](https://books.google.com/books?id=J0MDAAAAMBAJ&source=gbs_all_issues_r&cad=1) (accessed February 19, 2023), 18.

<sup>23</sup> *Jet*, “Medal of Honor Awarded to Slain G.I.,” February 28, 1952, from Google Books, [https://books.google.com/books?id=LEMDDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=LEMDDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed February 19, 2023), 6.

G.I. condemned to die for slaying a Korean farmer, “with little fanfare and a swift execution sentence.”<sup>24</sup> While the case holds importance as an update from soldiers in Korea, its focus on Korean-African-American relations does not address the racial tension between African-American and White soldiers. In another case, *Jet* featured a short article on captured G.I.s, stating, “At least 100 Negroes were among the 3,198 GIs held in prison camps by Chinese Reds.”<sup>25</sup> This article served as a feel-good story to boost public morale over the constant fear of the events happening in Korea. In contrast to *Ebony*’s narrow focus on war content, *Jet* provided a more well-rounded perspective of the African-American experience in Korea. However, there is a gaping hole in the civil rights movement news due to the dismissal of the African American soldiers in Korea. The limited coverage of the progress of desegregation in the Army contradicts the civil rights banner that *Jet* constructed for itself.

### **White and African American Relations and Interracial Relationships**

The popular topic of integration was at the center of attention of both African-American and mainstream media, as African-American leaders staunchly fought for integrated education, public transportation, and employment benefits in a new post-war wave of civil rights. While these topics were the focal points of the conversation, *Ebony* magazine hyper-focused on the aspect of race relations as both a spectacle and a means to improve race relations in America. Although it was unusual to see darker-complexioned African Americans on the cover of *Ebony* alone, it was not uncommon to see these individuals paired with a lighter-complexioned partner or even White individuals. This has been the case from the very beginning of the magazine’s tenure as a leading African-American magazine, as its first cover “did not feature a glamorous Black entertainer or an African-American ‘first’ but seven boys—six of them White—from a program to improve race relations.”<sup>26</sup> This is further shown by the plethora of *Ebony* magazine covers that include African-American celebrities who were considered mainstream successes with White counterparts, even those who were lesser known.

In 1949, *Ebony* published an article titled “Famous Negroes Who Married Whites” with N.A.A.C.P.’s Walter White and his White wife, Poppy Cannon, on the front cover. Although White served as an important activist for the African-American community, his mixed heritage allowed him to easily pass as a White man in racist American society. Highlighted by *Ebony* as a “bitter controversy” in society, White’s marriage was one of many in a trend of successful African Americans who married interracially. *Ebony* also included images of many of these celebrities and their spouses, including Lena Horne, Katherine Dunham, and Paul Robeson Jr., enjoying daily life to promote the idea of normalcy of interracial couples. Ironically, most celebrities included in the article were those of lighter complexion and more European features as opposed to the magazine’s audience. *Ebony* examined that “the general increase in mixed marriages as a result not of wartime weddings between G.I.’s to European brides but also because of a general lowering of racial barriers in the U.S.”<sup>27</sup> Although *Ebony* attempted to make the case of pros and cons of interracial marriages of African American leaders, there was bias shown toward those with White spouses, as one interviewee insisted the phenomena was to be expected since, “in our culture beauty has been systematically and continuously associated with whiteness and lightness of skin,” and another stating that interracial marriages “largely involves marriages between lighter-skinned educated Negroes and socially ‘advanced’ whites.”<sup>28</sup> This belief shared in *Ebony* shows the prolonging effects of mainstream

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<sup>24</sup> *Jet*, “Condemned G.I. to Get Hearing,” December 6, 1951, from Google Books, [https://books.google.com/books?id=HOMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=HOMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed February 19, 2023), 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Jet*, “100 Negro GI’s on Prisoner List,” January 3, 1952, [https://books.google.com/books?id=IEMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=IEMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed February 19, 2023), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Barnett and Flynn, “A Century of Celebration,” 30.

<sup>27</sup> “Famous Negroes Married to Whites,” *Ebony*, December 1950, 20.

<sup>28</sup> “Famous Negroes Married to Whites,” *Ebony*, December 1950, 24–25.

standards and the belief that the advancement of both races depended on dating and marrying White counterparts. *Ebony* even goes as far as including Frederick Douglass' interracial marriage and his steadfastness against opposition as an example of successful interracial marriage. However, he, too, was of mixed-race heritage. Showcasing prominent African American figures with White spouses and prominent White figures remained a common occurrence in the magazine during wartime, as four periodicals in both 1950 and 1951 featured covers of mixed-race pairings as opposed to one cover in 1952. *Ebony's* push for interracial marriage was not limited to prominent figures. It featured editorials regarding the benefits of interracial marriage on race relations in America and the struggles that came with challenging the norm. With its inclusion of "regular" interracial couples, *Ebony* used the same format of images of couples engaged in daily activities to combat the societal idea of interracial marriage as being irregular or even taboo. The article engaged in the difficulties of maintaining these marriages due to "social pressure" from both White and African-American communities.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, *Ebony* included images of these couples reading and studying together almost as an attempt to express an advancement in intellect as opposed to only including leisurely photos of prominent African American figures, implying that these average couples were striving to reach the level that these celebrity couples had achieved. Many of the images included these couples with their children with lighter complexions and more prominent European features and showed a healthy nuclear family. There was a clear message that this newly implemented family unit was up to mainstream beauty standards and had greater importance than the average African-American family by *Ebony*. The inclusion of stories on interracial families and communities remained a constant throughout the Korean War in *Ebony*.

Naturally, this push for interracial marriage included the large community of African-American soldiers as well as other members of the diaspora. *Ebony* interviewed a former fighter pilot of the 99th Pursuit Squadron who married interracially and settled in Austria. Living a life described as "free of racial discrimination," the article acts as an advertisement to others in the community seeking approval of the choice of interracial marriage while condemning the ongoing stigmatization of the practice in America.<sup>30</sup> One such article, titled "Wanted: Negro Husbands and Wives," showcased this wave of interracial relationships as also being wildly popular within the White foreign community. The article emphasizes that the main reasons for this increased popularity were "as a means to come to the U.S." and "to break the taboos on interracial marriage."<sup>31</sup> While there was an overwhelming number of German women looking for African American husbands using *Ebony* as a middleman, the article saw a change in the typical pattern, seeing average White men also search for African American wives, a number limited by "the tremendous wartime toll of Nazi troops."<sup>32</sup> Without irony, the most common reasoning given from the inquiries was that they "had Negro friends" or that African Americans had "good hearts" after meeting G.I.s during the war.<sup>33</sup> It was clear that *Ebony* wanted to spread these articles in the hopes of showing that not only were African Americans accepted internationally as equals and love interests, but that the magazine played an instrumental role in repairing racial relations. To hit viewers on a more emotional scale, an editorial by Seretse Khama titled "Why I Gave My Throne for Love" detailed Khama's experience as a displaced African chieftain after choosing to marry a White wife. He described his experience as "a parallel with that of the Duke of Windsor" and juxtaposed the tolerance of his people, even with their "lack of education," with the intolerance of the British government.<sup>34</sup> Again, *Ebony* linked acceptance of interracial relationships to one's intelligence level and the belief that the progress of society depended on deepening racial relations. Nevertheless, *Ebony* remained apathetic to the racial relations between soldiers, instead choosing interracial marriage as the sole step in dismantling segregation in racist America.

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<sup>29</sup> "The Case Against Mixed Marriage," *Ebony*, November 1950, 50.

<sup>30</sup> "An American in Vienna," *Ebony*, January 1950, 60.

<sup>31</sup> "Wanted: Negro Husbands and Wives," *Ebony*, March 1951, 65.

<sup>32</sup> "Wanted," March 1951, *Ebony*, 66.

<sup>33</sup> "Wanted," March 1951, *Ebony*, 66.

<sup>34</sup> Seretse Khama, "Why I Gave up My Throne for Love," *Ebony*, June 1951, 50.

While *Jet*'s content highlighted more civil rights and political articles, there was a more subtle approach given to the interracial conversation. Unlike *Ebony*'s full editorials juxtaposing the nuclear African-American family with mixed-race couples, *Jet* shared this content in small textboxes closer to the end of the magazine. In one rare instance, *Jet* included an expose on the phenomenon of German women seeking African-American husbands. *Jet* articulated this demand for African American husbands as "the best and fastest way of getting to America" rather than an advancement of race relations or romance, as presented in *Ebony*.<sup>35</sup> The article went further and placed the blame on "Hitler's racism" that resulted in the shortage of marriable men in Germany as the catalyst, again dispelling the idea of a dynamic shift between African American and White relations internationally.<sup>36</sup> Whether due to its sizing or direct intent from the editor, interracial content seemed purposefully placed as not to garner attention and backlash like *Ebony*. It is also noticeable that there was a very limited number of photos included with these particular articles as opposed to *Ebony*. However, due to *Jet*'s weekly release, the magazine's frequency of including articles on race relations and interracial relationships far surpassed *Ebony*'s and conveyed that the topic was an integral part of African-American current events.

### **Forgotten Interracial Children of African American G.I.s**

Interracial fetishization extended beyond romantic relationships; the magazine also attributed the high rate of abandoned children overseas to intimate relationships between soldiers and foreign women from different racial backgrounds. Michael Green postulated that the widespread phenomenon of abandonment, particularly prevalent in Eastern Asia, could be attributed to a combination of factors, including language barriers, racial disparities, and lingering wartime animosities between African-American soldiers and their foreign mistresses.<sup>37</sup> This was not uncommon to see in *Ebony* magazine, as articles about these children were features since World War II. While *Ebony* did not put as much emphasis on racially mixed children as was put on interracial relationships, there was a focus on the issue of child abandonment. De Faria examines *Ebony*'s sensationalizing of the "German War Babies" and public response to Afro-German children.<sup>38</sup> Released in the 1951 January issue, *Ebony* followed the case of Margaret Butler in adopting two of these Afro-German children. De Faria stated that *Ebony* and other members of the African-American press "were sites of Black voices which spoke vehemently against the social exclusion of Afro-German children within Germany between 1947 and 1960 "and acted as a bridge between the relationship between African-American soldiers and German civilians."<sup>39</sup> *Ebony* felt the responsibility relied on the public to aid these "little children who are half-American" and made sure they were "prompted to act by a feeling of shame about the behavior of their soldiers."<sup>40</sup> Ironically, de Faria notes that a primary motivator for these articles was "the hope of improving the shattered reputation of Black soldiers in Germany" at the expense of creating a wholly negative reputation back in America.<sup>41</sup> Through the promotion of adoption for these children, *Ebony* boosted the reputation of the African-American civil rights movement internationally and ignited a movement toward integration in Germany. The pattern was the same in Japan, as *Ebony* broadcasted African-American soldiers' ill behavior by

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<sup>35</sup> "Why German Women Want Negro Husbands," *Jet*, April 3, 1952, from Google Books, [https://books.google.com/books?id=QEMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=QEMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed February 19, 2023), 16.

<sup>36</sup> *Jet*, "Why German Women Want Negro Husbands," April 3, 1952, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Cullen Green, *Black Yanks in the Pacific: Race in the Making of American Military Empire After World War II* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 87.

<sup>38</sup> Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria, "'Germany's 'Brown Babies' Must be Helped! Will You?': U.S. Adoption Plans for Afro-German Children, 1950-1955," *Callaloo* 26, no.2 (Spring 2003): 342.

<sup>39</sup> de Faria, "Germany's 'Brown Babies,'" 346.

<sup>40</sup> de Faria, "Germany's 'Brown Babies,'" 348.

<sup>41</sup> de Faria, "Germany's 'Brown Babies,'" 348.

abandoning racially mixed children. The editorial was headlined with the polarizing sub-title, “Shunned and deserted, more than 2,000 racially mixed youngsters face tragic future,” under a photo of one of the children. Described as the “most hated subjects in the Japanese islands” and aptly regarded as the “brown baby crisis” by others, the article does its best to prey on the empathy of the African-American community and exacerbate the already negative reputation of both the Japanese public and African American soldiers. Images of the children are shown praying and eating meager meals in the hopes of gaining support from *Ebony*’s readers. This negative coverage of the irresponsibility of African American soldiers affected the public perception of soldiers overseas in Korea, as there was the belief that this behavior would continue, as it had in Germany and Japan. While this was an important topic to be covered by *Ebony*, it once again served as an example of the lack of acknowledgment of the internal racial conflict within the armed forces.

Like *Ebony*, *Jet* engaged the public in stories about the numerous “brown babies” overseas and their experiences in predominantly non-Black communities. While *Ebony* honed in on reproaching African American soldiers and the “return” of these children to America, *Jet* looked at their experience within their respective countries. In one case, *Jet* observed German “tan tots” in Germany’s education system. The story presented an ideal case, as Germany “resounded sharply against dual education facilities” and evoked integration rather than shunning mixed children. The condition of the children shown left little for concern in the images shared, again an unusual scene that differed greatly from *Ebony*’s images of famished and unbathed children. It is clear that the intent of *Jet* in including this article was to present these children in a more palatable manner to garner support for not only outside communities of mixed African Americans but also the successful implementation of integration. Moreover, *Jet*’s commentary exposed the opposing stances of White and African Americans on the identity of these mixed children, as White American authorities claimed “these children are entirely German responsibility.” By including negative comments from White Americans, the editor showcased the disregard of not only the children, but African American soldiers. Although this particular article received much attention, *Jet*’s other articles on the subject of mixed-race children followed a similar pattern to articles on interracial marriage, being relegated to smaller, unnoticeable textboxes. The editor makes small mention of the situation in Japan, stating, “10 Negro-Japanese babies will be brought to America for adoption” from the same orphanage that was previously interviewed in *Ebony*. However, with no images in this brief statement, it suggested the adoption process of these children was not significant news. In any case, *Jet* did not use the issue of mixed children to detract from the reputation of African-American soldiers. Instead, it treated it as a separate problem that did not allow room to excuse the racial mistreatment incurred during the Korean War.

*Ebony* and *Jet* remained prominent periodicals long past the duration of the Korean War. They filled the gap in media that was largely ignored by mainstream media, covering topics geared toward the African-American experience. *Ebony* bridged the gap between Black Hollywood and the average African American and created an experience of glamour that was typically relegated to White Americans. On the other hand, *Jet* made African-American news easily accessible and portable, spreading both domestic and international

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<sup>42</sup> “War Babies of Japan,” *Ebony*, September 1951, 15.

<sup>43</sup> “War Babies of Japan,” *Ebony*, September 1951, 18; Green, *Black Yanks*, 88.

<sup>45</sup> “Tan Tots in German Schools,” July 24, 1952, *Ebony*, from Google Books, [https://books.google.com/books?id=P0MDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=P0MDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false), (accessed February 19, 2023), 14.

<sup>46</sup> “Tan Tots,” *Jet*, July 24, 1952, 16.

<sup>47</sup> “Tan Tots,” *Jet*, July 24, 1952, 15.

<sup>48</sup> *Jet*, “Negro Japanese Babies Coming to the U.S.,” March 6, 1952, from Google Books, [https://books.google.com/books?id=LUMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=LUMDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed February 19, 2023), 14.

civil rights actions and progress. While both magazines thoroughly covered news in multiple categories, from medicine to education, their approach to the Korean War and African-American soldiers revealed their shortsightedness in the fight for integration. *Ebony's* trivialization of the African-American experience in the armed forces during wartime distorted the public's perception and proved detrimental to their image. In contrast, *Jet's* limited coverage of African-American soldiers left the public in the dark about the struggles with integration. While the reputation of these magazines continued to grow during the Korean War, like mainstream media, they served as distractions from the genuine issues of racism in the armed forces.

### Conclusión

In 1953, the Korean War reached an armistice, quietly concluding the U.S. armed forces' fight against North Korean communist forces. During this time, the Army dismantled its all-black units and joined its fellow branches as a fully integrated organization. The difficulties faced by African American soldiers over a century were acknowledged in the Army periodical *Eagle Forward*, which praised the 24th regiment as "a fine fighting Regiment, trim, experienced, and highly esteemed."<sup>48</sup> Detailing the accolades of the regiment throughout each American conflict, the message closed with "51 years and 11 months after its activation, the final curtain was lowered for the 24th United States Infantry."<sup>49</sup> In the eyes of the African-American community, the successful integration of the military acted only as a stepping stone in the fight for full integration into American society. However, this swift withdrawal of press coverage from African American troops allowed for distorting soldier experience in Korea, primarily the racial tension in camps and front lines. Due to the minimal attention given to the war and the media interpretation of the Korean War, African-American soldiers remained a hidden and misunderstood entity in military history.

Although integration was achieved through the persistence of the African-American press, soldiers, and leaders, the pattern of degradation of African-American soldiers' achievements and contributions during the war was a gradual process. The Korean War earned the moniker "forgotten war" due to its fast fading from the public eye in its closing and lack of coverage by the media soon after.<sup>50</sup> Paul Pierpaoli claimed the phenomena of "collective amnesia" of the Korean War in the American public was due to its placement "wedged tightly between the 'good war' and the 'bad war,'" World War II and the Vietnam War.<sup>51</sup> It served as an unwanted war too soon after the completion of World War II, and the collective memory of the American public associated the war with the previous turmoil inflicted by the Japanese Imperial Army. Moreover, Pierpaoli reasons that "the fact that the war was a stalemate and appeared inconclusive to the adherents of Communist 'rollback' did nothing to advance the cause of memory and history."<sup>52</sup> As Communism remained the biggest threat to the American public, a collective feeling of shame that America essentially was unable to dispel the spread of the "Red Wave" was to be expected. The paternalism America emitted toward Korea and the whole northeastern region of Asia could not handle the embarrassment of not achieving a complete victory against what was not only seen as an inferior foe in North Korea but also the direct enemy of democracy in the Soviet Union. These factors resulted in the continuous omission of the Korean War throughout history, as it represented a tremendous military stain after the prior successes of World War II. This erasure included the victories won by African-American regiments, as they meant little after an unsuccessful war.

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<sup>48</sup> *Eagle Forward*, "Message from the Commanding Officer," October 1951, in "Morale Attitudes of Enlisted Men," Mar-June 1949, Decimal File 1949-54, File 291.2, Box 109, Records of the Assistant Secretary of Defense/Manpower, Personnel, and Reserve Affairs/ Mail and Records Section, Record Group 330: National Archives at College Park, MD, 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Eagle Forward*, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Paul G. Pierpaoli, Jr., "Beyond Collective Amnesia: A Korean War Retrospective," *International Social Science Review* 76 no. 3-4 (2001): 92.

<sup>51</sup> Pierpaoli Jr., "Beyond Collective Amnesia," 92.

<sup>52</sup> Pierpaoli Jr., "Beyond Collective Amnesia," 93.

Media representation did little justice to the image of the African-American soldier who had swiftly transitioned through three wars in less than 20 years. Rackleff observed that in World War II, the African American soldier was unfairly depicted as “quietly strong, with a stoic acceptance of racial discrimination, and eager to play his ‘separate but equal’ role in the national defense” while also being incapable of leadership and combat.<sup>53</sup> This harmful and resigned perception was easy to use as scapegoat for any mistake or loss made on the battlefield, validating White Americans’ thoughts. However, the victories obtained by all-black units and the implementation of integration caused a dramatic shift in their image back to a childlike state where they were “still dependent on fatherly white officers.”<sup>54</sup> The underlying fear of the African American soldier as autonomous and on equal footing with their White counterparts was reflected in these media perceptions, as paternalizing him not only rewarded the White soldier as responsible for his victories, but put into question the decision of integration. Although this did not halt the integrative process, it further revealed what Gerald Early determined as “the complex depths of a profound contradiction Americans felt deeply—not only about race but also about the strength of their institutions and the influential reach of pop culture.”<sup>55</sup> Racism still dominated mainstream pop culture and was reflected in the absence of African-American soldiers in printed media that attracted the attention of the younger generation, such as comic books. Indeed, the argument that “depicting Black soldiers in pulp art would essentially have meant drawing a largely Black comic book” was a reason for not including African Americans within the comic books, but the underlying racism that excluded them from the covers was clear.<sup>56</sup>

By the beginning of the Vietnam War, there was still limited media that recognized the Korean War, and even less that included African-American soldiers. The release of the *M\*A\*S\*H\** film, a screen adaptation of Richard Hornberger’s critically acclaimed novel, in 1972 presented a comedic interpretation of the Army surgeons in Korea. However, it represented a microcosm of American racism masked as juvenile humor among its White surgeons. The absence of African Americans from the M.A.S.H. unit continued to personify the belief that African Americans lacked the intelligence to be a component of a medical unit. The brief acknowledgment of Oliver Harmon Jones, the Black army neurosurgeon of unit 4077, is overshadowed by his depiction as solely a former professional football player needed for a unit competition. Jones’ fellow White soldiers address him as “that negro boy who played for the 49ers” and “Spearchucker,” two negative racial connotations that relegate him to an inferior position.<sup>57</sup> Gordon noted that this stereotypical characterization “draws attention to a salient issue of military racial politics” and completely dismissed the surgeon’s intellect and replaced it with the typical image of an athletic Black man who excels at sports.<sup>58</sup> Although the television series, released two years after the movie, attempted to address integration by adding Jones to the main cast, it proved unsuccessful as he only starred in six episodes before being written out. The reasoning for his removal was due to “an attempt to maintain historical accuracy based upon the long-held view that no Black surgeons served during the Korean War.”<sup>59</sup> It completely disregarded Alvin Vincent Blount Jr., the first African American physician to serve in a MASH unit, who served in Korea. This complete erasure of African American military presence in Korea from popular media only aided in the fading memory of the American public on the struggle for integration.

Consequently, limited media is available that chronicles the experience of African-American soldiers in Korea. Lost in between two prominent wars, the American public remains largely unaware of the progress made in the fight for integration domestically. Although many of these soldiers may be remembered for their heroism during the Vietnam War, the Korean War brought many firsts for African-American soldiers as the barriers

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<sup>53</sup> Robert B. Rackleff, “The Black Soldier in Popular American Magazines, 1900–1971,” *Negro History Bulletin* 34, no. 8 (December 1971): 187.

<sup>54</sup> Rackleff, “The Black Soldier,” 188.

<sup>55</sup> Gerald Early and Alan Lightman, “Race, Art, and Integration: The Image of the African American Soldiers in Popular Culture during the Korean War,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 57, no. 1 (Autumn, 2003): 33.

<sup>56</sup> Early and Lightman, “Race, Art, and Integration,” 34.

<sup>57</sup> *M\*A\*S\*H\**, directed by Robert Altman (20th Century Fox, 1970), 1:34:15.

<sup>58</sup> Austin Gorman, “‘M\*A\*S\*H\*, The Longest Yard,’ and the Integrationist Imagination in the Postsegregation Era,” *American Studies* 54, no. 4 (2016): 29

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth L. Wilson et al., “The Forgotten MASH Surgeon: The Story of Alvin Vincent Blount Jr., MD,” *Journal of the National Medical Association* 104, no. 3–4 (March–April, 2012): 221.

of segregation came down. The presence of the African-American press built the necessary connection between the public and the soldier to combat racial hierarchy within the military forces and, ultimately, American society. While it was met with challenges of separating itself from the mainstream image of African Americans in the military, it shifted the perspective of the narrative to one of autonomy in validating their own stories.

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