



Black and white photograph of British West African black troops with a machine gun.

Online Collections Database, **1983.166.12**, www.theworldwar.org/research/database. National WWI Museum and Memorial. Online.

Forgotten Fronts: Africa and the Global Impact of World War I

Recommended Grade Levels: 7–12

Course/Content Area(s): World History, Geography, Global Studies

Authored by: Mackenzie Pichardo, National WWI Museum and Memorial Teacher Advisor

LESSON OVERVIEW:	While most histories of World War I focus on Europe, over two million Africans were drawn into the conflict as soldiers, porters, and laborers. This lesson introduces students to some of the African experiences of WWI through primary source image analysis. Students will consider how African colonies experienced the war, why they were drawn into it, and how the conflict reshaped ideas of independence and identity across the continent. It's important to recognize there is no single story of Africa during WWI, as each person, group, and nation encountered very different experiences. This lesson is designed to help explore a selection of stories from a variety of different groups' experiences.
OBJECTIVES:	<i>Students will:</i>
	• Describe how World War I affected African colonies and people. • Analyze primary source images that reveal African perspectives on the war. • Evaluate how colonial involvement in WWI influenced later independence movements.
STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:	National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Themes: Theme II: Time, Continuity, and Change – Examine historical patterns and connections among world events. Theme IX: Global Connections – Explore the interdependence of nations and peoples around the world. Theme X: Civic Ideals and Practices – Analyze historical examples of struggles for freedom and human rights. C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards: D2.His.1.6-12: Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place, as well as broader historical contexts. D2.His.4.6-12: Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras. D2.His.6.6-12: Analyze how people's perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.

	D3.1.6-12: Gather and evaluate relevant sources representing multiple perspectives on a historical question. D4.1.6-12: Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary limitations.
TIME NEEDED:	One class period (45–60 minutes)
INTERDISCIPLINARY:	World History, Geography, Global Studies
PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:	• Causes of World War I (alliances, imperialism, nationalism, etc.) • The concept of colonialism and European empires in Africa before 1914
MATERIALS NEEDED:	• Projector or screen for visuals • Map of Africa, 1914 (showing colonial powers in provided slides) • Primary source photographs from the National WWI Museum and Memorial Online Collections Database • Forgotten Fronts: Africa in WWI Worksheet • Forgotten Fronts: Africa Slides

LESSON

INTRODUCTION/HOOK:

State the essential question: How can photographs help us uncover the forgotten experiences of Africans in World War I?

“Whose War?” Visual Warm-Up (5–7 minutes)

Project photograph in the slides (Object ID 1983.166.12– British West African troops).

Ask students:

- What stands out to you first, and why?
- What story might this image be trying to tell about Africans in the war?
- Whose perspective might be missing from the picture?

Tell students:

- It’s important to recognize there is no single story of Africa during WWI, as each person, group, and nation encountered very different experiences. The lesson today is designed to help you explore a selection of these stories from a variety of different groups’ experiences.

DIRECTIONS:

Part 1: Mini Lecture: “Africa Goes to War” (10–15 minutes)

Use a map and visuals (provided in the slides) to explain:

- Africa’s division between Allied (Britain, France, Belgium) and Central Power (Germany) colonies.
- African contributions:
 - *Soldiers*: King’s African Rifles, Tirailleurs Sénégalais
 - *Porters/Laborers*: Millions carried supplies and perished from exhaustion or disease
 - *Battles*: German East Africa Campaign (1914–1918)
- Effects: loss of life, social disruption, early roots of independence movements

Part 2: Primary Source Analysis

- Distribute or display the six Online Collections Database photographs.
- In small groups, students analyze one image using the *Forgotten Fronts: Africa in WWI Image Analysis Worksheet*.

Guiding questions:

- Which photograph did your group analyze? (Caption explanation)
- Describe what you see. (People, objects, setting, activity)
- What story might this image tell about this African colonies during World War I?
- What emotions or experiences are shown or hidden in this photograph?
- Why do you think this photograph was taken? What purpose might it have served?

Groups record their answers, then share one observation and one question during class discussion.

3. Reflection & Discussion (10–15 minutes)

Bring the class together to discuss:

- What common themes or experiences appear across these photographs?
- How do the images reveal the realities of colonialism during the war?
- What do they tell us about the lives of these African soldiers, porters, and workers?
- What stories might still be missing and why?

Wrap-Up Writing Prompt:

“In one paragraph, explain what these photographs reveal about this collection of African experiences in World War I and why remembering these stories matters today.”

POST-ASSESSMENT:

- Completed worksheet and written reflection
- Group participation in analysis and discussion

MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMMODATIONS

- Provide pre-highlighted or simplified excerpts for English language learners.
- Allow oral reflection instead of written for accessibility.
- Use visual sources (photos, posters) for students needing additional support with text comprehension.

Further Resources:

Propaganda in the Colonies (Africa). 1914–1918 Online: *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Freie Universität Berlin, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/propaganda_in_the_colonies_africa.

Khan, Sidi. “The Black British Soldiers Who Were Deliberately Forgotten.” *Imperial War Museums*, 25 Oct. 2022, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-black-british-soldiers-who-were-deliberately-forgotten>.

Imperial War Museums. “The Role of Empire and Commonwealth Troops during the Battle of the Somme.” *Imperial War Museums*, 1 July 2016, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-role-of-empire-and-commonwealth-troops-during-the-battle-of-the-somme>.

Nasson, Bill. “South Africa and the German East Africa Campaign (Union of South Africa).” 1914–1918 Online: *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Freie Universität Berlin, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/south_africa_and_the_german_east_africa_campaign_union_of_south_africa.

Koller, Christian. “Colonial Military Participation in Europe (Africa).” 1914–1918 Online: *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Freie Universität Berlin, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/colonial-military-participation-in-europe_africa

Bibliography:

National WWI Museum and Memorial. *British West African Black Troops with a Machine Gun*. Object ID 1996.36.76, National WWI Museum and Memorial Online Collections Database, <https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=40875658-694d-423a-8f02-109e6b9d174f>.

National WWI Museum and Memorial. *French Colonial Troops: Senegal, Guadeloupe, Soudan, Algeria, Morocco, Madagascar*. Object ID 1983.166.12. National WWI Museum and Memorial Online Collections Database, [ns.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=767e4812-bc62-4017-8808-6d14f315a91a](https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=767e4812-bc62-4017-8808-6d14f315a91a).

National WWI Museum and Memorial. *Harper's Pictorial Library of the World War Vol. 3*. Object ID 1983.37.3. National WWI Museum and Memorial Online Collections Database, <https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=8683c782-4c48-40b6-9eab-98c48e6b0ea8>.

National WWI Museum and Memorial. *German East Africa: Schutztruppe Askari Troops with Artillery Guns*. Object ID 2012.95.1.17. National WWI Museum and Memorial Online Collections Database,

<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=798cb237-cfed-48e9-931e-a00486993cb0>.

National WWI Museum and Memorial. *German Cameroon African Troops on the March.* Object ID 2006.56.36. National WWI Museum and Memorial Online Collections Database,
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=4fd8be44-27ed-49ae-8489-8d0bbd2f7152>.

National WWI Museum and Memorial. *German East African Troops Setting Up a Field Gun.* Object ID 2006.56.51. National WWI Museum and Memorial Online Collections Database,
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=3a48d49d-6596-407b-b64f-bf1dd47af6a0>.