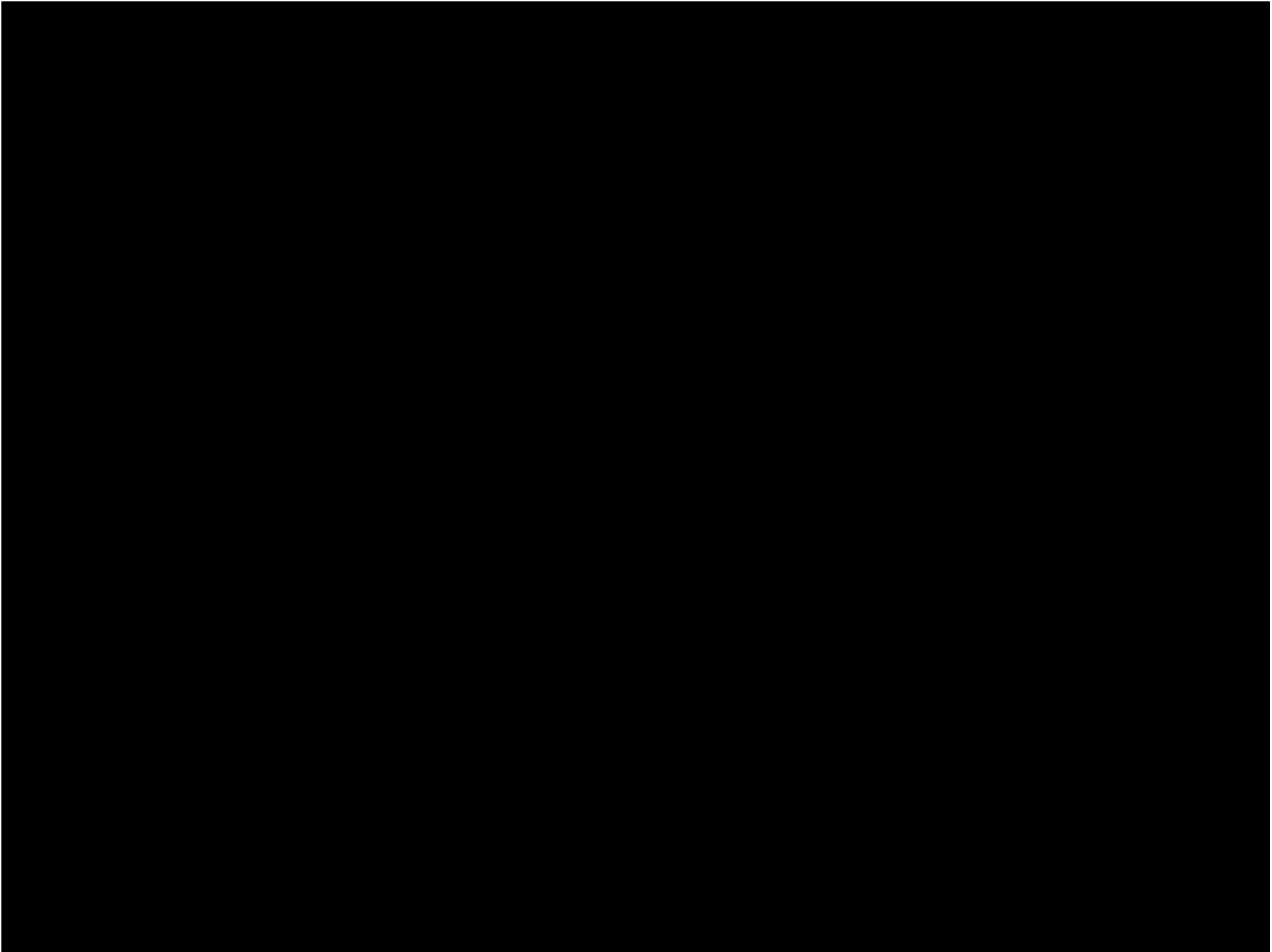


AMERICAN WITNESSES





Menu

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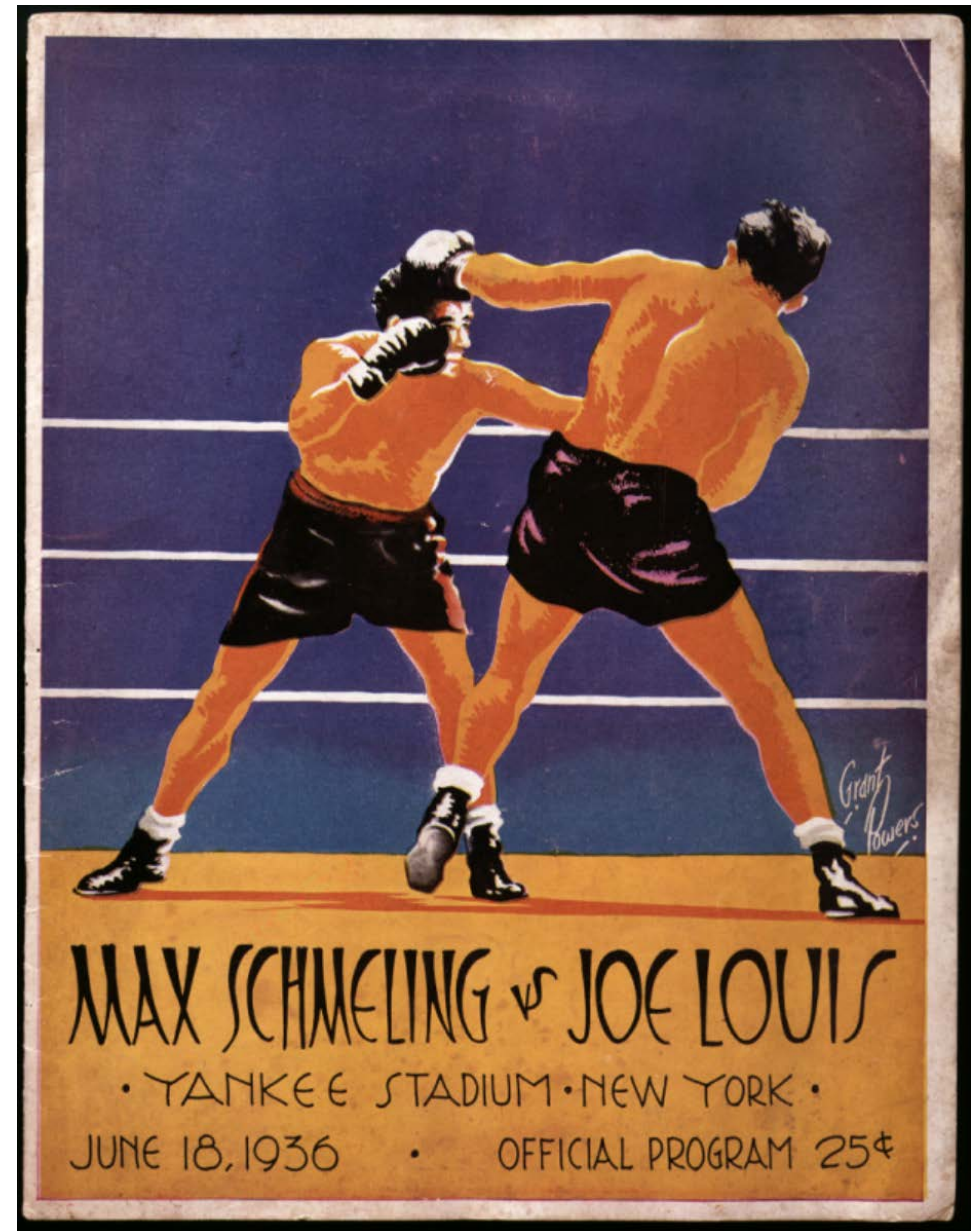


< CURRENT MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

American Witnesses

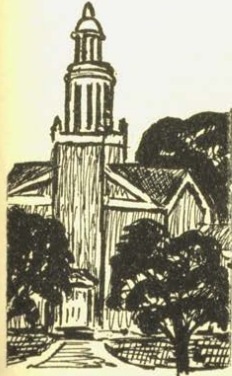
Program for the Schmeling-Louis Bout 1936

Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC; US
Holocaust Memorial Museum



Launching a State Federation of Teachers

DURING THE THANKSGIVING holidays an event occurred which will have an important bearing on the history of teacher unionization in New York State. This



event was a state-wide conference of Teacher Union delegates, which was called for the purpose of furthering the progress of teacher organization in New York and northern New Jersey. The 1936 convention of the American Federation of Teachers had divided the country into twelve organizing districts. Mr. Hendley, as vice-president in charge of New York State and northern New Jersey, aided by an up-state organizing committee, called this conference to consider the problems

facing teachers in our district.

The conference was an inspiring event. The number of delegates who responded to Mr. Hendley's call—thirty six—was far beyond our expectations. The meetings were conducted with excellent dispatch, and discussion was always spirited and constructive. Most remarkable of all were the reports of victories of many comparatively small locals up-state in their local campaigns, and the enthusiasm which the delegates evinced for the forthcoming organizational campaign in the local regional district.

The conference began with the reports from delegates. The locals represented were: Buffalo, East Hudson, Dutchess County (Vassar College), Brookwood Labor College, New Rochelle, the three New York City locals, the Trenton local of New Jersey, and a group of about twenty teachers from four other communities. The Buffalo delegates told of their union's growth, within a short period, from 15 to 150; they described also their campaign to bring union activities into the schools, and their progressively increasing gain in prestige at the expense of the local company union. Reports from other smaller locals indicated also an encouraging growth in membership and teacher interest. The report of Mr. Larabee, president of the Trenton local, was outstanding as an example of successful union activity, for in that city a campaign of the Teachers Union prevented the closing of the night schools and the passage of legislation that would have threatened teachers' tenure rights.

Mr. Hendley's talk pointed toward the future. He em-

phasized particularly the need for a State Federation of Teachers, the potential power of such an organization in promoting both legislation and the growth of teacher organization. Dr. Bella Dodd's report was in line with Mr. Hendley's suggestions. She called for a joint legislative conference to consist of the legislative representatives of all locals and other interested groups in the regional district. This conference, which will be held during the Christmas holidays, will formulate a concrete legislative program centering around such issues as tenure, federal aid to schools, salary restoration, pensions, rights of married teachers, and other issues of interest to all teachers in New York and New Jersey. Dr. Dodd finally emphasized the need of "pitiless publicity" to expose the stand of legislators on teacher issues; also the need for constant and unending contact with legislators through delegations and visits.

The results of this conference may be summarized as follows:

1. Plans have been set afoot to form a State Federation of Teachers. The value of such an organized group backing teachers' interests is quite apparent.
2. A legislative conference has been called for the Christmas holidays.
3. It was determined to hold the first state-wide convention of union teachers during the Easter vacation. This convention will be preceded by a lecture tour throughout the state designed to accelerate the progress of teacher organization.
4. Definite plans were made for the formation of many new locals in New Jersey and New York.

The delegates who attended the conference during the Thanksgiving holidays felt that with the intensification of the organizational campaign and the progress toward unified state-wide action culminating in the formation of a State Federation of Teachers, hopes for future success in the defence of teachers' interests are bright indeed.

Bitter Fruit

*Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
(Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,)
Black body swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.*

*Pastoral scene of the gallant South
(The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,)
Scent of magnolia, sweet and fresh,
(And the sudden smell of burning flesh.)*

*Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.*

ABEL MEEROPOL

<https://youtu.be/Web007rzSOI>

Play just until 1 minute in...

"Bitter Fruit"

1937

Abel Meeropol

The New York Teacher

Bitter Fruit

The New York Teacher; US Library of Congress

EXECUTIVE ORDER

REAFFIRMING POLICY OF FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE DEFENSE PROGRAM BY ALL PERSONS, REGARDLESS OF RACE, CREED, COLOR, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN, AND DIRECTING CERTAIN ACTION IN FURTHERANCE OF SAID POLICY.

WHEREAS it is the policy of the United States to encourage full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders; and

WHEREAS there is evidence that available and needed workers have been barred from employment in industries engaged in defense production solely because of considerations of race, creed, color, or national origin, to the detriment of workers' morale and of national unity:

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes, and as a prerequisite to the successful conduct of our national defense production effort, I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries ^{or Government} because of race, creed, color, or national origin, and I do hereby declare that it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations, in furtherance of said policy and of this order, to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

And it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. All departments and agencies of the Government of the United States concerned with vocational and training programs for defense production shall take special measures appropriate to assure that such programs are administered without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

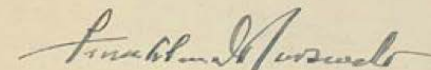
Executive Order 8802

June 25, 1941

- 2 -

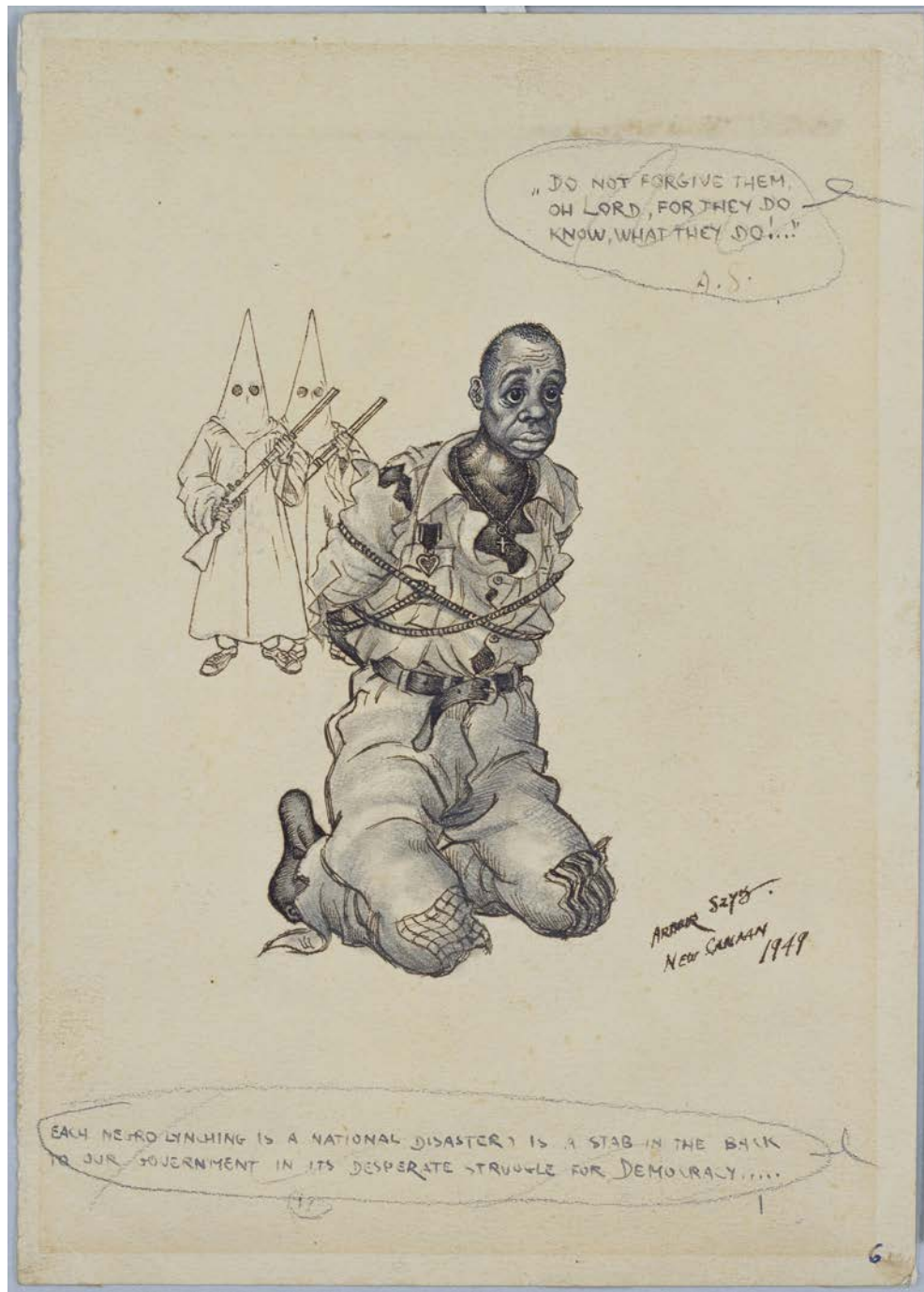
2. All contracting agencies of the Government of the United States shall include in all defense contracts hereafter negotiated by them a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any worker because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

3. There is established in the Office of Production Management a Committee on Fair Employment Practice, which shall consist of a chairman and four other members to be appointed by the President. The chairman and members of the Committee shall serve as such without compensation but shall be entitled to actual and necessary transportation, subsistence and other expenses incidental to performance of their duties. The Committee shall receive and investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provisions of this order and shall take appropriate steps to redress grievances which it finds to be valid. The Committee shall also recommend to the several departments and agencies of the Government of the United States and to the President all measures which may be deemed by it necessary or proper to effectuate the provisions of this order.



THE WHITE HOUSE,
June 25, 1941.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
FILED AND MADE AVAILABLE
FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION
JUN 25 12 17 PM '41
IN THE DIVISION OF THE
FEDERAL REGISTER



Untitled Drawing by Arthur Szyk
1948 Szyk 1949

US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Courtesy of Rinjiro Sodei



Reconnaissance



Sergeant Leon Bass
183rd Combat Engineer Battalion

Leon Bass was born in Philadelphia and served in the US Third Army in a segregated unit of African American soldiers. He was 20 years old when he entered the Buchenwald concentration camp days after its liberation. William A. Scott III also served in his unit.

Photo: Liberated prisoners with American soldiers, Buchenwald concentration camp, Germany, April 1945.



Testimony 3
Dial 508.784.1945 and press 3



Sergeant Leon Bass
183rd Combat Engineer Battalion



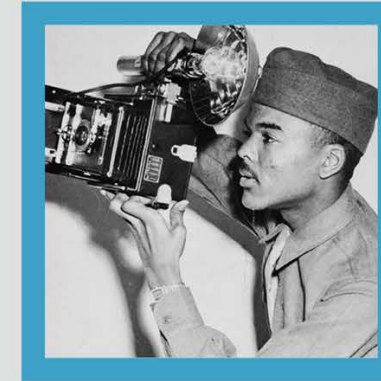
We were in the intelligence reconnaissance section of our unit and we went right to Buchenwald. And that was the day that I was to discover what had really been going on in Europe under the Nazis because I walked through the gates and I saw walking dead people.

And just looking at these people who were skin and bone and dressed in those pajama-type uniforms, their heads clean shaved, and filled with sores through the malnutrition. I just looked at this in amazement and I said to myself, you know, “My God, who are these people? What was their crime?” You know?

It’s hard for me to try to understand why anyone could have been treated this way. I don’t care what they had done. And I didn’t have any way of thinking or putting a handle on it, no frame of reference. I was only 20. Had I been told, I doubt if I could have had, in my mind’s eye, envisioned anything as horrible as what I saw.



Unit Photographer



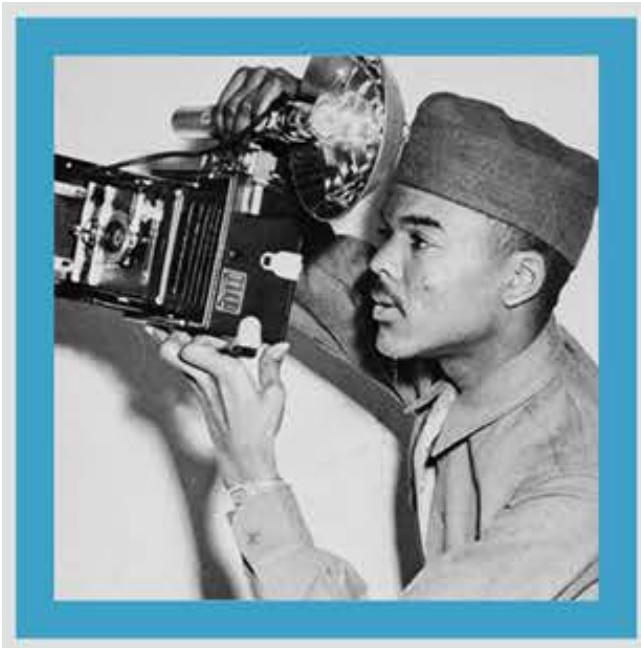
Sergeant William A. Scott III **183rd Combat Engineer Battalion**

William A. Scott III was drafted into the US Army in 1943 while attending Morehouse College. He joined the 183rd Combat Engineer Battalion, which was a segregated unit of African American soldiers. When he arrived with the second wave of Americans to reach the Buchenwald concentration camp, Scott was tasked with documenting what they saw.

Photo: Bodies of prisoners piled up near the crematorium, Buchenwald concentration camp, Germany, April 1945.



Testimony 9
Dial 508.784.1945 and press 9



Sergeant William A. Scott III
183rd Combat Engineer Battalion



We drove in and I said, “Gosh, it’s not as bad as they say. It looks just like a regular prison.”

And we drove around, around some buildings, and then I saw all of these people milling around and they were in terrible shape. And then it was there—like that I realized it was as bad as—in fact, I ended up saying it was worse. And I said, “There’s no way you can describe it.”

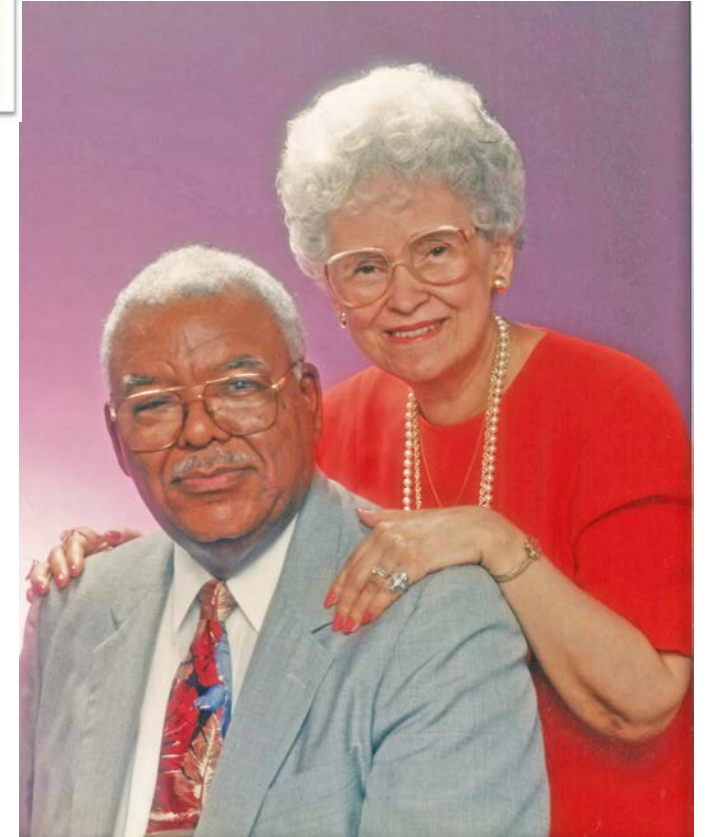
And I took a few photographs outside, and we were told by some of the survivors that over 30,000 had been killed in a two-week period, and that the Germans were trying to kill all of them before we got there.



Leon Bass
January 23, 1925 – March 28, 2015



Timed photo by William A. Scott with Leon Bass during basic training at Camp McCain, Grenada, Mississippi, spring of 1944, with the 183rd Engineer Combat Battalion of the VIII Corps of General George S. Patton's Third Army. Credit: Courtesy of M. Alexis Scott.



William Alexander Scott III
January 15, 1923 – March 11, 1992

American Witnesses Poster Set

<https://www.ushmm.org/teach/poster-sets/american-witnesses>

