Undergraduate Research Opportunity

African Americans at Home and Abroad during World War II

Prof. Matt Delmont
History

I am looking for a research assistant to help with research on my book project, To Live Half American: African Americans at Home and Abroad During World War II. This book is a narrative history that analyzes what the war meant for black Americans in local, national, and global contexts. The book’s title is drawn from a letter James G. Thompson wrote to the editors of the Pittsburgh Courier in 1942: “Being an American of dark complexion and some 26 years, these questions flash through my mind: ‘Should I sacrifice my life to live half American?’ ‘Will things be better for the next generation in the peace to follow?’ ‘Would it be demanding too much to demand full citizenship rights in exchange for the sacrificing of my life?’ ‘Is the kind of America I know worth defending?’” The Pittsburgh Courier and other black papers took up Thompson’s call to launch a Double Victory campaign, to secure both victory over fascism abroad and victory over racism at home. Viewed from an African American perspective, WWII was about not only America’s standing in the world but also about how much actual freedom would exist in the United States. Over seven decades later, the questions WWII raised regarding race and democracy remain unanswered. The goal of To Live Half American is to enable Americans to reckon with this history and its present day consequences.

Research assistant's duties:
The research assistant will help to locate, download, organize, and analyze historical articles from African-American newspapers. These articles are available via ProQuest digital database that is available online via ASU Libraries.

Required skills or qualifications:
There are no required skills for this position, only an interest in history. I can teach the RA everything they need to know about working with these digitized newspapers.

Skills student will acquire:
Students will acquire two primary skills:
1) Locating primary sources: By working with the ProQuest Historical Black Newspapers digital database, student will acquire skills that can be applied to other databases, archives, and collections.
2) Analyzing primary sources: By working with 1000s of articles related to African American in WWII, student will learn what kinds of questions to ask of primary sources.