

People of Colour serving in the British Empire during the First World War

In his article [Race, empire and colonial troops](#), Dr Santanu Das writes “Even by conservative estimates well over four million non-white men were mobilised into the European and American armies during the First World War, in combatant and non-combatant roles.”

- Approximately **1,610,582** (23% of the total) People of Colour served on the side of the British Empire as either soldiers or labourers during the First World War.

Region of the Empire	People who enlisted
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland	4,000,000 (initially 700,000, but grew to this number following conscription) Also: 620,000 from Canada, 417,000 from Australia, 146,000 from South Africa (White only), 120,000 from New Zealand and 12,000 from Newfoundland. Total = (approximately) 5,315,000
India (including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan) ¹	1,500,000 (all volunteers and greater than all other British Dominions, colonies and territories combined). (Source: British Council)
Nigeria, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Sierra Leone, Kenya, Uganda and Nyasaland (Malawi)	180,000 (Fearful of the political implications of pitting black soldiers against white soldiers, Britain refused to deploy a large African army for service in Europe. Instead, most Black people served in Africa, or as non-combatant labourers). (Source: The National Archives)
South Africa (Black South Africans)	85,000 (labourers – The White-dominated government of South Africa did not allow Black South Africans to be armed). (Source: The Army Museum)
Jamaica	10,280 (Source: The Imperial War Museum)
Other Caribbean Territories (Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, The	5,000 (Source: The Imperial War Museum)

¹ **60 percent of all combat troops raised in British India hailed from Punjab.** Source: Fogarty, Richard, Jarboe, Andrew Tait: Non-European Soldiers , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2021-04-29. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.11543.

Bahamas, British Honduras (Belize), Grenada, British Guiana (Guyana), the Leeward Islands, St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines)	
Indigenous People enlisting with Canadian Military	4,000 (1/3 of First Nations people in Canada age 18 to 45 enlisted during the First World War. This number does not include non-status “Indians,” Metis or Inuit Peoples, Source: Crown-Indigenous Relations)
Māori	2,500 (Source: The Imperial War Museum)
Black Canadians	1,500 (including 800 people who served with the No. 2 Construction Battalion).
Indigenous People serving with the Australian Military	1000 (Source: Australian War Memorial)
Cook Islands	500 (Source: The Auckland Museum)
Chinese Canadians	300 (Source: Canadian War Museum)
Japanese Canadians	222 (Source: Canadian War Museum)
Niue	150 (Source: Niue 'left behind' over huge WW1 contribution)
Indigenous Fijians	100 (Only allowed to serve as labourers, despite the efforts of Ratu Sir Lala Vanayaliyali Sukuna, Source: The Imperial War Museum)
Indigenous People serving with the Newfoundland Military	21 (Source: Winegard, Timothy C.: <i>Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War</i> , Cambridge 2011)
Tuvalu	9 (Source: The Auckland Museum)

* Nearly 140,000 Chinese contract labourers were hired by the British and French governments, forming a substantial part of the immigrant labour force working in France during the war. Source: [Race, empire and colonial troops](#).